

Buddhism Study Guide

buddhadhamma

P.A. Martin

The Founder of Buddhism

Siddhartha (personal name) Gautama/Gotoma (family name) of the Sakyas (clan name). Buddha (honorary).

Gautama lived in Northeast India/Nepal sometime between 620's-400 BCE. The traditional Theravadan date of his death is 543/542. The most popular opinion among modern scholars is that he lived from 563-483.

He left his family at the age of 29 to become a wandering monk in the *shramana* tradition. The *shramanas* believed that the ultimate goal of spirituality is liberation from the cycle (*samsara*) of birth, death, and rebirth, which they regarded as full of suffering. They practiced monastic renunciation (*sannyasa*) of all worldly ties, extreme asceticism, and meditation in the hope of attaining enlightenment unto liberation. This spiritual ethos was absorbed into orthodox (*astika*) Hinduism over time through the influence of the *shramana* tradition. But the *shramanas* originally existed separately as their own spiritual movement. They were regarded as unorthodox (*nastika*) for their rejection of the Vedic scriptures, the priests (*brahmins*), and rituals. Jainism, which survives to the present, was a major *shramana* sect that preceded Buddhism. Gautama Buddha formed another sect in the *shramana* tradition but modified its extreme asceticism.

After 6 years of experimenting with asceticism he found the middle way (*majjhima-patipada/madhyama-pratipad*) between extremes and, recalling an experience he had as a boy, he realized that liberation is to be attained not through bodily deprivations but ultimately through meditative absorption (*samadhi*). Thereupon he sat under a tree in deep meditation and resolved to not get up until he became fully awakened.

The Buddha preached his first sermon to his former ascetical partners on the topic of the Four Noble Truths and continued to teach for 45 years.

Siddhartha Gautama died of food contamination. His lifespan was 80 years.

The Concept of a Buddha

The word Buddha is from the Pali/Sanskrit word *bodhi*, which means to be awake, aware, and to understand. It refers to one that has become enlightened and awakened to the nature of reality.

All sentient beings have the potential to become Buddhas. But the title "the Buddha" is an honorary designation that is only granted to a *samma/samyak-sambuddha*, which is one that:

- + has "perfectly awakened" (lit. meaning) by developing the qualities and faculties to the highest extent,
- + is the first awakened being in an era after the true teachings have disappeared from the world,
- + therefore one who has realized the *dhamma* on his own without a teacher,
- + and teaches others the *dhamma*, thus "turning (or setting in motion) the wheel of the *dhamma*" (*dhamma-cakka-pavattana/dharma-cakra-pravartana*) in the world for the awakening of sentient beings.

(In Mahayana Buddhism a Supreme Buddha is supermundane and is more like a deity than a mortal being.)

A *prakyetabuddha* is one that has fully awakened on his own without a teacher but does not teach others.

Theravadan Buddhism has a rarely used term for those that fully awaken as disciples: *sravakabuddha*. This exact term is not in the Pali Canon. But awakened disciples are described as *bodhi*. Thus they were originally considered to be buddhas despite the fact that this is completely denied in post-Shakyamuni Buddhism.

Gautama Buddha is the only awakened being that has the honorary title of "the Buddha" in this span of human history. The Pali Canon mentions six previous Buddhas (the previous was Vipassi) and one future Buddha (Maitreya). Mahayana Buddhism introduced several different Buddhas (from the distant past and in other worlds) that are important characters in its scriptures, prayers, and iconology.

Common Titles of the Buddha

Bhagavan: blessed, opulent, prosperous, and by extension has the connotation of holy, venerable, and even divine lord in some contexts. The standard translation of this phrase in the scriptures is “Blessed One.”

Tathagata (pronounced thath-AH-gata): the standard self-designation of Buddha in the scriptures, has a double meaning of “thus-gone-one” (from the phenomenal world of *samsara*) and “thus-arrived-one” (to the unconditioned state of *nirvana*), but is often left untranslated. *Thath* is a traditional word for “thusness.”

Sakyamuni: “Sage of the Sakyis” (in reference to the Sakya clan)

The Four Sights of the Buddha

These sights caused him to pursue the spiritual life:

1. an old man
2. a sick person suffering from disease
3. a dead body
4. a monk

The legend is that Gautama was unaware of the extent of suffering until he ventured out of his sheltered palace and saw the three negative sights that are the fate of humanity. After seeing the fourth sight, he realized that he wanted to escape this suffering, which is perpetuated by the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Thereupon, he renounced the world through monasticism to find liberation.

The Buddha’s Religious Order and Lay Followers

The word “Buddhism” is Western. There was no distinguishing name for the religious order. It was called “the *dhamma* (doctrine/teachings) or *dhamma-vinaya* (doctrine/teachings and discipline) of the Buddha.”

To enter the monastic community and undertake its discipline is the full-following of the Buddha’s *dhamma* as it is essentially a religious order for monastics. Lay people (*upasaka*) receive a “gradual instruction” (*anupubbi-katha*), starting with generosity and the moral virtues, but they are not full-followers of *dhamma*.

In early Buddhism the *sangha* (community) referred to the monastic religious order alone. This remains the usage in Theravada Buddhism. But in Mahayana Buddhism it also refers to the committed lay practitioners.

Lay people can reach partial awakening as “stream enterers” and remain in the lay state. But monasticism is regarded as almost absolutely necessary to attain full awakening. There is no concept of a fully awakened lay person who remains in the lay state. The tradition is that in the extremely rare circumstance that a lay person becomes fully awakened he/she will either immediately become a monk/nun or die on the same day.

The Three Refuges

Also known as the Three Gems or Jewels (*tiratana*; *tisarana*)

Laypeople are formally recognized as being committed to the Buddha’s *dhamma* when they take refuge in:

1. The Buddha (the historical Buddha, even in the earliest scriptures he said to believe/have faith in him)*
2. The Dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha)
3. The Sangha (the mendicant community of monks which instructs laypeople and other monks in *dhamma*)

*some later interpreters consider “taking refuge in the Buddha” to also be referring to the innate Buddha nature within themselves but this is not the original meaning.

The most ancient formula for “taking refuge:”

Buddham saranam gacchāmi

I go for refuge in the Buddha.

Dhammam saranam gacchāmi

I go for refuge in the Dharma.

Sangham saranam gacchāmi

I go for refuge in the Sangha

This formula is still used in Theravadan Buddhism.

Brahmanical Elements that Shramanas Rejected:

- the Vedic scriptures
- the priesthood
- salvific ritualism
- animal sacrifices
- dependence on gods for ultimate salvation
- the caste system
- an “eternal and unchanging” self/soul

Elements Held in Common with Indian Religion:

- local pantheons of gods
- the continual cycle of rebirth
- liberation from craving to escape rebirth and its suffering
- enlightenment out of ignorance as the means of salvation
- importance of meditation
- monasticism as the exit route
- brahmanical religious vocabulary

The Four Noble Truths:

(*ariya sacca; ariya satya*)

The central dogmas of Buddhism:

1. The fact that life involves *dukkha*
2. The origin of *dukkha* is craving
3. The cessation of *dukkha* is attainable
4. The way to end *dukkha* is the eightfold path

The meaning of *dukkha* is dissatisfaction, suffering, stress, etc.

The Classical Summary of the Four Truths:

1. *Dukkha*
2. *Dukkha Samudaya* (the origination of *dukkha*)
3. *Dukkha Nirodha* (the cessation of *dukkha*)
4. *Dukkha Nirodha Gamini Patipada* (the path to end *dukkha*)

The Four Truths from the Buddha's own words:

"This is the noble truth of *dukkha*: birth is *dukkha*, aging is *dukkha*, illness is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are *dukkha*; union with what is displeasing is *dukkha*; separation from what is pleasing is *dukkha*; not to get what one wants is *dukkha*; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are *dukkha*."

"This is the noble truth of the origin of *dukkha*: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there, that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination."

"This is the noble truth of the cessation of *dukkha*: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, nonreliance on it."

"This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*: it is the Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation."

***The second noble truth, that craving is the cause of suffering, is often interpreted as "desire is suffering." This is false. The word *tanha* literally means "thirst" and in the acquired technical usage it means "craving." In Buddhism, the noble desire for awakening is called *chanda* and, far from causing suffering, this desire is said to be the primary driving force that leads to the following of the path, awakening, and the end of suffering.

The four noble truths are based on the ancient Indian medical model: disease, diagnosis, cure, treatment. It is not original to Buddhism.

The Noble Eightfold Path

(*ariyo atthangiko maggo; aryastangamarga*)

Threefold division of the Eightfold Path:

1. Wisdom (*panna; prajna*) 1-2
 2. Morality (*sila*) 3-5
 3. Meditation (*samadhi*) 6-8
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1. Right View/Understanding (*samma-ditthi; samyag-drsti*)
 2. Right Intention (*samma-sankappa; samyak-samkalpa*)
 3. Right Speech (*samma-vaca; samyag-vac*)
 4. Right Action (*samma-kammanta; samyak-karmanta*)
 5. Right Livelihood (*samma-ajiva; samyag-ajiva*)
 6. Right Effort (*samma-vayama; samyag-vyayama*)
 7. Right Mindfulness (*samma-sati; samyak-smrti*)
 8. Right Meditation* (*samma-samadhi; samyak-samadhi*)

**Samadhi* is typically translated into English as "concentration." This is a weak translation in the context of the final limb of the Eightfold Path. It is better translated here as "meditation."

The Essence of the Spiritual Practice

The Buddha summed up the entirety of spiritual practice as *purification* of the mind. (On a scale of 1 to 10 in importance, the statement that the essence of practice is purification is beyond a 10.) This is because the soteriological paradigm is cessation of all the phenomenal defilements to arrive at the unconditioned state.

The Middle Way

(*majjhima patipada; madhyama-pratipad*)

The middle way is moderation between extremes:

Principally, moderation between extremes of sensual indulgence and mortifications on the spiritual path

Secondarily, moderation between extreme views (especially about the self/soul, cosmology, and *nirvana*)

(Also, moderation in the use of speculation, which is regarded as unhelpful and as a distraction on the path)

The Three Resolutions

1. To abstain from all evil (*sabbapapassa akaraṇaṃ*)
2. To cultivate the good (*kusalassa upasampadā*)
3. To purify one's mind (*sacittapariyodapanam*)

The Three Pillars of Dharma

1. Generosity (*dāna*)
2. Morality (*śīla*)
3. Mental Cultivation (*bhāvanā*)

The Three Defilements/Poisons

(*kilesas, kleshas*)

1. Greed (*lobha, raga*)
2. Aversion/ill-will (*dosa, dvesa*)
3. Delusion (*moha*)

The Five Precepts

1. To refrain from killing
2. To refrain from stealing
3. To refrain from sexual misconduct
4. To refrain from lying, harsh speech, idle speech, and slander
5. To refrain from taking intoxicants which cloud the mind and cause heedlessness

The Ten Precepts

In addition to the first five precepts:

6. Refrain from taking food at inappropriate times, such as after noon.
7. Refrain from singing, dancing, playing music, or attending entertainment programs.
8. Refrain from wearing perfume, cosmetics, and decorative accessories.
9. Refrain from sitting on high chairs and sleeping on luxurious or soft beds.
10. Refrain from accepting money.

The Five Hindrances

1. Sensual desire (*kamacchanda*)
2. Anger/ill-will (*byapada, vyapada*)
3. Sloth (*thina-middha*)
4. Restlessness/worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*)
5. Doubt (*vicikiccha*)

The Ten Fetters

1. Belief in a compounded self (*sakkayaditthi*)
2. Doubt or uncertainty, especially about the teachings (*vicikiccha*)
3. Attachment to rituals (*silabbataparamaso*)
4. Sensual desire (*kamacchando*)
5. Ill will (*vyapado*)
6. Lust for material existence and rebirth (*ruparago*)
7. Lust for immaterial existence and for rebirth in a formless realm (*aruparago*)
8. Conceit (*mana*)
9. Restlessness (*uddhacca*)
10. Ignorance (*avijja*)

The Ten/Six Perfections

Theravadan list of ten perfections (*paramita*) that must be cultivated to lead one to awakening:

1. Generosity (*dana*)*
2. Morality (*sila*)*
3. Renunciation (*nekkhamma*)
4. Wisdom (*pañña*)*
5. Energy/Strength/Effort (*viriya*)*
6. Patience (*khanti*)*
7. Truthfulness (*sacca*)
8. Resolution (*adhitthana*)
9. Loving-kindness (*metta*)
10. Equanimity (*upekkha*)

*these virtues, in addition to meditation (*dhyana*), are known as the Six Perfections in Mahayana Buddhism.

Compassion / Loving Kindness

The cultivation of the related virtues of compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness or benevolence (*metta*) is highly emphasized in Buddhism. This is comparable to the emphasis on the *agape* type of love in Christianity. Compassion, defined as the sympathetic desire to relieve the sufferings of others, is regarded as a hallmark virtue of awakened beings. It demonstrates that one truly understands the extent of suffering in the universe.

(In Mahayana Buddhism the two principle virtues are wisdom and compassion.)

The Four Right Exertions

1. Effort in restraint (*samvara padhana*) of the senses.
2. Effort in abandonment (*pahana padhana*) of defilements.
3. Effort in cultivation (*bhavana padhana*) of enlightenment factors.
4. Effort in preservation (*anurakkhana padhana*) of concentration.

The Four Bases of Power

Especially unto successful attainment of the spiritual powers (*iddhipada*) that help to attain awakening:

1. Desire/Zeal (*chanda*)
2. Persistence/Energy/Effort (*viriya*)
3. Intention/Mind/Thoughtfulness (*citta*)
4. Investigation/Discrimination (*vimamsa* or *panna*)

The Five Spiritual Faculties

1. Faith/Conviction (*saddha*) – controls doubt
2. Energy/Effort/Persistence (*viriya*) – controls laziness
3. Mindfulness/Memory (*sati*) – controls heedlessness
4. Concentration/Absorption (*samadhi*) – controls distraction
5. Wisdom/Understanding (*panna*) – controls ignorance

The Seven Factors/Qualities of Awakening

Awakening-related states:

1. Mindfulness (*sati*)
2. Investigation of Phenomena (*dhamma vicaya*)
3. Energy (*viriya*)
4. Rapture/Happiness (*piti*)
5. Tranquility (*passaddhi*)
6. Concentration/Absorption (*samadhi*)
7. Equanimity (*upekkha*)

Five Daily Recollections

1. I am of the nature to grow old; I cannot avoid this.
2. I am of the nature to become ill or injured; I cannot avoid these.
3. I am of the nature to die; I cannot avoid this.
4. All that is mine, dear, and delightful, will change and vanish.
5. I am the owner of my actions, I am born of my actions, I am related to my actions; any thoughts, words, or deeds that I do, good or evil, those I will inherit.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

To be meditated upon to gain insight unto enlightenment:

1. Mindfulness of the body
2. Mindfulness of the feelings
3. Mindfulness of the mind
4. Mindfulness of the mental phenomena

Mindfulness of these elements is referred to as the direct path (*ekāyano maggo*) to enlightenment.

Meditation

The Pali Canon uses different but overlapping words that can be translated as meditation (emphasis of each word is underlined):

Bhavana- cultivation of mental qualities and states, especially through *samadhi*

Samadhi – the practice of concentration and meditation, especially in *jhana*

Jhana- the state(s) of meditative absorption, especially in the four states that are most described

The Buddha's preferred word for the actual practice of meditation is *samadhi*. *Samadhi* is concentration, focus, one-pointedness of the mind. Meditation practice is first of all complete concentration in the mindfulness of "the four foundations of mindfulness." But the four foundations of mindfulness must be surpassed because *samadhi* is especially transcendental meditative *absorption*. When Buddha was asked what *samadhi* is, he replied that it is *jhana*, the practice of the four meditative states (*ghanas*) of absorption.

Two Principle Qualities of Meditation:

These two essential qualities are principle focuses for cultivation in meditation practice.

1. Serenity/Tranquility (*samatha*)
2. Insight (*vipassana*)

These qualities arise from meditation, confirm the path, and also guide to *nirvana*.

The Four Meditative States:

(*Jhanas*) The states of absorption in ultimate reality are characterized by these qualities:

1. subtle mental movement remains, bliss begins, disappearance of the five hindrances
2. all mental movement ceases, complete bliss
3. the excitement of the bliss wanes, half of the bliss remains
4. bliss disappears, neither pleasure nor pain, calm sublime happiness, complete peace

+ The breath gradually comes to cessation in the *ghanas*.

The meditative states are the ONLY means to the ultimate end, which is the complete ontological reversal of dependent origination, and thus to experience the extent of *nirvana* in this life. But it is possible to enter these states and be deluded. Therefore the four meditative states must always be accompanied with insight.

Almost all sects/schools (including Theravadans) have abandoned the *jhana* paradigm of meditation.

The Four Formless Dimensions

Transcendent realms, entered after the first four *ghanas* (sometimes described as *ghanas* 5-8):

1. Dimension of Infinite Space
2. Dimension of Infinite Consciousness
3. Dimension of Nothingness
4. Dimension of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception

+ Guatama learned the 8 *ghanas* from yogis prior to his full awakening. But he discovered the 9th *jhana* on his own. This final *jhana* is described as cessation, *nirvana*. It is often equated with the state of *nirvana*.

The Eight Liberations:

Stages in meditation that lead to release:

1. Having form, one perceives form.
2. Being unaware of one's own form, one perceives external forms.
3. Perceiving beauty, one does not attach to it.
4. Transcending perceptions of matter, one abides in infinite space.
5. Transcending infinite space, one abides in infinite consciousness.
6. Transcending infinite consciousness, one abides in nothingness.
7. Transcending nothingness, one abides in neither-perception-nor-non-perception.
8. Transcending neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one abides in the cessation of perception and sensation.

Awakening and Nirvana

The definition of awakening in the scriptures is the experiential “realization of the *dhamma*.” Or, “directly seeing the nature of reality as it is.” The event of awakening is often referred to as “the opening of the dhamma-eye (or eye of dharma).” This especially refers to the existential understanding of (1) the Four Noble Truths, (2) the impermanency of phenomena which includes that there is no “eternal and unchanging” self/soul, and (3) the cause and effect mechanism of dependent origination. These are singled out as the essence of dharma, and are the foundational elements upon which the remainder of the teachings are based.

Beyond the basic definition, the scriptures merely *describe* the awakened state. The principle description of course is *nirvana* (Pali: *nibbana*), which is the inner state of liberation, and means blowing out, extinguishing, cessation, and cooling in reference to the defilements (esp. craving) that cause suffering. An oft repeated analogy is that “the fires of craving are extinguished.” More positively, the awakened state is also described as peace and happiness. The state of *nirvana* (“with remainder”) can be experienced while one is still alive.

The attainment of *nirvana* ends the cycle (*samsara*) of birth, death, and rebirth.

On a philosophical level, the most that can be said about *nirvana* is that it is return (through cessation) to the ultimate reality of the unconditioned state. There is nothing more that can be said except for the dogmatic negation of four views: that a Buddha exists after death (“eternalism”), does not exist after death (“nihilism”), both exists and does not exist after death, and neither exists nor does not exist after death. These views are rejected because the ultimate reality of the unconditioned state is believed to transcend these categories. The Buddha proclaimed that *nirvana* is beyond conceptualization and words, and one must experience it to know.

In early Buddhism, when an *arhant* attains complete *nirvana* (*paranirvana*) “without remainder” upon bodily death there is no more phenomenal existence for him. This understanding is upheld in the Theravadan tradition. But in the Mahayana tradition one does not entirely leave the phenomenal realm, or at least not yet.

The Mahayana sutras have multiple understandings of the complete *nirvana*: (1) postponed until one becomes a Supreme Buddha, which is the earliest form (2) postponed indefinitely until one becomes a Supreme Buddha and then saves all other beings in the universe, which is the stereotypical form (3) is not postponed at all but is experienced within *samsara* (“*nirvana* and *samsara* are one”), which is the philosophical form. The notion of postponing *nirvana* is therefore not necessitated in the Mahayana.

There is long-standing debate within Buddhism about the precise nature of awakening, *nirvana*, and their relationship to each other.

The Four Stages of Awakening

Awakening occurs in progressive stages culminating in the full awakening. The initial awakening is called stream entry. The four stages of awakening are:

1. Stream-entry: has intuitive understanding of the *dhamma*, the *dhamma*-eye has been opened, has abandoned the first three fetters, will attain *arahantship* within seven rebirths
2. Once-returning: needs less than seven more rebirths, but only one more rebirth in the human world
3. Non-returning has abandoned five of the ten fetters, does not need to be reborn in the human world, but may be reborn in the pure abodes
4. Arahantship has abandoned all ten fetters, is fully liberated, and will not be reborn in any worlds, as the escape from *samsara* has been attained

Arahant (Sanskrit: *arhat*) means “accomplished/worthy one.” In the Pali Canon and the Theravadan tradition an *arhant* is basically fully awakened. But they are not regarded as fully awakened in the Mahayana tradition.

Beings that are headed to *samma-sam* Buddhahood are known as *bodhisattas/bodhisattvas* (lit. “awake/enlightenment beings”). The original meaning of the term was probably a “being headed to awakening.” The term was used for Gautama and Vipassi (the previous Buddha) before their full awakening. But in the Mahayana tradition it refers to everyone who is on the “*bodhisattva* path,” which can include the laity.

The Timespan for Awakening

The Buddha taught that one who has the rare and most auspicious fortune to become a practitioner of his *dhamma-vinaya* may expect to either become a non-returner or *arahant* within one week to seven years:

“Whoever, monks, should practice these four foundations of mindfulness for just seven years may expect one of two results: either *arahantship* or, if there should be some substrate left, the state of a Non-Returner. Let alone seven years—whoever should practice them for just six years..., five years..., four years..., three years..., two years..., one year may expect one of two results...; let alone one year—whoever should practice them for just seven months..., six months..., five months..., four months..., three months..., two months..., one month—whoever should practice these four foundations of mindfulness for just one week may expect one of two results: either *arahantship* in this life or, if there should be some substrate left, the state of a Non-Returner.” (*Digha Nikaya* 22:22) (This is possible, hoped for, and can even be “expected” but not all monks get there.)

This time span is possible even though it has taken innumerable aeons (long enough to have “drunk more breast milk than there is water in the oceans”) for them to get to their present birth in the Buddha’s *sangha*.

However, post-Shakyamuni Buddhism came to believe that *arahantship* is an *extremely* rare occurrence.

The Mahayana tradition completely changed the original scheme. Instead of it being possible to complete the final goal of the spiritual life within one week to seven years under the Buddha’s *dhamma-vinaya*, now it takes innumerable aeons to do so. The new final goal is to remain in *samsara* until one becomes a highly deified *samma-sambuddha* for the salvation of others. Thus the *bodhisattva* ideal was promoted over *arhantship*.

The human incarnation is regarded as the best life-form for attaining full awakening because humans are in the unique position to be able to both recognize the depths of suffering and to completely reverse its causes.

Dependent Origination

(*paticcasamuppada; pratityasamutpada*) (also known as dependent (co-)arising)

The principle that everything in the phenomenal world arises in dependence upon causes and conditions. More specifically, this refers to the ontological chain of events that cause the human condition of suffering:

The Twelve *Nidanas* (link, cause, foundation, source, or origin):

1. Ignorance (*Avijja*)
2. Volitional Fabrications (*Sankhara*)
3. Consciousness (*Viññana*)
4. Name-and-form (*Namarupa*)
5. Six sense media (*Salayatana*)
6. Contact (*Phassa*)
7. Sensation (*Vedana*)
8. Craving (*Tanha*) *
9. Clinging (*Upadana*)
10. Becoming (*Bhava*)
11. Birth (*Jati*)
12. Aging, Decay, and Death (*Jaramarana*)

(There are a couple different orders of the list but this is the most common form in the Pali Canon)

**Tanha*, literally meaning “thirst” but carrying the meaning of “craving,” is regarded as the principle and formal cause of suffering because it holds an especial power over the psyche and keeps it locked in *samsara* (cycle of birth, death, rebirth). It is therefore singled out as the cause of suffering in the Four Noble Truths. The link between craving and suffering is so close that some Buddhists even state that *tanha* “is” suffering.

Each link in the chain causes the next, so that ignorance causes volitional fabrications to arise, volitional fabrications causes consciousness to arise, consciousness causes name and form to arise, and so on. “When this exists, that comes to be. With the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be. With the cessation of this, that ceases.” (SN 12:61) To end *dukkha*, the chain must be reversed.

The reversal of the causal chain through purification/cessation is the essence of Buddhist practice.

“With the ceasing of ignorance is the ceasing of formations, with the ceasing of formations is the ceasing of consciousness, with the ceasing of consciousness is the ceasing of name-and-form,” and so on.

On the positive side, there is the “chain of transcendental dependent origination” unto awakening/nirvana:

1. Suffering (*dukkha*)
2. Faith (*saddha*)
3. Joy (*pamojja*)
4. Rapture (*piti*)
5. Tranquility (*passaddhi*)
6. Happiness (*sukha*)
7. Concentration (*samadhi*)
8. Knowledge and vision of things as they are (*yathabhutañanadassana*)
9. Disenchantment (*nibbida*)
10. Dispassion (*viraga*)
11. Emancipation (*vimutti*)
12. Knowledge of destruction of the defilements (*asavakkhaye ñana*)

In the cosmology of early Buddhism, phenomenal sentient existence was regarded as a mistake and problem that must be overcome by escape back to the original unconditioned state, which is described as *nirvana*.

Thus, the main name for the Buddha in the Pali Canon is *Tathagata* (“thus-gone-one.”) When asked about his nature, he declined to state whether he is a man or deity or anything else, but is simply Awake... the Buddha.

Karma

The entire causal system of *paticcasamuppada* is governed by one's actions (*kamma; karma*). The causal theory of action-result, in which every action has a good, bad, or neutral result, is known as *karmaphala*. The basis of good *karma* is intention. It is through understanding the results of *karma* that one begins to practice the skillful means that lead to *nirvana*. In the meantime, *karma* determines the rebirths that one takes, whether as a god in heaven, a human or animal on earth, or a wretched being in hell. Therefore there are external rewards and retributions. But the doctrinal definition of *karma* is action that operates on the principle of automatic cause and effect. This is the mechanism through which merit (*punna; punya*) functions.

The Six Senses

The six sense media are:

1. Seeing
2. Hearing
3. Smelling
4. Tasting
5. Touching
6. Thinking

Each has its own parallel consciousness and points of contact.

The senses must be guarded ("guarding of the sense doors") because they lead to suffering.

The Five Aggregates

(*khandhas; skandhas*)

The Buddha taught that beings are compounded of multiple elements, the *khandhas*, which are temporarily bound together and form the appearance of a singular entity. There are five major aspects or aggregates that comprise human nature. They always change, are subject to decay, and will one day break up. Identification with them (the delusion that they are the self/soul) causes clinging and ultimately leads to suffering.

1. Matter/Forms (*rupa*)
2. Sensations/Feelings (*vedana*)
3. Perceptions (*sanna; samjna*)
4. Mental Formations/Volitions (*sankhara; samskara*)
5. Consciousness/Awareness (*vinanna*)

Anatman

(*anatta/anatman*) there is not *atta/atman* (this usually refers to an eternal, unchanging, absolute self or soul)

The term *atman* had an acquired technical meaning in religious/philosophical circles in India. (Even though this was the common parlance word for self/soul). It refers specifically to an "*eternal and unchanging*" (these are the two most common descriptions) and hence *absolute* self/soul that is the underlying essence of the phenomenal psycho-physical nature. The Buddha categorically rejected this concept as "the thicket of views."

The *ultimate* nature of all phenomena is therefore *anatman* (not an "eternal and unchanging" self/soul).

The two categories of extreme views about the self/soul that the Buddha rejected:

+ "eternalism": is absolutely existent, is eternal and unchanging, and is same after death and *paranirvana*.

+ "nihilism": is absolutely non-existent, or is existent but it does not continue after death and *paranirvana*.

The self/soul (*atman*) does not have *absolute*/ultimate existence but it does have *relative*/mundane existence.

The Buddha taught in almost every sutra that there is a self/soul (*atman*). It is the *citta* (see THE MIND section) which is not one of the five aggregates that are dogmatically defined as *anatman*. Buddha said that the self/soul must be “cultivated” and “perfected” and is regarded as “the only refuge.” He proclaimed: “You should live as islands unto yourselves, with yourself as your refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the *dhamma* as your refuge, with no other refuge. And how does a monk live as an island unto himself,... with no other refuge?” ... “That is how a monk lives as an island unto himself,... with no other refuge.” (DN 16:2:26)

In departure from this, almost the entire tradition of Buddhism came to teach the dogma that there is absolutely no self/soul in any sense whatsoever besides using the word “self” as a conventional linguistic construct. This became one of the most central and uncompromising dogmas of Buddhism. Thus as A.K. Coomaraswamy said: “Buddhism is most famous today for everything it originally never taught.”

In order to explain the thousands of scriptural references that affirm the self/soul, post-Shakyamuni Buddhism appeals to the valid distinction between “the two realities”: conventional and ultimate. But their version of conventional reality is simply the common way of talking about things and it is not *actually* real. The more accurate distinction is between mundane and ultimate or relative and absolute realities.

(There is a *minority* view within some Mahayana schools that there is a true *atman*, usually unconditioned.)

The Mind

The three main terms used for the mind in the Pali Canon:

Citta- mind, mindset, state of mind, mentality, mental/affective disposition, heart

Manas- mind, the thinking faculty, mundane mind

Viññāṇa (Sanskrit: *viñāna*)- mind, consciousness, perceiving mind

Cetasika- mental factors (an *Abhidharma* development)

Bhavanga- the inactive mind, ground of becoming (an *Abhidharma* development unique to Theravada)

Buddha taught that the mind is inherently luminous (*pabhassara citta*).

Citta-samtana - (*samtana* means continuum, continuous, etc.) mental-continuum, mindstream, continuing mind. This is the aspect that is reborn. It is similar to the Western concept of “stream of consciousness.”

The *citta* continues indefinitely through time as *citta-samtana*. This is very significant in light of the fact that the Buddha placed emphasis on the reality that everything in the phenomenal realm passes away. The *citta-samtana* is indeed part of the changing phenomenal realm but is unique in that it does not *entirely* pass away (in phenomenal time at least) as it is the transcendental continuum. In each passing instant the *citta* is regarded as simultaneously “not the same and not different.” The *citta* (when considered as *citta-samtana*) is the only phenomenon that has no final end except when, according to the Theravadans, a liberated being reaches *paranirvana* upon his bodily death. Mahayana, on the other hand, believes that it continues eternally.

Emptiness

(*sunnata*; *sunyata*) emptiness/voidness/nothingness

In early Buddhism, the concept of *sunnata* pertains to: (1) no self/soul (*atman*) in the sense of an “eternal and unchanging” entity, (2) phenomena in general is empty of absolute substance because everything is in a state of flux, and (3) the transcendental realm of emptiness that is entered through a meditative state (*jhana*) characterized by non-perception.

The Buddha was asked (SN 35:85): "It is said that the world is empty, the world is empty, master. In what respect is it said that the world is empty?" The Buddha replied, "Insofar as it is empty of a self/soul (*atman*) or of anything pertaining to a self/soul (*atman*): Thus it is said, Ananda, that the world is empty." This is against the Upanishadic idea that the phenomenal world has an "eternal and unchanging" self/soul (*atman*).

The Buddha did not use the word "emptiness" very often. But the Mahayana tradition developed an entire philosophy of ontological emptiness that became *central* to its form of Buddhism. They wrote new scriptures (ex. Heart Sutra) that dwell on emptiness to the exclusion of every other doctrine that the Buddha taught. The Mahayana philosophy of emptiness should be seen as a development of implicit doctrine from the Nikayas.

The Three Marks of Existence

(*tilakkhaṇa; trilakṣaṇa*)

1. Impermanence (*anicca; anitya*)
2. Unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*)
3. Non-Selfhood (*anatta; anatman*)

Did Buddha Believe in God?

False claims about Buddhism:

- (1) Buddhism is atheistic
- (2) Buddhism is agnostic
- (3) Buddhism is compatible with classical theism

First of all, Buddhism is a *polytheistic* religion so it is not atheistic or agnostic towards the existence of gods.

The concept of "God" may be understood in three different senses, which are as follows:

- 1) God as an Entity
- 2) God of Classical Theism
- 3) God as the Absolute*

(*The term "absolute" was used for convenient categorization but a more appropriate term is the "ultimate")

All of these conceptions of God are thoroughly treated in the scriptures. The word "Brahma" is used for each.

There is a definite sense in which the Buddha believed in "God." He even referred to the God (Brahma) of this world-system as a "creator/maker" of some kind. (The creative power is, however, limited to the re-ordering of pre-existing material.) But he believed that this God is a circumscribed entity that will die after the passing of many aeons like all other sentient beings. In the cosmology of Buddhism there are innumerable sovereign "creator" Gods (Brahmas) that rule over their own incredibly vast world-systems. Like everyone else, these Gods can have greed, hatred, and delusion to some degree, with the consequence that they experience *dukkha* and are in need of the Buddha's teaching. Thus Buddha is called the "the Teacher of Men and Gods." In the scriptures, God himself even bowed at the Buddha's feet. (Note: referring to "God" without qualification like this, even though it might sound monotheistic to people in the West, is in fact straight from the scriptures.)

The Buddha's teaching is inherently opposed to the God of classical theism (infinite, omnibenevolent, supreme controller) due to the problem of suffering. This is confirmed in the cosmology of early Buddhism. According to the doctrine of dependent origination, *the existence of phenomenal sentient beings is regarded, not as a plan of God, but as a problem caused by ignorance* that is only resolved when an *arahant* "destroys birth" so that "there is no more coming into any state of being." Furthermore, the Buddha taught that

consciousness, thoughts, and will are parts of the chain of dependent origination that cause suffering, and thus they are certainly not suitable qualities for a God that is supposed to be the ultimate reality. (Note: this cosmology has been preserved in the Theravada tradition but was changed in the Mahayana tradition.)

However, there is another sense in which the Buddha believed in "God." The ultimate is described as the eternal, the unborn, the unconditioned, the boundless, the infinite, the perfect, the formless, the permanent, the changeless, the undying, and as the supreme peace and bliss. Furthermore, the doctrine of dependent origination implies that sentient beings devolved from this unconditioned state at some incalculable time in the remote past and can return there. (This is true despite the fact that philosophical speculation on origins is discouraged.) The Buddha therefore retained the traditional Indian concept of the Brahma(n) ("God/the divine") even though he denounced the concept of an "eternal and unchanging" *atman* (self/soul).

The Buddha only rejected the mainstream pantheistic conception of the Brahma(n). The *brahmins* equated the world soul (*atman*) with Brahma(n). But Buddha believed that nothing can be equated with Brahma(n). The difference was as vast as claiming "I am Brahman" vs. even rejecting that "I am" has any ultimate truth.

But as the centuries passed, all of the sects/schools ended up rejecting the concept of the Brahma(n). Thus as A.K. Coomaraswamy said: "Buddhism is most famous today for everything it originally never taught." But the concept of the Brahma(n) is so innate in Buddhist ontology that the concept is implicitly affirmed.

That the Buddha believed in the Brahma(n) is evident from a scholarly analysis of the Pali Canon.

+ In the 5th century BCE the word Brahma(n) was in its developmental phase. There was not yet a universally consistent distinction between the words "Brahma" (the creator God) and "Brahman" (the absolute). Even the Vedas used the words interchangeably for a period of time for the absolute. The Pali Canon did not make the distinction. It was not written in Sanskrit so there should not be an expectation for exact equivalence. In fact, the use of the word "Brahma" in some contexts *necessitates* the fully developed concept of the Brahman.

+ The standard term for the celibate religious life was *brahmacharya*. The minimal meaning of this phrase is: "conduct in accordance with (lit.: to follow) Brahma(n)." It is commonly translated as: "divine [way of] life." But the traditional understanding of *brahmacharya* is: "conduct that leads to Brahma(n) (= God/the divine)." The Buddha in fact believed in the traditional understanding as he described the path as the "**ancient way... this Brahma-faring brahmacharya**," thus the way leading to the divine. The oft repeated phrase in the Nikayas when one reaches the goal of the spiritual life is: "that is it, the way of/to the divine (*brahmacharya*) has been completed, there is nothing more to be done." But the translation "holy life" is definitely erroneous.

+ The Eightfold Path is referred to as *brahmayana*, "the way to Brahma (God/the divine)"

+ The "wheel of law" (*dharmachakra*) is also called the *brahmachakra*, "wheel of Brahma (God/the divine)"

+ The Buddha is continuously described as *brahmapatta*, "one who has attained Brahma (God/the divine)"

+ The ones that will not be reborn are said to "have become Brahma (God/the divine)"

That Buddhism did not always look over these verses is evident in Buddhaghosa (5th cent. CE), one of the greatest commentators, when he said: "Tathagata is *dharmakaya brahmakaya dhammabhuta brahmabhuta*."

+ The false assertion that the word "Brahma" was used in a metaphorical sense based on the god Brahma is absolutely refuted by the fact that the Brahma gods were not looked up to and that they were often regarded as deluded beings in need of the Buddha's teachings. The word Brahma must mean the divine, the Brahman.

It is a fact that Buddha believed in the divine. The Buddha would have even approved the use of the English word "God" because he used the word Brahma for both the Great God and for the ultimate. (The word "God" in its philosophical sense.) But the Buddha believed that the divine is beyond the four possible ontological categorizations: being, non-being, both being and non-being, or neither being nor non-being. Thus it is neither

theism nor atheism. This is the proper way to understand the position of the Buddha on the existence of God. The Buddha taught that theories about ultimate reality cannot convey understanding because it is beyond thoughts. In accordance with this transcendentalism the Buddha exclusively used the traditional *via negativa* method of teaching about ultimate reality. His staunch apophaticism presents a barrier to further speculation.

There is no mention of any spirituality about relationship with a personal God in Buddhism. Upon attaining full awakening/liberation, it is repeatedly said: "that is it, the way of/to the divine (*brahmacharya*) has been completed, *there is nothing further to be done.*" *Nirvana* is cessation into the impersonal ultimate reality.

The Buddha also rejected the concept of achieving "union" (or, yoking: "yoga") with God as a valid spiritual goal. He denounced Brahmas that requested beings to be in union with them as deluded because, in their exalted state of consciousness, they mistakenly think that they are the Supreme God that is the source of everything else. There is in fact no being that can provide release from suffering for another. The only way to awakening and liberation is through individual effort. Furthermore, in Buddha's metaphysics it is impossible (and oxymoronic) for a phenomenal being to be united to the unconditioned ultimate reality, i.e. Brahman. The soteriological paradigm of Buddhism is not attaining union with anything, but *cessation*. (But in the Mahayana tradition this comes through the realization that phenomena are already inherently empty.)

Dharma-kaya, Buddha-Dhatu, Tathagatagarbha

The "*dhamma*-body" denotes the entirety (hence "body") of the Buddha's teachings. But it acquired another meaning as already the seeds for speculation were planted when Buddha proclaimed in the Pali Canon: "Why do you want to see this filthy body? Whoever sees the *dhamma* sees me; whoever sees me sees the *dhamma.*" There is some kind of a "*dhamma*-body" that is distinguished from the decomposing body.

This concept was evolved in Mahayana Buddhism. The term *dharmakaya* came to mean the universal "Buddha-Nature" (*buddha-dhatu*) that Buddhas embody. In some schools it is believed to be innate in all beings. It is distinguished from the astral body, called the "body of enjoyment" (*sambhogakaya*), and also from the "created body" (*nirmanakaya*) of form that passes away. Thereby the doctrine of the "three bodies" (*trikaya*) of the Buddha" was established.

The "buddha-womb" (*tathagatagarbha*) is a related concept to the Buddha-Nature. The word *garbha* is better translated as root, embryo, or essence. It refers to *the innate buddha-nature within the unawakened person* that is covered over by the defilements. It simply needs to be uncovered through purification. There was an entire genre of sutras that promoted this concept beginning in the 2nd century CE.

Monasticism

Monk: *bikkhu*; Nun: *bikkhuni*

The word *bikkhu* means beggar, one who lives by alms, or mendicant.

Buddhism is a monastic religion: founded by a monk, he formed the monastic order, proclaimed monasticism as the ideal spiritual practice, almost all of the scriptures are addressed to monks (with few exceptions), it is assumed that one who fully follows the religion will become a monk, and the clerics of temples are always monks. (This assertion is not to deny the legitimacy of the laity.)

Becoming a monk is known as "going forth" (*pabbajja/pravrajya*) into the state of homelessness.

The highest ideal for monks is to be wandering lone "forest dwellers" but the normal form of monasticism is to live in monasteries (*arama, vihara*) with other monks.

The monastic way of life is called *brahmacarya*, "divine way" or "way that leads to the divine."

Monks are governed by 227 rules (311 for nuns) in Theravada Buddhism, 250 rules in Mahayana Buddhism, and 258 rules in Tibetan Buddhism. The most well-known of these rules are:

- strict celibacy
- shaved head
- one meal per day, and cannot eat after noon*
- must beg for all food using a bowl and cannot store any of it for future use*
- cannot have any possessions besides robes, belt, bowl, water-strainer, razor, and a needle*
- cannot buy, sell, or barter*
- cannot engage in any work to support themselves*
- cannot own any land*

*Monastic communities (and revisions made to the rules) often found ways around these conditions.

One becomes a monk by an ordination ceremony with at least 5 monks present who have been ordained for at least 10 years. The principle ceremony after one has become a monk is the recitation of the discipline and confession of faults every fortnight (2 weeks). The monastic status is lost (the monk "disrobes") due to 4 unpardonable faults: sexual intercourse, stealing, killing, and making false claims of spiritual attainment. Buddha demanded that a monk who commits these can never become a monk again under any circumstances.

Super-mundane Powers

(*iddhi*)

Entrance into the formless dimensions causes miraculous mental abilities (*abhijna*) such as:

super-knowledge, the ability to directly perceive the *dhamma* ("the dhamma eye"), to know various facts in the universe, to recall former existences, and to penetrate minds, i.e. telepathy

super-vision ("the divine-eye") vision into the spirit realm and remote viewing

super-hearing ("the divine-ear") hearing into the spirit realm and remote hearing

There are also physical powers such as:

"When the four bases of spiritual power have been developed and cultivated in this way, a *bhikkhu* wields the various kinds of spiritual power: having been one, he becomes many; having been many, he becomes one; he appears and vanishes; he goes unhindered through a wall, through a rampart, through a mountain as though through space; he dives in and out of the earth as though it were water; he walks on water without sinking as though it were earth; seated cross-legged, he travels in space like a bird; with his hands he touches and strokes the moon and sun so powerful and mighty; he exercises mastery with the body as far as the brahma-world." (SN 51:11)

These powers aid in spiritual progress when used correctly but Buddha discouraged their public use.

First Two Councils of Early Buddhism

First Council – convened 3 months after the Buddha's death, 500 *arhats* in attendance, its purpose was to orally codify the Buddha's *dhamma-vinaya* so that it would not become corrupted.

Second Council – convened 100 years after the Buddha's passing, according to traditional accounts this council was the occasion for the first schism in Buddhism, between the *sthaviravadans* ("Way/Doctrine of the Elders") and the *mahasamghikas* ("Great Assembly/Sangha"), most likely due to some alleged changes in the Vinaya.

Denominations of Buddhism

The original form of Buddhism is non-existent. Before the common era, the *sangha* split into at least 18 different sects/schools. None of them are existent except for the Theravada which claims to be an heir to one.

Theravada (The Way of the Elders)

- Southern Buddhism.
- Also referred to as Hinayana, “the Lesser Vehicle,” a pejorative term used by Mahayanists for not following the *bodhisattva* ideal of Supreme Buddhahood. The most traditional form of Buddhism.
- Became prominent around 250 BCE (due to the patronage of the Indian King Asoka according to their tradition). This is the only existent sect/school of early Buddhism.
- Scriptures are the Pali Canon, also known as the Tripitaka, which consists of three "baskets" or collections: the Sutta Pitaka (containing the five *Nikayas*), the Vinaya Pitaka (the monastic discipline) and the Abhidamaa Pitaka (the further expositions). The five *Nikayas* of the Sutta Pitaka are: *Digha Nikaya*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, *Samyutta Nikaya*, *Anguttara Nikaya*, *Kuddhaka Nikaya*. Scholars regard the first 4 books of the Sutta Pitaka as the earliest scriptures that come closest to the actual words of Buddha.
- 38% of the Buddhist population. The Theravada majority countries include: Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Laos.

Mahayana (The Greater Vehicle)

- East Asian Buddhism
- The Mahayana canon (Chinese) contains most of the contents from the Pali Canon. But in the 1st century BCE onwards scriptures began to be produced that had no semblance to anything that preceded them. They were supposedly secretly transmitted through the centuries until they were finally written down. These scriptures claimed to teach superior doctrines that traditional Buddhism did not understand.
- Emphasis on becoming Supreme Buddhas for the salvation of all sentient beings (and taking the “*bodhisattva* vow” to accomplish this), the centrality of compassion, and the cosmology of emptiness as key.
- Developed the concepts of the *Dharmakaya* to a further extent, the Three Bodies of the Buddha, the Eternal Buddha-nature, the *Tathagatagarbha*, and a very small minority postulates a true Self.
- Exalted the Buddha to the status of a cosmic Lord. There is also widespread devotion to mythological *bodhisattvas* that are treated as savior deities.
- It is common for Mahayana Buddhists to also be involved with other spiritual traditions such as Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, or local varieties of Shamanism.
- Some popular Mahayana sects are:
 - Chan (Zen): focuses on direct experience, utilizes the guidance of a master more than scriptures, believes in “original enlightenment” which is the concept that everyone is *already* enlightened in their true nature, formed in China in the 6th century, has sects in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

- Tendai: focuses on the Lotus Sutra as the supreme expression of *dharma*; Japanese.

- Pure Land: focuses on devotion to a different Buddha, named Amitabha, who helps devotees arrive to his heaven through faith in him, prayer, and grace; this is more or less influential throughout different forms of Mahayana Buddhism, but only has its own sect in Japan.

- 56% of the Buddhist population is Mahayana (not including Tibetan Buddhism). Popular in China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, etc.

Vajrayana (Diamond Vehicle)

- Northern/Tibetan Buddhism.
- It is Mahayana but is often put into its own category. Also known as Esoteric and Tantric Buddhism.
- Developed in the 6th century in India. Known as esoteric because emphasis was placed on transmission of secret formulas (*mantra*), gestures (*mudra*), and diagrams (*mandala*) from master to pupil. Uses many different rituals to induce the state of enlightenment.
- Tibetan Buddhism is the most prevalent form of Vajrayana. The office of the “dalai lama,” the supposed rebirth of a *bodhisattva* who is installed as the political/spiritual leader of one part of Tibetan Buddhism, was invented in the 14th-16th centuries. 6% of Buddhists are Tibetan. The dalai lama is not acknowledged by other schools of Tibetan Buddhism or by the 94% remainder of Buddhists in the world.

Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana each have numerous sub-schools of thought and practice.

Each country developed its own characteristics including particular emphases, customs, and local deities.

Buddhism Population Statistics

About 6% of the world’s population professes Buddhism.

The conservative estimate of adherents is 350-750 million people.

The countries with the highest Buddhist population:

Thailand - 95%, Cambodia - 90%, Myanmar - 88%, Bhutan - 75%, Sri Lanka - 70%, Tibet - 65%, Laos - 60%, Vietnam - 55%, Japan - 50%, Macau - 45%, Taiwan - 43%