

## Episode 1: Discovering Buddhism

**cat:** Hello everybody, and welcome to first episode of buddhapod! I'm Catherine.

**andrew:** And I'm Andrew. Today we will be introducing the podcast and talking about why we started this program, and then go into our background as buddhists.

**cat:** So Andrew, tell me about your first inspiration for this podcast.

**andrew:** Ok, let's put me on spot here sure. Haha

**cat:** It was your idea!

**andrew:** Yeah, it was my idea. This actually isn't my first podcast. I've done one before, but schedules ended up changing and that podcast ended up taking a really long break. But I was thinking about how podcasts are really accessible to a lot of people, and I wanted one especially focusing on younger buddhist voices and sharing this perspective, since we are both college students, and whatnot.

**cat:** Yeah for sure. I feel that college is the time where you really discover yourself and your faith and for instance on Facebook, I would see my friends from high school getting really intense about their faith in college or on the other side, they would just completely forget about it. So when you pitched me this idea for the podcast, I thought it would be really cool because I think some people in college are looking for something new. This podcast is a really good way to introduce people to Buddhism, and if they have an interest in this they don't have to go read the sutras because that's really hard. They can just listen to this and see if it's right for them.

**andrew:** Definitely. That reminds me of when I was first starting off as a young buddhist quite a few years ago, there weren't very many resources like this online. So I did start off reading the sutras, and that probably was not the best way to start. I remember it was because I was at a temple event and I was reading the Heart Sutra, which to me still doesn't make a lot of sense at some parts. I can't really say that I understand the full heart sutra but at that point I was just like these are just words going over my head. I have no idea what this is saying right now. So I think, things like these, like podcasts, video lectures, and even introductory books to Buddhism are more accessible to people and certainly help to guide them in.

**cat:** For sure! For those listening who don't know about the Heart Sutra, it is a very concise piece of buddhist scripture and it contains basically all of the Buddha's teachings. You can google it, and you're welcome to read it but it's definitely something not easily digestible. even tho its very short (it's one of the shortest sutras out there), so we might get to it some point, but for now I think talking about our personal experiences with Buddhism, how it has helped us, and what we've learned from it is a great place to start.

**andrew:** Definitely. Should we start with you, and how you got into Buddhism?

**cat:** Sure! so background on me: I was born in the US but as I was growing up, I lived in Taiwan and also China which were both predominantly buddhist countries, but I wasn't really buddhist then. I think my family had a statue of Guan Yin Bodhisattva, also known as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and that's one of the most famous buddhist figures in the whole world I would say. I

wouldn't even categorize my family as buddhist, they are probably just superstitious. They don't really know if you asked them what are the four noble truths, or what's the noble eightfold path. They wouldn't really know. So I grew up in that kind of environment where temples were a norm, and buddha statues were a norm, but I didn't really learn Buddhism. In my adolescent years I was actually a christian. I lived with different family friends, and they were christian, so I also went to church with them. When I went to bible study, I think I treated it more as a field of study or class. I didn't treat it as my faith per say. Then when I got into high school, I started going to the temple that I go to now. Even then I couldn't confidentially say that I was a buddhist, but being at the temple, just being around that environment, and also learning things form daily life, I think that's what made me a buddhist. I guess the biggest step that I took was last year when I was going into my junior year of college. I wanted to explore more about my faith and what Buddhism is all about so I went to Taiwan. I went to this monastery school where I was cut off from the outside world and just studied Buddhism, studying alongside nuns who just renounced to become buddhist nuns and were studying really hard. It gave me a taste of buddhist life, and it inspired me to do more and give back to the community that gave me so much. That's where I am at now. Being a buddhist in college has intensified my practice. It'ss really helped me a lot with personal issues, unexpected things, and life changes, but I am able to handle them better because of my buddhist practice.

**andrew:** Wow!

**cat:** Yeah that's me!

**andrew:** That' really cool.

**cat:** I mean, it's definitely where the conditions were so weird for me to have stumbled to the temple that I go to now. it's really fascinating and you can't really explain it in words, but I'm really glad that I'm able to come to this temple and that I had all the right conditions to be able to volunteer at the temple.

**andrew:** Definitely. We will get into talking about causes and conditions in a bit.

**cat:** For sure. what about you, Andrew?

**andrew:** Haha I should probably introduce myself too. We do share some similarites. My family also had a statue of Avalokiteśvara in our house too, but aside from that, there wasn't much Buddhism going on. It was sort of just a thing where we would go to the temple say maybe once or twice a year. It was never a big part of the family, but it was just present. I was also born in the US and I grew up my entire life in Portland, Oregon, so a small town, similar to Seattle in terms of weather. I started going to temple more out of curiosity after going to some celebrations for the Lunar New Year. I wanted to find out a bit more and that was also when I found out about the Heart Sutra and got confused by it. It was around that time when I started to thinking that I wanted to understand Buddhism, since it seemed relevant to my family, especially relevant after my family member passed away. I was a freshmen in high school and one of my relative passed away. During the funeral process, Buddhism played a really large part of it and I've never seen my family as buddhist as they were until that few weeks span when we did the funeral things. I was really intrigued and so after that I decided to go tot temple more and part of it was built into the funeral process (we had to show up at the temple every week), and after going there for a good seven weeks, I thought I might as well really find out more about this. So I started talking

to the local monks there, (this was a small little temple in Portland). Of course, my mandarin wasn't very good at the time and I had just started taking Chinese classes so communication was really difficult but at one point, I found out enough to be like "I think I really do want to spend more time with this" and while I didn't do a six month program, I started with a week long retreat. After that one week retreat, I realized that this was something that I wanted to continue, I really liked the daily practices, the lifestyle I had at the monastery, and so I came back the following year and did another week. and this kind of continued every summer until I finished high school. and again with very strange conditions, I had actually applied and got into a college in southern California which was really close to the temple I was doing the retreats at . While I was going to do a research project at the college over the summer, somehow they lost my application. and they notified me in April or so saying that I didn't apply even though I was really, really sure I did. I even have the email receipts saying that I applied to this position. but I didn't get it so I had nothing to do over the summer and so I thought maybe its best if I spent a few weeks at the temple. and it just so happened that there was an opportunity for me to spend six weeks living at the temple and that really transformed how I approached the world, and changed even how I approached college, I think it really benefited me but we'll get into that later.

**cat:** Wow thats actually a really fascinating story as well. What I caught from your story was the part about the funeral because a lot of people in Asia associate funerals with Buddhism. that's what I mean when I say that my parents are superstitious, and culturally buddhist. They associate Buddhism with death, pessimism, staying in the mountains, but once I started getting involved in my temple, in Orlando, it has really opened my eyes to how the future is full of possibilities in the buddhist' point of view. So that's what really helped me. I wanted to ask, what is it about the six month, or even one week retreat that changed some of your behavior or outlook on life?

**andrew:** Haha so I'll start with the one week one. My first retreat was the short term monastic retreat and this was held for kids, or at least that was the group I did it with at Hsi Lai temple, in Hacienda Heights. At my first week there, I was under that impression (you mentioned). It's true, we go and we have our heads shaved, and we become novice monks for a week and it was my first real intensive buddhist experience. Even the curriculum was completely adapted for young kids. I really appreciated the sort of discipline, the habit, the routine, that went into life there. I've never really been much of a morning persona and even though every day at the temple was so busy, and this is true for all retreats I've done, even tho life was so busy and waking up was done so early in the morning, I've never really felt tired and that really amazed me.

**cat:** Oh my Buddha, I related to that so much. while I was away in the Taiwan monastery, Fo Guang Shan, in Kaoshiung, we were living life so routinely but everyday was like a full day. You cannot waste a second or a minute there— it was so busy. But I always felt energized and sometimes I would wake up before the signals, which was this huge drum and bell, on either side of our school. They would hit it in the morning and before we went to sleep. I never realized life could be so simplistic. After I came back from the buddhist college, I often worry about a lot of things like my grades, my family, and little things like that. But when I was there, I could really utilize my time and not waste it on swiping my phone or something.

**andrew:** You have no phone swipe haha

**cat:** Haha exactly! They take all that away from you.

**andrew:** But I mean, part of me was really worried, would I be able to last a week away from my smartphone. (at that point, I had just gotten a new smartphone). But hey! I've lasted how many years in my life before smart phones existed? It was perfectly fine without it. We both started our buddhist paths through these retreat programs, and I think that being able to live a simple life and realize there is so much value in living a simple life. Living a simple life doesn't mean living boring life and living a simple life doesn't mean living a meaningless life. Every day at the monastery, like you said, was packed full of things, and I think that each day was so valuable to me, whereas here, I may have everything that I want to do, but don't get up until say 11 am and there goes half a day wasted.

**cat:** Right! There's no motivation there, and I think also what I learned was to be more mindful of my time and more grateful for everyday that I was able to wake up and just, like you said, we live and experience this busy lifestyle, but there are moments where you realize there is nature around you. You are mindful of more things that are bigger than yourself and that's what really changed my perspective on a lot of things. A lot of worries that I have now are self centered and related to myself, which is normal, but when I'm at the monastery, I have to be aware of other people and be mindful of other people and so it made me a better team player.

**andrew:** Definitely. oh my gosh, before spending time at a monastery, I never thought much about lining up but when you do it twenty times a day, always waiting for one or two people, it becomes really annoying! I remember when I was at the monastery, I was just thinking oh my goodness, how long is it going to take them, everyone is already in line, hurry up! but sometimes I would be the one who was last, and it made me more self conscious about how what was doing and whether or not I was managing my time well, because that would affect all of my neighbors and all of the people in my class. Actually, my favorite part about living a monastery would be mealtimes. and not just because the food was great, but more because I had never really spent that much time thinking about my food. So whenever we had meals at the monastery, we would start with an offering prayer and personally I don't necessarily like sharing my food but to have that sort of symbolic sharing of food with not just one or two people but with all beings, and having that intention has slowly transformed me and now I do share food so that's one thing. another thing is that as we were eating, we would think about where the food comes from and I thought that was a really good practice too, to make me be more appreciative of the food and also once I was appreciative of it, I would stop wasting food and only take only as much as I could eat.

**cat:** Yeah I relate to that a lot too. I think when you said you were the one late, on a bigger scale too, when we interact with other people face to face, sometimes we forget to think from another person's perspective, and in a monastery, everything is living together and everyone has to interact with everyone everyday and so there is no hiding in your own room and thinking about your own problems or sulk because you share a room with ten other people. I think just from lining up, you can learn about interpersonal connections and how to deal with people on a day to day basis. Just thinking from their perspective will make your life and also their life a lot easier because you are not just thinking from your self and what you need. I think that's what we need sometimes, when we have disagreement, or having an argument. The understanding need to be there for our relationships to go smoothly.

**andrew:** Definitely yeah, but I was thinking as we were talking about our experiences about Buddhism and how they both have to do with intensive retreats, most people I would say don't have the opportunity to do these retreats though.

**cat:** I agree.

**andrew:** I wish that more people had the opportunity to do these retreats but I know a lot of people especially college students are busy over the summer— there are internships, research, so many things competing. a lot of time, spending a month at a monastery is not a possibility.

**cat:** Right.

**andrew:** So I was thinking, we should probably talk about things that our listeners can do concretely wherever they might be.

**cat:** Ok, I think that would be a good start. First of all, I would say go visit a temple if you haven't been to one yet and just really try to make connections with the people there and see what their community is like. so Andrew and I actually belong to the same temple, we are just at different branches temples. Our headquarters is located in Taiwan where had I had my buddhist retreat. We're from different coasts, but I know that our temples don't have branch temples everywhere so if you can find a buddhist temple, definitely go and talk to the monastics there. see what you can do to start out. Usually at temples they have meditation classes, or classes just about Buddhism. You can do your online research but there is not the feel of being at a monastery and I think the atmosphere of a temple will calm your mind and change your attitude on things. I think a lot of people are familiar with the act of meditation, so you can start meditation with one minute a day, two minutes a day. That would be really helpful as well. What is your advice on this andrew?

**andrew:** I would agree. I think that nowadays, there are temples everywhere essentially, and I mean for people in rural areas, they might not be very close by but I think in every major city in the us, there should be a temple and while there are many different schools of Buddhism, the best way to start, is to start with what you have. For example, I didn't start with Fo gang Shan, this organization, this monastery. I started in Portland where there is no branch and so I just went to the local temple for a good five, six years before I came down to Los Angeles for college. during that time, I was able to interact with quite a variety of buddhist organization. Portland is a very popular place for Buddhism. I would go to a Chinese temple on Sunday and on Thursday nights, I would go to Buddhism classes at quite interestingly enough, a presbyterian church.

**cat:** Oh wow!

**andrew:** Yeah they would meet in the basement of the church and I would go there for Thursday night Buddhism classes in a Japanese tradition. Then on Saturdays, I would go to a Zen temple. There are a lot of groups and I learned some things from each group. Eventually I hovered and spent a lot of time at the Chinese Mahayana temple which is why I found Fo Guang Shan really appealing when I went to Los Angeles. They're very similar— well I guess they are the same actually. There's that. another thing, at least for me, is that when I was starting, there was a lot of uncertainty as to, where to start, what to start with, but really, the best thing to do is to start. it takes a lot of things in order for anyone to have exposure to Buddhism. even today, Buddhism isn't a really major religion, its up there, but there aren't that many people who know about Buddhism or really have the will or motivation to understand it. If your listening to this podcast, you obviously want to learn more about Buddhism and I think thats a really great

aspiration or motivation to have. Take charge of it. Take it while you have this motivation, and while you have the resources to find whatever it is in your area and be involved here and out.

**cat:** Yeah I agree with what you just said about starting something. I'm a huge procrastinator and before I do anything, I do my thorough research. I check my grade before I start an assignment, as if that would change my grade. In our human mind, I feel like we often do things that are against what's really good for us and sometimes you might be uncertain and sometimes you might be scared, but it really is best to just take that moment, take that first step and all never know where you end up, you don't know the conditions or where it could take you. For me, choosing, well I didn't choose, my aunt took me to temple, but choosing later on in life to get involved is definitely the best choice I have made in my young adult life. I agree with Andrew and definitely go check out a local temple. Don't be scared! You might not speak the same language as them, but as long as you go in with an open mind, I think everyone will be welcoming.

**andrew:** Definitely. I think another thing to keep in mind is that no matter what tradition of Buddhism your interested in, starting off at any buddhist temple will help. A lot of the methods might be different, but there are also so many similarities. Building a solid foundation in any sect of Buddhism is easily transferable to any of the other schools.

**cat:** Oh yeah definitely. Later on we will talk about why there are different schools of Buddhism, and it really just is to suit people's needs. Whatever people need, thats how it transforms to the different schools. Even if your first experience with Buddhism is not what you were hoping for, I would say keep looking, because there are so many different ways that Buddhism is taught but essentially, underneath it all, the teaching are the same.

**andrew:** Definitely. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about for todays episode?

**cat:** Actually, I had a question I was holding. what attracted you to FGS specifically? You said it really appealed to you. what part of it?

**andrew:** So, this is going to sound a but strange, but what appealed to me the most was the chanting services originally.

**cat:** Ohhh interesting!

**andrew:** It was a really strange thing, because when I went to Hsi Lai Temple for the first time, it was actually partly in relation to my recently deceased relative. While Hsi Lai Temple didn't do the funeral, we were there to prepare for the funeral and get advice. On one of the days, we ended up staying for the service and what really attracted me was the melody. It felt really soothing. That was my first start, and how I decided I wanted to come back and learn more.

**cat:** Oh wow. I would say you had really good conditions in the past because thats not how I felt about chanting haha. So how I started at Fo Guang Shan temple: there is one in Orlando, and it happened to be very close by to my house, so that's a condition there. but my aunt took me there at first. I was forced to go basically. In the beginning though, the monstatic, the Abesse there (her name is Venerable Jue Fan), she saw me, as a little kid, not knowing what to do, so she would ask me to do these small tasks, like typing up library labels for her or just washing dishes. I think from a young age of doing that, that helped me learn how to be responsible and

also let me get in touch with Buddhism in a way that is not apparent. I didn't really know she was trying to teach me Buddhism; she was getting me to volunteer. There are things where she would be really patient in teaching me and she wouldn't put too much on me at once, so it was her way of bringing me into the temple, but not pushing it. She never tries to convert anyone. Just this week, she had this lady come in and asked if she could talk to her but the lady made it very clear that she's not buddhist, doesn't want to convert to Buddhism, but that she just needed someone to talk to. Our venerable said "Yes, of course I'll talk to you. My goal is never to convert anyone." I really felt that as a child, and looking back, I could see that's what she's doing. It taught me about responsibility and how temple is a place for me to grow. and then college happened. haha the buddhist college program. It progressed really fast.

**andrew:** Actually, now that we're on this topic, I have a question for you too.

**cat:** Ok

**andrew:** I wanted to ask how you went from being a christian growing up to being a buddhist now.

**cat:** So I wasn't just any Christian, I was actually a Jehovah's witness and I know they are notorious to go door to door at people's houses, but I living with that family friend at the time and she took us to church. I thought that I identified as a christian. I thought the Bible was really interesting. I didn't really read the Bible though; I read a book that had pictures and told stories from the Bible. I read it, and I thought it was interesting. Now looking back, I don't think I could confidently believe in God. I treated it as something I was studying, and of course being at that age, I don't think I had a strong sense of religion. Because I was in that environment, I was immersed and became Christian. That was also the case when I came to temple at first. I couldn't confidently say I was a Buddhist, I just said "oh I go to this temple." But when I started to learn the teachings of Buddhism, it really resonated with me; I really agreed with it and that was when I decided to declare I was Buddhist loud and proud. I wasn't a super devout Christian, I was a kid haha. That's my journey. I religion hopped, and now I'm a Buddhist.

**andrew:** The last thing we should close on is the topic of conditions. This is something we said at the beginning of podcast we'd come back to. We've been throwing around this term through the podcast. We should talk about it more since the idea of causes and conditions in Buddhism, that nothing just happens for no reason— there's always causes, actually many causes, many conditions, a lot of things coming together that allow for things to happen. For example, we've been using it in this episode, sort (looking at) the causes and conditions that led us to Buddhism. So just looking at that and taking that apart, for me, at least for how I become a buddhist, I would say one of the big parts of that was my relative passing away. But also my relative could have passed away and we wouldn't have had Buddhist funeral, and it was also because of my family's background to have wanted a buddhist funeral. Okay, so we have a few things form there. And it also just so happened that the day we went to temple to talk about the funeral, we also stayed for the Sunday service. If we hadn't done that, I wouldn't have ben so interested. They also happened to have an advertisement at that time for the summers retreat. So when I saw that, I was thinking, "well maybe i'll come back later." And I did come back later that year. So all of these things, one after another, if something had gone differently, things would be really different right now. But it's because of all of these conditions together that makes us what we are what we are today.

**cat:** Yeah! like how we are making this podcast together.

**andrew:** Oh my goodness. Also talking about the causes and conditions that came into this podcast? All of it was surreal. I never thought that I would meet you. You live a good thousand or so miles away from me, we're not even in the same time zone— what the heck!

**cat:** Haha yeah I know! We live literally on opposite coasts of the united states. I guess how I met you was... what month is it? I met you last year, in july? right? After I came back?

**andrew:** Oh yeah!

**cat:** Right! that was the first time I met you, we never talked in person except that one time I don't really remember.

**andrew:** Oh yeah. It wasn't even a very long conversation either. We had passed by each other in Los Angeles at the temple and I think I said something like "hey, didn't you just come back from Taiwan?" and you said "yeah" and we walked off.

**cat:** Hahah wow and then we became friends over Facebook and talked on messenger but I saw you because you were also the translator for the retreat.

**andrew:** That's right!

**cat:** And I thought you were weird because you kept looking at me and I thought, "wow what's the deal with this guy?" then I found out you were the translator, and apparently you do this at every retreat. That's really cool! So how I'm involved in my temple is that I'm the president of the youth group called the young adult division (YAD), so why I was at Hsi Lai Temple was because of this conference they were having last year. So if wasn't for me being involved in YAD and going to Hsi Lai temple and if the retreat weren't on the same days, we wouldn't just passed by each other.

**andrew:** Causes and conditions! I guess this is also the time to thank everyone involved. We have a beautiful website thanks to some of my dharma friends in Portland, and we have a really beautiful logo because I reached out to a Buddhist artist and he finished this logo in a week,

**cat:** Oh yeah the logo is amazing!

**andrew:** I'm really happy at how it turned out, and I'm really surprised all of this came together. I never imagined that talking to you about the podcast would lead to this big of a thing. I thought it would be the two of us talking and maybe two listeners ever.

**cat:** That's what I thought in the beginning too. I mean at the time when you pitched the idea to me, it was the beginning of the semester, and I was really unsure because of my schedule but my finals are over and we could do this and keep it up.

**andrew:** Is there anything else we wanted to talk about before we end today?

**cat:** Oh yeah, the website!

**andrew:** [buddhapod.org](http://buddhapod.org)

**cat:** Yes that is. I shouldn't have the spell it out. but it's B-you-D-D-H-A-P-O-D-DOT-O-R-G. Its been a really good conversation and I had such a great time talking to you Andrew. Thanks for inviting me on this project, and I'm really excited at how things are going to turn out in the future.

**andrew:** No yeah, definitely, I think it would really really and awkward if this podcast was just me so thank you for being the other half of this podcast.

**cat:** No problem!

**andrew:** To all you listening, we'll see you again next week. If you have any sort of comments, questions, ideas you want to pitch to us for future episodes just shoot us an email through the website or through our Facebook and, one last time, I'm Andrew.

**cat:** And I'm Catherine.

**both:** Thanks for listening to buddha pod and see you next time!