

Introduction to Buddhism: Notes from Patricia Phelan's chapter:

"A Practice of Body, Mind and Consciousness: Introduction to Buddhism"

Five Voices Five Faiths: An Interfaith Primer, Amanda Millay Hughes, ed., Cambridge, MA: Cowley Pub., 2005

The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion defines Buddhism as "the religion of the awakened one (Buddha). With no centralized governing authority Buddhism is a richly diverse tradition, practiced around the world in various forms.

- non-theistic
- emphasizes actual experience and personal efforts in "practice"
- Practice is the process we go through to wake up to the true nature of reality. Buddha told his disciples not to take his teachings to be true simply because he said them; he told them to verify the teachings for themselves through their own experience. "If you investigate and taste the Truth for yourself, then it will be a living teaching.

"Buddha" = "awakened one"

The story of Siddhartha – 6th century BCE

At the age of 80 Buddha died. His last words were: "All composite things decay. Work out your salvation with diligence."

"Our effort in Buddhist practice is not an tempt to conquer our desires and fears, our depression or anger or confusion. Our effort is to *awaken* them, to notice our mental and emotional states without trying to pursue them or to squelch them. When we simply observe them, as Siddhartha observed the attacks of Mara, these things lose their power. They burn themselves out and come to rest on their own." -Patrician Phelan, *An Introduction to Buddhism: A Practice of Body, Mind, and Consciousness*,

...Buddhist practice is about being wholly and completely present with no attempt to repress

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

1. **Life is sometimes painful and filled with suffering.** This is due to the impermanence of all phenomena, including everything we call "self."
2. **The origination of dissatisfaction of suffering is "attachment" or "clinging."** We cling to that which we define as the self. Anything we think of as self is impermanent, and therefore, ultimately unsatisfactory. There are three kinds of craving:
 - a) sensuous experience
 - b) craving to maintain the self, trying to maintain our identity of who we think we are
 - c) craving for extinction. An extreme form is suicide; a weaker form is the desire to escape from the cycle of birth and death or the suffering of this world

Any kind of craving or grasping, clinging or attaching, automatically creates dissatisfaction or suffering.

3. **There is a way to end suffering.** Whenever clinging or craving stops, dissatisfaction and suffering will stop.
4. **The way to end craving is through practicing the Middle Way, Buddha's Eight-fold Path:** Right view, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.

Mindfulness, Right Concentration. This path avoids too much pleasure or self-indulgence and too much pain or austerity.

"Right" = completed = perfected

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Right View or Right Understanding is to know and deeply understand the Four Noble Truths

Right Intention or Thought is thought or intention free from sensuous desire, ill-will, cruelty. This manifests as the absence of all emotional obstructions, and it is a state of consciousness free from the limiting consideration of self-interest.

Right Thought, Right Speech, and Right Action are the basis for the precepts of Buddhism. The usual meaning of "intention" is the mind with which we act, and the intention in any particular activity is a strong factor in determining its *karmic* result. One of the fundamental teachings in Buddhism is the law of cause and effect, or action and the result of action. The word *karma* means "volitional action which is enacted through our body, speech, and mind."

-If your motivation is unwholesome do not continue its expression into further activity.

Right Speech – free of falsehood, slander, self-aggrandizement, harsh speech, dogmatic assertions, and hypnotic suggestions. "By not indulging in, or listening to, lying, back-biting harsh talk and idle gossip, we can establish a connecting link between 'right thought' and 'right action.'" ...this actually means "Right Communication", including the printed word, television, movies, internet, and advertisements.

Right Action or Right Conduct refers to our physical activity.... not killing, not stealing, not misusing sex

Right Livelihood has traditionally been defined to mean not butchering, including not fishing or hunting; not making weapons or engaging in warfare; not manufacturing, distributing, or selling intoxicants.

Right Effort is one's endeavor, or energetic will, to abandon unwholesome states and to develop wholesome states. The roots of unwholesome actions or states of mind are greed, hate, delusion. Wholesome actions, or states that are the opposite of states that have their basis in, for example, generosity, loving-kindness, and insight

Right Mindfulness is fourfold: mindfulness of the body, of sensations, of states of mind, and of mind-objects. The literal meaning of “mindfulness” is *keeping awareness of the present near one’s mind or consciousness*. This is a clear and wordless knowing of what is and what is not which takes place before you start thinking. Mindfulness is an antidote to being on the kind of automatic pilot that so often dominates our routine activity.

Right Concentration or Meditation is the concentration of the mind within meditation associated with wholesome states of consciousness. When the mind is active, it is often too active, jumping all over the place (remember something from the past, planning the future, thinking about a grocery list, singing a song, lost in some other fantasy). At this time, we are separated from our real life, here and now, which is the only life we can be alive in. Often our attention is pushed and pulled by our hopes and fears, our expectations and desires, being agitated, and producing distorted perceptions like the water when the lake is disturbed. By contrast, the mind in meditation is compared to a still lake after the waves have become calm. A calm, clear mind can perceive and interact with the world appropriately without the distortion of our conditioning and preconceived ideas.

Varieties of Buddhism Two major divisions today: Theravada and Mahayana

Early Buddhism is often referred to by the pejorative term “Hinayana” (literally “small vehicle” in Sanskrit).

It is believed that, historically, there were 18 schools within “Hinayana”

Today just the two. “Theravada” is Pali for “teaching of the elders”. It is characterized by a focus on individual liberation through one’s efforts on meditation and careful adherence to moral disciplines that involve, what is sometimes called, “harmless behavior.”

Mahayana (“great vehicle” in Sanskrit) developed several centuries after the life of the historical Buddha. While valuing the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, this stream of Buddhism placed more emphasis on the presence of Buddha-nature in all beings, a much larger pantheon of Buddhas and other enlightened beings, and the path of the bodhisattva (“enlightenment being”) characterized by the Six Paramitas. The paramitas, or “perfections” begin with the perfection of generosity, characterized by open-handedness, open-heartedness, and liberality. The practice of generosity stresses the warm-hearted readiness to give, while the essence of liberality is an unattached and spontaneous mind. The perfection of generosity is followed by the perfection of conduct of morality, patience, energy or effort, meditation, and wisdom. **The bodhisattva is known for the vow to remain in the cycle of birth and death (this world of ignorance and suffering) until all beings are enlightened.**

The Zen School began to form in China about CE 500, about 1,000 years after Shakyamuni Buddha lived. It spread from China to Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. As Zen developed, it was influenced by ‘Confucianism and Taoism while regaining its roots in the life and teachings of Buddha.’ It is characterized by simplicity, and appreciation of nature, and has its basis in non-duality. The fundamental practice of Zen is a form of meditation called *zazen*, a Japanese word that literally means “sitting Zen.” It is the practice of awareness, the practice of bringing your attention to the present moment, this whole complete moment, by bringing your awareness to your physical presence (including posture, bodily sensations, breathing) as well as the state of mind.

Zen Buddhist practice stresses that the world of enlightenment is not separate from the everyday world we all know. *“Carrying water and chopping wood are the activities of the Buddha,”* and *“Ordinary mind.”... “Beginner’s mind.”* Zen realization shows us that we are directly connected to, dependent on, all living beings and everything that exists. Compassionate concern for the welfare of others and for the environment flows naturally from this insight.

Tibetan Buddhism is an ancient tradition now symbolized by the exiled religious and temporal political leader of Tibet His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. He was born July 6, 1935 to a peasant family in a small village in northeastern Tibet and recognized at the age of two as the reincarnation of his predecessor, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lamas are the manifestation of the Buddha of Compassion, who chose to take rebirth to serve humanity. *“Dalai Lama”* means Ocean of Wisdom. In 1950 the Chinese invaded Tibet and destroyed many of their monasteries. He has led the Tibetan Government-in-exile from Dharamsala, India since 1959. There is a world-wide effort to pressure the Chinese government into freeing Tibet. He travels the world with his message of peace and compassion and is a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. There are many practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism in the U.S. though far less than Zen.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

“Great Compassion is the root of all forms of worship.”



“Inner darkness, which we call ignorance, is the root of all suffering. The more inner light that comes, the more darkness will diminish. This is the only way to achieve salvation or nirvana.”



*“Now if these words are helpful for you, then put them into practice.
But if they aren’t helpful, then there’s no need for them.”*