

BUDDHA'S ORIGINAL TEACHINGS

© 2011 by Victor Daniels
(see end of document for copyright and reproduction information)

AS MUCH A PSYCHOLOGY AS A RELIGION. Buddha was the most psychological of history's noted spiritual teachers. When asked about the existence and character of God, he replied that he did not concern himself with that question, but that the nature of suffering and how to decrease it, in this life, was the essence of his teachings. How to make this life a good and satisfying one, beneficial to ourselves and others. We could as well call it an ethics, or a psychological system. But psychology did not exist in his day, and religion was the available vehicle for transmitting his teachings.

Enlightenment, liberation, or awakening. "Buddha" means "The enlightened one" or depending on your translation "the liberated one." A buddha is a human being with sufficient determination and resolve to have traversed the path to become enlightened. There have been numerous buddhas, but only one Gautama Buddha of Kapilavastu, who is known as the Buddha. His description of himself: I am an ordinary human being who has become liberated from many of the causes of suffering.

"The Buddha was a profoundly good person," writes contemporary Buddhist teacher Sylvia Boorstein. He was generous and moral, restrained and patient, honest and openhearted. He was also tough. He did not confuse passion with passivity. He obligated monks and nuns to leave the community when their presence was disruptive. . . He acted wisely and energetically, out of love, on behalf of all beings. We could too." (Boorstein, 2002, p. 2)

Below are three sections.

*PART I is a Thumbnail summary of Buddha's central teachings;
PART II is a fuller outline of his ideas and practices, and
PART III is a collection of anecdotes and narrations about his life.*

I hope this will be useful to you. Of course there are thousands of books about Buddha and his teachings--this is my attempt to convey the very essence in a few words.

PART I: THUMBNAIL SUMMARY OF BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

THE MIDDLE WAY, (or Middle Path). In all matters, find the middle way between your extremes that is right for you. The middle way is usually found by experiencing extremes, not by staying to the middle and avoiding them.

AN EMPIRICAL ATTITUDE. Buddha said, "Believe nothing until you have tried it out for

yourself and found it to be true. Don't accept something just because I tell to.

LETTING GO. Liberation comes in part through giving up our grasping and attachments and letting go. This includes unhelpful old ideas and beliefs as well as attachments in the material world.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

1. Suffering exists. It is part of the very structure of existence
2. Suffering has a cause.
3. There is a way to end (or at least greatly reduce) suffering.
4. A way to end (reduce) suffering is by following the eightfold path.

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

The term "right," as used in most translations, should not be interpreted in a dualistic sense as "right vs. wrong." Some translators have suggested that "Helpful" or "Appropriate" or some similar term which implies a variety of possibilities rather than a single correct way is a more appropriate rendering. The longer "Lecture on Buddha's Original Teachings" at this website renders the term as "Helpful and beneficial understanding. . ." etc. and provides more detail regarding each of the eight elements of the path.

1. Right Understanding Especially knowledge of the Four Noble Truths

2. Right Motivation (resolve). The determination to remove animosity, malice, and hatred from our consciousness, and also the determination to renounce worldly pleasures.

3. Right Speech. Telling the truth and avoiding lies, harsh language, frivolous gossip, and any remarks which may cause others unnecessary hardship or pain.

4. Right Action. Acting in ways that honor rather than destroy life, and no stealing or immorality or action which would harm others or yourself . Let your acts create good karma.

5. Right Livelihood. Finding an occupation which suits your own nature, which contributes to the world in some positive way, and which does not cause damage, difficulty, or hardship to others.

6. Right Effort.. Directing your efforts toward faithfully following the Eightfold Path

7. Right Mindfulness. (Sometimes translated "awareness.") Letting go of thoughts of "I must have this," or "I must have that." Developing moment-by-moment awareness of what we are in fact doing in our lives and the world, and sensitivity to the effects of this. Learning to perceive the world and others clearly, without judgment or envy.

8. Right Concentration. Practicing meditative states which lead us in the direction of self-mastery and evenmindedness.

UNWHOLESOME STATES-- IMPORTANT SOURCES OF UNHAPPINESS

Ignorance and Delusion. If we hold mistaken beliefs and cannot see and hear things clearly as they are (including ourselves, then we are sure to behave in ways that are harmful to ourselves and others.

Afflictive emotional states. Some, such as fears, need to be talked-through and worked-through to reduce them. Others, like hate, enmity, and belligerence, should be simply observed but not expressed, and our attention then moved to more helpful and constructive states. We may note here that no war has ever been fought in the name of Buddhism. It holds a resolutely nonviolent attitude.

Unwillingness to come to terms with impermanence. This is holding on to a craving that for the continuation as they are of things that inevitably must change.

Identification with possessions, whether material or ideational

Egoism and Egotism. Egoism is being locked into my own views and acting for my narrow advantage even when it harms others. Egotism is thinking and saying that I'm better than others.

WHOLESOME STATES, OR "THINGS TO BE ENCOURAGED"

The "Ten Paramitas" are generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, lovingkindness, equanimity.

The development of awareness, a clear mind, and lovingkindness could be viewed as the central elements in the Buddhist path. Renunciation, or letting-go of things we want but don't really need, is part of letting go of craving things that we are unlikely to get, or that distract us from acting in kind, generous ways toward other. Life is fundamentally relational, and acting in ways that benefit other people and other sentient beings brings us peace of mind as well, in which we do not have to erect mental barriers that separate us from others. Patience and generosity go together with these.

Lovingkindness is a central relational attitude to be cultivated. "Hatred will never cease by hatred. It will cease by love alone." Like Jesus, we are exhorted to love our enemies, but with a further dimension articulated: doing so teaches us tolerance and compassion.

Determination and perseverance are crucial to self-transformation. No amount of belief or faith alone can lead us to liberation. It requires the diligent effort necessary to develop a clear, centered mind and a tolerant, loving heart.

MEDITATION

Analytical meditation (contemplation) endeavors to understand a topic through reasoning. **Stabilizing meditation (concentration)** endeavors to develop control of your attention and clarity of mind. **Imaginative meditation** involves imagining that you already have certain spiritual qualities that you want to develop.

PART II: GOING DEEPER INTO BUDDHA'S IDEAS AND PRACTICES

SOME BASIC IDEAS

On Belief and Experience: Buddha encouraged people to question and think through what he said. He declared, "Believe nothing until you have experienced it and found it to be true. Accept

my words only after you have examined them for yourselves; do not accept them simply because of the reverence you have for me." He advanced his teachings as a method that each person could experiment with for themselves, and made no demand that his followers "believe" on his authority. He told his others to accept each aspect of his teaching only after they had tried it out for themselves and found it to work. When your experimentation confirms one step, then try another. In this sense he had a very "scientific" understanding. Sadhatissa writes, "these 'truths' are...the result of one man's truth and freedom, and they have been found valid by many millions who followed after him; but each individual, in so far as he is a true follower of the Buddha, must reason out each step for himself, and must in time come to experience the truth, not by hearsay but by direct knowledge during his own lifetime." (p. 37) I find this a refreshing contrast to the authoritarian stance of many gurus and religious authorities of East and West alike that "MY way is the RIGHT way, and if you want to be saved or liberated or enlightened you have to believe what I tell you to.

The Middle Path: Out of your experience of your extremes, find a middle path that avoids attachment to the worldliness of possessions, power and reputation on one hand, and the painful, vain, and unprofitable extreme of excessive asceticism on the other. Buddha was unusual in Indian tradition in that he renounced not only worldly ways but also extreme asceticism. He realized that instead of mental clarity and inner peace, the severe asceticism to which he subjected himself had impaired his health and dulled his mind. He formulated the Middle Way after having been brought back to health and hearing a story of a Lyre strung too loosely, too tight, and just right. You can find your own Middle Way in all things. Avoid being too extreme even in espousing the Middle Way itself.

Letting Go. Tibetan Lama Tarthang Tulku offers a useful clarification: "There are two kinds of 'giving up' or 'letting go'. There is giving up attachments, and there is giving up because of difficulties and disappointments. The person who has inner strength and openness does not 'give up'--but gives up grasping and attachment, and consequently gains freedom and confidence." (1977, p. 9)

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Buddha elucidated the Four Noble Truths in his first sermon, given at the Deer Park in Sarnath, just outside Benares, or Varanasi (today it is a suburb of Benares).

1. **Suffering (some translations use "unhappiness") exists.** It is built into the very structure of our existence. Suffering includes ordinary pain, the suffering of unwanted change, and the suffering of pervasive conditioning.
2. **Suffering has a cause.** Its cause is self-centered craving, and desire for that which will not be obtained. Out of this comes grabbing, clinging, or rejecting. Much of this is bound to fail because we fail to deeply realize the truth of impermanence, so that we grasp at the constant, changing flux of life as if it were something stable and fixed. These causes are part of a series of interconnected links of cause and effect which create a vicious circle from which there appears to be no escape. We meet new situations still encumbered with the views and attitudes of the past, which create still more ties which bind us to the wheel of suffering. "We grasp at an illusion and run chasing after it...dreaming and waking," writes Sadhatissa. (p. 42)
3. **Suffering can cease (or be greatly reduced)** Through letting go of conditioned states and views, and desires which will not be fulfilled, the cause of suffering falls away. Buddha stated that about 1/3 of our suffering is an inevitable function of the conditions of human life, but we ourselves create the rest of it. We can learn to stop doing that.
4. **There is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering and unhappiness, called the Eightfold Path.** Nirvana is a state in which we no longer create avoidable suffering and unhappiness for ourselves and others. (It parallels Jesus' concept of the "Kingdom of

Heaven on Earth." In this state we do not create avoidable unhappiness due to unrealistic desires or other causes. What Nirvana is not: It does not require involvement with the conceptual construct of a God or deity-figure.

The most helpful attitude to take toward the Four Noble Truths, Buddha said, is a "confidence-based knowledge" that there is a path to tread and that positive results can come from following that path.

The term Dhamma or Dharma is often used in Buddhist tradition for the collected body of Buddha's teachings, as in the term, "I take refuge in the Dharma."

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

The Eightfold Path is devoted to changing the habits of mind that create avoidable suffering. "In order to get rid of suffering we need to eliminate the causes and conditions of suffering, and in order to achieve happiness we need to acquire the causes and conditions of happiness," notes the Dalai Lama (2002, p. 59) Boorstein adds, "We can learn to "act, speak, work, and manage our relationships in a way that produces a contented heart," (2002, p. 6).

A background condition of the Eightfold Path is recognition of the interdependence of cause and effect, called the doctrine of *karma/vipaka*. We are conditioned by all that we have been and done, all that we have been told, and all situations in which we have lived, yet in every present moment we are consciously or unconsciously determining the future. Our life is both the *vipaka* of the past and the *karma* of the future. "The intricate interplay of the myriad strands of kamma/vipakia, some reinforcing each other, some counterbalancing, some fading, some waxing strong", is said to have been one of the realizations that came to Buddha as he sat under the pipal tree in Bodh Gaya. (Saddhatissa, p. 46)

The eight elements are: (Here I have substituted the terms "helpful and beneficial" for the more commonly used "Right" as in "Right Views" because they encourage thinking and awareness, whereas "Right" may result in measuring your behavior against some conception of a rigid formula in a way that is less likely to encourage thinking and awareness. In the Brief Summary, also on this website, I use the conventional "Right.")

1. Helpful & beneficial understanding or views
2. Helpful & beneficial thought or motives
3. Helpful & beneficial speech
4. Helpful & beneficial action
5. Helpful & beneficial livelihood
6. Helpful & beneficial effort
7. Helpful & beneficial mindfulness
8. Helpful and beneficial concentration

Now, one by one:

1. Helpful & beneficial understanding or views. "Understanding" is sometimes translated as "knowledge" or "views." The term "understanding" seems to leave more latitude for thinking in terms of a broader conception of wisdom. This principle is concerned with the content and direction of your thinking. You are making an effort to stop mechanical, automatic thinking. You regularly question your old beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions. You endeavor to let go of egoism and egotism. The Dalai Lama adds, "Put others first; you yourself come next. This works even from a selfish viewpoint. . . If you show other people kindness, love, and respect, they will respond in kind; this way your happiness will increase. . . Ordinary selfishness focuses only on your own needs, but if you are wisely selfish, you will treat others just as well as you treat those

close to you. . . . So even from a selfish viewpoint, you get better results by respecting others, serving others, and reducing self-centeredness." Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield add, "Right understanding starts by acknowledging the suffering and difficulties in the world around us as well as in our own lives. Then it asks us to . . . find what we really care about, and to use that in the basis of our spiritual practice. When we see that things are not quite right in others and in ourselves, we also become aware of another possibility." (1987, p. 4)

2. Helpful & beneficial motives. This principle is concerned with the character and quality of the emotional drives that underlie your thoughts. Beneficial thoughts and actions are usually based on beneficial motivation. You move away from suffering from emotional blocks that interfere with clear thinking. Be willing to work through and let go of any old emotional & motivational reactions that may obstruct your clarity of thought and perception. Boorstein frames the Second Noble Truth a little differently. She states it as: "Wise Intention: motivation, inspired by understanding, to end suffering." (p. 15)

3. Helpful and beneficial speech is free from a commitment to being "right," from dogmatic or authoritarian statements, from self-righteousness, and from trying to make yourself better by putting yourself above others and causing them to feel less. Such speech avoids gossip, malicious talk, back-biting, slander, talk intended to stir up people's hatred or violence, telling secrets told in confidence, judgmental put-downs and other forms of one-upmanship. Requires an ongoing effort to be honest with oneself. Speaking less, we listen more. "Do not lie to anyone at all," writes the Dalai Lama. "There are exceptions, when lying can result in great benefit to others, but they are rare." (2002, p. 106).

4. Helpful and beneficial action. "Never cheat anyone and always remain honest," advises the Dalai Lama. (2002, p. 106) This Noble Truth is based on a recognition of the omnipresence of karma. Includes the Bodhisattva path. The Bodhisattva is one who has "crossed the river" from samsara (illusion) to nirvana (liberation, enlightenment), and then instead of simply hanging out in enjoyment of the enlightened state, comes back to help others cross the river. This is the essence of the Mayayana ("large vehicle") path.

5. Helpful and beneficial livelihood is that which does not cause harm to others or to yourself. It is livelihood that is consistent with your nature and that can further your own development. Your reading in Saddhatissa elaborates this in detail.

6. Helpful and beneficial effort involves cultivating skillful, peaceful habits of mind--especially insight, intuition, and will-power. Insight helps us perceive which of our usual and habitual states of mind are useful and valuable to preserve or strengthen, and which are unhelpful and deserving of our effort to let go of.

7. Helpful and beneficial Mindfulness. This is one of the most central elements of the Buddhist path. "The essence of awakening is. . . to see clearly and directly the truth of our experience in each moment, to be aware, to be mindful," write Goldstein & Kornfield (p. 5). This . . . systematic development and opening of awareness [includes] the four foundations of mindfulness: awareness of the body, awareness of feelings, awareness of mental phenomena, and awareness of truths, of the laws of experience." (p. 5) In mindfulness we are not asked to "think about" or conceptualize, but to simply "pay attention to." There is a phenomenological quality about this. One outcome is the development of **equanimity (even-mindedness)**. In Saddhatissa's words, "To abide in mindfulness is to see the world clearly and to see our fellow men clearly, without judgment, without envy, without hatred. To be able to do this we must know ourselves intimately and know the source of happiness and unhappiness within us". (1971, p. 23)

8. Helpful and beneficial concentration. In Boorstein's words, this is "cultivating a steady, focused, ease-filled mind." Right concentration refers to concentrative meditation, the cultivation

of mental disciplines that further our ability to be mindful. This can help us move away from "**money mind**" to the ability to maintain a clear and steady focus of our attention and awareness

- The challenge and the paydirt in the eightfold path, of course is in the nitty-gritty grasp of the it and how to put each of the eight principles into practice. By misunderstanding them, we can go astray. This is where a capable teacher comes in.
- Compared to most other religious, spiritual, or transformative paths (and even some varieties of later Buddhism), Buddha's own teachings are remarkable for their succinctness, organization, and clarity. We are clearly looking at a remarkably penetrating mind at work. This is probably due to the unusual combination of a young man having brought up to be a king, to rule, and having been given the training to do that well, in combination with a fundamentally spritual and psychological disposition and inclination.

SOURCES OF UNHAPPINESS (UNWHOLESOME STATES)

Ignorance and delusion. We believe things that are not so, out of conditioning by others or limited experience, and fail to recognize things that are so. At the very heart of Buddha's teachings was the principle that 'when we see clearly, we behave impeccably.' (Boorstein, 17)

Afflictive desire, craving, and grasping. Some measure of desire is a normal and necessary part of life. If we did not desire water we would soon die. But we also desire things that we will not get; we desire things that are bad for us if we do get them, and we are afflicted by craving and grasping that cause us to act in ways destructive to us and other. Philosopher Archie Bahm suggests that the essence of Buddha's philosophy is: Desire for what will not be attained ends in frustration; therefore, to avoid frustration and suffering, avoid desiring what will not be attained. (p. 15) However, notes Bahm, "it is natural to want more --at least a little more--than one gets. The frustration entailed in this unattained more is ever-present. Secondly, one cannot always anticipate precisely what will be attained." In the face of such uncertainty, we hope for the better, but to the extent that this is more than we get, we will be frustrated. Also, (points out Bahm), since effort of will or strength of desire itself often influences the outcome, we ought to desire strongly enough to assure adequate effort, but desires are not equipped with automatic antilock brakes, so inevitably desires often overshoot their mark. While wanting enough food to survive comfortably is good, I may crave sumptuous gourmet meals and expensive wines. Or I may want someone to love me whose romantic interests are elsewhere. In general, the stronger the craving, the more bitter the frustration.

Hatred, jealousy, and envy. "There are two classes of afflictive emotions--one that is better expressed and the other that is better not expressed," says the Dalai Lama. "An example of the former is a terrible fear from the past that becomes fixed in the mind. In this case, it is definitely best to let your feelings out and discuss the incident. . . . The other class of counterproductive emotions--which include such feelings as lust, hatred, enmity, jealousy, and belligerence--should not be expressed. . . . Expressing them tends to make them stronger and more prevalent. It is better to reflect on the disadvantages of such emotions and try to displace them with feelings of satisfaction and love." (2002, pp. 44-5)

Impermanence. The source of unhappiness is not the impermanence itself, which is a condition of life to be recognized, but a poignant desire for that which is impermanent to endure beyond its time. This includes attachments to people, things, and circumstances that will inevitably pass away, and failure to recognize that many sources of satisfaction in life are temporary and by the conditions of their existence will pass away. When we accept impermanence, "We see the truth of change. We begin to understand how fragile life is and how, most surely, we will lose everything that is dear to us. At some point, in some way, we ask ourselves . . . 'Is there some way I can do this life with my eyes open and my heart open and still love it? Is there a way not to suffer?' The

pain of that question calls us to attention, just as it did the Buddha. And out of that attention, the intention to be free is born." (Boorstein, 27)

Identification with possession. "My . . ." Literally, this is materialism. "If only I have this or that, I will be happy." (But excessive identification with an ingroup and consequent denigration of an outgroup is also a potentially destructive form of possessiveness.)

Egoism and Egotism. Egoism is being locked into my own perspective and acting for my own benefit at the expense of others. Egotism is believing that I am better than others and expressing this belief in my words and actions, putting others down, belittling them and trying to make them feel small, etc. Egotism often has a compensatory function--at some level I feel inferior or inadequate, and try to make myself feel big by making others seem small. In order to reduce egotism, notes the Dalai Lama, "Buddhist scriptures recommend that you hide your good qualities and achievements like a lamp inside a vessel. You should not advertise them unless there is a great purpose in doing so." (2002, p. 61).

Spiritual Materialism (Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's term) is a particular subtle form of Egotism. A major obstacle in following the path that Buddha outlined, or for that matter, any path of psychological or spiritual development, is to imagine that we are farther ahead than we actually are. The idea that I am "more conscious than thou," and if you're lucky, one day you will get it together enough to raise your conscious to as high a level as mine. (characteristically said as a self-righteous dig in which the person saying or thinking this is ignoring, suppressing, or repressing his or her own shadow side.) Buddha's principle "Right mindfulness" reminds us to become as aware as we can of what we actually are doing, experiencing, feeling, and what actually is motivating us at this moment, rather than getting stuck in some view of how we think are "supposed to be." A variation on this is the belief that "my religion is better than yours, and people who believe as I do are good and others are bad."

Belief that some ceremony, rite, or ritual will improve your life. There is no ceremony analogous to baptism for initiation into Buddhism, or for the "washing away of sins." The only way to truly become a Buddhist is to follow Buddha's teachings and put them into practice in your own life.

Reversal of means and ends. "In the frenzy of modern life we lose sight of the real value of humanity," writes the Dalai Lama. People become the sum total of what they produce. Human beings act like machines whose purposes is to make money. This is absolutely wrong. The purpose of making money is the happiness of humankind, not the other way around. . . . If there is too much attachment to wealth, it does not help at all." (2002, p.35)

SOURCES OF HAPPINESS, WHOLESOME STATES, OR "THINGS TO BE ENCOURAGED"

The Ten Paramitas

1. **Generosity**
2. **Morality**
3. **Renunciation**
4. **Wisdom**
5. **Energy**
6. **Patience**
7. **Truthfulness**
8. **Determination**
9. **Lovingkindness**

10. Equanimity

Sylvia Boorstein comments on the *Paramitas* (pp. 9-12, 35), "I love this list. I love knowing that all of these qualities are the natural, built-in inclinations of the human heart. . . . We are relational. When we aren't frightened into self-absorption, we look out for each other. We take care of each other. . . . when we act morally, we give the people we meet the gift of safety, and. . . experience what the Buddha called "the bliss of blamelessness." By practicing Renunciation, we give ourselves the gift of modulated desires and. . . an increased appreciation of what we already have. . . . Patience, in a rushed world, is a shared relief. Witnesses to patient transactions, as well as participants, all get to calm down. . . . Lovingkindness depends on forgiveness. . . . When I am able to forgive myself--which is not always easy--I am kinder to everyone else. . . . It is not possible to cultivate any single Paramita without all the others developing."

"**Generosity** can be practiced," write Goldstein and Kornfield. "With practice, its spirit forms our actions, and our hearts will grow stronger and lighter." (p. 8) Buddha said, "If you knew what I know about the power of giving, you would not let a single meal pass without sharing it in some way."

In regard to **morality**, the Dalai Lama says, "Refraining from harming others is the essence of the initial stage of living the teachings of morality. . . . Develop a strong desire to refrain from harming others either physically or verbally no matter whether you are embarrassed, insulted, reviled, pushed, or hit. . . . The morality of concern for others--called the morality of Bodhisattvas (beings primarily concerned with helping others) --is mainly practiced by restraining the mind from falling into selfishness. . . . You have the same right to be happy as everyone else, but the difference is that you are one and they are many. To lose the happiness of a single person is important, but not so important as losing the happiness of many other beings. From this perspective, you can cultivate compassion, love, and respect for others. In a sense, all human beings belong to a single family. We need to embrace the oneness of humanity and show concern for everyone--not just *my* family or *my* country or *my* continent." (2002, p. 28, 71, 80) We should not take what is not ours, not stealing from others, or even from plants or animals.

Regarding **renunciation**, the Dalai Lama writes, "Notice your attachments to food, clothes, and shelter, and adapt monastic practices of contentment to a layperson's life. Be satisfied with adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Use the additional free time for meditation so that you can overcome more problems." (2002, p. 71)

Wisdom includes a recognition that we are all interconnected with other people and all other living beings. It involves an effort to consciously notice cause and effect in our lives, becoming aware of how our words and action affect both us and others.

Of **patience**, Boorstein writes, "The living of regular, ordinary everyday life--even when it is most simple--requires ongoing attention to diffusing *impatience*." (181)

In regard to **Truthfulness**, the Buddha said, "A wise person, upon acknowledging the truth, becomes like a lake, clear and deep and still. Find friends who love the truth." The Buddha taught that bare attention, just noticing what's happening without additional commentary, helps us discover even the truths that we've been hiding from ourselves, or embroidering, or embellishing. As you notice how you embellish worries and judgments about yourself, you may begin appreciating positive truths about yourself that you had not allowed yourself to recognize.

Of **Determination**, Boorstein writes of being "reinspired in my Determination to dismantle the obstacle course of confusion that seems to trip my mind at every turn. . . . I know that when I am paying attention, my mind stays clear and my heart stays open. . . . I am certain that my own good heart is one mind-moment, and one breath away. So I start over. . . . Plan to be starting over, all

the time. Each time you find that your mind has gotten stuck in a struggle, remember that you know the way out. You've found it before. Stop. Take a breath. Dismiss dismay, if you can, as fast as it arises. . . Freedom from habit is a possibility. Not once and for all, as far as I can tell, but day after day, little by little, and more and more often." (220)

Of **Lovingkindness**, the Dhammapada says, "Hatred will never cease by hatred. Only love will erase hatred. This is the eternal law." Boorstein comments, "If I make blessing my habit, if I meet each moment with equal benevolence, my mind relaxes and all of my rehearsed reasons for resenting are redeemed by goodness. . . . Being on good terms with all of my life allows me to feel safe and convinces me that Lovingkindness must be the universal antidote to suffering, that it must be what everyone wants most. . . . The Lovingkindness sermon. . . assumes that one's own boundlessly safe and happy heart has no walls with hooks on them which to hand old animosities, no filing systems filled with fear stories that get in the way of forgiving." Then she goes on to say, "These are the words I am saying these days, so. . . I invite you to try them: 'May I feel protected and safe. May I feel contented and pleased. May my physical body provide me with strength. May my life unfold smoothly with ease.' Now say the phrases again. This time, stop after each phrase and take a deep breath in and out." (223-5)

Boorstein also speaks of "the four categories of persons--dearly beloved people, good friends, neutral people, and enemies--that we use to identify the people we know. . . ." A friend of hers asked, "Do you have any enemies? Anyone that you've put out of your heart?"(169/ Then she goes on to tell a story about someone she had nourished a longstanding grudge against, because he had written her a letter that was very hurtful to her, and how after a number of years she finally discussed it with him and they achieved a reconciliation."

Boorstein goes on to elaborate about lovingkindness that one way to practice it is to tell good stories about people. Even with people who have great difficulties, or about whom you could find a bad story to tell, look for something good you can say about them, and if an occasion presents itself, do so. She goes on to talk about "writing new endings for old stories"--especially stories that are filled with conflict and antagonism. "All of the great spiritual traditions teach that the 'enemy' needs to be befriended, that retaliation is endless. . . . Without erasing, we can sometimes mend a story by writing more at the end of it." (231-5)

In a remark that in a sense sums up the *Paramitas*, Saddhatissa writes, "If the root is generosity, compassion, or insight," says Saddhatissa, "the resultant act constitutes wholesome kamma and will produce correspondingly beneficial effects. If the root is greed, hatred or delusion, unwholesome kammic acts result, leading to undesirable effects." 46)

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

These are vows taken by Buddhist monks and nuns, framed in such a way that they can apply to anyone. :

1. I endeavor to refrain from harming living beings. (This includes speech and action that causes psychological harm as well as those that cause physical harm.)
2. I endeavor to refrain from taking what is not given. This "necessitates waiting until things are offered rather than rushing out and grabbing them." (Saddhatissa 1971, p. 29)
3. I endeavor to refrain from misuse of the senses, the body, and bodily sensations. (This is often interpreted as a focus on avoiding sexual misconduct, but it can equally be applied to eating or other actions. It does not require abstaining from food or sex. Rather it means avoiding excessive indulgence of any kind. It includes not acting out of sexual desire, or other forms of desire, in any way that causes harm or suffering to another, or to oneself..
4. I endeavor to refrain from wrong speech. (This overlaps with one of the eight items on the Eightfold Path.)

5. I endeavor to refrain from taking drugs or drinks that tend to cloud the mind.

TYPES OF MEDITATION

The Dalai Lama uses the terms "analytical meditation" and "stabilizing meditation" for two types of meditation. (I use the terms "contemplative meditation" and "concentrative meditation.")

In **analytical meditation** you try to understand a topic through reasoning. For example you might analyze one of the causes of suffering, or one of the items on the Eightfold Path, or one of the Paramitas. Or you might contemplate some habit of your own that causes you difficulty, being careful not to fall into your conditioned usual patterns of thought about it. (2002, p. 118)

In **stabilizing meditation** you try to achieve calm, clear abiding by fixing your mind on a single focus of attention. This might be something physical like a candle or your breathing, or a mental object such as a visualization or word (yantra or mantra in yogic terminology).

You can also "**meditate in the manner of wishing**. For example, you might wish to be filled with the compassion and wisdom of a Buddha." The best wishes are not to "get" something, but to develop positive qualities that will enable you to act for your benefit and that of others. Such meditation is related to prayer.

In **imaginative meditation** you envision that you have certain qualities that you want to develop. You might, for example, imagine Buddha or the Dalai Lama or some other spiritual teacher sitting before you, and envision yourself acting in ways that mirror that person's qualities. Or you might imagine that spiritual teacher as existing inside you, in the region of your heart, so that you embody his or her qualities.

A morning practice. Examine your motivation as often as you can. Even before getting out of bed in the morning, establish a nonviolent, nonabusive outlook for your day. At night examine what you did during the day. . . . Reflect on how you are caught in a pervasive process of conditioning." (2002, p. 41)

OTHER REFLECTIONS

"Up until now." Whenever you talk about yourself to another, or even think about yourself, make a habit of saying *Up until now I . . .*." This can free your mind to think differently about yourself and your possibilities, instead keeping you locked into your old beliefs, attitudes, and mental habits about yourself. You can do the same thing in regard to others. "Up until now you . . ."

Difficulties can wake us up. All of our difficulties, in a Buddhist perspective--our suffering, our attachments, our impermanence, and so on--can serve to wake us up. Any time we feel like something is not right in our lives, we can direct our attention to noticing what we are doing to create that "not rightness."

Hard times help you let go of pretenses. "If your life is easy and everything is going smoothly, then you can maintain pretenses. However, when you face really desperate situations, there is no time to pretend: you have to deal with reality. Hard times build determination and inner strength. (Dalai Lama 2002, p.76)

Facing great difficulty. "On those occasions when you feel most hopeless, you must make a powerful effort. . . . Just a drop of something sweet cannot change a taste that is powerfully bitter. We must persist in the face of failure. . . . When you experience a difficult period, do your best to avoid behavior that will add to your burden later on. . . . Keep this in mind: By greeting trouble

with optimism and hope, you are undermining worse troubles down the line. . . . Under no circumstances should you lose hope. Hopelessness is a real cause of failure." (Dalai Lama 2002, p. 39)

Enemies. "For a practitioner of love and compassion, an enemy is one of the most important teachers," says the Dalai Lama. "Without an enemy you cannot practice tolerance, and without tolerance you cannot build a sound basis of compassion. So in order to practice compassion, you *should* have an enemy." (2002, p. 75)

A mini-statement of Buddha's teaching

- Stop acting in harmful ways
- Learn how to act in helpful ways
- Develop clarity of mind

Enlightenment (liberation) can only be attained by working diligently at it. "***Work out your liberation with diligence,***" he said.

PART III: A FEW STORIES ABOUT GAUTAMA THE BUDDHA

NOTE: The most engaging and readable book I have read about Buddha's life and teachings is Betty Kelen's *Gautama Buddha in Life and Legend* (1967, 1969, 2000). Unfortunately it is out of print, and I have seen just a few copies online. As a result, I have taken the liberty of exceeding the "fair use" rule of quoting no more than 450 words, in confidence that this will not cut into the sales of those few copies but rather will whet people's appetite to buy them. Wherever I have quoted Kelen, I have put her name in parentheses after the closing quotation marks at the end of the quoted material. If anyone who owns the rights objects, please let me know and I will remove all quotations in excess of fair use and paraphrase instead.

Buddha was the son of the ruler of a small kingdom in northern India. His father expected him to be his successor as king. As a result, he was well-educated, trained in the arts of administration, organization, warfare and generalship, and the other skills needed to run a kingdom. Later in his life, after he renounced his position of successor to his father and became a spiritual teacher, he was well equipped to organize a large order of monks and initiate the recording of his teachings in a manner that would be passed down through the generations. He would live to the age of 84, and therefore his teachings were well documented for posterity and we do not have the controversies over which were and were not authentic that we have with some other religious leader.

YASODHARA'S INFLUENCE. The woman Buddha chose for his wife, Yasodhara, was independent and assertive. In those times women in India wore veils, but Yasodhara refused to cover her face in that manner. Of course she was widely criticized for immodesty, but when chided, she is said to have replied, "Those whose thoughts have no cover, who have no shame or decorum or any virtue and who gossip, may cover themselves with a thousand garments, yet do they walk the earth naked. But those who veil their minds, control their senses, and have no thought for any other except their husband, why should they veil their faces?" (Kelen) King Suddhodana, Buddha's father, is said to have been delighted at his daughter-in-law's words. She had spared Buddhist, and ultimately Hindu, women as well, from having to wear veils from that time until now.

FOUR JOURNEYS OUT FROM THE PALACE TO THE PARK. It is said that after Buddha and Yasodhara were married, he had four palaces, one for each season. During the rainy season, entertained by female musicians, he did not leave the palace. It is said, and this may be true or may be a legend, that when Buddha was born, wise men told his father that he would become either a great king or a great spiritual teacher., since compassion for the unfortunate was one of his personal qualities. Therefore King Suddhodana commanded that he should be kept away from sights and sounds of human misfortune that might incline him toward the latter path. Legend asks us to believe that amid a never-ending succession of joys and pleasures, it did not enter his mind that sickness, old age, or death afflicted many people.

.....It is said that a new pleasure garden was built a small distance away from the palace at Kapilivastu, and that Buddha set out to visit it from time to time. On one of these trips he saw a very old and decrepit man who was destined to die soon, and on another a very sick man, and on yet another a dead man under a sheet being carried by a group of weeping relatives. He was deeply disturbed by these things. And then on a fourth trip he is said to have seen a monk who had "gone forth from his home to lead a simple, religious life, to find peace of mind through good actions, harmlessness, and kindness to all creatures." (Kelen) Before long Buddha resolved to set out to lead such a life himself, and so find peace of mind. And so one night he stole away from the palace and set out to become a wandering sadhu who begged for his food. (Ultimately his son and then his wife came and joined him in the order. In the meantime, they doubtless underwent considerable suffering themselves about his absence.

AN END TO ANIMAL SACRIFICE. As Buddha traveled toward the city of Rajagriha, he came upon a shepherd with his flock of sheep. One small lamb had a hurt leg and was having a hard time. Buddha said, "I'll travel with you and carry this little lamb for you." Then when he asked the herdsman where he was going, the latter replied that he was taking them to King Bimbisara, where they would all be killed in sacrifice to the gods. When they reached the King's hall and Gautama entered with the lamb on his shoulders, "Roughly

clothed though he was, his princely manner had not deserted him; his gestures and manner were impressively royal, and when he asked elave to speak, the crowd listened. He spoke to them with tenderness of the miracle of life which none can give, though it may so easily be taken away; he told the kind that if he would sacrifice to the gods his sinful desires instead of helpless lambs, it would make a better man of him. The Brahmins looked ashamed, and the king gave orders that the sacrifice should cease." (Kelen)

GURUS IN THE HILLS: ALARA KALAMA AND UDRAKA. Gautama made his way to the kingdom of Magada, which today is the Indian state of Bihar, which was full of hills and caves where aescetics and other rishis lived. He sought out a well known holy man called Alara Kalama and spent some time with him. He noted "that it was not by faith alone that Alara had attained his wisdom, but by the hard work of thinking and understanding." (Kelen) Once Buddha had fully understood Alara's doctrine, he asked where it all led. Alara said, "To the realm of non-existence." By that he meant a kind of trance that can be attained through a certain form of meditation. Buddha concluded that finding the realm of non-existence was not worth leaving his wife and family for, bid Alara goodbye, and sought another famous teacher, Udraka. After spending enough time with Udraka to master his system, he again asked, "Where does it lead," and Udraka told him that it led to a state of neither Perception nor non-perception. Gautama reportedly thought that such a state might be a fine achievement for a mystic, but offered little to help most people cope with the troubles and suffering they met in their everyday lives. He bid farewell to Udraka, and when he went, five of Udraka's disciples, having recognized Gautama as an extraordinary person, went with him. Kelen comments, "Siddhartha Gautama was one of the most practical men who ever lived. His every word, as it has come down to us, breathes forth the concrete thinker. His arguments, parables, and images, though they are subtle, are honely and fashioned of the stuf of life. . . He wanted to find out why men suffer, and how they could be delivered from suffering. He was after truths that could be used in the world of action." Later when he was talking with someone about the holy men of the hills, he said, ""There are many ascetics who conceive night to be just the same as day, and day just the same as night. I call this being in love with illusion. As far as I am concerned, when night is here it is night; and when day is here it is day.'" He was a rare genius: A great mystic who was also a practical man.

NEAR URUVELA: THE SEVEREST ASCETIC. In Buddha's time, following the pre-Upanishadic and Upanishadic traditions, severe asceticism and renunciation was common among spiritual seekers in India. The idea was to burn out all desire, and thereby achieve evenness of mind. Ascetics vied to see who could endure more severe deprivations than the next one. Gautama made his way to the forests near Uruvela, which today is known as Bodh Gaya,* and sat down resolved to engage in the most severe self-deprivation possible in order to find his way to truth. He lived on berries and weeds.

Occasionally he begged food in the town, or a villager would bring him food as a good deed. As he sat motionless in meditation, birds perched on his head. Years passed in this way. He ate so little that his body shriveled up to the point where his bones protruded and his hair fell out. He could put his hand on his stomach and touch his backbone. He was starving to death. He concluded, "This is as far on this path as any human being can go." Remembering the pleasures of his youth, he asked himself how it was that he was trying to conquer suffering while suffering intensely. But he persisted until one day he fainted and fell over, too weak to move. A passing goatherd saw him, and squeezed a little milk from a goat's udder into his mouth. This brought him back to consciousness, and he opened his eyes and asked the goatherd for a bowl of milk. The boy replied "But I am of low caste, and eating food I give you will defile you." Gautama said that was nonsense. "It is virtue, not castes, that decides excellence in man." (Kelen) He never cared about caste, and in the order of monks that he would later found, people of all castes lived and worked together as equals. (Note: Most online sources say that Bodh Gaya is the contemporary name for Uruvela. Some texts maintain that it is a village built on a spot where Buddha sat beneath a tree in a forest, not far distant from where Uruvela once stood.)

THE LUTE AND THE MIDDLE WAY. After Gautama who was to become the Buddha was revived by the goat's milk, some dancing girls passed by. They were singing about a lute. If it was strung too tightly, the notes were high and thin, if too loosely they were dull. But if it was strung just right, beautiful notes could be played. Contemplating the song, Gautama realized that both luxury and severe asceticism were like a lute that was badly strung, and that a person with a healthy body who lived with moderation was more likely to find enlightenment, and ways to combat suffering, than one who dwelled in either extreme. From this event he formulated the principle of The Middle Way.

UNDER THE BODHI TREE. At the age of 35, the seeker Gautama selected a large old pipal tree, not far from the main road, under which he could sit in meditation undisturbed. He seated himself in the lotus position and vowed not to stir from that spot until he had attained complete and absolute wisdom. It is said that he went inward in his meditation and then was tempted by, and did battle with, many demons and many illusions that were figments of his imagination. Many tales are told about his inner experience while he sat beneath that tree, and about the length of time he sat there. He was allegedly tempted and threatened by every kind of earthly allure and danger. It is said that the sins of selfishness, hate, greed, ambition, pride, ignorance, fear, and lust all tried to take command of Gautama's mind and spirit. But he realized that these were all illusions. And as he watched his own responses to them he came to the conclusion that wisdom exists, just as surely as the realms of illusion, and that he had this wisdom within him and the power to communicate it to others. And finally he burst through into the

ultimate experience of spiritual ecstasy in which he was united in a timeless state with all people and all beings. And it is said that beyond that point, he sought the cause of the many kinds of suffering that people endure and inflict on one another. The cause, he concluded, is ignorance. Ignorance leads to a heavy load of wrong desires, and wrong ideas about how to live, which this man who was now becoming the Buddha called *samsara*. He perceived the "chain of causation" which holds that if ignorance ceases, we move into a *letting go* or *ceasing* of egocentric actions, selfish efforts, craving, grasping and the other sorrows of life, so that a person steps onto a path that leads toward self-perfection, and ultimately passes into the state of consciousness called *Nirvana*, or enlightenment. And the final achievement in enlightenment is not to just hang out there getting high on spiritual delight, but to go back "across the river" to *samsara* and "build a large boat" to carry others across the river to nirvana too. This is called the *bodhissatva* path.

BUDDHA'S SYSTEM AND THE DEER PARK IN SARNATH. Having attained these deep realizations, finally Buddha got up from under the pipal tree, which came to be known as the bodhi tree, or tree of enlightenment. He began strolling around the neighborhood, sometimes sitting here or there, thinking about how he could communicate what had come to him beneath the tree to others. And he realized that even if he could explain it, some people would understand, some would understand some aspects but not others, and some just wouldn't get it. And then he thought about the lotus plants that grow in some forest pools. All the lotus plants are rooted in the mud at the bottom of the pool. Some strive upward but do not reach the surface, and remain submerged. Others barely reach the surface, and their topmost leaves float on it. And yet others grow up above the water and their buds open up to become beautiful flowers. People's reactions to his teachings, he thought, would be like that, "and yet, all these multitudes strove upward, seeking light, because it was in their natures to do so. Suddenly Buddha was seized with immense compassion for mankind, so helplessly rooted, so ceaselessly searching." (Kelen) But he would make his teachings as clear, as comprehensible, and as difficult to misunderstand as he possibly could. Drawing on the most penetrating thoughts of the philosophers of his day, and on his own deep searching and experience, he formulated the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, which together constituted the most systematic and clearly organized system of spiritual teachings the world had ever seen. With these in mind, he proceeded to Sarnath, near the holy Hindu and Yogic city of Benares, to spread his new teachings. In the "deer park" where ascetics and philosophers gathered to converse, he met the five former disciples of Udraka who had travelled with him for some time and they were the first to whom he preached his new system, described in detail in Chapters One and Two above. He did not insist that his followers obey every one of the principles in the Eightfold Path to the letter, but merely that they do their best to find "the balanced contentment which is the reward of simple virtue." To live what one understands of the path, he held, is more

important than being able to repeat aloud the entire teaching.

THE DOCTRINE OF NO-SELF. This is one of the most misunderstood aspects of Buddha's teachings. He goes through a series of rhetorical questions-- "Are your thoughts yourself? No. You can change your mind and still be you." "Is your body yourself? No. You can lose an arm or leg and still be you." And so on. It doesn't mean that there are no aspects of you that endure. Rather, my take is that from a practical point of view, the point is to minimize your ego-identification, your "Me, me, me, I want, I want, I want" attitude so that you become able to respond to the needs of others and other living beings. By letting go of identifying yourself with your thoughts, your feelings, your sensations, etc., you become able to respond to the world with more flexibility. You can let go of an old thought or feeling and replace it with a new one. You become able to live in, and enjoy, the reality of this moment in your life now rather than hanging on to who you used to be.

THE COMMUNITY OF MONKS. Wherever Buddha went there were people who responded to his teachings and wished to follow him, and them. He found that he needed to make rules so that they did not become an unruly mob. Since he had been brought up to be a king, such organizing apparently came easily to him. Soon there were organized groups of his followers in numerous towns. He had not set out to create a new religion, but that is what was happening. The three central vows of those who followed him were, "I take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma (literally "duty," but in this context also "the teaching,") and the Sangha (the community of monks.) One result of this is that for several decades during his lifetime there were many people available to record and transmit his teachings. And since the Sangha endured after his death, and in various forms spread to Tibet, the countries of Southeast Asia, and China and Japan, the transcriptions were passed on from generation to generation so that we have a record of his teachings and his system that are remarkably accurate for someone who lived so long ago. At first his followers were all men; eventually his wife Yasodhara prevailed upon him to begin an order of nuns as well, so that women could become part of the Sangha.

KARMA. Buddha emphasized meditation and helpful action rather than prayer. He did not think prayers useful for getting what you want or for forgiveness of sins, because the Law of Karma made nonsense of such requests. A person's fate, he said, is not in the hands of God but in his or her own hands. It results from a person's own thoughts and actions. He said, "I am the result of my own deeds, heir to deeds, having deeds for matrix, deeds for kin; to me the deeds come home again; whatever deed I do whether good or evil, I shall become its heir . . . let [everyone] contemplate this thought often." In this view, the only atonement for bad deeds is good ones. One kind of deed to oneself he stressed was the development of *even-mindedness*--that is, gaining control over our emotions so that we do not let ourselves become

unnecessarily upset (in whatever way is our tendency) by events.

THE MUSTARD SEED. A woman whose son had died was so distraught that she went about carrying his body. She went to one guru after another asking them to bring him back to life, but none was able to. Finally she was directed to Buddha. He told her, "All right, I will restore him to life, on one condition. You must bring me a mustard seed from a household where no one has died--no father or mother or grandparent, no aunt or uncle, no brother or sister, no daughter or son or grandchild." The woman went out eagerly to find a mustard seed from such a house. At every door she told her story. But at house after house, at every door the person with whom she spoke replied with their own sorrow about someone in their family who had died. Finally the woman realized that she would never find such a mustard seed. But through telling her story again and again, and hearing the stories of everyone with whom she spoke, she was healed. At last she returned to Buddha and thanked him. This custom subsequently spread throughout India, and today is a part of the cultural fabric for Hindus and Buddhists alike.

THEOLOGY VS. PRACTICAL LIFE: MALUNKYAPUTRA'S QUESTION. One day a monk named Malunkyaputra came to Buddha and asked him a number of questions about whether the soul is the same as the body, whether the world is eternal or not eternal, and other such questions. Buddha replied, "When you came to the Sangha, did I promise to address these matters?" "No," was the reply. "Malunkyaputra," said Buddha, "You are like a man pierced by an arrow who urgently needs the arrow pulled out. When the surgeon arrives, the man says, "Don't pull the arrow out until I know who shot it, whether he was tall or short, or light or dark, and of what caste, and where he comes from, and what his bow was made of, and what kind of feathers the arrow has--and so on. You would die before all your questions were answered. The religious life does not depend on the questions you posed. I have explained the cause of suffering and the path that leads to ending it. This is useful. This is the essence of the religious life." He had devised the eightfold path as a guide to navigating through life in a way that honored and protected the spirit. For him this was the essence of religion.

BEWARE OF AUTHORITY. Buddha constantly exhorted people to think for themselves. "Do not be bound by anything told to you, even by your teacher," he said. Not by tradition, recitation, logic, inference, reason, or doctrine. *Know for yourself* what is right and what is wrong.

REFERENCES

- Bahm, A.J. (1958) *Philosophy of the Buddha*. New York: Capricorn.
- Boorstein, Sylvia (2002). *Pay Attention, For Goodness' Sake*. New York: Ballantine.
- Byles, Marie Beuzeville (1957) *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*. Wheaton, Ill: Quest.
- Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (2000) *The Meaning of Life*. Boston: Wisdom Publication.
- Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (2002). *How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life*. New

- York: Atria.
- Goldstein, Joseph & Jack Kornfield (1987). *Seeking the Path of Wisdom: The Path of Insight Meditation*. Boulder & London: Shambhala.
 - Kelen, Betty (1967) *Gautama Buddha in Life and Legend*. New York: Avon.
 - Saddhatissa, H. (1971) *The Buddha's Way*. New York: George Braziller
 - Tulku, Tarthang (1977) *Gesture of Balance*. Emeryville, CA: Dharma Publishing.

Copyright 2011 by Victor Daniels. You are welcome to forward copies to as many people as you wish on the web and/or make hardcopies as handouts for classes in educational, religious, and other such settings. Securing financial profit from distribution in any form is prohibited. Hardcopies may be sold for just enough to cover printing costs. All copies sent or duplicated in any form must bear this entire notice, beginning with the word "Copyright" and ending with the word "downloads." **FREE DOWNLOAD FROM <matrixmeditations.info>.** **Please visit the site to learn about *Matrix Meditations: A 16-Week Program for Developing the Mind-Heart Connection* by Victor Daniels and Kooch N. Daniels, and for other free downloads.**

