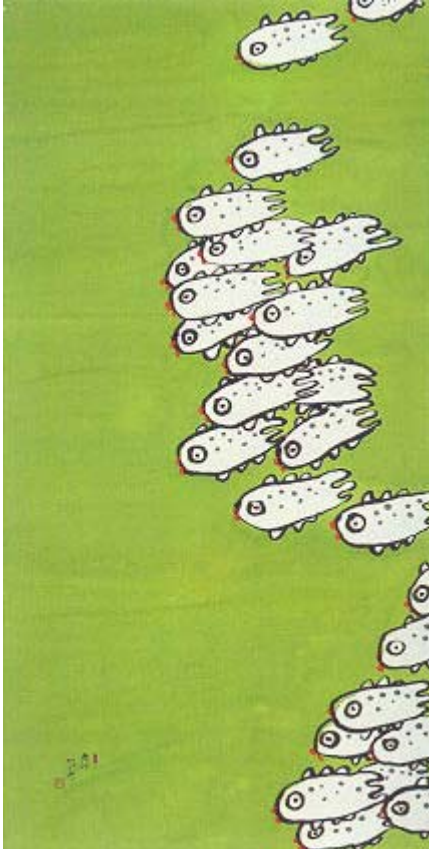


Book Review

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Teaching Buddhism in the West: From the Wheel to the Web.

Edited by Victor Sogen Hori, Richard P. Hayes, and J. Mark Shields. London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002, xxvii + 234 pages, ISBN: 0700715576, US \$25.95 (paper); ISBN 0700715568, US \$75.00 (cloth).

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*T*his valuable set of reflections on the nature of Buddhist Studies and how to teach it is based on a conference held at McGill University in October, 1999, and continuing on the web at http://teaching_buddhism.tripod.com (note that this URL differs from the one given on page vi of the book, which is obsolete). This website contains the papers which could not be included in the book and for which substitutes were obtained, along with a great deal of additional material, links, and so forth. Because of the ongoing nature of the web-based discussion, a complete review of the project is not possible. All that can be given here is an assessment, as it were, of the root text. Let the reader go to the website for the commentaries and latest developments. This is as it should be: teaching is a relationship and, like all relationships, it is constantly changing, never perfected, and always

in need of improvement based on experience.

The book is divided into seven sections containing a total of fourteen papers and an Introduction by Victor Hori. The Introduction is a masterful summary of the papers; readers who are pressed for time should read it carefully before skimming the rest of the book. The section headings are not altogether useful. Like any collection of conference papers, there is, despite a generality of theme, a wide variety of approaches, with overlaps and omissions. This reviewer thought he saw only three major concerns — the nature of the university, the movement away from the traditional classroom, and the perennial attempt to captivate apathetic students.

In "Teaching Buddhism in the Postmodern University," Frank Reynolds builds on his previous remarks on this topic, and his thoughts are expanded by Victor Hori in "Liberal Education and the Teaching of Buddhism." They provide food for thought on how to teach Buddhism in what is, in effect, a hostile environment, one that wishes to trivialize Buddhism as antiquated and irrelevant, if not just plain wrong. In "Buddhist Studies in the Academy," Charles Prebish tells us how we got this way. Susan Mattis takes the fight into the enemy camp with "Introducing Buddhism in a Course on Postmodernism," while Todd Lewis challenges students to take Buddhism seriously by stressing "The Centrality of Ritual and Story Narratives." O' Hyun Park grasps the nettle in "A Critique of the Objective Approach to Teaching Buddhism," and Stephen Jenkins tweaks it in "Black Ships, Blavatsky, and the Pizza Effect."

So much for the hostile. What about the bored? Students may end up in a Buddhism course just because the course they wanted to take was full. This is what Joanne Wotypka ("Engaged Buddhism") found, 90 percent

of whose students would have preferred to take "Witchcraft and the Occult." She captured their interest by assigning "life-projects," in which they reported on their attempts to teach Buddhism to long-suffering parents and roommates. David Waterhouse ("Buddhism and the Teaching of Judo") slipped Buddhism into his martial arts class; William Waldron ("An End-run round Entities") piggy-backed it on top of Science; and Ronald Grimes taught Zen by "Not Teaching Zen and the Arts." Walking around campus with his students, and using buildings and scenery as stimuli for Socratic dialogues, Rick Jarrow ("The Peripatetic Class") managed simultaneously to get out of the traditional classroom, and intrigue his students. Leaving the traditional classroom entirely, Mavis Fenn ("Teaching Buddhism by Distance Education") and Brett Grieder ("Academic Buddhology and the Cyber-Sangha") discuss how they have used web-based teaching formats.

This reviewer found all but one of the papers useful, but somewhat *apologetic* (in the literal sense of apologia). Todd Lewis alone has the courage to take the polemical initiative. What is it about liberalism and humanism that is so compelling? Do we teachers of Buddhism who are not, at least while we are in a college classroom, Dharma teachers, really believe, in our heart of hearts, that the Buddhist worldview is inauthentic, and must be made to fit the Procrustean bed of standard academic assumptions about reality? Why might it not be the other way around? This reviewer, if he may be so bold as to say so, made this suggestion more than a decade ago in "How is the Study of Buddhism Possible?" in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 2:1 (Spring 1990) 27–41, and then demonstrated how it might be done in *The Vision of Buddhism: The Space Under the Tree* (St Paul MN: Paragon, 1989).

The debate does, indeed, need to continue.