

# Early Buddhism 6



Here & Now

# Buddhism in history

- Buddhism is conditioned by its history, both ancient and modern.
- Modern Buddhism stems from the Indologists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Essential contributions were made by European scholars such as TW Rhys Davids.
- Reform movements led by Ledi Sayadaw, Anagarika Dharmapala, Ajahn Mun.

# Timeline

- Buddha: 480–400 BCE
- Chandragupta: 322–298 BCE
- Second Council: 300 BCE
- Aśoka: 268–234 BCE
- Mahāsaṅghika Schism: *circa* 150 BCE

# Early schools

There were “18” early (pre-Mahāyāna) schools. These emerged gradually after Ashoka (c. 200–100 BCE). The most relevant are:

- Theravāda (Mahāvihāravāsin)
- Sarvāstivāda (Most suttas, vinaya, abhidhamma)
- Mūlasarvāstivāda (Vinaya in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit)
- Dharmaguptaka (Vinaya, Dīrgha Āgama, 1 abhidhamma)
- Mahāsaṅghika (Vinaya, some suttas)
- Mahīśāsaka (Vinaya)

# Extant texts

- Pali Buddhist Texts
- Buddhist texts in Chinese translation
- Some texts in Tibetan, Sanskrit, other
- Little archeology before Ashoka (c. 150 years after the Buddha)

# How do we know?

- Testimony of tradition
- Concordance of suttas
- Evolution of doctrine
- Evolution of language
- Political, social, technological conditions
- Candragupta & Aśoka

# What is early?

- Most doctrinal passages attributed to the Buddha in the Suttas.
- Some of the framing narratives and teachings by disciples in the Suttas
- The *pāṭimokkha* & some other Vinaya material.
- Some verses in the Dhammapada, etc.
- Occasional quotes in later literature.

# What is not early?

- Abhidhamma (c. 200+ years After the Nirvana)
- Jatakas (c. 100–400 AN)
- Other late books of the Khuddaka, e.g. Peta-, Vimanavatthu, Cariyapiṭaka, Buddhavaṃsa, etc.
- Most of the Vinaya (c. 100–200 AN)
- Mahāyāna (c. 400–1000 AN)
- Some additions to the Āgamas, including certain verses, legendary elaborations, proto-Abhidhamma
- Biographies of the Buddha



# Purpose of ethics

- Happiness
- Rebirth
- Awakening

# Happiness & intention

- If the intention is good, happiness results
- If happiness results, the intention was good
- We can know what happiness is
- We can know what good intentions are

# Maturing right view

- Ethics
- Learning
- Discussion
- Calm
- Insight

# What is meditation? Buddha

- Cittabhāvanā: development of the mind
- Samādhi: oneness, stillness, coalescence
- Jhāna: Absorption
- Samatha: tranquility
- Vipassanā: discernment, insight, clear seeing
- Anupassanā: contemplation, sustained observation
- Satipaṭṭhāna: 4 establishments of mindfulness
- Brahmavihāras: emotional development
- Pāṭisaṅkhā: reflection/right perspective

# Early Buddhist vs. 20<sup>th</sup> century meditation

- Samatha *and* vipassanā vs. samatha *contra* vipassanā
- Satipaṭṭhāna leads to jhāna vs. satipaṭṭhāna = vipassanā
- Bliss is essential vs. bliss is dangerous
- Skilful eliminantion vs. suppression of hindrances.
- Stillness vs. concentration

# Five supports

- Good friendship
- Virtue
- Teachings
- Effort
- Wisdom

# Four meditations

- Unattractiveness
- Loving kindness
- Mindfulness of breathing
- Perception of impermanence

# The function of wisdom

Wisdom is not an end in itself, but is the key to liberation.

- Ethics → Meditation → Wisdom → Freedom



# Stages of wisdom

- Listening/learning (*bahussuta*)
- Reflecting (*pātisaṅkhā*)
- Discussing (*sakkacca*)
- Applying to experience (*yoniso manasikāra*)
- Clear discernment (*vipassanā*)
- Knowing reality (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*)
- Knowing the end of affliction (*āsavakkhayañāṇa*)
- Reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa*)

# How does wisdom work?

Wisdom is

- informed by knowledge,
- expressed through morality,
- integrated in stillness,
- accompanied by confidence,
- and leads to peace.

# The four noble truths

- Suffering
- Origination
- Cessation
- Path

# Challenged by Early Buddhism

- Sectarian Buddhism (Mahāyāna, Theravāda, forest tradition)
- Vipassanā
- Abhidhamma
- Secular Buddhism
- Psychology
- Traditional/ritual Buddhism
- Scientific materialism
- Theism
- Abbots
- Discrimination, incl. nationalism, sexism

# Challenges for Early Buddhism

- Scientific materialism
- Historical uncertainty
- Relationship with tradition
- Difficulty
- Changing contexts
- No fun?

# Early Buddhist exemplars

- Ajahn Brahm
- Bhikkhunis
- Richard Gombrich
- Analayo
- Kiribathgoda Gnanananda
- Yin Shun
- Bhikkhu Bodhi

# Ideas for practice

- Start a meditation group
- Start a sutta discussion group
- Read suttas regularly
- Deepen your ethics
- Do another Early Buddhism course!