

# RLGN 2020 A01 ★ Introduction to Buddhism

## Short Essay 2 Assignment

For the first Short Essay, please answer the question below. Please base your answer on the lectures and readings assigned for class. DO NOT use any outside sources (Wikipedia, other internet sources, or publications not assigned for class) and DO NOT use any form of citation or bibliography. Be sure to answer each part of the question. Do not write an introduction or conclusion; jump right into answering the question. Write as if you are addressing someone who knows nothing about Mahayana. Your essay will be graded on clarity and organization in addition to content.

The maximum length is three pages, double spaced, 12 point font; the minimum length is two and a half pages. Any portion of your essay that exceeds this length will not be graded. Please do not use a title page. Essays are due in class on Thursday, Nov. 3.

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Two of the main theories on the emergence of Mahayana are the Compassion/Lay-origin Theory and the “Hard core” Ascetic Monk Theory. What are these theories, and what are the main problems with them? How does Mahayana actually seem to have emerged?

In answering the first question, be sure to discuss how the two theories represent attempts to answer the question “Why did a large number of ancient Indian Buddhists decide to adopt the long, hard path of the bodhisattva?” and why this is the wrong question ask. Also be sure to discuss why Buddhists believed that they could not become bodhisattvas in this life, Mahayana sutras’ claim that their listeners were already irreversible bodhisattvas, the “headstart” that they give to their listeners, and the three shortcut methods to Buddhahood they present. In answering the second question, be sure to discuss dharmabhanakas and the relationship of Mahayana to the various nikayas.