



The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative-Historical Introduction

Carl Olson

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For centuries, Buddhist teachers and laypeople have used stories, symbols, cultural metaphors, and anecdotes to teach and express their religious views. In this introductory textbook, Carl Olson draws on these narrative traditions to detail the development of Buddhism from the life of the historical Buddha to the present. By organizing the text according to the structure of Buddhist thought and teaching, Olson avoids imposing a Western perspective that traditional texts commonly bring to the subject.

The book offers a comprehensive introduction to the main branches of the Buddhist tradition in both the Mahayana and Theravada schools, including the Madhyamika school, the Yogacara school, Pure Land devotionalism, Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and village folk Buddhist traditions. Chapters explore the life and teachings of the Buddha in historical context, the early development and institutionalization of Buddhism, its geographic spread across Asia and eventually to the United States, philosophy and ethics, the relationship between monks and laity, political and ethical implications, the role of women in the Buddhist tradition, and contemporary reinterpretations of Buddhism.

Drawn from decades of classroom experience, this creative and ambitious text combines expert scholarship and engaging stories that offer a much-needed perspective to the existing literature on the topic.

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