

Introduction to Buddhism

Dear friends, I wish to take you around a small journey, the journey of life that the Lord Buddha has taught us. It is immaterial whether you don't have even a slight idea of Buddhism or you are proficient in Buddhism; you can grasp the principles of Buddhism or compare what you know with the given information. We try our best to restrict to direct sayings or teachings of the Lord Buddha. There are different ways of interpretations made for your benefit. In such a case it will be clearly mentioned that they are only interpretations and not direct sayings or teachings of the Lord Buddha.

The Lord Buddha learned everything via developing mind power and he has not tried to prove anything that was obvious to him, but has provided logical or analytical explanations to the questions asked in various situations. Therefore, our intention is neither to compare with science nor to try to prove these points with science, but to state or explain the teachings of Lord Buddha.

There are three basic factors in nature. One fact is that nothing is permanent and everything changes whether one likes it or not. The change occurs every moment in every living being and non-living things although we may not be able feel it or perceive these momentary changes. Growth is associated with this and the same individual looks bit different over the years. The baby becomes a child that becomes young, middle age and finally old due to these changes happening in the body. The mind of every living being also changes with time. There are lot of explanations about these mind changes and material changes that the Lord Buddha has stated. Let's look at those at a later stage. At this point it is important to know that nothing is permanent and everything changes. This means that there is no place that we can live forever and there will be an end point whether it is human, animal, divine or devil. The earth we live may be destroyed one day and a similar one may be created or developed which is kind of cyclic.

Some people have got confused with the argument that if you take a person in the next moment it is neither the same person nor a different person. The argument that it is not the same person is based on the fact that he or she has changed in the next moment, but it cannot be said that it is a different person because the current person is the result of the continuation of the same previous person. For the purpose of explanation we consider it to be the same person or same thing if it is a continuation of the same being or the same thing throughout this document.

The Lord Buddha has clearly mentioned that rebirth exists. A person who dies shall be born again with the difference being the birth is into a different body but a result of the continuation of the same mind. When a man dies, he can be born as a divine being, animal or any different form and vice versa. For one individual this repetition cycle is known as moving in the sea of "*Sansara*".

The next factor is the suffering, pain and frustration that we undergo while moving in this sea of *Sansara*. One may argue that not only suffering, pain and frustration that we undergo, but also

we experience the pleasure, satisfaction and happiness. Basically there are things that we love to experience and there are things that we hate to undergo.

We always wish to

1. enjoy the life, be happy or keep our pleasure.
2. avoid pain, run away from things that we hate or overcome frustration and sufferings.

At the same time we hate to

1. face difficulties, feel pain or come across frustrations or disappointments.
2. be separated from our loved ones, be away from the things we like or stop enjoying the pleasure we get.

In addition to the sufferings you get, the argument is that your pleasure is going to be ended one day because nothing is permanent. The Lord Buddha has mentioned that in this cycle of rebirth, an individual gets subjected to more suffering than pleasure in general due to the nature of our mind works. Also, there is a heavier chance of rebirth to a place where one could suffer than getting pleasure if he is not careful.

In this *Sansara* cycle (birth and death again and again), one can be born human, animal, divine, devil or a live form in hell. Places where a particular individual can be born is taught or said in various situations by the Lord Buddha and at this point these places will be briefed for the understanding of the user without going into details. The Lord Buddha has mentioned that some of these worlds are different or away from where human lives exist, but has not specifically mentioned whether it exists in a part of the earth or a different place from the earth. For an example whether the hell is part of inside or on earth or an entirely different planet is arguable. Let's look at these places in the descending order considering highest order live forms are happier with less suffering.

1. Brahma

This is known to be highest live form in term of happiness. It is beyond divine and there are no sex differences for those who are born in this form. They seemed to be enjoying a tranquil or kind of peace in a very relax manner throughout. This kind of sensation is possible for human beings to acquire through meditation and it is said that if a person who is in a special state called *Samadi* state while doing meditation dies while he is in that state, he will be born in this form. There are various forms of this nature. They are born automatically in a spiritual form and in one such world they have two sensory systems only. They can see and hear, but cannot smell, feel the touch or cannot taste. They do not enjoy the normal pleasures that we get through our five sensory systems as their minds are in higher states and they enjoy a mind meditation state that seems to be more pleasure, soft and better than the five sensory enjoyments that we are used to. Their

worlds are away from humans and they can come to human world, but cannot be seen by the human eye. They undergo pleasure only. There are other forms of this nature where one kind only has the mind and so on. Details of these can be read later as this is only an introduction.

2. Divine

These individuals are in the form of gods or angels. They live a happy life having all the sensors that humans have with a spiritual type body where they don't need or have parents. The sex differentiation exists and they are automatically born fully grown in a spiritual form either masculine or feminine. They have different worlds in general, but visit to the human world is possible. The most below forms of this nature live in the human world but cannot be seen by human eye and may undergo certain pains. In general they undergo pleasure only.

3. Human

Both pleasure and pain exists having more pleasure than pain. Mating of two parents or mating of these seeds is generally a must. Humans are born and subjected to growth. There is a very special ability in humans. A *complete* human (there are humans who are born who cannot learn beyond a certain point) can develop his mind power to very high levels, learn, understand and do wonders. In all the other forms, mind power is limited or cannot exceed the powers that limits by the type of live form they are born.

4. Animal

Both pleasure and pain exists having more pain than pleasure in general. Although their ways are similar to humans they cannot develop their mind power like humans. They are driven by their needs with a little intelligence. All creatures existing in this world except humans are categorized into this world including mammals, birds and fish.

5. Preetha and Asura

Most of these forms live in the human world automatically born in a spiritual form with all the sensors that humans have. They cannot be seen by human beings in general. The term *Asura* is used as they seem to enjoy certain amount of pleasure while having pains as well. The term *Preetha* is used where they undergo only pain. This is much higher than the pains that humans or animals can be subjected to. For an example, a human can undergo thirst and if he does not get water or a suitable liquid form, he will suffer, but die after sometime. *Preetha* can undergo the same suffering for years, but they don't die.

Compared to animal world they suffer a lot more pains and what animals and humans suffer is comparatively negligible. Most of these live in the human world where there are certain exceptions.

6. Hell

It is a place for suffering only. They are neither spiritual nor human nor animal like form. It is said that humans and animals are made of thicker form than divine or *Preetha*. These individuals seem to be made of thicker form than humans or animals. They live in a different place from humans. It could be underneath or an entirely different planet. Their bodies are subjected to various pains and they suffer, but they don't die. They suffer a lot more than those in the world of *Preetha* or in brief they are the ones who suffer the most.

In this Sansara birth and death recycle is a suffering to an individual. Although one can argue that there is no suffering in Bhahma or divine worlds, one cannot easily be born these worlds. One needs to undergo a decent life without doing any wrong things to anybody which is not an easy task. One may have to undergo lot of suffering or stress to go to these places. Those places are also not permanent and there will be an end. Also one can be born in Divine and in next birth he may go to hell.

The Lord Buddha has clearly said that a particular individual can be born in Brahma world and then could even be born in hell with this rebirth cycle. No place is permanent and therefore there is no place where you can have eternal life. Although Brahma or Divine worlds have pleasure without pain, at one point it is going to end. Sometimes some individuals have power to know that it is going to end and they become very frustrated because at that point as all the pleasures they enjoyed are going to be ended. Some religions believe that there exists an eternal life place where they can live forever once they reach that state. The Lord Buddha has clearly rejected it and mentioned that **nothing is permanent**.

Then the question comes "how can we have an end to this suffering?" The only way to end this suffering is not to be born again and suffering ends when there is no birth and no existence. The third factor is important at this point. The Lord Buddha has mentioned that even our rebirth cycle can be ended or in other words so called soul of a particular individual is not permanent that clearly differentiated Buddhism from other religions. The so called permanent soul does not exist. However for a particular individual this will not be ended automatically. The teaching of Lord Buddha is mainly about how human minds can develop to a certain state so that they will no longer be born. Attaining this state of mind is known as attaining *nibbana*, *nivana* or *nirvanaya*.

The next question is that if you take a particular individual, how he starts this rebirth cycle for which the Lord Buddha has not given explanations in detail. According to him, it is not important. He has given all priority to end the existence only. However, the Lord Buddha has only mentioned that for a particular individual, the origin or the beginning of the rebirth cycle cannot be seen.

The above statement coupled with another statement that the Lord Buddha can see to any past possible, there are certain arguments that have been put forward. Combining these two statements some say that there is no origin to a particular individual. The author has a different argument. A particular individual's rebirth may have occurred due to a long time evolution where it is not possible to mark a time line where that individual existed and where he had not existed. So obviously the origin cannot be seen in a simple term. Both arguments could even be wrong and it could be something else, as we all make our concepts based on certain assumptions. Let's not dig into details of something that the Lord Buddha has only mentioned very briefly, as objective of this article is for the readers to understand the teachings of the Lord Buddha only.

Before we look at in detail how to attain *nibbana* or path to *nibbana*, let's look at the basic three ways that one individual can attain it.

1. Become Buddha status

This takes a long time in *Sansara*, since there are many wishes and deeds that need to be conducted in attaining this status. One who attains this status has the full knowledge of everything. He knows everything and every principle that governs the world. So he is capable of teaching others how to attain *nibbana*. When he attains Buddha status he already attains *nibbana* status so that his existence will cease after he passes away. Some may be under a wrong belief that Lord Buddha could do anything. He knew everything, but he or any other being is not capable of doing everything. He had the knowledge that nobody can change the fact that nothing is permanent and everything changes or get destroyed one day.

2. Become Arahath status

This is known as attaining *nibbana* by hearing, reading and understanding Lord Buddha's teachings. Many have attained such status in his times and now also is possible since his teachings or *Dhamma* is available. These individuals do not know everything though they managed to attain *nibbana* and they can teach others to attain it by repeating the teachings of Lord Buddha.

3. Become Pasebudu status

Once again this is known as attaining *nibbana* on one's own without the assistance of Lord Buddha or without hearing his *Dhamma*. These individuals also do not know everything although they managed to attain *nibbana* on their own. They cannot teach others as they have not heard the teaching of Lord Buddha and hence their knowledge is confined to themselves.

The concept of *nibbana*, *nirvana* or *nivana* is very different from others. This term *nivana* has two meaning. One meaning is an adjective term used to characterize a person who is patient, calm and well disciplined in nature. Also, the same term used for an adjective when a light or fire is put off. Both these terms are very much in line with the concept of *nivana*. A person who has attained *nivana* is calm and patient and has a very relax mind. When the same person passes away his existence ceases ending his moving in the *Sansara* cycle. If you consider the existence of a person as fire, similar to fire being put off, the existence of the person is no longer there.

In order to cease rebirth or attain *nibbana* a person has to **absolutely understand** the four noble truths. They are as follows.

1. Suffering

First of all, the person has to understand that we all suffer while moving in this endless *Sansara*, It is obvious that living being in hell and *Pretha* world suffer a lot. Animals also suffer to a certain extent. Suffering or pain takes place when

- i) One is born
- ii) One is sick
- iii) One is old
- iv) One is subjected to death
- v) One has to be away from the loved ones
- vi) One has to be with hated ones
- vii) One cannot find what is needed

In addition to that, to be born as a human, divine or Brahma one needs to conduct good deeds happening as the principle of *Kamma* and need to avoid doing wrong things that require lot of effort and patience. This is not an easy task and has to undergo lot of pains in doing so.

2. The reasons for suffering

The reason for suffering is due to the desires we have in order to satisfy five sensory systems and pleasures that our minds undergo at various situations such as satisfying our ego needs or we could be attracted by a mind state of meditation. We love to look at pleasant sceneries that satisfy our eyes, we are happy to listen to pleasant music satisfying our ears, we like to enjoy good smell, we are willing to taste lovely foods and we love to be touched by our loved ones basically satisfying our five sensory systems.

This makes us attached or stuck to fulfill satisfying these desires keeping us in this repetitive *Sansara* cycle. If one manages to get rid of these desires there will be no rebirth and no existence.

3. End of suffering

When there is no rebirth, there will be no existence and hence it will break the *Sansara* cycle that will end the suffering. In short the five sensory systems causing rebirth will continue suffering for a particular individual. When there is no rebirth suffering ends.

4. The path to end suffering

The main cause for rebirth is the attachment and desires we have. To end suffering or to attain *nibbana* one has to get rid of this attachment that is not easy to achieve. The path of achieving this is the path to end suffering. The main theme of teachings of Lord Buddha is based on this. There are eight ways of life and three practices that one individual should undergo in order to achieve this in the long process of *Sansara* Cycle.

I would like to brief the three practices one has to undergo in attaining *nibbana*. It is advisable for you to read more articles on this subject to understand it better.

1. Dhana (Give or donate)

To end desires and attachment, one has to start practicing to give others your belongings. When you give there could be so many reasons. One reason could be purely you want the other person to be happy or get rid of some pains that person is already undergoing. One other reason could be that you believe in Kamma (Good deeds will come after you) or you might expect a certain favor from him later on. Obviously the first reason is nobler than the second. Also, one could wish to get rid of attachment that we have towards various things while we give donations. Whether you wish or not you get rid of attachment to a certain extent every time you give. Getting rid of attachment while giving donation will accelerate your journey to *nibbana*.

2. Sheela (Discipline)

You need to be well disciplined if you are to attain *nibbana*. It takes lot of time and discipline throughout *Sansara* cycle to get rid of desires and attachment. It means that you may need lot of life cycles to conduct this task. Also you may attain this in this life, if you have already practiced it in previous births. The discipline is essential for you to conduct good deeds and avoid bad deeds so that you can be born as human or divine where you can attain *nibbana*.

3. Bavana (Meditation)

One needs to understand the principle of non permanency well through meditation. When you meditate, you will come to a state of mind so that you can observe the instant

changes of your body and your mind. Then only one can clearly or absolutely understand that nothing is permanent and everything rapidly changes with time.

It is interesting to find out the laws that govern the form or birth of an individual as well as the nature. According to Lord Buddha there are five principles that govern the world. Let's see the five principles or causes for the various changes and the reasons for existence and the continuation of the world according to Buddhism. The Lord Buddha has mentioned that there is cause effect relationship and things occur when sufficient causes take place for that thing to happen and it vanishes if one of the causes that is necessary and sufficient is no longer there. Therefore Buddhism is considered as a philosophy rather than a religion.

The five main principles, causes or forces that occur in the world are categorized as follows:

1. Beeja Niyamaya (Principle of bio sciences that causes one generation from the other)

It is due to this principle that a kitten is born in a cat family and not in a dog family, a reason for mango plant comes out of mango seed and not from the apple seed. It is due to this reason that the child has a characteristic of his father or the mother.

2. Chitta Niyamaya (Principle of mind)

This is all about the mind. The power of mind and how mind works and determination of the mind and interaction between two minds are explained in this principle. Unlike Beeja Niyamaya, the Lord Buddha has explained many things about the mind and we will look at them as we proceed. For the time being what is important is that Lord Buddha has mentioned that a human can change many things by changing the mind power into a correct or in a right direction. Effort, attitude, determination, courage and confidence are some of the factors that humans can inculcate to achieve targets. The main thing that one has to understand is that the mind is also subjected to change.

3. Kamma Niyamaya (The golden rule that yields good for good deeds and bad for bad deeds)

The *kamma* or *karma* is known as the rule that comes after you for what you have done, Although this *kamma* concept exists in other religions as well, Buddhism has a clear distinction. One is that this rule is not made by anyone or anybody. The rule has not been created by anybody to provide justice. Therefore this is different from any law that exists in any country. *Kamma* is a kind of force that exists in nature and need not be fair. Second thing according to Buddhism is this is closely related with the mind and for someone to collect such *Kamma* he should do it on purpose. Also, the effect of *Kamma* is not only related to the doer, but also a combinational or productive effect of the doer

and the person who is affected as well as the other environmental factors including all the other four principles as well. At this point the reader should understand that the Lord Buddha has mentioned that *Kamma* is one of the reasons for certain things but not the one and only reason. When something happens, it may be difficult to say whether it is due to *Kamma* or not. More productive way is that it is one of the forces that can affect your life, but not the only cause. The environmental factors existing and your mind power can make it more effective or counter effective. However the *kamma* effect is multiple in general and there is no point in arguing about its fairness since it is only a force in nature and not a law or a rule made by a god to punish the bad doers and reward the good doers. The Lord Buddha has only explained the effect of *kamma*, but not the reasons for existence of *Kamma*. However, the force *Kamma* has a direct relationship with the mind and selfness. There are many analysis and explanations of *Kamma* in various teachings of Lord Buddha that we can discuss later on.

4. Rithu Niyamaya (The principle of seasonal changes)

It is due to this principle that we have got different seasons such as winter, summer rainy season and non rainy season etc. All the changes in the nature including flooding, wind pattern changes and earthquakes happen according to this principle. Also, iron become rusty, food become unsuitable in warm weather, changes in solid state to liquid state or gas state and vice versa come under this principle.

5. Dhamma Niyamaya

There are certain things that happen and the reason can only be understood by Lord Buddha that cannot be understood by others. One such thing is that nobody can murder Lord Buddha and there will not be two Lord Buddhas at the same time in the same world. Reasons for such things can only be understood by a person who has attained Buddha status only. There is a clear difference between attaining *nibbana* and attaining Buddha status. In this repetitive cycle of *Sansara* Lord Buddha has mentioned about previous Lord Buddhas and their ways and what they have done and about one Lord Buddha that shall emerge in future.

I have tried to brief the very basic teachings of the Lord Buddha or introduction to Buddhism. You can understand or quench your thirst in Buddhism by reading more. It is better to read the direct sayings or teachings of Lord Buddha in *Pali* language (It is documented as *Thripitakaya*) that has been memorized and believed to have not changed for you to get the philosophy without any bias from other individual ideas or concepts that may deviate from what had been said.