

Lecture abstract:

Rethinking Buddhism

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In the account of the Buddha's death contained in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha is said to advise his followers to 'live as a light unto yourselves, taking refuge in yourselves and nobody else, with the Dhamma as your light, with the Dhamma as your refuge, taking refuge in nothing else'. If this advice is applied to the academic study of Buddhism in the 21st century, it suggests that we should try to understand the Buddha's teachings by considering them in the light of the canonical texts. This does not mean that the exegetical works of Buddhaghosa and others is to be discarded: on the contrary, post-canonical Pali works are a vital aid to the study and practice of Buddhism. But if we are to understand the historical reality of early Buddhism, the primary sources are the teachings themselves, which can be used as a light to guide research before even considering the interpretation of later tradition. This talk will explore some ways in which the Sutta and Vinaya Piṭakas can be used to better understand aspects of early Buddhist doctrine, practice and institutions.