

1. Introduction

1. Buddhism the religion exists in many forms, but they all stem from the revolutionary ideas set forth first by one man in the fifth century BCE. Who was he really?
2. Our earliest texts interested in teaching the dharma rather than the Buddha's life story. (S/B, p. 79). The life story of the Buddha may have been interesting, but it was considered relatively unimportant.
3. On the other hand, our course will be on biography, not dhamma.
4. Story of the monk Vakkali. (SN 22.87). Elderly, sick, Vakkali asks for the Buddha to visit him.
5. The Buddha visits, he says he has a lot of remorse and regret from not having been well enough to see the Buddha before.
6. The Buddha dismisses such talk, saying " One who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma." This is a sentence which will loom large in later Buddhist history. But for now it suffices for inspiration, to introduce the course.
7. In the Buddha's life, we see the dharma personalized. But we see it in a real life, not a mere philosophical placeholder. There are a lot of interesting and human stories in the early texts; there is a certain amount of hagiography and legend as well, but we will try to get beneath the popular legends and focus more on the

Buddha's story as it might really have been: as a wandering ascetic in 5th c. BCE India.

8. To that end we will look at the Buddha's life in five sections.
9. First we will introduce the Buddha, and consider whether we know anything about him at all. We will look at some of the popular legendary stories of his life, and consider whether he was a kind of historical fiction constructed out of whole cloth. We will see there is reason to believe he was a historical figure, however we will never know for sure. We will also look at the historical background in which he is said to have grown up and flourished.
10. Second we will look at his life before he became awakened. What was it like? More importantly perhaps, what was he like? How did his thinking get started, according to the early texts?
11. Third we will look at his awakening and some aspects of his early teaching career. We will see how his dharma teachings appear to have begun in somewhat simplified forms, and how his early concerns shaped those teachings.
12. Fourth we will look at his mature life, in both his teaching style and his concerns and interests. We will look at the development of the saṅgha and consider a couple of key controversies that dogged the Buddha's later life.
13. Finally we will look at the deaths of some of his closest companions and the Buddha's death itself. We will turn to some considerations of how Buddhism the philosophy and religion became formalized and established.
14. This course will attempt a biography of what might be termed "the historical Buddha" in HW Schumann's terms: the Buddha beneath the legends. This is a

way of looking at the Buddha much as historians of Christianity look at "the historical Jesus" and try to reconstruct his life as apart from the early legends.

15. You will find by the end of the course that the Buddha you thought you knew was the Buddha of legend. The Buddha of history is more human, more real, and more compelling than the legends that got told about him.

REFERENCES

H.W. Schumann, *The Historical Buddha* (Motilal Banarsidass, 2004). Schumann's book can be hard to source. It was written originally in 1982 so is slightly dated.

Vishvapani Blomfeld, *Gautama Buddha: The Life and Times of the Awakened One* (Quercus, 2011). Although not quite as scholarly as Schumann's book, it is significantly more recent and quite readable. It lends more space to legendary material than we will in this course. NB: Blomfeld uses Sanskritized rather than Pāli words and names.

Bhikkhu Sujato and Bhikkhu Brahmali, "The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts".

Supplement to the *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* (2015). (S/B).

<https://ocbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/authenticity.pdf>

<https://suttacentral.net/sn22.87/en/bodhi>