



# **Theravāda Buddhism**

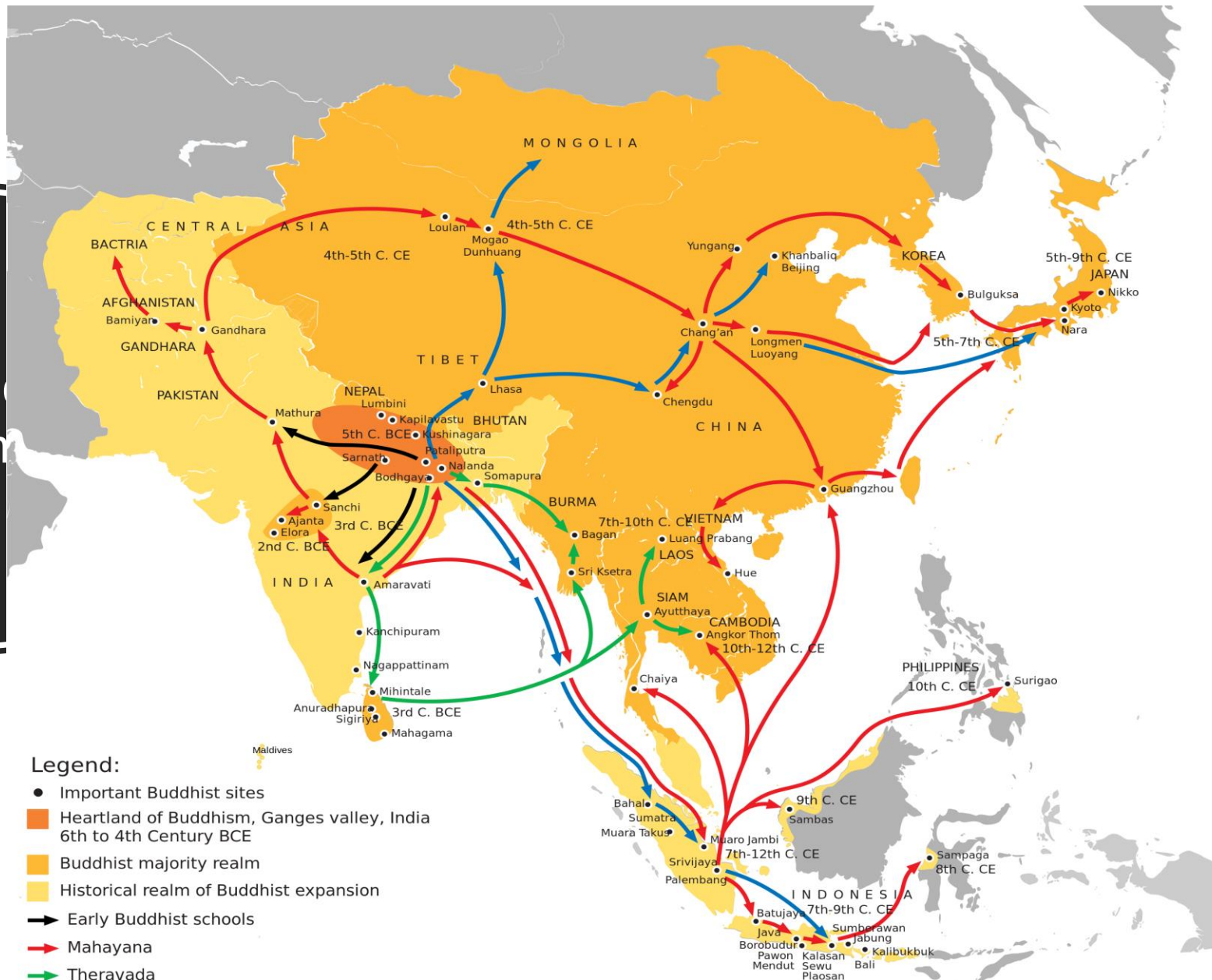
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# History of Theravāda Buddhism

- Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) in the 6th century BCE
- First Buddhist council - After 3 months of passing
- The significance of the Third Buddhist Council held in Pataliputra (modern-day Patna, India), under Emperor Ashoka's patronage
- Oral tradition



# Spread of Buddhism



# The Pāli Canon



## Introduction to the Pāli Canon:

Pāli Canon, also known as the Tipiṭaka or "Three Baskets," is the most complete collection of Theravāda Buddhist scriptures. These texts were orally transmitted for centuries before being written down in the Pāli language on palm leaves in Sri Lanka during the 1st century BCE.



## Components of the Pāli Canon:

**Vinaya Piṭaka:** Focus on the monastic code of discipline for monks and nuns

**Sutta Piṭaka:** Contains the discourses of the Buddha on various aspects of the teaching.

**Abhidhamma Piṭaka:** Offers a detailed philosophical analysis of the Buddha's teachings, presenting an abstract and systematic account of the Dhamma.



## Significance of the Pāli Canon:

The Pāli Canon is regarded as the closest record of the original teachings of the Buddha. It serves as the doctrinal foundation for Theravāda Buddhists, guiding both the monastic community and lay practitioners in their practice and understanding of the Dhamma.

It also plays a crucial role in the preservation and dissemination of the Theravāda tradition throughout history and into the modern era.

# Core Teachings of Theravāda Buddhism

## Introduction to the Core Teachings:

- Theravāda Buddhism focuses on the Buddha's original teachings, emphasizing personal insight, ethical conduct, and mental development towards enlightenment.

## The Three Universal Truths:

- **Anicca (Impermanence):** Everything in the universe is in a constant state of change.
- **Dukkha (Suffering):** Because all things are impermanent, clinging to them leads to suffering.
- **Anatta (Non-self):** There is no permanent, unchanging self; what we consider the "self" is a collection of changing phenomena.

## The Four Noble Truths:

- **The Truth of Suffering (Dukkha):** Life inherently involves suffering, from obvious physical pain to more subtle forms like dissatisfaction and impermanence.
- **The Cause of Suffering (Samudaya):** Suffering is caused by craving (tanha) and clinging to impermanent states and things.
- **The End of Suffering (Nirodha):** By ceasing to cling, suffering can be ended, leading to Nirvana, the ultimate peace.
- **The Path to the End of Suffering (Magga):** The Noble Eightfold Path, a practical guide to ethical and mental development.

## The Noble Eightfold Path:

- Presented as a path of practice encompassing moral conduct (Right Speech, Action, Livelihood), mental discipline (Right Effort, Mindfulness, Concentration), and wisdom (Right Understanding, Thought).
- Emphasizes the interconnectedness of ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom as means to enlightenment.





# Practices in Theravāda Buddhism

- **Overview of Theravāda Practices:**

- Sila -, ethical conduct, Samadhi - mental discipline and Panna-Wisdom

Emphasize that these practices are accessible to both monastic members and lay followers, each contributing to the path toward enlightenment.

- **Daily Practices and Rituals:**

- **Chanting:** Explain the importance of chanting from the Pāli Canon, including discourses, ethical texts, and protective verses, as a way to memorize, understand, and internalize the teachings.
- **Offerings and Merit-Making:** Discuss the practice of making offerings (e.g., food, flowers, candles) to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha as expressions of devotion and means of making merit, which is believed to contribute to one's spiritual progress and well-being.

- **Meditation Practices:**

- **Vipassanā (Insight Meditation):** Describe Vipassanā as a practice aimed at developing insight into the three marks of existence: impermanence, suffering, and non-self. It involves mindful observation of the body, feelings, mind, and mind objects to gain a deeper understanding of reality.
- **Samatha (Tranquility Meditation):** Introduce Samatha as a complementary practice focused on developing concentration and tranquility through mindfulness of breathing or concentration on a specific object. This leads to the development of jhānas (meditative absorptions), which are states of deep peace and concentration.

- **Observance Days and Retreats:**

- **Uposatha (Observance Days):** Highlight the observance of Uposatha days, occurring on the full moon, new moon, and quarter moon days, as times for increased meditation, reflection, and observance of precepts.
- **Vassa (Rains Retreat):** Discuss the Vassa period, a three-month annual retreat during the rainy season for monastic practitioners, which lay followers support through offerings and participation in Dhamma talks and meditation sessions.

# Theravāda and Mahāyāna

Feature	Theravāda Buddhism	Mahāyāna Buddhism
<b>Origin</b>	Considered the oldest form of Buddhism, dating back to the Buddha's original teachings.	Developed around the 1st century BCE, introducing new sutras and the Bodhisattva ideal.
<b>Main Goal</b>	Achieving Arhatship, which is personal enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth.	Achieving Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, emphasizing the Bodhisattva path.
<b>Scriptures</b>	Relies primarily on the Pāli Canon (Tipiṭaka) as its scriptural foundation.	Includes the Pāli Canon and numerous other sutras not found in Theravāda, such as the Lotus Sutra and Heart Sutra.
<b>Practices</b>	Focuses on monastic life, meditation practices (Vipassanā and Samatha), and adherence to the Vinaya.	Incorporates a wider range of practices, including meditation, devotional practices, and in some schools, esoteric practices.
<b>Philosophical Focus</b>	Emphasizes the original teachings of the Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.	Expands the philosophical scope to include concepts like emptiness (Śūnyatā) and skillful means (Upāya).
<b>Role of the Sangha</b>	The monastic community is central, viewed as the ideal path for spiritual development and enlightenment.	While still valuing monastic life, there is a stronger emphasis on lay practices and achieving enlightenment as a layperson.
<b>Bodhisattva Ideal</b>	Focus is primarily on personal enlightenment, with less emphasis on the Bodhisattva path.	Central to Mahāyāna belief, aspiring to become a Bodhisattva who seeks enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

Common  
Misconceptions  
&  
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Misconception	Reality
<b>Theravāda is solely focused on individual enlightenment, neglecting the welfare of others.</b>	While Theravāda emphasizes individual enlightenment (achieving Arhatship), it also teaches compassion and kindness towards all beings. The path includes ethical living and helping others as integral components of practice.
<b>Theravāda Buddhism is the same as Hinayana.</b>	"Hinayana" is an outdated and often pejorative term that inaccurately groups early Buddhist schools, implying a lesser or inferior path. Theravāda is a specific tradition within early Buddhism that has a rich, compassionate teaching and practice framework.
<b>Theravāda does not practice meditation as extensively as Mahāyāna.</b>	Meditation is central to Theravāda practice, with a strong emphasis on Vipassanā (insight meditation) and Samatha (tranquility meditation) as means to develop mindfulness, concentration, and ultimately, wisdom.
<b>Theravāda rejects the Mahāyāna sutras outright.</b>	While Theravāda bases its teachings on the Pāli Canon, it does not necessarily "reject" Mahāyāna texts. The distinction lies in the canonical texts recognized by each tradition, with Theravāda focusing on the earliest recorded teachings.
<b>Theravāda Buddhism is more primitive or less developed than Mahāyāna Buddhism.</b>	Theravāda is not "primitive" but rather maintains practices and teachings close to the Buddha's original teachings. Its depth and complexity are found in its preservation of early Buddhist doctrine and ethical practice.
<b>Only monks or nuns can achieve enlightenment in Theravāda Buddhism.</b>	While monastic life is highly valued in Theravāda for its conducive environment for practice, the tradition also acknowledges the potential for lay practitioners to attain significant spiritual achievements, including enlightenment.

**My current Interests: Inmates, mindfulness-based interventions including addiction recovery.**