

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

Lecture 1 – The Basics



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❑ The 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)

❑ The 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 of all dynasties consistently

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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/Ulimate** 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/training for seeking/recovering/attaining our 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
 - ➔ There are numerous schools which follow the core of the Buddha's teachings
- Shravaka or Arahant (聲聞、阿羅漢), Pratyeka-Buddha (緣覺), Bodhisattva (菩薩), and Buddha (佛) are **different levels of achievement** of enlightenment
- **Temples** (Sze 寺) were established originally as **educational institutes** reporting 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, Condition, and Result 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, null, and 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 that of a 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)
 - ➔ Mindset of making distinctions or discriminatory thoughts (分別)
 - ➔ Attachments, clinging, 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**, and manifest itself into
 - ➔ Greed
 - ➔ Anger
 - ➔ Ignorance
- Because of delusion, we are making karmas (業) every moment
- 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)?

- 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 is conditioned (所由) and what we do is conditioning (所)
 - ➔ There is not a judge, a jury, or a ruling body who determines the consequences of what we do
 - ➔ What we receive today (retribution) are the consequences of what we did in the past and up to the present
 - ➔ The consequences are rooted (caused) at the very moment when something is done
 - ➔ The consequences surface when the conditions are mature or converge
 - ➔ No one can predict when and where the conditions will mature or converge
 - ➔ Cultivation is to root good causes, to nurture good conditions, and to choke bad conditions
- 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 – a **disaster** or **tragedy**
- 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 & Complete Enlightenment
- Self enlightenment (自覺)
- Help others enlighten (覺他)
- Perfection in both self-enlightening and enlightening others (覺行圓滿)

❑ What Are Those Statues, then?

- 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 them
 - ➔ Reminding ourselves that we are **equally capable** of becoming one of them, through continuous practice, self-cultivation, and realization
 - ➔ Humiliating 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 a great compassionate mind
- ➔ Nurturing our thinking and wisdom, and broadening our mind

➤ Specific areas,

- ➔ Nurturing the Three Virtuous Conditions 〈三福〉
- ➔ Abiding by the Six Principles of Living in Harmony 〈六和〉
- ➔ Centering on the Three Curriculum 〈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 or capability
- ➔ Suitable and convenient for individual's way of living
- ➔ Compatible with the society and environment the individual lives

➤ Any sutra is as good as the others

- ➔ 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, or schools

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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?
 - ➔ The Buddha told us four reliance principles to authenticate a Dharma teaching in the *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 on the literals (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 Dharma teaching
 - ➔ Impermanence — All dharma are impermanent (一切法無常)
 - ➔ Selflessness — 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 attend one's** teachers and all elders; be **compassionate** and refrain from killing; realize the Ten Virtuous Deeds (*Dasabhadra Karmamarga*)
(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; always 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 Living in 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)

- It is called curriculum because of their ordering (Chapter 6 of *Surangama Sutra* 楞嚴經第六品－清淨明晦章)
 - ➔ Because of upholding the practice of precepts, attaining Dhyana is possible (因戒生定)
 - ➔ Because of the mind Dhyana, arising and functioning of the innate wisdom is possible (因定發慧)
- 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)
- 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)

- **Equally respect 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 generously, extensively, and respectfully (廣修供養)**
- **Repent karmic obstacles and vow not to repeat them (懺悔業障)**
 - ➔ Obstacles resulted from afflictions (煩惱障)
 - ➔ Obstacles resulted from and knowledge-attachment (所知障)
 - ➔ They 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 true practitioners to turn the Dharma Wheel (請轉法輪)**
 - ➔ Widely spread the Buddha's teaching to benefit a wider audience

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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 evils (諸惡莫做),
- Practice all virtuous conducts (眾善奉行),
- Purify/Cleanse our mind (自淨其意),
- This is the teaching of all Buddhas (是諸佛教)

□ And One Can

- Live without Fears and Worries
- Live healthily
- Live happily

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❑ Other Classes Offered Covering the Theory and Practice

- Three Refuges, Four Reliance Principles, and Three Dharma Seals (三皈依、四依法、三法印、及一實相印)
- The Four Noble Truths (四聖諦)
- The Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation—The Nidanas (十二因緣)
- The Noble Eight-fold Path (八正道)
- The Three Virtuous Conditions (淨業三福)
- The Six Principles of Living in Harmony (六和敬)
- The Three Curriculum (三學)
- The Six Prajna 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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□ How are Buddhist organizations/temples and monks and nuns supported?

➤ At Buddha Sakyamuni's time

- ➔ Solely on donations – food and all other needs
- ➔ Sangha members did not own anything
- ➔ Donations to one sangha member belonged to all members

➤ Before mid-Tang Dynasty in China

- ➔ Primarily by government sponsorship and donations from people
- ➔ Temples gradually began to own properties through governments and donations

➤ Post mid-Tang Dynasty in China

- ➔ Donations were still the primary source of support
- ➔ More and more temples owned their own properties
- ➔ Monks and nuns raised crops on the temple owned lands and generated income on a self-sustained basis to support the temples and themselves
- ➔ **Conceptually, a temple's assets belonged to all Buddhists (monastics and laymen) from all directions**
 - No individual ownership
- ➔ Giving to the poor and help emergencies with their extras
- ➔ **Daily living codes were developed and strictly followed**
- ➔ “Work to eat” was the norm

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□ How are Buddhist organizations/temples and monks and nuns supported? (Cont' d)

- These days – in China (to the best of my knowledge)
 - ➔ Majority of the temples are monitored and supported by the government
- These days – in Taiwan and the places I know
 - ➔ No specific government sponsorship
 - ➔ Donations are the major source of support
 - ➔ Temples own their own assets
 - The concept of belonging to Buddhists from all directions begins to fade, or has vaporized already
 - ➔ Some choose to operate commercial activities, for example, vegetarian restaurants, souvenir shops, and bookshops within their temples/centers
 - ➔ Some even choose to do fund-raising (soliciting) activities
 - ➔ Very few organizations/centers choose to rely solely on donations
 - The Pure Land Center & Buddhist Library (i.e., our Center) is one example

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□ Terminologies:

- Theravada (小乘): The paths to attaining Enlightenment by strictly abiding by the precepts. Focusing on attaining accomplishments for oneself
- 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.
- The Nidanas (十二因緣) – The Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation.

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□ Terminologies (Commonly used terms):

- **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 Nidanas.
- **Shunyata (空性):** the emptiness nature
 - ➔ Void of self-existence or self-nature
- **Samsara (輪迴):** re-incarnation, cycle of death and re-birth
- **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 Buddha's 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 attained from deep concentration.
- Vipashyana (觀): Self-reflection from inside while in Shamatha.
- Dhyana (定): A state of mind in which one is totally detached from all forms and afflictions, and in which time and space dimensions become boundless.
- Tripitaka (三藏): Refers to the Buddha's teaching in three categories:
 - ➔ Sutras (經): the recorded direct teachings of the Buddha
 - ➔ Vinaya (律): rules, precepts, or disciplines
 - ➔ Sustras (論): commentary notes made by Bodhisattvas, and by patriarchs)

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□ Useful URL References for Introductory Materials

- <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
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- http://english.hsilai.org/e_hsilai/dharma_talk/dharma_talk_perfection.htm