

Some Basic Buddhist Concepts

prepared by Stephanie Noble stephanienoble.com

Four Noble Truths

1. The existence of suffering.
2. We can find the root of our suffering, identify its causes within ourselves and how through our habitual patterns we create and enforce it.
3. We can be liberated from suffering by providing patient spaciousness attention to our experience, both pleasant and unpleasant.
4. The means of liberation is The Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is the tool we can use to understand the root of our suffering and transform it. On our first encounter with the idea of there being 'right' views, speech, etc., we may bristle. We don't want to be forced into a particular way of speaking or thinking. We want to speak authentically and think for ourselves. But in fact they are not rules of behavior but useful tools to explore the cause of our suffering. For example, if we are gossiping about someone and begin to feel badly, we can look to the Eightfold Path and see that it is in having done the opposite of 'right' or 'wise' speech that we created suffering. Quite naturally through the greater spaciousness of meditative practice, our increased awareness helps us to live more fully in the moment, able to sense the onset of suffering and see its cause, so that we live with more wisdom and compassion. In each case 'Right' can be read as 'Wise', if preferred:

Right View is:

- Understanding that any point of view is only that: a single point among many possible views; and that perception is veiled with projections and therefore subjective.
- Seeing into the causes of suffering: what we have ingested into our minds to bring about suffering?
- Distinguishing wholesome roots or seeds from unwholesome ones.
- Trying to see the whole picture in any situation, trying to see what contributes to other people's behavior before reacting.
- Deeply understanding the Four Noble Truths and seeing clearly the path of transformation.

Right Thinking is:

- Reflecting the way things are rather than creating stories around it.
- Staying in touch with the body through the breath, allowing the mind-body to be whole.
- Achieved through the following four practices:
 - Question any thought that comes up – “Am I sure?” “How do I know this is true?”
 - When doing an activity, ask yourself “What am I doing?” to bring attention back to the activity, which in turn enriches the experience by being fully present for it. (Could also simply note, “eating”, “driving”, “listening”, etc. or by saying “In the precious moment, I am ...”)
 - Recognize the thinking that arises out of habit, embrace it as an old friend but be aware of it. Eventually, with loving attention, it will lose its dominance.

- Sense into your own desire to bring happiness to others. This is cultivating 'Mind of Love' or Bodhichitta.

Right Speech is:

- Mindful of its impact on others, and the power of words to cause suffering or bring joy and inspiration
- Speaking only the truth but only in a way that can be understood by the other.
- Arises from right thinking and right mindfulness
- Understanding that if we talk harshly to ourselves in our thoughts, we will speak harshly to others, even if we are not aware of it.
- Arises out of deep compassionate listening (Kwan Yin -- Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara)

Right Mindfulness is:

- Being present, able to experience deeply
- Nourishing the object of your attention
- Relieving the suffering of others
- Having insight and understanding
- Allowing transformation and healing

Right Action is:

- Not harming any living being, protecting life
- Generosity and loving kindness, giving time, energy & resources
- Respecting property of others
- Helping to bring about justice and well being
- Sexual responsibility to maintain integrity and well being of individuals, couples, families and society.
- Responsible eating, drinking and consuming; avoiding ingesting toxins of all kinds.

Right Diligence is:

Practicing without forcing, competing or setting a goal. Tuning oneself like a guitar, whose strings must be neither too tight nor too loose to play well. The Middle Way.

Right Livelihood is

- Work that doesn't cause suffering to ourselves or others
- Doing nothing that would put others in the position of harmful livelihood (i.e. eating meat causes another to slaughter.)
- Being mindful in our work, especially in our relations with others.
- If possible, helping to create right livelihood jobs for others.

The Five Precepts

The precepts are vows taken by Buddhist monks and nuns, and also by retreatants at the beginning of a retreat. They are not commandments but wise guidelines. They are:

1. To protect life and do no harm to self or others.
2. To take only what is freely given.
3. To protect relationships and to avoid sexual misconduct.
4. To speak truthfully and kindly.
5. To protect the clarity of mind by avoiding intoxicants.

The Three Refuges

As Buddhists we take refuge in:

The Buddha, *both the historical Buddha and the story of his awakening as an inspiration and shining light to our own potential, and our Buddha nature that resides in each of us.*

The Dharma, *the teachings and insights.*

The Sangha, *the community whose like-minded intention supports us in our practice.*

The Four Bramaviharas

Bramavihara is a Pali word meaning 'heavenly abode.' An abode is a dwelling place, in this case a dwelling place for our consciousness, or a state of being.

The four bramaviharas are 'heavenly' because they are states of well being. In these states of being, we are able to see beyond the illusionary boundaries that seem to divide us, and we can feel ourselves held in the embrace of a loving awareness.

The four brahmaviharas are: *Metta* which means lovingkindness, *Karuna*, compassion, *Mudita*, sympathetic joy and *Upekka*, equilibrium.

Many who have practiced some meditation are familiar with the term *metta*, but may not know the others. And this is fine, because the meditative practice of *metta* ultimately produces the other three states. They are the rich fruit of practice.

There are many more concepts in Buddhism and there are many useful books to explore them all. But Buddhism is first and foremost experiential, so it is recommended that a budding Buddhist spend more time on the cushion meditating and less time in reading 'about' Buddhism.