

Epicurus and Buddhism: The Pursuit of Tranquility and Happiness

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This outline explores the parallels between **Epicurus' philosophy and Buddhism**, focusing on how both traditions advocate for a **simple, mindful, and contented life** free from unnecessary desires. Despite being commonly misunderstood as a hedonist, Epicurus (341 – 270 BCE) actually taught that true happiness comes from **inner tranquility (ataraxia)** rather than indulgence. Similarly, Buddhism emphasizes **freedom from craving (tanha)** as the key to overcoming suffering.

1. Epicurus on Happiness and the Role of Pleasure

Pleasure as the Goal: For Epicurus, the ultimate goal of life is **happiness (eudaimonia)**, achieved through **pleasure (hedone)**. However, **true pleasure** is not about indulgence but about the **absence of pain (aponia)** from mental distress, especially anxiety.

- **Two Types of Pleasure:**
- - **Kinetic Pleasures:** Short-lived, active sensual pleasures (e.g., eating, drinking, entertainment, sex).
 - **Katastematic Pleasures:** Lasting, passive pleasures (e.g., peace of mind, good health, friendship).
- **True happiness comes from simplicity, self-sufficiency, and rational thought.**
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- **Comparison to Buddhism:**
 - Both philosophies emphasize **the mind's role in shaping happiness** rather than external wealth or power.
 - Similar to **Buddhism's Middle Way**, Epicurus promoted **moderation and simplicity** as the path to happiness.
 - The **Middle Way** similarly teaches that neither indulgence nor extreme asceticism leads to happiness.
 - **The Four Noble Truths** state that suffering arises from craving (tanha), and true happiness comes from non-reactivity and letting go of attachments

2. Desire, Attachment, and Simplicity

- **Epicurus** categorized desires into three types:
 1. **Natural & Necessary:** Food, shelter, friendship—**essential for a good life.**
 2. **Natural but Unnecessary:** Luxuries, gourmet food—**pleasant but not needed.**
 3. **Unnatural & Unnecessary:** Wealth, fame, power—**socially conditioned and harmful.**
- **Buddhist Parallels:**
 - The Buddha also warned against **craving (tanha)** as the root of suffering.
 - Desires were divided between **wholesome desires** like knowledge, liberation, and ethical living and **unwholesome desires**, including greed, lust, and attachment to status or material wealth.
 - The goal of practice is to develop **contentment and wisdom** rather than chase fleeting pleasures.

3. Overcoming the Fear of Death

- **Epicurus' View:** "Death is nothing to us." Since we do not experience anything after death, there is no reason to fear it.
- The key is to live **fully in the present**, without anxiety over the future.
- **Buddhist Perspective:**
 - **The concept of anatta (non-self)** aligns with Epicurus' idea that there is no soul to suffer after death.
 - **Impermanence (anicca):** Accepting change and death leads to liberation from suffering.
 - **Mindfulness of death (maranasati)** is a practice to reduce attachment and increase appreciation for life.

4. The Importance of Friendship and Community

- **Epicurus: Friendship is the greatest source of happiness.** He encouraged living in small, supportive communities. He established the **Garden** community.
- **Epicurus's Garden** was not just a physical place where he and his followers lived but also a metaphor for a well-cultivated life of wisdom, friendship, moderation and contentment.
- **Buddhism:** The Buddha said, "Good friends are the whole of the spiritual life"
- The Sangha (**spiritual community**) is **one of the Three Jewels of Buddhism**—essential for deepening one's path.
- **True Friendship** involves **compassion, honesty, and encouragement on the path.**
- **Discussion:** How do meaningful relationships contribute to inner peace?

Reflection and Meditation

- **Guided Meditation on Simplicity & Contentment:**
 - Reflect on a moment of deep happiness that required nothing extravagant.
 - Visualize letting go of an unnecessary craving.
 - Cultivate gratitude for what is already present.

Discussion Questions

1. What unnecessary desires in your life cause stress? How can we manage them?
2. How do you define happiness—through pleasure, peace of mind, or something else?
3. How does accepting impermanence free us from anxiety?
4. What is one practical way you can apply Epicurus' or Buddhist teachings in your daily life?

Conclusion

Both Epicurus and Buddhism emphasize **moderation, inner peace, friendship, and reducing unnecessary suffering**. True pleasure and happiness do not come from **external excess** but from **wisdom, simplicity, and meaningful relationships**. Through meditation and mindfulness, we can cultivate a life that is both **joyful and free from unnecessary craving**.