Outline Lecture Four—The Path Out of Suffering: The Buddha

I) Existence as Source of Suffering
   a) The Rationale behind Buddhism’s “Pessimistic” Outlook
      i) What is the first sound that every newborn makes?
         (1) Samsara as a vicious cycle of suffering—not just between rebirths, but within each cycle of existence
      ii) Why is existence a cycle filled with suffering?
         (1) Suffering from a thirst, a craving we cannot assuage
             (a) The anxiety and stress of anticipation, of longing, of expectation
             (b) Any pleasure or satisfaction at best fleeting
         (2) Suffering from attachment to possessions, to persons, to life itself
   b) What then is Nirvana?
      i) Literally, it means “the total annihilation of existence”
      ii) Practically speaking, a state of mind beyond craving, beyond suffering

II) The Middle-Path between Extremes
   a) Path between Indulgence and Asceticism
   b) Avoidance of Extreme Stridency in Views
      i) Siddhartha’s respect for Indian tradition
         (1) Familial duties: Father, Yasodhara, the Sakyas
      ii) Traditional role of women in regards to religious cultivation
         (1) Mahaprajapati’s request along with 500 noble-women
         (2) Contentious acceptance of women into the Sangha
         (3) Compromise between full acceptance and exclusion
         (4) Eight Precepts for Nuns
   c) The Social Challenge of the Middle-Path
      i) Why did Buddhism fade in India merely 500 years after its founding?
      ii) Its slow cultivation of wisdom vs. the instant gratification and spectacle of ritual and sacrifice

III) Prajnaparamita—The Perfection of Wisdom
   a) The Jewel of Buddhism
      i) The “Diamond Sutra” and the “Heart Sutra”
   b) The Dialectic of Sunyata (Philosophical Paradox of Emptiness or Void)
      i) “Form is precisely emptiness, emptiness precisely form”
      ii) Meaning of “emptiness” through the metaphor of a “flowing stream”
         (1) What is the “appearance” of a flowing stream?
         (2) “Empty” of a permanent, and independent nature
         (3) Insisting on “emptiness” is not about negating existence
      iii) The five skandhas or aggregates/components of “self”
         (1) Form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness
         (2) Nagasena’s responses to King Menander
   c) What does all this have to do with suffering?
      i) Cultivating non-attachment to the five skandhas
         (1) Foremost, our habitual attachment or aversion to form
(2) Relate to the Law of Dependent Origination

ii) The Suffering of Patācārā
   (1) Her story reminiscent of Job
   (2) “Sister, regain awareness, acquire mindfulness”

iii) The plight of the “second arrow”

iv) Self-emancipation through wisdom
   (1) “All component things are perishable; work diligently on your own salvation”