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Las Vegas Buddhist Sangha

Introduction to Buddhism

-Better and Happier Life-



What is a “better” and “happy” life?

For example, what if I have a nice house?

“A wealthy man worries about his estate if he has one; he worries about his mansion and all other possessions. He worries lest some disaster befall him, his mansion burn down, robbers break in, kidnappers carry him off. Then he worries about death and the disposition of his wealth. Indeed, his way to death is lonely, and nobody follows him to death.” (*The Teaching of Buddha*, p. 96)

What if not?

“A poor man always suffers from insufficiency and this serves to awaken endless desires – for land and a house. Being aflame with covetousness he wears out both his body and mind, and comes to death in the middle of his life.” (*The Teaching of Buddha*, p. 96)



We are not fulfilled OR suffer in either case...

Buddha’s Solution



Our happy life:

- ✗ Material wealth
 - ☞ Temporal satisfaction
 - ☞ Outwardly: to try to change the situation surrounding us.
- ⊙ Spiritual fulfillment
 - ☞ Absolute strength
 - ☞ Inwardly: to change this “I” to appreciate the situation

Example of Changing Oneself

Once there was a young woman named Kisagotami, the wife of a wealthy man, who lost her mind because of the death of her child. She took the dead child in her arms and went from house to house begging people to heal the child.

Of course, they could do nothing for her, but finally a follower of Buddha advised her to see the Blessed One who was then staying at Jetavana, and so she carried the dead child to Buddha.

The Blessed One looked upon her with sympathy and said: “To heal the child I need some poppy seeds; go and beg four or five poppy seeds from some home where death has never entered.”

So the demented woman went out and sought a house where death had never entered, but in vain. At last, she was obliged to return to Buddha. In his quiet presence her mind cleared and she understood the meaning of his words. She took the body away and buried it, and then returned to Buddha and became one of his disciples.

(The Teaching of Buddha, pp. 94-95)

Buddha: Doctor for Human Suffering

Origin of Buddhism¹



Prince Siddhartha's search for the path to solve human essential suffering



Buddha is a special doctor for human suffering

Buddhism is a path in which we work on our suffering

What would you do, when you have a stomach pain?
Would you see a dentist, an optometrist, or an internist?

- Realization that I am “sick” = Realization that I am living a life of suffering
- Visit an appropriate doctor = Find an appropriate teaching

Our “Symptoms” from Buddha’s Eyes: Examples of the Reality of Our Lives

“In the sky there is no distinction of east and west; people create the distinctions out of their own minds and then believe them to be true.”

(The Teaching of Buddha, p. 52)

¹ Please refer to “Leaving Home” on page 15.



“It is easy to point out the mistakes of others, while it is hard to admit one’s own mistakes. A person broadcasts the sins of others without thinking, but one hides one’s own sins as a gambler hides his extra dice.”

(The Teaching of Buddha, p. 189)



“Everyone is the master of oneself, one is the oasis he/she can depend on; therefore, everyone should control him/herself above all.” *(The Teaching of Buddha, p. 190)*



“There are three kinds of people in the world. The first are those who are like letters carved in rock; they easily give way to anger and retain their angry thoughts for a long time. The second are those who are like letters written in sand; they give way to anger also, but their angry thoughts quickly pass away. The third is those who are like letters written in running water; they do not retain their passing thoughts; they let abuse and uncomfortable gossip pass by unnoticed; their minds are always pure and undisturbed.”

(The Teaching of Buddha, p. 89)

Essential Causes of Our “Sickness” (Suffering)

- | | | |
|--|----|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ignorance• Desire | or | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greed• Anger• Ignorance |
|--|----|---|

“From these primary sources [=ignorance and desire], all greed, anger, foolishness, misunderstanding, resentment, jealousy, flattery, deceit, pride, contempt, inebriety, selfishness, have their generations and appearances.” *(The Teaching of Buddha, p. 82)*

Our Visions Covered by Deluded Passions

Like Rain on a Car's Windshield

Unclear vision	Clear vision
More chances to have an accident	Less chances to have an accident
Harming myself or/and others	More fun of driving

Q. Which is better?

Q. Do you want your loved one to drive with such an unclear vision?

Burning House: the world we are living now

“The world is full of suffering.” (*The Teaching of Buddha*, p. 38)

“Indeed, this world is burning up with its many and various fires. There are fires of greed, fires of anger, fires of foolishness, fires of infatuation and egoism, fires of decrepitude, sickness and death, fires of sorrow, lamentation, suffering and agony. Everywhere these fires are raging. They not only burn the self, but also cause others to suffer and lead them into wrong acts of body, speech and mind.” (*The Teaching of Buddha*, pp. 82-83)

Then, Sakyamuni Buddha compared us to a child playing in a burning house.

“Now I will tell you a parable,” Buddha said. “Once there lived a wealthy man whose house caught on fire. The man was away from home and when he came back, he found that his children were so absorbed in play, had not noticed the fire and were still inside the house. The father screamed, ‘Get out, children! Come out of the house! Hurry!’ But the children did not heed him.

“The anxious father shouted again. ‘Children, I have some wonderful toys here; come out of the house and get them!’ Heeding his cry this time, the children ran out of the burning house.”

This world is a burning house. The people, unaware that the house is on fire, are in danger of being burned to death so Buddha in compassion devises ways of saving them.

(*The Teaching of Buddha*, p. 19)

Sakyamuni's compassionate message

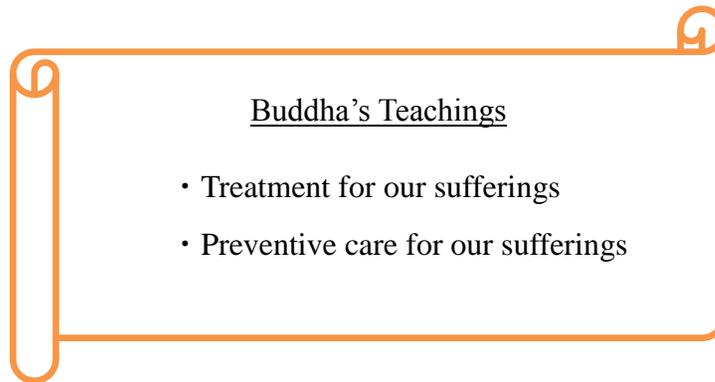
“The world is always burning, burning with the fires of greed, anger and foolishness; one should flee from such dangers as soon as possible.” (*The Teaching of Buddha*, p. 187)

Buddha's Treatment

“If desire, which lies at the root of all passion, can be removed, then passion will die out and all human suffering will be ended.” (*The Teaching of Buddha*, pp. 38-39)

Buddha = One who is released from all deluded passions and thus has no suffering
= One who compassionately wishes all beings be released from suffering

Buddhist = One who wishes to become a Buddha, because he/she is not the one yet
= One who respectfully follows the teaching and practice revealed by Buddha



What kind of “treatment” or “preventive care” does Buddha prescribe to us?

• Causality

“There are causes for all human suffering, and there is away by which they may be ended, because everything in the world is the result of a vast concurrence of causes and conditions, and everything disappears as these cause and conditions change and pass away.

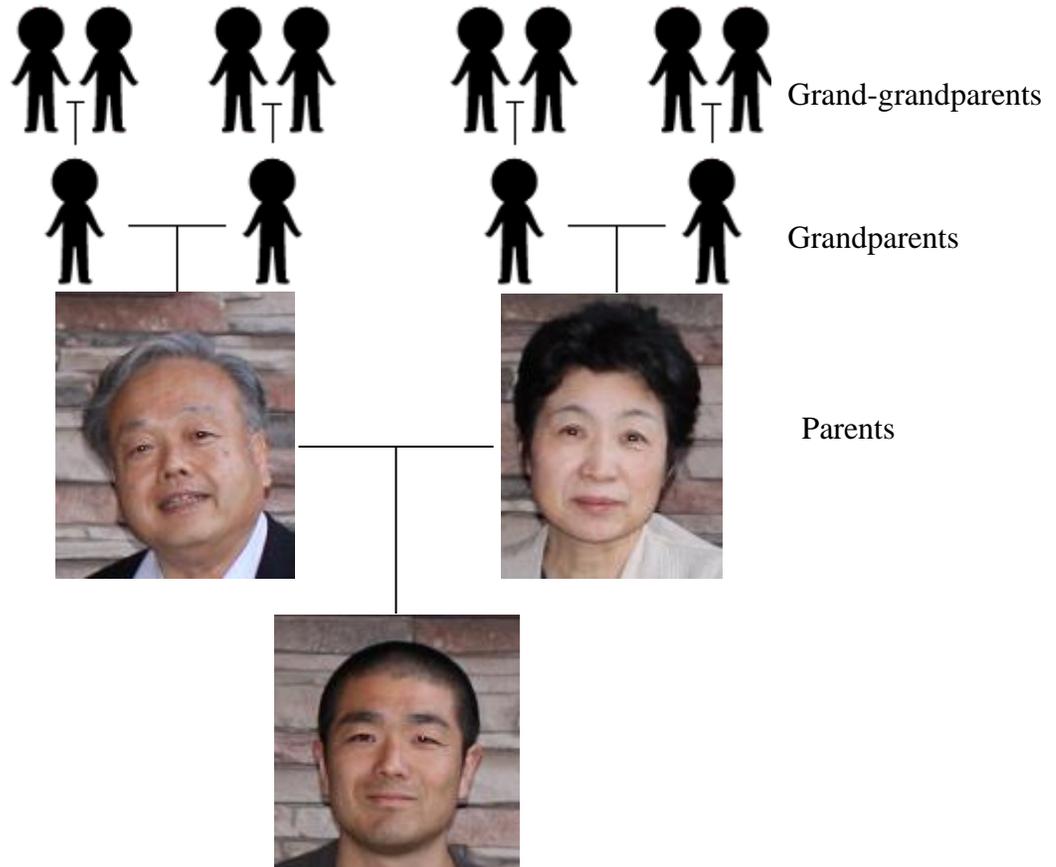
Rain falls, winds blow, plants bloom, leaves mature and are blown away. These phenomena are all interrelated with causes and condition, and brought about by them, and disappear as the causes and conditions change.

①One is born through the conditions of parentage. ②His body is nourished by food: his spirit is nurtured by teaching and experience. Therefore, both flesh and spirit are related to conditions and are changed as conditions change.” (*The Teaching of Buddha*, p. 41)

Everything = result of causes + conditions

☞ Aggregation of innumerable factors

① Top of Long Lineage



My existence is dependent upon the long lineage of innumerable ancestors

Memorial service: an important occasion to appreciate what we have received from those who passed away and also reaffirm the preciousness of my life/existence in the relationship with them

② Indirectly dependence on others

Human body = Aggregation of innumerable cells
Each cell functions to support other cells
Food that nourishes and maintains our body
They are also the result of innumerable causes and conditions.²

Word for meals by Japanese Buddhists “*Itadakimasu*”



“*Itadakimasu*” literally means “I am going to receive (them).”



We appreciate food which directly maintains our body and also innumerable things which indirectly make this food/meal possible.

² Details of “hidden water”: <http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/embedded-water/>

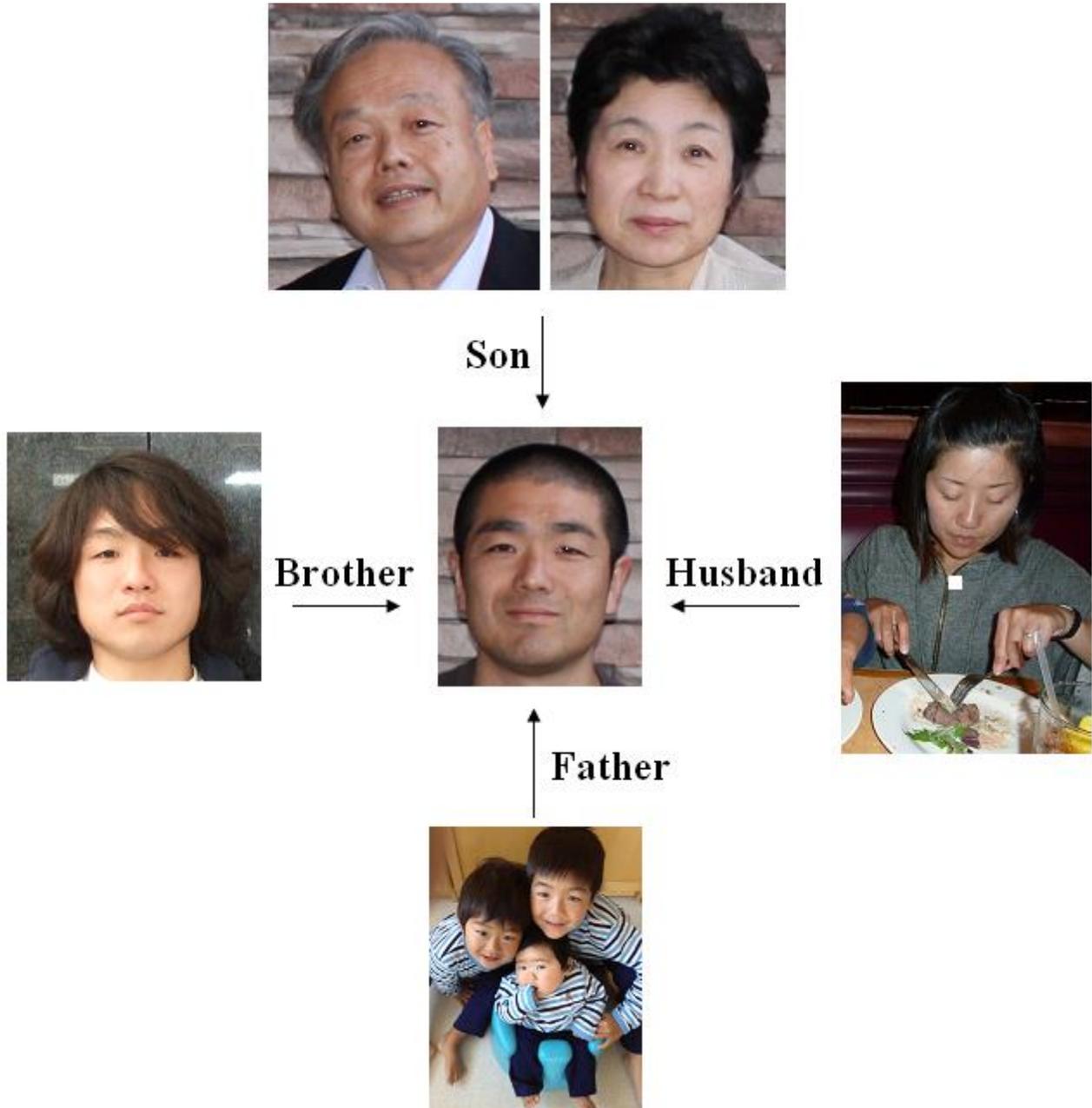
• **No Independent Core Essence of Existence (No Self)**

Everything = aggregation of innumerable causes & conditions



How we/things exist is totally conditional.

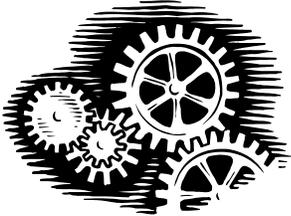
Q. Who am “I”? What am “I”?



There is no substantial son-hood, husband-hood, brotherhood and fatherhood in me. This is because those are dependent upon conditions. Such an idea is true to all existence. According to the Buddhist ontology, interdependence is the essence of how we/things exist. In other words, there is no independent and solo entity that sustains the existence.

• **Nothing can stay as it is: ceaselessly changing**

“Since both body and mind appear because of cooperating causes, it does not follow that there is an ego-personality [= fixed, unchangeable and absolute entity]. As the body of flesh is an aggregate of elements, it is, therefore, impermanent.” (*The Teaching of Buddha*, p. 46)



Every gear is connected with other gears directly or indirectly. Once one gear moves, all other gears should also spin: no gear can stay as it is.

Practical significance of the teachings

Teachings/truth revealed by Buddha

- Causation
- Interdependence
- No Independent Core Essence (Non self)
- Nothing stays as it is (Impermanence)



Our ignorance of those truths brings us suffering and hardship in our lives.



Buddhism is not a play of intelligence. With the realization of the truth, each of us has to seriously think of how to live our lives.

For example, my life is possible in the relationship with others and supported by innumerable things. At the same time, this means that I am also the part of “innumerable causes and conditions” which support others. Then, how should I live my life?

“As a net is made up by a series of knots, so everything in this world is connected by a series of knots. If anyone thinks that the mesh of a net is an independent, isolated thing, he is mistaken. It is called a net because it is made up of a series of connected meshes, and each mesh has its place and responsibilities in relation to other meshes.”

(*The Teaching of Buddha*, p. 46)

Various Paths: 84,000 Dharma Gates to Buddhism

Various paths/methods to get to the summit

&

Various types of climbers

Buddhism = One Destination + Variety of Practitioners + Variety of Teaching & Practice

Variety of Buddhist paths: Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, etc.

☞ Buddha's compassion for anybody to find an appropriate path for him/her

“The Spirit of Buddha is that of great loving kindness and compassion. The great loving kindness is the spirit to save all people by any and all means.”

(The Teaching of Buddha, p. 15)

☞ Careful and serious consideration whether a path is really suitable for me or not.
(Which doctor we should visit when we have stomach ache?)

Summary

Most of us don't want to lead an unhappy and miserable life. Then, how do we live a happy and fulfilled life? Material richness could satisfy us. However, it won't last forever because we are living in the world of impermanence or the world of constant change. Even when our wishes for material things come true, our greed could drive us to pursue the next target. To satisfy our greed is like to water the desert.

Since Buddha knows the truth of deluded passions, he did not think to actualize our secular and materialistic wishes is true happiness or a better life. He instead tries to bestow the spiritual fulfillment on us. By truly realizing the truth of our existence and the world where we are living now, we can change the way we live, think, see and so forth, as Kisagotami did. With the Buddhist teachings, we are nurtured spiritually, which gives us the strength to live positively and meaningfully in any circumstances. For example, we could face and overcome inevitable hardships in our lives; we could have a deeper appreciation of our lives. According to my understanding, this is the happy and better life that Sakyamuni Buddha wants to gift to us.

Because of its significance, Buddhism is an invaluable treasure; many people have appreciated it all over the world. I hope we gratefully enjoy the true happiness taught by Buddha and share it with more people.



“To live a single day and hear a good teaching is better than to live a hundred years without knowing such teaching.” *(The Teaching of Buddha, p. 187)*

Appendix

Leaving Home

Even as a child, Prince Siddhartha showed great ability in his studies and in the practice of martial arts. His father, King Suddhodana, and the people of his country had high hopes for him.

One day, Prince Siddhartha noticed a tiny bird pull a worm out of the ground. Soon after, he saw that very bird caught and eaten by a hawk. It is said that witnessing these events, in which living things can exist only by killing and eating other living things, made a great impression on the young prince. He began to consider deeply the meaning of life.

In order to divert his son from such reflection, King Suddhodana provided a luxurious castle for him. When Prince Siddhartha came of age, he married the beautiful Yasodhara. However, although the outward aspects of his life were exciting and dynamic, his quest in contemplating the suffering of life continued.

The day came when Prince Siddhartha decided to observe the world outside his secluded palace grounds. Leaving the Eastern Gate of Kapila Castle, he was surprised to see an emaciated old man. “Will I become old some day, like that man?” he wondered.

Later, he left the Southern Gate and saw a man wasted by illness, and when he left the Western Gate, he caught sight of a funeral procession, leading him to realize that life was just one endless round of birth and death and suffering.

Finally, leaving the Northern Gate, he spotted a monk who had abandoned the ways of the world. He was struck by the noble and dignified attitude of the man. It is said that Prince Siddhartha resolved to become a monk that day.

A child was born to Siddhartha and Yasodhara. The Prince rejoiced at the birth, but he could not avoid thinking that the child was just another obstacle to his spiritual quest. As a result, the baby was given the name Rahula, which means “obstacle.”

The desire to seek the Way continued to grow within Siddhartha. When he was twenty-nine years of age, he gave up the life of a prince, abandoned his beloved family, and sought Awakening among those who performed ascetic practices. His extended family continued to care for his wife and child, a common practice among warrior families.

(Jodo Shinshu a Guide, pp. 6-7)