

Lecture 1: The Buddha (part 2 – the life of the historical Buddha)

(Notes on Bhikkhu Bodhi's introductory lectures, "The Buddha's Teaching as It Is", <http://www.buddhanet.net/audio-lectures.htm>).

Buddha Gautama/Shakyamuni (553-483BC approx.; N.B. *slightly different dates accepted by different scholars*)

Buddhahood as the culmination of virtues that are perfected over countless lifetimes

The Buddha's story begins many eons (*kalpa*) ago. Ascetic Sumedha is awed by Dipankara's majesty and aspires to become a Buddha.

Cultivation of the Perfections (*parami / Skt. paramita*) over countless lifetimes:

- generosity (*dāna*)
- moral discipline (*sīla*)
- renunciation (*nekkhamma*)
- wisdom (*paññā*)
- energy (*virīya*)
- patience (*khanti*)
- truthfulness (*sacca*)
- determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*);
- loving kindness (*mettā*);
- equanimity (*upekkhā*)

(N.B. These are the 10 perfections listed in the Theravada tradition.

Mahayana texts usually list them as six: generosity, moral discipline, patience, energy, concentration and wisdom)

Life as Prince Siddhartha Gautama

- Court astrologers predicted greatness: either as a universal emperor (*cakravartiraja*) or as a great spiritual teacher. To encourage the former and prevent the latter, Gautama is shielded from suffering and surrounded by luxury and entertainment by his father.
- At age 29, questioning the value of pleasure, power and fame. On an outing with his charioteer, Gautama encounters four sights: aging, sickness, death, and an ascetic (*samaṇa*). He leaves the palace at night to become a homeless 'seeker'.

Following existing systems

- Masters the systems of several existing meditation masters but moves on realising their limitations: they led to deep blissful concentration (*samādhi*) but not liberating wisdom (*paññā / prajna*)
- Self-mortification – extreme fasting etc. - almost to the point of death. Then gives up self-mortification concluding that weakening the body is counter-productive.

Under the Bodhi tree

- Allegorical struggle against the demon Mara representing the defilements (*klesha*): Mara tempts Gautama with power, sensuality and fame, attempts to frighten him with armies and weapons.
- ‘Calling the earth to witness’ his fulfilment of the 10 Perfections
- Stilling the mind then cultivating wisdom in three stages:
 - (1) recollection of previous lives, everything as transient;
 - (2) sees evolution and destruction of world systems and all beings cycling through rebirths and deaths according to their karma;
 - (3) insight into dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda* / *Skt. pratītyasamutpāda*) and the four noble truths.

Teaching the Dharma

- The Buddha is urged by a ruler-deity, *Brahmā Sahāmpati*, to teach out of compassion and has a vision of living beings as being like lotuses at different stages of growth in a pond; some are near the surface and only need the sun’s rays to unfold.
- Four Noble Truths, and then selflessness (*anattā* / *Skt. anātman*) taught to his ascetic former companions, who become Arahats.
- For the rest of his life, the Buddha and his followers travel widely teaching to people from all backgrounds, including his own family. His wife and son take full ordination.

Features of the teachings:

- A universal concern: suffering and end of suffering.
- Personal, immediate, verifiable
- No external reliance. The Buddha is a teacher, not a saviour.
- No call to blind belief – followers urged to investigate the teaching, “just as a goldsmith tests gold by burning, rubbing, scraping...”
- Taught freely and openly to all (irrespective of caste, occupation, gender)
- Skill in teaching according to each person’s disposition, needs and capacity

Paranibbana, final passing away

Last discourse (*Parinibbana Sutta*): “All conditioned things are impermanent, subject to destruction. Work out your salvation with diligence”