

# Dharma Drum Mountain Toronto: Selected Readings from the *Samyukta Āgama*

Lecture 1 | March 7, 2026

Lecturer: Venerable Chang Yuan

## I. Course Theme and Significance

This course takes the *Samyukta Āgama* (Saṃyutta Nikāya) as the primary text for guided study. The *Samyukta Āgama* is one of the most important early Buddhist scriptures. It consists of a collection of short suttas. Although it is varied in form, it constitutes the very foundation of Buddhist practice.

Course Theme:

Departure: A Compassionate and Mindful Journey to Freedom

“Departure” implies an active, forward-moving force—like an airplane that, once airborne, can only move ahead and cannot stop or retreat. Learning the Dharma should similarly be a power that propels our lives continually forward, not merely an accumulation of knowledge.

The journey is driven by two central forces:

1. Compassion—starting from a heart of loving-kindness, caring for oneself and others.
2. Mindfulness and non-negligence—remaining awake and attentive in both life and practice, cultivating a freer and more peaceful existence.

## II. Why Study the *Samyukta Āgama*

The *Samyukta Āgama* is the very root of Buddhist cultivation, like the deep, unseen roots of a great tree that nourish all its branches and leaves—serving as the source of nutrients for all Mahayana scriptures. Even practitioners who have studied a wide range of teachings often return to this original and fundamental collection.

Three main reasons for choosing this text:

1. Authenticity: It is one of the closest records to the Buddha’s own words, compiled by five hundred great arahants after his parinirvāṇa.
2. Doctrinal Core: It embodies the essential Dharma seals—**The Three Dharma Seals (Three Marks of Existence)**:  
All phenomena are impermanent  
No phenomenon has a self  
Nirvana is Quiescence / Nirvana is Peace
3. Foundational Teachings: It covers core frameworks such as the Five Aggregates, Dependent Origination, the Four Noble Truths, and the Thirty-seven Factors of Enlightenment.

The course emphasizes “Integration of Understanding and Practice”—knowledge and cultivation must progress together.

### **III. The Buddha’s Story and His Inner World**

#### **(1) Historical Context**

Prince Siddhartha was born about 2,500 years ago in ancient India. His father, King Śuddhodana, ruled Kapilavastu, a small kingdom living cautiously among powerful neighbors. At that time, the Aryan peoples had migrated into India and established various states. The society was pervaded by the caste hierarchy and a harsh law of the strong dominating the weak.

#### **(2) Childhood and Growth**

Siddhartha’s mother, Queen Māyā, passed away shortly after his birth, and he was raised by her sister, Mahāprajāpatī. A Brahmin sage named Asita predicted that the child would become either a Universal Monarch or a Buddha. The old seer wept—knowing he would not live long enough to hear the Buddha’s teaching.

Gifted from a young age, Siddhartha mastered arts and letters by the age of seven, and martial training by the time he was twelve. Yet his achievements failed to satisfy him. Deep inside, he sensed an unfulfilled yearning to uncover the truth of life.

#### **(3) The Four Sights and the Birth of Renunciation**

On several outings, Siddhartha encountered the realities of old age, sickness, and death. He also developed the serene demeanor of a wandering ascetic. He saw insects devoured in the fields and farmers labouring endlessly recognizing the suffering and injustice of the world. Compassion arose within him, along with the resolve to find a way to free all beings from suffering.

King Śuddhodana, fearing the prince might renounce the world, surrounded him with pleasures—music, dancers, jewels, and wealth—and even sealed the city gates. Yet none of these could sway Siddhartha’s determination.

#### **(4) The Great Renunciation**

One day, hearing an ascetic explain the reason for renunciation, he was deeply moved. The ascetic said, “Precisely because family ties, emotions, and social obligations bind us, true cultivation is impossible; thus, I choose to leave them.”

“Renunciation,” Siddhartha realized, “is not an escape—it is liberation from the inner fetters that obscure the truth of life.”

That night, he awakened his attendant, Channa, and departed the city at midnight. It is said that celestial beings lifted his horse over the city walls in protection. Once outside, he shaved his head, sent Channa home with his horse and hair, and began the life of a mendicant.

News of the prince's departure shook the entire kingdom. The king was heartbroken and sent ministers to bring him back. They appealed to filial piety and parental love, but Siddhartha replied:

"I understand my father's grief, but the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death is far more dreadful. To resolve this great affliction, I must leave the comfort of home."

He compared his decision to food that, once vomited, cannot be swallowed again. Having seen his unshakable resolve, Siddhartha's ministers were moved. They gave up all attempts to change his mind. Five attendants, even followed him into ascetic practice. Later they became the Five *Bhikkhus*, who all attained arhatship?

### **(5) Six Years of Asceticism and the Middle Way**

After renunciation, Siddhartha practiced two major disciplines popular at the time: austerities and meditative absorptions.

The austerities included breath-holding, extreme fasting (one grain of barley a day), and physical torment to reduce attachment to desire. Yet he realized such severity only clouded the mind. It did not lead to wisdom.

He then studied under renowned meditation masters, and swiftly attained the highest levels of *jhāna* and *formless attainments*. Each of his teachers professed that he was their equal.

Soon he discerned that meditative bliss alone could not bring true liberation. Subtle selfhood remained, and the cycle of rebirth continued. He thus abandoned both extremes and chose the Middle Way—neither self-indulgence nor self-torture—cultivating wisdom and insight. Beneath the Bodhi tree, he finally awakened and attained liberation.

## **IV. The Five Aggregates and the Nature of "Self"**

To end suffering, one must first understand who suffers. That is, one must understand the nature of self.

Buddhism analyzes the "self" in terms of the "Five Aggregates", or five *skandhas*. These are form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

Form: The physical body, composed of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. The body's cells renew completely in about seven years. The "you" of before no longer exists now.

- Sensation: Sensations arising from contact—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—arise and cease moment by moment.
- Perception: Recognition and conceptualization. Like new versions of technology, our knowledge constantly updates. Old perceptions are replaced by new ones.
- Volition: Mental activities and intentions are constantly shifting. A single compassionate vow may falter once a person's circumstances change.
- Consciousness: Awareness and discernment constitute a continuous stream of change.

All five aggregates are impermanent, unstable, and uncontrollable. If a permanent “self” truly existed, we would be able to forbid our bodies from aging or falling ill. But clearly, we cannot. Thus, the “self” is merely a temporary convergence of conditions. It is like a tree that exists only because of a seed, water, sunlight, and soil.

### **Definition of “Living Beings” (*Samyukta Āgama* 122)**

The Buddha explained to the monk Rādha that a “living being” is one who clings and attaches to the five aggregates. A child may build a sandcastle, and cry when it washes away. Likewise, our suffering arises from our attachment to what is transient. We are trapped not by the world, but by our clinging to it.

When we release this clinging, we move toward liberation.

## **V. The Definition of Suffering**

The root of *dukkha* (suffering) lies in two aspects:

1. Imperfection: We seek lasting satisfaction, yet nothing conditioned is eternal: all is limited and flawed.
2. Oppression: We labour to preserve what we want to keep from changing. But when they inevitably alter, we feel crushed.

In essence, we suffer because we grasp at things that can never be permanently ours.

“All feelings are suffering.” (*Samyukta Āgama Sutta*, 473)

This *dukkha* does not refer merely to emotional pain but to the inherent instability of all experience. All feelings are impermanent and unreliable in nature.

The Buddha compared the body to foam, and feelings to bubbles in water: they are momentary and vanishing. Where, then, is a lasting “self”?

## **VI. Summary of This Lecture**

This first lecture explored the course theme of the *Samyukta Āgama* as one of the most important early Buddhist scriptures. It addresses the choice of scripture, the Buddha’s renunciation story, the analysis of the Five Aggregates, and the definition of suffering. The core insights are:

1. The Dharma is not an accumulation of knowledge but a living power of practice that propels life forward.
2. The root of cultivation is to establish Right View and embody it in daily life.
3. The “self” is a temporary aggregate of conditions. Attachment to it is the cause of suffering.
4. To let go of attachment is to embark upon the path to freedom.

In the next class, we will discuss the three forms of suffering: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering inherent in formation. We will also learn how to observe the changing nature of the Five Aggregates in daily life.

## 《雜阿含經》導讀課程

第一堂課 | 2026年3月7日

主講: 常源法師

### 一、課程主題與意義

本課程選讀《雜阿含經》作為導讀教材。《雜阿含經》是一部非常重要的早期佛教經典，內容以短篇經文累積而成，形式雖「雜」，卻是整個佛法修行的根基。

課程主題為：

*Departure: A Compassionate and Mindful Journey to Freedom*

「啟程」(Departure)意指一個主動出發、往前走的力量。就如飛機起飛後只能向前，不能停止也不能後退。我們學習佛法，也應是帶動整個生命不斷前進的力量，而不只是知識上的累積。

推動這段旅程的核心力量有兩個：

第一是慈悲心——以慈悲為出發點，關懷自己與他人；第二是正念不放逸——在生活與修行中保持清醒，累積自在的人生。

### 二、為何選讀《雜阿含經》

《雜阿含經》是修行的根本基礎，就如同一棵大樹深埋地下的根系——它滋養所有枝葉，是一切大乘經典的養分來源。即使許多修行者廣學各種經典，最終也會回頭閱讀這部原始的根本經典。

選讀此經的主要原因有三：

其一，它是最接近佛陀親口所說的紀錄，由五百位大阿羅漢於佛陀涅槃後結集而成；其二，它包含修行的核心法印——三法印（諸行無常、諸法無我、涅槃寂靜）；其三，它涵蓋五蘊、緣起、四聖諦、三十七道品等修行基礎。

本課程的學習主軸是「解行並重」——從理解到實踐，知見與修行必須同步並進。

### 三、佛陀的故事與內心世界

## (一) 時代背景

悉達多太子出生於距今約二千五百年前的古印度，其父淨飯王統治著迦毗羅衛國——一個夾在列強之間、戰戰兢兢的小國。當時，雅利安民族從東北方遷入印度，建立了各個大小王國，社會充斥著不平等的種姓制度與弱肉強食的現實。

## (二) 童年與成長

悉達多出生後，母親摩耶夫人隨即離世，由姨母摩訶波闍波提撫養成人。婆羅門智者阿私陀為其相命，預言他未來必成「轉輪聖王」或「佛陀」，令年邁的智者當場落淚，遺憾自己恐怕無緣聽聞其教法。

悉達多自幼聰慧過人，七歲學習文藝，十二歲習武，文武雙全，各項才藝一學即精。然而，這些成就並未讓他感到滿足——他的內心一直有一種隱隱的探索欲，感到生命的真相還未找到。

## (三) 出城四門·萌生出離心

悉達多數度出城，見到了老、病、死的真實景象，以及修行沙門的清淨形象。他看到農田中蟲被啄食、農夫辛苦勞作，深感現實世界的的不平等與苦難，心中燃起了悲憫之情，決意尋找解救眾生的方法。

淨飯王深知太子可能出家，百般安排美女歌舞、珠寶財富，試圖留住他的心；甚至封鎖城門，不讓他外出。然而，這一切都未能動搖悉達多的意志。

## (四) 毅然出家

悉達多在聽了沙門講述出家理由後，深受觸動——沙門說：「正因為家庭、情感與社會的種種束縛，讓人無法真正修行，所以我才選擇出離。」

「出離不是逃避，而是出離內心的束縛，去解決生命真相的探索。」

他喚醒隨從車匿，深夜出走。傳說中，天神護持，將他馬匹托舉出城。離城後，他剃髮出家，將馬匹與頭髮託付車匿帶回。

太子出家的消息震動整個國家。淨飯王悲痛欲絕，派遣大臣追回太子。大臣以父子情深、孝道倫常動之以情，而悉達多回應：

「我知道父王的悲哀，但生老病死的大患更為恐怖。為了解決這個根本問題，我不得不暫別父母的情愛。」

他以「吐出的食物不能再吞回去」為比喻，堅定表明：他已離開那座迷惘之城，不願再重回火宅。兩位大臣深受感動，無法勸回；其中五位隨從則跟隨他一同修道，即後來的五比丘，最終皆證阿羅漢。

## (五) 六年苦行與轉向中道

出家後，悉達多先後嘗試了當時流行的兩種修行：苦行與禪定。

苦行包括閉氣、斷食（一天只吃一粒麥子）、各種身體折磨，目的是減少欲望。然而，佛陀發現苦行讓心智昏昧，無法帶來真正的智慧與解脫。

隨後，他轉而跟隨各位禪定師學習，迅速達到四禪八定乃至空無想定的最高境界，但每位老師都說：「你已與我齊平。」他察覺禪定之樂同樣無法究竟解脫，因為仍有「自我」未斷，輪迴依然存在。

於是，他捨棄兩個極端，選擇了「中道」(Middle Way)——不苦不樂，以智慧觀察，最終在菩提樹下覺悟解脫。

## 四、五蘊與「我」的本質

要解決苦，必須先了解「是誰在受苦」——這就是要認識「自我」的本質。

佛法以五蘊（色、受、想、行、識）來分析所謂的「我」：

色 (Rūpa)：物質身體，包括皮膚、骨骼、四大（地水火風）。身體七年後細胞全然更新，早已不是原來那個你。

受 (Vedanā)：接觸外境所生的感受——苦受、樂受、捨受，剎那生滅，從未停止變化。

想 (Saññā)：認知與概念。從iPhone 15到16到17，知識不斷更新，舊有的認知隨時被新的取代。

行 (Saṅkhāra)：意志與行為，隨時動搖。一個發心要幫忙的承諾，往往因外境一變就動搖了。

識 (Viññāṇa)：了別與判斷，亦是不斷變化的意識流。

五蘊的共同特徵是：無常、不穩定、不可控。若「我」真實存在，我們應該能控制身體不生病、不衰老；但顯然不能。因此，「我」只是一個由眾多因緣暫時組合而成的存在，如同一棵樹，需要種子、水、陽光、土壤共同成就，缺一即不存在。

### 「眾生」的定義（第122經）

佛陀以比丘羅陀為問者，解釋「眾生」的含義：所謂眾生，就是對五蘊產生強烈攀緣、依戀不放的人。就像小孩子在沙灘上堆起沙堡，愛著它，一旦被浪打散就哭泣——我們對五蘊的執著，正是如此。

「We are trapped not by the world, but by our clinging to it (困住我們的，不是外在的世界，而是我們對這個世界如膠似漆的執迷)。」

只要放下這個執迷，我們就能走向解脫。

## 五、苦的定義

苦(Dukkha)的根源來自兩個層面：

第一，不圓滿(Imperfection)：我們渴望永恆的滿足，但世間沒有任何事物能帶來永恆的滿足；凡是有條件的存在，都有其限制與缺陷。

第二，逼迫感(Oppression)：我們努力維持自以為不變的東西，一旦它被破壞，就產生難以承受的壓力。

因此，苦的核心邏輯是：我們拼命抓住那些注定無法永恆擁有的事物，才產生了痛苦。

「凡所有受，皆是苦。」(《雜阿含經》第473經)

這裡的苦，並非指令人悲哀的苦，而是因為一切感受都是無常、變化、無法依賴的，所以本質上是苦的。

佛陀的比喻：觀察身體如泡沫，觀察感受如水泡——一剎那即消逝，哪裡有一個永恆的「我」可以依靠？

## 六、本堂課小結

本堂課從課程主題、經典選擇、佛陀出家故事，一路探索到五蘊的組成與苦的定義。核心訊息如下：

第一，佛法不是知識的累積，而是帶動生命前進的實踐力量；第二，修行的根基在於建立正確知見(Right View)，並在生活中落實；第三，「我」是因緣合和的暫時組合，執著於它才是苦的根源；第四，放下執著，才能走向解脫。

下堂課將繼續討論「苦的三種形態」(苦苦、壞苦、行苦)，以及如何在日常生活中觀察五蘊的變化。