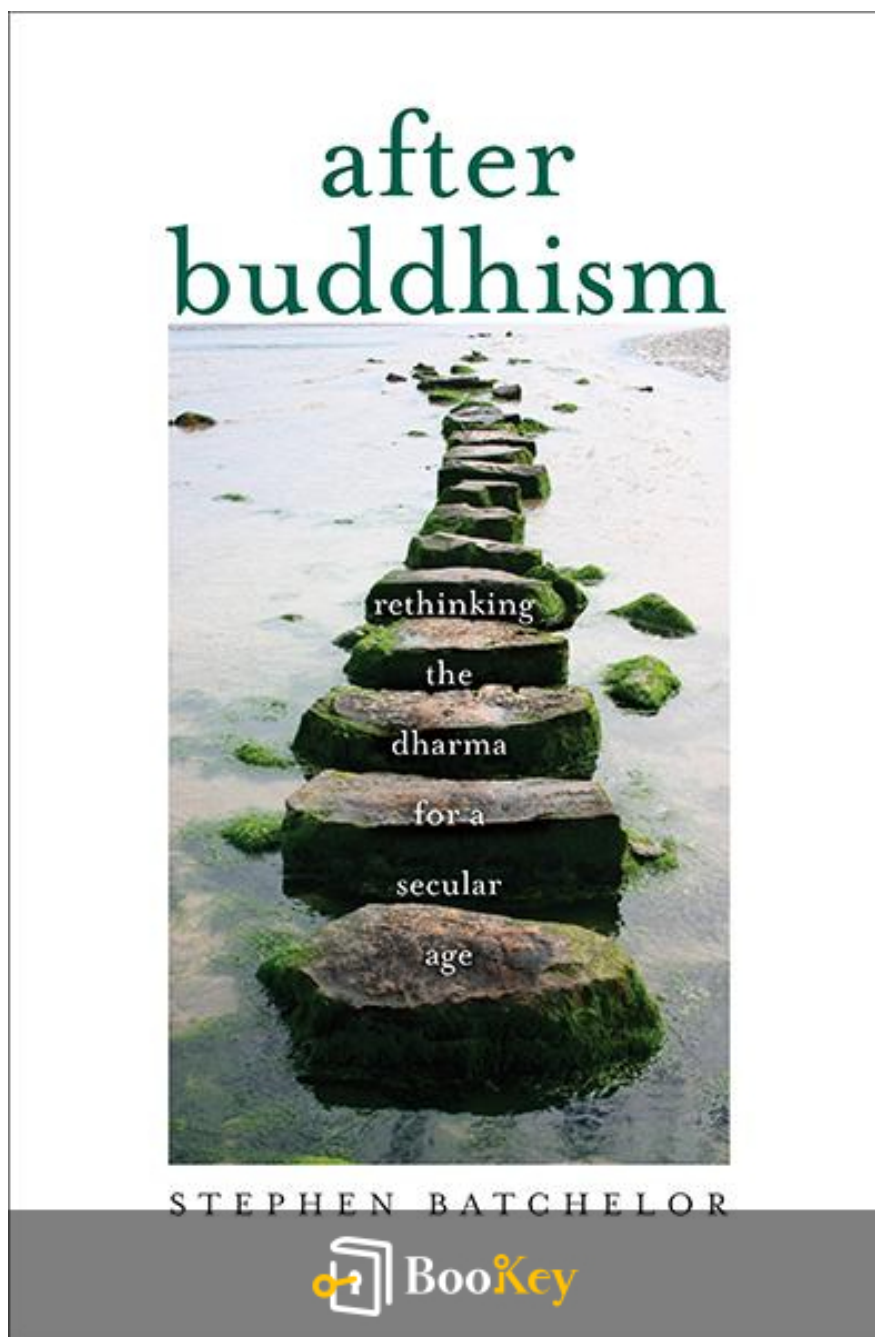


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Stephen Batchelor



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After Buddhism Summary

Exploring Buddhism Beyond Belief and Tradition

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About the book

In "After Buddhism," Stephen Batchelor invites readers on a thought-provoking journey that transcends traditional Buddhist beliefs, urging us to explore a secular and modern understanding of the teachings of the Buddha. Batchelor delves into the core principles of Buddhism, unraveling the dense layers of dogma that have accumulated over centuries while highlighting the relevance of mindfulness, ethical living, and inquiry into the nature of existence in contemporary life. His exploration is not merely a critique but a call to engage with the profound wisdom of the Buddha, stripped of cultural embellishments, and to embrace a pragmatic approach that resonates with our modern existential challenges. This compelling synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern insights challenges us to rethink our spiritual practices and invites us to cultivate a deeper, personal connection to the essence of Buddhism in a post-religious world.

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About the author

Stephen Batchelor is a prominent author and Buddhist teacher known for his innovative approach to Buddhist thought and practice. Born in 1962 in England, he spent a significant portion of his early life immersed in the study of Buddhism, which included ordination as a monk in the Tibetan tradition. Over the years, Batchelor has carved a unique space within the Buddhist community by advocating for a secular and adaptable interpretation of Buddhist teachings that resonates with contemporary concerns. His writings, including works like "Buddhism Without Beliefs" and "After Buddhism," encourage readers to engage with the core principles of Buddhism while critically examining its traditional frameworks, making his contributions both accessible and relevant to modern audiences.

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Chapter 1 Summary: 1. AFTER BUDDHISM

In "After Buddhism," Stephen Batchelor begins by emphasizing the importance of perceiving reality directly, as illustrated through a teaching intended for Baṭhiya. The essence of this teaching is clear: one's awareness should focus solely on the present experience—seeing, hearing, sensing, and consciousness itself.

The narrative unfolds in Jeta's Grove, where the Buddha encounters a diverse group of teachers committed to conflicting metaphysical beliefs. They argue about fundamental truths concerning the nature of existence, creating a cycle of endless verbal disputes. The Buddha critiques this behavior, suggesting that such rigid adherence to opposing views results in blindness to the true essence of the dharma. His approach is notable for its non-disputational nature, as he chooses not to engage with these beliefs, recognizing that clinging to ideological certainties is counterproductive.

Batchelor illustrates this concept using the parable of blind men describing an elephant by touching different parts of its body. Their arguments about its nature depict how truth is often subjective and limited by individual perception. The Buddha's teaching redirects focus away from metaphysical correctness towards pragmatic understanding, highlighting that true realization of the dharma transcends philosophical conflict.



1. Buddha's Community and Teachings The Buddha sought to establish a community conducive to genuine understanding, free from hierarchical dogma. He emphasized equality among practitioners, irrespective of gender or status, yet contemporary Buddhist practices often reflect patriarchal structures that eclipse this vision.

2. Secular vs. Religious Perspectives: Batchelor discusses how his secular upbringing has colored his interpretation of Buddhism. He acknowledges that while religious frameworks traditionally emphasize practices tied to beliefs about metaphysical realities, a secular approach can offer a meaningful existential perspective grounded in immediate experience.

3. Emptiness Redefined: Emptiness, as he interprets it, was originally a formative perspective on one's embodied existence rather than an abstract truth to be realized in meditation. He contrasts this with later interpretations that position emptiness as a state to be intellectually understood. Emptiness entails a sensibility rooted in daily awareness rather than detachment.

4. Pragmatic Engagement: Batchelor argues that the actual engagement with the dharma requires a responsive and situational approach rather than rigid adherence to dogmatic beliefs. The practitioner is tasked with navigating their life and relationships with a mindful, compassionate awareness, framed not by right or wrong judgments but by the quality of



responses to life's myriad situations.

5. Historical Context and Evolution: Batchelor expresses a desire to trace how Buddhist concepts evolved over time, especially how doctrines emerged to define the tradition. He aims to disentangle core principles that may be timeless from those that are products of historical context, ultimately seeking a path that resonates with modern concerns.

6. The Dialogical Nature of Buddhism: The interplay between curiosity and the dogmatic nature of beliefs within Buddhism is highlighted. Batchelor aspires for a secular interpretation that remains engaged with the foundational ethical and philosophical dimensions of the dharma while navigating the challenges of modern existence.

7. Towards a Coherent Vision His endeavor aims to articulate a vision of Buddhism applicable to contemporary life, acknowledging the varied experiences of different practitioners across history and emphasizing the need for dialogue between traditional teachings and modern interpretations.

Overall, Batchelor's exploration in "After Buddhism" advocates for a reinterpretation of the dharma that bridges ancient wisdom with the practicalities of modern existence, aiming to foster a richer engagement with the world and a more compassionate humanity.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Focus on Present Experience

Critical Interpretation: As you navigate through the complexities of daily life, remember the Buddha's teaching that calls you to engage with your immediate experiences—seeing, hearing, sensing, and simply being aware. Instead of getting caught up in the distractions of past regrets or future anxieties, allow yourself to immerse fully in the present moment. By doing so, you'll cultivate a clearer perception of reality, free from the noise of conflicting beliefs and desires. This non-disputational approach encourages you to respond to life situations with mindfulness and compassion, helping you foster deeper connections with yourself and others. Embracing the present not only alleviates the burdens of your thoughts but also enriches your understanding of the world, guiding you towards a more harmonious existence.

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Chapter 2 Summary: 2. MAH N MA: THE

In Chapter 2 of "After Buddhism," Stephen Batchelor presents the story of Mahānāma, a prominent figure in the Sakiyan community connected to the Buddha, exploring themes of belief, duty, and transformation in the context of early Buddhism. The narrative delves into the socio-political landscape of Kapilavatthu, describing its prosperity and the complexities faced by its inhabitants, particularly through the eyes of Mahānāma.

1. Context and Environment: Kapilavatthu, depicted as a prosperous town situated along a vital trade route, reflects the ambitions and socio-political dynamics of its time. Mahānāma, the chief, lives in a society transitioning from tribal governance to centralized monarchies. The Sakiyans, who historically held political autonomy, find themselves increasingly subordinate to the Kosalan monarchy under King Pasenadi.

2. Mahānāma's Character and Dilemma As a cousin of Gotama, the Buddha, Mahānāma embodies the tension between personal desire and social responsibility. His moments of fear about potential dangers in Kapilavatthu serve as metaphors for his broader existential anxieties regarding his authority, the safety of his community, and the spiritual path he might tread.

3. Philosophical Inquiry and Conversion: Mahānāma vocalizes a



profound spiritual struggle, questioning the nature of his thoughts and impulses, particularly those driven by greed, hatred, and delusion. His encounters with Gotama reveal a path toward transformation, where he seeks to embody the values of the Eightfold Path and develop a “lucid confidence” in the Buddha, the dharma, and the community.

4. Community Dynamics: The chapter underlines the importance of community affiliation and the boundaries between the roles of mendicants and adherents. The narrative highlights the inclusivity of the early Buddhist community, where a diverse group of individuals, across various backgrounds and walks of life, aspire toward the common goal of awakening.

5. Tension Between Traditions The discussion reveals the ongoing tensions between the emerging Buddhist ideals and the entrenched Brahmanic traditions. Rather than outright rejection, Maha^{na}ma's conversion reflects a more complex engagement with existing norms, indicating that the adoption of Buddhist tenets was possibly more about ethical realignment than the mere abandonment of prior beliefs.

6. Maha^{na}ma's Advocacy for Women Maha^{na}ma's relationship with women in his community—especially his strong-willed wife—illustrates a progressive attitude toward gender roles in a patriarchal context. His efforts to ensure women can engage with the Buddha's



teachings indicate a forward-thinking stance that acknowledges the shared spiritual potential of all individuals.

7. The Tragic Conclusion: The chapter culminates in a poignant narrative of sacrifice, revealing Maha^{na}ma's ultimate act of selflessness as he chooses to drown to save his people from the invading armies. His death symbolizes the culmination of his life choices, reflecting a profound embodiment of the principles he embraced, ultimately serving as an act of compassion.

Through the character of Maha^{na}ma, Batchelor articulates the complexities of spiritual conversion and the quest for meaning amid sociopolitical upheaval. The intertwined narratives of personal struggle, community identity, and ethical evolution present a rich tapestry that resonates with the broader themes of early Buddhism and its relevance in the quest for human flourishing.



Chapter 3: 3. A FOURFOLD TASK

In Chapter 3 of Stephen Batchelor's "After Buddhism," the concept of a fourfold task is presented, tracing the Buddha Gotama's journey from a prince to an enlightened teacher. This transformation is framed through the discovery of a twofold understanding of life, emphasizing the interrelated themes of conditioned arising (the nature of existence) and nirvana (emancipation from suffering). The essence of this chapter revolves around eight key principles that encapsulate the adaptations required for a meaningful life grounded in the Buddha's teachings.

1. The Journey of Inquiry: At twenty-nine, upon the birth of his son, Gotama embarks on an existential quest, pondering the delights, tragedies, and emancipatory potentials of life. Leaving behind his comforts, he seeks a life devoid of habitual attachments, ultimately leading to a realization that happiness arises conditionally, the tragedy of life is inherent in its impermanence, and true liberation stems from relinquishing grasping.

2. The Experience of Awakening: Gotama's realization is not a sudden

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Chapter 4 Summary: 4. PASENADI: THE KING

In Chapter 4 of "After Buddhism" by Stephen Batchelor, we explore the significant interactions between King Pasenadi of Kosala and the figure known as Gotama, the Buddha. This chapter delves into the complexity of Pasenadi's character, ambition, and his relationship with Gotama, shedding light on deeper themes of kingship, ethics, and spiritual aspiration.

1. The Duality of Historical Identity: The chapter begins with contemplation about the historical existence of figures like Gotama and Pasenadi. Batchelor raises questions on whether to view them as real historical figures or symbolic representations of universal human experiences. This inquiry fosters an understanding that these characters serve as vessels for exploring human suffering and spiritual endeavor.

2. King Pasenadi's Role: Pasenadi is depicted as a pivotal figure in the Buddha's life, engaging in numerous dialogues with Gotama. Despite the depth of their discussions, Pasenadi remains an underappreciated figure in Buddhist history, overshadowed by other rulers like Bimbisara. His continuous status as a ruler, alongside his lack of significant spiritual progress, raises questions about the impact of worldly responsibilities on spiritual awakening.

3. The Ethics of Kingship: Batchelor reflects on the inherent contradictions



in Pasenadi's kingship. The Buddha recognizes the necessity of royal authority and the use of power, even while promoting a non-violent ethic. This presents a complex dilemma about how leaders can maintain moral integrity while exercising authority. Through dialogues, Batchelor illustrates how the Buddha refrains from outright condemnation of Pasenadi's violent actions, acknowledging the harsh realities of political power.

4. The Nature of Care: Central to the Buddha's teachings is the concept of "care" (*appama da*), which is presented as the foundation of the path. Care encompasses vigilance and heartfelt concern for oneself and others. Batchelor positions this virtue as vital for achieving both worldly and spiritual goods. The conversation between Gotama and Pasenadi highlights the importance of nurturing ethical values through relational dynamics and community.

5. Self-Reflection on Wealth and Power: Throughout their exchanges, Pasenadi reveals discomfort with the corrupting influence of wealth and power. His personal insights about greed and carelessness provide a window into his inner struggles as a king navigating the temptations of authority. This self-awareness facilitates his engagement with the dharma, prompting a dialogue that reflects on moral conduct amidst worldly attachments.

6. The Role of Relationships: The reciprocal nature of relationships emerges as a theme, emphasizing that one's spiritual practice is interwoven with



community and companionship. The success of the dharma relies on nurturing true friendships, as highlighted in the dialogues between Pasenadi and Gotama. This suggests that spiritual growth is not merely an individual pursuit but a collective endeavor.

7. A Final Reckoning: The chapter culminates in a poignant depiction of the last meetings between Pasenadi and Gotama as they both age. Their conversations reflect not only the burden of leadership but also a profound mutual respect. As the narrative progresses toward Pasenadi's tragic end, there emerges a poignant sense of loss, illustrating the intertwined fates of spiritual seekers and worldly rulers.

In summary, this chapter intricately weaves historical inquiry, personal reflection, and philosophical discourse, illuminating the enduring struggle between worldly desires and spiritual aspirations. Through the lens of King Pasenadi, Batchelor invites readers to contemplate their own ethical commitments and the profound interconnectedness of self, others, and the broader fabric of existence.



Chapter 5 Summary: 5. LETTING GO OF TRUTH

In Chapter 5 of "After Buddhism," Stephen Batchelor explores the transformative journey Buddhism has taken from its early teachings to the later doctrinal developments that have shaped its modern interpretations. He critically analyzes the shift from practical applications of the dharma—focused on ethical actions and lived experiences—to a more metaphysical framework emphasizing truths and propositions. This transition, Batchelor argues, has led to significant misunderstandings regarding the essence of Buddhism.

1. The Shift from Tasks to Truths: Originally, Buddhism centered around a pragmatic understanding encapsulated in the twofold ground and fourfold tasks aimed at alleviating human suffering. Over time, however, it evolved into a framework of two truths—the Four Noble Truths—and a dogmatic approach fostering debate over propositions rather than direct engagement with ethical living. This shift has often obscured the original, practical wisdom of the Buddha.

2. Understanding sacca (Truth): In early texts, "truth" primarily referred to ethical qualities such as honesty and integrity. However, as Buddhism matured, this term increasingly took on metaphysical weight, becoming equated with reality itself, which often steers followers towards doctrine over personal experience. The emphasis shifted from understanding



suffering directly to abstracting it as a “noble truth,” leading to confusion about what truly constitutes suffering in everyday life.

3. The Role of the Four Noble Truths: Batchelor critiques the doctrinal framing of the Four Noble Truths, arguing they misrepresent early teachings. The Pali texts oscillate between what one should do (tasks) and what one should believe (truths), ultimately privileging philosophical orthodoxy over lived experience. This has led to confusing the noble truths with the tasks of understanding, letting go, realizing, and cultivating, which focuses on essential aspects of practical engagement rather than mere belief.

4. On the Notion of Suffering: The metaphysical notion that "craving is the origin of suffering" has taken a central role in traditional interpretations, yet Batchelor emphasizes that this assertion lacks textual support and reduces complex human experiences to simplistic causality. In early teachings, reactivity itself—not an abstract idea of suffering—should be the focus, framing suffering as a process to be engaged with rather than a truth to be believed in.

5. The Doctrine of Two Truths: Early Buddhism's relative clarity has often been obscured by the doctrine of two truths, which splits truth into conventional and ultimate. Batchelor contends that this bifurcation leads to an ontological mindset, deviating from the Buddha's original teachings on avoiding metaphysical speculation. Ultimately, he argues that such



structures propagate a misguided spiritual hierarchy, alienating practitioners from the essence of the dharma.

6. Ethical Emphasis versus Metaphysical Assertions: By embracing a more ethical and pragmatic approach, Batchelor posits that the original teachings lend themselves more to personal transformation in the face of life's challenges. The Buddhist path can be effectively articulated without the metaphysical assertions that have come to dominate many schools of thought, allowing for a more authentic engagement with life's realities.

7. The Unborn and Unconditioned: Batchelor addresses the notion of an "Unborn" or "Unconditioned" that occurs in some early texts, arguing that these terms do not allude to an independent reality but instead reflect a life lived unconditioned by desire and delusion. The goal is presented as a potential for living free from reactive inclinations rather than an escape to another state of being.

8. Bringing it All Together: Ultimately, Batchelor argues for a return to a more straightforward, ethical practice that remains grounded in lived experiences. This approach encourages practitioners to engage with their immediate realities rather than venerate abstract doctrines or metaphysical truths, facilitating a path towards genuine human flourishing.

In summary, Batchelor's critique of traditional Buddhist thought reveals the

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necessity of returning to the original teachings of the Buddha, emphasizing the importance of practical engagement with life and the ethical dimensions of truth in spiritual practice. He advocates for a Buddhism that prioritizes personal experience and ethical integrity over rigid doctrinal adherence, thus fostering a more inclusive and relevant interpretation of the dharma in contemporary contexts.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Shift from Tasks to Truths

Critical Interpretation: By recognizing that Buddhism originally emphasized direct action and ethical practice rather than abstract beliefs, you can find inspiration in approaching your life with a focus on tangible acts of compassion and mindfulness. Instead of getting lost in philosophical debates or dogmatic ideologies, you might choose to engage with the world authentically, seeking to alleviate suffering through your actions. This shift can empower you to live with greater intention, nurturing a lifestyle anchored in the practical wisdom of being present, ethical, and responsive to the needs of others, ultimately leading to personal transformation.

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Chapter 6: 6. SUNAKKHATTA: THE TRAITOR

In Chapter 6 of "After Buddhism" by Stephen Batchelor, titled

"Sunakkhatta: The Traitor," the narrative revolves around Sunakkhatta, a Licchavi who denounces the Buddha in a public assembly, claiming Gotama lacks any superhuman qualities and that his teachings are merely the product of personal reasoning. Ironically, his criticism inadvertently acknowledges the efficacy of the Buddha's teachings, which are said to lead to the complete end of suffering.

1. Historical Context of the Buddha: Batchelor emphasizes the challenge of reconstructing an accurate historical image of the Buddha, contrasting the glorified figure depicted in later traditions and iconography with a more human portrayal seen in early texts. The Buddha is sometimes presented as an extraordinary being with divine marks, while in other stories, he appears as an everyday mendicant, highlighting a tension in how he was perceived by his followers.

2. Sunakkhatta's Character: Sunakkhatta emerges as an idealist seeking

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Chapter 7 Summary: 7. EXPERIENCE

In Chapter 7 of "After Buddhism" by Stephen Batchelor, the focus shifts to the foundational aspects of human experience as articulated by Gotama, the Buddha. Batchelor outlines a perspective on existence that is grounded in practical experience rather than metaphysical speculation. The central themes and principles of this chapter can be summarized as follows:

- 1. Differentiation from Brahmanic and Theistic Views:** Gotama approached the world devoid of theistic notions, focusing instead on human experience. He aimed to delineate his teachings from Brahmanic ideology, which posited the existence of an eternal soul, by providing a framework that embraced the transient nature of human experience without invoking divine or eternal substances.
- 2. Pragmatic Understanding of Experience:** Gotama emphasized that Dharma practice occurs entirely within the "domain" of human experience. He dismissed metaphysical claims about a transcendental deity as irrelevant and directed his focus toward the profound exploration of the sensations and phenomena that characterize the human condition.
- 3. The Nature of Suffering (Dukkha):** Central to Gotama's teaching is the concept of dukkha or suffering, which encompasses not only pain but the inherent unease that accompanies happiness. The understanding of



suffering entails engaging with the impermanence of life and appreciating the beauty of fleeting moments, which ultimately contributes to personal flourishing.

4. The Five Clinging Aggregates (Khandha): Batchelor discusses

Gotama's classification of human experience into five "clinging bundles":

form (ru pa), feeling (vedan), perception (saññ), inclination and consciousness (viññ Ga). These aggregates are not rather interconnected aspects of experience that contribute to an individual's lived reality.

5. Embodied Attention and Mindfulness: Dharma practice involves

cultivating 'embodied attention', which is essential for understanding one's experience at a fundamental level. Mindfulness helps individuals navigate their feelings, perceptions, and inclinations, fostering a deeper comprehension of reactivity versus responsive actions in life.

6. Interdependence of Name-Form and Consciousness: Gotama's

presentation of na ma - ru pa (name-form) reveals the emergent nature of experience. Consciousness arises from the interplay of sensory engagement with the environment, intricately linked to the constituents of experience, thereby negating the notion of a separate self.

7. Self and Moral Agency: Gotama's teaching challenges the traditional

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notion of self as an independent entity. By examining the five aggregates, one realizes that personal identity is deeply interwoven with experience rather than an isolated essence. He promotes an understanding of self that allows for moral agency, which is acknowledged through decisions and actions, rather than through a rigid understanding of selfhood.

8. Practical Framework for Liberation: The chapter concludes with the understanding that Gotama's teachings offer a pragmatic framework intended to liberate individuals from the cyclical nature of suffering, encouraging compassionate engagement with the world. He defines awakening as comprehension of the true nature of experience, guiding followers toward a life of freedom and flourishing devoid of attachment to a permanent self.

Batchelor's insights bring forth an understanding of Gotama's philosophy that shifts focus from existential inquiries into metaphysical realms towards the immediacy of human experience. This perspective fosters an appreciation of the beauty within transience and emphasizes the importance of practical engagement with the world.



Chapter 8 Summary: 8. J*VAKA: THE D

In Chapter 8 of "After Buddhism" by Stephen Batchelor, the author explores the intricate relationship between the Buddha's teachings—referred to as dharma—and the practice of medicine through the figure of a physician in ancient India. The chapter begins with a poignant parable about a man seeking a snake, which serves as a warning about how mishandling the dharma can lead to suffering. Batchelor posits that like a venomous snake, the dharma can be dangerous if misunderstood or misapplied.

1. Nature of the Dharma: The dharma is not merely a belief system; it can become toxic if treated like a set of dogmas. It requires skillful handling to harness its liberative potential. Individuals who approach the dharma with a mindset of criticism and debate, rather than understanding and personal transformation, risk causing themselves long-term harm. The text emphasizes that a static understanding of the dharma can become a "living death," stifling genuine spiritual experience.

2. Complexity of Human Desire: Batchelor reflects on the nuanced nature of desire, acknowledging that while some forms of desire can lead to suffering, others may propel individuals toward enlightenment. The text examines the complexity of motivations, such as the difference between greed and aspiration. The concept of wanting—whether it be lofty spiritual goals or mundane desires—remains inherent to human experience,



necessitating discernment in practice.

3. J+v a k a - T h e P h y s i c i a n The author traces J+v a k a's journey from birth, his studies in Taxila, and eventual rise as a royal physician, reflecting his blend of skills and cultural exposure. J+v a k a emerges as a practitioner of the dharma while remaining deeply engaged with the world. His role highlights the intrinsic connection between healing and spiritual practice. Batchelor suggests that the Buddha's approach to illness and treatment mirrors J+v a k a's medical expertise, illustrating the interconnectedness between physical health and spiritual well-being.

4. Ethical Considerations in Practice: The chapter underscores the importance of situational ethics in the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha's nuanced stance on issues such as eating meat reveals a flexible, compassionate approach to ethics rather than rigid dogmatic rules. His teachings advocate for responsiveness to the specific needs and circumstances of individuals, emphasizing the underlying values of loving-kindness and compassion in ethical decision-making.

5. Legacy of J+v a k a J+v a k a's decision to embrace Buddhism and his commitment to integrating dharma into his medical practice. His life serves as a model for living a fulfilled existence that harmonizes professional duties with spiritual insights. Batchelor conveys that true fulfillment occurs when one's daily life, intertwined with professional responsibilities, becomes a



path towards understanding deeper truths of existence.

Through the lens of Jivaka's character and experience on fundamental themes in Buddhism, such as the nature of suffering, the intricacies of human desires, and the essential qualities of ethical living rooted in compassion. Ultimately, the text invites readers to reconsider the dualities often present in spiritual practice, urging a compassionate and engaged approach to the complexities of human life.

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Chapter 9: 9. THE EVERYDAY SUBLIME

In Chapter 9 of "After Buddhism," Stephen Batchelor explores the concept of the everyday sublime, emphasizing a form of meditation that engages deeply with the present moment rather than seeking mystical experiences or heightened states of consciousness. He articulates a perspective on meditation that values the richness of ordinary experiences, advocating for an approach that transcends traditional practices focused solely on concentration or the attainment of special insights.

1. Embracing the Everyday Sublime: Batchelor argues that meditation should center on the immediacy of our experiences rather than escaping into altered states of consciousness. He challenges the notion that the mystical exists beyond our current experiences, asserting that the sublime suffuses the world around us—each moment is infused with beauty and wonder, waiting to be appreciated.

2. The Fourfold Task: Central to this practice is the fourfold task which entails: (1) embracing one's existential reality; (2) letting go of ingrained

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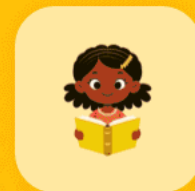
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Chapter 10 Summary: 10. NANDA: THE ATTENDANT

In Chapter 10 of "After Buddhism" by Stephen Batchelor, the focus shifts to Ānanda, a key figure in the early Buddhist community, exploring his life, the dynamics of his relationship with the Buddha, and the complexities surrounding the community that thrived after Gotama's passing. The narrative intricately weaves historical insights with personal struggles of Ānanda as he navigates a world marked by human frailty, uncertainty, and conflict.

1. Humanity in Buddhism: The texts reveal a Buddhism that emphasizes the intricacies of human life rather than mythical depictions found in Indian epics. Figures such as King Pasenadi symbolize personal and political struggles rather than heroic grandeur. The world portrayed is relatable and mirrors contemporary complexities, making Buddhism accessible and relevant to those involved in the anxieties of urban life.

2. Societal Roles within the Dharma: Ānanda, alongside other householders, illustrates that early Buddhism attracted diverse societal members involved in new urban formations. Insights into their lives reflect a practical approach to the dharma that supported their demanding existence, suggesting that the teachings were meant for real-life application rather than abstract ideals.



3. Ānanda's Early Life and Insight Described as the cousin of Gotama, Ānanda's path towards becoming the Buddha's personal attendant showcases his early fascination with the dharma, influenced by mentors like Pun. n. a Man. taniputta. This early mentorship leads to Ānanda's breakthrough understanding of self through the insight into impermanence and clinging, vital principles in early Buddhist thought.

4. Role as Attendant: Ānanda assumes a critical role as the Buddha's attendant, chosen for his youth, promise, and ability to manage community affairs as Gotama's health declines. His conditions for accepting the role indicate his dedication to the Buddha while also asserting an independent stance against potential exploitations from others in the community.

5. Community Dynamics Post-Buddha: Ānanda witnesses the rising tensions within the community post-Buddha, especially with figures like Devadatta and the conservative Mahākassapa, who threatens to redefine the community's direction after the Buddha's death. This includes the emergence of competing ideologies regarding leadership, adherence to the rules, and interpretations of the dharma.

6. Final Teachings and Legacy. In the final months before his passing, Gotama emphasizes self-reliance and the importance of the dharma as a guiding principle rather than dependency on another's authority. His last



instructions encourage the mendicants to become “islands unto themselves,” marking a pivotal moment in Buddhist thought that emphasizes personal responsibility intertwined with communal support.

7. Ānanda's Transformation Following the Buddha's death, Ānanda struggles with his identity and authority within the community, facing scrutiny over past decisions and coping with feelings of isolation. However, with determination, Ānanda ultimately realizes enlightenment before the council, cementing his place not merely as a remnant of the Buddha's era but as a powerful figure capable of preserving and transmitting the Buddha's teachings.

8. Divergent Paths and Community Splits: As Mahākassapa pushes for rigid adherence to rules, Ānanda's approach embodies a vision of an egalitarian community tied by mutual respect and the shared practice of the dharma. His recognition of merit and wisdom within individuals, irrespective of rank or gender, signifies a departure from future interpretations skewed by hierarchical structures.

9. Cremation and Continuation of the Teachings The chapter recounts how Ānanda honors Gotama with a proper cremation, preserving the Buddha's teachings while struggling with the emerging power dynamics. The subsequent council meetings indicate ongoing tensions as Ānanda champions a vision of the dharma free from rigid orthodoxies.



10. Lasting Impact: Ānanda's legacy, cemented in narratives and memories, is revered within certain traditions as the second patriarch of Buddhism, reflecting the complexities behind his character and the multifaceted relationships within the early community. His life story serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of the Buddha's teachings and the ongoing dynamics of community and leadership in Buddhism.

The complexity and depth of Ānanda's experiences underscore the nuances of early Buddhist life, where human emotions, societal structures, and spiritual quests intertwine in ways that remain relevant for contemporary readers. Through Ānanda's journey, Batchelor illustrates the richly human elements of Buddhism that continue to resonate deeply.

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Chapter 11 Summary: 11. A CULTURE OF AWAKENING

In "After Buddhism," Stephen Batchelor explores the intricate relationship between cultural context and Buddhist beliefs, particularly focusing on the concepts of karma and rebirth.

1. The Enmeshment in Culture: From birth, individuals are deeply embedded in specific cultural frameworks that dictate their perspectives and beliefs.

This cultural embedding affects everything, from gender identity to views on the universe. For instance, centuries ago, beliefs in karma and reincarnation were as self-evident to some as modern scientific theories are today. These convictions are not easily abandoned, as they are interwoven within the social fabric.

2. The Pragmatic Role of Buddhist Beliefs: Within Buddhist cultures, karma and reincarnation serve pragmatic, rather than absolute, functions. For many Buddhists, such beliefs operate seamlessly within cultural practices, influencing emotional and social aspects of life. For example, rituals surrounding death serve to provide solace and community irrespective of doctrinal scrutiny regarding reincarnation.

3. Western Encounters with Rebirth: For Western converts to Buddhism, the beliefs in reincarnation may seem foreign and are often emotionally, rather



than culturally, significant. These converts grapple with their acceptance of such doctrines in contexts that challenge their validity. Unlike long-standing Buddhists, they feel a deeper duty to rationalize their beliefs, which may lead to an internal struggle compared to their Asian counterparts who seamlessly integrate these beliefs into their lives.

4. Scientific Inquiry into Rebirth: The scientific examination of rebirth raises critical questions. Notable work by Ian Stevenson studying children who recall past lives suggests the potential for past lives; however, these findings do not address the core karmic principles pivotal to Buddhism. The doctrine of karma requires a moral causal relationship that mere recollections cannot validate, emphasizing a fundamental divergence between empirical observation and traditional Buddhist metaphysics.

5. The Nature of Existence: Batchelor contemplates existential existence, proposing that rebirth serves as a metaphor for the repetitive nature of life. He argues that achieving liberation does not necessitate transcending this existence but rather entails addressing reactive patterns in daily life.

6. A Different Vision of Awakening: The contemporary understanding of awakening does not necessitate a rigid adherence to ancient cosmologies; instead, a secular perspective grounded in the interconnectedness of existence is viable. This view allows personal actions and collective behaviors to carry significant consequences, reflecting a contemporary



understanding of moral responsibility disconnected from ancestral beliefs in rebirth.

7. **Reconstructing Community:** Drawing from the Buddha's model of a diverse community centered on human flourishing, Batchelor emphasizes the need to inspire a modern Buddhist practice that fosters connection, mutual support, and egalitarian values. He advocates for a community committed to shared dharma ideals without hierarchical structures, ultimately fostering an inclusive, vibrant space for practice.

8. **A Culture of Awakening:** Batchelor concludes with a vision for a secular Buddhist space—defined by care, empathy, and collective responsibility. He posits that today's practitioners should focus on nurturing a culture of awakening informed equally by Buddhist and secular wisdom, with emphasis placed on the present human experience and interconnected existence.

Through this exploration, Batchelor not only reevaluates traditional Buddhist teachings but calls for a pragmatic, culturally aware practice that resonates with contemporary existential realities.

Key Concepts	Description
Enmeshment in Culture	Individuals are deeply embedded in specific cultural frameworks that shape their beliefs, including views on karma and reincarnation.

Key Concepts	Description
Pragmatic Role of Beliefs	Karma and reincarnation in Buddhist cultures play pragmatic roles, influencing emotional and social aspects rather than serving as absolute truths.
Western Encounters with Rebirth	Western converts face challenges in accepting reincarnation, experiencing a deeper need to rationalize beliefs compared to long-standing Buddhists.
Scientific Inquiry	Research like Ian Stevenson's work on past lives raises questions about reincarnation but does not validate core karmic principles essential to Buddhism.
Nature of Existence	Batchelor views rebirth as a metaphor for life's repetitiveness, advocating for addressing daily reactive patterns for liberation.
Vision of Awakening	A contemporary understanding of awakening focuses on interconnectedness without strict adherence to ancient cosmologies, emphasizing moral responsibility.
Reconstructing Community	Advocates for a modern Buddhist community based on human flourishing, mutual support, and egalitarian values without hierarchical structures.
Culture of Awakening	Calls for a secular Buddhist space based on care, empathy, and collective responsibility, fostering a culture of awakening informed by both Buddhist and secular wisdom.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embracing Interconnectedness

Critical Interpretation: Imagine awakening each morning with the realization that your actions, thoughts, and feelings are not just isolated experiences, but are intricately woven into the vast tapestry of life surrounding you. Stephen Batchelor's exploration of a secular Buddhist approach urges you to engage with the interconnectedness of existence, making each decision you make carry weight and meaning. This perspective invites you to nurture empathetic relationships and foster a sense of community that transcends cultural barriers, creating space for mutual support and shared growth. In a world often defined by division, the practice of recognizing our shared humanity can inspire you to cultivate compassion, become more mindful of your impact on others, and ultimately contribute to a culture of awakening—transforming not just your life, but the lives of those around you.

