

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

Lecture 5 – Understanding the Noble Eightfold Path



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❑ A quick review

➤ Topic One : The Basics

- ➔ 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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□ A quick review

➤ Topic Two : The Three Refuges and 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 : 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 : 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
 - ➔ Arahant (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 Paranirvana; 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 speech 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 tempt 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, Samatha (止) or Vipasshyana (觀), 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 curriculum” 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 likely 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 Pure Land 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)