

Buddhism: Beliefs

From the specification:

The dhamma

- The concept of dhamma (the truth)
- The concept of paticca samuppada (dependent arising)
- Three Marks of Existence:
 - anicca (impermanence)
 - anatta (no-soul)
 - dukkha (suffering)
- The human personality in Theravada and Mahayana traditions:
 - Theravada: the Five Aggregates (skandhas) of form, sensation, perception, mental formations, consciousness
 - Mahayana: sunyata, the possibility of attaining Buddhahood and Buddha-nature
- Human destiny:
 - Different ideals in Theravada and Mahayana traditions: Arhat (a 'perfected person') and Bodhisattva ideals
 - Buddhahood and the Pure Land

The Buddha and the Four Noble Truths

- The Buddha's life and its significance:
 - the birth of the Buddha and his life of luxury
 - the Four Sights: illness, old age, death, holy man (Jataka 075)
 - the Buddha's ascetic life
 - The Buddha's Enlightenment
- The Four Noble Truths:
 1. Suffering (dukkha) including different types of suffering
 2. The causes of suffering (samudaya); the Three Poisons, ignorance, hatred, greed
 3. The end of craving (tanha), interpretations of nibbana (nirvana) and Enlightenment
 4. The Eightfold Path (magga) to nibbana; the path as the Threefold Way: ethics (sila), meditation (samadhi) and wisdom (panna), Dhammapada 190-191

How these beliefs influence Buddhists today

The dhamma

The Three Refuges

These are the three important columns of the Buddhist faith, with each on of equal importance for Buddhist belief and practice:

1. **The Buddha** (Siddhartha Gautama; the founder of the religion as discoverer of the dhamma)
2. **The dhamma** (the truth'; literally the 'order' of the universe; the teachings of Buddhism)
3. **The sangha** (the community of all Buddhists, including lay Buddhists and monks and nuns)

The meaning and importance of the dhamma

Buddhists believe that the dhamma is the unalterable truth about the nature of reality, it incorporates all physical and spiritual facts about what the universe is like.

The Buddha did not create or write the dhamma, he only discovered it in his enlightenment.

Buddhists believe that they do can discover this ultimate reality through being enlightened.

The dhamma includes all teachings about suffering and the nature of existence as well as truths about the scientific nature of the universe.

Links – all Buddhis teachings

Influences – showing how to stop suffering / meditate to understand the dhamma

The concept of paticca samuppada

Paticca samuppada means 'dependent origination' or 'dependent arising' and means that everything that exists is dependent on other things for its very existence and nature. Nothing can be the cause of itself, so everything exists because something else made it exist. The way anything is depends on the way other things are. Because of this everything is reliant of other things, meaning that everything is connected in a complex web of causes and effects.

For example, the health of a tree is dependent on the sun, the amount of rain, the quality of soil, the impact of wildlife and so on. The tree was causes to exist by a seed, which was caused to exist by another tree and so on. This means that the tree is dependent on and connected to many other things in the universe. Likewise, a person's mental state is dependent on many factors.

Links – 2nd Noble Truth / anicca

Influences – stops attachment to things as things are reliant on each other / encourages good behaviour to have good impact on others

The Three Marks of Existence

Anicca = impermanence

- Nothing is permanent and things are always changing
- This includes human beings, who are always changing because of external and internal factors
- There is no point in clinging on to anything, because it will not last forever
- Suffering will not last forever, but nor will happiness

Links – paticca samuppada / anatta / dukkha / 3rd Noble Truth

Influences – stop being attached as things will end / have hope that suffering will end / be prepared for change / make the most of good things before they end

Anatta = no-soul

- There is no fixed self or soul
- No living things have a constant identity, because of anicca
- Human beings are a series of parts located in space and through time, but have no one thing that makes them who they are
- If we examine a person, we find nothing in them that is 'me'

Links – anicca / dukkha / sunyata / five skandhas / paticca samuppada

Influences – stop craving things for 'me' as there is no 'me' / stop clinging to self as it doesn't exist / no selfishness, looking to others instead

Dukkha = suffering

- Life is characterised by suffering
- Natural suffering = birth, illness, aging, death
- Psychological suffering = sadness, lamentation, despair, being away from what you like, being with what you don't like, not getting what you want
- Three main types = physical and emotional pain, reacting to change and being generally unsatisfied with life
- Suffering can't be escaped in the cycle of samsara (birth, life, death and rebirth)

Links – 1st Noble Truth / 2nd Noble Truth / 3rd Noble Truth / metta / karuna

Influences – try to help end your own suffering by learning 4 Noble Truths / try to help others stop suffering / stop craving to end suffering

The human personality

The five skandhas (Theravada Buddhism)

- As there is no soul, human beings are simply a 'bundle of aggregates (parts)'
- These parts make a person who they are and nothing else
- Taking apart of chariot reveals just parts; it's the same with people
- There are five aggregates (skandhas):
 - FORM – physical body
 - SENSATION – feelings in reaction to the world
 - PERCEPTION – sense experiences that help us recognise things
 - MENTAL FORMATIONS – thoughts and opinions
 - CONSCIOUSNESS - general awareness of the world

Links – anatta / anicca

Influences – stop clinging to 'self' / stop craving for self / detach self from the world

Sunyata and Buddha-nature (Mahayana Buddhism)

- Sunyata = emptiness, 'void'; the idea that humans are empty of any soul
- Everyone has 'Buddha-nature' within them, which is the 'seed' of a Buddha
- Everyone can become a Buddha as their Buddha-nature is realised
- When Buddha-nature is achieved, a person reaches 'Buddhahood' and becomes a Buddha

Links – anatta / enlightenment

Influences – meditate to realise Buddha-nature and become a Buddha / stop clinging and craving to self / see Buddha as role model for enlightenment

Human destiny

Arhat (Theravada Buddhism)

- Arhat = 'perfected person'
- A person who has been enlightened and stopped craving, so is free from suffering
- When they die, they will reach nibbana and never be reborn again

Links – enlightenment / 3rd Noble Truth

Influences – meditate to become enlightened / stop craving

Bodhisattva (Mahayana Buddhism)

- An enlightened person who doesn't suffer
- When they die, they do not enter nibbana, but stay to help other people become enlightened
- Earthly Bodhisattvas stay on earth as people to teach others
- Transcendent Bodhisattvas exist between nibbana and samsara and are prayed to

Links – enlightenment / 3rd Noble Truth / karuna

Influences – meditate to become enlightened / devotion to Bodhisattvas / stop craving

Pure Land Buddhism

Pure Land and Buddhahood

- Amitabha Buddha created Sukhavati (the Pure Land) as a perfect paradise, free for all forms of suffering, where he teaches the dhamma
- Pure Land Buddhists want to go there to increase their chance of enlightenment
- To be reborn in Sukhavati, Pure Land Buddhists chant Amitabha's name, pray to him and devote their lives to him
- Sukhavati is not the ultimate aim of Pure Land Buddhists, who want to reach nibbana after being enlightened in the Pure Land

Links – enlightenment / 3rd Noble Truth / worship / dukkha

Influences – show devotion to Amitabha to be reborn in Sukhavati / worship with other Pure Land Buddhists / seek enlightenment by meditating

The life of the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama)

Birth and life of luxury

- Before his birth, it was prophesied that he would become a prophet
- His father (the King) kept him in the palace to stop him seeing suffering

Links – 1st Noble Truth / anicca

Influences – avoid living in luxury / live in Middle Way between suffering and luxury / trust in the Buddha as he was prophesied about

Four Sights

- He escaped the palace and the four sights showed him the reality of life
- Sick man, old man, dead man, holy man
- He was inspired to become an ascetic

Links – dukkha / 1st Noble Truth

Influences – meditate to learn reality of life / avoid suffering by not craving

Ascetic life

- He lives with some monks who are searching for the meaning of life; they eat very little food
- He almost starves to death, so leaves

Links – dukkha / 1st Noble Truth

Influences – live in Middle Way between luxury and suffering / seek enlightenment to understand suffering

Enlightenment

- He sits under the Bodhi tree and after battling with Mara (a demon), he is enlightened
- He discovers the meaning of life and nature of suffering

Links – all of dhamma

Influences – meditate to become enlightened too / trust Buddha and learn his teachings

The Four Noble Truths and associated beliefs

First Noble Truth = everything is suffering (dukkha)

- Life is characterised by suffering, that cannot be escaped in samsara (cycle of birth, life, death, rebirth)
- There are many types of suffering and many forms of suffering (see Three Marks of Existence)

Links – other Noble Truths / Three Marks of Existence / Four Sights

Influences – learn other Noble Truths / help people who suffer

Second Noble Truth = there are causes of suffering (samudaya)

- Suffering is caused by craving (tanha)
- All forms of suffering result from human craving or clinging to something

Links – other Noble Truths / paticca samuppada / Three Marks of Existence

Influences – learn other Noble Truths / help people who suffer

Three poisons = greed, hatred, ignorance (of the dhamma)

- People suffer because of the three poisons

Links – Four Noble Truths / nibbana / Three Marks of Existence / paticca samuppada

Influences – stop being greedy / stop hating / learn the dhamma

Third Noble Truth = there is an end to suffering (nirodh)

- Craving can be stopped, and when it does, suffering will end
- To stop suffering, a person needs to stop craving and abandon the three poisons

Links – other Noble Truths / paticca samuppada / Three Marks of Existence

Influences – learn other Noble Truths / stop craving / stop clinging

Nibbana and enlightenment

- A person is enlightened when they stop craving and truly realise the dhamma
- Nibbana is a state of freedom from suffering, but not a 'place'
- Nibbana could be a state of perfect happiness (paradise) or non-existence (extinguishing)

The Four Noble Truths and associated beliefs

Fourth Noble Truth = the path to the end of suffering

- The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to stop craving, and so end suffering
- By following the Noble Eightfold Path, a person frees themselves from craving and suffering

The Noble Eightfold Path; the Threefold Way

- The path is not a set of rules, but a list of qualities to train in
- The eight parts are not a series of steps, as all must be approached positively and at the same time

Wisdom (panna)

- Right View (Understanding) = learning and understanding the dhamma
- Right Intention (Aspiration) = having the right attitude towards the dhamma and trying to apply and live it as well as believing it

Ethics (sila)

- Right Action = behaving in a positive, helpful way towards all living things, involving practising ahimsa (no harm), metta and karuna and obeying the five moral precepts
- Right Speech = not engaging in gossip, not lying; saying only positive and helpful things
- Right Livelihood = earning a living by doing a job that does not go against Buddhist principles

Meditation (samadhi)

- Right Effort = trying hard with meditation and not giving up
- Right Concentration = staying focused while meditating and not being distracted
- Right Mindfulness = being fully aware of what you are thinking while meditating

Links – all parts of the dhamma / enlightenment / meditation / metta / karuna / five moral precepts / six perfections

Influences – follow all parts of the path