

Buddhism in Brief

It is said that soon after his enlightenment, the Buddha passed a man on the road who was struck by the Buddha's extraordinary radiance and peaceful presence. The man stopped and asked, "My friend, what are you? Are you a celestial being or a god?" "No", said the Buddha. "Well, then, are you some kind of magician or wizard? Again, the Buddha answered,

"No".

"Are you a man?"

"No".

"Well, my friend, then what are you?"

The Buddha replied, "I am awake".

The word Buddha means "one who is awake". It is the experience of awakening to the truth of life that is offered in the Buddhist tradition. For over 2,500 years, the practices and teachings of Buddhism have offered a systematic way to see clearly and live wisely. They have offered a way to discover liberation within our own bodies and minds, in the midst of this very world.

History records that the Buddha was born as a prince in an ancient kingdom of northern India (original name Siddharta Gautama born 624 BC Kapilavastu, Sakya Republic Kosala Kingdom). Although as a youth, he was protected by his father in beautiful palaces, as he grew older, the Buddha encountered what we must all face: the inevitable sorrows of life. He saw the loss of all things we hold dear, and the aging, sickness and death that come to every human being. Seeing this, he chose to

renounce his royal title and leave his palace to become a seeker of truth, searching for the end of human sorrow, searching for freedom in the face of the ceaseless round of birth and death.

For some years the Buddha practiced as an austere yogi in the forests of India. In time he realized that his extreme asceticism had brought him no more freedom than his previous indulgence in worldly pleasure. Instead, he saw that human freedom must come from practising a life of inner and outer balance, and he called this discovery the Middle Path.

Having seen this, the Buddha seated himself under a great banyan tree and vowed to find liberation in the face of the forces that bring suffering to humankind. He felt himself assailed by these forces – by fear, attachment, greed, hatred, delusion, temptation and doubt. The Buddha sat in the midst of these forces with his heart open and his mind clear until he could see to the depths of human consciousness, until he discovered a place of peace at the center of them all. This was his enlightenment, the discovery of nirvana, the freeing of his heart from entanglement in all the conditions of the world. The realisation of truth that he touched that night was so profound that his teachings about it have continued to inspire and enlighten people all over the world to this day. Over the centuries, one and a half billion people, one quarter of the human race, have followed the Buddha's way.

From the Buddha's enlightenment, two great powers were awakened in him: transcendent wisdom and universal compassion. Setting in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma (Dharma) the Buddha wandered first to the Deer Park in Benares and gave instructions to the yogis who had practised with him in the forest. After this, for forty five years, he brought the teachings of wisdom and compassion to all who would listen. These teachings, which the Buddha called the Dhamma (Dharma), or the Way, are an invitation to follow the path to enlightenment. They are an invitation to all who hear them to discover their own Buddha-Nature, the freedom and great heart of compassion that is possible for every human being.

To bring about the awakening of students of all temperaments, the Buddha taught a wonderful variety of spiritual practices. There are foundation practices for the development of loving kindness, generosity and moral integrity, the universal ground of spiritual life. Then there is a vast array of meditation practices to train the mind and open the heart. These practices include awareness of the breath and body, mindfulness of feelings, and thoughts, practices of mantra and devotion, visualisation and contemplative reflection, and practices leading to refined and profoundly expanded states of consciousness.

To carry on these teachings, the Buddha created an ordained Sangha, what is now one of the oldest surviving monastic orders on earth. These monks and nuns, who still number in the hundreds of thousands around the globe, follow the Buddha through a life of

renunciation. But the teachings he left were not limited to renunciates. They can be understood and awakened in the heart of human beings in every circumstance, in every walk of life.

Buddhists take refuge, have trusting confidence and utmost faith in the Three Jewels. Namely the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Vesak Day

The most important Buddhist festival is Vesak which commemorates the birth of the Buddha. The event is observed on the full moon day of the lunar month of Vesakha (May). The day is observed as a public holiday in many South East Asian countries. It is marked by special devotional services and meritorious acts such as the presentation of food or alms to monks and nuns or the release of captive birds and fish in memory of the Buddha's compassion. The Buddha's enlightenment and passing away are also observed on this day.

Dhamma Cakka

The most common symbol of Buddhism is called Dhamma Cakka (The Wheel of Dhamma or Dhamma Wheel). It is based on 'Dhammacakkappavattanasutta' or setting in motion the Wheel of Dhamma (TRUTH). The Buddha's first sermon.

The Four Noble Truths are the essence of the Buddha's teaching. Namely the Noble Truth of suffering or unsatisfactoriness (Dukkha). It's arising (Samudaya). Its cessation (Nirodha)

and the path leading to the cessation of suffering (Magga). The Four Noble Truths which are expounded in the discourses consist of twenty four factors.

<p>1. Noble Truth of Suffering</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Birth is suffering (repeated existence) 2. Old Age 3. Death 4. Sorrow 5. Grief 6. Physical Suffering 7. Mental Suffering 8. Anguish 9. Association with the unpleasant 10. Disassociation from the pleasant 11. Not to get what one wants 12. In short, the five aggregates of grasping are impermanent (anicca), unsatisfactory (dukkha) and selfless (anatta)
<p>2. Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Desire for sensual pleasure 14. Desire for becoming (Eternalism) 15. Desire for non becoming (Nihilism)
<p>3. Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Enlightenment of Nibbana (Nirvana)
<p>4. Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (namely the Noble 8-Fold Path)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Right Understanding (view) 18. Right Thoughts (intentions) 19. Right Speech 20. Right Action 21. Right Livelihood 22. Right Effort 23. Right Mindfulness 24. Right Concentration

Thus the Dhamma Wheel with twenty-four spokes represents the twenty-four factors of the Four Noble Truths and the Dhamma Wheel with eight spokes represents the Noble Eight Fold Path.

Words of the Buddha

Do no harm.
Do only good.
Train your mind.
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

From the Dhammapada Sutta (Dhamma sayings scripture)

We are what we think.
All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.
Speak or act with an impure mind
And trouble will follow you
As the Wheel follows the ox that draws the
cart.

We are what we think
All that we are arises with our thoughts
With our thoughts we make the world
Speak or act with a pure mind
And happiness will follow you
As your shadow, unshakeable

How can a troubled mind
Understand the Dharma?

Your worst enemy cannot harm you
As much as your own thoughts,
Unguarded

But once mastered,
No one can help you as much,
Not even your father, or your mother

From the Kalama Sutta

Do not believe in anything (simply) because
you have heard it.
Do not believe in traditions because they have
been handed down for many generations.
Do not believe in anything because it is spoken
and rumored by many.
Do not believe in anything (simply) because it
is found written in your religious books.
Do not believe in anything merely on the
authority of your teachers and elders.
But after observation and analysis, when you
find that anything agrees with reason and is
conducive to the good and benefit of one and
all then accept it and live up to it.

BUDDHA (623-543 BC.)
(Abguttara Nikaya, Vol 1, 188-193 P.T.S. Ed.)

From the Vajrachedika Sutra (Diamond Cutter Scripture)

Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

Dedication Prayer

May the truth of the Buddha Dharma awaken
transcendent wisdom and a great heart of
compassion in all beings. Through study,
contemplation, meditation and practise, may
all beings attain unsurpassed supreme
enlightenment.