

# Suffering and the Self: A Survey of Indian Buddhist Philosophy

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## *Part 1: Introduction and Basic Doctrines*

- Buddhist traditions:
  - Hīnayāna/“Basic Buddhism” (*The Lesser Vehicle*)
    - Modern: Theravāda (*The Doctrine of the Elders*)
  - Mahāyāna: (*The Greater Vehicle*)
    - Yogācāra (*The Practice of Yoga – not at all a useful description!*)
    - Madhyamaka (*The Middle Way*)
- The Buddha's life story.
- The Four Noble Truths:
  1. Suffering
  2. The Causes of Suffering
  3. The Cessation of Suffering
  4. The Path to the Cessation of Suffering
  - ... as a description of reality.
  - ... as a framework for meditation.
- Three types of suffering:
  - The suffering of suffering (no, that's not a typo!).
  - The suffering of change.
  - The suffering of conditioned existence.

## *Part 2: Mahāyāna Metaphysics & Ethics*

- Four reductionisms:
  - Mereological reduction.
  - Reduction to the “aggregates” (*skandhas*).
  - Idealism.
  - Momentariness.
- An ethic of universal compassion.
- Modern connections:
  - Buddhism as religion.
  - Buddhism and (modern) science.

## Suggestions for Further Reading

This reading guide is also available on my website, where it may be updated from time to time:

<https://davidnowakowski.net/indian-philosophy>

- Ashvaghoṣha, *Life of the Buddha*, translated by Patrick Olivelle (Clay Sanskrit Library, 2008).
  - A famous Indian poem, telling the life story of the Buddha. Olivelle gives a masterful translation of the first half of the poem (from the Buddha's birth and early life, through his temptation on the night of his enlightenment) based on the surviving Sanskrit text, followed by a summary of the second half, which now survives only in Chinese translation.
- *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*, edited and translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Wisdom Publications, 2005).
  - The volume collects important selections from the Pali Canon, the earliest layer of stories and narratives of the historical Buddha's teachings, arranged by topic.
- Śāntideva, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, translated by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford World's Classics, 1995).
  - This is a classic guide to ethics in the Madhyamaka tradition of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, by an 8<sup>th</sup> century scholar-monk. After passionately laying out the Madhyamaka view of suffering, Śāntideva shows how to cultivate the six perfections (virtues) of the supremely enlightened person. This translation, made directly from the Sanskrit text, is my personal favorite.
- Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *For the Benefit of All Beings: A Commentary on The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, (Shambhala Classics, 2009).
  - Not strictly an Indian text, this is a commentary by the current Dalai Lama on Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (cited above). It's the transcript of teachings given by the Dalai Lama to an American audience, explaining Śāntideva's text chapter by chapter, and doing a wonderful job of showing the relevance of the text for a contemporary audience. Whenever a numbered verse appears, the Dalai Lama is quoting that verse from Śāntideva (although the translation may differ, and in some chapters, the numbering gets off by one place). This is best read alongside Śāntideva's text: one chapter from both books, then the next chapter from both, etc.
- *The Foundations of Buddhism*, by Rupert Gethin (Oxford, 1998).
  - This is a very solid survey of the development of Buddhist thought in India (and a few references beyond), which balances accessibility with depth and subtlety.