

Introduction To Buddhism Series

Lecture 5 – Understanding the Noble Eightfold Path



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□ A quick review.

➤ Topic One : General Introduction

- ➔ Buddhism is an **education**, not a religion or a philosophy.
 - It teaches us how to recover our wisdom and regain our Buddha nature.
 - It teaches us how to solve our problems through wisdom – an art of living.
- ➔ The **law of causality** governs everything in the universe.
- ➔ 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 each other – prevailing ones occur first.**
 - Karmas, good or bad, accumulate over time and do not disappear.
 - When many bad karmic retributions come together, they form disasters.
- ➔ Cultivation means to stop planting bad seeds and nurturing bad conditions, and to, instead, plant good seeds and nurture good conditions.

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- Topic Two : Taking the Three Refuges and Accepting the Four Reliance Principles
 - ➔ We formally accept the Buddha's education and **set our goals** by Taking the Three Refuges.
 - Buddha (Awakening 覺), Dharma (Right or Proper 正), Sangha (Purity & Clarity 淨)
 - The Three Refuges are within ourselves.
 - ➔ We return to and rely on the **Three Refuges within ourselves** and accept the **Four Reliance Principles** provided to us by the Buddha to guide ourselves along the path of **cultivation**.
 - Rely on the Dharma, not on the persons who expound it. (依法不依人)
 - Rely on the meaning of the sutra, not just on the words. (依義不依語)
 - Rely on wisdom, not on perception. (依智不依識)
 - Rely on the sutras that can lead us to break out of delusion, not on the ones which won't. (依了義經不依不了義經)
 - (Sutras need to fit one's level, or they will not help.)
 - ➔ Four Reliance Principles also help us authenticate a teaching and the person who expounds the teaching.

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□ A quick review (Cont'd)

➤ Topic Three : Recognizing the Four Noble Truths

➔ We begin cultivation by recognizing the Four Noble Truths:

- There is suffering in our lives. (苦)
- There is a cause or origin of sufferings. (集)
- There is a cessation of sufferings. (滅)
- There is a path leading to the cessation of sufferings. (道)

➔ Karma (業) refers to an action and its retribution under the law of causality.

➔ Sufferings occur because we are committing innumerable karmas every moment.

➔ Bad karmas are subsumed as **three poisons: greed (貪), anger (瞋), and ignorance (癡).**

- Greed, Anger, and Ignorance are also called the **Mind Karma (意業)** that drives our **Body Karma (身業)** and **Speech Karma (語業).**

➔ **Body Karma, Speech Karma, and Mind Karma** together

- **Seeded** and **are seeding** the causes of all sufferings of the past, present, and future
- **Conditioned** and **are conditioning** all sufferings of the past, present, and future

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□ A quick review. (Cont'd)

- Topic Three : Recognizing the Four Noble Truths (Cont'd)
 - ➔ Nirvana is the cessation of sufferings. (Nirodha 滅諦)
 - ➔ Nirvana can only be attained via continuous cultivation with diligence and focus, and when we reach Buddhahood.
 - ➔ Realization of the **Noble Eightfold Path** is **the path** to the cessation of sufferings, Nirvana.
- Topic Four: The Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation
 - ➔ Clearly depicts the function of the law of causality in the death & rebirth cycle
 - Dependent Arising (Pratitya Samutpada 緣生)
 - **Due to the existence or production of A, B arises or is produced.**
 - ➔ Also explains how to “stop” the chain (Moksha 還滅)
 - **If we don't want B to arise or be produced, we MUST STOP the existence or production of A.**
 - ➔ The Twelve Links are:
 - First Link – Ignorance or Avidya (無明)
 - Second Link – Volitional Action (行)

(Avidya and Actions are the Causes/Seeds (過去苦因) in the past, from which the present Effects (Dukkha, 現在苦果) arise.)

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□ A quick review. (Cont'd)

➤ Topic Four: The Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation

➔ The Twelve Links are: (Cont'd)

- Third Link – Consciousness (識)
- Fourth Link – Name & Form (名色)
- Fifth Link – Six Sense Spheres (六入)
- Sixth Link – Contact (觸)
- Seventh Link – Feeling (受)
- Eighth Link – **Attachment (愛)**
- Ninth Link – **Grasping (取)**
- Tenth Link – **Existence (有)**

Consciousness through Existence are the seeds from which future Dukkha arise. (現在苦因)

- Eleventh Link – Birth (生)
- Twelfth Link – Aging and Death (老死)

Birth, Aging and Death are the future Dukkha (苦) arisen from the seeds of suffering we are presently planting. (未來苦果)

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□ A quick review. (Cont'd)

➤ Topic Four: The Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation

➔ Attachments (愛), Grasping (取), and Existence (有) are the only ones over which we still have control.

- Breaking out of the Chain from these places are definitely possible.
- It seems the easiest from Existence: stopping depositing anything into our consciousness.

➔ Mahayana's Perspective of Four Noble Truths and Twelve Links (大乘佛法對四聖諦與十二因緣的觀察)

- All dharma are conditionally arisen or existent (緣生).
- The existence (生) of the Four Noble Truths and the Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation is also a false illusion; so are the extinctions (滅) of them.
『無無明，亦無無明盡，乃至無老死，亦無老死盡。無苦集滅道，無智亦無得』。
(般若波羅密多心經)
- Form and Emptiness do not differ in nature – they are co-existent or non-existent.
『色不異空，空不異色』(是指性相不二)
- Therefore, we should dwell on NEITHER emptiness NOR existence.
(不住空亦不住有)

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□ The Noble Eightfold Path

- Recorded in the *Agama Sutra* (阿含經) family and many other sutras when the Buddha taught the *Saptatrimasad-Bodhi-Paksika Dharma* (三十七菩提分法) – the thirty-seven conditions leading to Buddhahood.
- Bodhi-Paksika are divided into seven Sections; Noble Eightfold Path is at the last.
 - ➔ In other words, all prerequisites have been met.
- Regardless of Theravada or Mahayana Buddhism, the Noble Eightfold Path is a **must**.
 - ➔ Criteria may be different; the approaches may be different, too.
 - ➔ Criteria differences exist even among different Mahayana Schools.
- It centers on teaching us to take the middle way (i.e., to avoid the extremes) (中庸之道) and to develop the proper cultivation path.
 - ➔ “Right” is not a fixed definition; rather, it implies deep context of “proper” which is situational.

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□ Right Understanding (正見)

- ▶ “Conduct our behaviors with **no outflows**, and clearly reflect the Four Noble Truths; this is called Right Understanding.” (Patriarch Ou Yi) 『修無漏行觀，見四諦分明，名正見。』(藕益大師法語)
 - ➔ “Outflow” refers to any divergence from our Buddha nature. (漏 Anasrava)
 - ➔ Our Buddha nature is **pure, clear, tranquil, and harmonious**.
 - ➔ Used here “outflow” refers to our afflictions (煩惱 klesha) due to wearisome affairs and knowledge. (煩惱障、所知障)
 - ➔ Behaviors are those of body, speech, and mind. (身、語、意)
- ▶ Right Understanding means that we clearly see the true reality:
 - ➔ One sees the true self, and the proper relationship between self and the surroundings, i.e., as big as the Universe.
- ▶ Developing Right Understanding is a progressive process:
 - ➔ Theravada (小乘) and Mahayana (大乘), as well as different schools have different criteria.
 - ➔ Arhant (阿羅漢), Bodhisattva (菩薩), and Buddha (佛), for example, represent different levels of Right Understanding.

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□ Right Thought (正思維)

- “Use the **no leak mind to resonate with our thinking**, let the no leak mind function on our six sense faculties while encountering sense objects, and nurture these functions until attaining Maha Par nirvana; this is called Right Thought” (Patriarch Ou Yi)
『以無漏心相應思維，動發覺知籌量，為令增長，入大涅槃，名正思維。』(藕益大師法語)
- When “thinking” resonates with our no leak mind,
 - ➔ It is not based on perception or consciousness (不賴心意識)
 - ➔ It is based on wisdom reflecting the realities. (用觀照 Vipashyana)
- Right Thought is driven by Right Understanding.

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□ Right Speech (正語)

- “Use the **no leak wisdom**, avoid the four livelihoods, refrain from committing bad verbal karmas, and always use proper language; this is called Right Speech.” (Patriarch Ou Yi) 『以無漏慧，除四邪命，攝諸口業，住一切正語中，名正語。』(藕益大師法語)
- The four livelihoods refer to earning a living by:
 - ➔ Social interaction (方口食), (e.g., lobbyists).
 - ➔ Witchlike engagements (維口食), e.g., witch doctors.
 - ➔ Use of supernatural forces (仰口食), e.g., fortune tellers.
 - ➔ The cultivation of crops (下口食).
- Bad verbal karmas include:
 - ➔ Divisive speech (兩舌), Harsh speech (惡口),
 - ➔ Deceitful speech (妄言), and Enticing speech (綺語).

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□ Right Action (正業)

- “Use the **no leak wisdom**, refrain from committing bad body karmas, and always conduct ourselves with a pure and clear mind; this is called Right Action.” (Patriarch Ou Yi) 『以無漏慧，除身一切邪業，住清淨正身業中，名正業。』(藕益大師法語)
- Bad body karmas refer to, in particular:
 - ➔ Killing (殺), Burglary (盜), and Sexual Misconduct (淫).
- We should also behave “just right” in everything we do.
 - ➔ Take the middle way and avoid the extremes. (行中庸之道)
 - ➔ Be humble and respect others. (自卑而尊人)

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□ Right Livelihood (正命)

- “Use the **no leak wisdom** to conduct our three karmas (i.e., body, speech, and mind), refrain from committing the five wrong livelihoods, and always earn a living from those that are pure and clear; this is called Right Livelihood.” (Patriarch Ou Yi) 『以無漏慧，通除三業中五種邪命，住清淨正命中，名正命。』(藕益大師法語)
- The five wrong livelihoods refer to earning a living by:
 - ➔ Demonstration of “special” capabilities to fool or cheat the public (詐現異相奇特).
 - ➔ Promotion or exaggeration of one’s own merit to make people believe (自說功德).
 - ➔ Use of psychic abilities to make people believe (占相吉凶).
 - ➔ Use of power or threatening means to make people follow (高聲現威).
 - ➔ Use of improper interest to entice people (說所得利以動人心).
- Living a simple life
 - ➔ Is the most effective way to be away from greed and anger.

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□ Right Effort (正勤)

- “Let our **no leak wisdom** resonate with our **Buddha nature** to guide our cultivation, be diligent and focused, and proceed on the path to Nirvana; this is called Right Effort.” (Patriarch Ou Yi) 『以無漏慧相應，勤行精進，修涅槃道，名正精進。』(藕益大師法語)
- Persevering the **Four Assiduities** (四正勤)
 - ➔ Stop immediately the wrong/evil doings already committed or being committed – put an end to existing evils
(已生惡令斷滅)
 - ➔ Stop the wrong/evil doings about to be committed – prevent evils from arising
(未生惡令不生)
 - ➔ Give rise to **the thoughts of good deeds and begin to commit them**
(未生善令生起)
 - ➔ **Continue to nurture all good deeds already committed**
(已生善令增長)

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□ Right Effort (正勤) (Cont'd)

- Retract the six faculties of our sense organs. (都攝六根)
- Keep our mind **continuously** focused on purity, clarity, and tranquility. (淨念相繼)
- The Zen school uses meditation as the method to accomplish this.
- The Pureland school uses the Buddha Name Chanting method.

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□ Right Mindfulness (正念)

- “Use our **no leak wisdom** to resonate with our Buddha nature, be mindful of the major cultivation method and the auxiliary method; this is called Right Mindfulness.” (Patriarch Ou Yi) 『以無漏慧相應，念正道及助道法，名正念。』(藕益大師法語)
- Many people select a major cultivation method and another method as a helper.
 - ➔ The auxiliary method is optional and completely up to the individual.
 - ➔ If chosen incorrectly, it may hinder, rather than help.
- In the Pureland school, chanting Buddha Amitabha’s name is the major as well as the auxiliary method.

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□ Right Concentration (正定)

- Also known as Dhyana (禪定)
- “Use the **no leak wisdom** to resonate with the state of Dhyana; this is called Right Concentration.” (Patriarch Ou Yi) 『以無漏慧相應入定，名正定。』 (藕益大師法語)
- The state of Dhyana is relative:
 - ➔ Dhyana is a “core course” for every Buddhism school, and is a **necessary, but not sufficient**, condition to attain Buddhahood.
 - ➔ The more one’s deluded mind is purified and cleansed, the more one will be able to achieve a higher level of Dhyana.
 - ➔ Only in this way could our ultimate wisdom begin to arise.
- The Zen school uses meditation; the Pureland school uses chanting Amitabha Buddha’s name.
- Many patriarchs personally practiced and also advised us to use Buddha name chanting method.

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□ The Noble Eightfold Path encompasses the entire spectrum of our daily lives today.

- Educational aspect:
 - ➔ Right **Understanding** (正見)
 - ➔ Right **Mindfulness** (正念)
 - ➔ Right **Concentration** (正定)
- Economical aspect:
 - ➔ Right **livelihood** (正命)
- Social aspect:
 - ➔ Right **speech** (正語)
 - ➔ Right **action** (正業)
- Motivational aspect:
 - ➔ Right **thought** (正思維)
 - ➔ Right **effort** (正勤)