



美國行願多元文化教育基金協會 - 行願蓮海月刊 Amita Buddhism Society - Boston, USA

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Truly Wise Buddhist Practice and Self-Cultivation



What is Buddhism ?

The word Buddha is a Sanskrit word. When translated it means "wisdom and enlightenment." Buddha includes essential aspects as functional meanings. In essence, Buddha means wisdom and enlightenment. In application or function, it means enlightenment.

Buddhism is the Buddha's teaching. In regards to time, it encompasses the past, present and future. In regards to space, it talks about everything: from our living environment all the way to infinite worlds. Buddhism is a teaching of wisdom — the understanding of life and the universe. It is not a religion.

In Buddhism, it is clearly stated that the Buddha is the original teacher, and we practitioners are the students. Bodhisattvas are our senior fellow students, those who have progressed further in their studies than we have. These titles [heshang and heshangni in Chinese] are derived from a Sanskrit word khosha that describes a person who acts as personal mentor to a practitioner. Each Buddhist cultivation center has only one khosha. Teachers who teach on behalf of the khosha are called "acarya." Their speech and behavior can be models for us to follow. Others who do not directly teach would be called "Dharma Masters" or "Fa-shi."

The principle of Buddhism is to break through all superstitions and delusions. It is to resolve delusion to attain happiness and enlightenment, to eliminate suffering to gain serenity and purity of mind. Resolving delusion to attain enlightenment is the cause and eliminating suffering to attain happiness and purity is the effect. Only through resolving superstition and delusion, can enlightenment be attained. This is the objective of the Buddha's teaching. This wisdom will enable all beings to differentiate true from false, proper from improper, right from wrong and good from bad. It can help us to establish a dynamic and caring attitude toward life and our surroundings. So, we can clearly see that Buddhism is neither passive nor obsolete, nor is it retreating from society. It enables us to obtain true and ultimate benefits by creating fulfilling lives, happy families, harmonious societies, prosperous nations, and a peaceful world. These are the objectives of the Buddha's teachings for our world now. Therefore, we can see that it is an education that will enable us to attain truth, virtue, beauty, wisdom,

and genuine eternal happiness.

Filial to our Parents & Respectful to our Teachers

Buddhism is an education of honoring teachers and revering their teachings, which is based on the foundation of filial piety.

We begin our learning and practice by being filial to our parents and respectful to our teachers and elders.

We keep expanding from being filial to our parents and respectful to our teachers until we respect and care for all sentient beings equally without discrimination or attachment. It is said in Brahma Net Sutra that “All men are my father; all women are my mother.” This is the broadening of our mind of filial piety so that it encompasses all beings in the universe, in the past, present and future. Buddhist teachings are based on the principle of filial piety for without it there would be no principle of respecting teachers.

Buddha Shakyamuni taught us to begin our learning from respecting teachers. He is our original teacher from 3000 years ago. If we respect a teacher from this far in the past, how would we not respect our current teachers? When we pay respect to an image of the Buddha, we are not worshipping him. We respect the image as a representation of our “Original Teacher” and therefore we pay our debt of gratitude to him. This is why the followers of the Buddha respect the Buddha’s images as well as memorial tablets of ancestors. This practice has a far-reaching and widespread educational significance, for at the sight of them, we remember our obligation of caring for and respecting our parents, teachers, and elders.

The Threefold Learning – abiding by the precepts, deep concentration, and wisdom

What is the first step in learning Buddhism? Start by reciting one sutra. To do so is to follow the practice the Threefold Learning of abiding by the precepts, deep concentration, and wisdom. Do we need to understand it? No. For when we have not ended afflictions and have not obtained enough wisdom, our understanding will be erroneous. Why do we recite only this sutra? There is no difference between reciting the sutra and practicing deep concentration in Zen. The only difference is the method being used. By reciting the sutra, the Threefold Learning of abiding by precepts, deep concentration, and wisdom are accomplished together. Sutras are words that flow from the Buddha’s true nature. Nothing can surpass these words in virtue. Therefore, reciting a sutra is doing all that is good and results in the perfection of self-discipline so there is no need to practice the precepts one-by-one. When reciting a sutra, we must focus. By focusing, we cultivate concentration. Clearly enunciating every word correctly without any omission is the practice of wisdom. Therefore reciting the sutra properly is to practice the Threefold Learning at the same time. Any attempt to analyze the sutra while reciting is in fact treating the sutra as a worldly book. This will result in none of the Threefold Learning being accomplished and is not true cultivation. Never belittle the practice of sutra recitation, as it is the foundation of cultivation.

Almsgiving, Abiding the precepts, Patience, Diligence, Deep Concentration and Wisdom Nowa days , people pursue wealth, knowledge, health and long life. They are known as the good fortune. The Buddha taught us that wealth, wisdom, and long life are all karmic results. If we want to obtain the result, we must first nurture and establish the cause.

Good causes result in good results, while bad causes result in bad results or retribution. Where there is a cause, there will be a result and vice versa. The Buddha taught us that having wealth is the karmic result of a cause planted in former lifetimes.

The giving of wealth results in obtaining wealth, the giving of teaching results in obtaining wisdom, the giving of fearlessness results in obtaining health and long life. Therefore, if we wish to have wealth, wisdom and long and healthy

lives in our future, we need to nurture and establish these causes in this lifetime.

If we can abide by the precepts and laws, we will have a tranquil body and mind, which will allow us to be free from worries and fear. Deep concentration arises from tranquility. Therefore, the precepts are essential to self-cultivation.

There are three categories of patience. First, tolerate the injuries of physical and verbal abuse. Patience is a virtue. With patience, we will have a quiet and pure mind; thus, it will be easier to attain deep concentration and achievement. When we successfully practice patience, we will gain the greatest good fortune. Second, we would do well to be patient with variations of the natural elements, hot and cold, summer and winter, hunger and thirst, as well as natural disasters. Third, be patient in the arduous course of our practice. Before attaining the joy of cultivation and before our cultivation becomes strong, we will encounter many obstacles. However, once we get through this phase, we will attain happiness.

The Chinese word for diligence is comprised of two characters meaning perseverance in a specialized field and progress.

The two need to work together. Buddhism is neither conservative nor backward, but seeks daily improvement.

This is similar to the Confucian saying of “making progresses everyday, day after day.” Progress is good, but it is more important to progress with diligence in a specialized field. We need to specialize in a certain field when learning worldly knowledge. The same applies to our learning Buddhism. We are practicing diligence when we choose one school, or method, and stay focused on our selection, studying until we excel in it, before advancing to another method. If we try to practice many methods before we are enlightened, they will become obstacles. It is not effective to concentrate on different methods at the same time. Once we understand one method, we will understand all other methods as well. Thus the Buddhist saying: “Once we achieve in one, we achieve in all.”

In the Platform Sutra, Master Hui-Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen school, explained that deep concentration was more than just sitting in meditation. Sitting in meditation is only one of many methods to practicing deep concentration. Except for sitting in meditation, there are infinite methods to achieve deep concentration. Meditation is not being attached to any external phenomena (i.e. to all changing forms). Concentration is inwardly sustaining the mind of tranquility. Do not attach to all changing forms, while maintain the mind of stillness, is to practice Meditative concentration. A higher level of deep concentration or samadhi can exist in all acts of our daily life ex walking, resting, sitting, and sleeping.

All phenomena are illusory, like dreams, bubbles and shadows. They are unattainable. The Buddha saw through everything and urged us not to give rise to any discriminations and attachments. If we can do so, then we will uncover our true nature and attain the Buddha's understanding of all things in the universe. This is the paramita of wisdom. We apply it in our daily lives, as we learn the Bodhisattva way (and we live a Bodhisattva's life). We know everything around us but we do not cling to it as we do our best to help others.

Boston Amita Buddhism Society new website: <http://www.amtb-ma.org/>

Group Buddha Recitation Every Saturday 9:30am

For details please call ABS (857)998-0169 or email to amtb.ma@gmail.com