

Buddhist Basics: Being Happy Now

Form and emptiness: the fundamental Two Truths. In the Buddhist Middle Way these Two Truths are: **Ultimate Truth**, *shunyata*/emptiness/boundlessness, *dharmakaya* (truth body), unbounded whole (*mahabindu*), the very clear-light nature of mind; and **Relative Truth**, all the appearing spacetime physical and mental forms or modes of being that arise within this vast whole. Buddha told it in his great *Heart Sutra*: "Form is empty; emptiness is form". These two truth dimensions are a unified prior and present unity. No emptiness, no form. No form, no emptiness. The **Three Buddha Bodies** (*kayas*) that constitute this emptiness/form continuum are formless *dharmakaya* (*OM*), *sambhogakaya* (*AH*, the luminous bridge), and *nirmanakaya* form (*HUM*). Thus the primordial mantra *OM AH HUM*. Well, what is this spacious emptiness that fills the worlds with light ($E = mc^2$)? What is real? Who am I? How can I be really happy?

Buddhist emptiness is not a transcendent, logocentric, absolutely existing reality ground. Rather, emptiness is a selfless, non-essential *relativized* absolute abiding *interdependent-ly*, as "dependent origination" or "interbeing", a timeless infinitely vast causal nexus/matrix of interconnected causes and conditions. Form is really real, yet not *independently*, *essentially* real. So this Middle Way view is non-essentialist. Our appearing world of experience is merely the causal, relative "dependent arising" of spacetime forms from their ultimate emptiness "groundless ground". Hence the *fullness of emptiness*. Appearing reality then is "*ontologically relative*"—real, yes, by way of our linguistic, cultural "web of belief"—but not intrinsically, ultimately or absolutely real. H.H. The Dalai Lama terms this seeming paradox the "*emptiness of emptiness*".

How shall we understand this? Our primordial emptiness base (*gzhi*) is established by an observer's ordinary mind. It exists, but only conventionally. It is utterly absent intrinsic *ultimate* existence (*svabhava*). Its dependently arisen stuff is *relatively* real, reified via language, our dualistic, conceptually imputed/designated socio-cultural materialist worldview. Yet, emptiness is not the nihilistic nothingness of Indian Idealism. So the myriad forms of emptiness are real, just not intrinsically real. Thus the Buddhist Two Truths trope—relative (*samvriti satya*) and ultimate (*paramartha satya*)—a centrist Middle Way between permanent existence, and nihilist non-existence. What then shall we do with this precious life we've been given?

The Four Noble Truths. To lead beings to realization of the happiness inherent in awakening to this compassionate *unity* of the Two Truths, Buddha taught the *Four Noble Truths*:

1) *Life is suffering*. There are different kinds of suffering: physical and emotional pain; unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the adversity of life; the "suffering of change" that is this anxiety/fear of our impermanence. All this arises in emptiness, and returns again to emptiness.

2) *Suffering has a cause*. This cause is ignorance (*avidya*) of the nature of reality as empty/selfless (*anatman*), impermanent (*anitya*) and causally interdependent. *Avidya* is grasping at self, failing the recognition of our *bodhicitta*—selfless heart-mind intention to benefit others. Ignorance results in the negative emotions: fear, anger, greed, pride, the very causes of suffering.

3) *Suffering has a cure*. As we awaken our *bodhicitta*, the cause of happiness, we are liberated from the ignorance that is suffering, which then bestows great happiness. But how?

4) *The Eightfold Path* is the mind training and life practice to accomplish this awakening. It is the very cause of human flourishing that is *relative* hedonic happiness (*felicitas, eudaemonia*), and results in the fruition of *ultimate* happiness itself (*mahasuka, paramananda, beatitudo*), the happiness that cannot be lost, our always already present Buddha mind. These *Four Noble Truths* are the very foundation of Buddhism pervading all the Vehicles of the Buddhist Path.

In the *Prasannapada*, Chandrakirti's great commentary on Nagarjuna's *Exposition of the Middle Way*, we learn of the natural interrelationship of the Buddha's Two Truths of the Middle Way (*Madhyamaka*), namely, *emptiness* (ultimate truth), and the dependent arising of *form* (relative truth). From Buddha's *Heart Sutra*: "Form is not other than emptiness; emptiness is not other than form". Form and its emptiness ground are a unity; the trans-conceptual one truth, invariant through all cognitive state changes—outer, inner, innermost secret and nondual (no subject/object separation). From this *primordial wisdom of emptiness* naturally arises the wisdom Path of awakening to this great truth. That Path is Shakyamuni Buddha's *Eightfold Path*.

Chandrakirti reasons that, if we will first postulate the interrelated unity of the primordial emptiness ground of being with its arising interdependent phenomenal appearances ("form is empty, emptiness is form"), we can then postulate the causal connection, the cause and effect relationship, between the first two Noble Truths—*The Truth of Suffering* and *The Truth of the Cause/Origin of Suffering*. This causal connection is the natural law of karma—thought, intention, action and effect (positive and negative imprints). Karma, H.H. The Dalai Lama tells, is a subset of the scientific law of causality—the Causal Principle—that governs the realm of relative spacetime reality, the reality dimension of Relative Truth. We utilize these relative "concealer truths" to awaken to ultimate truth, beyond fear and hope, our liberation from suffering that is this awakening to the unity of the Two Truths, form and emptiness.

Thus, from ignorance (*avidya*) of the truth of emptiness/selflessness arises concept-mind (*manovijnana*) and with it the adventitious *attraction* and *aversion* that causes the narcissistic negative afflictive emotions—greed, pride, fear, anger—grasping/clinging to the self (*klesha-desire mind/klishtamanovijnana*). This results in the causal, karmic mental and emotional imbalances that produce the destructive behavior that causes human suffering and human evil.

Hence, for Chandrakirti, from an understanding of the unity of selfless emptiness and causal interdependence (*pratitya samutpada*) of form, we can understand the causal relationship between these First and Second Noble Truths. Thus may we engage the possibility of a means to the cessation of suffering—of its origin and causes—a path to liberation from this ignorance and imbalance (*avidya, marigpa, ajnana, hamartia/sin*) that is the cause of human suffering. Buddha told, "One who controls the mind, controls everything". Most of us cannot control adversity. However, with the practice of the Path we can control our responses to adversity.

Thus arises Buddha's Third Noble Truth, *The Truth of the Cessation/Cure of Suffering*. And if this cessation is possible—and by the demonstration of the lives of all the Buddhas and *mahasiddhas* of our wisdom traditions it clearly *is* possible—we can then engage the Fourth Noble Truth, *The Eightfold Path* that is the mind training program of life practice, the Wisdom Path to ultimate liberation from suffering and its relative causes. Thus, **The Eightfold Path** is:

Wisdom: 1) Right View, or understanding; 2) Right Intention, or aspiration

Ethics: 3) Right Speech; 4) Right Action/Conduct; 5) Right Livelihood

Meditation: 6) Right Effort; 7) Right Mindfulness; 8) Right Wisdom

The Six Paramitas. From the *Four Noble Truths* naturally arise the *Paramitas*. These six perfections bespeak the qualities/virtues developed and manifested by a Bodhisattva (awakened being) on the Path to ultimate liberation that is Buddhahood. The *Six Paramitas* are:

1) *Generosity:* from our natural, innate *bodhicitta* arises generous, kind, selfless service to reduce the suffering of beings. Sharing; we practice giving wisely our money, time, patience.

2) *Ethical Discipline:* virtue, conduct; practicing the two *bodhicittas*, relative and ultimate.

3) *Patience:* gentle tolerance; understanding of cause and effect, or karma.

4) *Diligence:* perseverance; the effort and courage required to continue the practice and complete the Path. Perseverance furthers. Reasons to quit are endless. Make the Path the goal.

5) *Meditation:* *dhyana/samadhi*; *shamatha* (mindfulness) and *vipashyana* (penetrating insight); *Dzogchen*; *Essence Mahamudra*. These practices are the very foundation of Wisdom.

6) *Wisdom:* *Prajnaparamita*, the perfection of wisdom; ground and realization of the wisdom of emptiness/boundlessness/selflessness accomplished by diligent practice—with guidance from a qualified mentor—of all the *paramitas*. Wisdom protects the bodhisattva's compassionate conduct (*bodhicitta*). In the Vajrayana the *jnana paramita* expresses *ultimate* (beyond even relative *prajna*) nondual *primordial awareness wisdom* (*yeshe, jnana, bhavanga, gnosis*).

The Five Precepts. From the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Six Paramitas* naturally arise the Buddha's Five Precepts or virtues, the five practical aspects of essential morality or conduct for the Buddhist lay practitioner who aspires to a conscious life of mindfulness and *bodhicitta*.

1) *Refrain from taking life.* Honor all life (*ahimsa*). Cause no harm to humans, nor to any living creature. This is an aspect of Authentic Action, the fourth aspect of the noble *Eightfold Path*. All life is interconnected and interdependent. All beings desire to live. Do no harm.

2) *Refrain from taking what is not freely given.* Greed is taking too much; more than we really need. We learn to appreciate our interdependence with other beings, including our mother earth, and with Life itself. As we cultivate generosity, the first of the Six Perfections, we learn to practice giving; to share, to *give wisely* of what we have, to ourselves, then to others. Thus do we learn to practice an authentic, genuine ecology of body, mind and spirit.

3) *Refrain from false speech.* Authentic speech is the third aspect of the noble *Eightfold Path*. Be a good listener; listen with selfless compassion. Then when you speak, speak what is true, useful, helpful and wise. Use the great power of mantra. Use your voice mindfully, carefully, kindly. Don't lie, gossip, bear false witness or criticize others. Don't use harsh speech.

4) *Refrain from sexual misconduct.* Learn to be sexually responsible, authentic, non-grasping/clinging, and non-manipulative. The regenerative energy is very powerful. It can cause terrible harm to others, and thus to ourselves. Cause no emotional or sexual harm. Learn to be sexually mindful and compassionate. "In the moment of love, emptiness dawns nakedly".

5) *Refrain from mindless, abusive use of intoxicant substances.* Foods and thoughts can also be abused. Be mindful and aware of all that enters your bodymind.

The Five Spiritual Faculties (*Indriya*; also *The Five Strengths*). These strengths must be cultivated to accomplish the *Third Noble Truth*, the cessation of ignorance (*avidya*) that is the root cause of human suffering (*dukkha*). We do this by entering, then practicing the *Eightfold Path*. Four of these qualities or faculties of mind—faith, effort, concentration, wisdom must be balanced and fine-tuned by the third power, mindfulness. Hence, the *Five Faculties* are:

1) *Faith (saddha)*; confidence, trust, devotion): The seed of certainty in the essential teachings of the Path: karma and rebirth; emptiness/openness/selflessness (*shunyata*); dependent arising (*pratitya samutpada*); the four refuges (outer, inner, secret, innermost secret/nondual).

2) *Effort/Energy (viriyā)*: We need *faith* to motivate the effort required by the Path; then we need authentic effort and great courage to continue and complete it. The three voices/faces of effort/energy are: preliminary effort, liberating effort, and developed or continuing effort.

3) *Mindfulness (sati)*: In the *Satipatthana Sutra* Buddha teaches the Four *Satipatthana* or four awareness foundations of mindfulness: body/matter; sensations (*vedana*); mind (*citta*), mind states and emotions (positive and negative-afflictive); and mental productions (*dhamma*).

4) *Concentration (samadhi)*: Here lies the very heart-seed of the teaching; a continuation and continuity of mindfulness practice as the Four *Dhyanas (jhanas* in Pali) that brought Buddha to his ultimate *anuttara samyak sambodhi* wisdom. This was the actual mind/body practice of Shakyamuni Buddha. Only a qualified master can transmit the Four (or eight) *Dhyanas*. Entering in Authentic Concentration (*samma samadhi*) bestows a mindful steadiness to the constant of change that gives a fearless stability of attention to one's practice, and in due course, a permanent moment to moment stability and continuity of mindfulness (the nine stages of *shamatha*), and penetrating insight (*vipashyana*) in the total lifeworld of the practitioner.

5) *Wisdom (prajna, discernment, deep multidimensional understanding)*: In the Vajrayana we find nondual (beyond subject-object duality) primordial awareness wisdom (*yeshe, jnana*). Such wisdom includes unshakable steadiness, certainty and mindfulness of change, based in *Concentration*, that provides a constant, trans-conceptual knowing stability to one's practice. Such wisdom is grounded in both dualistic and nondual understanding of the truths of no-self (*anatman*), impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*dukkha*), and dependent arising (*pratitya samutpada*) of form. These Five Spiritual Faculties are ultimately inseparable, a prior and present unity.

The Five Hindrances. Obstructions/obscurations to practice of the *Eightfold Path*:

1) *Attraction*: obsessive desire for sense pleasure, greed, pride.

2) *Aversion*: fear/anxiety, anger, and their flip-side: ill-will, hostility, aggression, hatred.

3) *Laxity*: "sloth and torpor", dullness, drowsiness, laziness, the endless excuses.

4) *Excitement*: restlessness, agitation, nervousness, obsessive rumination and speech.

5) *Paralyzing Doubt*: second-guessing your knowing/feeling certainty/confidence as to dharma, teachers, guru, practices, deities, adversity, timing, time, *ad infinitum*. What to do?

Each breath, moment to moment, be mindful (*shamatha*), and aware (*vipashyana*). Buddha told, "Let it be as it is and rest your weary mind, all things are perfect exactly as they are". Let confusion be transformed into objects of meditation. Your hindrances are openings for the wisdom light to enter in. Suzuki Roshi: "The only mistake you can make in practice is to quit!"

Bodhicitta: The *Four Boundless States* are the proto-Mahayana of early Buddhism's *Brahma-vihara*, or the Four Immeasurables (*Apramana*). These limitless mindstates of loving kindness (*maitri*), compassion (*karuna*), limitless joy (*mudita*), and meditative equanimity (*upeksha*)—for both self and others—result in the spontaneous presence (*lhundrup*) of bodhicitta (heart-mind of enlightenment) of the *bodhisattvas* (we Buddhas in training). Here abides the great heart-mind intention to benefit others; and to awaken oneself for the benefit of all beings.

This great aspiration, with engaged action, bestows the selfless compassionate activity that is, through the inexorable law of karma, the very cause of human happiness. As Buddha told, "*What you are is what you have been. What you will be is what you do now*". Our past deeds are past. Our future is what we *choose* to do now. This transition from past to future requires accepting full responsibility for "what you have been" in the past. No blame. No excuses.

The Seven Point Mind Training (*Lojong*) of Atisha utilizes the loving kindness (*maitri*) practice of the *Four Boundless States* as *Tonglen* (giving and receiving) practice, and utilizes all six *Paramitas*, the six perfections of the Bodhisattva's training. These natural states are the actual *causes* of relative/hedonic, and ultimate/liberation happiness for practitioners of this Path.

The "Four Mind Changes" begin the Buddhist Path: 1) Our precious human birth; 2) Impermanence; 3) Karma; 4) Suffering, or the hell of living in ignorance/*samsara*.

Thus begins the foundational *ngöndro* of the noble *Eightfold Path* that transforms karmic, materialistic, habitual deep cultural background mental, emotional and attentional mindstate imbalances—the causes of suffering—into our indwelling natural innate transcendent wisdom of emptiness/boundlessness. From such wisdom spontaneously and effortlessly arises compassionate action toward all beings; the very causes of both relative and ultimate human happiness. Thus are Compassion ("skillful means") and *Wisdom* the two limbs of the Buddhist Path.

This wisdom is the *Prajnaparamita*, Great Mother of all the Buddhas, the "perfection of wisdom", the end of ignorance that is our unhappiness. This great nondual truth realizes, then actualizes our primordial ground state, bright *presence* of it—by whatever name—natural, selfless clear-light state/space of mind; in short, our ever-present Buddha mind; who we are now.

Wonder of wonders, this already present state of presence, this inherently abiding seed or potential of Buddha nature (tatagatagarbha) is always already present and fully awake within each one from the very beginning! "The child knows the mother." Why don't we manifest it? Because, on the accord of the Mahayana, our innate Buddha mind is shrouded in ignorance, grasping at permanence and in servitude to the self, the ego-I. Step by step, the Path awakens and liberates us from this adventitious bondage. As His Holiness tells, "Just open the door". Then enter in.

The result/fruition of the *Eightfold Path* with its various practices is the gradual, "brief moments many times", then sudden permanent trans-personal realization of mind nature, of conceptually transcendent perfection of wisdom (*Prajnaparamita*)—the luminous *wisdom of emptiness*. This result is decidedly not mere conceptual speculation, or reading, or classes. The student grounds the View and Path in practice of meditative quiescence (*shamatha*/mindfulness), penetrating insight/*vipashyana*, the Vajrayana foundational practice

(*ngöndro*), and finally, nondual *Dzogchen*, or *Essence Mahamudra*. All this realized in compassionate everyday conduct under the guidance of, and with great *devotion* to a qualified master.

The Three Marks of Existence (*Trilakshana*, the Three Gates to Liberation): The *Trilakshana* is Buddha's explication of the first Noble Truth, the Truth of Suffering. It is accepted by all Buddhist Schools. These three basic characteristics of conditioned, dependently arisen spacetime existence are: 1) *suffering* (*dukkha*), this adversity of being in form; 2) *impermanence* (*anitya, anicca*), everything (the *Five Skandhas* of physical form, sensation, perception, mental formation/volition, and consciousness) changes and passes away; 3) *selflessness* (*anatman*), no-self or insubstantiality. Selflessness/emptiness applies not merely to relative phenomena, but to all phenomena (*dhamma*), both conditioned relative-conventional, and ultimate, including emptiness itself. These three are utterly interdependent, a prior, present unity. The bright faculty of wisdom (*prajna/panna, yeshe, jnana, gnosis*) directly, trans-rationally perceives, feels and knows that everything is characterized by these three qualities. Such was Buddha's enlightenment. Penetrating insight (*vipashyana*) into these *three gates of enlightenment* shall bestow liberation from the ignorance that causes suffering; then opens into ultimate happiness itself (*mahasuka*), Buddha mind, the happiness that cannot be lost (*Dhammapada* verses 277, 278, 279). This is Buddha's teaching gift to us as to the way in which we, and everything else, truly exists.

Refuge. We all take refuge in something. Too often this refuge is hedonic and materialistic. The beginning practitioner takes refuge in something far more powerful. The three *refuge sources* are the *Three Jewels*: 1) the living Master as the *Buddha*; 2) the *Dharma*, the teaching of the Buddha; 3) the *Sangha*, the spiritual community that includes the luminous *rigzin sangha*, the *vidyadhara* lineage of all enlightened beings of the three times—past, present, future.

These *Three Jewels* have *four refuges*, with four levels of meaning: an exoteric "outer", an esoteric "inner", a secret, and then an "innermost secret" or nondual meaning. These, our four voices are in no way separate. They are a prior knowing/feeling unity. Such refuge generates the *la/energy* that nourishes, holds and protects the practitioner on this difficult Path. This stabilizes the understanding (the *View*), which motivates the commitment to the *Path*, resulting in the *Fruit* of enlightenment, compassionate ultimate happiness itself (*mahasuka, paramananda*). Such happiness lies not in the future. *We cannot become happy, we can only be happy*. Thus do we "make the goal the Path". "This fruit is no different at the pinnacle of enlightenment than it is at the primordial base" (Ad Zom Rinpoche). Our selfless, indwelling enlightenment Buddha mind already knows this. And *That* is who we actually are, without a single exception.

According to H.H. The Dalai Lama, all states of consciousness—negative or positive—indeed all phenomena are pervaded by this luminous clear light wisdom of emptiness, this "wish fulfilling jewel", reflexive primordial awareness wisdom (*gnosis/jnana/yeshe*), "supreme source" of reality itself. From emptiness this all arises, abides, and into emptiness it all returns, with no essential separation, ever. The dynamic intrinsic awareness (*gzhi rigpa*) presence (*vidya*) of that primordial "groundless ground" is our always present Buddha heart-mind. OM AH HUM. Ad Zom Rinpoche told:

The limbs of the Buddha's teaching have this one purpose—to lead us to the nondual primordial wisdom—Buddha mind. This wisdom participates in and pervades all views and paths for one who is capable of accessing it.

Thus, let us remember, moment to moment, wherever we go, whatever we do, the great truth that this already present wisdom presence is our actual “supreme identity.” Who is it that I am? *Tat Tvam Asi. That I Am!* In that we take refuge. It's like coming home.

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