

Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd.



Buddha Dhamma Questions and Answers

The famous poet Rudyard Kipling wrote "I keep six honest serving men. They taught me all I know; their names are What and Why and When, and How and Where and Who".

For this paper in seeking to explore the concept of applying Buddha Dhamma we use Kipling's six honest serving men to frame the analysis.

Buddha Dhamma is a system of living taught by the Buddha Shakyamuni. Buddha Dhamma is a system that can help one come out of suffering, when practiced and realized each for himself or herself, it stops the cycle of birth.

We quote Venerable Master Chin Kung:

"Buddhism is the most profound and wholesome education directed by the Buddha toward all people.

"The content in Buddha Shakyamuni's forty-nine years of teaching describes the true reality of life and the universe. Life refers to oneself, universe refers to our living environment. The teachings directly relate to our own lives and surroundings.

"Buddhism is an education, not a religion. We do not worship the Buddha, we respect him as a teacher. His teachings enable us to escape from suffering and attain happiness.

"A student of the Buddha does not just read Buddhist texts, but studies them to reach a deeper understanding of life and the universe and puts the teachings into practice in everyday life."

What are the Four Noble Truths?

The Four Noble Truths, which Lord Buddha taught in his first sermon after receiving Enlightenment, are a fundamental teaching of Buddhism.

- (i) All sentient beings are bound to suffering, because
- (ii) They act under the influence of Ignorance, Greed and Hatred. All these delusions come from the basic Ignorance, not knowing the true nature of oneself and of what one perceives. However,
- (iii) Suffering can stop, leaving one in perfect, everlasting happiness (Nirvana).
- (iv) There is a way, or Path, to receive this cessation of suffering by eliminating the delusions.

These Truths may appear very simple, or even obvious, but actually they are very profound. Only a Buddha can understand them completely.

Who is Buddha Dhamma for?

Buddha Dhamma is not a religion for a particular race or chosen people. Buddhism aims at the enlightenment of all beings. Its teachings are Universal and not relative to any particular geographic area of any country.

Although it originated in India, it soon made the world its home. The recent spread of Tibetan Buddhism to many countries is a living example of these facts.

Tibetan Buddhism preserves the pure traditions of all the various levels of teachings taught by Lord Buddha, and their subsequent development in India, long after these traditions died out in India itself.

On Friday 30 January 2003, Members of our Chan Academy Australia attended a teaching by Buddha Dhamma Master Sogyal Rinpoche. Sogyal Rinpoche is a renowned Teacher and the author of the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying that has sold half a million copies world wide.

Sogyal Rinpoche is said to have "a remarkable gift for presenting the essence of Tibetan Buddhism in a way that is both authentic and profoundly relevant to the modern mind".

A brief summary of the teaching as interpreted by one of our Members is given here. We apologise for any error, omission, simplification or misinterpretation in the brief summary presented.

Sogyal Rinpoche said we are all looking for happiness but happiness and sadness are both dependant on the mind.

Buddhism is about transforming the mind and heart.

Sogyal Rinpoche said most of the suffering in the today is from thinking too much and leads to problems like depression. It is like we water the misery and make it grow.

The advice is not to commit any unwholesome actions. You may think that to be very difficult. Try as much as possible not to do any harmful actions. This is the most basic thing.

The word Dhamma is used rather than the word religion. Dhamma is the nature of everything.

We take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

Many great Masters have said, "If you cannot help at least do not harm."

Cultivate virtue and adopt positive action in body, speech and mind.

It is the foolish who look for happiness outside themselves.

Happiness is not outside it is inside. Transform and tame your mind then you have freedom.

Body, speech and mind are the three doors through which we do negative or positive things.

Science is now seeing correlation between body and mind.

If we have negative minds then our body is susceptible to sickness. When you smile you are strong.

You can transform the mind. It is up to you.

Thoughts come and go and sometimes we grasp them when they are gone.

You have to look after yourself. No-one can help you honestly speaking. You have to take care of your mind and have dignity and respect.

The teachings of wisdom and compassion are tools.

The past has gone and the future has not yet arisen, the present is the space in between. This is the whole point.

Sogyal Rinpoche relayed a conversation between his Master and an Indian Diplomat. The Indian Diplomat was asking the Master how to meditate.

The Master said, "Look at it like this, when the past thought has gone and the next one hasn't come, there is a gap, right."

The Indian Diplomat said, "Yes".

The Master said, "Well, prolong it".

Initially the whole point of meditation is to use mindfulness to settle the mind, when the mind is settled then to remain in this pure cognizance, free of any thoughts. In the present there are no thoughts.

When you start thinking it has already past. You discover a mind beyond thoughts.

We think that thoughts and emotions are the mind but the mind is really like the sun and the

thoughts and emotions are the rays.

Samsara is the mind turned out and Nibbana is the mind turned inwardly.

Padmasambhava said, "Seek not to cut the root of phenomena, cut the root of the mind."

There is no end to thoughts. How can you stop all the thoughts? This is like coming home or turning inwardly.

When we are scattered all over it is like nobody is home.

Think of water. If you do not stir the water it becomes clear. In the same way the mind becomes clear if you leave it alone. We always manipulate and fabricate by too much thinking.

To settle the mind, focus on breathing this is a natural expression of mind and source of energy.

The essence of meditation is to remain in a state of non-distraction.

The Rinpoche talked about the Four Noble Truths and that all of the Buddha's teachings are included in these Four noble Truths.

The Four Noble Truths are each the effect of a particular cause.

It is useful here to answer the question, What is Karma?

All pleasures and pains basically derive from the mind. Through acting with an undisciplined mind, clouded by delusion, one accumulates good and bad deeds. The traces of these deeds are carried by the mind from life to life until one meets suitable circumstances, then their result is experienced. Bad actions lead to suffering, life after life, until the accumulation of them runs out. On the other hand, every good action which one does will at some time cause one to experience happiness. Every moment of happiness is the result of some good action of helping others in the past. Every moment of pain or suffering is the result of a bad action one has done. This is called the Law of Karma. "Karma" is a Sanskrit word which simply means "action".

One's karma, or past actions, determine both the form of one's next life and the circumstances one will meet in that life. To be born as a human being at all one needs exceptionally good karma, but even as a human being one can meet with unfavourable circumstances. According to the theory of karma, children who are born deformed or die young are merely receiving the fruits of what they have done in a former incarnation. People are ultimately responsible for their own destiny and the pattern of their next incarnation.

Tibetan Buddhists therefore consider it essential to prepare for death in this lifetime. They believe that to be born as a human in a land where the Buddhist teachings are practiced is extremely difficult to achieve. Once this 'Perfect Human Rebirth' is lost, it is almost impossible to regain. Unless one has practiced Buddha Dhamma in this life one will not receive another Perfect Human Rebirth for many, many lifetimes.

But if one practices continuously, one can go on meeting the Buddha Dhamma teachings life after life. One's spiritual advances in one life are retained in the next so that it is possible to progress gradually.

To incarnate means to assume a body or to be "made flesh". To reincarnate means when "your body dies, another birth arises to give "you" a new body. Buddhists accept reincarnation as a fact.

Belief in reincarnation is very old. It was held by some of the early Greeks, Romans, also other religious groups including early Jews and Christians. In the Christian Church, it was condemned at the time of the second council of Constantinople held by the Emperor Justinian without the Pope's approval in 553 A.D. However, there are several references to reincarnation in the Old and New Testaments, and many Christians have also believed in it.

(The status of Justinian's condemnation of Originism is controversial. For further information see Head and Cranston, "Reincarnation - An East-West Anthology". The Pope, although in Constantinople at the time, boycotted the Council, and furthermore the condemnation does not even seem to have been officially enacted by that council.)

There are some people who remember their lives, they may recognise their former relatives, friends and possessions, and places where they lived. Further evidence of earlier lives is that certain young children show strange abilities. One child could speak at three months old and another could speak several languages by the time he was six. A child born in Germany in 1721 spoke within a few hours of his birth and knew world history at the age of three and could speak three languages. The child predicted his own death that occurred at the age of four. Some children can solve very complex mathematical problems. Others can compose music at an early age. A famous Western musician, Mozart could compose at the age of four.

A person born in one country, on visiting another, might find the scenes there familiar. Possibly, this is evidence that this person lived there in a former life.

In all Tibetan Buddhist orders, the title "Lama" (literally, "superior") is reserved strictly for Tulkus or incarnate lamas, and for Gurus who give formal teachings, whether or not they are monks or Geshe. Thus the term "Lama" can never be taken as a synonym for "monk". Rather it is the equivalent of the Sanskrit word "Guru".

When an assistant Abbot becomes Abbot, he earns the title "Rinpoche" (Precious One). If he so chooses, he can start a line of incarnate Lamas after him. These successors will also bear

the title "Rinpoche" from birth and be regarded as Lamas.

The title "Geshe", which means a spiritual friend, refers to a degree not unlike a doctorate. From the age of about eight, until twenty-five, the candidate must study and thoroughly master five main subjects, and to pass several oral examinations on them in public. His Holiness the Dalai Lama too had to take such examinations in front of thousands of monks in Lhasa.

Certain advanced beings do not have to incarnate but do so voluntarily in order to assist others. In Buddhism these beings are called Bodhisattvas. Some of them have reincarnated again and again on this planet. One of these great beings is the Dalai Lama.

Who is the Dalai Lama?

Tibetans believe that the Dalai Lama is an incarnation of the great Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. The Dalai Lama, apart from being spiritual head, has been in charge of Tibet since the time of his 5th reincarnation in the 17th Century until the Chinese occupation in 1950. "Tenzin Gyatso" is the particular name of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama (the present Dalai Lama). He was born on 6th July, 1935 in Amdo in the far north-east of Tibet.

It is not necessary that death and rebirth should occur at the same time since there may be time when the spirit is elsewhere. The 13th Dalai Lama died in 1933. The present Dalai Lama is a reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama who was a reincarnation of all the other Dalai Lamas. He was found and identified as the true incarnation by a special committee of senior Lamas.

Among his own people, the Dalai Lama is generally known as Kun-dun which means "Presence". The present Dalai Lama was installed to office when he was only four years old. When he was a very young child, he could recognise the friends he had when he was the 13th Dalai Lama. As a boy, the Dalai Lama was intelligent and eager to learn and was not shy. In 1950, before he was sixteen, the Dalai Lama was enthroned as a Ruler of Tibet. This ceremony normally takes place when the Dalai Lama is eighteen, but was hurried on because the Chinese were about to take over Tibet. The Chinese occupied Tibet in 1950. The young Dalai Lama visited Peking in 1954 to try to understand the Chinese.

The Dalai Lama has been in India since early 1959. Tibet is occupied by the Chinese. After the Lhasa uprising against Chinese occupation, the Dalai Lama fled across the Himalaya mountains to India with a number of his countrymen. The Government of India offered him and his people a home and he now lives at Dharamsala, a Himalayan Hill station in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh.

The Chinese destroyed most of Tibet's great monasteries, libraries and sacred art works. The Dalai Lama and his followers preserve the old Tibetan books and traditions at Dharamsala in India and elsewhere. Over 100,000 Tibetans have left Tibet and now live in different countries. Although the 13th Dalai Lama had spent some time in India, in the 1920's, there

had not been much contact between the Indians and Tibetans in the recent past. In the years since the Dalai Lama and his followers arrived in India, the Indian Government has helped to settle the Tibetans. In Dharamsala, schools have been established to teach about Tibetan Buddhism. Many Westerners have trained as lay people, monks and nuns at these schools over recent years.

The Dalai Lama stressed that, even if someone harms or hurts you badly, you should think of his good qualities and this develops humility towards others.

He quoted another important verse:

If one whom I've helped my best,
And from whom I've expected much,
Harms me in a way I can't imagine:
May I regard such a person my best teacher!

His Holiness sees nothing wrong with material progress provided men take precedence over progress. He has liked science and technology since his childhood and he realises now more than ever before that material progress is highly necessary to mankind, but at the same time he believes material things provide us mainly with physical comfort, not with mental peace. Good human qualities - honesty, sincerity, a good heart - cannot be bought with money, nor can they be produced by machines, but only by the mind itself.

How can we end our suffering?

Following the various disciplines described by Buddhists can stop the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The fourth noble truth is the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of suffering: this is the way to end the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

The truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering is the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh explains the interrelated nature of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path:

"As we study and practice the Noble Eightfold Path, we see that each element of the path is contained within all the other seven elements. We also see that each element of the path contains the Noble Truths of Suffering, the making of suffering, and the end of suffering.

"Practicing the First Noble Truth, we recognize our suffering and call it by name - depression, anxiety, fear, or insecurity. Then we look directly into that suffering to discover its basis, and that is practicing the Second Noble Truth. These two practices contain the first two elements of the Noble eightfold path, namely, Right View and Right Thinking. All of us have the tendency to run away from suffering, but now with the practice of the Noble

Eightfold Path we have the courage to face our suffering directly. We use Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration to look courageously at our suffering. The looking deeply that shows us clearly the basis of our suffering is Right View. Right View will not show one reason for our suffering, but layers upon layers of causes and conditions: seeds we have inherited from our parents, grandparents, and ancestors; seeds in us that have been watered by our friends and the economic and political situations of our country; and so many other causes and conditions.

"Now the time has come to do something to lessen our suffering, we find a way to cease ingesting that nutriment, whether it is edible food, the food of sense-impression, the food we receive from our intentions, or the food from our consciousness. We do this by practicing Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, remembering that Right Speech is also listening deeply. To practice these three aspects, we take Mindfulness Trainings as our Guide. Practicing according to the Mindfulness Trainings, we see that when we speak, act, or earn our living, we do it with Right Mindfulness. Right Mindfulness lets us know when we say something that is not Right Speech or do something that is not Right Action. Once Right Mindfulness is practiced along with Right Diligence, Right Concentration will follow easily and give rise to insight or Right View. In fact, it is not possible to practice one element of the Noble Eightfold Path without practicing all the seven other elements. This is the nature of interbeing, and it is true for all of the teachings offered by the Buddha."

By practicing good actions with body, speech and mind you can come out of troubles.

May all beings, in the ten directions, seen and unseen, receive blessings from this script.

We thank the Devas and Devatas of Learning for their help in and guidance with the writing of this script.

May you be well and happy.

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"The gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts".