

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

By His Holiness Sakya Trizin

His Holiness Sakya Trizin's "Introduction to Buddhism" provides a beautifully clear condensation of the most important parts of the Buddha's teaching. Close study of this text will provide a strong foundation for further study of Buddhism.

1. Why is the motivation behind our actions important?
 - *Because it determines the direction in which our actions lead us.*
2. What is the highest motivation for studying Dharma?
 - *To attain full enlightenment not just for the sake of ourselves but for the sake of all sentient beings.*
3. So what should be our motivation for receiving teachings?
 - *Think that you are receiving teachings in order to accomplish the altruistic aim of attaining full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings*
4. What is the basic progression of practice in all schools of Buddhism – Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana schools?
 - *First, to establish a basis of sound moral conduct, then to study, contemplate, and meditate.*
5. What does it mean to receive teachings with right motivation and right conduct?
 - *It means we receive them with a physical, verbal, and mental attitude of respect.*
6. According to Buddhist sutras who possesses Buddha nature?
 - *Every sentient being, from tiny insects up to the highest gods possesses Buddha nature.*
7. What is Buddha nature?
 - *Buddha nature is the true nature of our minds; pure and unstained by obscurations.*
8. Why is Buddha nature important?
 - *Because every living being, when it meets with the right causes, right conditions, and right methods, has the potential to attain perfect enlightenment – buddhahood.*

9. What prevents us from seeing the true nature of our minds?

- *Our minds are completely deluded by two types of obscurations: obscurations that are defilements and obscurations of knowledge. These obscurations block our path to Buddhahood and cause us to remain in samsara.*

10. What is samsara?

- *It is our deluded universe, the cycle of existence that goes on and on.*

11. Can we describe our minds in the same way as the body?

- *No, we cannot see, touch, feel or describe the mind in terms of shape, color, smell, size, etc.*

12. Could our minds have come from our bodies?

- *No, because the mind is invisible and invisible mind cannot arise from a visible physical entity, such as matter or elements.*

13. So, do we know where our minds came from then?

- *Our minds, like the body, also has to have some kind of continuity. It cannot come from nothing.*

14. Based on this, give one reason why each sentient being must have had past lives.

- *Because the mind cannot have arisen from the body, or from nothing, it must have existed before the body.*

15. Can we identify the point in time as the beginning of a particular person's mind?

- *No, our minds are beginningless.*

16. What is the point of the Buddha's teaching?

- *The Buddha taught the path to escape the suffering of the wheel of samsara.*

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

17. What was the first teaching that the Buddha gave?

- *The four noble truths.*

18. What are the four noble truths?

- *The truth of suffering;*
- *The truth of the cause of suffering;*
- *The truth of cessation, and*
- *The truth of the path.*

I. The Noble Truth of Suffering

19. What are the four major sufferings to which we are all generally subject?

- *The sufferings of birth, illness, aging, and death.*

20. What additional sufferings are there among human beings?

- *The wealthy can have mental suffering.*
- *The poor can have physical suffering such as hunger, thirst, and exposure to the elements.*
- *We observe many other types of suffering from news every day.*

21. What are the three lower realms and the three higher realms of samsara?

- *The three lower realms are:*
 - *the hell realm,*
 - *the hungry ghost realm, and*
 - *the animal realm;*
- *The three higher realms are:*
 - *the human realm,*
 - *the demigod realm, and*
 - *the god realm.*

22. What are the three kinds of suffering?

- *The suffering of suffering;*
- *The suffering of change; and*

- *The suffering of the conditional nature of all phenomena.*

23. What is the suffering of suffering?

- *What we normally consider to be suffering such as pain, anxiety, misfortune; etc.*

24. What is suffering of change?

- *Feelings we often consider pleasurable, which in reality, are just another kind of suffering because they do not last.*

25. What is suffering of the conditional nature of phenomena?

- *Our lives in samsara are infected by uneasiness or dissatisfaction that comes from misapprehension of the way things are.*

26. Why is it important to realize that life is suffering?

- *Until we realize that the whole cycle of existence is nothing but suffering, we will not apply the remedies necessary to overcome that suffering.*

27. Once we truly know about the suffering nature of samsara what do we develop?

- *What is known as renunciation.*

28. What is renunciation?

- *A wish to completely eradicate suffering by applying the remedies to alleviate it.*

II. The Noble Truth of the Cause

29. If there is no creator God, what creates our life, our experiences, our happiness and suffering?

- *It is all a product of our own past actions, or our karma.*

30. Explain how karma works?

- *Every physical, verbal, and mental action we perform it is like planting a seed on fertile ground; it will produce a result.*

31. Given this law of karma, what are our good or bad experiences a product of?

- *Happiness and sadness are the product of our own actions, not outside forces.*

32. Why do we create the causes of our own suffering?

- *It is due to ignorance – not knowing the true reality and not seeing the true nature of our mind (buddha nature), and clinging to a notion of self instead.*

33. What is the basic cause of suffering?

- *It is clinging or attachment to self out of ignorance. This brings about all our faults and thereby suffering.*

34. In reality, is there a self?

- *No.*

35. Logically, why is there no self?

- *If there were actually a self, it would have to be our name, our body, or our mind.*

36. Why is one's name not one's self?

- *Any name could be given to anyone and, therefore, it is just a label empty of a self.*

37. Why is one's body not one's self?

- *When we investigate our body there are many different parts such as flesh, blood, bones, etc, but no single part can be called the self.*

38. Why is one's mind not one's self?

- *The mind is invisible, and it is constantly changing. Something that is constantly changing at every moment cannot be permanent and, therefore, cannot be the self that we cling to.*

39. If nothing is there, why do we cling to this mistaken notion of self?

- *It has been our habit from beginningless time to cling to the notion of a self, so this tendency of ours is very strong and feels utterly natural to us.*

40. Why is clinging to mistaken notion of self the root of all faults?

- *When we cling to the notion of "self" there naturally arises the notion of "other." Then, there arises attachment to our own side and anger toward others.*

41. What are the three root defilements?

- *Desire, anger, and ignorance.*

42. Which of the three defilements is the most basic?

- *Ignorance.*

43. What is the very root of ignorance?

- *Not knowing the nature of reality and clinging to the self.*

44. What arises from this ignorance?

- *Attachment (also translated as desire) and anger (also translated as hatred).*

45. What other defilements can arise from these three main defilements of ignorance, attachment and anger?

- *Jealousy, pride and other defilements.*

46. Given this reasoning, what is the cause of suffering?

- *The cause of suffering is the defilements of attachment, anger, ignorance, jealousy, and other impure thoughts, which arise from ignorance.*

47. What happens when we perform actions tainted by defilements?

- *Taking actions or creating karma is like planting seeds, non-virtuous or negative actions ripen as unpleasant experiences, such as pain and difficulty and other suffering.*

48. What are the ten types of non-virtuous actions?

- *Three non-virtuous actions of the body:*
 - *Killing;*
 - *Stealing;*
 - *Sexual misconduct.*
- *Four non-virtuous actions of the voice:*
 - *Lying;*
 - *Speech which creates disharmony;*
 - *Harsh words that cause pain; and*
 - *Idle talk (talk that has no benefit and instead gives rise to defilements)*
- *Three non-virtuous actions of the mind:*
 - *Covetousness;*
 - *Ill will; and*
 - *Wrong view, which means not believing in the law of karma.*

49. What is then the cause of any difficulty or suffering we face today, such as poverty, inability to fulfill wishes, anxiety and so on?

- *Unwholesome or non-virtuous actions committed in the past.*

50. How can we avoid suffering in the future?

- *Avoid committing non-virtue now.*

51. What is the tragedy of our ignorance?

- *Though our aim is happiness, due to ignorance, we are constantly creating more causes for suffering.*

52. So in order to be free of suffering and to accomplish happiness what must we do?

- *We must understand the actual source of suffering so that we can avoid the causes of suffering and accumulate the true causes of happiness.*

53. How does the Buddha help sentient beings?

- *By giving teachings that explain what is right and what is wrong, and how to find happiness.*

54. Is the Buddha able to give liberation or enlightenment to sentient beings?

- *No, the Buddha said, "I have shown you the path of liberation. You are your own savior.*

55. What is the main cause of liberation in Buddhism?

- *Our own efforts.*

56. Using a medical metaphor, explain the relationship between: the Buddha, Dharma, oneself, and one's defilements?

- *The Buddha is like the doctor; the Dharma is like the medicine; we are like the patients; and our current defilements are the illness. To cure these defilements we must follow the Dharma that the Buddha taught.*

57. How can we overcome suffering?

- *By avoiding the cause of suffering, which is non-virtuous deeds arising from defilements.*

58. What is our closest enemy?

- *Actions arising from defilements.*

59. Can other enemies (such as external factors) create the same suffering?

- *No other enemy can, in fact, create as much suffering. Our own defilements can create such suffering as we cannot even imagine.*

60. Where does our greatest enemy reside?

- *Within our own mind; it is not external.*

61. Realizing this what must we do?

- *Try to eliminate these defilements.*

62. What is the first step toward eliminating the defilements?

- *Realizing that the cause of suffering is not an external enemy; the real cause is actually our own inner defilements.*

63. So why, in fact, perceive outside enemies?

- *Our own defilements cause us to perceive external enemies.*

64. What are the external enemies a reflection of?

- *All of these outside problems, obstacles, enemies, and so on are the reflections of our own defilements.*

65. What will then naturally happen if we control or destroy our inner defilements?

- *All of our enemies and obstacles natural disappear.*

66. What is the relationship between the first two noble truths?

- *They are the cause and result of samsara.*

67. Why did the Buddha teach the result (truth of suffering) first, and the cause (truth of the cause of suffering) second?

- *Because until we realize that life is suffering, we will not want to apply the remedy.*

III. The Noble Truth Of Cessation

68. What is the state of cessation of suffering called?

- *Nirvana, or real peace.*

69. What does nirvana mean?

- *True peace, which is the cessation of suffering that comes from freedom from defilements.*

70. Why is the result (nirvana) given first by the Buddha in his second pair of the Four Noble Truths teaching?

- *Because when we see the benefit of the result of nirvana, we will wish to obtain it.*

IV. The Noble Truth of the Path

71. How do we accomplish the truth of cessation, nirvana?

- *By following the Buddha's path.*

72. How do we enter the truth of the path?

- *When we long for the result, we will naturally enter the truth of the path.*

73. What is the first step in entering the Buddha's path?

- *Taking refuge in the Triple Gem.*

74. What are the Three Jewels?

- *The Buddha; the Dharma; and the Sangha.*

75. Why is taking refuge important?

- *It is the root of all Dharma, the preliminary practice of all paths, and foundation of all vows.*

76. What makes one a Buddhist?

- *Taking refuge in the Triple Gem is what distinguishes Buddhists from non-Buddhists*

77. Are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha the same in all Buddhist schools?

- *Yes, whether Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, but the explanations in each vary slightly.*

78. What does the word "Buddha" generally mean?

- *Fully enlightened one.*

79. What is the further explanation of the buddha in the Mahayana teachings?

- *A buddha is one who possesses the three kayas, or "bodies".*

80. What are the three bodies of the Buddha?

- *The dharmakaya; the sambhogakaya; and the nirmanakaya.*

81. What is the dharmakaya?

- *The body of reality, ultimate wisdom or realization of ultimate truth.*

82. Who possesses this *dharmakaya*?

- Everyone possesses it.

83. What is the difference between the Buddha's *dharmakaya* and our *dharmakaya*?

- Every form of obscuration has been eliminated from the Buddha's *dharmakaya*.

84. Why is the Buddha's *dharmakaya* said to be doubly pure?

- First, it has the natural purity characteristic of the *dharmakaya* of every sentient being, and secondly he has removed every temporary obscuration from it.

85. What is the sambhogakaya?

- *The body of enjoyment, an exalted physical form visible only to highest bodhisattvas, most advanced followers of the Buddha.*

86. What is the nirmanakaya?

- *The emanation body, in ordinary form, which can appear in whatever form is necessary to help sentient beings, such as the historical Buddha Shakyamuni.*

87. According to Mahayana teachings, when did the Buddha first attain enlightenment?

- *In previous lives, before he was born in India.*

88. Why did the Buddha choose to take birth and perform his holy deeds?

- *To show how an ordinary person can work toward enlightenment.*

89. What role does the Buddha serve on our journey on the Dharma path?

- *The Buddha is the experienced guide who shows the path.*

90. What is the meaning of "Dharma"?

- *The Sanskrit word "dharma" has many meanings. Among these, the "holy Dharma" has two aspects: the experience or realization of the Buddhas and bodhisattas; and the teachings themselves.*

91. Why is teaching the Dharma referred to as "Turning the Wheel of Dharma?"

- *When Buddhas and bodhisattvas teach or “Turn the Wheel of the Dharma,” as the wheel turns, it gets us to our destination of enlightenment.*

92. What role does the Dharma serve on our journey on the Dharma path?

- *We take refuge in the Dharma as the actual path upon which we proceed to a place beyond the suffering of samsara.*

93. Who are the real Sangha?

- *Those bodhisattvas who have reached the irreversible stage of the path and will never fall back into mundane existence.*

94. What role does the Sangha play on our journey on the Dharma path?

- *The Sangha are our companions on the path.*

95. In summary, how should we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha?

- *The Buddha is our guide; the Dharma is the path we follow; and the Sangha are our companions on the path.*

96. What are the two philosophical schools of Buddhism?

- *Hinayana (or Theravada); and*
- *Mahayana*

97. What is the primary emphasis of the Hinayana school?

- *Attaining nirvana for oneself.*

98. What is the basic teaching/path of a Hinayana practitioner?

- *Life is suffering and nobody wants to suffer. To eliminate this suffering, the Hinayana school teaches to renounce the world and attain nirvana for oneself. Once the defilements are exhausted, the complete peace and happiness of nirvana is naturally attained.*

99. What is the primary emphasis of the Mahayana school?

- *Seeking enlightenment for the sake of every living being.*

100. Why do Mahayanists think that it is not right to attain liberation for oneself alone?

- *Because it is important to also consider the welfare of other beings.*

101. How are we related through karma to other sentient beings?

- *Every sentient being has been our mother in a previous life, even though we no longer recognize them.*
102. Why should we strive to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings?
- *So that we can repay the benefit and kindness that these beings have shown us in previous lives by gaining enlightenment for ourselves and then helping them gain it, too.*
103. What is the goal of the Mahayana path?
- *To seek enlightenment for the benefit of every living being without exception.*
104. Why does practicing the Mahayana path bring great merit?
- *Because if benefitting even one living being is meritorious, benefitting every living being is infinitely meritorious.*
105. What is enlightenment mind?
- *The resolve to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.*
106. What is the relationship between enlightenment mind and bodhichitta?
- *They are synonyms: Enlightenment mind is the English translation of the Sanskrit "Bodhichitta."*
107. How does one give rise to bodhichitta?
- *By developing loving kindness and compassion.*
108. What is loving kindness?
- *The wish that every living being be happy and have the cause of happiness.*
109. How does compassion arise?
- *When we develop loving kindness compassion naturally arises.*
110. What is compassion?
- *The wish that every living being be free of suffering and the cause of suffering.*
111. Why should we feel compassion for sentient beings?
- *Because they long for happiness, yet through ignorance create the causes of their own suffering.*
112. How does enlightenment mind arise?

- *From loving kindness and compassion, enlightenment mind arises.*

113. How did the Buddha attain enlightenment?

- *By generating enlightenment mind, then accumulating merit and wisdom, and eventually attaining enlightenment through which he benefitted countless sentient beings.*

114. How should Mahayana Buddhists cultivate their practice?

- *Abandon non-virtue, and accumulate loving kindness, compassion, and enlightenment mind.*

VOCABULARY

What is a sentient being? (Any living being with a mind)

What is Buddha nature? (The true, pure nature of our minds)

What is samsara? (Our deluded universe, the cycle of existence that goes on and on)

What is renunciation thought? (The wish to eradicate suffering by applying the remedies necessary to overcome that suffering.)

What is karma? Action; especially the law of the causes and results arising from action: virtue brings happiness and non-virtue brings suffering.

What is nirvana? – the state of cessation of suffering; complete peace.

What is taking refuge? - (Taking refuge is what differentiates Buddhists from non-Buddhists. It is the door to the Buddhist path, and signifies reliance upon the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha)

What are the Three Jewels? (The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha)

Define Buddha - a fully enlightened one who possesses the three bodies: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya.

Define Dharma - Two aspects: 1) the experience and realization of the Buddhas, and 2) the Buddha's teachings.

Define Sangha - (the community, especially those Bodhisattvas who are on the irreversible path.)

Define dharmakaya - (the dharmakaya - body of reality, ultimate wisdom)

Define sambhogakaya - the body of enjoyment, an exalted physical form visible only to advanced practitioners

Define nirmanakaya - nirmanakaya - emanation body, of which the historical Buddha Shakyamuni was one.)

Buddha nature – (the true nature of our minds, pure and never stained by obscurations).

Enlightenment mind - (the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings)

Bodhichitta - (synonym for enlightenment mind)

Loving kindness (the wish that every being will be happy and have the cause of happiness)

Compassion - (the wish that every being will be free from suffering and the cause of suffering)