

Revision guide: Buddhism:

Dhamma: The Dhamma is the way the Universe operates, like 'cosmic law'. It existed before the Buddha. The Buddha put it into words and explained it for others to understand. So, what the Buddha taught is, to Buddhists, a form of law. The Buddha's teachings include the **Three Marks of Existence**. These are also known as the Three Universal Truths. The Buddha taught that:

- Everything is impermanent and illusory. Everything changes and is constantly in flux – this is **anicca**. Since everything is constantly changing, there can be no permanent self or soul, as the elements which might make this are in constant flux – this is **anatta**. Everything is constantly changing, which causes unsatisfactoriness, which leads to suffering – this is **dukkha**.
- **The Four Noble Truths** and the
- **Noble Eightfold Path**. (aka the Three Fold Way)

The nature of reality: There are two basic beliefs in Buddhism about the nature of reality: first, the **Three Marks of Existence** and second, '**dependent arising**'

Paticca samuppada: dependent arising, meaning there are interdependent events which cause the existence or occurrence of other events. Buddhists believe that we have many thousands of rebirths – we are each a changing bundle of elements (*skandhas*) born into many lifetimes each time trying to attain enlightenment. Together these elements are enough to keep the illusion going, but the chain of existence comes from **paticca samuppada**, or dependent arising (that there are interdependent events which cause the existence or occurrence of other events).

Skandhas: 5 aggregates which make up each person. These are constantly changing even from second to second – hence **anatta**. All **skandhas** are impermanent, so lead to dukkha.

- Physical form (**rupa**) – made up of the elements of air, earth, fire and water.
- Sensations/feelings (**vedana**) – causes when the eye sees, ear hears, mouth tastes, nose smells, mind thinks, etc. e.g. we taste something (feeling) which we decide is not pleasant (sensation)
- Perception (**samjna**) perceptions of sense.
- Mental formations (**samskara**)- the decision-making bit of our brain, which makes us say/think/do something.
- Awareness/consciousness (**vijnana**)

Sunyata – means emptiness. It is the skilful (upasala) means by which a person disentangles themselves from the impurity of existence and from unsatisfactoriness. To realise sunyata is to cease attachment and craving. It leads to enlightenment. Meditation is a means to that understanding, hence meditation is being able to deliver enlightenment (as for the Buddha). The Buddha described sunyata as 'void', 'no rising and falling', 'calmness' and 'extinction'. Without this, he would not have been able to attain enlightenment'

Anatta: there is no permanent soul.

Anicca: impermanence is the reality

Karma: the ethical value or quality of all intentional actions/words/thoughts. Essentially our rebirth (samsara) – positive or negative – is defined by our karma. A current lifetime is a result of karma from previous ones. Actions can be skilful or unskilful – skilful actions bring positive future consequences and unskilful ones bring negative ones. The consequence can come in this lifetime, the next one or many lifetimes away, but Buddhists believe it will happen as an automatic outcome, without someone giving a judgement or sentence.

Samsara- the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Four Noble Truths: **Dukkha** – suffering, **Tanha-** craving, **Nirodha** – non-attachment – cessation of suffering, **Magga** – Middle way – Eightfold Path

Dukka: Everything is unsatisfactory. Since all is impermanent, all existence must involve suffering (Dukkha). Dukkha is caused by craving, our attitude and attachment and also by the three poisons of greed, ignorance and hatred. In Buddhism there is not value to suffering, through suffering is endless until a person can cease attachment and hence achieve enlightenment.

Attachment: upadana/clinging/not wanting to be separated from someone or something.

Tanha: craving – Dukkha the first noble truth is caused by craving (the second noble truth. We suffer because we continue to crave- we want bad things to stop and we want good things to never end. This links to Paticca samuppada because our past lives shape our present and future, but in the present life desire and attachment build to keep us bound to the cycle of rebirth or samsara.

Nirodha: cessation of suffering. End Tanha (craving) by achieving non-attachment (nirodha). Stop wanting = stop suffering. This is also nibbana – the cessation of suffering – when a person stops being attached to the material world and what is in it. They have the calm of enlightenment and are not affected by the Three Poisons because of non-attachment.

Magga: the Path, the Fourth Noble Truth. It is the Middle Way

Magga - Eightfold Path or the Threefold Way (The 8 elements of the Eightfold Path can be grouped into 3 aspects.

Wisdom

- Right understanding - This is seeing things as they really are. The Four Noble truths are the ultimate form of this
- Right Thought- Having only compassionate and positive thoughts towards others and in all actions.

Morality or Ethics

- Right Action- Always acting kindly means not hurting others (e.g. not killing), not stealing or taking what is not freely given and not misbehaving sexually, e.g. not having an affair.
- Right Speech - Using language kindly includes not lying, not spreading untruths, not gossiping and not using language hurtfully (e.g. swearing).
- Right Livelihood - This means avoiding harmful types of work, specifically those dealing with weapons, intoxicants, abuse of other living beings, meat, poisons. Usury (lending money at high rates of interest) is discouraged.

Meditation or Mental Discipline

- Right Effort - This is about developing in oneself positive qualities while reducing negative ones. In effect, everything is done in a compassionate but non-attached way
- Right Mindfulness/Meditation - This is meditation, which needs discipline and training. It removes/weakens the mental hindrances of sensuality, ill-will, laziness, worry and scepticism.
- Right Concentration - This is about training one's mind to be able to recognise what is important, and not be distracted from the path

'Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind, this is the teaching of the Buddhas'.

'Though one may live a hundred years with no true insight and self-control, yet better, indeed is a life of one day for a man who meditates in wisdom'

The Buddha: Siddhartha Gotama was the man born to be the Buddha in 563BCE. Stories of his life were written after his death, some many centuries later. Siddhartha had a special birth and shortly after his birth, a holy man, Asita, told the King that Siddhartha would become either a great king or a great holy man.

Life of Luxury: His father wanted him to rule, so he shaped Siddhartha's life around that aim. He was given a life of luxury, but he was kept in ignorance of death, illness and other suffering in order to prevent him from becoming concerned about the meaning of life. Asita had said that Siddhartha would become a great religious leader if he saw the Four Sights.

The Four Sights: Aged 29, during four visits outside the palace Siddhartha encountered:

1. An old man. This made him realise that aging happened to all regardless of wealth.
2. A sick person. This made him realise that illnesses is an unavoidable part of life.
3. A dead body. This made him realise that we all crumble to dust eventually.
4. A holy man. It inspired Siddhartha to try for himself, vowing to find a solution to suffering.

Life of Austerity: After leaving his life of luxury he spent the next few years learning meditation techniques from different Hindu masters. He wanted to gain insight into the problem of suffering. He also lived a very austere life, denying the things he craved, especially food. This period of his life lasted six years, during which he almost starved to death – but he did not find the solution to suffering.

Enlightenment: After eating a small meal Siddhartha sat down to meditate under a Bodhi tree vowing he would not move until he was enlightened.

Mara tried to distract him with fear, his beautiful daughters and whether he was worthy. Siddhartha touched the ground to witness he was fit for enlightenment and Mara left.

The Four Stages of the Buddha's Enlightenment:

1. He recalled all his past lives – and saw he was ready to become enlightened.
2. He understood how all living things come to exist – paticca samuppada (dependent arising). He understood everything is impermanent.
3. He realised that suffering comes from a desire or craving for things to stay as they are, or for the better. Overcoming those cravings was the key.
4. With these realisations, he attained nibbana – the three poisons (greed, hatred and ignorance) stopped within him, so no longer controlling him, and he was left with a sense of calm and happiness.

The 5 Precepts. These are 5 guidelines which all Buddhist laity (ordinary people) must keep to. To follow the precepts in a skilful way is to keep them, and results in good karma being generated.

- Abstain from harming sentient beings (ahimsa)
- Abstain from taking that which is not freely given.
- Abstain from sexual misconduct.
- Abstain from using false speech.
- Abstain from using intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.

Unskillful means ignoring the Five Precepts as well as deliberately breaking them. Buddhism emphasises intention, so thoughts and words matter just as actions do. A Precept can be kept or broken in mind as well as in practice. Monks are required to follow ten Precepts.

'Whoever destroys a living creature, and speaks untruth, takes what is not given in the world, and goes to another's wife, and whatever man applies himself to drinking liquor and intoxicants, that person digs up his own root here in this very world' (The Buddha in the Dhammapada)

Influence or Impact of The Buddha's Teachings:

The Environment and Animal Life: ***'All tremble at violence; all fear death. Comparing [others] with oneself, one should not kill or cause to kill'*** (The Buddha in the Dhammapada)

Eating meat: Many Western Buddhists are vegetarian out of respect for all life – animals are also part of the cycle of rebirth. The skilful means of keeping the First precept of non-harming would encourage vegetarianism.

Animals: All life should be respected. The First Precept tells us not to harm other sentient beings. Right Livelihood implies that Buddhists should not work in a job that exploits animals. This could involve working as a fisherman, poultry farmer, butcher, scientist working with animal experimentation or an animal trainer for the entertainment industry. The Dhammapada teaches that all living things fear being put to death – let no one kill or cause others to kill.

The Environment: As we use the earth during many lifetimes, we protect it for ourselves as well as for our children. Ignorance and greed poison lead to most of the pollution being caused. E.g. companies building factories in the third world so they can pay the workers less, have fewer pollution levels to keep to, all leading to bigger profits. Buddhists would also be concerned about the use of natural resources and would be concerned that there should be limits so that they are not abused but conserved for future generations. Modern farming, particularly for the grazing of cattle for beef production has led to destruction of natural habitats which has harmed the whole ecosystem. This has been particularly clear where areas of rainforest have been cut down to provide land for grazing to meet increasing demands for beef. The high production costs in terms of the environment of raising meat has arguably made a huge contribution to climate change and global warming because of the levels of greenhouse gasses emitted in the process. Buddhists would argue that being vegetarian also minimises damage to the environment.

Racism: Buddhism teaches that discrimination leads to dukkha (Suffering) so it must be wrong and avoided. The belief not to harm others or use harmful language (Abstaining from false speech) is one of the Five Precepts. Everyone is equal because everyone is welcome in the sangha. Prejudice creates bad karma and has a negative effect on rebirth. The Dalai Lama stated that the best way to live life was to ***'always think compassion'***.

Poverty ***'At the hour of death, the king and the beggar are exactly equal in that no amount of relatives or possessions can affect or prevent death. But who is the richer at the time of death? IF the beggar has created more merits, then although he looks materially poor he is really the rich man'*** Thubten Zopa Rinpoche (Nepalese Buddhist Monk)

The Dhammapada teaches that riches ruin the foolish...through craving for riches, the foolish one ruins himself. Greed for wealth is associated with the Three Poisons and is a form of craving. Buddhism teaches Right Action, Right Thought, Right Intention and Livelihood – for the wealthy to see poverty and ignore it would be wrong.

War: ***'We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves'*** Tenzin Gyatso The Dalai Lama) The First Precept, to refrain from harming others, is ahimsa and is a core principle of Buddhism. The Dhammapada teaches Hatred does not cease by hatred, hatred ceases by love. The Dhammapada teaches He should not kill a living being, nor cause it to be killed, nor should he incite another to kill. Buddhism does not believe in war – it leads to greater problems than it solves. It is often the result of the Three Poisons – greed, ignorance and hatred – while also encouraging these in us.