

Chapter 1

Essential Buddhism

The Principle

The fundamental Buddhism is summarised by Shakyamuni in the Dhammapada:

1. Not to do any evil
2. To cultivate good
3. To purify one's mind

This is the teaching of the Buddhas.

It is simple but not easy. When a kid is three years old, he knows it. However, when he is over 80 years old, he cannot really practice it in his daily life.

Morality

Morality is the preliminary stage on the path to attain Buddhahood. It is a necessary condition, though not sufficient, leading to wisdom. It is absolutely essential for enlightenment. Morality in Buddhism is a rational and practical, based on verifiable facts and individual experience, and it is regarded as one of the most perfect moral codes ever known in the world.

What is the criterion of morality according to Buddhism?

In the admonition given by the Buddha to young Rahula, there is the answer:

If there is a deed, Rahula, you wish to do, reflect thus: Is this deed lead to harm myself or another or both? Then is this a bad deed entailing suffering. From such a deed, you must desist.

If there is a deed you wish to do, reflect thus: Is this deed not lead to harm myself or another or both? Then is this a good deed entailing happiness. Such a deed you must do.

Thus, in assessing morality, a Buddhist takes into consideration the interests of both himself and of others, animals not excluded.

To understand the exceptionally high standard of morality, one can vigorously study

Dhammapada, Sigalovada Sutra, Vyagghapajja Sutra, Mangala Sutra, Mutta Sutra, Parabhara Sutra, Vassla Sutra, Dhammika Sutra.

Good deeds are essential for one's development, but when once the ultimate goal of holy life or enlightenment is attained, one transcends both good and evil. Morality is a means to an end, but not an end in itself.

Three Poisons / Three Evil Roots

The Flower Adornment Sutra says that

*For all bad Karma created in the past,
Based upon beginning-less greed, hatred and delusion,
And born from body, mouth and mind,
I now repent and reform.*

It is the well known Repentance Verse in Buddhism. In Buddhism, the distinction between what is good and what is bad is simple. It hinges on the intention or motivation from which an action originates. The deed which is associated with greed/attachment, hatred/ill will, delusion/stupidity is evil. Greed, hatred and delusion are called the *Three Poisons* or *Three Evil Roots*, which are the primary source of all evil deeds. It is the Three Poisons that create all bad Karma, resulting in all kinds of suffering in accordance with the Principle of Cause and Effect¹. The Three Poisons are also obstacles to the attainment of good Karma. Thus we have to abandon them by all means.

1. *Greed*. Greed is the cause of many offences. The five greedy desires are: wealth, sex, fame, eating and sleeping. Greedy desire is endless and therefore can never be satisfied. The lesser the greedy desire, the happier and more satisfied we are. The best prescription to deal with greed is in giving away.
2. *Anger*. Hatred to people is another cause of evil deeds. We should not lose temper and get angry when we are unhappy. We should be calm and patient.
3. *Delusion*. It means the persistent belief in something false and distorted. We have to observe and think in an objective and rational manner, so as to avoid prejudice and misunderstanding. For instance, if we don't believe in cause and effect, and then commit offence frequently and heavily, we will suffer from the retribution.

Five Precepts

Buddhism is the most profound and wholesome education directed by the Buddha towards all people. The *Five precepts* are the curriculum of Buddhist teaching, which are embraced in the moral code of Buddhism. By observing these precepts, you not only cultivate your moral strength, but you also perform the highest service to your fellow beings. These are the basic precepts that all people should practice and abide by². As a result, you will live in Three Good Paths (Gods, Demigods & Human), not in Three Evil Paths (Hell, Hungry Ghosts

¹Zie pagina 67 voor enig commentaar op het boeddhistische "Principle of Cause and Effect".

²er aan vasthouden

& Animals), and enjoy all the blessings, happiness and freedom in the Human and Deva³ Realm.

1. **Do not Kill.** One must not deliberately kill any living creatures, either by committing the act oneself, instructing others to kill, or approving of or participating in the act of killing. It is a respect to others' lives. One should not deprive others (animals not excluded) of the right to live. If one is hurt or killed, one's family, relatives, friends will suffer. It is the cause of rebirth in Three Evil Paths. The effect of killing to the performer are brevity of life, ill health, handicapped and fear. In observing the first precept, one tries to protect life whenever possible. Furthermore, one cultivates the attitude of loving kindness to all beings by wishing that they may be happy and free from harm.
2. **Do not Steal.** It is a respect to other's properties and the right to own property. If something is not given, one may not take it away by stealing, by force or by fraud. Besides these, one should avoid misusing money or property belonging to the public or other persons. In a broader sense, the second precept also means that one should not evade one's responsibilities. If an employee is lazy and neglects the duties or tasks assigned to him, he is, in a way, 'stealing' time that should have been spent on his work. In its broadest sense, observing the second precept also means that one cultivates the virtue of generosity. A Buddhist gives to the poor and sick because of their need. He makes offerings to the monks, nuns and masters because he respects the qualities they possess. He is generous in his gifts to his parents, teachers and friends because of the advice, guidance and kindness they have shown him. Besides giving material things to the needy and the worthy, Buddhists should also offer sympathy and encouragement to those who are hurt or discouraged. It is said, however, that the best of all gifts is the gift of the Dharma in the form of teaching it or in the production and distribution of Buddhist books. Greed is one of the Three Poisons, which leads us to attachment and suffering. The bad effect of stealing are poverty, misery, disappointment, etc.
3. **Do not Indulge in Sexual Misconduct.** Though the moral standards are different in different countries and in different times, rape, adultery and other abnormal sexual behaviour that involve physical and mental injury to others should be prohibited. It is also a matter of respect for people and personal relationships. Sexual desire is one of the main causes of rebirth in the Six Paths. If we wish to end the birth and death cycle, we should not indulge in sexual misconduct or any other abnormal form of sexual relationship. The effect of sexual misconduct are having many enemies, always being hated, and union with undesirable wives and husbands.
4. **Do not Lie.** To refrain from telling lies is to show respect for the truth. No good can come from telling lies, be it out of fun or malice. When a Buddhist observes the fourth precept, he refrains from telling lies or half-truths that exaggerate or understate, and instead cultivates the virtue of truthfulness. Once people uphold the respect for truth, there will be fewer quarrels and misunderstandings and fewer cases of false accusations in the courts of justice. Society will then become more peaceful and orderly.

³goddelijk, van de goden

5. **Do not Take Intoxicant.** Buddhism emphasises wisdom. Taking intoxicant will descend and lose the seed of wisdom. Intoxicants, such as drugs, liquor, smoking, etc., are harmful to health. It seems that taking intoxicant is not hurting others. However, if we are drunk and lose our consciousness, we may easily commit evil deeds and hurt others. Therefore, one who breaks this precept will tend to break all other precepts along with it. The fifth precept is based on respect for mental health. It guards against the loss of control of one's mind. It is particularly important to those who meditate because, by refraining from taking intoxicants, they can more easily cultivate awareness, attention and clarity of mind. Thus the observance of the fifth precept not only contributes to happiness in the family and peace in society, it also prepares a person for the practice of Mental Development.

Eight Precepts

The *Eight Precepts* are the Five Precepts described above and three additional, namely:

- 6 to refrain from taking food after midday;
- 7 to abstain from indulging in songs, dances, music and shows as well as the use of ornaments, perfumes and cosmetics;
- 8 to refrain from using a high or luxurious seat or bed.

The Eight Precepts are usually observed on new moon and full moon days. These precepts may be difficult for a lay Buddhist to follow. Therefore, their observance is entirely voluntary. Those who make the attempt are those who wish to experience the disciplined life of renunciation lived by members of the Order.

In observing the sixth precept, for example, the lay Buddhist eats one or two simple meals between dawn and noon and avoids taking food beyond that. This cuts down the time spent on meals and allows him more time to spend on meditation. As for the seventh precept, the lay Buddhist refrains from enjoying songs, dances, music and shows during this period of observance so that he will not be distracted by sensual pleasures that may give rise to unwholesome thoughts. At the same time, by refraining from the use of ornaments, perfumes and cosmetics, he becomes more aware that physical beauty is impermanent and that one should not be vain. By observing the eighth precept, the lay Buddhist experiences a simple way of life with the minimum of luxuries. Observing the sixth, seventh and eighth precepts requires more effort on the lay Buddhist's part because he has to restrain himself from indulging in the physical comforts and pleasures that he may be so accustomed to in everyday life. The purpose is to enable him to detach himself from all the distractions of normal activity in order to gain a better understanding of the real nature of life.

The Ten Good Deeds and the Ten Meritorious Deeds

Because body, speech and mind are the three means of actions, we can summarise Precepts and Poisons in the following scheme.

The Ten Good Deeds		
1.	Do not kill	Three Precepts
2.	Do not steal	
3.	Do not indulge in sexual misconduct	
		Body deeds
4.	No lying	Speech deeds
5.	No double-tongued speech	
6.	No abusive speech	
7.	No irresponsible speech	
8.	No greed	Three Poisons
9.	No hatred	
10.	No delusion	
		Mind deeds

Apart from avoiding the evil actions, one can take positive attitude in performing the good actions. The Ten Meritorious Deeds allow people to gain a happy and peaceful life as well as to develop knowledge and understanding. The Ten Meritorious Deeds are:

The Ten Meritorious Deeds	
1.	Charity
2.	Morality / Taking Precepts
3.	Mental cultivation / Meditation
4.	Reverence or respect
5.	Services in helping others
6.	Transference of merits
7.	Rejoicing in the merits of others
8.	Preaching and teaching Dharma
9.	Listening to the Dharma
10.	Straightening one's own views

Fulfilling all these requirements, one will be re-born in the Deva Realm. One will enjoy all kinds of happiness and blessings.



The Four Noble Truths

In His first sermon to the five ascetics in the Deer Park near Varanasi, the Buddha spoke of the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths summed up, in a systematic formula, are the central teaching of the Buddha.

1. The Truth of Suffering;
2. The Truth of the Cause of Suffering;
3. The Truth of the End of Suffering;
4. The Truth of the Path leading to the End of Suffering.

The Truth of Suffering

The Buddha's discovery of the solution to the problem of suffering began with the recognition that life is suffering. This is *the first of the Four Noble Truths*. If people examine their own experiences or look at the world around them, they will see that life is full of suffering. Suffering may be Physical or Mental.

Physical Suffering Physical suffering takes many forms. People must have observed at one time or another, how their aged relatives suffer. Most of the aged suffer aches and pains in their joints and many find it hard to move about by themselves. With advancing age, the elderly find life difficult because they cannot see, hear or eat properly. The pain of disease, which strikes young and old alike, is unbearable, and the pain of death brings much grief and suffering. Even the moment of birth gives pain both to the mother and to the child that is born.

The truth is that suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death is unavoidable. Some fortunate people may now be enjoying relatively happy and carefree lives, but it is only a matter of time before they, too, will experience suffering. What is worse, this suffering must be born alone.

Mental Suffering Beside physical suffering, there are also various forms of mental suffering. People feel sad, lonely or depressed when they lose someone they love through separation or death. They feel irritated or uncomfortable when they are forced to be company of those whom they dislike or those who are unpleasant. People also suffer when they are unable to satisfy their limitless needs and wants.

Happiness in Life When the Buddha said that there is suffering in life, he did not deny that there is happiness also. On the contrary, he spoke of many kinds of happiness such as the happiness of friendship, the happiness of family life, and so on. But all these kinds of happiness are impermanent and when one loses them, one suffers. For example, one may like a pleasant and charming person and enjoy his or her company. But when one is separated from that person, the happiness turns into suffering. One suffers because of one's attachment to pleasures that do not last.

People often remain unaware of the inevitable sufferings of life because they are distracted by temporary pleasures.

The Truth of the Cause of Suffering

The Buddha had observed that life is suffering. Before He could find a solution to the problem of suffering in life, he had to first look for the cause of suffering. The Buddha was just like a good doctor who first observes a patient's symptoms and identifies the cause of the illness before prescribing a cure. The Buddha discovered that the direct causes of suffering are desire or craving, and ignorance. *This is the truth of the cause of suffering, which is the Second Noble Truth.*

Craving Craving is the deep-seated desire that all living beings have for the pleasures of the senses and for life itself. For instance, people always seek to enjoy good food, entertainment and pleasant company. Yet none of these can give them complete and lasting satisfaction. After the fine meal has been eaten, the beautiful music heard and the pleasant company shared, one is still not content. One would like to enjoy these pleasures again and again, and for as long as possible.

People who desire to own many things can never be fully satisfied too. Like children in a toy shop, they crave for all the attractive things they see around them. But like children too, they soon become dissatisfied with what they already have and desire for more. Sometimes, they can hardly eat or sleep until they get what they want. Yet when they succeeded in getting what they want, they may still find their happiness short-lived. Many will be too worried for the safety and condition of their new possessions to enjoy it. Then when the object they possess eventually breaks into pieces and has to be thrown away, they will suffer its loss even more.

When we have obtained something that we desire, we may want more and more of it and so greed arises. Because of desire and greed, people will lie, cheat and steal to get what they want. Uncontrolled desires can also lead to addiction, for example, smoking, drinking and overeating all lead to suffering and cause mental and physical harm.

If one is prevented by another person from getting what one desires, one may feel anger with that person. Desire when obstructed can lead to ill will and anger. This in turn can lead to harsh words, violent quarrels and even fights or killings. All this is suffering.

Ignorance Craving or desire is like a great tree having many branches. There are branches of greed, of ill will and of anger. The fruit of this tree is suffering, but how does the tree of craving arise? Where does it grow? The answer is that the tree of craving is rooted in ignorance. It grows out of ignorance. Ignorance is the inability to see the truth of things, to see things as they really are. There are many truths about the world which people are ignorant of because of the limitations of their understanding.

Science has shown, for instance, that there are sounds that people are unable to hear and waves of light, which they are unable to see. People would be totally unaware of radio waves, or ultra-violet light rays if special instruments had not been developed to enable them to observe these things. So long as people remain ignorant of things about the world in which they live, they suffer from all kinds of misunderstandings and delusions.

When people develop their minds and acquire wisdom through study, careful thought and meditation they will see the Truth. They will see things as they really are. They will understand the suffering and impermanence of life, the Law of Cause and Effect and the Four Noble Truths. By overcoming craving and ignorance, they will attain happiness and Enlightenment just as the Buddha did about 2500 years ago.

The Truth of the End of Suffering

The Buddha's realisation of the end of suffering and his attainment of Nirvana at the age of thirty-five, crowned his search for Truth with success. For six years, the Bodhisattva had spared no effort to find a solution to the problems of suffering. He had tried the principal

methods of ending suffering and had found them incomplete. Eventually he found his own solutions to the problems of life.

Having realised the Truth through his own efforts, the Buddha offered it to all that were ready to listen.

There is an old story of a turtle and a fish. The turtle lived on land as well as in the water while the fish only lived in the water. One day, when the turtle had returned from a visit to the land, he told the fish of his experiences. He explained that creatures walked rather than swam. The fish refused to believe that dry land really existed because it was something beyond his own experience. In the same way, people may not have experienced the end of suffering, but it does not mean that the end of suffering is not possible.

A patient must have confidence in an experienced doctor, otherwise he will never take the medicine that the doctor has prescribed and he will not be cured of his sickness. Similarly, people must have confidence in the Teaching of the Buddha, who has shown that end of suffering is really possible.

The end of suffering is the final goal of the Buddha's Teaching. It can be experienced by anyone here and now. For example, when greed and anger arise in one's mind, one experiences unhappiness and when the thoughts of greed and anger cease, one's mind becomes happy and peaceful. To end suffering completely one must remove desire, ill will and ignorance. *This is the Third Noble Truth of the End of Suffering.*

The Buddha taught that the end of suffering is supreme happiness. Every step towards the end of suffering is accompanied by ever-increasing joy. Those who follow the Teachings of the Buddha live happily without greed, even among those who are overwhelmed by desire. They live happily without anger, among those who harbour ill will. The more people free themselves from desire, ill will and ignorance, the greater their happiness will be. When they have completely overcome desire, ill will and ignorance, they will know the supreme happiness as experienced by the Buddha.

Enlightenment By putting the Buddha's Teachings into practice, people can also achieve supreme Enlightenment. Enlightenment has countless qualities, of which perfect wisdom and great compassion are the most important. With perfect wisdom and great compassion we are able to help countless beings to overcome their suffering. The end of suffering has been described as supreme happiness and Enlightenment. However, these terms do not fully express the real nature of the end of suffering, or *Nirvana*. Nirvana cannot be exactly put into words. Attempting to describe Nirvana is like saying that a mango is sweet, but not like a banana or apple. One has to eat a mango in order to know for oneself what it really tastes like. Similarly Nirvana has to be experienced for oneself.

Therefore, if people have confidence in the Buddha's Teachings and put them into practice, they can achieve happiness, peace and Enlightenment.

The Truth of the Path leading to the End of Suffering

As a youth, Prince Siddhartha⁴ enjoyed an indulgent life of pleasure in his father's palace. Later, when he renounced the worldly life and become an ascetic, he experienced the hardship of torturing his mind and body. Finally, not long before attaining Enlightenment he realised the fruitlessness of these two extreme ways of life. He realised that the way to happiness and Enlightenment was to lead a life that avoids these extremes. He described this life as *the Middle Path*.

These three ways of life may be compared to the strings of different tensions on a lute. The loose string, which is like a life of indulgence, produces a poor sound when struck. The tightest string, which is like a life of extreme asceticism, similarly produces a poor sound when struck and is also likely to break at any moment. Only the middle string, which is neither too loose nor too tight, produces a pleasant and harmonious sound when struck. The middle path, like the middle string, is the best to choose.

So those who follow the Middle Path and avoid the extremes of indulging in one's desires and the opposite extreme of unreasonably torturing one's body and mind, will find happiness, peace of mind and Enlightenment. *This is the Fourth Noble Truth of the path leading to the end of suffering.*



The Noble Eightfold Path

Like a wise and experienced doctor, the Buddha recognised the sickness of suffering. He identified its cause and discovered its cure. Then for the benefit of mankind, the Buddha put his discovery into a systematic formula, which can be easily followed in order to end our suffering. The formula includes both physical and mental treatment, and is called *the Noble Eightfold Path*.

The Noble Eightfold Path, discovered by the Buddha Himself, is the way to Nirvana. It avoids the extreme of self-torture that weakens one's intellect and the extreme of self-indulgence that retards one's spiritual progress. It consists of the following eight factors:

1. Right Understanding
2. Right Thoughts
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

⁴Siddhartha Gautama of Boeddha, een spiritueel leider die waarschijnlijk leefde van 563 tot ca. 483 v.Chr., geboren in een hindoe-familie. Volgens religieuze overleveringen bereikte Gautama Boeddha complete en volledige verlichting (het Boeddhaschap). Boeddha betekent 'hij die ontwaakt (verlicht) is'. De titel Boeddha wordt gegeven aan iemand die de Dhamma (de waarheid, de natuurlijke ordening der dingen, perfecte wijsheid) ontdekt heeft en verlichting heeft bereikt. In principe kan iedereen uiteindelijk het boeddhaschap bereiken. Volgens overlevering zijn er vóór Gautama Boeddha nog een aantal andere boeddha's geweest.

1. **Right Understanding** is the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. In other words, it is the understanding of oneself as one really is. The keynote of Buddhism is this Right Understanding. Buddhism is based on knowledge and reason, and not on unreasonable belief.

2. **Right Thoughts** are threefold. They tend to purify the mind. They are:

- (a) The thoughts of renunciation which are opposed to sense-pleasures.
- (b) Kind Thoughts which are opposed to ill-will.
- (c) Thoughts of harmlessness which are opposed to cruelty.

3. **Right Speech** deals with refraining from falsehood, slandering, harsh words and frivolous talks.

4. **Right Action** deals with refraining from killing, stealing and unchastity. It helps one to develop a character that is self-controlled and mindful of others.

5. **Right Livelihood** means earning one's living in a way that is not harmful to others. Right Livelihood deals with the five kinds of trades which should be avoided by a lay disciple. They are:

- (a) trade in deadly weapons
- (b) trade in animals for slaughter
- (c) trade in slavery
- (d) trade in intoxicants
- (e) trade in poisons

6. **Right Effort** is fourfold, namely:

- (a) the endeavour to discard evil that has already arisen.
- (b) the endeavour to prevent the arising of unrisen evil.
- (c) the endeavour to develop that good which has already arisen.
- (d) the endeavour to promote that good which has not already arisen.

Effort is needed to cultivate Good Conduct or develop one's mind, because one is often distracted or tempted to take the easy way out of things. The Buddha teaches that attaining happiness and Enlightenment depends upon one's own efforts. Effort is the root of all achievement. If one wants to get to the top of a mountain, just sitting at the foot thinking about it will not bring one there. It is by making the effort of climbing up the mountain, step by step, that one eventually reaches the summit. Thus, no matter how great the Buddha's achievement may be, or how excellent His Teaching is, one must put the Teaching into practice before one can expect to obtain the desired result.

7. **Right Mindfulness** is the awareness of one's deeds, words and thoughts. It is also fourfold:

- (a) mindfulness with regard to body
- (b) mindfulness with regard to feeling
- (c) mindfulness with regard to mind
- (d) mindfulness with regard to mental objects.

8. Right Meditation Meditation means the gradual process of training the mind to focus on a single object and to remain fixed upon the object without wavering. The constant practice of meditation helps one to develop a calm and concentrated mind and help to prepare one for the attainment of Wisdom and Enlightenment ultimately.



Three Universal Characteristics

A characteristic is a fact which tells us something about the nature of a things. If a fact is sometimes connected with a thing and sometimes not, then it is not a characteristic and will not help us very much to understand the nature of that thing. Heat, for example, is a fact. Heat is not characteristic of water, as water is not always hot. The heat of water depends upon other factors like sun or an electric stove. But heat is a characteristic of fire because fire is always hot and heat of fire does not depend on any other factors. Heat is always connected with fire and tells us something about the nature of fire.

When the Buddha taught that there are three characteristics of facts of existence. They are generally found in all that exists and so they can tell us something about the nature of existence.

The three characteristics of existence taught by the Buddha are *Impermanence*, *Suffering* and *Impersonality*.

Impermanence

The Buddha taught that all existence is impermanent because there is nothing internal or external whatsoever which is permanent, stable, lasting, not subject to decay and destruction, and forever the same. Everything changes continuously. Existence is like the flowing water of a river or the burning flame of a candle, which is never the same in two consecutive moments.

Our body, for instance, is made up of material elements such as flesh, bones and blood, which are impermanent. From the moment of our birth, the body constantly undergoes change. The human mind, too, is dependent on many factors. It is in constant change. It is like a monkeys forever jumping about, never still for even a moment. Thus neither the body nor the mind is permanent and unchanging.

Science teaches us that apparently permanent objects like the oceans, continents, mountain ranges and even the earth, the sun and the solar system are constantly changing and will some day become extinct. When all these are also subject to change and destruction, one cannot doubt the impermanence of life. Life can end at any moment. No one can avoid death and the destruction of the body.

Understanding the characteristic of impermanence benefits people in two important ways. Firstly, it can improve human relationships and activities. Secondly, it can encourage people to follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

Often people find that they make mistakes in their relationships with other because they fail to take into account the changes that constantly occur in themselves and others. Often friendships die because one or both parties fail to realise that their friend's personality, interests and attitudes have changed.

When one realises that people and situation are impermanent and constantly changing, one will approach each moment of a relationship with an open mind. One will be able to react to each new situation without clinging to outdated ideas about people. Relationships can then develop fruitfully. Success in life depends on one's ability to adapt to change in situations and to make the most of new opportunities arising.

Having understood that youth, health, material well-being and even life itself are impermanent, people should then make the most of those favourable circumstance while they last. This means that they need to practice the Noble Eightfold Path in order to achieve happiness and Enlightenment. The Buddha's last words were: "Subject to change are all things, Strive on with diligence".

Suffering

The Truth of suffering is the first of the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha. Suffering is a fact of life which people can see for themselves. It is one of the three characteristics of existence.

Whatever is impermanent is also suffering. Everything which arises will last only for a time, then it decays and finally dies. Repeated birth and death is hard to endure, It disturbs one's peace and mind and is a cause of suffering.

Thus old age, sickness and death which are evidence of the impermanence of life are forms of suffering. Since people tend to cling to youth, health, relationship and material achievements, the realisation that these are impermanent, cause anxiety and fears. It is said that even the gods trembled when the Buddha reminded them that the heavens are also impermanent.

Understanding that suffering is universal and inevitable enables one to face the realities of life with calmness of mind. One will be able to cope with old age, sickness and death without becoming disheartened or desperate. It also encourages people to look for solutions to the problem of suffering just as Prince Siddhartha did.

Impersonality

People often think that there must be a personality or self that is real and permanent, otherwise they would not exist or experience things in life. However, the Buddha taught that there is no real, permanent and independent personality or self at all. This is the third characteristic of existence.

If a permanent and independent self really existed, one should be able to identify it. Some people may say that the body is the self, or that mind is the self. However, both ideas are wrong. Both body and mind are impermanent, ever changing and subject to destruction. They depend on many factors for their existence. Neither body nor mind can possibly be the permanent and independent self.

If the body were the self, it would be able to will itself to be strong or fair. However the body grows tired, hungry and falls sick against its will, so the body cannot be the personality or self.

Similarly, if the mind were the self, it would do whatever it wished. But the mind often runs away from what it knows to be right, and run after what is wrong. It becomes disturbed, distracted and excited against its will. Therefore the mind is also not the self.

When people say, for instance, "I am going to work", they are just using a convenient name I for a collection of physical and mental factors. In reality, there is no I or self.

So long as people think that the self is permanent and independent, they are bound to be self centred and egoistic. Not only will they feel constantly threatened by people and situations, but they will also feel compelled to protect themselves, their possessions, and even their opinions, at any cost.

But once people realise that the self is just a convenient name for a collection of constantly changing physical and mental factors, they will no longer cling to it in fear and insecurity. They will find it easier to grow, learn, develop, and to be generous, kind and compassionate because they will no longer need to be constantly on the defensive.

Understanding the fact of impersonality can help people deal more effectively with everyday situation. It encourages the cultivation of Good Conduct and helps one to progress towards happiness, peace and Enlightenment.

Impermanence, Suffering and Impersonality are the three characteristic of existence. Whatever is impermanent is suffering, and whatever is impermanent and suffering is also without an independent self. Those who realise the truth of these three facts of existence will be able to overcome suffering because their minds are freed from delusions of permanence, pleasure and the self.



Rebirth and Karma

Karma

When people are happy and contented, they tend to take life for granted. It is when they suffer, when they find life difficult, that they begin to search for a reason and a way out of their difficulty. They may ask why some are born in poverty and suffering, while others are born in fortunate circumstances. Some people believe that it is due to fate, chance, or an invisible power beyond their control. They feel that they are unable to live the life they desire so as to experience happiness always. Consequently, they become confused and desperate. However, the Buddha was able to explain why people differ in their circumstances and why some are more fortunate in life than others. The Buddha taught that one's present condition, whether of happiness or suffering, is the result of the accumulated force of all past actions or Karma. ⁽⁵⁾

⁵Commentaar "karma" op pagina 68

Karma is intentional action, that is, a deed done deliberately through body, speech or mind. Karma means good and bad volition⁶. Every volitional action (except that of a Buddha) is called Karma. The Buddhas do not accumulate fresh Karma as they have destroyed all their passions.

In other words, Karma is the law of moral cause. It is action and reaction in the ethical realm. It is the natural law that every action produces a certain effect. So, if one performs wholesome actions, one will experience happiness. On the other hand, if one performs unwholesome actions, such as killing a living being, one will experience suffering. This is the law of cause and effect at work. In this way, the effects of one's past karma determine the nature of one's present situation in life.

The Buddha said, *"According to the seed that is sown, so is the fruit you reap. The door of good will gathers good results. The door of evil reaps evil results. If you plant good seeds well, then you will enjoy good fruits."*

Karma is a law itself. But it does not follow that there should be a law-giver. It operates in its own without the intervention of an external, independent agency.

The Principle of Cause and Effect

As one sows, so shall one reap. Every effect arises from a cause. Under certain conditions, a cause will come to an effect. This is a universal principle, on which Buddhist morality is based. ⁽⁷⁾

Here's a verse. If you want to know the causes in your past life: The way you live at present is the effect of your past life. If you want to know what your future life will be: What you do at present is the cause of your future life.

In the world, some beings are fortunate while others are less fortunate. Some are happy while others are less happy. Why? The Buddha has specifically stated that Karma explains the differences between living beings. It is also Karma that explains the circumstances that living beings find themselves in.

Literally, Karma means 'action', 'to do'. Action itself is considered neither good nor bad, but only the intention and thought make it so. Thus, Karma is an intentional, conscious, deliberate and wilful action. Karma is volition. Karma is not fate nor predestination.

Every action must have a reaction, i.e. an effect. The truth applies both to physical world and to the moral world.

Law of Karma is an important application of the Principle of Cause and Effect in morality.

The denial of the Law will destroy all moral responsibility. ⁽⁸⁾

There are two kinds of Karma: Good Karma (Kushala) It means intelligent, or skillful. It refers to those intentional actions, which are beneficial to oneself and others, springing out from kindness, compassion, renunciation and wisdom. Bad Karma (Akushala) It means not intelligent, not skillful. It refers to those intentional action springing out from greed, hatred and illusion.

⁶wil, wils-uiting

⁷Commentaar "oorzaak" op pagina 67

⁸Commentaar "responsibility" op pagina 69

For unintentional actions, such as walking, sleeping, breathing, they have no moral consequences, thus constitute neutral Karma or ineffective Karma.

Cause and Condition

Every cause has its effect. However, there must be conditions that are ripe for the effect.

Though Buddhism stresses on Karma, it rejects fate. One should take good actions all the time, and let all good conditions arise so that: ⁽⁹⁾ evil retribution has little chance to come to an effect and good retribution becomes more and more significant in enhancing our lives in happiness and wellness.

Rebirth

One question that is often asked is, “What happens to us after death?” According to the Buddhists, rebirth takes place at the end of this life. Buddhists regard rebirth as a fact. There is evidence that each person has lived many lives in the past and will continue to live more in the future. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Rebirth is a reality although one may not be aware of it. The existence of past lives has been confirmed by those who have developed their minds through meditation. Meditators who have attained powers of concentration have been able to recall their previous lives in great detail. The Buddha and His prominent disciples in many countries and at different times have been able to prove the existence of past lives. The Buddha, on the night of His Enlightenment, developed the ability to see His past lives. He also saw beings dying in one state of existence and being reborn in another, according to their actions. Thus it was from personal experience that the Buddha taught His followers the truth of rebirth.

In recent years, evidence has been collected and documented, which confirm that rebirth is a fact. There have been cases of people who have been able to recollect their experience of previous lives. Their description of places and persons of the past were confirmed after thorough investigations. Professor Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia, USA, has researched and published his findings on over twenty cases of rebirth. These cases, which have been well documented and verified, are from various countries including France, Italy, India, Sri Lanka and Burma.

Rebirth in the Six Realms

Buddhism teaches that birth, death and rebirth are part of the continuing process of change. This is similar to the continuous process of growth, decay and replacement of cells in one's body. At the moment of death, when this life is over, and the body can no longer survive, the mind is separated from the body. At that time, the craving for life causes one to seek a new existence, and the karma done previously determines the place of one's rebirth.

There are six realms in which one may be reborn after death. They are the realms of gods (deva), the demigods (asura), human beings, animals, hungry ghosts and the hells. These

⁹Commentaar “conditions” op pagina 68

¹⁰Commentaar “rebirth” op pagina 69

are just general categories and within each, there exist many sub-categories. The six realms of existence include three relatively happy states, and three relatively miserable states. The realms of the gods, the demigods and human beings are considered more happiness and less suffering. The realms of animals, hungry ghosts and the hells are considered relatively miserable because living beings there suffer more from fear, hunger, thirst, heat, cold and pain.

In general, wholesome actions like good conduct, charity and mental development, are the cause of rebirth in the happy realms of gods, demigods and human beings. On the other hand, unwholesome actions like immoral conduct, miserliness and cruelty cause rebirth in the unhappy realms of animals, hungry ghosts and the hells.

One need not wait until one is reborn to imagine what existence in other realms is like. For instance, when one is intensely happy or totally at peace with oneself, one experiences a state similar to that of the gods. When one follows one's basic instincts and is totally preoccupied with eating, sleeping and sex, one's existence is like that of the animals. Then again, when one is overwhelmed by fear and pain, or is tortured and killed in this life, one experiences suffering like that of the hells.

Of all the six realms, the realm of human beings is considered the most desirable. In the realm of human beings, the conditions for attaining Nirvana are better. In general, in the unhappy realms, the suffering of living beings is so intense and their ignorance so great that they are unable to recognise the Truth and follow the path to attain freedom. Alternatively, living beings in the realms of the gods and demigods experience so much happiness and have so many distractions that they do not think of rebirth until it is too late¹¹. Then they may be reborn in one of the lower realms of suffering. In the realm of human beings, however, people experience both happiness and suffering, and are intelligent enough to recognise the Truth and follow the path to attain freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, one is indeed fortunate to be born as a human being, and should remember that the principal cause of birth in this realm is Good Conduct.

The Cycle of Birth and Death

The Buddha pointed out that whenever one is reborn, whether as a human being, as an animal, or as a god, none of these states of existence is permanent. The average life span of the living beings in the six realms of existence differ but none of them lasts forever. Eventually, rebirth will take place. The realm into which one is reborn and one's conditions of rebirth are determined by one's past and present actions. This is the law of karma at work.

Because of the force of their karma, people are born and reborn endlessly, in one realm of existence or in another. The Buddha declared that there is no permanent rest in this cycle of birth and death. It is only when one follows the Noble Eightfold path taught by the Buddha and eventually attains Nirvana, that one finally becomes free from this ceaseless cycle and gains supreme and permanent happiness.

People who understand karma and rebirth see life in a better perspective. They understand that every action they perform will have its effects now and in the future. The knowledge gives them hope and strength in the face of difficulties. It gives them courage to continue

¹¹Dit is een at merkwaardige (primitieve) opvatting van 'good realms'!

doing good. They are convinced that they will experience the good effects of their wholesome actions either in the short-term or in the long-term.¹²

Dependent Origin and Rebirth

All things arise from causes and conditions. A sprout, for example, arises from a seed but it also depends on soil, moisture, air and sunlight for its growth. If any of these conditions is missing, then the sprout will not grow. The flame of an oil lamp depends on the wick and oil. When either the wick is totally burnt up or the last drop of oil is used up, the flame will die out. In the same way, life arises from cause and conditions, and not through mere chance.¹³

Just as the flame of an oil lamp depends upon the wick and the oil for its existence, so rebirth and suffering occur depending on an impure mind and actions (karma).

The mind is impure as long as it is not free from ignorance, craving and clinging. Ignorance is failing to see things as they really are. Out of ignorance, people crave for pleasant experience and cling to them. They fail to understand that pleasant experience such as wealth, friendship, youth and even life, are impermanent. All these will eventually slip through their fingers like a handful of sand.

As a result of an impure mind, people commit unwholesome acts to obtain the things they crave for and soon become used to acting in the same way. If some people find that they can obtain what they want by dishonest means on one occasion, they may be tempted to do it again on future occasions. Eventually, dishonesty becomes a habit. However, other may find that they can succeed by hard work. As a result, they are encouraged to work hard at each task and hard work becomes a habit for them.

In the same way, other habits are formed and become part of the personality. When people come face to face with a new situation, they will respond to it in their accustomed way and so reinforce their habits. At death, an impure mind with its habitual actions becomes the cause of a person's rebirth just as the seed which is supplied with soil, moisture, air and sunlight, is the cause of a sprout. So long as people's minds are not freed from ignorance, craving and clinging, they will continue to act in their accustomed way, and so long as they act in this way, they will be reborn.

Rebirth is suffering because experience conditioned by ignorance, craving and cling is never satisfactory. Even the pleasant experience which people crave for and cling to, are impermanent. Consequently, people experience the suffering of loss, ageing, death, sorrow and grief.

To end rebirth and suffering, people need to purify their minds of ignorance, craving and clinging. When they have freed their minds of impurities, action (karma) will not take place. Then rebirth and suffering will also cease and freedom from the cycle of birth and death is achieved

¹²Omdat de meeste mensen op deze wijze pragmatisch denken over hun voor- en nadeel, is het niet onverstandig dit zo als waarheid te verkondigen, en zou het onverstandig zijn het tegen te spreken.

¹³Hier wordt over het hoofd gezien dat er i.h.a. een zekere *kans* is dat de noodzakelijke voorwaarden vervuld zijn om van een oorzaak tot een gevolg te komen. Meestal speelt het toeval geen ondergeschikte rol. Een deterministisch wereldbeeld is weliswaar gemakkelijker te begrijpen, maar het wordt niet gerechtvaardigd door de fysica.

Dependent Origination and 'Emptiness' or Relativity

At the beginning of this topic, it was seen how a sprout and the flame of an oil lamp depend on a combination of causes and conditions for their existence. This means that the sprout and the flame, like all things, do not exist independently. They exist only in relation to other things. This is called relativity or 'emptiness' in Buddhism and is another aspect of Dependent Origination.

Things are what they are only in relation to other things, for instance, the same man is a father to his son and a son to his father. His identity depends upon his relation to another, and is relative.

Relativity or 'emptiness' means that because things do not exist independently, they do not have an unchanging nature of their own. One is not independently or by nature a father. A man becomes a father by the relation to his son. 'Emptiness' does not mean nothingness. On the contrary, it means openness and infinite possibility. Any son can become a father if the right combination of causes and conditions is present. Similarly, anyone can be enlightened if he cultivates Good Conduct, Mental Development and Wisdom.

The principle of Dependent Origination is the central teaching of the Buddha. Through the understanding of Dependent Origination, the Buddha attained Enlightenment. He said, "Deep indeed is Dependent Origination. It is by not realising this principle that all men have become entangled like a ball of thread, unable to stop suffering and rebirth".

The *Law of Dependent Origination* states that all phenomena arise depending upon a number of casual factors. In other words, they exist under the condition that the other exist; they have under the condition that others have; they extinguish under the condition that others extinguish.

Text based on: web.singnet.com.sg/~alankhoo



Meditation

The Meditative Art of Attention

Meditative attention¹⁴ is an art, or an acquired skill which brings clarity and an intelligence that sees the 'true nature of things'. Among the variety of techniques in Buddhist meditation, the art of attention is the common thread underpinning all schools of Buddhist meditation. Its ubiquitousness is illustrated by this Zen story: A monk once asked his teacher, 'What is the fundamental teaching in Buddhism?' the Master replied 'Attention'. The student, dissatisfied with the answer said, 'I wasn't asking about attention, but was wanting to know the essential teaching in Buddhism'. The Master replied, 'Attention, Attention, Attention'. So, it can be appreciated that the essence of Buddhist practice is to be found in the word - attention!

But how to do it? What is the practice? Vague advice to an aspiring meditator, such as 'be mindful' or 'be attentive', while offered with good intention, is unlikely to be effective. To recognize the fact that most of us tend to function in a rather inattentive, unfocused way, which results in a rather superficial experience of life, is to see the necessity for training the errant attention in a systematic way. Trained attention has the effect of uncovering, or laying bare, things as they really are. It is the 'primary' attention that sees through the 'content' mind to the underlying processes. In laying bare the reality of psychophysical phenomena, their characteristics are revealed without interfering with them. The art of this *bare attention* is to simply register the predominant object in one's experience as it arises without preference or interference, as a witness. That is, just registering or noting the changing phenomenon without reaction – be it sensation, sound, thought or a state of mind. However, if there is a reaction during the observation, as is natural for the untrained mind, then that too must be noted. This way of no-interference has better potential to uncover the true nature of the phenomenon observed. Thus a non-reactive, unconditioned awareness is acquired that brings *inseeing* or *insight knowledge*.

Orientation to the Six Sense Doors

Being attentive is not a practice that needs to be confined to a crossed-legged posture. Meditative attention is a dynamic practice of paying close attention to what you are doing in whatever posture or situation you happen to be in. The way to orientate yourself in this practice is to literally *come to your senses*. That is, a strategy of being fully aware of all your activities through a conscious orientation to the five senses and the 'sixth sense' - the mind. The Six Sense Doors is the name for the five physical senses: eye, ear, nose, tongue and body and the sixth sense, which is a collective term for the five kinds of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, etc. So, the practice is to be consciously attentive at the predominant door or sense base. For example, being on guard at the eye-door allows you to notice the effects of the contact between the eye and the visible objects and how you are relating to them. This orientation to any sense door brings awareness of what is happening during any sense impression and with it the ability to monitor the associated feelings and consciousness that arise.

¹⁴*Vipassana meditation, the Art of Attention*. Taken from a text by Bhante Sri Pannayavaro found at http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/artofatt.pdf

The actual meaning of ‘attention’ indicates its practice: *to attend upon, to be present with*. By being attentive ‘presence of mind’ is developed. While there are degrees of attention (down to lack of attention), it can be said that there are two types: natural attention, which is ‘automated attention’ and the intentionally ‘deployed’ attention that is developed in *meditative attention*.

Deployed attention is either passive, or in the sense of being applied, active. The passive mode is *bare attention*, that is just registering what is happening, in a receptive state of mind, without reaction. The active mode of attention is applied when any kind of movement or action is done, including active *reflective thought on things observed*.

Check! Where is your attention at this present moment? What sense impression is predominant now? Is it the eye-door as you view the page, the ear-door attracted by sounds or the touch sensations of the body’s contact on the chair you’re sitting on. This moment is the time to establish the habit of being consciously present at a sense door and notice what is happening during a sense impression.

Choose a sense-door and be attentive to what is happening there. What feeling is present; what is the quality of that feeling; is it pleasant, unpleasant or neutral? What thoughts are associated with it? Take particular notice of the changes. It is useful to make a habit of checking yourself during your daily routine: what sense door am I at; what is happening there; what are the associated feelings that arise?

Mental Noting

A useful device to support meditative attention is naming or labelling the various objects during the observation of your own body and mind. Used judiciously, it is a very useful tool for focusing and sustaining the attention. The noting is done by repeatedly making a mental note of whatever arises in your body/mind experience. For example, ‘hearing’, ‘hearing’, ‘thinking’, ‘thinking’, ‘touching’, ‘touching’, etc. This is a powerful aid to help establish bare attention, especially at the beginning of the practice, when it is vital to systematically note or label as much as possible to establish the attention. Otherwise, you are likely to get lost in unnoticed wanderings with long periods of inattention. Having succeeded, even partially, in sustaining the attention, then the mental noting can be dropped, especially if the noting has become mechanical or is so clumsy that it is interfering with the subtle attention. Having acquired the ability to monitor your experience with just bare attention, you will need to return to the mental noting only when the attention weakens, is lost or needs to be re-established. The mental noting can be combined with the practice of orientating to your sense impressions by the naming of the physical and mental objects as they arise at the six sense doors. Be careful not to analyse what is being observed, just register or note it *without reaction*.

The Four Spheres of Attention

The four spheres of attention are structures or frames of reference used to support the practice. They are based on the Satipatthana Sutta¹⁵ and can be used as guidelines to help you direct the attention as you investigate the various experiences in your body and mind.

¹⁵Sutta (Pāli) discourse; Satipaṭṭhāna on the establishing of mindfulness..

1. Attention to the *body*, directed to apprehending the primary elements of the body (earth, air, fire and water) i.e., hardness, softness, temperature, fluidity and movement within the body and awareness of the various body postures, movements and actions in daily activities.
2. Attention to *feelings* or *sensations*, noting the qualities of feelings as either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, while being careful to differentiate the primary feeling from the emotional story.
3. Attention to the *consciousness* and *mind-states*. The consciousness is the ‘knowing’ of anything, e.g., a physical sensation and the knowing of it. Particular attention is paid to the mind-states, eg. happiness, sadness, agitation and seeing their arising and passing away.
4. Attention to the *mental content*. This is not analysing mental events or classifying them, but using the attention to passively register the things of the mind –thoughts, ideas and concepts– as a witness without commentary.

The Two Modes of Meditation

There are two modes of meditation: *calm* (Samatha) and *insight* (Vipassana). Calming or serenity meditations use techniques of ‘fixing’ on a single object, excluding all other objects, to produce calm and one-pointedness. Examples are techniques using visualisation, following the respiration, mantras and contemplation. The second meditation mode is made up of practices that develop awareness. That is, paying close attention to the predominant object in your physical and mental experience with moment-to-moment awareness.

The ability to successfully manage yourself in meditation depends on whether you can make appropriate adjustments or ‘fine tuning’ during a practice session. This ability is based on understanding these two modes of meditation: for example, if you become strained or tense during insight meditation, switching to the serenity meditation mode will calm and relax the mind; or if you became stuck in a becalmed mind-state in serenity meditation, you can invigorate the mind with an awareness exercise to give it an investigative edge.

It is necessary to appreciate the nature of ‘practice’ as applied to meditation because it could mistakenly be taken to imply the notion of control. This is far from the case, as the meditator needs to have a flowing receptivity to the experience without in any way controlling it. So ‘discipline’ in the meditation context can be misunderstood as imposing one’s will to control the practice. Actually, it is no more than following the directions and persistently applying the instructions with sensitivity. So correct practice is repeated performance to develop skills, without controlling or interfering with the experience.

Daily Meditation Practice

The image most often associated with meditation is that of a sitting Buddha fixed in a crossed-legged posture. While such a representation is undoubtedly inspirational and aesthetically pleasing, it unfortunately suggests to the uninitiated that meditation is a static, ‘statue-like’ pursuit practised only in meditation halls.

If meditation is to have any relevance to everyday life it has to be done at home. This does not just mean your residence but wherever your attention happens to reside. To meditate at home requires a 'hands-on', dynamic approach that is not restricted to any particular time, place or posture. It should be integrated into the ordinary activities of life and become the basis for a meditative lifestyle in the home and everyday life.

There is a saying that the beginning and the end of a journey are essentially the same. This is especially true of meditation. For there is nowhere you need to go to discover your true nature other than where you can be now, meditating at your home-base.

