

Buddhist Basics: Being Happy Now

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Form and Emptiness: The Fundamental Two Truths. In Buddhist Middle Way these Two Truths are: **Ultimate Truth** (*paramartha satya*)—*shunyata*/emptiness/*dharmakaya* (truth body), unbounded whole (*mahabindu*), utterly selfless clear-light nature of mind; and **Relative Truth** (*samvriti satya*)—all appearing spacetime physical and mental forms or modes of being that arise within this boundless 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 form, no emptiness. Emptiness wisdom transcends, embraces our concepts and beliefs about it.

The Three Buddha Bodies (*kayas*) that constitute this great emptiness/form continuum are: 1) formless *dharmakaya* emptiness ground (*OM*), 2) *sambhogakaya*, luminous clear-light bridge into form (*AH*), and 3) *nirmanakaya* form (*HUM*), light-form gift arising as thought, intention and action for the benefit of all beings. Thus the primordial mantra *OM AH HUM*, Body, Voice, Mind of the Buddhas. Vocalizing this great mantra generates the *la*/energy that protects the engaged Buddhist practitioner on this joyous difficult path. Practice it "brief moments, many times". Well, what is this spacious emptiness that fills the worlds with lightform ($E = mc^2$)? Who am I? What is the Real? What is the very secret and cause of human happiness?

Boundless Emptiness. Emptiness (*shunyata*) is not a transcendent, logocentric, absolutely existing reality ground. Rather, emptiness is a selfless, non-essential *relativized* absolute, a "groundless ground" arising *interdependently*—"dependent arising" or "interbeing"—a timeless infinitely vast causal matrix of interconnected causes and conditions. Form is real, yet not *independently, essentially* real. Beings in form have a conventional self-ego-I, but are absent any intrinsic or permanent self-nature. So this *Madhyamaka* (Middle Way) *Prasangika* view is non-essentialist, and empty and absent, as Nagarjuna told, "any shred of intrinsic self-existence".

Experience is but the causal, relative, interconnected "dependent arising" (*pratitya samutpada*) of impermanent (*anitya*), selfless (*anatman*) spacetime forms arising in their formless ultimate emptiness "groundless ground". Hence the *fullness of emptiness*. Appearing reality then is "ontologically relative"—real by way of our relative, deep background linguistic, cultural "web of belief"—but not intrinsically, permanently, ultimately real. H.H. The Dalai Lama terms this paradox the "*emptiness of emptiness*". Emptiness itself is empty of intrinsic existence!

How shall we understand this? Our primordial emptiness base (*gzhi rigpa*) is established by an observer's ordinary mind. It exists only relatively, via conceptual convention. It is utterly absent intrinsic *ultimate* existence or self-nature (*svabhava*). Its dependently arisen mind-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 phenomenal forms of emptiness are *relatively* real, just not intrinsically *ultimately* real. Thus is this Buddhist Two Truths trope—Relative and Ultimate—a centrist Middle Way between forms' absolute existence—an observer-independent "real world out there" (RWOT), and its nihilist illusory non-existence. What then shall we do with this precious life we've been given? What is human happiness, and how shall we realize it in our lives?

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

1) *Life is filled with suffering (dukkha)*: physical and emotional pain; unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the adversity of life; the "suffering of change" that is this anxiety/fear of our impermanence (*anitya*). All of this form 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 actual cause of happiness, we are liberated from the ignorance that is suffering, which then bestows great happiness. But how?

4) *The Eightfold Path* is Buddha's mind training life practice that accomplishes this awakening. This Path is the cause of human flourishing that is *relative* hedonic happiness (*felicitas, eudaemonia*), that may result in the fruition of *ultimate* happiness itself (*mahasuka, paramananda, beatitudo*), the happiness that cannot be lost—our always already present Buddha Mind. These *Four Truths* are the foundation of all the Vehicles of the Buddhist Wisdom Path.

In the *Prasannapada*, Chandrakirti's great commentary on Nagarjuna's *Exposition of the Middle Way*, we learn of the natural interrelationship of Buddha's Two Truths, 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 relative cognitive state changes—outer, inner, innermost secret and nondual (no subject/object separation). From this *primordial wisdom of emptiness* naturally arises Buddha's *Eightfold Path* to awakening.

Chandrakirti reasons that, if we will first postulate the interrelated unity of the primordial emptiness ground of being itself with its interdependently arising 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. Thus do we utilize these relative "concealer truths" to awaken to Ultimate Truth, beyond fear and hope, our enlightened liberation from suffering that is this awakening to the prior and present unity of the Two Truths—form and emptiness. The indwelling, already present *Presence of That (tat, sat)*—*vidya/rigpa*—is our actual identity.

Thus, from ignorance (*avidya*) of the wisdom of emptiness/selflessness arises concept-mind (*manovijnana*) with its adventitious *attraction* and *aversion* that causes the narcissistic negative afflictive emotions—fear, anger, greed, pride—grasping/clinging to a self (*klesha*-desire mind/*klishtamanovijnana*). This results in the destructive behavior that causes human suffering and human evil. Mindful Path of the wisdom of emptiness is here present as Happiness Itself.

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 or method 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 root cause of human suffering. Buddha told, "One who controls the mind, controls everything". Most of us cannot control adversity. *But with mindfulness 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 comprises the authentic mind training program of life practice, the Wisdom Path to ultimate liberation from suffering and its relative causes.

Buddha's Eightfold Path:

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

Love/Ethics: 3) Authentic Speech; 4) Authentic Action/Conduct; 5) Authentic Livelihood.

Meditation: 6) Authentic Effort; 7) Authentic Mindfulness; 8) Authentic Wisdom/Love.

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

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, love.

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

3) *Patience:* kind 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/sati* (mindfulness) and *vipashyana* (penetrating insight); *Dzogchen*; Essence *Mahamudra*, the foundation of Buddha Mind/Wisdom Mind.

6) *Wisdom: Prajnaparamita*, the perfection of wisdom; ground and realization of Wisdom Mind, emptiness/boundlessness/selflessness accomplished by diligent practice—with guidance from a qualified master—of all the *paramitas*. Wisdom protects the bodhisattva's loving 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 basic morality or conduct for the Buddhist lay practitioner who aspires to a happy 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 Conduct, the fourth injunction 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 must 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 injunction of the noble *Eightfold Path*. Be a good listener; listen with non-judgmental selfless compassion. Then when you do speak, speak what is true, useful, helpful and wise. Use the great power of mantra, for example, *OM AH HUM* to transmit and protect your *bodhichitta*. Use your voice mindfully, carefully, kindly. Don't lie, gossip, bear false witness or criticize others. Avoid 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 you allow to enter your precious bodymind.

The Five Spiritual Faculties (*Indriya*; also *The Five Strengths*). These must be cultivated to accomplish the *Third Noble Truth*, the cessation of ignorance (*avidya*). *Avidya* is the root cause of human suffering (*dukkha*). Thus do we enter in and practice the *Eightfold Path*. Four of these five 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). Faith is the trans-conceptual seed of certainty in the essential teachings of the Path: karma and rebirth; emptiness/openness/selflessness (*shunyata*); dependent arising (*pratitya samutpada*); the Four Refuges, namely, the outer, inner, secret, innermost secret/nondual refuges.

2) *Effort/Energy (virya)*: 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 awareness foundations of mindfulness: body/matter; sensations/feelings (*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 Mind. This was the actual mind/body practice of Gautama Shakyamuni Buddha. Only a qualified master can transmit the Four (or eight) *Dhyanas*. Entering 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 mo-

ment stability and continuity of mindfulness, the six (or nine) stages of *shamatha* (mindfulness), and *vipashyana* (penetrating insight) in the total lifeworld of the practitioner.

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

The Five Hindrances. Obstructions/obscurations to the 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 painful apertures for 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 *Brahmavihara*, or the Four Immeasurables (*Apramana*). These limitless mindstates of 1) loving kindness (*maitri*), 2) compassion (*karuna*), 3) limitless joy (*mudita*), and 4) meditative equanimity (*upeksha*)—for both self and others—result in the Spontaneous Presence (*lhundrup*) of *bodhicitta—unity of love and wisdom that is the heart essence of all the Buddhist vehicles*. *Bodhicitta* is thought, intention and action for the benefit of others beings. *Bodhicitta* is the compassionate engaged action of the Bodhisattvas; and the primary cause of a mind in comfort and ease.

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 *Parami-*

tas, 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 are basic understanding of 1) Our precious human birth; 2) Impermanence; 3) Karma; 4) Suffering, the hell of living in ignorance/*samsara*. Thus begins the foundational *ngöndro* practice of the *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. From such wisdom spontaneously and effortlessly arises compassionate action toward all beings; the very causes of both relative and ultimate human happiness. Compassion ("skillful means") and *Wisdom/Love* 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-ego-I. Step by mindful step, the Path awakens and liberates from this adventitious bondage. As His Holiness tells, "Just open the door". Then enter in.

The result/fruition of the *Eightfold Path* with all of 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 adventitious 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, anatta)*, no-self or insubstantiality. Selflessness/emptiness applies not merely to relative phenomena, but to all phenomena (*dharma, dhamma*), both conditioned relative-conventional, and ultimate, including emptiness itself. These three are utterly interdependent, a prior and present unity.

Our bright faculty of wisdom—both relative, discriminating *prajna/panna*, and ultimate *jnana, yeshe*, gnosis—directly, trans-rationally perceives, feels and knows that everything—all interdependently arising form is characterized by these three qualities of existence. Such was Buddha's enlightenment, that is now our own luminous intrinsic Buddha Mind (*samatajnana*).

Shamatha (quiescent mindfulness practice), and *vipashyana* (penetrating insight practice) are these *three gates of enlightenment*; and 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 wisdom gift to us as to the way in which we, and everything else, truly exists. Who am I? *Tat Tvam Asi. That I am.*

Refuge. We all take refuge in something. Too often this refuge is hedonic and materialistic. The engaged practitioner takes refuge in something far more powerful. The three *refuge sources* are the precious *Three Jewels*: 1) the Master as the *Lama-Buddha*; 2) the *Dharma*, 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. Through this understanding the *View* is stabilized, which motivates a commitment to the *Path*, resulting in the *Fruit/Result* of enlightenment, liberation from unnecessary suffering, that is compassionate ultimate happiness itself (*mahasuka, paramananda*). Such happiness lies not in some future awareness mind state. *We cannot become happy later; but we can be happy now.* So we "make the Path the goal". "This fruit is no different at the pinnacle of enlightenment than it is at the primordial base" (Adzom Rinpoche). Our selfless, inherent (*sahaja*) enlightenment Buddha Mind/Wisdom Mind always already knows this. It is that natural wakefulness to which we awaken, each mindful step. *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 relative spacetime phenomena are pervaded by this luminous clear-light wisdom mind, the wisdom of emptiness, this "wish fulfilling jewel", reflexive primordial awareness wisdom (gnosis/jnana/yeshe), "supreme source" and ground of reality itself.* From emptiness this all arises, abides, and into emptiness it all returns, with no essential separation, ever. As *Dzogchen* founder Garab Dorje told, "It is already accomplished from the very beginning. The dynamic intrinsic awareness (*gzhi rigpa*) Presence (*vidya*) of that primordial "groundless ground" is our always present Buddha Heart-Mind (*samatajnana*), *OM AH HUM.* For *Dzogchen* master Adzom Rinpoche:

The limbs of the Buddha's teaching have this one great purpose—to lead all beings to the nondual primordial wisdom—Buddha Mind. This primordial Wisdom Mind pervades all views and paths for one who is capable of accessing it.

It is good to remember that wherever we go, whatever we do, the Presence of our indwelling Buddha Mind is always already present. Our cognitive touchstone? *OM AH HUM.*