

Introduction To Buddhism Series

Lecture 3 – Four Noble Truths



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□ A quick review

➤ Topic One : General Introduction

- ➔ Buddhism is an **education**, not a religion or a philosophy.
 - An education on how to recover our wisdom and Buddha nature.
 - An education on how to solve our problems by wisdom – an art of living.
- ➔ The **law of causality** governs everything in the universe, including the universe itself. Buddhas cannot be away from the it, either.
- ➔ All sentient beings possess the **same Buddha nature**.
 - Our Buddha nature is temporarily **lost** due to **delusion**.
 - Our lost Buddha nature can be recovered **only** via **cultivation**.
- ➔ Karma refers to an action and its retribution under the law of causality.
 - Good and bad karmas **do not offset** – prevailing ones function first.
 - Karmas accumulate over time, good or bad, and **do not disappear**.
 - **When bad karma retributions come together, they form disasters.**
- ➔ **Cultivation** means to stop planting the bad seeds and conditions and to begin planting the good seeds and nurturing good conditions, and finally recover our ultimate wisdom and attain Buddha-hood.

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□ A quick review.

- ▶ Topic Two : The Three Refuges, the Four Reliance Principles, and the Three Dharma Seals
 - ➔ We formally accept the Buddha's education and set our goals by Taking the Three Refuges; they are within ourselves.
 - Buddha – Awakening
 - Dharma – Proper understanding
 - Sangha – Purity, clarity, & harmony
 - ➔ We apply the Four Reliance Principles to guide our own cultivation:
 - Authenticate a Dharma teaching and the person who expounds the teaching,
 - To reflect our own cultivation and to make sure we are on the right path.
 - ➔ We use the Dharma Seals to authenticate a teaching.
 - All dharma are impermanent in Nature
 - All dharma are void of self-existence
 - Nirvana is the ultimate liberation from sufferings, including samsara
 - ➔ The Four Reliance Principles are what Buddha left for us as a useful tool to guide us on the cultivation path.
 - ➔ The Dharma Seals are what Buddha left for us and patriarchs elaborated for us to guide ourselves on the cultivation path.

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□ Where do we start our cultivation?

- A few words about cultivation (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
 - ➔ Prepare and use for the raising of crops.
 - ➔ Loosen or break up the soil about (growing plants).
 - ➔ Foster the growth of <cultivate vegetables>
- When we cultivate a crop,
 - ➔ We dig, we weed, and we seed.
 - ➔ We fertilize and nourish conditions until the harvest time.
- When we cultivate Buddha hood,
 - ➔ We discover and recognize our delusion – digging,
 - ➔ We drop our delusion – weeding,
 - ➔ We vow to reach Buddha hood – seeding,
 - ➔ We practice with longevity – fertilizing and nourishing conditions until reaching the Buddha hood.

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□ So, where do we begin to recognize our delusion (Avidya 無明)?

- Buddha Sakyamuni explained four basic truths to his first five disciples recorded in *Dharma-Cakra Pravartana Sutra* (轉法輪經).
- The Four Noble Truths
 - ➔ There is “suffering” in our lives – Dukka (苦諦).
 - ➔ There is a cause or origin of sufferings – Samudaya (集諦).
 - ➔ There is a cessation of sufferings – Nirodha (滅諦).
 - ➔ There is a path leading to the cessation of sufferings – Magga (道諦).

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□ There is “suffering” in our lives – Dukkha (苦諦).

- Talks about the reality: we experience sufferings everyday.
- Represents the ordinary meaning of suffering.
- Also implies a deeper sense of imperfection, impermanence, dissatisfaction, etc.
- Includes happy or pleasant feelings because they are impermanent.
- Reflects the conditioned results of our delusion or wrongdoing. (苦果)
- It has three aspects
 - ➔ Dukkha-Dukkhata (苦苦)
 - ➔ Samkhara-Dukkhata (壞苦)
 - ➔ Viparinama-Dukkhata (行苦)

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□ What is Dukkha-Dukkhata (苦苦)?

- Four observations/reflections (四念處):
 - ➔ Our body and all its components are not clean (觀身不淨)
 - ➔ Our sensations are full of suffering (觀受是苦)
 - ➔ Our mindset is ever changing (觀心無常)
 - ➔ Self is non-existent in any dharma (觀法無我)
- Birth, Aging, Illness, Death. (生、老、病、死苦)
- Separation from loved ones. (愛別離苦)
- Association with those we dislike. (怨憎會苦)
- Not getting what is wanted. (求不得苦)

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□ What is Dukkha-Dukkhata (苦苦)? (cont'd)

➤ Five clinging-aggregates. (五陰熾盛苦)

➔ Our being is a conditioned result of **matter** (色), **sensation** (受), **perception** (想), **mental formation** (行), and **consciousness** (識).

➔ Discord of the five aggregates causes sufferings.

➔ This is actually the cause of all of the above sufferings.

➔ Laozi said: “The biggest concern I have is that I have a body.”

老子說：『吾之大患，在吾有身』。

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□ What is Samkhara-Dukkata (壞苦)?

- The five aggregates are conditioned:
 - ➔ By numerous causes and conditions; they are ever-changing.
 - ➔ Inevitably the five aggregates will undergo change.
 - ➔ Changing the state causes sufferings.
- The first aggregate – matter.
 - ➔ Is a conditioned result of the **four great elements** (四大): **solidity** (地大), **fluidity** (水大), **heat or energy** (火大), and **motion** (風大).
 - ➔ Our sense organs are derivatives of the four great elements: **eye** (眼), **ear** (耳), **nose** (鼻), **tongue** (舌), **body** (身), and **mind** (意).

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□ What is Samkhara-Dukkata? (Cont'd)

- The second aggregate – sensations.
 - ➔ The faculties of our sense organs receive the external objects and produce the senses of: **color** (色), **sound** (聲), **odor** (香), **taste** (味), **tangible items** (觸), and **mind objects** (法).
 - ➔ Our sense organs, by receiving the external objects, also produce the feelings of: **sadness** (苦), **happiness** (樂), **depression** (憂), **joy** (喜), and **equanimity** (捨).
- The third aggregate – perceptions.
 - ➔ There are six kinds of perceptions corresponding to our six internal faculties and external objects.
 - ➔ **It is the perceptions that recognize objects**, physical or mental.
- The fourth aggregate – mental formations.
 - ➔ It refers to volitional actions, mental or physical, that produce karmic results, either good or bad.
- The fifth aggregate – consciousness.
 - ➔ It recognizes the existence of an object, but does not recognize what the object is.

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□ What is Viparinama-Dukkata (行苦)?

- It refers to sufferings of decay or destruction.
- These sufferings are caused by change or transience.
 - ➔ Nothing is permanent.
- These are mental sufferings.

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□ There is a cause/origin of sufferings – Samudaya (集)

- ▶ The concept of karma (業)
 - ➔ It is based on the natural law of causality.
 - ➔ Being a natural law, there is no judge, jury, or ruling body that determines the consequences of what we do.
 - ➔ The consequences (retribution) of what we do are determined by our past body actions (身), speeches (語), and thoughts (意).
 - ➔ The consequences are what we are receiving today.
 - ➔ Karma refers to an action and its retribution.
- ▶ There are innumerable causes and conditions of sufferings.
 - ➔ We are committing to innumerable karmas every moment.
- ▶ They are driven by the **three poisons** (三毒煩惱):
 - ➔ Greed or craving, (貪)
 - Endless desires, severe attachments, ceaseless discontent, etc.
 - ➔ Anger (瞋), and
 - When our greed is not satisfied, we become angry.

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□ There is a cause or origin of sufferings (Cont'd)

➤ Three Poisons (Cont'd):

➔ Ignorance (癡)

- Fundamentally, greed and anger arises from our **ignorance – delusion**.
- Our delusion prevents us from seeing the true reality of dharma.
- All dharma are conditioned and are empty, null, and void of self-existence.

➤ Greed, Anger, and Ignorance are also called Mind Karma (意業) that drives our Body Karma (身業) and Verbal Karma (口業)

➔ Body Karma: killing (殺), stealing (盜), and sexual misconduct (淫)

➔ Verbal Karma: divisive speech (兩舌), harsh speech (惡口), deceitful speech (妄言), and enticing speech (綺語).

➤ The Body Karma, Verbal Karma, and Mind Karma together

➔ Seeded and is seeding the causes of all sufferings of past, present, and future;

➔ Conditioned and is conditioning all sufferings of past, present, and future.

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□ There is a cessation of sufferings – Nirodha (滅)

- Also known as **Nirvana** (涅槃) which is the absolute truth or ultimate reality.
- It is beyond duality or relativity – **One-Truth Dharma Realm.**
 - ➔ Dharmakaya is recovered – the ultimate body (法身)
 - ➔ Prajna is recovered – the ultimate wisdom (般若)
 - ➔ Ultimate bliss – total liberation of all sufferings (Moksha) (解脫)
- It is beyond our intellectual abilities or faculties to understand at this point.
- It is unimaginable, but it does exist.
- It can only be attained when we reach Buddha-hood.
- Therefore, we must cultivate continuously with diligence and focus.

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□ There is a path leading to the cessation of Dukkha – Magga. (道)

- It is the Noble Eightfold Path (八正道).
 - ➔ Right **understanding** (正見): of oneself and the world,
 - ➔ Right **thought** (正思維): free of greed and anger.
 - ➔ Right **speech** (正語): truthful, meaningful, and with good will.
 - ➔ Right **action** (正業): proper behavioral conduct in every respect.
 - ➔ Right **livelihood** (正命): proper lifestyle that is pure and simple.
 - ➔ Right **effort** (正勤): being diligent and focused.
 - ➔ Right **mindfulness** (正念): always being aware of and attentive to our own conduct.
 - ➔ Right **concentration** (正定): pure, clear, and tranquil mind.
- Regardless of Theravada or Mahayana Buddhism, the Noble Eightfold Path is a **must**.
 - ➔ Criteria may be different.
 - ➔ Criteria differences exist even among different Mahayana Schools.