

## What is *A* Buddha

- 1) These last two weeks, Ron taught us about *THE* Buddha, or Buddha Shakyamuni/Buddha Gotama. Also known as the historical Buddha, this is who most of us think about when we talk about Buddha—the guy sitting cross legged under the tree, etc.
- 2) Typically, many people unfamiliar with Buddhism tend to implant their own understanding on Buddhism—thus, as there is only one Christ, one Moses, one Prophet (etc), there must have been only one Buddha
- 3) This, however, is incorrect—there are and were countless Buddhas before and after Buddha
- 4) Really, *Buddha* is a title, not a name: it is affixed to a name to identify, but in and of itself, it means “Enlightened One.” If you went to most Buddhist countries and said “the Buddha,” they would not know who you were talking about.

## Why *THE* Buddha is different from *A* Buddha

- 5) What makes *THE* Buddha so unique is that he was the first to speak in our age and to teach the enlightenment he realized
  - i) Buddhism, like Hinduism, believes in cyclic history in the universe; thus, at some time before the Buddha, there were other Buddhas who taught the *dharma*, and there will be others after him.
  - ii) When the Dharma is taught, this is considered to be a “turning” of the wheel of Dharma.
    - a) As you’ll recall from Ron’s talk, Buddha was hesitant to teach at first. There were many Buddhas before the Buddha, but they were called *Pacceka Buddha (Jataka Tales)*—or Silent Buddhas.
    - b) We call him *THE* Buddha because he was the first to teach the Dharma
- 7) However, the importance of *THE* Buddha was not himself, but what he taught.
- 8) Thus, we really do not praise the Buddha, but the Dharma
  - a. And the Lord said: “It may be that you will think: ‘The Teacher has ceased, now we will have no teacher!’ It should not be seen like this, for what I have taught and explained to you will, at my passing, be your teacher.” (Digha Nikaya 16.6.1)
- 9) Another verse from the same sutra drives this home:
  - a. Verse 22: “The law and discipline, which I have taught you, will, after my death, be your master. The Law be your Light! The Law be your Refuge! Do not look *to any other* for refuge!”
    - i) This implies that we are not even to look to The Buddha for refuge, but to what he taught.

## What is *A* Buddha?

- 1) A Buddha is anyone who realizes enlightenment, or *nirvana*
- 2) I’m going to give a quick warning:
  - i) The true definition of enlightenment is up for debate amongst Buddhist traditions: in Theravada Buddhism, enlightenment is ceasing reincarnation by removing ones clinging to the world; in some schools of Mahayana Buddhism, this is impossible, so enlightenment is becoming fully compassionate while removing clinging to the world

- ii) The other warning: I'm dreadfully, epic-ly, unenlightened. What I'm telling you about comes from other sources, and minimally from my experience.
- iii) I talk about this the way a Christian talks about God—with no real proof, but devout belief and some experience, yet still no absolute answer. What I have experienced is but a glimmer of a whole I can't recognize.

3) Now, Nirvana directly means: cessation, or extinction.

- i) The reason it's called this is that, in Buddhist theory, karma causes us to reincarnate; everything must have a cause and effect, and if we die, that cause must still have an effect.
- ii) It is a common misconception that we *want* to reincarnate—we don't! Thus, when a Buddha realizes the true nature of reality and acts accordingly to that reality, he stops reincarnating.
- iii) As the Anguttara-Nikaya says, enlightenment is when:  
 “His heart becomes free from sensual passion, free from the passion of existence, free from the passion of ignorance. Free am I! This knowledge arises in the liberated one, and he knows: Exhausted is rebirth, fulfilled the Holy Life; what was to be done, has been done; naught remains more for this world to do.”
  - i) note: Some Pure Land Buddhists believe that, after nirvana, Buddhas can live in a “pure land” that is pretty similar to heaven—most Buddhists believe in cessation.

You're probably thinking that *not-reincarnating* sounds pretty scary, but if you think about it, it makes sense. Why do we play video games, watch movies, read books? To see the end, to have a conclusion. People *want* an ending to things—for the Buddhist, nirvana is that end.

However, we don't need to focus on reincarnation—most Buddhists are skeptical whether reincarnation occurs or not. We just need to know that enlightenment—the cessation of suffering, the extinction of passion—can help us now.

NOTE: People are often disturbed when they hear someone say that passion is bad—after all, passion is the spice of life, right? Really, this comes down to a translation error—English lacks an equivalent, single word.

- i) When we say *passion*, we mean the unhealthy grasping to things; we mean greed and *clinging*
- ii) A Buddha is not disconnected from the world; A Buddha is not some passionless, emotionless husk of being; A Buddha has passion, but for the positive; A Buddha is not attached to their passions. We don't do the “I could never live without \_\_\_\_\_” thing.

3) So, enlightenment ultimately is the total removal of suffering from ones life:

- a. Removal of attachments (either by removing things to be attached to, like a monk, or removing one's attachment to the world around us)
- b. It is realizing the true nature of things: that all things are impermanent, that all things are dependent on cause-and-effect (thus, they do not have a “true nature”), and that our suffering comes from attachment to these changing things

- 4) This is not to say, however, that a Buddha is *always* happy—they still feel pain, they still get mad, etc.—but it is to say that they don't suffer.
- 5) You can be miserable without suffering. Pain is caused by outside circumstances (a loss, a pain, etc.), while suffering is when we eternalize and dwell upon pain.
- 6) It is important to note that just because we recognize the above are true, does not mean we're enlightened. We must fully internalize and *realize* they are true through our own experience.
- 7) As we learned from Ron's talk, a Buddha's enlightenment is not a sudden thing, but a slow process of realization and recognition.

So, did anyone notice that we didn't say only Buddhists can attain enlightenment? *ANYONE* has the potential to be a Buddha, no matter what religion, race, age, gender, social status, etc. This is because of...[Buddha nature]

### **Buddha-Nature**

- 1) Now, we often use the term “attains enlightenment”—this makes it sound like enlightenment is a distant knowledge we work for, reach out for, and finally grab
- 2) However, enlightenment is really a *realization*—it is something that has been within us, but we just didn't know it.
- 3) When you realize something—when you see a glimpse of reality—*real* reality—or of enlightenment—it feels as if you are remembering it, not that it is something new. It feels like seeing something that has been there all along, but you overlooked it.
- 4) Thus, it is said that we all have Buddha-Nature—that inherently, at our core, is the capability of enlightenment. We just don't realize it. [Water analogy]
- 5) Another analogy often used is that we are like sleeping Buddhas, lost in our dreams, our own figments of reality—when we awake, we are enlightened.

I think the story of The Buddha's life captures this subtly: if you recall, Buddha Shakyamuni realized enlightenment while doing a meditation he had done as a child. Although his spiritual journey taught him a lot and made him realize many things, it all led him back to the same meditation he had known all along.

### **So, what is a Buddha?**

- 1) A Buddha is *any* being who attains enlightenment: any being who truly realizes that
  - i) All things are impermanent
  - ii) Our attachment to the impermanent causes us pain
  - iii) By removing our attachment from the impermanent, we free ourselves.

2) So,

you are a Buddha, I am a Buddha, your mom is a Buddha, your cat will one day be a Buddha; that jerk behind you in class is a Buddha, that girl or guy who broke up with you is a Buddha; your best friend is a Buddha, your worst enemy is a Buddha, Katy Perry and Ke\$ha are Buddhas—ALL these people are, on some level, Buddhas—

—However, few of them realize it; they are sleeping.

Thus, when we bow before an image of the Buddha or any Buddhist icon, we are bowing not only to *who* it depicts, but *what* it depicts: our potential for enlightenment, for pure compassion and loving kindness.