

The Tree of Enlightenment – Peter Della Santina

Presentation Notes – Michelle Hartel

Part One – Fundamentals of Buddhism

Chapter 1 – Modern Perspective

- Buddhism is not culture bound
 - Many types; Indian, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Japanese, etc.
 - Race-less, boundary-less
- Pragmatic
 - Not interested in academic question & metaphysical theories
 - ID the root of problem and resolve it practically
- Verify truth according to personal experience (Kalama Clan – story of Buddha telling the Kalamas that there is no perfect teaching and that they should not believe anything they hear, but should assess through their own experiences.)
 - Try it on
 - Don't believe everything you are hearing

Chapter 2 – Pre-Buddhist Background

- Back in the 3rd Millennium BCE and for a few thousand years later
- Indus Valley
 - Meditation
 - Renunciation
 - Rebirth or Reincarnation
 - Moral responsibility – Karma
 - Goal was ending cycle of birth and death
 - Ascetics were revered
- Aryans
 - Worshipped many Gods, including:
 - Indra – God of thunder & lightning
 - Agni – God of Fire
 - Varuna – God of Water
 - No focus on meditation, but on sacrifice to please the Gods
 - Priest was revered, and family man was most worthy (not ascetics)
 - No rebirth, no karma
 - Loyalty to the clan
 - Final goal was heaven
 - Caste system existed
- Merged, came closer together as nomadic life of Aryans slowed and commerce leaders became more important than religious figures
- Buddhism inherited many factors from the Indus Valley and a few from Aryan
- Hinduism inherited many factors from the Aryans and a few from Indus Valley

Chapter 3 – Life of the Buddha

- 3 Virtues exemplified in the life of the Buddha
 - Renunciation to eliminate attachment (left life of royalty...)
 - Love & Compassion to counter aversion

- Wisdom to counter ignorance
- Left his first teachers
 - Meditation alone did not permanently end suffering
 - Cushion time not sufficient
 - Engaged Buddhism
 - However...meditation critical to sharpening the mind for seeing absolute truth

Chapter 4 – Four Noble Truths

- Heart of the Buddha's Teaching (relationship of cause & effect)
 1. There is Suffering (Dukkha)
 - a. Physical
 - b. Mental
 1. There is Origination of Suffering
 - c. Craving/Desire
 - d. Ignorance (not seeing things as they are)
 2. There is Cessation of Suffering
 - e. Nirvana, complete cessation of suffering
 - f. Can happen in this lifetime
 3. There is a Way to the End of Suffering
 - g. Noble Eightfold Path (can all be done in parallel)
 - i. Right View
 - ii. Right Intention
 - iii. Right Speech
 - iv. Right Action
 - v. Right Livelihood
 - vi. Right Effort
 - vii. Right Mindfulness
 - viii. Right Concentration
 - h. The Middle Way
 - i. Do best to follow the path with balance and not behave in extremes
- To progress through the 4 Noble Truths, there are certain insights and reflections that one needs to recognize
 - Reflective Pattern to move through 1st Noble Truth
 - Acknowledgement that suffering exists
 - Suffering should be understood (acceptance suffering as it is)
 - Suffering has been understood
 - Reflective Pattern to move through 2nd Noble Truth
 - There is the origin of suffering, which is attachment to desire*.
 - Desire should be let go of.
 - Desire has been let go of.
 - *feel free to insert any cause of suffering
 - Reflective Pattern to move through 3rd Noble Truth
 - There is cessation of suffering.
 - The cessation of suffering should be realized.
 - The cessation of suffering has been realized.

3 WAYS OF PRACTICE (MORALITY, MENTAL DEVELOPMENT & WISDOM)

Chapter 5 – Morality

- Foundation of all qualities for progress on the path

- 2 Principles
 - equality – all are sentient beings are equal, having same outlooks and desires for happiness and not to suffer
 - reciprocity – Golden Rule, behave unto others as you would want to have bestowed upon you

Chapter 6 – Mental Development

- Focus on our own mental development, not on fixing everyone else
- Cannot purify the whole world, start with ourselves
- Example of covering the Earth with leather, versus making shoes

Chapter 7 – Wisdom

- Not sufficient to intellectually understand 4 Noble Truths, must internalize them and adopt them as your living truth

Chapter 8 – Karma

- Unwholesome acts and Wholesome acts contribute to Karma
- Unwholesome acts contain:
 - 3 unwholesome acts of body
 - killing
 - stealing
 - sexual misconduct
 - 4 unwholesome acts of voice
 - lying
 - harsh speech
 - slander
 - malicious gossip
 - 3 unwholesome acts of mind
 - greed
 - anger
 - delusion
- Karma manifest in this life or in future lives
- 5 conditions that modify weight of Karma
 - Subjective
 - persistence or repetition
 - willful intention
 - absence of regret
 - Objective
 - Quality of object the action is directed to (i.e. living-being)
 - Indebtedness (nature of relationship between object and subject)

Chapter 9 – Rebirth

- it is not a “self” that gets reborn over and over, but a type of store consciousness reappearing in different forms over time
- Rebirth Realms
 - Resulting from Karma of Unwholesome Acts
 - Hell Realms (violent actions)
 - Hungry Ghosts (attachment and greed)
 - Animals (Ignorance)
 - Resulting from Karma of Wholesome Acts

- Human (most desirable realm, as we have chance to evolve and stop cycle)
- Demi-Gods (jealousy and conflict)
- Gods (Happiest of realms, although it is impermanent)

Chapter 10 – Interdependent Origin

- Twelve Components
 - Afflictions
 - Ignorance
 - Craving
 - Clinging
 - Actions
 - Volition
 - Becoming
 - Sufferings
 - Consciousness
 - Name and Form
 - Six Sense Spheres
 - Contact
 - Feeling
 - Birth
 - Old Age and Death
 - Afflictions cause Actions
 - Afflictions with Action, cause Suffering
- Some people categorize these through a lens of Past, Present and Future Life

Chapter 11 – Three Universal Characteristics of Existence

- Characteristic is “necessarily connected to something else”
- 1. Impermanence (aging/dying/etc.)
- 2. Suffering (impermanence is an occasion for suffering)
- 3. Not-Self/Non-Self (collection of factors, no distinct self)
 - Understanding this is a key to Enlightenment

Chapter 12 – Five Aggregates

1. Form – 6 senses (taste, touch, smell, hear, feel and mind)
2. Feeling
3. Perception
4. Volition or Mental Formations
5. Consciousness

Chapter 13 – Fundamentals in Practice

- Everyone can achieve enlightenment
 - Just honest effort to follow the Noble Eightfold Path will get you there
- Practice, not just intellectual study is important