

## Evolution of Buddhist Thought

- An understanding of the evolution of the philosophical systems allows us to see the ever-growing subtlety of view – that is, studying the views of the lower schools makes one's grasp of the highest view more subtle and precise.
- Historically and logically, one school grew from another and different views emerged gradually.
- It is important to realize that *there is nothing here that the Buddha did not teach*.
- One could argue that the final view of Buddhist thought is the Prasangika Madhyamaka view that *all things and events are free of any intrinsic reality*.

### The Three Wheels of Buddhism – Three Turnings of the Dharma Wheel

1st turning of the Dharma wheel

- Hinayana – the first way
- Began with the Buddha's method of finding personal liberation.
- Buddhism began with the profound awakening of one man, Gautama Siddhartha (563-483 B.C.E.).
- The Buddha found his enlightenment not from complete abstinence nor from uncontrolled gratification – the true light came between the two extremes.
- He taught his solution as the Four Noble Truths: (1) living is suffering; (2) origin of suffering comes from cravings and desires; (3) suffering can be overcome by giving up cravings and desires; (4) a demanding but clear-cut path to follow.
- Pali sutras (studied in Theravada schools)
- Enlightenment offered to those willing to give up their personal lives to become monks, *arhats*.

2nd turning of the Dharma wheel

- Mahayana – the second way
- Developed Buddhist liberation to include other people and universal compassion.
- A new ideal emerged: the *bodhisattva*, or enlightened being. Instead of staying isolated in nirvana, bodhisattvas turn away from enlightenment, and return to the world to help others until every person is enlightened.
- Mahayana expanded the meaning of the Four Noble Truths – the goal was not simply to overcome suffering but to wake up from *illusion*. We live our daily lives in a *dreamlike state* – when we overcome ignorance by correcting our thinking, we come to a new understanding about the nature of reality: *emptiness*.
- Emptiness was a new idea of Mahayana – real wisdom is the recognition that everything in our world is ultimately without individual essence, and enlightenment is the intuitive realization of this.
- Understanding of the Buddha also changed – no longer thought of as an individual person, Siddhartha, Buddha was now a cosmic being, a symbol of enlightenment. He became eternal and omniscient, representing the absolute wisdom of enlightenment.
- Perfection of Wisdom (*prajnaparamita*) sutras
- Two schools of Mahayana Buddhism developed – Madhyamika (the Middle Way) and Yogacara (Mind Only)

3rd turning of the Dharma wheel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vajrayana – a new way</li> <li>▪ Offered new methods to reach enlightenment – by following the tantric path, people can accelerate the journey to enlightenment.</li> <li>▪ Though Vajrayana's roots are in India, it was most fully developed by the Tibetans.</li> <li>▪ Buddha Nature Sutra (<i>Tathagatagarbha Sutra</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>BUDDHISM IN INDIA – Three Stages</b>	
1st stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Time of the Buddha and soon after – about 200 years</li> <li>▪ Without written records</li> <li>▪ Confusion about dates and concepts</li> <li>▪ Buddhism developed within a richly cultured and philosophical society with well-established religions, such as Brahmanism and Jainism.</li> </ul>
2nd stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Time of King Ashoka – ruled almost all of India and converted to Buddhism.</li> <li>▪ Buddhism became a strong and separate religion.</li> <li>▪ By 250 B.C.E., the Buddha's teachings were quite established and respected.</li> </ul>
3rd stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Began with a surge of development in more sophisticated philosophical tools.</li> <li>▪ 4th century – Asanga created a system of philosophy that became the Chittamatra (Mind Only) school.</li> <li>▪ Ca. 450 Dignaga – logical reasoning reached a new level.</li> <li>▪ Ca. 625 Dharmakirti – follower of Dignaga</li> </ul>
<b>The Buddha's Teachings: Three Baskets or <i>Pitakas</i></b>	
Sutra Pitaka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Comprises the bulk of the teachings of the Buddha – sermons taught by Buddha and his teachers.</li> </ul>
Vinaya Pitaka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consists of discourses mainly concerned with rules and regulations of the monastic community – rules of the order.</li> </ul>
Abhidharma Pitaka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deal with philosophy (they explained the nature of reality of things and events) and were debated extensively (there was never much debate about the Vinaya and Sutra baskets) – commentaries on the sutras.</li> </ul>
<b>The Four Schools</b>	
Vaibhashika (Great Exposition) [Non-Mahayana]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Belief in the reality of atom-like building blocks</li> <li>▪ Searched for the basic building blocks of the universe – and these basic particles were seen as truly existent.</li> <li>▪ Only assert the selflessness of persons – not of phenomena.</li> <li>▪ View of karma and cyclic existence is simpler than that of the later schools and can be of more immediate impact in our daily lives.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Practitioners work toward achieving individual liberation.</li> <li>▪ Realism of Vaibhashika.</li> </ul>
Sautrantika (Sutra) [Non-Mahayana]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A new understanding about the mind developed and standardized the presentation of Buddhist psychology.</li> <li>▪ Also, searched for the basic building blocks of the universe – and these basic particles were seen as truly existent.</li> <li>▪ Also, only assert the selflessness of persons – not the selflessness of phenomena.</li> <li>▪ Also, view of karma and cyclic existence is simpler than that of the later schools and can be of more immediate impact in our daily lives.</li> <li>▪ Practitioners also work toward achieving individual liberation.</li> <li>▪ Realism of Sautrantika</li> </ul>
Chittamatra (Mind Only) (Yogachara) [Mahayana]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Asserted that external objects have no reality separate from the consciousness that perceives them.</li> <li>▪ Intrinsic reality of external objects is questioned – while the mind is real, the objects perceived by the mind cannot have independent existence because of the very reliance on the mind to ascertain them.</li> <li>▪ Mahayana tradition works toward attaining full enlightenment in order to free all beings from suffering.</li> </ul>
Madhyamaka (Middle Way) [Mahayana]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nagarjuna (considered one of the greatest Mahayana thinkers) lived in the 2nd century C.E. and was the founder of the Madhyamaka school.</li> <li>▪ Their position lies between the <i>eternalism</i> of the first two schools (that sees objects as existing from their own side) and the <i>nihilism</i> of the Chittamatra school that asserts that things and events have no reality at all.</li> <li>▪ Mahayana tradition works toward attaining full enlightenment in order to free all beings from suffering.</li> </ul>
<b>BUDDHISM IN TIBET – Two Disseminations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Before Buddhism, Tibet had its own native shamanistic religion called Bön.</li> <li>▪ As Buddhism became established, Bön ideas and practices merged with the new religion to influence what was to become Tibetan Buddhism.</li> <li>▪ Tibetan Buddhism is a form of Buddhism that, through a method of inner transformation, offers an active way of enhancing life – a transformation that is accomplished through various methods and techniques that engage the mind, the senses, and one's behaviour. (With these practices, a person learns to experience a vibrant life filled with colour and beauty.)</li> <li>▪ Tibetan Buddhism believes there is nothing that can't be sanctified, nothing that can't be a symbol of the spiritual – that can't awaken in us our deeper, spiritual natures. (Everything we do, even the simplest daily routines, can be meaningful.)</li> <li>▪ And then, when life is over, we can learn how to face death with a clear, calm mind, even look upon death as an opportunity to transform consciousness.</li> <li>▪ Virtue can be taught – and Tibetans have devised a carefully worked out system that trains the mind to become enlightened. (It takes time and effort, but it can be done – and anyone can do it.)</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In Tibet, the Madhyamaka school was divided into (1) Svatantrika Madhyamaka and (2) Prasangika Madhyamaka subschools. (The Svatantrika became another "lower" school to be refuted.)</li> <li>▪ Virtue is altruism – love, compassion, kindness, and tolerance.</li> </ul>	
<p>First Dissemination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 617 C.E. – Songtsen Gampo, the Tibetan king, sent people trained in Sanskrit to India to study Buddhism.</li> <li>▪ Trisong Detsen (the next king) worked with Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita to make Buddhism the state religion.</li> <li>▪ Padmasambhava founded the first tradition of Tibetan Buddhism – the <u>Nyingma</u>. He also developed the ritual side of Buddhism to fit in with the then-existing ritualistic system of Bön.</li> <li>▪ Shantarakshita introduced Madhyamaka philosophy to Tibet – the views of the <i>Svatantrika Madhyamaka subschool</i>.</li> <li>▪ Langdarma (the next king) was very opposed to Buddhism and almost destroyed it.</li> </ul>
<p>Second Dissemination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 11th century – second dissemination started with Lotsawa Rinchen Sangpo who translated many texts that had been destroyed.</li> <li>▪ Kadam tradition was developed – it was founded by the Indian master Atisha, who worked tirelessly to re-establish the teachings and to strengthen Buddhism in Tibet by showing there was no contradiction in practicing both Sutrayana and Vajrayana.</li> <li>▪ The Kadam tradition was later integrated into the other four schools – Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug.</li> <li>▪ Atisha was a <i>Prasangika</i> practitioner, and so Prasangika views became prominent in the second dissemination.</li> <li>▪ Marpa Lotsawa (contemporary of Atisha) founded the <u>Kagyu</u> tradition – and held Prasangika views. His disciple was Milarepa – famous for many beautiful songs and poems.</li> <li>▪ The <u>Sakya</u> tradition flowered around the same time as the Kagyu tradition – Sakya Pandita (1182-1251) was the greatest philosopher of the Sakya tradition, and a strong advocate of Prasangika Madhyamaka views.</li> <li>▪ Lama Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) championed Chandrakirti's interpretation of Nagarjuna, and founded the <u>Gelug</u> school.</li> <li>▪ From the time of the 5th Dalai Lama (1617-82) until the Chinese invasion in 1959, the Gelug tradition was dominant.</li> <li>▪ The four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism each emphasized different texts and each had slightly different views on reality – but all paid homage to Nagarjuna as the preeminent interpreter of the Buddha's teachings on ultimate truth.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tsering, Geshe Tashi. <i>Relative Truth, Ultimate Truth</i> (The Foundation of Buddhist Thought, Volume 2). Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2008.</li> <li>▪ Simpkins, C. Alexander and Annellen Simpkins. <i>Simple Tibetan Buddhism: A Guide to Tantric Living</i>. Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2001.</li> </ul>	
<p>© 2014 Alexander Michael Peck</p>	