Buddhism Before the Theravada Part 2

- rebirth
  - Samsara
    - going round in circles
      - a qualitative phenomenological sense to our finding ourselves in the same place repeatedly
      - we're carrying the same stuff over
      - That is a sense of how we're reborn moment to moment.
    - The idea, obviously, is to get outside of that. Liberating yourself from carrying stuff over
    - Know we repeatedly end up in similar places. And this whole cycle will continue for the rest of your life. Unless you do something about it
      - There's the fatalism, if you like, to a degree. If you don't do something about it, it continues over. Continues again and again and again and again
      - there, if you like, is the impetus to do something about it
    - The consolation, if you like, is again, within this life, in that you could be free of that. Free of repetitive behavior.
  - 3 poisons (defilements)
    - lobha (greed)
      - infatuation with stuff
    - **moha (ignorance/confusion)**
      - our societies are confused and our parents were confused. And we end up being confused
      - this one is the backdrop against which the other two (and all the rest of our bad behaving) takes place.
    - dosa (hatred)
      - aversion to the stuff we're not infatuated with.
      - unless you can deal with these, then repetitive behavior is going to go on
  - Hear the teachings in whatever way is helpful.
    - There is the pragmatic philosophical sense which allows us to understand what is happening in this life without getting metaphysical and has the consolation that we can change in this life.
    - and there's the traditional version, metaphysical consolation, going from life to life to life. And if that's helpful, well then, use it.
      - ?
      - I'm not sure I'm completely on board with this. It feels like delusion.
  - another version of empirical rebirth here: is that your stuff goes on even after you're dead
    - your effect on people
    - your physical garbage
    - the wake you leave in the world. emotional/interpersonal, environmental, etc.
- bhavana is cultivate not meditate.
- **mis-translations**
  - **Heidegger: engage in a destructive retrieve**
    - when we start to look look at these early texts in this much more dynamic way
    - something that Heidegger says he does to the history of Western philosophy
      - never thought I'd say I was doing something Heidegger did.
      - my philosophy dean would be thrilled.
    - You have to destroy the tradition in order to retrieve what the tradition has cut out.
    - **it is trying to retrieve those gold nuggets which are there in those early texts, which get so lost within this orthodoxy which we can so easily sign up to, and lose our, in a sense, our investigative capacities here**
      - **keep alive your investigative capacity, your capacity to engage with these texts. They will reward you if you engage in this way.**
  - **we can get led into a religiosity simply by the language that we use, which isn't present in the early texts.**
    - I think the English word often blocks us from really really engaging with what the Buddha is saying.
  - Viññāna
    - usually translated simply as consciousness
    - which then neglects the more dynamic aspect of it which is thinking. This is consciousness and thinking. It's cognizance, in other words. …
  - **sankhara**
    - "volitional formations:
      - what the heck is that?
    - it's HABITS.
      - Could be bad habits could be good habits, but they're still habits.
      - unthinking, almost neural, pathways upon which the mind runs and constantly reproduce themselves in various activities and engagements
  - **nibbana**
    - it's a verb
      - it's what's classed as in-intransitive verb in Pāli. It means it doesn't move from a subject to an object. It's an intransitive. So, it's actually, literally means "gone out". That's what it means. And it refers to the gone-out-ness of greed, infatuation, aversion, and confusion. Those have literally gone out. They cease to be the flaming forces behind your behavior.
    - not a Buddhist heaven.
  - **Samsara**
    - going round in circles
      - it's a verb.
  - avijja
    - not-knowing.
      - [it's] not just not knowing, it's not wanting to know. It has that as it's major context: not wanting to know. It's not-vijjā, not knowing. Not wanting to know within it. Confusion. It also has that connotation of confusion within it.
  - **dukkha**
    - I want to talk about how I mis-translated this one in the last episode and the drive behind that.
      - maybe use this as an opportunity to talk about the three poisons - aversion and ignorance on that one.
  - monastery
    - vihara
      - [Vihāra is] literally a dwelling place.
  - monks/nuns
    - bhikkhu/bhikkhuni
      - Bhikkhu means basically, beggar or sharer. Now, literally it means, at the most basic level it can mean beggar, one who begs. But one who begs and also then shares what they have gained as food.
      - they also share the dharma
- **meta**
  - **respond to comments from listeners**
    - **jeff's version of the intro, please...**
    - an introduction of john peacock; the fact is i'm interested in the talk, not john peacock as a person.
      - maybe apologize to peacock for not knowing much about him, but there's no wikipedia page and i think he'd be pleased to know we are more focused on the content of the talk than of the person providing the content.
    - **speak more slowly.**
  - this talk is shorter. only 45 minutes.
  - maybe talk about how dharma talks are not efficient like talks today; i'm trying to reframe the talk a bit to cover the parts i think are particularly important.
    - Part 1 was 96 minutes of material. i'm not interested in cliff notes, and expounding on every point he made would be enough for 15 podcast episodes. it's a long game. :)
    - zen talks.
  - I'd like to talk about dukkha as negativity bias.
    - and what it was like to say something and then, hearing myself say it, realize I don't believe it's true.
  - maybe talk about the fact that folks should listen to the talk, this is an exploration between jeff and i of what i thought was most helpful to discuss with him, not a cliff notes of the talk.
    - we might do one entire episode on translation issues that peacock brings up across the series.
  - people wanted more details about etymology, etc. we need to be careful because it's really easy to get into the weeds about that stuff. I love doing that, but ultimately the point is human flourishing. not nit-picking. not even, frankly, not even having fun.
    - seekers have been pulled down the same rabbit holes for 2500 years. I'm not interested in beating long-dead horses.
    - the abidharma texts were written by people who'd fallen down rabbit holes. dancing on the heads of pins, as it were.
      - they were worried about creating coherent philosophical systems. G was not, and I am not, worried about that.
        - situational ethics.
        - I'm worried about negativity bias and how to live the good life.
    - I do hope to explore details later, like why are there more rules for nuns than monks? but we're just in the beginning of the conversation and it's maybe helpful to establish ground.
- From last time
  - G is not creating a religion but rather a philosophy of human flourishing
    - "I can only admit this for myself to you, which is: what I'm interested in is actually not religion, but I'm interested in what is there as a teaching which can help us directly."
    - Theravāda is a religious position
      - that's not to say it's a bad religious position. It's not to say it's a good religious position. It's a religious position. It's a position and a reading of the early texts in a very particular way. It's a very selective reading of the early texts. Primarily by this figure called Buddhaghosa in the fifth century, who then writes that massive doctrinal foundation for Theravāda, the Visuddhimagga
      - what I'm trying to get you to hear is that it is an orthodoxy. There are certain things that you subscribe to as a Theravādan. Which are not necessarily there within those early strata of texts
  - Gotama as a social critic (he engaged with his culture and we should engage with ours)
    - just like jesus was a social critic
    - there were attempts on his life
    - (he was a radical figure, articulated in part 1)
    - he had to play politics carefully.
    - the story with the brahmins and throwing water.
    - He's finding a middle way between the household life of the brahmins and the asceticism of the jains.
      - side note - jains are naked philosophers that alexander the great came across when he conquered parts of india.
      - the household life can be stultifying to awakening
      - people want to renounce, but he says I will make you completely dependent on society. so he doesn't let people just leave society. they have to engage with it.
- **ethics**
  - **defining ethics**
    - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics
  - **this is why mindfulness was not enough for me. I didn't know it at first, but I do now.**
    - this idea of having a mindful sniper. maybe. but you cannot have an ethical sniper. a dharma practitioner cannot be a sniper.
      - side note: they can be a non-violent protester.
      - Buddhaghosa, says that even your meditation practices, if they're not rooted in ethics, are groundless.
        - ?
        - what does that mean?
      - **I don't know, jf, if this is something you've heard, but it's something that I've heard.**
    - I had a hard time defining mindfulness when i started teaching. there is JKZ's standard definition, but like the intro to this podcast, it doesn't resonate for most folks.
      - i had forgotten this was in this talk until i listened to it again in preparation for this podcast. it was very helpful to hear now that I've come farther in my understanding/practice.
    - "this is falling short in Western dharma circles. "
    - i've commented abut this before with other mbsr teachers; one in particular was adamant that ethics (metta) is implicit in all the teachings.
      - that's fine, but i'm not into implicit teachings. i prefer explicit.
        - and the people that I want to reach are the same way.
        - they don't teach metta, friendliness meditation, until week X. (The all-day retreat?) everyone in my classes now says they wished it was taught earlier. and they ask for it in every session. twice a week.
  - look at your behavior. Look at your thinking behind your behavior. Look at intention behind that. This is all coming out from an early study of the text. He's putting ethics at the forefront of this.
  - **The Dharma is rooted in ethics. That is where it's rooted. It's rooted in that practice of everydayness. How you're acting every day.**
  - **the precepts, I often find very mistranslated**
    - **curtailed. Shortened. The sting, the radicality of what the Buddha is even proposing in the precepts, taken out of them.**
    - list the precepts?
    - they are rules of training, not commandments.
    - don't kill
      - **"A rule of training, a rule of training to refrain from harming living beings. Far more interesting than "don't kill". Isn't it? I can actually engage with that. The other one just tells me: Don't do it. Whereas to refrain from harming living things means to actually engage in an inquiry into all my relationships of harm. Including harm to yourself."**
    - the third precept is an interesting one because it's usually just translated: don't engage in sexual misconduct
      - Yet actually, again, is mis-translated. It's actually, the word, one of the words within the whole phrase is "kāmesu", which is "sensual" indulgence. It's saying, "I engage in a rule of trying to refrain from sensual and sexual misconduct. So this is how you abuse your senses. We have multifarious ways, far more than in ancient India, engage in sensual misconduct, misuse and overuse of the senses
    - Reflect on the precepts on a regular basis in your daily life. Because they are the bedrock upon which the rest of the inquiry, which is the way I see this path of the Buddha, is giving us in the early texts.