

1. Intro: the Buddha's Teaching to Laypeople

1. When many of us come to a study of the early teachings of Buddhism, or indeed of Buddhism generally, we hit a stumbling block.
2. Most of the Buddha's teachings were directed towards monastics. And most of us do not want to become monastics.
3. Celibacy, not handling money, not having remunerative jobs, not being married or having children, renouncing ordinary forms of entertainment, including multiple meals a day.
4. We may (or we may not) understand that monastic renunciation can be a worthwhile practice, however we have jobs, income, and families, and have built lives in the world that we do not wish to give up.
5. We want to know: did the Buddha have anything to say to us?
6. The answer is that he did!
7. Indeed it's a mistake to think that the Buddha didn't care about laypeople. In a very real way lay support was — and remains — the base of the monastic saṅgha.
8. As well as being a teacher of profound wisdom for the committed renunciant community, the Buddha was a teacher of deep pragmatism for this lay community.
9. He wanted and needed this community to be healthy and wise.

10. Some of what he said will be common sense to us, but no less important to hear. Some of what he said will be very surprising, particularly from the person of the Buddha.
11. But all of what he said was complex and nuanced, not the sort of thing to be grasped at first hearing.
12. In this course I'll try to get across those nuances, those surprises, and that common sense.
13. We'll begin by looking at the Buddha's recommendations on work: how we were to evaluate work from an ethical perspective. We will see that the Buddha's recommendations here were somewhat complex and nuanced.
14. We'll then turn to money and wealth, and see how the Buddha felt that the prudent, balanced accumulation of wealth was one of the duties of the layperson.
15. We will even see that the Buddha had recommendations on allocating our personal finances, and on such things as debt.
16. After that we'll turn to one of the key uses of wealth for the layperson, the pursuit of pleasure. We'll see that the Buddha not only suggested that pleasure was one possible use of wealth, but indeed that it was one of the duties of the layperson to use their wealth for pleasure.
17. This recommendation rubs up against the general teaching of the early dharma that sense pleasures are a danger to be avoided.

18. This is one of the nuances of the teaching. To highlight this nuance we will look in detail at one sutta that points out the dangers of the pursuit of wealth and its associated sense pleasures. (A sutta study).
19. We will see why the Buddha considered lay life difficult and problematic, even dangerous.
20. In the last major section of the course we will turn from sutta study to four lectures on another early sutta that provides a number of integrated practices for the layperson, weaving together work, money, pleasure, and our relations to family, friends, co-workers and others.
21. This sutta will provide us a comprehensive picture of the right way for a layperson to live his or her life as a spiritual or ethical path towards the aim of integrity and social well-being.
22. This path is not independent of wisdom. In our last class we will turn finally to wisdom and how it can be pursued and attained from within a lay context.