

How to use *dhamma* (along with *tripitaka*)

What is *Dhamma*?

Purpose of *Dhamma*

How to learn and practice *Dhamma*

What is *Dhamma*?

- *Dhamma* (Pali) *Dharma* (Sanskrit)
- *Dhamma* refers to the second of the 3 jewels of Buddhism - Buddha, *dharma*, and sangha.
- The word often is defined as "the teachings of the Buddha," but *dharma* is really more than just a label for Buddhist doctrines.
- The word *dharma* comes from the ancient religions of India and is found in Hindu and Jain teachings, as well as Buddhist. Its original meaning is something like "**natural law.**" **Its root word, *dham*, means "to uphold" or "to support."**
- *Dharma* refers to **ethical conduct and righteousness**. In some Hindu traditions, *dharma* is used to mean "**sacred duty.**"

Dhamma in Theravada Buddhism

There is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than *dhamma*. It includes not only the conditioned things and states, but also the non-conditioned, the absolute Nirvana. (Ven. Walpola Rāhula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Grove Press, 1974), p. 58).

Dhamma, on the external level, refers to the **path of practice - the Buddha taught to his followers**"

This *Dhamma* has three levels of meaning:

1. The words of the Buddha,
2. The practice of his teaching, and
3. The attainment of enlightenment.

The word *dhamma* has a fourfold meaning.

1. *Dhamma* incorporates the phenomenal world as it is;
2. The laws of nature;
3. The duties to be performed in accordance with the laws of nature; and
4. The results of fulfilling such duties.

Dhamma has six attributes.

1. *Dhamma* was taught comprehensively by the Buddha
2. All of us can realize *Dhamma* through our own efforts
3. *Dhamma* is timeless and present in every immediate moment
4. *Dhamma* is open to verification and does not have to be accepted on faith
5. *Dhamma* allows us to enter nirvana
6. *Dhamma* is known only through personal, intuitive insight.

6 qualities of Dhamma

1. *Svakkhāto*" The *Dhamma* taught by the Blessed One is Excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle and excellent in the end - all of Buddha's Discourses are consistent and teach the same truth.
2. "*Sandiṭṭhika*" *Dhamma* is self-evident and can be understood in this life itself.
3. "*Akālika*" *Dhamma*, Noble Truths, cannot be changed nor can they be altered over time.
4. "*Ehipassiko*" "come and see"; Buddha's *Dhamma* is to be investigated.
5. "*Opanayika*" *Dhamma* can only be understood by oneself.
6. "*Paccattam vedittabbo vinnuhiti*" *Dhamma* is for the wise to understand and realize.

The Dharma Body

Both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists speak of the "**dharma body**" (*dharmakāya* or *dharmakāya*). This is also called the "**truth body**."

Very simply, in Theravada Buddhism, a Buddha (an enlightened being) is understood to be the living embodiment of dharma. This does not mean that a Buddha's physical body (*rupa-kāya*) is the same thing as dharma, however. It's a bit closer to it to say that the dharma becomes visible or tangible in a Buddha.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the *dharmakāya* is one of the three bodies (tri-kaya) of a Buddha.

1. *Dharmakāya* means "truth body." *The dharmakāya* is the absolute; the unity of all things and beings, all phenomena un-manifested, beyond existence and non-existence.
2. *Sambhogakāya* means "bliss body" or "reward body." The "bliss body" is the body that feels the bliss of enlightenment.
3. *Nirmanakāya* means "emanation body." This is the physical body that is born, walks the earth, and dies.

In sum, the word dharma is nearly indefinable. But to the extent that it can be defined, we can say that dharma is both the **essential nature of reality** and also the **teachings and practices that enable the realization of that essential nature**.

Purpose of *Dhamma*

1. The Buddha's purposes of teaching *Dhamma* to the world and beyond

Dhamma should be taught;

- for the Benefits and happiness of many people (*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya*)
- out of compassion for the world (*lokānukampāya*)
- for the welfare, benefit, and happiness of gods and men (*atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ*)

These purposes give expression to the universality of Buddhism. The Buddha exhorted the first monks who had achieved enlightenment (*arahattā*) to share the truth they had realized with others. The word used *bahujana* meaning “people in general” and *loka* meaning “the world”. This meaning comes out clearly in the reference to *devamanussā* meaning “gods and humans” referring to the whole of humanity and those beyond.

2. *Nissaranaththāya no gahanaththāya - Dhamma* is for emancipation not for grasping
3. *Dhamma* is compared to a raft. Once you crossed the river, you do not need to carry the raft with you. In the same way, once you accomplished the purpose of *Dhamma - nirvāna*, you no longer need *dhamma*
4. *Dhammo have rakkhati dhammacāri* - The person who follows and practises *Dhamma* is protected by *Dhamma*
5. *tathāgatappavedito dhammavinayo, bhikkhave, vivaṭo virocati, no paṭicchanno* - Teachings of the Buddha shine out in the open unhidden
6. This *dhamma* is for the wise not for the unwise - *Paññavato ayaṃ dhammo, nāyaṃ dhammo duppaññassā*.

How to learn and practice *Dhamma*?

1. Learning and practising *dhamma* in a wrong way is like a man trying to catch a poisonous snake in the wild by hand. (*Arittha sutta* MN 220)

“Monks, it is important to understand my teachings thoroughly before you teach or put them into practice. If you have not understood the meaning of any teaching I give, please ask me or one of the elder brothers in the Dharma or one of the others who is excellent in the practice about it. If you do not practice the Dharma correctly, you may come to understand it as the opposite of what was intended. But if you practice intelligently, you will understand both the letter and the spirit of the teachings and will be able to explain them correctly. Do not practice just to show off or argue with others. Practice to attain liberation, and if you do, you will have little pain or exhaustion.

“An intelligent student of the Dharma is like a man who uses a forked stick to catch a snake. When he sees a poisonous snake in the wild, he places the stick right below the head of the snake and grabs the snake's

neck with his hand. Even if the snake winds itself around the man's hand, leg, or another part of his body, it will not bite him. This is the better way to catch a snake, and it will not lead to pain or exhaustion.

2. The Buddha asked all his followers not to take his word as true, but rather to test the teachings for themselves.
3. A monk who had not attained enlightenment inquired the Buddha whether he has attained enlightenment by using evidence such as Buddha's bodily actions and his speech (through the eye and ear) - *Vīmaṃsaka* (The Inquirer) *Sutta* (MN 47)
4. The one who sees *dhamma* sees me - (Buddha) *Yo dhammaṃ passati so maṃ passati*
5. *Kālāma sutta* - the Buddha's charter of free inquiry:

The people of *Kālāma* asked the Buddha who to believe out of all the ascetics, sages, venerable, and holy ones who, like himself, passed through their town. They complained that they were confused by the many contradictions they discovered in what they heard. The *Kālāma Sutta* is the Buddha's reply.

- I. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing - hearsay (*anussava*),
- II. nor upon tradition (*paramparā*),
- III. nor upon rumor (*itikirā*),
- IV. nor upon what is in a scripture (*piṭaka-sampadāna*)
- V. nor upon surmise - suppose that something is true without having evidence to confirm it. (*takka-hetu*),
- VI. nor upon an axiom (theory) (*naya-hetu*),
- VII. nor upon specious reasoning (*ākāra-parivitakka*),
- VIII. nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over (*diṭṭhi-nijjhānakkhantiyā*),
- IX. nor upon another's seeming ability (*bhabba-rūpatāya*),
- X. nor upon the consideration, The monk is our teacher (*samaṇo no garū*)

Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: these things are **bad; Blamable; censured by the wise; undertaken and observed; and lead to harm and ill**, abandon them.'

Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: "These things are **good; blamable; praised by the wise; undertaken and observed; lead to benefit and happiness**," enter on and abide in them.