
The Geography of Buddha

OSHER 965-001

Dates: Mondays: October 12 – November 16

Times: 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Location: Online via Zoom

Instructor: Jonathan Duncan jonathan@alpinevisionmedia.net

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course provides an introduction to Buddhist philosophy through the lens of the landscapes, history, and culture that inspired it. Students will trace the emergence of Buddhism in northern India, and examine the role that the geography and culture of the Himalayas have played in its evolution. The class will explore the representation of mountains in Eastern mythology, as well as the art, literature, and ethnogeography of the Himalayan region. Through slide-illustrated lectures, readings, and open discussion, students will gain intimate knowledge of a region that is held sacred to five of the world's great religions.

COURSE OUTLINE:

- Week 1: Introduction and Overview:**
- Opening slideshow and discussion
- Week 2: Landscapes and Culture**
- Early human settlements in the Himalaya
 - Cultural adaptations to the mountains
 - Trade, pilgrimage, and refuge
- Week 3: The Dharma—Understanding Buddhist philosophy**
- The story of Siddhartha and the Hero's Journey
 - The Three Jewels: Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha
 - The Four Noble Truths and the Middle Way

Week 4: The Sacred Mountain

- Mountains in mythology: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Bon
- Mt Meru: the center of the universe
- Shambhala, beyuls, and hidden lands

Week 5: Buddhist Art and Symbolism

- The Himalayas in art, poetry, and literature
- Stupas, mandalas, and mani stones
- Mountains as symbol and metaphor

Week 6: Course Conclusion