

# Theravada & Mahayana Buddhism



Gotama or Sekkyamnuni Buddha

**Introduction** –**Theravada - Buddhism** emphasizes on the Bhikkhu's (Sangha) are the only ones capable of attaining Arahant. The laity supports them in the hope of receiving a favorable rebirth, like Sotapanna and Cula Sotappana.

b. **Mahayana encourages** both the laity as well as the Bhikkhu & Bikkhuni (Sangha) to become **Bodhisattas**. The laity is also capable of attaining Enlightenment as householders. The **Vimalakirti Nidesa Sutra** is centered on concept of the enlightened householder.

Several hundred years after Gotama Buddha's death, the Sanghas became divided. This was because the original Teaching - determined by a council of Buddhist monks that **catered only to those who renounced the world and spent their time in meditation**. Another group of monks recognized the need for a new formulation of the Dharma to accommodate ordinary laymen - householders.

This brought about the split of The Order Of Monks. The group who retained the original Teaching was called Sthaviravadins (later **Theravadins**). The group who reconstructed Buddhism became known as the Mahasanghikas (later **Mahayanas**).

In reality, there is practically no difference at all between the two doctrines. Religion is for the benefit of mankind, and thus adjusted to suit the living conditions of the people.

The table shows the subtle differences:

# Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism

<b>THERAVADA Southern School</b>	<b>MAHAYANA Northern School</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Teaching of the Elders</b>	<b>The Great Vehicle</b>	<b>Identifying name</b>
<b>Gotama Buddha and 24 passed Buddhas</b>	<b>Gotama Buddha and Bodhisattas and Arahants and Deities</b>	<b>Both accept – Gotama as Supreme Teacher</b>
Bodhisatta – <b>Mettreyya</b> is accepted	<b>Avalokitesvara, Mansjuri, Ksitigarbha and Samanthabadra</b> are four very well known bodhisattvas besides <b>Maitreya</b>	Theravada is restricted to self purification for Arahantship slightly different from the Bodhisatta ideal to save the sentient beings as well.
Aim is to achieve <b>Arahant Ideal</b> , or <b>pacceka-buddha</b> . (total reliance on one-self)	Aim is to achieve <b>bodhisattva</b> Ideal. <b>Buddhahood</b> (via bodhisatta path). To strive for oneself as well as for others.	<b>Theravada</b> strictly caters to those who renounced the world – Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni <b>Mahayana</b> caters to the laities who are striving their living in <b>mundane world</b> . <b>Arahant ideal is too difficult and is beyond the capabilities of ordinary people</b>
a. Aspire to achieve <b>Nirvana</b> , or b. Aspire to have a <b>better rebirth</b> in the next life.	a. Aspire to attain <b>Enlightenment</b> , or b. <b>rebirth in the Pure Land</b> (heaven).	There is land called – Pureland – <b>Sukhavati</b> where in resides – <b>Amitabha Buddha</b>
<b>Tipitaka – sacred Text in Pali</b>	<b>Tipitaka and Sacred texts are the Sanskrit Sutras</b>	<b>Mahayana accepts Tipitaka plus relevant suttas and discourses for laity.</b>
<b>The Four Noble Truths</b>	<b>The Four Noble Truths</b>	<b>Both accept the Four Noble Truths.</b>
a. <b>The truth of suffering</b> b. <b>The cause of suffering</b> c. <b>Annihilation of Suffering</b> d. <b>The path leading to the cessation of suffering</b>	e. <b>The truth of suffering</b> f. <b>The cause of suffering</b> g. <b>Annihilation of Suffering</b> h. <b>The path leading to the cessation of suffering</b>	
Accept: <b>Paticca-samuppada</b> or the <b>Dependent Organization</b>	Accept: <b>Paticca-samuppada</b> or the <b>Dependent Organization</b>	<b>Both accept - The law os the dependent Origination Paticca-samuppada or the Dependent Organization</b>
Believes that the Buddha has <b>2 Bodies</b> a. <b>human being</b> and b. <b>consciousness.</b>	Believes that the Buddha has <b>3 Bodies - Trikaya :</b> a. <b>Gautama Buddha</b> b. <b>a holder of the Dharma</b> and c. <b>a deity</b>	

<b>Reject the creation of the world by the Supreme being</b>	<b>Reject the creation of the world by the Supreme being</b>	<b>Both reject the idea of one supreme being creates the world.</b>
<b>Follows the Noble 8 Fold Path –</b> 1. Right Understanding <b>Panna</b> 2. Right Thought <b>Paññā</b> 3. Right speech <b>Sila</b> 4. Right Action <b>Group</b> 5. Right Livelihood 6. Right Effort <b>Samadhi</b> 7. Right mindfulness <b>Group</b> 8. Right Concentration	<b>Follows the 6 Paramitas –</b> 1. Right Understanding <b>Panna</b> 2. Right Thought <b>Paññā</b> 3. Right speech <b>Sila</b> 4. Right Action <b>Group</b> 5. Right Livelihood 6. Right Effort <b>Samadhi</b> 7. Right mindfulness <b>Group</b> 8. Right Concentration	Both accept – Noble Eightfold Path.
<b>Accept to follow::</b> <b>Anicca, Dukha &amp; Anatta</b>	<b>Accept to follow:</b> <b>Anicca, Dukha &amp; Anatta</b>	<b>Both accept the law of existence</b>
<b>Goal is to achieve – Buddha hood or pacceka-buddha</b>	<b>Goal is to achieve Arahant hood</b> <b>Save yourself as well as others</b>	<b>Gotama Buddha took a period of 1500 Buddhas and another 24 Buddhas to fulfill the ten paramis. It is beyond ordinary's.</b>
<b>Prevalent religion in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar etc.</b>	<b>Prevalent religion in China, Tibet, Korea, Japan etc.</b>	<b>Buddhism is a dynamic religion</b>
<b>Tharavadin – worship –only Buddha and no Gods (devas or Brahmans Deities)</b>	<b>Mayahanaist – worship – Deities – Bodhisattas and Gods-Devas and Brahmans</b>	<b>Brahmanism is assimilated to Mahayanist belief.</b>

## Local Influence on Practices in Myanmar

<b>Theravada Practice in (Myanmar)</b>	<b>Mahayana Practice in Other Countries</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>In Principle – worship Sekkyamuni Buddha</b>	<b>Worship Sekkyamuni Buddha Bodhisattas and Deities</b>	Mahayana caters to laity for their mundane life; while Theravada caters to Monks already renounced the world and practicing meditation in seclusion.
<b>To gain mundane benefits, some Myanmar also worship popular deities:</b> <b>Sivali Maha Thera (Shin Thi Wa Li)</b> <b>Upagota Maha Thera (Shin Upagote)</b> <b>Sakka (Indra)</b> <b>Tuyatadi Mae Daw (Sarawasti)</b> <b>Naga Mae Daw</b>	<b>Amithaba Buddha (Namo O-Mi-To-Foo)</b> <b>Yao Shih P'usa - Bhaisajyaguru Buddha (Medicine Buddha)</b> <b>Kuan Shih Yin P'usa - Avalokiteshvara (Namo Kuan Shih Yin P'usa)</b> <b>OM MANI PADME HUM</b>	Theravada in principle worships only Gotama Buddha. However, traditional Myanmar Buddhist also worship deities brought over from Brahmanism – 1. Shin Thi Wali – Wealth and abundance 2. Shin Upagote – Protection 3. Tuyatadi – wisdom & knowledge

<p><b>The Nine Gods - Phya Ko Zu –</b></p> <p><b>Buddha</b></p> <p><b>Rahula</b></p> <p><b>Kondana</b></p> <p><b>Revata</b></p> <p><b>Magallana</b></p> <p><b>Sariputta</b></p> <p><b>Gavampati</b></p> <p><b>Ananda</b></p> <p><b>Upali</b></p> <p><b>Revata – patron Saint of alchemist &amp; Gavampati the patron Saint of Mon and Pyu</b></p>	<p><b><u>WEN-SHU-SHIH LI P'USA</u>: Manjushri Bodhisattva</b></p> <p><b><u>PU HSIEN P'USA</u>: Samantabhadra Bodhisattva</b></p> <p><b><u>TI-TSANG WANG P'USA</u>: Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva</b></p> <p><b><u>Mi-LO FWO</u>: Maitreya Buddha</b></p>	<p><b>Theravadins for Mundane benefits do their offerings to the Hindu deities – like 9 Gods ceremony.</b></p> <p><b>Mahayanist worship all deities brought over from Brahmanism</b></p>
<p><b>The Five Deities Gods and Goddesses</b></p> <p><b>Tuyatadi (Sarawasti) consort of Brahma</b></p> <p><b>Sandi (Chandi) Consort of Shiva</b></p> <p><b>Paramaythwa (Siva)</b></p> <p><b>Maha Peinne(Ganesh)</b></p> <p><b>Peiktano or Gawra-manta (Vishnu)</b></p>	<p><b><u>KUAN TI</u>: (Sangharama) Protector of Buddhism</b></p> <p><b><u>WEL-TO</u>: (Skanda) Protector of the Dharma</b></p> <p><b>Devas of the Four Kings</b></p> <p><b><u>MO-LI CHING</u>: Guardian of East</b></p> <p><b><u>MO-LI HAI</u>: Guardian of West</b></p> <p><b><u>MO-LI SHOU</u>: Guardian of North</b></p> <p><b><u>MO-LI HUNG</u>: Guardian of South</b></p>	<p><b>In Myanmar – Theravadin popularly worship Sakka (Indra) and Tuyatadi (Sarawasti)</b></p> <p><b>Man by nature must strive to achieve mundane benefits as well as lokutara benefits before Nibbana</b></p>
<p><b>The King of Gods – Sakka – Thagyarmin</b></p> <p><b>On new year</b></p>	<p><b>All deities from Brahmanism</b></p> <p><b>18 Lohans (Arahants from Buddhist Scripture)</b></p>	<p><b>Local tradition has Sakka as the head of the 37 terrestrial Devas</b></p>
<p><b>Monks worship: -</b></p> <p>a. Buddha is restricted to Monks in meditation</p> <p>b. Monks recite – Paritta – to invoke helps from Deities (see 11 Parittas and Mahasamaya suttas)</p> <p><b>Laity worship:</b></p> <p>a. Some laities - Buddhas only</p> <p>b. Some laities – Buddha and all Deities assimilated from Brahmanism.</p>	<p><b>Both Monks and Laity worship the same Buddhas, Bodhisattas and Deities.</b></p>	<p><b>In Myanmar though, Monk in principle worship Buddha, when they recite parittas, they also invoke for helps from the deities.</b></p> <p><b>In merits sharing, they must invite all deities to accept the merit sharing.</b></p> <p><b>Parittas are all composed to gain blessings from Deities.</b></p> <p><b>Mahasamaya suttas is a who's is who in the Deva world.</b></p>
<p><b>Buddha said in the Dhammapada verse 109 : "By respecting and honoring the elders and those who are wise and virtuous, one would gain not only longevity, but also beauty, happiness and strength." This story depicts the 9 Gods ceremony (Phya Ko Zu) and how an individual could be saved from death if protected by Gods.</b></p>		

- References : 1. The Nine Gods – by Dr. Htin Aung
2. Buddhnet – Deities and Bodhisattas.

## Appendix – A

### Dhammapada Verse 109

#### The Story of Ayuvaddhanakumara

**Introduction** – Even though Theravadin Bhikkhu says they don't worship deities, when it comes to partitas they will ask for helps from Deities on their entire Parittas recital. See this Dhammapada stories that illustrates why Monks recite partitas to save the life of a boy who is destined to die in seven days.

While residing in a village monastery near Dighalangkha., the Buddha uttered Verse (109) of this book, with reference to Ayuvaddhanakumara.

Once, there were two hermits who fixed together practicing religious austerities (*tapacaranam*) for forty eight years. Later, one of the two left the hermit life and got married. After a son was born, the family visited the old hermit and paid obeisance to him. To the parents the hermit said, "May you live long," but he said nothing to the child. The parents were puzzled and asked the hermit the reason for his silence. The hermit told them that the child would live only seven more days and that he did not know how to prevent his death, but Gotama Buddha might know how to do it.

So the parents took the child to the Buddha; when they paid obeisance to the Buddha, he also said, "May you live long" to the parents only and not to the child. The Buddha also predicted the impending death of the child. To prevent his death, the parents were told to build a pavilion at the entrance to the house, and put the child on a couch in the pavilion. Then some bhikkhus were sent there to recite the *parittas*\* for seven days. On the seventh day the Buddha himself came to that pavilion; the devas from all over the universe also came. At that time the ogre Avaruddhaka was at the entrance, waiting for a chance to take the child away. But as more powerful devas arrived the ogre had to step back and make room for them so that he had to stay at a place two yojanas away from the child. That whole night, recitation of parittas continued, thus protecting the child. The next day, the child was taken up from the couch and made to pay obeisance to the Buddha. This time, the Buddha said, "May you live long" to the child. When asked how long the child would live, the Buddha replied that he would live up to one hundred and twenty years. So the child was named Ayuvaddhana.

When the child grew up, he went about the country with a company of five hundred fellow devotees. One day, they came to the Jetavana monastery, and the bhikkhus, recognizing him, asked the Buddha, "For beings is there any means of gaining longevity?" To this question the Buddha answered, "By respecting and honoring the elders and those who are wise and virtuous, one would gain not only longevity, but also beauty, happiness and strength."

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

**Verse 109.** For one who always respects and honors those who are older and more virtuous, four benefits, viz., longevity, beauty, happiness and strength, will increase

**At the end of the discourse, Ayuvaddhana and his five hundred companions attained Sotapatti Fruition.**

**\* *Parittas*: religious stanzas that are usually recited for protection against harmful influences.**

**Note - This story is taken from Dhammapada Pali Sutta Pitaka from Theravada Suttas. Here the story depicts how the boy was saved from death as predicted by in his destiny but was saved from imminent death by the deities after monks recited the partitas invoking for deities'partitas.**

**Man by nature must live to gain both **mundane** (Loke) and supramundane (Lokuttara) benefit. People adapt and adjust to suit in order to gain both types of benefits.**