

Introduction To Buddhism Series

Lecture 1 – The Basics



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❑ Origination of Buddhism

- Establishment began ~2,500 years ago; formed over many years.
- By Buddha Sakyamuni (who originally was a prince of a kingdom).
- In northern India (Nepal today)

❑ Propagation

- Theravada – Prevalent in Indo-China (e.g., Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia,)
- Mahayana – Prevalent in China, Taiwan, Japan, Tibet, Nepal, Korea, Vietnam,
- Massive translation of Mahayana sutras took place in China beginning 67 AD and lasted over 1000 years, sponsored by the imperial governments through all dynasties.

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□ What Exactly Is Buddhism?

- **NOT** a philosophy, **NOR** a religion
 - ➔ Although its presentation today appears to be religious, and
 - ➔ Academic institutes treat it as a philosophy to research.
- A Virtuous & Perfect **Education/Teaching**
 - ➔ Buddha Sakyamuni is our **Original/Ultimate** Teacher. (**Not a prophet, or god**)
 - ➔ As a teacher-student or master-apprentice relationship.
 - ➔ Most teachings were conducted in seminar settings rather than sermons or testimonials.
 - ➔ Skill-in-means allows it to be adapted to the mentality and circumstances of the audience being taught. **That is, no fixed teaching method or format.**
 - ➔ Buddha told us to be an independent individual and to find the truth by/from ourselves.
(not to blindly follow him, and ought to know **why you believe what you believe**)
- It is an education for seeking/recovering/attaining innate/ultimate wisdom and attaining complete enlightenment.
- It is **an art of living** – to live a relaxed and healthy mental life.

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□ What Exactly Is Buddhism? (Cont'd)

- Neither pessimistic, nor optimistic; rather, it is **realistic**.
- Teaching is for all sentient beings, without **distinction** of any kind – **true equality**.
- Sutras are the records of Sakyamuni's teaching over 45+ years, and are the materials used for teaching and learning today.
 - ➔ **They are not prophecies**.
- Theravada, Mahayana, and various practices are different methods, paths, or routes of reaching the above goals.
- Shravaka or Arahant (聲聞、阿羅漢), Pratyeka-Buddha (緣覺), Bodhisattva (菩薩), and Buddha (佛) are **different levels of achievement** or enlightenment.
- **Temples** were established originally as **educational institutes**, reported to the emperors directly.

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□ What Did Buddha Sakyamuni Teach Us?

- The Law of Cause, Conditions and Effects/Results (**a.k.a. Law of Causality** 因果律) governs everything in the universe, including the lives of sentient beings and the universe itself.
 - ➔ Cause, Conditions, and Results are **cyclic** and **continuous**, and **by no means function singularly**;
 - ➔ Everything was **seeded** and is **seeding**;
 - ➔ Everything was **conditioned** and is **conditioning**; therefore,
 - ➔ **Everything is empty and null, void of self-nature** (萬法皆空), but
 - ➔ **The Law of Causality**. (因果不空)
- Sentient beings possess **the same wisdom** and virtuous capabilities **as the Buddha – Equality**. (眾生皆有如來智慧德相)
- The innate wisdom and virtuous capabilities are temporarily **lost** or hidden and are unattainable due to our **DELUSION** (無明).
 - ➔ Constant wandering thoughts, (妄想)
 - ➔ Mind of making distinctions or discriminatory thoughts (分別)
 - ➔ Attachments, clinger, or dwelling. (執著)

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□ What Did Buddha Sakyamuni Teach Us? (Cont'd)

- **DELUSION** (Avidya 無明) is the root cause of all sufferings, **including birth and death.**
- Only when we **break through DELUSION**, can we **re-gain** our innate wisdom and virtuous capabilities and become a Buddha.
 - ➔ Dropping wandering thoughts
 - ➔ Dropping discriminatory thoughts
 - ➔ Dropping attachments
 - ➔ Attaining perfect enlightenment
- The only way to break through delusion is through **self-cultivation and practice.** (修行)

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□ What Is Karma (業報)?

- First, the concept of Pratitya Samutpada. (緣起)
 - ➔ Dependent arising – everything is driven by causes and conditions
 - ➔ No singularity or independence
 - ➔ No omni-potency
- So, what we receive or do is conditioned (所由) and conditioning (所).
 - ➔ There is no judge, jury, or ruling body that determines the consequences of what we do.
 - ➔ What we receive today (retribution) are the consequences of what we did in the past.
- Karma refers to an action and its retribution.
- **Karmas do not function singularly, either.**
 - ➔ **Good or bad!**
 - ➔ What the most scary is when bad karmas function together – **disaster**.
- We all have accumulated uncountable number of karmas over eons due to our Greed (貪), Anger (瞋), and Ignorance (癡).

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❑ What Is A Buddha?

- An individual who attained Innate Wisdom, and Perfect and Complete Enlightenment.

❑ What Are Those Statues?

- They are not gods.
- Symbolic representations of individuals who attained levels of Shravaka (聲聞), Pratyeka Buddha (緣覺), Bodhisattva (菩薩), or Buddha (佛), for examples.
 - ➔ Different names & sculptures represent our virtuous nature, innate qualities of wisdom, virtuous abilities and artistic talents, – they are infinite.
- The meanings of “worship” (namasseyya 摩頂) to these statues are:
 - ➔ Showing our admiration, gratitude, and respect to these individuals.
 - ➔ Reminding ourselves that we are **equally capable** of becoming one of them, through continuous practice, self-cultivation, and realization.
 - ➔ Humiliate ourselves – a practice to overcome our arrogance.
 - ➔ **Not** praying/asking for blessing!

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□ To Practice

- To begin with, in our daily lives:
 - ➔ Being filial and respectful toward parents, teachers and elders;
 - ➔ Having the great compassionate mind;
 - ➔ Nurturing our thinking and wisdom, and broadening our mind.
- Specifically,
 - ➔ Nurturing the Three Virtuous Conditions 〈三福〉
 - ➔ Abiding by the Six Principles of Harmony 〈六和〉
 - ➔ Centering on the Three Curriculums 〈三學〉
 - ➔ Being diligent on realizing the Six Paramitas 〈六度〉
 - ➔ Committing to following Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Great Vows 〈普賢十願〉 .

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□ To Practice (cont'd)

- Sutra selection:
 - ➔ Fitting individual's level of attainment;
 - ➔ Suitable and convenient for individual's way of living;
 - ➔ Compatible with the society the individual is living in.
- Any sutra is equally good
 - ➔ Sutras just recorded different ways/methods to attain achievement.
 - ➔ Any method is as good as the others.
 - ➔ One sutra fitting you is sufficient – that's all you need.
- One teacher, one sutra, and continuous cultivation (follow through) is the key to success.
 - ➔ **Very important** – always respect and praise students/teachers who practice other methods/sutras.

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❑ So, How Do I Know I Am on the Right Track?

- Am I having right teacher and following the right teaching?
 - ➔ Buddha told us four reliance principles to authenticate a Dharma teaching in *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* (大般涅槃經)
- Four Reliance Principles (四依法)
 - ➔ Rely on the Dharma, not on the people who expound it. (依法，不依人)
 - ➔ Rely on the meaning of the sutras, not just on the words. (依義，不依語)
 - ➔ Rely on the wisdom, not on the perception. (依智，不依識)
 - ➔ Rely on the sutras that lead us to enlightenment, not on those that do not. (依了義經，不依不了義經)
- Patriarchs elaborated Three Dharma Seals for us to authenticate a teaching.
 - ➔ All dharma are impermanent (一切法無常).
 - ➔ I have no control or determination power over any dharma (一切法無我).
 - ➔ Nirvana (涅槃) is the ultimate Moksha (解脫，滅) – ultimate liberation from suffering (涅槃寂滅).

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□ Nurturing Three Virtuous Conditions (淨業三福):

- Be **filial** to one's parents; **respectfully serve one's** teachers and all elders; be **compassionate** and refrain from killing; follow ten virtuous/good conducts.

(孝養父母；奉事師長；慈心不殺；修十善業)

- Take the **Three Refuges**; uphold the **precepts**, laws and customs; conduct oneself in a **proper and decent** manner.

(受持三歸；具足眾戒；不犯威儀)

- Give rise to the **Bodhi mind**; deeply believe in the “**law of causality**”; **recite and uphold** Mahayana Sutras, and **encourage others** to advance on the path to enlightenment.

(發菩提心；深信因果；讀誦大乘；勸進行者)

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□ Abiding by Six Principles of Harmony (六和敬):

For people in the same practice group (i.e., Sangha 合和僧):

- **Share** the same viewpoints and goals (見和同解).
- **Abide by** the same precepts and rules (戒和同修).
- Live and practice together **harmoniously** (身和同住).
- **Accord** with others and not argue (口和無諍).
- Experience the **inner peace and happiness** from practicing together (意和同悅).
- Share benefits **harmoniously** (利和同均).

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□ Centering on the Three Curriculumms (三學):

- Self-discipline or abiding by the **precepts**. (戒)
- Settle our minds with **deep concentration** – **Dhyana**. (定)
- Follow the method of self-cultivation and **uncover innate wisdom**. (慧)

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❑ Realizing Six Prajna Paramitas (六度):

- Giving – Generosity (布施)
- Moral self-discipline, abiding by the precepts (持戒)
- Patience and tolerance (忍辱)
- Diligence/Zeal in cultivation (精進)
- Deep concentration – Dhyana (禪定)
- Wisdom – Prajna (般若 / 智慧)

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□ Committing to Following Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Vows (普賢十願)

- Pay equally respect to all beings and things (禮敬諸佛).
 - ➔ They are all Buddhas or Buddhas-to-be.
- Praise the virtues and kindness of others (稱讚如來).
 - ➔ Admire and adore the good – i.e., the true nature/virtuous deed.
- Make offerings extensively and respectfully (廣修供養).
- Repent karmic obstacles and vow not to repeat them (懺悔業障).
 - ➔ Karmic obstacles resulted from afflictions (煩惱障) and knowledge-attachment (所知障), which obstructed us from seeing our true nature and attaining enlightenment.
- Be joyful over others meritorious deeds (隨喜功德).
 - ➔ By no means to harbor jealousy or hinder others.
- Request those who truly practice to widely propagate the Buddha's teaching – turn the Dharma wheel (請轉法輪).

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□ Committing to following Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Vows (Cont'd)

- Ask/appeal to Buddhas/teachers to reside in this world and to guide us (請佛住世).
- Constantly be a follower of Buddha's teachings (常隨佛學).
 - ➔ Diligently/tirelessly uphold the Buddha's teaching in our every thought, word, and deed.
- Accord with all sentient beings (恆順眾生).
 - ➔ While according, look for opportunities to try to encourage people to stop committing to wrongdoings.
- Dedicate all merits (普皆迴向).
 - ➔ Dedicate the peace and happiness gained from practicing the above deeds to all sentient beings, hoping that they will attain the unsurpassed understanding.

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□ Summary

- Refrain from all evil (諸惡莫做),
- Practice all good (眾善奉行),
- Purify/Cleansing our mind (自淨其意),
- This is the teaching of all Buddhas (是諸佛教).

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❑ Other Classes/Subsequent Sessions

- Three Refuges, Four Reliance Principles, and Three Dharma Seals (三皈依、四依法及三法印)
- Four Noble Truths (四聖諦)
- The Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation (十二因緣)
- Noble Eight-fold Path (八正道)
- Three Virtuous Conditions (淨業三福)
- Six Harmonies (六和敬)
- The Three Curriculums (三學)
- Six Paramitas (六度 a.k.a. 六波羅蜜)
- Ten Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva (普賢十願)
- Pure Land and Pure Mind (淨土與淨心)

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□ Terminologies:

- Theravada (小乘): The paths to attaining Enlightenment by strictly abiding by the precepts. Focusing on attaining accomplishments for himself or herself.
- Mahayana (大乘): The Bodhisattva's paths of helping ALL sentient beings to attain Enlightenment.
- Pratitya Samutpada (緣起):
 - ➔ Mutual dependency – Arise due to convergence of conditions.
- Klesha (煩惱) – Affliction.
 - ➔ Generic term referring to the “causes” from where sufferings are resulted.
- Twelve Nidanas (十二因緣) – The Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation.

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□ Terminologies:

- Shravaka (聲聞): The enlightenment level at which one breaks out of the delusion through the Four Noble Truths.
- Pratyek-buddha (緣覺): The enlightenment level at which one breaks out of the delusion through the Twelve Nidanas.
- Shunyata (空性): Emptiness.
 - ➔ Void of self-existence or self-nature.
- Samsara (輪迴): Re-incarnation.
- Avidya (無明): Unknown, unaware, or unclear – Delusion
 - ➔ Refer to unaware of the Shunyata.
 - ➔ The root cause of samsara.
- dharma (法): all conditioned results.
 - ➔ This is actually referring to everything in the Universe and include the Universe itself.
- Dharma (佛法): Refers to the teaching.

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□ Terminologies:

- Karma (業): An action and its retribution.
- Moksha (解脫, 滅): Ultimate liberation from Samsara (輪迴).
- Shamatha (止): Tranquility from deep concentration.
- Vipashyana (觀): Self-reflection from inside while in Shamatha.

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□ Useful URLs for Reference

- <http://www.amtb-dba.org/English/Text/Buddhism/index.html>
- <http://www.amtb-dba.org/English/Text/Understand.html>
- <http://www.amtb-dba.org/English/Text/Education.html>

- http://english.hsilai.org/e_hsilai/dharma_talk/dharma_talk.htm
- http://english.hsilai.org/e_hsilai/dharma_talk/dharma_talk_time.htm
- http://english.hsilai.org/e_hsilai/dharma_talk/dharma_talk_deeds.htm
- http://english.hsilai.org/e_hsilai/dharma_talk/dharma_talk_rebirth.htm
- http://english.hsilai.org/e_hsilai/dharma_talk/dharma_talk_perfection.htm