



An Introduction to the
Phuoc Hue Buddhist Temple
of San Antonio,
History of Buddhism,
And Foundational Teachings

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Namo Shakyamuni Buddha

Introduction to the Phuoc Hue Buddhist Temple of San Antonio

The Temple

Namo Shakyamuni Buddha!

Welcome dear Sangha and friends to Phuoc Hue Buddhist Temple of San Antonio. The temple is located at 6292 Lockhill Rd., San Antonio, Texas 78240. The temple was established in December 2007 by Most Venerable Abbot Thich Phuoc Quang, and is a Vietnamese-American temple. The temple is on 3.5 acres of beautiful land with an open garden suitable for relaxing and peaceful meditation and reflection.

The temple's gardens features many beautiful statues and scenery of the Buddha's life story: his birth, his renunciation of his royal life, his first sermon, and his Parinirvana (death). As well as a statue of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva.

In January 2021 the new 4,000 sq. ft. Buddha Hall was completed. Inside the Buddha Hall displays the very large Buddha statue, several Bodhisattvas (saints), the ceremonial bell and drum, an ancestors altar, and a small giftshop.

The temple offers weekly services on Sunday at 9am for Vietnamese chanting and 12:30pm for an English

dharma talk (sermon) and chanting. There are also free meditation classes, Buddhism 101 classes, retreats, and Mindful Working days (volunteer days) that are offered to the community.



Shakyamuni Buddha (above) stands 18 feet high in the center of the shrine. His majestic and peaceful face and posture inspires calmness and peace whenever you look up at him and sit in silence. To his right stands Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva (Hearer of the Cries of the World), the saint of compassion and loving-kindness. To his left stands Kshitigarbha Bodhisattva (Earth Store), the saint of saving beings from the six worlds/realms of

existence. He is often depicted holding a staff in one hand to force open the gates of hell and a bright jewel in the other hand to light up the darkness.



On the back two corners of the hall are the Deva Guarding Bodhisattvas. They are the guardians of the temple and the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). Also in the center of the hall, stand Amitabha Buddha (Buddha of Infinite Light) and his two attendants, Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva (Hearer of the Cries of the World) and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva (Great Strength).

All the statues of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are tools for practitioners to use as visualization aids to help them concentrate and cultivate the characteristics of that Buddha or Bodhisattva.



Our Tradition & Lineage

The Phuoc Hue Buddhist Temple of San Antonio is a **Mahayana** temple following the **Tiantai** tradition and lineage – a mixture of Zen and Pure Land Buddhism.

Tiantai is a school of Buddhism in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam that reveres the Lotus Sutra as the highest teaching in Buddhism. In Japan the school is known as Tendai, in Korea as Cheontae, and in Vietnam as Thiên thai.

The name is derived from the fact that Zhiyi (538–597 CE), the fourth patriarch, lived on Tiantai Mountain. Zhiyi is also regarded as the first major figure to make a significant break from the Indian traditions, to form an indigenous Chinese system. Tiantai is sometimes also called “The Lotus School,” after the central role of the Lotus Sutra in its teachings.

During the Sui dynasty, the Tiantai school became one of the leading schools of Chinese Buddhism, with numerous large temples supported by emperors and wealthy patrons. The school’s influence waned and was revived again through the Tang dynasty and also rose again during the Song dynasty. Its doctrine and practices had an influence on Chinese Chan (Zen) and Pure land Buddhism.

History of the Tradition

Unlike earlier schools of Chinese Buddhism, the Tiantai school was entirely of Chinese origin. The schools of Buddhism that had existed in China prior to the emergence of the Tiantai are generally believed to represent direct transplantations from India, with little modification to their basic doctrines and methods. However, Tiantai grew and flourished as a native Chinese Buddhist school under the 4th patriarch, Zhiyi, who developed an original and extensive Chinese Buddhist system of doctrine and practice through his many treatises and commentaries.

Over time, the Tiantai school became doctrinally broad, able to absorb and give rise to other movements within Buddhism, though without any formal structure. The tradition emphasized both scriptural study and meditative practice, and taught the rapid attainment of Buddhahood through observing the mind.

The school is largely based on the teachings of Zhiyi, Zhanran, and Zhili, who lived between the 6th and 11th centuries in China. These teachers took an approach called “classification of teachings” (jiaopan) in an attempt to harmonize the numerous and often contradictory Buddhist texts that had come into China. This was achieved through a particular interpretation of the Lotus Sūtra.

Early figures

Due to the use of Nāgārjuna's philosophy of the Middle Way, he is traditionally taken to be the first patriarch of the Tiantai school.

The sixth century dhyāna master Huiwen (Chinese: 慧文) is traditionally considered to be the second patriarch of the Tiantai school. Huiwen studied the works of Nāgārjuna, and is said to have awakened to the profound meaning of Nāgārjuna's words: "All conditioned phenomena I speak of as empty, and are but false names which also indicate the mean."

Huiwen later transmitted his teachings to Chan master Nanyue Huisi (Chinese: 南嶽慧思, 515-577), who is traditionally figured as the third patriarch. During meditation, he is said to have realized the "Lotus Samādhi," indicating enlightenment and Buddhahood. He authored the Mahāyāna-śamatha-vipaśyanā. Huisi then transmitted his teachings to Zhiyi (Chinese: 智顛, 538-597), traditionally figured as the fourth patriarch of Tiantai, who is said to have practiced the Lotus Samādhi and to have become enlightened quickly. He authored many treatises such as explanations of the Buddhist texts, and especially systematic manuals of various lengths which explain and enumerate methods of Buddhist practice and meditation. The above lineage was proposed by Buddhists of later times and do not reflect the popularity of the monks at that time.

What to expect/FAQs

You've never been to a Buddhist temple before? No worries! You'll feel at home soon.

We know that it can be a little intimidating to visit a Buddhist temple for the first time. We do everything we can to make you feel welcome and comfortable. We hope that this will help you get the greatest benefit out of your time here. If you have questions about specific activities, check out the detailed descriptions on our events page on our website. And never hesitate to ask questions, either while you are here or you can email us beforehand.

Dress code?

There's no dress code, although we recommend modest clothing for both men and women, and no shorts, skirts, tank-tops, or beach-wear. All we ask is that you remove your shoes outside unless you need them for medical reasons.

Can I sit on a chair?

We have a few different seating options for your convenience. We have chairs, cushions, and benches. If you have something you like to sit on, feel free to bring it with you to any of our services.

We're Family friendly

Young people are welcome at all of our events and services. Parents can decide what works best for their kids. If you have questions, just ask.

Who are the monks? How do you greet them?

The monks and nuns are ordained and trained in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. You can recognize them because they wear yellow robes and shave their heads. The only thing you really need to know about interacting with them is that they don't shake hands or hug. You can greet them with a smile or by placing your palms together in front of your chest. They are available after any of the services to answer questions about meditation or Buddhism.



If I visit the temple, can I talk to the monks?

You are always welcome to visit the temple and walk the grounds. The main shrine is only open during weekly services and classes, but you are free to walk the beautiful grounds whenever. The monks and nuns are not always available since they live by a strict schedule, so if you see the monastics outside, they are typically working on their chores and may not have too much time to chat. But you are welcome to say hello and ask a quick question. The best time to talk is after services.

Bowing?

While you are here, you will see people bowing to the monks, nuns, and to the Buddha statue. Bowing to people we respect is an ancient practice all around the world. Don't feel any pressure to bow if you are not comfortable doing so. People bow in all kinds of different ways, so no need to try and "get it right."

Chanting?

Like with bowing, you are not obligated to chant along when we do our chanting. You are most welcome to chant along and follow the Sangha, or you can sit back and observe. Do as much or as little as you feel comfortable doing.

We're looking forward to meeting you!

If you have any questions about anything while you are at our services, never hesitate to ask. If you have any questions now, just contact us on our website.

History of Buddhism

Siddartha

The Buddha wasn't always the Buddha. Before his enlightenment, Sakyamuni Buddha was Prince Siddartha Gautama. Born on the night of the full moon in May around 623 B.C., his mother, Queen Mahā Māyā, gave birth to him in the Lumbini Park at Kapilavatthu. Siddartha's father, King Suddhodana of the Sākya clan, was eager to raise his son as a royal prince so he would one day rule the kingdom.

Queen Mahā Māyā unfortunately died seven days after Siddartha's birth. Siddartha's aunt, Mahā Pajāpati Gotami who was also married the king, adopted the child and entrusted her own son, Nanda, to look out for young Siddartha.

Joyous about Siddartha's birth, an ascetic of high spiritual attainments named Asita (also known as Kāladevala) visited the palace to see the royal baby. The sage was asked to predict the child's future. The sage replied to the king telling him that his son would either grow up to become a great king and rule the kingdoms or become a great holy man.

Worried that Siddartha would leave the royal life one day, the king sheltered him inside the palaces and gave him every imaginable luxury. The king created an

artificial environment so that everything was perfect and possible, and free of worries and suffering. The king never wanted his son to see that anything was wrong with the world so that he would continue staying in the palace and not go out into the world and become a holy man as was predicted by the sage.

Sheltered from pain and suffering, Siddartha indulged in a life of pure pleasure and luxury. When the prince was 16 years old, his father married him to his cousin, Yaśodhara. For 29 years Siddartha enjoyed the palace life, never leaving, never seeing the outside world. The king constantly sheltered him and never let him outside the walls of the palace. Until one day, Siddartha finally made his way outside with his attendant.

Outside of his life of luxury and pleasure, Siddartha sees his first of four encounters that would ultimately change the rest of his life. He sees an old man. Troubled, he asked his attendant why that man looked like that. The attendant replied, “That’s change. One does not always stay young.”

On his second visit outside, his second encounter, Siddartha sees a sick man and asked his attendant what was wrong with him. The attendant replied, “That’s sickness. It happens to all of us.”

Out on his third visit outside, Siddartha’s third encounter, he sees a corpse. Asking his attendant, the

attendant replies, “That’s death. We will all eventually die.”

Upon seeing the corpse, Siddartha realizes impermanence, suffering, and death as the reality from his sheltered and luxurious life. Siddartha thought to himself, “This is my fate; to become old, sick, and die. How do I deal with these things?”

On Siddartha’s fourth encounter, he sees an ascetic trying to overcome suffering, old age, sickness, and death. Troubled, Siddartha wanted to comprehend the nature of suffering and decided he wanted to leave the palace and go on a spiritual journey to answer his question.

Siddartha’s wife had just given birth to a baby boy, Rahula, which means “fetter.” On a late summer night, Siddartha entered his room and watched his wife and newborn son as they were sleeping. This was his goodbye. He then went to the courtyard where his horse was waiting for him and fled the palace, leaving his wife, his newborn child, father, and empire behind. Siddartha realized that in order to gain anything, one must lose everything.

For the first time, Siddartha was alone in the world. At a nearby river, he met an ascetic. He drew his sword and cut off his hair, and traded his royal robes for the yellow robe of the ascetic and became homeless. Traveling South on the Ganges River, a prince that had

everything now has nothing. From prince to beggar, Siddhartha traveled through the woods, slept on the cold ground, and begged for any scraps of food.

Siddhartha didn't have any understanding, teaching, or insight yet. He recognizes the problem, but doesn't have a solution yet. He couldn't get any help from the religion at the time, the ancient Vedic religion, a religion of ceremony and ritual. He joined thousands of searchers, who like him, became renouncements to renounce the world, embracing celibacy and poverty.

At the time, renouncements were a flourishing culture. Many wanted to find the way to escape the cycle of death and rebirth. The only way out was to become enlightened, to become a Buddha. Historical texts say that Siddhartha has been through an incalculable number of lives as animals, humans, and gods.

For his search of the truth, Siddhartha came across his first teacher, a highly recognized guru who taught rigorous forms of yoga and meditation, and methods to tame the mind, desires, and passions. Mastering all the methods and techniques of the guru, Siddhartha ascended himself to these high levels of consciousness, but he knew it was impermanent and it doesn't penetrate the truth of the nature of reality, so it was simply only a temporary escape from the problem, but it didn't solve the problem.

Siddhartha set out and met another accomplished guru, but the results were the same. He then thought to himself, “This practice does not lead to direct knowledge or deeper awareness,” so he left his guru. He continued his search for the answers to his questions.

Asceticism was a common practice among the renunciants, punishing the body in order to attain wisdom and serenity. Siddhartha met five ascetics, whom later on would become his first disciples. He subjected his body to extreme pain and hardships, doing everything he could to find his answers. Because the body was the common element of age, sickness, and death, ascetics believed by punishing the body of these elements, they would be able to escape them.

For six years, Siddhartha starved and punished himself in attempt to rid himself of everything he sees as “bad,” of everything that he sees as in the way of gaining his answers. Siddhartha became extremely anorexic, eating only one grain of rice a day, drinking his own urine, standing on one foot, sleeping on nails, he did everything to the extreme.

Siddhartha’s body was slowly withering away. In one of his stories, the Buddha said, “My limbs became like the jointed segments of vine. My spine stood out like a string of beads. My ribs jutted out like the jutting rafters of an old abandoned building. The gleam of my eyes appeared to be sunk deep in my eye sockets like gleam of water deep in a well. My scalp shriveled and withered like a

green bitter gourd. Shriveled and withered in the heat and wind.”

Siddhartha tried to push his body to the extreme as much as he could, but then he realized he couldn't gain what he wanted from that. He was on the verge of dying when he remembered something. He remembered a day when he was young and his father took him to a spring ploughing festival. Siddhartha sat by the river and watched the ceremonial dancing. He looked down at the grass and thought about the insects and their eggs being destroyed as the field was planted, he was very saddened. His mind soon started drifting. As by instinct, he crossed his legs into the lotus position and the natural world paid him homage. As he sat there, he felt a sense of pure joy. He found joy in the world that was already broken, in this transitory world we're all in.

Once Siddhartha made this remarkable realization, he knew asceticism was not the way and that he needed to regain his strength if he wanted to continue his search. At that moment, a village maiden came up to him and offered him a bowl of rice porridge. Siddhartha had failed. He had been clinging to asceticism and still hadn't found his answer, but he knew the extreme of luxury and the extreme of asceticism were not the ways. The five ascetics who were practicing with Siddhartha saw him eating, upon this sight then said, “Siddhartha loves luxury. He has forsaken his spiritual practice. He has become extravagant.” So they left Siddhartha alone in disgust and disappointment.

Siddhartha had put his faith in two gurus and put his body into extremes, neither have given him the answers he was seeking. Now he knew what he was doing. To find the answer to his questions, he would look within and trust himself.

The Buddha

After accepting the bowl of rice porridge, Siddhartha took off his robes, bathed in the river, sat down under the shade of the Bodhi tree and meditated. During a full moon in the spring, before the sun would rise, Siddhartha's long search would be over.

As Siddhartha sat under the Bodhi tree, he vowed not to get up until he gained enlightenment. Throughout the night, he meditated and all his former lives passed before him. He gained the power to see life, death, and rebirth that all beings go through. As the morning star appeared, Siddhartha said, "My mind is at peace." He had become the Buddha.

The Buddha had realized that Nirvana, Enlightenment, was always there, is a part of everyone, but that our ignorance, greed, and anger keep us from seeing it – All we have to do is eradicate our ignorance to be in Nirvana that is already the whole world around us. Nirvana is not a place or a destination, it is not something you can try to travel to and go in the afterlife. Nirvana is here in the now, it is the quality of this moment.

For the next forty-nine days, the Buddha remained under the Bodhi tree enjoying the peace and joy of his realization. The Buddha contemplated on whether or not he should teach the Dharma of his realization to others. He was concerned that people would not understand or believe him because they were so overpowered by ignorance, greed, and anger that they would not be able to realize the path that is subtle, deep, and hard to grasp.

Out of his great compassion, the Buddha traveled to the Deer Park in Sarnath where he met the five ascetics he used to practice with. Seeing the Buddha walking toward them, they didn't want to welcome him and felt uneasy, but as the Buddha got closer, the ascetics saw how radiant the Buddha was and they could not resist welcoming him. After offering the Buddha water to drink, the Buddha explained to them that he had found the path to enlightenment. The five ascetics then became his first disciples and the Buddha taught them the Four Noble Truths. This discourse is referred to as Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dharma (Dhammacakkappavattana).

The Buddha did not preach a dogma. Instead, he spoke from his own experiences and hardships. He told his disciples that he has found a new way. Not a way of extreme luxury, nor a way of extreme asceticism, but a Middle Way. Like a string on the guitar that's too tight will break and the music dies. If the string is too slack, then there's no sound and the music dies. The middle

way, tuning the string not too tight and not too slack, and there will be music for all to enjoy. The Buddha taught that the path to enlightenment lies in the Middle Way.

Finally, the Buddha was able to answer the question he'd been tirelessly trying to find. The answer was the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha realized that suffering, or better translated as "dissatisfaction," is not something we can just get rid of. Instead, suffering is something we need to acknowledge and accept rather than try to push away and deny. The Buddha discovered and taught us that life is unsatisfactory because there are causes, these causes are caused by our own mind. When we have wants and needs that are unattainable, we become dissatisfied and unhappy. These feelings of desire, greed, and anger are the causes we create for our own suffering.

Buddha's first Noble Truth is that life is suffering, life is dissatisfying. The second Noble Truth tells us that our suffering has a cause; our wants, needs, desires, etc. The Third Truth is an important Truth; it tells us that we can be free of suffering if we can understand the cause of suffering. Buddha taught us that the problem is desire. However, there is good desire and there is bad desire. We all desire to be enlightened, is that desire also part of the desire we need to eradicate? No. We can have desires, but we must be smart about them. We need desire to live our lives. Without desire, where will we get the motivation to succeed in school or work in order to have a successful future? Without desire how will we

accomplish important tasks or projects? Therefore, without desire we cannot attain Buddhahood. Without the desire to become a Buddha, we will never accomplish our goal. Desires of greed, to harm, to lie and steal, to cheat – these are the desires we cannot have.

The Fourth and final Truth, the Buddha gave us our instructions manual, the guide to lead a life toward enlightenment; the Noble Eightfold Path – the cultivation of mindfulness, moral discipline, and wisdom.

After the Buddha explained the Four Noble Truths to the five ascetics, all five became Arhats (arhat: an enlightened being who has attained Nirvana). It didn't take long before people started hearing about a great sage. The Buddha's disciples quickly swelled from a few hundred to a few thousand.

For the next 45 years, the Buddha taught the Dharma to a diverse range of people with different intellects and capabilities, using similes and parables in order to have everyone understand his teachings correctly in their own way.

Mahaparinirvana

In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, the Buddha at the age of 80 announced that he would soon be reaching Parinirvana, the final deathless state. The Buddha ate his final meal, which was an offering from a blacksmith named Cunda. Soon after, the Buddha became very ill

and instructed his attendant Ananda to convince Cunda that his meal offering had nothing to do with his passing and that his meal would be a source of great merit as it provided the last meal for a Buddha.

The Buddha told his attendant Ananda to prepare a bed for him between two Sal trees, with its head facing north. Ananda, who served the Buddha for over 20 years, was deeply upset. “Don’t grieve, Ananda!” said the Buddha. “The nature of things dictates that we must leave those dear to us. Everything born contains its own cessation. I too, Ananda, am grown old and full of years. My journey is drawing to its close, and just as a worn-out cart can only with much additional care be made to move along, so too the body of the Buddha can only be kept going with much additional care.”

The Buddha asked his disciples three times if anyone had any doubts about his teachings or the disciplines. The disciples stood silent. “Not one, Ananda, has misgivings. All will eventually reach enlightenment.” The Buddha then said his final words: “Listen, Bhikkhus, all conditioned things are subject to decay. Strive with diligence for your liberation.”

Resting on his right side, the Buddha passed into Mahaparinirvana. For the next six days, the Buddha’s body was honored with perfumes and garlands. On the seventh day, the body was taken to Mukutbanhana Chaitya, the sacred shrine of the Mallas. During the cremation, the last ceremony was performed by Maha

Kasapa. When the cremation was completed, the ashes were collected by the Mallas as relics, which included a skull bone, teeth, and inner and outer shrouds. These relics are enshrined in stupas across Asia.

Before Buddha's passing, his disciples asked him, "Teacher, please don't go. Who will be our teacher and teach us?" The Buddha replied, "Your precepts and Dharma will be your teacher."

Fundamental Teachings

What is Buddhism?

“What is Buddhism?” is actually a difficult question to answer. Depending on who we ask, where they’re from, what their school/tradition is, and the amount of knowledge and understanding they have, each person will probably have a different answer. A basic answer is this: Buddhism is a religion, a philosophy, a psychology, and a way of life. It is the practice of love; loving-kindness and loving-compassion. It is the practice to live in peace and bliss. A more complex answer would be: Buddhism is a practice of psychology, of mastering the mind. It is a mind-centered religion aimed at eradicating the three poisons (ignorance, greed, and anger) that cause us to suffer and live in this cyclic existence of death and rebirth.

The Buddha taught us that the main factor contributing to our suffering is desire. Desire is what causes us to want the things we can’t obtain and the things that we can obtain, we always want more of it or wanting the newest things. These desires turn into greed, and when our greed isn’t satisfied, we become angry. Our anger causes us to be ignorant toward the true nature of reality. So Buddhism is the practice of spiritual development that leads to the insight into the true nature

of reality. A practice to teach us how to escape suffering, eradicate our ignorance, greed, and anger, and ultimately to become enlightened.

Unlike most other religions that base their faith in a god or deity, Buddhism is not a faith-based religion toward a higher being for one's liberation or access to heaven or a better life. Instead, Buddhism takes a firm stand that the only way toward our liberation or a better life is faith in ourselves and our practice. There is no god or deity figure in Buddhism. Buddha was not a god nor a mystical being. He was human; he cried, bled, got sick, and died just like a human. Relying on gods was not useful for those seeking enlightenment, the Buddha taught. What makes him extraordinary is his realization to the path to escape our constant birth, death, and rebirth. The main focus in Buddhism is in the practice (self-inquiry and experimentation in the teachings) rather than belief and faith.

The best way to explain Buddhism to people is to show them. Not showing them statues or relics, but rather the observation people make of you over time. Because Buddhists are constantly practicing loving-kindness, compassion, and generosity, and should never sway toward anger, frustration, or impatience, this simple way of living is the essence of being a Buddhist and the best way to show people what Buddhism is.

The foundations of Buddhism are in the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, and the meditation and contemplation on them. These basic yet complex Dharmas can liberate us on a basic level and put us on a path of greater understanding. It is very important to truly have a strong grasp and understanding of what might seem like “Buddhism 101,” but this 101 information is the foundation of anything else we will learn on our spiritual journey.

The Three Jewels

The Three Jewels, the Three Gems, or the Three Refuges are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the starting point for becoming a Buddhist follower, that is, for learning and practicing Buddhism. The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are the focus of personal faith for every Buddhist follower. The Three Jewels are considered the noble wealth that transcends all worldly forms. The Buddha is like sunlight that can mature and perfect sentient beings, for the Buddha is the teacher of this world; the Dharma is like water that can nurture sentient beings, for the Dharma is the truth of life; and the Sangha is like a field that can cultivate the Dharma wealth of merit for the believer, for the Sangha is the community of spiritual friends who sustain the Dharma. The importance of the

Three Jewels is comparable to sunlight, water, and soil, for none of these can be lacking. The life of wisdom is planted through taking refuge in the Three Jewels. Understanding the Three Jewels allows us to elevate the spiritual world of our mind and transcend the confines of mundane life.

To officially become a Buddhist, one must undergo the procedure of taking refuge in the Three Jewels. When we take refuge, we devoutly make a mind-to-mind connection with the Buddha, and then the Buddha infuses our mind and body with the power of loving-kindness and compassion. It is only after this spiritual connection has been made that we can be considered a Buddhist follower. If we have not undergone this refuge ceremony, but merely pray, chant, and burn incense, we are someone who honors Buddhism, but we cannot truly be considered Buddhists.

One might question the need of taking refuge, saying, “I already believe in Buddhism, and I regularly chant and burn incense at the temple. Why do I need to participate in the refuge ceremony?” We all understand that if we want to join a political party but have yet to made the pledge, we cannot become a member of that political party. Serving in a public office, such as president of a country, also requires the taking of an oath of office before formally assuming the post. When a couple

wishes to marry, they must hold a marriage ceremony and be acknowledged by society, for only then is their union legally binding. Taking refuge is very similar to this, because it formalizes and acknowledges one's commitment to the Buddha's path.

Though taking refuge isn't necessary to your practice of Buddhism, but by taking refuge and reciting daily the Three Jewels helps establish and develop your commitment to the Dharma. It also makes you an official member of the temple and that temple become your Root Temple. After taking refuge, you may visit and practice at any Buddhist temple and listen to teachings of any teachers, but taking refuge with Phuoc Hue Buddhist Temple establishes that it is your root temple, your spiritual home. Your spiritual home is where your spiritual friends and family are, and they are a huge resource to your spiritual development and study. The Sangha can be one of the most important features of your Buddhist path. The monastics and members of the temple are there to help guide and mentor you. Becoming a member also grants you the position of a sort of helper at the temple, where you can start to learn playing the Dharma instruments and the specific activities and rituals done during services.

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is a big and exciting step in your Buddhist path. At Phuoc Hue Buddhist

Temple, we recommend that you be attending our services for at least 6-12 months before requesting to take refuge. This helps you to create a connection and relationship with the Sangha and to ensure this is the right place you want to practice. After two years of having taken the Three Refuges and Five Precepts, you are qualified to take the **Bodhisattva Vows**. The Bodhisattva Vows consist of ten major and forty-eight minor precepts. They are the “next level” for a Buddhist who is committed to the path and helping sentient beings learn the Dharma.

The Five Precepts

Along with the Three Jewels, a practitioner commits to the Five Precepts during the Taking Refuge Ceremony. The Five Precepts are: to abstain from taking life, to abstain from lying, to abstain from sexual misconduct, to abstain from stealing, and to abstain from taking intoxicants.

Undertaking and observing the five precepts represent the practical application of faith. These are the most meaningful activities one can embark upon in life – something truly gratifying and laudable. The precepts form the basis for everything good. Their essential character is one of non-violation, for it is by not violating others that one can perfect the purity of the three karmas

of body, speech, and mind. For many, the greatest advantage in human life is represented by the pursuit of fame and fortune, including all the money and wealth such pursuits entail. But in truth, all the advantages in the world added together would fall far short of the value gained by undertaking and observing the three refuges and five precepts. By undertaking the five precepts, we can develop faith, generate merit, and increase moral strength. By observing the five precepts, we can enjoy peace and well-being in the human form, hone spiritual focus, and avoid acting in unwholesome ways. In other words, understanding and observing the five precepts allows us to generate our intrinsic *prajna* (perfection) wisdom, obtain respect, and ultimately, produce harmony.

The precepts aren't "laws" or "commandments" that make us think in matters like "you can't do this" and "you can't do that." We may wonder if that is limiting us. We worry that it will mean a loss of freedom. In fact, if we were to go to a prison and make a survey into the reasons for incarceration and the loss of freedom, we would find that every single inmate there had violated one or more of the five precepts. Murder, aggravated assault, embezzlement, stealing, extortion, robbery, kidnapping, sex trafficking, and rape are all violations of the five precepts. We can easily find ourselves locked up

in jail with our freedom taken away because we violated the five precepts. Thus, observing the precepts is also assuring that we will obey the laws of society. Only people who are able to undertake and observe the five precepts and truly understand them can enjoy real freedom. Thus, the true meaning of the precepts is freedom, not limitation.

In case we do break the precepts after undertaking them, what can we do? Sometimes people think that undertaking the precepts means that it is impossible to avoid breaking them, so if we do not undertake the precepts, we will not have to worry about breaking them. Actually, the negative karma from breaking the precepts can be lessened when we have a sense of regret and repentance. In this way, we still have a chance to obtain liberation. If we do not undertake the precepts and commit harm without any sense of remorse, then our negative karma is all the more severe, since we do not have a reason to correct our behavior. Such people will be reborn as animals, hungry ghosts, or in hell. Thus, it is better to undertake the precepts and show repentance upon breaking them, rather than committing transgressions without even having undertaken the precepts in the first place. It is only through undertaking the precepts that we can obtain the opportunity for liberation. Not undertaking the precepts makes the

attainment of Buddhahood impossible. Not undertaking the precepts does not mean that we can commit wrongdoing with impunity, for we will still be in the wrong when breaking the precepts, even though we have not undertaken them. An important note to remember is *intention*. If you accidentally killed an animal, whether because they ran into the road while driving or you stepped on them while walking, is a lesser offense than intentionally seeking out animals to kill. Though an accidental taking of life still produces bad karma, it is not as heavy as intentionally killing. Hence, as part of our Buddhist practice, we must also practice repentance. Repentance in Buddhism is not like confession or seeking forgiveness from the Buddha. Instead, repentance is an act of remorse and recommitting to yourself to follow as best you can the five precepts and to avoid violating them again.

The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths (catvāri āryasatyāni) is the central doctrine of Buddhism. The Four Truths explain the nature of suffering (dukkha), its causes, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. Our suffering, or unsatisfactoriness, has three main aspects: 1) physical and mental suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death; 2) attachment to things that are constantly changing; 3) and the dissatisfaction of everything that is

impermanent, transitory, and not meeting our expectations.

The **First Noble Truth** is that life is suffering (Dukkha). For non-Buddhists or those new to it might take a dramatic reaction to the word “suffering,” because they might think of suffering in its literal sense of pain, gore, and torture. But suffering here means “dissatisfaction.” One thing to remember here is that our own mind causes it. So what is suffering? In the physical sense, suffering is physical pain, injury, sickness, old age, and of course death. Mentally, suffering is disappointment, jealousy, depression, sadness, fear, anger, frustration, etc. There are many degrees of suffering, but life in its totality is imperfect and incomplete. “But life isn’t always suffering – there are moments of happiness and contentness,” you might say. That’s exactly what it is. MOMENTS! They are imperfect, impermanent moments that will eventually fade away. The Buddha taught that unless we can gain insight into the truth of reality and what is able to give us happiness and what is unable to give us happiness, the experience of unsatisfactoriness will continue.

The **Second Noble Truth** is the cause, origin, roots, creation, or arising of suffering (Samudaya). The main cause of suffering is attachment and desire. It’s the attachment to transient things, not only physical

transient objects, but also objects of our perception. Ignorance is the lack of understanding of how our mind is attached to impermanent things. Other reasons for suffering are craving, as well as striving for fame or glory, and pursuit of wealth and prestige. Because there is attachment to these transient objects, their loss is inevitable or unattainable, thus causing suffering. The three main causes for suffering are the Three Poisons: ignorance (avidya), greed/attachment (raga), and anger/aversion (dvesha).

The **Third Noble Truth** is the cessation of creating suffering by refraining from doing the things that make us suffer (Nirodha). Cessation is the spiritual goal in Buddhism. Once we have truly understood the causes of our suffering, we can then eradicate these causes and be free from suffering. The cessation of these sufferings can be attained through nirodha; the unclinging to sensual craving and conceptual attachments. This means that suffering can be ended by extinguishing all forms of clinging and attachment.

The **Fourth Noble Truth** is the path that leads to refraining from doing the things that cause us to suffer – *The Noble Eightfold Path* (Marga). It is the path of the Middle Way between the two extremes of excessive sensual self-indulgence (hedonism) and excessive self-mortification (asceticism), and will lead to

the end of Samsara (the cycle of rebirth). The Noble Eightfold Path is a practical guide, that when developed together, leads to the cessation of our suffering. The path are not “stages” that we can move from one to another, instead, they are dependent on one another to work as one complete path or way of living.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path (āryāṣṭāṅgamārga) described by the Buddha is the path that leads to the end of suffering. It is a practical guideline for ethical and mental development with the goal of freeing ourselves from the Three Poisons (ignorance, greed, and anger). The Eightfold Path is not a step-by-step practice, it is practiced holistically. To have a right view or perception of something, we must also have right thinking, right speech, and right action in order to have right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

The Eightfold Path is grouped in three groups that will lead us to enlightenment: Morality/Ethical Conduct (Sila), Wisdom (Prajna), and Meditation/Concentration (Samadhi).

- Wisdom (Prajna) – Right View and Right Intention.

- Morality (Sila) – Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.
- Concentration (Samadhi) – Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

1. Right View (samyāg-driṣṭi)

Right View is the deep understanding to see things as they really are, to deeply understand the Four Noble Truths. Right View is first because we need Right View to see and understand everything before we think it, speak it, do it, and live by it. It is to understand how our reality, life, nature, and the world as they really are – to see these things as impermanent and imperfect. It begins with the intuitive insight that all beings are subject to suffering and it ends with complete understanding of the true nature of all things. Right View is also the ability to distinguish wholesome roots from unwholesome roots (or seeds) deep within our consciousness.

If we are honest people, it is because the wholesome root or seed of honesty is in us. If we live in an environment where our seed is watered, we will become honest people. But if our seed of dishonesty is watered, we may deceit those we love and care about. We might feel bad or guilty about it, but if this seed of dishonesty is strong, we may do it anyway. Practicing mindfulness

helps us identify all the seeds in our consciousness and water the ones that are the most wholesome

2. Right Intention/Thinking (samyāk samkalpa)

Right Intention refers to the volitional aspect; the mental energy to control our actions. This is the commitment to ethical and mental self-improvement; ridding ourselves of whatever qualities we know to be wrong and immoral. If we train ourselves in Right Intention, our Right View will improve. Because thinking often leads to action, Right Intention is needed to take us down the path of Right Action.

Right Intention reflects the way things really are, but the practice of Right Intention/Thinking is not easy. Our mind is often thinking of one thing while our body is doing another. Our mind and body are not unified. When we're driving, we might be singing along to a song or swearing at other drivers while almost completely forgetting that we're driving! Conscious breathing is an important practice. When we concentrate and become mindful of our breathing, we bring mind and body back together and become unified again.

There are three types of right intentions:

1. the intention of renunciation, which means resistance to the pull of desire.

2. the intention of good will, meaning resistance to feelings of anger and aversion.
3. the intention of harmlessness, meaning not to think or act cruelly, violently, or aggressively, and to develop compassion.

3. Right Speech (samyāg-vāc)

In short, Right Speech is:

1. to abstain from false speech, especially not to tell deliberate lies and not to speak deceitfully.
2. to abstain from speaking with a forked tongue; saying one thing to one person and something else to another.
3. to abstain from harsh and slanderous speech.
4. to abstain from exaggerating or embellishing speech; to not dramatize unnecessarily, making things sound better, worse, or more extreme than they actually are.

4. Right Action (samyāk-karmanta)

Right Action refers to doing wholesome, compassionate deeds. Right Action can also refer to the Five Precepts. The Cunda Kammaraputta Sutta states to:

1. to abstain from taking life (harming sentient beings and suicide).
2. to abstain from taking what is not given (stealing, robbery, fraud, dishonesty).
3. to abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. to abstain from consuming intoxicants.

5. **Right Livelihood (samyāg-ājīva)**

Right livelihood means that one should earn one's living in a righteous way and that wealth should be gained legally and peacefully. The Buddha mentions four specific activities that harm other beings and that one should avoid for this reason:

1. dealing in weapons.
2. dealing in living beings (including raising animals for slaughter as well as slave trade and prostitution).
3. working in meat production and butchery.
4. selling intoxicants and poisons, such as alcohol and drugs. Furthermore, any other occupation that would violate the principles of right speech and right action should be avoided.

6. Right Effort (Diligence) (samyāg-vyāyāma)

To some, Right Effort should be the First of the Eightfold Path, because Right Effort is the individual's will to achieve wholesome ethics and deeds. It is the mental effort and energy in doing wholesome or unwholesome thoughts and deeds. It's the same energy that fuels desire, envy, violence, and aggression, but it's also the energy that fuels self-discipline, honesty, benevolence, and kindness. Right Effort has four types of endeavors:

1. Prevent the unwholesome seeds that has not yet arisen in oneself.
2. Letting go of the unwholesome seeds that has arisen in oneself.
3. Watering the wholesome seeds that has not yet arisen in oneself.
4. Maintaining the wholesome seeds that has already arisen in oneself.

7. Right Mindfulness (samyāk-smṛiti)

Right Mindfulness is the mental ability to see things as they are, with clear consciousness. Mindfulness exercises a powerful grounding function. It anchors the mind securely in the present, so it does not float away into the past and future with their memories, regrets, fears, and hopes. Right mindfulness is cultivated through a practice called the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness" (cattaro

satipatthana): the body, feelings, mind, and mental objections.

8. Right Concentration (samyāk-samādhi)

Right Concentration (meditation) is described as one-pointedness of mind, meaning a state where all mental faculties are unified and directed onto one particular object. Right concentration for the purpose of the eightfold path means wholesome concentration, i.e. concentration on wholesome thoughts and actions. Samadhi in meditation can be developed through mindfulness of breathing (Anapanasati), through visual objects (Kasina), and/or through repetition of phrases (Mantra). For meditation, the meditating mind focuses on a selected object. It first directs itself onto it, then sustains concentration, and finally intensifies concentration step by step.

There are two types of concentration: active and selective. In active concentration, the mind abides on whatever is happening in the present moment, even as things come and go and changes. Active concentration means concentration on whatever is going on in our mind; allowing the thoughts and images to come and go without clinging onto them or entertaining them.

Selective concentration is holding onto and concentrating on one object. While doing sitting or walking meditation, we might concentrate on an image or statue of the Buddha, on our breath, or any other meditation object we select. We stay focused and keep

our concentration on the one object. We are aware of the noises of the cars outside, of the thunder storm, or the dog barking, but we only acknowledge them and continue with our concentration on our object.

We don't concentrate on an object to escape our suffering. Instead, we concentrate to make ourselves deeply aware of the present moment. Samadhi means concentration, to practice Samadhi is to live deeply in every moment. To concentrate, we should be mindful, fully aware and present of what is going on. Mindfulness creates concentration, concentration creates wisdom, wisdom leads to insight, and insight leads to enlightenment.

Karma

We hear and read about karma all the time. Karma is a central aspect in Buddhist teaching because it's the energy that shapes our lives. To the commoner, karma is this invisible force that controls the fortune and misfortune of people. So if a driver cuts someone off on the highway, or broke into a car, it's the result of their bad karma. Karma works both ways; the person breaking into the car will accumulate bad karma, and the person that had their car broken into is paying back a karmic debt that they have.

Karma is a Sanskrit word meaning "action." In Buddhism, it's the principle of causality. Our thoughts, speech, and actions influence our present and future lives. Good deeds contribute to good karma and a good

life, and bad deeds contribute to bad karma and suffering.

The nature of every action from the perspective of morality (every thought, every action, and every speech) can be classified in three ways: virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral – or good, bad, and neither good nor bad. We've been accumulating karma for thousands or millions of lifetimes. It stays with us through our lifetimes in Samsara. It's because of the karma of our past lives that we have the life we have today; whether we were born into a rich or poor family, beautiful or ugly, smart or mentally challenged, or well-built or disabled – it's all because of our past karma. The accumulation of our present karma will determine our future lives. If we've been doing virtuous things and accumulate good karma, we'll be reborn into a life with good circumstances and fortunes, but if we're doing non-virtuous things, then we'll be reborn into a life of suffering and misfortunes, or even in another realm of existence (hell, animal, or ghost realm).

There are six realms we can be reborn in: Deva, Asura, human, animal, ghost, or hell. Only we can determine where we will be reborn based on the good or bad deeds we do. Every thought, speech, and action contributes to our karma and sows the seed in our consciousness. If we steal, commit sexual misconduct, or hurt/kill someone, that will affect our action karma. Slandering and lying affects our speech karma. Greed, anger, hatred, and ignorance affects our thought karma.

As we sow the seeds of our thoughts, speech, or actions, we reap the results in the present life or in a future life. What we reap today is what we have sown in the present life or in a past life. The Samyutta Nikaya states:

“According to the seed that’s sown,
So is the fruit you reap there from,
Doer of good will gather good,
Doer of evil, evil reaps,
Down is the seed and thou shalt taste
The fruit thereof.”

Karma is essentially the law of moral causation. Nothing is accidental or random, nothing is by chance when it comes to the circumstances of our lives. Everything has a cause and because of that cause it has an effect. Nothing happens to us unless it’s something that we deserve, whether good or bad. We are simply either reaping the benefits of our good karma, or paying back our karmic debt of bad karma.

What is the cause of the inequality that exists among mankind?

Why should one person be brought up in the lap of luxury, endowed with fine mental, moral and physical qualities, and another in absolute poverty, steeped in misery?

Why should one person be a mental prodigy, and another an idiot?

Why should one person be born with saintly characteristics and another with criminal tendencies?

Why should some be linguistic, artistic, mathematically inclined,

or musical from the very cradle?

Why should others be congenitally blind, deaf, or deformed?

Why should some be blessed, and others cursed from their births?

Karma is a law in itself that operates in its own field without any external entity or source. Asking where karma comes from is like asking where god comes from. It's not really important to know how or where karma comes from, but that it's there, all around us, creating the path for our present and future life.

Our lives are governed by causes and effects. Ignorance and desire are the main causes of karma. Our happiness and sufferings are the inevitable effects of the causes. In Buddhism, these causes and effects aren't rewards and punishments assigned by a supreme, supernatural being to people who have done good or bad. Buddhism, which denies such supreme, supernatural being, believes in the natural law and justice of causality that cannot be created by a supreme, supernatural being or by a compassionate Buddha. This natural law bears the rewards and punishments according to the doer's actions, whether human justice finds out or not.

Unlike other religions that state humans are born with sin or that our fate is sealed and cannot be changed, Buddhism disagrees and argues that regardless of how or where one is born, our circumstances can always be changed by our own efforts. If we are born in a poor, underdeveloped country or area, we can alleviate ourselves and escape the area by studying hard in school,

going to college, and getting a good job. College might not be free, but with the help of scholarships and grants, it's almost free. And almost everyone has access to Financial Aid, so being poor or living in a poor area is no excuse – you can change your future with your own efforts.

Meditation

Contrary to popular belief, meditation isn't just about sitting crossed-legged, placing our hands on our knees with finger and thumb touching, and chanting “Om” repeatedly. It can be in a yoga class, but this isn't a yoga class. In Buddhism, meditation is many things: contemplation, awareness, insight, and finding inner peace and happiness.

Many resources, those new to meditation, and even the instructor in our yoga class, will tell us to sit down, relax, and clear our mind. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Clearing our mind is the end result, which may be many, many years down the road. If we ever even get there. Right now, meditation is about making friends with our mind. Meditation is about being mindful and aware of our mind and body, of its feelings, thoughts, habits, and sensations in the present moment. It's about knowing how the mind works in order to “override” it so we can handle whatever life throws at us.

Meditation is not passive; it's active. We don't just sit there, relax, and “clear our mind.” What's the point in that? Meditation is about actively working on the mind,

focusing it, eliminating distracting thoughts and defilements, and contemplating. The objective of meditation is to train the mind. By observing our mind, we can learn how it works, how thoughts and feelings arise, and how we acknowledge and handle them. For beginners of meditation, not being sucked into our thoughts is nearly impossible, but with practice and dedication, we can learn to be aware that we're being sucked in and slowly pull ourselves out.

Those new to meditation often try to find something through the experience, thinking that an "Aha!" moment will suddenly happen or that there's some finish line they need to cross. Meditation isn't a race, it isn't a destination, there's no expectations or finish lines. It's a never-ending practice. Meditation is simply being in the present moment and being aware of it. In the West, people want specific directions and techniques of meditation that will take them to this magical realm of peace and quiet. These techniques and magical places aren't important. What is important is the way of being present, mindful and aware of our body and mind right here and now.

In Buddhism, many books and teachers will say, "Take what I have just said and meditate on it." What exactly does that mean? In Zen, the Zen master gives a koan to his students, something as random as "What is a seashell that is neither a sea nor a shell?" The student then meditates and contemplates on this koan for as long as several years until he arrives at an answer that the

Zen master accepts. When we contemplate in meditation, we take something apart, dissect it, and analyze it until we see and understand every aspect of it.

The first Truth in the Four Noble Truths, for example, is “Life is Suffering.” What does this mean to us? What is life? Our life? People’s lives? What is suffering and what constitutes as suffering? Suffering is translated from the Sanskrit word Dukkha, and it can sometimes come off as a very harsh or dramatic meaning. But what suffering really means is dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction with life and all the good and bad things that come with it.

So when we contemplate on “Life is Suffering,” what we’re really trying to do is realize that life is dissatisfying, that it is impermanent. Even the wealthiest of people are dissatisfied with their lives, whether it’s because they want more money, or because all the money they have causes them stress and is too much responsibility. They become overwhelmed and depressed. Even for ordinary people, life is stressful, overwhelming, and depressing.

We suffer because of our ignorance, greed, desire, and anger. So the point of meditating on suffering is realizing that we are ignorant because we don’t know the Truth. We are greedy because we always want things for ourselves. We desire things we don’t and can’t have. And we become angry because of our ignorance, greed, and desire. When we contemplate these things, when we realize this is happening to us and then dig deeper into

why we have ignorance, greed, desire, and anger, we learn the truth about ourselves. We come to a realization that, “Ah, maybe I’m always angry at my younger sister because I’m jealous of her success.” These are the kinds of realizations we want to come to, because the more we know our mind and what causes us dissatisfaction, the better we can deal with them and avoid that kind of suffering in the future. When our mind is peaceful and free from worries, anxieties, and anger, we can experience true happiness. If we train our mind to become peaceful, we will be happy even during hectic and harsh conditions and circumstances.

Why We Meditate

Through meditation we can do wonderful things. We can overcome our ignorance, delusions, greed, anger, hatred, jealousy, and depression, and enhance our compassion, loving-kindness, happiness, and equanimity. Meditation is the way we can find liberation to escape the bonds of dissatisfaction. A common problem that can come up during meditation is that we find this happy, magical place that gives us this sense of relaxation and peace – that’s great and all, but it’s important that we don’t attach or cling to this feeling or special place. We must strive to push ourselves further and penetrate our mind deeper in order to escape the prison our mind has locked us in and find our way out to freedom.

Every being wants happiness. As humans we go from one thing to another in order to find that happiness;

from one relationship to another, one job to another, or one city to another. We go to college and major in art, medicine, or creative writing in hopes that it will get us to a job that will make us happy. We adventure to new places to experience new foods and cultures, practice yoga, play video games, or grow flowers. Almost everything we do is an attempt to find happiness and avoid dissatisfaction. If we take a look at our lives, we'll discover that we spend a lot of our time and energy on mundane activities, such as seeking material, emotional, and sexual satisfaction, and enjoying the pleasures of the senses. Although these things can make us happy temporarily, they can't provide us lasting and true happiness. Eventually all the pretty things we have, feelings we get, and pleasures we experience will end and become dissatisfying. We then find ourselves again and again going after these external pleasures and again eventually becoming dissatisfied. By becoming attached to worldly pleasures, it directly or indirectly causes us to suffer. Our desire to have the latest tech gadget gives us temporary happiness until the next new gadget comes out and we again desire to have it, and if we can't we suffer. Everything will end, everything is impermanent. Our house will eventually age and fall apart. Our car will also age and stop running. Our loved ones will age, get sick, and die. If all we're doing is trying to find external happiness in material or emotional experiences, our mind will never be at peace.

Happiness can come from external pleasures, but it doesn't truly satisfy us and free us from our problems. It

is unsatisfying, transitory, and unreliable happiness. This doesn't mean we have to give up everything we enjoy like friends and possessions. Rather, we need to give up the misconceptions of what they can do for us. At the root of our problems is the fundamental mistaken view of reality, because we see these things as permanent and able to satisfy us "forever." We have an instinctive belief that people and things exist in and of themselves; that they have an inherent nature, an inherent thingness. This means we see things as having certain lasting qualities within them; that they are good or bad, attractive or unattractive. These qualities seem to be in the objects themselves as independent of our view point and everything else.

For example, we think that ice cream is inherently delicious, or that having lots of clothes is inherently satisfying. If they were, surely they would never fail to satisfy or give pleasure and we would all experience them in the same way. Our mistaken ideas are deeply programmed in our mind and habitual to us; it controls our relationships and experiences with the world. We probably never question on whether or not the things we see is the way they actually exist, but once we do, we'll be able to see that our view on reality is exaggerated and one-sided; that the things we see as good or bad, attractive or unattractive are the things we've created and project by our mind.

Happiness is a state of mind; therefore, the real source of happiness lies within ourselves, not in external

circumstances. Though there is nothing wrong with having possessions and enjoying pleasures, we however tend to cling to these things and when they end or disappear, we suffer. If our mind is peaceful and free from attachment, greed, ignorance, and anger, then we will become happy. Likewise, if our mind is not peaceful and free, we will become unhappy. So the purpose of meditation is to cultivate these states of mind of peace and happiness, and eradicate those that are not. The Buddha said that it's a great gift to be born as a human, because only as a human do we have the chance and ability to gain enlightenment. Animals can enjoy food and sex, build homes, and care for and protect their family, but they can't completely eliminate suffering and find true happiness. So why as humans do we sometimes only achieve what animals can do? As humans we must use our precious time to study and practice virtuously so we can escape the cycle of Samsara. Meditation helps us break the mundane walls of our attachment, ignorance, and greed and lift us out of the prison of our mind to find love, happiness, and freedom.



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