

Buddhism: Social Context

After the Aryan invasions the society divided into four classes (*varṇa* = colour), forming the framework for hundreds of castes (*jāti* = birth):

1. **Brahmaṇa**, 'priest', keepers of the rituals, the secret-sacred teachings of the *Vedas*, *Brāhmaṇas*
2. **Kṣatriya**, 'warrior', ruler, in the course of time subordinate to the priests
3. **Vaiśya**, 'merchant', prestige increased with wealth
4. **Śūdra**, 'worker', servants

The rest were 'outcasts', 'untouchables', outside the classification

1

The Life of the Buddha

The Buddha story is orientated to two poles: *bodhi* (enlightenment) and *parinirvāṇa* (definitive entry into *nirvāṇa* = death), and evolves around places of pilgrimage:

- Place of **birth** (Lumbinī)
- Place of **enlightenment** (Bodh Gayā)
- Place of the **first proclamation** of the teaching (Isipatana = Sārnāth, Vārāṇasī)
- Place of **death** (Kusināra)

Born into the Kṣatriya class; father Suddhodana, a ruler (*Rāja*) of the Śākya clan in the city-state of Kapilavastu; mother Māyā; 563-483? 450-370 BCE?

2

The Four Stages of Life (*āśramas*)

Idealised social order:

- ***Brahmacārin***, ‘novice’, disciple of a Brahmin
- ***Gṛhastha***, ‘householder’, father of a family (preferred above the others by the Brahmins)
- ***Vānapras̥tha***, ‘forest dweller’, Yogin
- ***Sannyāsī***, homeless wandering ascetic

Final goal: ‘letting go’ (*mokṣa*, ‘liberation’) – possible only for the two last!

Polarity: *grāma* (village) / *vāna* (forest), *karmavāda* (deeds) / *jñānavāda* (wisdom)

3

The ‘Three Refuges’ in the ‘Three Jewels’ (*triratna, tiratana*)

“I take refuge in

The Enlightened One (*Buddha*)

The Community (*saṅgha*)

The Teaching (*dhamma*)”

Spoken with the right intention and in the appropriate context, this suffices to make one a Buddhist or to be accepted into the Order.

Stages of acceptance:

- *Pabbajā* (going forth from home)
- *Upasampadā* (ordination as a *bhikkhu*)
- *Uposatha* (recitation of the Rule, mentioning transgressions)

4

The 'Ten Commandments' of Buddhism

For all Buddhists:

1. Avoiding the destruction of living things
2. Not taking whatever is not given
3. Avoiding unchaste behaviour
4. Not lying
5. Avoiding intoxicating substances

Additionally for monks:

1. Not eating after midday
2. Avoiding dance, music, shows
3. No decorations, perfumes, jewellery
4. Not sleeping on raised and elaborate beds
5. Not accepting gold or silver

The Four Noble Truths

1. **DUKKHA: everything is 'suffering', unsatisfactory:**
Birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, distress, not to have what one desires, being separated from what one loves...
2. **SAMUDAYA: this is the origin of suffering:**
'Thirst' (*taṇhā*), desire for sense pleasure, becoming, existing, even annihilation...
3. **NIRODHA: this is the eradication of suffering:**
The complete eradication of desire without remainder...
4. **MAGGA: this is the Way that leads to the elimination of suffering:**
The Noble Eightfold Path (*atthaṅgika-magga*)...

The Noble Eightfold Path (*ārya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*) (The 'Middle Way')

1. **Right view (*sammā diṭṭhī*):** understand the Four Noble Truths (*dhamma*)
2. **Right thought (*sammā saṃkappa*):** abandon the notion of Self (*anattā*)
3. **Right speech (*sammā vācā*):** no lying, gossip, calumny
4. **Right action (*sammā kammanta*):** no theft, unchastity, killing (*ahiṃsā*)
5. **Right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*):** earning one's living responsibly
6. **Right effort (*sammā vāyāma*):** firm determination to strive for release (*mokkha*)
7. **Right mindfulness (*sammā sati*):** practice of meditation (*jhāna, dhyāna*)
8. **Right concentration (*sammā samādhi*):** mastering the four stages of contemplation (*brahmavihāra*)

1-2: WISDOM (*prajñā, paññā*)

3-5: MORALITY (*śīla, sīla*)

6-8: MENTAL CULTURE (*bhāvanā*)

7

The Setting Up (*paṭṭhāna*) of Mindfulness (*sati*)

The four Stages of absorption (Skr. *dhyāna*, Pāli *jhāna*, Ch. *ch'an*, Jap. *zen*):

1. Hold the image of the meditation sign (*kasinā*) in awareness, experience of joy and bliss
2. Eliminate judging (*vitakka*) and reasoning (*vicāra*), retain joy and bliss
3. Persevere in equanimity (*upekkhā*) and mindfulness (*sati*), beyond joy and bliss
4. Neither suffering nor joy, purity of mind through equanimity and mindfulness

Yogic absorption (*jhāna*) together with Buddhist insight (*vipassanā*) with the goal of shutting down all emotional responses (*nirodha-samāpatti*) as preparation for perfect liberation (*mokkha, nibbāna*), also attainable through:

The four Illimitables (*brahmācāra*, 'Brahma-dwellings'): loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sharing joy (*mudītā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*)

8

The Chain of Conditioned Becoming (*praty-ītya-saṃ-ut-pāda, paṭiccasamuppāda*)

Chain of preconditions (*nidāna = conditio – not cause = causa!*):

1. From birth comes ignorance (*avijjā*)
2. Because of ignorance emotional reactions and intentions to act arise (*saṅkhārā*)
3. Because of emotional reactions, hate-and-desire-packed memory arises (*viññāna*)
4. Memory transmitted to new being as name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*)
5. Name-and-form gives rise to the six senses (incl. *manas*, mind = *salāyatana*)
6. Six senses give rise to contact (*phassa*)
7. Contact gives rise to feeling (*vedānā*)
8. Feeling gives rise to craving (*taṇhā*)
9. Craving gives rise to clinging to existence (*upādāna*)
10. Clinging gives rise to becoming (*bhava*)
11. Becoming gives rise to birth (*jāti*)
12. Birth gives rise to age, death, sorrow, lamentation, suffering and despair (*jarā-maranā*)
 - 1-3 = past (previous birth); 4-9 = present (present birth); 10-12 = future (future birth)

Basis of Buddhist Schools

1. Faith (*śraddhā, saddhā*): trusting the authority of the Buddha
2. Effort (*vīrya, vīriya*): active dedication to meditation
3. **Mindfulness** (*smṛti, satī*): **foundation of all the others**
4. Absorption (*samādhi*): practice of concentration, single-mindedness
5. Wisdom (*prajñā, pañña*): true knowledge as result of practice

Mutually reinforcing, but according to emphasis give rise to traditions:

- **Madhyamaka** (‘Middle System’), new wisdom (*prajñā*)
- **Shin** (‘Pure Land’), faith and devotion (*śraddhā*)
- **Yogācāra** (‘Mind Only’), meditation practice (*samādhi*)
- **Tantra** (esoteric), ritual action (*vīrya*)

Further Reading

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Theology offerings at ACU

- Certificate in Theology (4 units)
- Bachelor of Theology (24 units)
- Graduate Certificate in Catholic Studies (4 units and gives accreditation for teaching)
- Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies (4 units)
- Master in Theological Studies (16 units)
- Master of Theology (Research) and PhD.