

## **EMP2538: Analysis of the Mind in Abhidhamma Buddhist Psychology**

Emmanuel College, Victoria University  
University of Toronto

### ***Course Prerequisites or Requisites***

---

EMT 2631H – Foundational Tenets and Practices of Buddhism or the permission of the instructor

### ***Course Description***

---

The Pāli term Abhidhamma means higher, subtle or ultimate teaching (of the Buddha) or the ultimate truth. Abhidhamma is often described as the core features of Buddhist psychology, dealing mainly with mental phenomena and explaining how our mind works. The Abhidhamma is the third great division of the Pāli Canon, the other two consisting of the Suttas (discourses) and the Vinaya (ethics). Unlike the Suttas, in which the Buddha adapts his teaching to his audience and speaks in conventional terms and concepts, in the Abhidhamma, the Dhamma is presented from the vantage point of ultimate reality. All phenomena are analysed into their ultimate constituents (dhammas) which are defined, classified and systematically arranged and discussed. Students will develop an in-depth understanding of the Buddha's teachings of the mind and all its functions and structures within the more general knowledge of the Buddhism found in the Suttas.

This course will survey the understanding of the mind (focusing on mundane consciousness), the qualities of mental functioning (distinguishing ethical and skillful aspects of mind from those considered non-ethical or unskillful), the causal and conditioned relations between aspects of mind, the continuity of consciousness from moment to moment, and the nature of unconscious and latent psychodynamic factors. In addition the psychological analysis of meditation will be presented.

In addition, the soteriological implications of the Abhidhamma will be explored in its aspects as a psycho-spiritual understanding of human experience. The potential of Buddhist psychology to facilitate realization and embodiment of the highest and most spiritual facets of human growth and development, will be discussed.

### **Methodology:**

The Abhidhamma literature is vast and highly sophisticated, conceptually dense, and abstract. In this course students will be exposed to the basic features of the Abhidhamma focusing on those elements of greatest value in understanding the profound nature of Buddhist psychology within the context of the Masters Pastoral program. To make this material of greatest use for the students a major pedagogical focus of the course will be to relate the course content to lived experience. Students will be required to journal their contemplative analysis of the concepts on a weekly basis and which will be discussed at the beginning of each class. In addition each student is expected to come prepared to participate in discussion about the given reading or assignment, and are encouraged to engage their own unique experiences and perspectives to the class discussions. Finally, students will be asked to maintain a meditation practice throughout the course in order to make direct experiential contact with the class material. The research essay will allow an opportunity for a more in-depth academic analysis of any aspect of the Abhidhamma within the context of modern psychotherapy.

### **Course Outcomes:**

1. **Understanding Abhidhamma Theory**: Classify, define and describe the key terms and concepts comprising the Buddhist Abhidhamma.
2. **Contextualizing the Abhidhamma**: Interpret Abhidhamma concepts within the broader domain of Buddhist psychology and psychotherapy
3. **Analyzing Abhidhamma in the Modern Context**: Illustrate key concepts of Abhidhamma within the student's lived experience, in the world at large, and within Buddhist contemplative practices.
4. **Applications of Abhidhamma in Professional Settings**: Contrast and correlate Abhidhamma concepts and western psychological concepts, especially within their own (or potential) psychotherapeutic practice, if applicable.

**Required Text:**

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (1999). A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. (free download from [https://store.pariyatti.org/Comprehensive-Manual-of-Abhidhamma-A-PDF-eBook\\_p\\_4362.html](https://store.pariyatti.org/Comprehensive-Manual-of-Abhidhamma-A-PDF-eBook_p_4362.html)).

**Course Evaluation:**

**Research Essay:** 40% - in-depth examination of any aspect of the Abhidhamma and its link with applied and clinical psychotherapeutic practices and interventions

**Class Attendance:** 10% - 1% per class

**Weekly Reflection:** 20% - 1-page personal contemplative and meditative reflection of the concepts examined in the previous class; submitted weekly

**Class Summaries:** 20% - 2-page summaries of each class based on readings; submitted weekly

**Annotated Glossary:** 10% - develop a cumulative annotated glossary of key Abhidhamma terms based on weekly class discussions and assigned readings

**Lecture Schedule:**

Week 1 (sept 14) Introduction: Overview of the Abhidhamma: History, Content, Breadth

Week 2 (sept 21) Lecture by Sr. Susila on Abhidhamma for Daily Life

Week 3 (sept 28) Overview of the Basics of Buddhist Psychology

Week 4 (oct 5) Analysis of Mind (Citta): Mundane Consciousness

Week 8 (oct 12) Analysis Cognitive (Mental) Process: Bhavanga

Week 5 (oct 19) Analysis of Mental Factors (Cetasikas) I: The 13 Ethically Variable Aspects

Week 6 (oct 26) Analysis of Mental Factors (Cetasikas) II: The 14 Unskillful Aspects

Week 7 (nov 2) Analysis of Mental Factors (Cetasikas) III: The 25 Skillful Aspects

(Reading Week – No Class on nov 9)

- Week 9 (nov 16)      Analysis of Psychological Causation: The Patthanas (Conditions and Co-Relations)
- Week 10 (nov 23)      Analysis of Unconscious Psychodynamics: The Anusaya (Latent Tendencies) and Asava (Taints)
- Week 11 (nov 30)      Analysis of Meditation Subjects I (Shamatha): Tranquility and Concentration
- Week 12 (dec 7)      Attainment of Nirvana: Authentic Mental Health; Applied Abhidharma

### **Bibliography**

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (1999). A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma. Buddhist Publication Society: Kandy.

Galmangoda, S. (1998). An introduction to Theravada Abhidhamma. Singapore.

Guenther, H.V., & Kawamura, L.S. (1975). Mind in Buddhist Psychology. Dharma Publishing: Emeryville, CA.

Gyatso, K. (1993). Understanding the Mind. Tharpa Publications: Guildford.

Hanh, Thich Nhat (2006). Understanding Our Mind. Parallax Publishing: Berkeley CA.

Jayasuriya, W.F. (1976). The Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism: An Introduction to the Abhidhamma. Kuala Lumpur.

Karunadasa, Y. (2014). The Theravada Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality. Hong Kong. Centre of Buddhist Studies.

Mon, Mehm Tim (2002). Buddha Abhidhamma- The Ultimate Science. (free download [http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/abhidhaultsci.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/abhidhaultsci.pdf)).

Sircar, Rina. (1999). The Psycho-ethical Aspects of the Abhidhamma. Lanham: University Press of America.

Van Gorkom, N. (1989). Abhidhamma in Daily Life. Bangkok: Dhamma Study and Propagation Foundation.

Nyanaponika Thera. (1998). Abhidhamma Studies: Buddhist Explorations of Consciousness and Time. Kandy: Wisdom.

Nyanaponika Thera. (1971). Guide through the Abhidhamma Pitaka. Kandy.

Susila, Sayalay. Unravelling the mysteries of mind and body through Abhidhamma. Penang, Malaysia: Inward Path Publisher. 2005.