

Intro to Buddhism in the US

Week 7: A Symphony of Suttas

The Center at Belvedere
Charlottesville, VA

Link to extended readings and slides:<https://parusanalytics.com/introbud2023/week-seven.html>

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A couple of links

MBSR = "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction" (initially developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in 1980s based on vipassana/"Insight" meditation methods; now everywhere).

Link to Ezra Klein/ Rachel Zoffness podcast:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/21/opinion/17eks-ezra-klein-podcast-rachel-zoffness.html>

Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson, *Altered Traits*: [Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body](#), (2017)

Suttas

Mindfulness and meditation

- **Sattipatthana Sutta:** Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness
- **Anapanasati Sutta:** Mindfulness of Breathing.
- **Karaniya Metta Sutta**

Foundations

- **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta:** Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion.
- **Dhammapada**

Skeptical Buddhism

- **Kalama Sutta**

ChatGPT: Summarize the Buddhist Sattipatthana Sutta

The Sattipatthana Sutta is a central Buddhist scripture that describes the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The sutta emphasizes the practice of mindfulness as a means to gain insight into the nature of existence and to overcome suffering.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are:

1. Mindfulness of the body: Paying attention to the physical sensations and movements of the body, including breathing, posture, and actions.
2. Mindfulness of feelings: Observing and understanding one's emotional states, both pleasant and unpleasant, without getting caught up in them.
3. Mindfulness of mind: Being aware of the thoughts and mental states that arise, and developing the ability to focus the mind and let go of distracting or unhelpful thoughts.
4. Mindfulness of phenomena: Investigating the nature of existence, including the impermanence and interconnectedness of all things, and gaining insight into the nature of reality.

By cultivating mindfulness in these four areas, one can develop greater awareness, understanding, and compassion, and ultimately attain enlightenment. The sutta teaches that the practice of mindfulness can lead to the cessation of suffering and the realization of ultimate truth.

Five Aggregates or Khandas

1. Form or Rupa
2. Consciousness or Vinnana
3. Feelings or Vedana
4. Perception or Sanna
5. Mental states or Sankhara

And more suttas

Right behavior

- **Mangala Sutta**
- **Abhaya Sutta: To Prince Abhaya (right speech)**

Forgiveness (self and others)

- **Sallatha Sutta**
- **Angulimala Sutta**

Sudden enlightenment

- **Bahiya Sutta**

Skepticism: Kalama Sutta

"Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon rumor, nor upon scripture, nor upon surmise, nor upon axiom, nor upon specious reasoning, nor upon bias toward a notion pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration 'The monk is our teacher.' When you yourselves know: 'These things are bad, blamable, censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them... When you yourselves know: 'These things are good, blameless, praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them."

ChatGPT: Which suttas discuss the proper conduct for Buddhists?

There are many suttas in the Buddhist canon that discuss the proper conduct for Buddhists. Here are a few examples:

1. The Sigalovada Sutta (DN 31): This sutta is also known as the "Discourse to Sigala" and is often recommended as a guide to proper conduct for lay Buddhists. In this sutta, the Buddha teaches a young man named Sigala about the six directions (north, south, east, west, up, and down) and how to behave properly towards parents, teachers, spouse, friends, employees, religious leaders, and other groups of people.
2. The Dhammika Sutta (Ud 7.2): In this sutta, the Buddha teaches a wealthy layman named Dhammika about the proper conduct of a Buddhist layperson. He emphasizes the importance of generosity, virtuous behavior, and cultivating wholesome qualities of mind.
3. The Mangala Sutta (Sn 2.4): This sutta, also known as the "Discourse on Blessings," lists 38 qualities that lead to a happy and successful life. These include respect for elders, generosity, kindness, honesty, and avoiding the company of fools.
4. The Karaniya Metta Sutta (Kh 9): This sutta, also known as the "Discourse on Loving-kindness," teaches the practice of loving-kindness (Metta) as a means of cultivating wholesome qualities of mind and behavior. It also emphasizes the importance of treating all beings with kindness and compassion.

These are just a few examples of suttas that discuss proper conduct for Buddhists. There are many others that cover similar themes, such as the Anapanasati Sutta (MN 118), the Satipatthana Sutta (MN 10), and the Noble Eightfold Path (MN 117).

Comment: Sort of missed on the final sentence (and the Metta Sutta), where these are simply, per the talk, the most important guides to practice generally, though I supposed that's one interpretation of "conduct". My first attempt at a query, "Which of the Buddhist suttas discuss proper conduct of lay members of the sangha", was too complex for ChatGPT to handle

Mangala Sutta

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Exalted One was dwelling at Anathapindika's monastery, in Jeta's Grove, near Savatthi. Now when the night was far spent, a certain deity whose surpassing splendor illuminated the entire Jeta Grove, came to the presence of the Exalted One and, drawing near, respectfully saluted him and stood at one side. Standing thus, he addressed the Exalted One in verse:

"Many deities and men, yearning after good, have pondered on blessings. Pray, tell me the greatest blessing!"

[The Buddha:]

"Not to associate with the foolish, but to associate with the wise; and to honor those who are worthy of honor — this is the greatest blessing.

To reside in a suitable locality, to have done meritorious actions in the past and to set oneself in the right course — this is the greatest blessing.

To have much learning, to be skillful in handicraft, well-trained in discipline, and to be of good speech — this is the greatest blessing.

To support mother and father, to cherish wife and children, and to be engaged in peaceful occupation — this is the greatest blessing.

To be generous in giving, to be righteous in conduct, to help one's relatives, and to be blameless in action — this is the greatest blessing.

To loathe more evil and abstain from it, to refrain from intoxicants, and to be steadfast in virtue — this is the greatest blessing.

To be respectful, humble, contented and grateful; and to listen to the Dhamma on due occasions — this is the greatest blessing.

To be patient and obedient, to associate with monks and to have religious discussions on due occasions — this is the greatest blessing.

Self-restraint, a holy and chaste life, the perception of the Noble Truths and the realisation of Nibbana — this is the greatest blessing.

A mind unruffled by the vagaries of fortune, from sorrow freed, from defilements cleansed, from fear liberated — this is the greatest blessing.

Those who thus abide, ever remain invincible, in happiness established. These are the greatest blessings."

Source: <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/kn/khp/khp.5.nara.html>

Mahayana sutras

- Lotus Sutra
- Diamond Sutra
- Heart Sutra

ChatGPT: Why is the Lotus Sutra important to Buddhists?

The Lotus Sutra is one of the most important scriptures in Mahayana Buddhism and is considered to be the ultimate expression of the Buddha's teachings. It is important to Buddhists for several reasons:

1. **Emphasis on the Bodhisattva Path:** The Lotus Sutra emphasizes the Bodhisattva Path, which is the path to enlightenment that emphasizes compassion and the desire to liberate all beings from suffering. It teaches that anyone can become a Bodhisattva, regardless of their social status or spiritual abilities.
2. **Universal Salvation:** The Lotus Sutra teaches the concept of universal salvation, which means that all beings, regardless of their past actions or karma, have the potential to attain enlightenment. This message of inclusiveness and equality is a central tenet of Mahayana Buddhism.
3. **Skillful Means:** The Lotus Sutra teaches the concept of "skillful means" or "upaya," which refers to the use of various methods and teachings to help individuals reach enlightenment. The sutra teaches that the Buddha's teachings are adapted to the level of understanding and spiritual maturity of the audience, and that the ultimate goal is to lead all beings to enlightenment.
4. **Emphasis on Faith and Devotion:** The Lotus Sutra emphasizes the importance of faith and devotion to the Buddha and his teachings, as well as the role of the Buddha as a compassionate guide on the path to enlightenment.

Overall, the Lotus Sutra is considered to be a powerful and inspiring text that offers a comprehensive vision of the Buddha's teachings and provides a roadmap for spiritual practice and attainment. It is a source of inspiration, guidance, and comfort for millions of Buddhists around the world.

ChatGPT: What are the major Tibetan Buddhist books

There are many important Tibetan Buddhist books, but some of the most well-known and influential ones include:

1. The Tibetan Book of the Dead (also known as the Bardo Thodol): This book is a guide to the afterlife and is meant to be read to the deceased person to help them navigate the transition from life to death.
2. The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (also known as the Lamrim Chenmo): This book is a comprehensive guide to the Buddhist path, covering topics such as meditation, ethics, and wisdom.
3. The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying (by Sogyal Rinpoche): This book is a modern classic that offers guidance on how to live and die in a mindful and compassionate way.
4. The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa (by Milarepa): This book is a collection of songs and teachings by the famous Tibetan yogi Milarepa, who is revered for his spiritual realization and poetic expression.
5. The Collected Works of Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche (by Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche): This collection of teachings by a contemporary Tibetan master offers practical guidance on how to apply Buddhist principles in everyday life.

These are just a few examples of the many important Tibetan Buddhist books. Each text offers unique insights and guidance on the Buddhist path, and can be studied and practiced by both beginners and advanced practitioners alike.

Comment: ChatGPT's answer also included the Heart and Diamond Sutras, which I edited out here to save space: whether these should be on the list depends on your definition of "book". Notice that this does not include popular contemporary works by the Dalai Lama, whereas the Google search does, as well as trying to sell you these. The ChatGPT list is fairly similar to this *Tricycle* reference article: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/tibetan-buddhist-texts/>