

THEME	RELIGIOUS BUDDHISM/TRADITIONAL BUDDHA-DHARMA.	SECULAR BUDDHISM/NEO-MODERNIST DHARMA
<u>I. Ground:</u> The human condition	Beginningless samsāra; the round of rebirths; the five (six) realms of rebirth; multiple planes of existence governed by karma & its fruits; aspiration for enlightenment, liberation from round of rebirths.	Our immediate existential situation; samsāra as metaphor; unconcern with rebirth or rejection of rebirth; focus on here & now; aspiration to “wake up,” be free from suffering for self and others; compassionate action in the world.
<u>II. Buddha</u> (1) Conception of Buddha	Plurality of buddhas across cosmic time. Multi-life background to buddhahood (bodhisattva career); “Enlightened One” by transcendental breakthrough to ultimate truth; “realizes true nature of things”; eradication of defilements; cosmic role as “teacher of devas & humans”; “omniscience”, super-powers; guide to liberation. Blessing power of buddhas; transcendent bodhisattva-and-buddha activity (Pure Land).	No concern with multi-life bodhisattva career; wise human being who “wakes up” to the truth about the human condition; emerges from specific historical & cultural context; achieves pragmatic knowledge rather than veridical cognition; “omniscience” & “super-powers” are “deification”; actual eradication of defilements questioned; experiential overcoming of suffering.
<u>Buddha</u> (2) Attitude to Buddha	Regarded as Bhagavan; incomparable teacher; beyond questioning; fully purified, perfectly compassionate, ultimate wisdom; hence full trust, refuge, veneration, adoration. Basic response is faith (śraddhā) and devotion (bhakti), discipleship. Model and ideal for earnest disciples and bodhisattvas.	Regarded as excellent teacher, but not necessarily unique; refuge in terms of quest for immanent goal—quenching of dukkha; open to questioning and doubt (particular wrt his claims about karma & rebirth and super-cognitions). Basic response is respect and admiration; status of pupil rather than disciple. Buddha as model in qualified sense.

<p><u>III. Dharma</u> (1) Texts</p>	<p>Veneration of canon; reluctance to question or doubt texts; openness to exploration within boundaries of faith; see suttas as laying down a path to transcendent liberation; memorization and recitation of texts. Knowledge of texts as domain of learned monks; Tendency to scriptural fundamentalism. Ritualistic use of texts (<i>paritta</i>).</p>	<p>Ranges from indifference to curiosity to keen interest. Regard texts as accessible to anyone; to be tested for oneself, interpreted by oneself; accept & reject based on personal experience (Kalama Sutta). Practical advice for meaningful life; critical-historical interest in texts—context & evolution; reject mythic elements as Asian cultural overlay; no ritualistic use of texts.</p>
<p><u>Dharma</u> (2) Doctrine (a) Four noble truths</p>	<p>Understood from two angles, “vertical” and “horizontal,” immediately visible and samsāric. Truths as domain of ultimate realization.</p>	<p>“Vertical”—immediately visible—aspect alone is relevant. Dukkha understood as experiential suffering; four truths seen as therapeutic formula. Stress on tasks imposed by truths.</p>
<p>(b) Karma & rebirth</p>	<p>Accepted as true, used as basis for understanding and practice. Cosmological view of karma.</p>	<p>Generally dismissed or considered irrelevant. Dharma applies to life here & now. Psychological interpretation of karma.</p>
<p>(c) Dependent origination</p>	<p>Seen as extending over three lives, as describing the dynamics of samsāra, how we are born, age, and die, what keeps the cycle of becoming in motion.</p>	<p>Interpreted solely in terms of this-life experience. Metaphorical interpretation of birth and death. Stress on DO as entailing “everything is inter-dependent and inter-connected.”</p>
<p>(d) Three marks, emptiness, nonself.</p>	<p>“The real, undistorted nature of things.” Insight into the “real nature of things” leads to transcendent path.</p>	<p>Pragmatic device to help reduce suffering. Guidelines to living without dukkha.</p>
<p><u>Dharma</u> (3) Practice</p>	<p>Acceptance of three levels of practice: for this-life benefits, future good rebirth, final liberation. Hence: (1) ethics → this-life good; (2) meritorious deeds, devotional</p>	<p>Middle level is excluded, though its practices may be absorbed into level 1. Levels 1 and 3 merge, as meditation is pursued as means to well-being here & now, psychological</p>

	<p>practices → happy rebirth; (3) meditation (samatha & vipassanā) → transcendent breakthrough. Pāramitās as “provisions” leading to transcendent realization. Practice aims at disenchantment, dispassion, liberation, “ending birth and death.”</p>	<p>wholeness, living life fully aware. Devotional and ritualistic practices marginalized. Revival of brahmavihāras in light of human ethics. Pāramitās as ideal personal qualities for present-life benefits. Therapeutic conception of practice aimed at overcoming unwholesome emotions—fear, bias, anger, attachment, etc.—more patience, understanding, kindness,, etc. Merger of Buddhist meditation and psychotherapy. Psychology as lens for understanding Buddhism.</p>
<u>IV. Sangha</u>	<p>Ideal focus on the Ariyan Sangha: reverence for the great disciples (Theravada) and divine bodhisattvas (Mahayana). Communal focus on monastic Sangha as visible object of faith and reverence, field of merit and offerings. Monastics as supreme teaching authority.</p>	<p>Ariyan Sangha is not recognized or treated as marginal. Monastics may be respected as teachers and persons, but monastic Sangha not a priority. Sangha signifies the group that practices together. Position of teacher open to anyone, but priority given to lay teachers, closer to practitioners. Lay lines of transmission, assimilation to psychology.</p>
<u>V. Dharma & Society</u>	<p>Keeps a distance from social engagement. Participation in conventional philanthropy (sick, orphans, homeless, animals, etc.), but political and social transformation seen as marginal, a corruption of practice, impediment to practice. Suspicion of politics. Ecological consciousness minimal or absent.</p>	<p>Aims at a fully engaged Buddhism. Dharma applications in many new fields—peace work, social justice; work with dying, prisoners, homeless. Mindfulness in health care, psychotherapy, education, prison work. Bring Dharma practice into society without Buddhist identity. Quest to define a Buddhist ecological ethics.</p>

<p><u>VI. Prospects in modern world</u></p>	<p><u>Strength:</u> Preserves traditional doctrine and practice; avoids adulteration; potential for deep practice, transcendent realization, fidelity to Buddha’s Word.</p> <p><u>Weakness:</u> Tends to pessimism about human progress; suspicion of modernity. Danger of clinging to cultural forms, identifying forms with essence. Complacency; danger of polarization between Dharma practice and everyday life; tendency to fundamentalism and doctrinal rigidity.</p>	<p><u>Strength:</u> Appeals to contemporary consciousness. Makes Dharma more accessible. Encourages critical inquiry. Unpacks new applications of Buddhism neglected by tradition. Applies Dharma to ordinary life.</p> <p><u>Weakness:</u> Risks “throwing out baby with bath water.” Lack of sufficient faith in Three Jewels. Break with ancient tradition. Overconfidence in its own validity. Dilution of teaching. Lowers Dharma practice to worldly standards—“McMindfulness.” Loss of ethical dimension; loss of deep practice, high attainments, transcendent realization.</p>
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