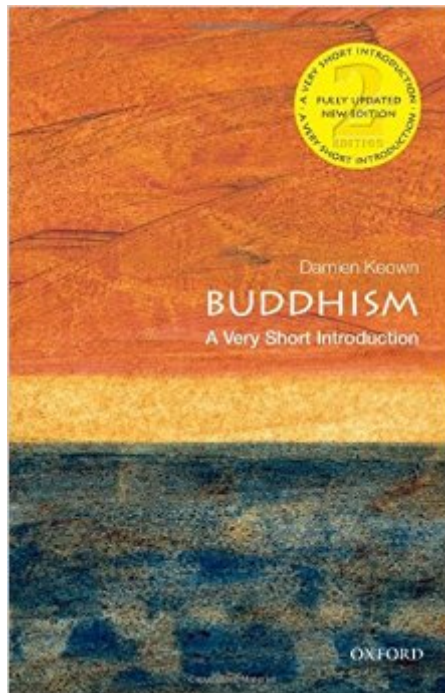


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Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

This Very Short Introduction offers readers a superb overview of the teachings of the Buddha, as well as a succinct guide to the integration of Buddhism into daily life. What are the distinctive features of Buddhism? Who was the Buddha, and what are his teachings? Words such as "karma" and "nirvana" have entered our vocabulary, but what do they mean? Damien Keown provides a lively, informative response to these frequently asked questions about Buddhism. As he sheds light into how Buddhist thought developed over the centuries, Keown also highlights how contemporary dilemmas can be faced from a Buddhist perspective. In the second edition Keown provides new perspectives on Buddhist thought, including up-to-date material about the evolution of Buddhism throughout Asia, the material culture of Buddhism and its importance, new teachings on the ethics of war and peace, and changes to ethnicity, class, and gender. About the Series: Oxford's Very Short Introductions series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, Literary Theory to History, and Archaeology to the Bible. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume in this series provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given discipline or field. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how the subject has developed and how it has influenced society. Eventually, the series will encompass every major academic discipline, offering all students an accessible and abundant reference library. Whatever the area of study that one deems important or appealing, whatever the topic that fascinates the general reader, the Very Short Introductions series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The quality of a factual book should be judged by its lack of overt partiality, comprehensiveness, sources and ability to make you think and ask questions. This book scores well on all points and above all reads like an essay which you can zap through. It contains a good bibliography for follow up reading and includes details of the the award winning "Journal of Buddhist ethics" on the web which was partly established by the author. Apart from the author's erudition his book is backed up by other experts and has been reviewed by his students. Above all the book analyses what is meant by religion (as Buddhism does not easily fit this classification) and provides a modern interpretation of this system of thought from all its major perspectives. The treatment of Mahayana Buddhism short, yet precise and on the whole Keown concentrates on highlights. Towards the end is a discussion on Buddhism in the West. The book also provides useful comparisons with other religions. Compared to many small and "cheap" introductions to Buddhism, this book is fairly impeccable. It is not perfect (2 tiny errors I identified with regards to scriptural quotations) but will lead anyone interested to work out what Buddhism is for him or herself, rather than being spoon fed as it were. I was however, disappointed that the book ended so fast - and glad at the follow up leads left, by this trustworthy writer.

I wish I had read this book when I was first attempting to learn about Buddhism, because it is clear, concise, accurate, and (usually) respectful. It briefly covers the historical Buddha, the development and foundations of the different major branches, and the major themes, beliefs, and ideas. People are always asking me for a book that "explains Buddhism" and I always want to offer them something that has a good chance of opening their eyes. I used to give "What the Buddha Taught" but I plan on giving this in the future. Even though studious Buddhists may already know all the information here, it is still beautiful to read again in its simplicity and profunity. Also, a great biography.

This is not only an accessible volume, but also a very insightful one. Damien Keown has a good understanding of Buddhism and presented it in a short and simple format. Yet within its simplicity lies many valuable pearls and insights that are rarely seen in books of this size. There is the brief discussion on what is suffering in which he explain to great clarity why certain terms were used and

what they mean. His discussion on ethics is excellent. I would strongly recommend it to any reader, be it those only seeking a brief introduction or those who are already very well read on Buddhism.

Part of a series by Oxford University Press, this book, 'Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction', follows the same format as other texts in the Very Short Introduction series -- it has fewer than 150 pages, is well indexed, has a useful glossary, accessible and enjoyable narrative, and captures the essence in a very short space the major points of its topic. There are probably nearing 100 volumes in this Very Short Introduction series (making it, ironically, not a Very Short series), but among those that I have read, this text stands out as being one of the best. Damien Keown, of the University of London and the Royal Asiatic Society, addresses Buddhism past and present, East and West. Beginning with narrative tales the help to exhibit the principles, Keown examines in turn the major questions. First, with regard to Buddhism, is this -- is Buddhism really a religion? Often categorised as such, it is often the exception proving the rule. Many take strong spiritual and philosophical ideas from Buddhism (sometimes without knowing it) but do not subscribe the larger system of practices -- but perhaps most telling, Buddhism is a non-theistic way of being. Keown looks at seven dimensions of religion, and concludes that Buddhism does fit a broader definition of religion. Keown proceeds from there to look at the origins of Buddhism, the life of the Buddha, ideas of karma and reincarnation, and the central ideas of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism. From these beginnings, Buddhism branches out, the largest grouping being the Mahayana (who get their own chapter), and other spreading first across Asia and then to the rest of the world. Like other books in this Very Short series, there are useful maps, a nice snapshot timeline, and suggestions for further reading, should the Very Short introduction not prove sufficient (and for many, this sample will leave the reader wanting more). I cannot speak too highly of this series, and of this volume on Buddhism by Keown in particular.

Written by Damien Keown (the version which came out in May 2000, not the one written by M. Carrithers), A very short introduction to Buddhism is one of the best "short-form" books on Buddhism I have read. It has clarity and it is enlightening. The author makes a complex subject easily understandable for readers who may not have much knowledge of Buddhism. Even for advanced readers of Buddhism, the book was v enjoyable. That is why I have given away over 20 copies of this book, and keep finding myself buying more as gifts. I have never written a book rec until now, because I believe this book truly deserves one. It spreads lots of good karma!

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