

AN IDEAL PRACTITIONER OF BUDDHISM

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Abstract

The Buddha discovered through personal experience the Middle Path 'which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to Calm, Insight, Enlightenment, Nibbāna'. This Middle Path is generally referred to as the Noble Eightfold Path, because it is composed of eight categories or divisions: namely,

1. Right Understanding (Sammādiṭṭhi)
2. Right Thought (Sammāsaṅkappa)
3. Right Speech (Sammāvācā)
4. Right Action (Sammākammanta)
5. Right Livelihood (Sammājīva)
6. Right Effort (Sammāvāyāma)
7. Right Mindfulness (Sammā sati)
8. Right Concentration (Sammāsamādhi).

The teaching of the Buddha is meant not only for monks in monasteries, but also for ordinary men and women living at home with their families. The Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Buddhist way of life, is meant for all, without distinction of any kind.

The Buddha taught not to do any evil, to do good and to purify one's mind, this is the teaching of all Buddhas. He taught four Brahmavihāra: Mettā- extending unlimited, universal love and good-will to all living beings without any kind of discrimination just as a mother loves her only child, Karuṇā- compassion for all living beings who are suffering, in trouble and affliction, Muditā- sympathetic joy in others' success, welfare and happiness, and Upekkhā- equanimity in all vicissitudes of life. These teachings are the ways to become an ideal practitioner of the Buddha.



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Road to Ultimate Goal

According to Buddhism for a man to be perfect there are two qualities that he should develop equally: compassion (*karuṇā*) on one side, and wisdom (*paññā*) on the other. Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart, while wisdom would stand for the intellectual side or the qualities of the mind. If one develops only the emotional neglecting the intellectual, one may become a good-hearted fool; while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the emotional may turn one into a hard-hearted intellect without feeling for others. Therefore, to be perfect one has to develop both equally. That is the aim of the Buddhist way of life: in it wisdom and compassion are inseparably linked together. Buddhism is a religion of wisdom and compassion. Wisdom is to see into the true nature of existence. And compassion is for all beings by living a life of complete love and harmlessness.

The Buddha discovered through personal experience the Middle Path ‘which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to Calm, Insight, Enlightenment, *Nibbāṇa*’. This Middle Path is generally referred to as the Noble Eightfold Path, because it is composed of eight categories or divisions. These eight factors aim at promoting and perfecting the three essentials of Buddhist training and discipline: namely: Ethical Conduct (*Sīla*), Mental Discipline (*Samādhi*) and Wisdom (*Paññā*). It will therefore be more helpful for a coherent and better understanding of the eight divisions of the Path, if we group them and explain them according to these three heads.

In Ethical Conduct (*Sīla*), based on love and compassion, are included three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path: namely, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.

Next comes Mental Discipline, in which are included three other factors of the Eightfold Path: namely, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness (or Attentiveness) and Right Concentration.

All the evils in the world are produced by selfish desire or lack of wisdom. The root of all evil is ignorance and false views.

Right Understanding is the understanding of things as they are, and it is the Four Noble Truths that explain things as they really are. Right Understanding therefore is ultimately reduced to the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. This understanding is the highest wisdom which sees the Ultimate Reality. According to Buddhism there are two sorts

of understanding: What we generally call understanding is knowledge, an accumulated memory, an intellectual grasping of a subject according to certain given data. This is called ‘knowing accordingly’. It is not very deep. Real deep understanding is called ‘penetration’, seeing a thing in its true nature, without name and label. This penetration is possible only when the mind is free from all impurities and is fully developed through meditation.

From this brief account of the Path, one may see that it is a way of life to be followed, practised and developed by each individual. It is self-discipline in body, word and mind, self-development and self-purification. It has nothing to do with belief, prayer, worship or ceremony. In that sense, it has nothing which may popularly be called ‘religious’. It is a Path leading to the realization of Ultimate Reality, to complete freedom, happiness and peace through moral, spiritual and intellectual perfection.

The ultimate goal of Buddhists

Nibbanais an ultimate reality which is supramundane (*lokuttara*), that is, beyond the world of mind and body or the five ‘aggregates’. *Nibbanais* to be understood by intuitive knowledge and inferential knowledge (*paccakkha or pativedha nana and anumana or anubodha nana*). To express both ideas it is stated that *Nibbana* is to be realized by means of the wisdom pertaining to the four Paths of Sainthood and that it becomes an object to the Paths (*Magga*) and Fruits (*Phala*).

It becomes an object to the Paths and Fruits, and is called *Nibbana* because it is a departure (*ni*) from the craving or attachment (*vāna*). In others words, intrinsically (*sabhavato*) *Nibbana* is Supreme peaceful (*santi*) state derived by the cessation of all sufferings (extinction of mental and spiritual defilements or annihilation of the 10 *kilesa* flames originating in lust, hatred and ignorance).

This single *Nibbana* is viewed as twofold according to the way it is experienced before and after death. *Nibbāna* (Sanskrt-Nirvana) is composed of *ni* and *vāna*. *Ni* is a particle implying negation. *Vāna* means weaving or craving. It is this craving which acts as a cord to connect the series of lives of any particular individual in the course of his wanderings in *Saṃsara*.

As long as one is entangled by craving or attachment, one accumulates fresh Kammic forces which must materialize in one form or other in the eternal cycle of birth and death. When all forms of craving are extirpated, Kammic forces cease to operate, and one, in

conventional terms, attains *Nibbāna*, escaping the cycle of birth and death. The Buddhist conception of Deliverance is this escape from the ever-recurring cycle of birth and death, and is not merely an escape from 'sin and hell'.

Etymologically, *Nibbāna* means non-craving or non-attachment, or 'departure from craving'. Strictly speaking, *Nibbāna* is that *Dhamma* which is gained by the complete destruction of all forms of craving or attachment. *Nibbāna* also means the blowing out, the extinction, the destruction, of the flames of lust or desire, hatred, and ignorance. (*Rāgakkhayo Dosakkhayo Mohakkhayo- Idarṇvuccatinibānaṃ*) *Nibbāna* is one fold according to its intrinsic nature (*santilakkhana*). According to the way (it is experienced), *Nibbāna* is twofold—namely;

1. *Sa-upādisesa Nibbāna* (the element of *Nibbāna* with the substrata): It is the type of *Nibbāna* having the 5 aggregates or *khandhas* as remainder.
2. *Anupādisesa Nibbāna* (the element of *Nibbāna* without the substrata remaining). It is the type of *Nibbāna* not having the five aggregates or *khandhas* as remainder.

Nibbāna is threefold according to its different aspects: *Sunnata* (void), *Animitta* (Signless), and *Appanīhita* (Longing-free).

1. *Sunnata* (void) *Nibbāna*—Devoid of lust, hatred, and ignorance, or of all conditioned things.
2. *Animitta* (Signless) *Nibbāna*—Free from the signs of lust, hatred and ignorance or from the signs of all conditioned things.
3. *Appanīhita* (Longing-free) *Nibbāna*—Free from the hankerings of lust, hatred, and ignorance or because it is not longed for which any feelings of craving or attachment.

The great seekers who are free from craving declare that *Nibbāna* is deathless, absolutely endless, non-conditioned, and incomparable.

Nibbāna is the ultimate goal of Buddhists. It may also be defined as the extinction of lust, hatred and ignorance, "The whole world is in flames," says the Buddha. "By what fire is it kindled? By the fire of lust, hatred and ignorance, by the fire of birth, old age, death, pain, lamentation, sorrow, grief and despair it is kindled."

It should not be understood that *Nibbāna* is a state of nothingness or annihilation owing to the fact that we cannot perceive it with our worldly knowledge. One cannot say that there exists no light just because the blind man does not see it. In that well known story, too, the fish arguing with his friend, the turtle, triumphantly concluded that there exists no land.

Nibbāna of the Buddhists is neither a mere nothingness nor a state of annihilation, but what it is no words can adequately express. *Nibbāna* is a *Dhamma* which is "unborn, unoriginated, uncreated and unformed." Hence, it is eternal (*dhuva*), desirable (*subha*), and happy (*sukha*). In *Nibbāna* nothing is "eternalized," nor is anything "annihilated," besides suffering.

According to the Pali text references are made to *Nibbānaas saupādisesa* and *anupādisesa*. These, in fact, are not two kinds of *Nibbāna*, but the one single *Nibbāna*, receiving its name according to the way it is experienced before and after death. From a metaphysical standpoint *Nibbāna* is deliverance from suffering. From a psychological standpoint *Nibbāna* is the eradication of egoism. From an ethical standpoint *Nibbāna* is the destruction of lust, hatred and ignorance.

The Path to Nibbāna

How is *Nibbāna* to be attained? It is by following the Noble Eightfold Path which consists of Right Understanding (*sammā-ditṭhi*), Right Thoughts (*sammā-sankappa*), Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*), Right Actions (*sammā-kammanta*), Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*).

1. Right Understanding, which is the keynote of Buddhism, is explained as the knowledge of the four Noble Truths. To understand rightly means to understand things as they really are and not as they appear to be. This refers primarily to a correct understanding of oneself, because, as the *RohitassaSutta* states, "Dependent on this one-fathom long body with its consciousness" are all the four Truths. In the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Understanding stands at the beginning as well as at its end. A minimum degree of Right Understanding is necessary at the very beginning because it gives the right motivations to the other seven factors of the Path and gives to them correct direction. At the culmination of the practice, Right Understanding has matured into perfect Insight Wisdom (*vipassana-pañña*), leading directly to the stages of sainthood.

2. Clear vision of right understanding leads to clear thinking. The second factor of the Noble Eightfold Path is, therefore, Right Thought (*sammā-sankappa*), which serves the double purpose of eliminating evil thoughts and developing pure thoughts. Right Thought, in this particular connection, is threefold. It consists of: *Nekkhamma*- Renunciation of worldly pleasures or the virtue of selflessness, which is opposed to attachment, selfishness, and possessiveness; *Avyāpāda* - Loving-kindness, goodwill, or benevolence, which is opposed to hatred, ill-will, or aversion; and *Avihimsā* - Harmlessness or compassion, which is opposed to cruelty and callousness.

3. Right Thoughts lead to Right Speech, the third factor. This includes abstinence from falsehood, slandering, harsh words, and frivolous talk.

4. Right Speech must be followed by Right Action which comprises abstinence from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

5. Purifying his thoughts, words and deeds at the outset, the spiritual pilgrim tries to purify his livelihood by refraining from the five kinds of trade which are forbidden to a lay-disciple. They are trading in arms, human beings, animals for slaughter, intoxicating drinks and drugs, and poisons. For monks, wrong livelihood consists of hypocritical conduct and wrong means of obtaining the requisites of monk-life.

6. Right Effort is fourfold, namely: the endeavor to discard evil that has already arisen; the endeavor to prevent the arising of unarisen evil; the endeavor to develop unarisen good; the endeavor to promote the good which has already arisen.

7. Right Mindfulness is constant mindfulness with regard to body, feelings, thoughts, and mind-objects.

8. Right Effort and Right Mindfulness lead to Right Concentration. It is the one-pointedness of mind, culminating in the *jhānas* or meditative absorptions.

Of these eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path the first two are grouped under the heading of Wisdom (*pañña*), the following three under Morality (*sīla*), and the last three under Concentration (*samādhi*). But according to the order of development the sequence is as follows:

I. Morality (*sīla*) - Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.

II. Concentration (*samādhi*) - Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

III. Wisdom (*pañña*) - Right Understanding and Right Thoughts.

Conclusion

The teaching of the Buddha is meant not only for monks in monasteries, but also for ordinary men and women living at home with their families. The Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Buddhist way of life, is meant for all, without distinction of any kind.

The Buddha taught not to do any evil, to do good and to purify one's mind, this is the teaching of all Buddhas. He taught four *Brahmavihāra*: *Mettā*- extending unlimited, universal love and good-will to all living beings without any kind of discrimination just as a mother loves her only child, *Karuṇā*- compassion for all living beings who are suffering, in trouble and affliction, *Muditā*- sympathetic joy in others' success, welfare and happiness, and *Uppekkhā*- equanimity in all vicissitudes of life. These teachings are the ways to become an ideal practitioner of the Buddha.

'One is one's own refuge, who else could be the refuge?' said the Buddha. He admonished his disciples to be a refuge to themselves and never to seek refuge in or help from anybody else. He taught, encouraged and stimulated each person to develop himself and to work out his own emancipation, for man has the power to liberate himself from all bondage through his own personal effort and intelligence. The Buddha says: 'You should do your work, for the *Thatāgatas* only teach the way.' If one desires to be a true Buddhist or to become a perfect man, the teachings of the Buddha should be followed and practised.

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