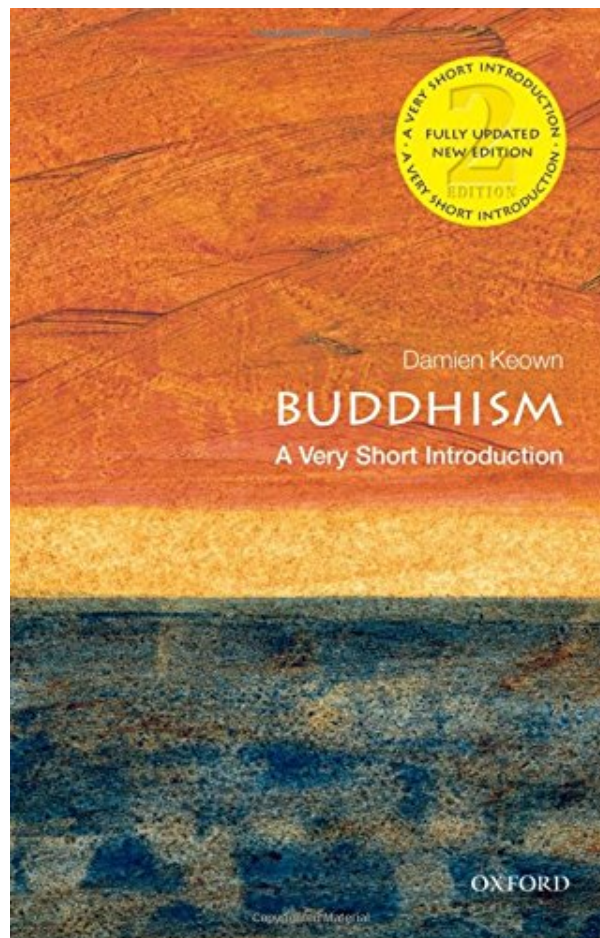
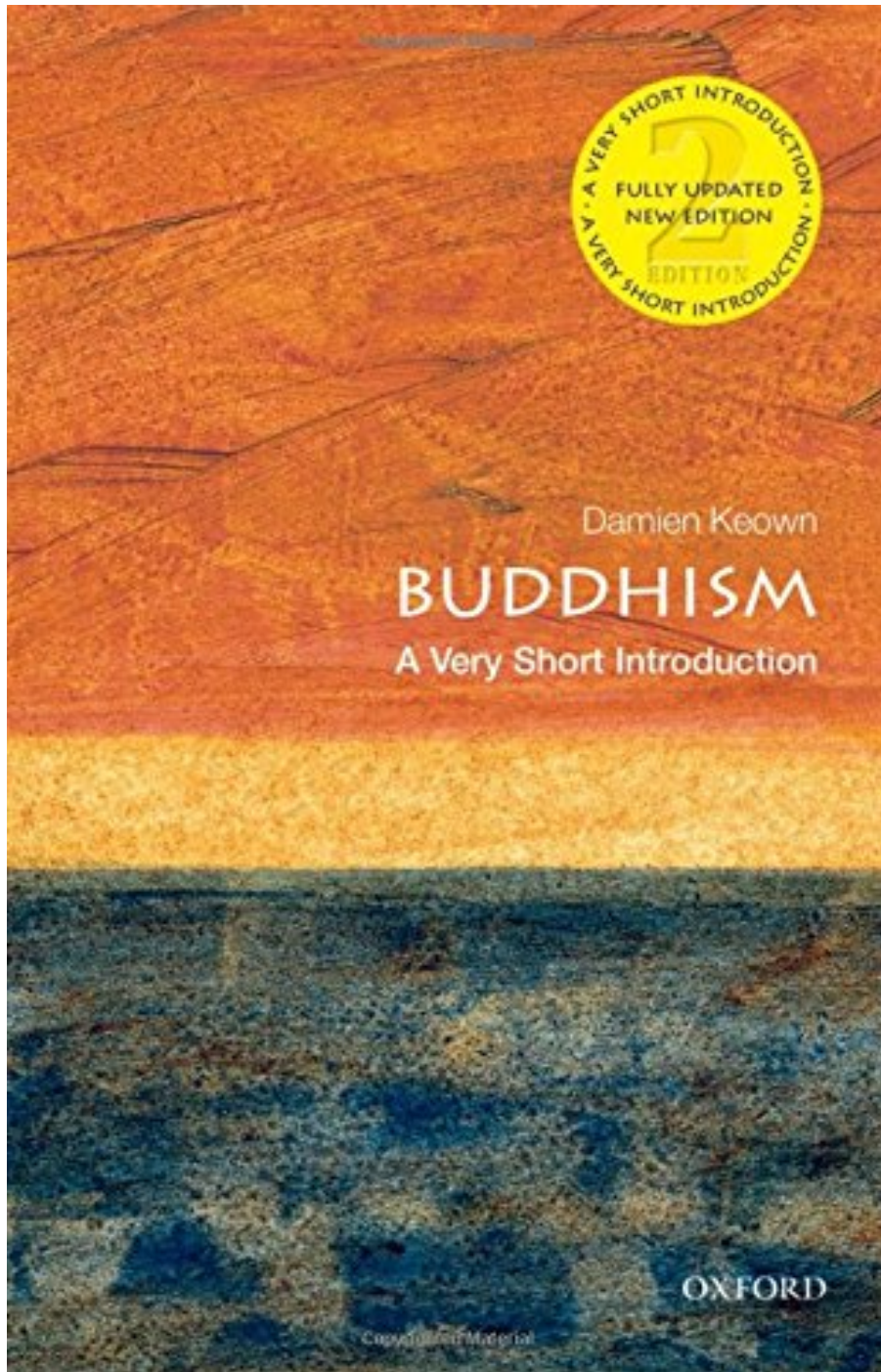


# **BUDDHISM: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION (VERY SHORT INTRODUCTIONS) BY DAMIEN KEOWN**



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Seeing the whole elephant

By Peter Reeve

There are many introductory texts available on Buddhism, but this is by far the best I have come across. Its great strength is its scope. Other books that I have read on the subject present some or other particular variety of Buddhism, usually a Westernized version of Zen. As Keown states on page 1, "Students of Buddhism have tended to fasten onto a small part of the tradition and assume their conclusions held true about the whole". He illustrates this with the story of the blind men and the elephant (from a Buddhist scripture called the *Udana*) in which each man grasps a part of the elephant - tail, trunk, tusk, etc - and bases his description of the animal on that part alone. Keown attempts a broad overview of the history, development and fragmentation of Buddhist thought, from the life of the Buddha to the present day.

It is what it says - only a very short introduction - but it is packed with useful information. Keown writes well, in a lucid, concise style.

A different edition of the same book is also available in the *A Brief Insight* series, available here on Amazon. The text in that series is (so far as I can tell) always the same as in the *VSI* series, but the print is larger and there are many more illustrations, some in color. You might want to check that out if you intend to read this book, which you should.

[PeterReeve]<sup>8</sup> of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Short and sweet

By FrKurt Messick

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. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Found this little volume to be exactly what I hoped ...

By Arnold Sealove

Found this little volume to be exactly what I hoped it would be. The author presented the information in an interesting, informative and objective manner. specifically comparing the various forms of Buddhism to one another as well as similarities and differences between Buddhism, and other Judeo-Christian religions. If one is looking for a brief introduction, this seems to be right on line. See all 51 customer reviews...



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