

Lecture 1: The Buddha (part 1)

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

1. The need for both study and practice

Three stages of wisdom:

- Wisdom born of learning (*sutta mayā paññā*) – hearing/reading the teachings
- Wisdom born of reflection (*cintā-mayā paññā*) – investigating, pondering them
- Wisdom born of meditation (*bhāvanā-maya paññā*) – transforming mere intellectual understanding into experience

Dhamma (Sanskrit: 'Dharma' / 'that which sustains'). Several levels of meaning:

- The truth realised by the Buddha, the true nature of phenomena
- The path leading to that realisation
- The doctrines that elucidate the truth and the path

Pali Canon: an ancient collection of texts in the Pali language, made up of three sections (collectively the '*Tipitaka*')

- *Vinaya pitaka* – rules for the monastic community
- *Sutta pitaka* – (skt. 'sutra') discourses of the historical Buddha
- *Abhidhamma pitaka* – philosophical and psychological analysis

[N.B. Other organised canons of scripture in Buddhism are in preserved in Chinese and Tibetan languages, both consisting of scriptures translated mainly from Sanskrit. These collections also include versions of vinaya, sutra and abhidharma, and overlap with the Pali Tipitaka as well as containing texts that have no Pali equivalent)

2. What is a Buddha?

'Buddha' – Not a name of a specific person but a type of person. 'The Buddha' as an honorific title often refers to Siddharta Gautama because he is the 'present' Buddha.

[N.B. Although he lived over 2,500 years ago Gautama is the 'present Buddha' because he is known to us in history, and his teachings are still kept alive through scriptures and lineages of teachers. From a Buddhist cosmological standpoint there are countless past and future Buddhas in other eons and world systems].

From the standpoint of function of a Buddha

According to Buddhist cosmology:

- The physical universe consists of countless world systems (*lokadhatu*) that arise, develop and disintegrate over mind-staggeringly vast time periods (*kalpa*, eons).
- Beings cycle through a chain of rebirths across different planes of existence (divine, human, hellish, etc) all of which, including 'divine' realms or heavens, are transitory and unsatisfactory. This cycle of compulsive rebirth is called *samsara*. Freedom from it is called nibbana (skt. *Nirvana*)
- There are long periods during the path to nirvana has been lost. A Buddha is a person who independently rediscovers this lost path and then makes it known again to the world so that others can follow it and also achieve release from *samsara*.

From the standpoint of qualities of a Buddha

Elimination of defects:

- The Buddha has eliminated all defilements that cause bondage and suffering (*klesha*) completely and irreversibly
- Main *kleshas* (greed, hatred & delusion) and many secondary ones

Achievement of excellent qualities:

- Purity of thought, speech and action
- Wisdom: understanding things precisely in their deepest nature; knowing how to present the teaching in a way that liberates the variety of living beings.
- Great Compassion (*mahakaruna*): Through unlimited compassion for all beings, leading them to liberation by making the path known to them.

Distinction between 'Arahat' and 'Buddha'

Arahats attain nibbana with the guidance of a Buddha, whereas the Buddha discovers it without a teacher and has additional qualities enabling him/her to function as a world teacher. There is only one Buddha in any historical period.

(N.B. This is the Theravada view on the distinction. Mahayana Buddhism makes the distinction differently).