


Buddhist Philosophy

Buddhist philosophy has stood the test of time due to its logical practicalness. Buddhism has one aim, and that is overcoming suffering in your life right now. Also, due to its practicalness, it can be studied and practiced without having to take on a religious doctrine. The essential path of Buddhism (the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path) has never been lost. The essential Buddhist process of overcoming suffering has always been able to stand apart from the traditions, doctrine and culture of the various Buddhist schools.

4 Noble Truths	
1.	The reality of suffering
2.	The nature of suffering
3.	The answer to overcoming suffering
4.	The path of overcoming suffering – The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path	
1. Right View	Wisdom
2. Right Intent	
3. Right Speech	Ethical Conduct
4. Right Action	
5. Right Livelihood	
6. Right Effort	Mental Development
7. Right Mindfulness	
8. Right Concentration	



Also, the basic principles of Buddhism easily equate with the that of other religions such as Christianity, providing Christianity is studied from the perspective of experiential wisdom rather than a blind faith in the written word.

Buddhism also shares many commonalities with modern wisdom philosophy and psychology. In this summary, a contemporary interpretation of the Buddhist path is used to suit our particular culture without undermining its original meaning.

The Noble Eightfold Path describes the way to the end of suffering, as it was laid out by Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha. It is a practical guideline to ethical and mental development with the goal of freeing the individual from unhealthy dependencies and mental confusion. Its potential does not end there through. Its ultimate goal is to enable us to attain highly advanced levels of self-realization and self-mastery. Great emphasis is put on the practical aspect, because it is only through practice that one can attain a higher level of awareness and finally reach Nirvana (total liberation from delusion and suffering). The written word, therefore, is never seen as an infallible truth, but instead, only a facilitator of your journey to the truth that is found within your own higher consciousness.

The eight aspects of the path are not to be understood as a sequence of single steps. Instead they are highly interdependent principles that have to be seen in relationship with each other. Also, the use of the word “right” does not mean a dogmatic interpretation of some designated truth. Rather, the word “right” can be equated with the word “skilfull”, indicating the ability of one to become in tune with the most appropriate thought and action in any given moment. The ultimate authority where this attunement can be found is within our own heart of wisdom, which also connects us directly with the super-consciousness of Life itself.

Buddhism stands on the premise that there is a “way”, like a set physics of consciousness, that represents a blue print for the human mind and consciousness (the Super-Consciousness of life, or



Supreme Universal Consciousness), that when followed and practiced, guides us into an ultimate state of awareness. It is interesting to note that the more modern psychology investigates this “physics” of consciousness, revealed in this way by Buddhism, the more it empowers modern psychology. For example, the meditation practice of mindfulness has become an important therapeutic approach in psychology and counselling.

The Noble Eightfold Path

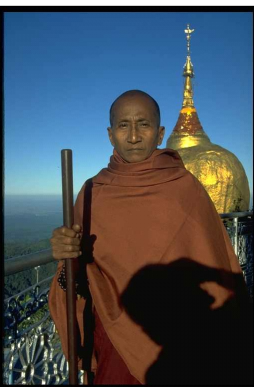
1. Right View

Right View is a vital key to the successful attainment of the realizations available to one who practices the Noble Eightfold Path. The quality of our knowledge, thoughts and actions is determined by the principles or values we believe in and serve. This is our own personal philosophy. Whether we are consciously aware of our beliefs or not, until we learn the power of conscious choice, it is our habitual thought-patterns that create and control our experiences in life (most people think they are controlled by the world around them, including the people in it. Hence, most people remain powerless victims to the challenges in their lives and learn little from their experiences). It is through our beliefs that we view the world and act in the world. Our beliefs can make our vision clearer or they can blind us.

The great masters and teachers down the ages have all taught that Unconditional Love is the highest principle of all. By its very nature the principle of Unconditional Love is uncompromising, and to the ego mind, unfathomable. All ignorance and confusion is confronted by this ultimate principle, which is as it should be. Unconditional Love is the great undoer of the ego mind. When the spiritual seeker surrenders his or her mind to the transforming power of this most divine of principles, the path to ultimate enlightenment is initiated. Like the other steps, Right View must never be taken for granted. Our understanding and attainment of Unconditional Love is naturally going to keep evolving as we continue to walk our individual path to self-mastery.

Also, Right View essentially contains the full clarity of understanding of the Four Noble Truths. In the words of Buddha:

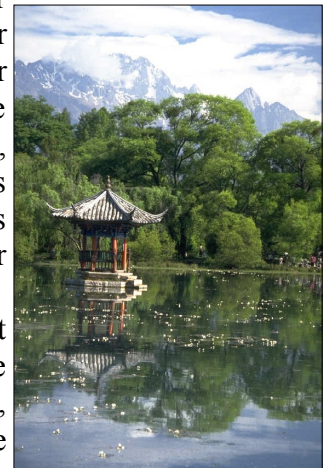
“What, monks, is the truth of suffering? Birth is suffering, decay, sickness and death are suffering. To be separated from what you like is suffering. To want something and not get it is suffering. In short, the human personality, liable as it is to clinging and attachment brings suffering.”



As a human being therefore, suffering is unavoidable. Suffering is then perpetuated, even increased, by trying to escape from suffering. For example, trying to surround oneself with possessions, including people, only to lose them or be in fear of losing them. Therefore, suffering is ultimately caused by clinging to, or trying to make permanent all things that are impermanent, and by its nature, physical life itself is impermanent.

Buddha then goes on to reveal the secret to ending suffering, and that is to cease the desire to be attached to all that is impermanent. The method that he gave to us to achieve this breakthrough in consciousness, or “liberation,” is the Noble Eightfold Path. Here we can consider that “attachment” in this context equates to dependencies that trap us, delude us, and prevent us from evolving. Therefore, Unconditional Love is total non-attachment or total freedom to achieve our potential—to literally be Love, rather than constantly chasing it.

It is understood that one does not need to reject the world and its material nature in order to achieve a high degree of enlightenment. Rather, what essentially changes is one’s relationship to



the world. Having acquired a million dollars can be the result of greed, which naturally leads to the suffering of oneself and others, or the pursuit of wealth can be motivated by the desire to serve humanity with this resource, leading to ethical conduct and the alleviation of suffering for many. The path of the Bodhisattva also reveals the deep compassion of Buddhism with its ideal of serving humanity in the aim of ending suffering for all beings.

One can practice the Noble Eightfold Path in order to alleviate suffering to a level that leads to a well-lived and meaningful life, or one can totally surrender oneself to the path of self-realization and of service in the pursuit of full liberation.

2. Right Intention

Right Intention, second of the wisdom steps, is one's unyielding commitment to the path of personal and spiritual development. The path becomes the foundation of your life. Buddha outlines three types of right intentions: 1. the intention of renunciation, which means resistance to the pull of unhealthy desire and its inevitable attachments, 2. the intention of good will, meaning resistance to feelings of anger and aversion, and 3. the intention of harmlessness, meaning not to think or act cruelly, violently, or aggressively, and to develop compassion. In other words, it is the commitment to accept personal responsibility for all that we do, say, feel and think—not because someone says so, but because freedom from suffering, and the ability to free others from suffering is the result. Even more than this, it is about awakening our power to love under all circumstances.

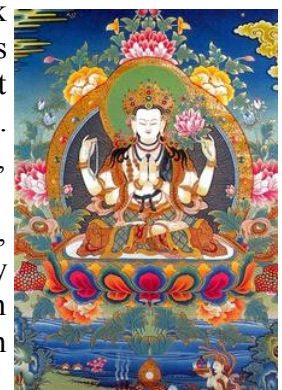
Right Intention is also about lovingly taking care of the ongoing development of our own mind and consciousness. This includes accepting and having compassion for our humanness, which is often forgotten in the pursuit of the spiritual ideal. It is like the intention to lovingly care for one's own child. No matter how many mistakes the child makes, love is never withdrawn, but instead continues to flow in the form of compassion, understanding and consistent appropriate guidance and discipline. The same consideration is of course given to all other beings, nature included, but loving others is made far easier by maintaining our own inner-balance through healthy self-love. Giving to others is more effortless and natural when we are also properly caring for ourselves. The aim is to live a simple, balanced life, free of fear-based attachment, that is of benefit to others.

Right View and Right Intention are the foundation steps. The other steps of the Eightfold Path are there to help us fully comprehend the first two steps.

3. Right Speech

Right Speech is the first principle of ethical conduct in the Eightfold Path. Ethical conduct is viewed as a guideline to moral discipline, which supports the other principles of the path. Purification of the mind can only be achieved through the cultivation of ethical conduct. The importance of speech in the context of Buddhist ethics is obvious: words can break or save lives, make enemies or friends, start war or create peace. Buddha explained right speech as follows: 1. to abstain from false speech, especially not to tell deliberate lies and not to speak deceitfully, 2. to abstain from slanderous speech and not to use words maliciously against others, 3. to abstain from harsh words that offend or hurt others, and 4. to abstain from idle chatter that lacks purpose or depth. Positively phrased, this means to tell the truth, to speak kindly, respectfully, and gently and to talk with a positive and constructive intent.

Right speech can also encapsulate our internal dialogue. For instance, pay attention to how you talk to yourself throughout the day. Note how many times you put yourself down or criticize others etc. This can reveal much about the nature of your relationship with yourself and all others, which can



determine the bulk of your suffering or the depth of your inner-harmony.

4. Right Action

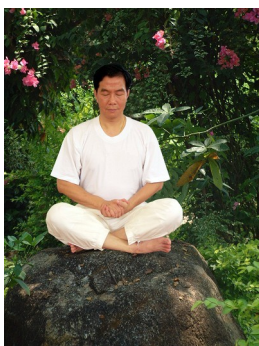
The second ethical principle, right action, encapsulates all that we do. Unwholesome actions lead to unsound states of mind, while wholesome actions lead to wholesome states of mind. Again, the principle is explained in terms of abstinence: right action means 1. to abstain from harming anyone or anything (such as nature, including our planet), especially to abstain from taking life (including suicide) and doing harm intentionally or delinquently, 2. to abstain from taking what is not given, which includes stealing, robbery, fraud, deceitfulness, and dishonesty, and 3. to abstain from sexual misconduct. Positively formulated, right action means to act kindly and compassionately, to be honest, to respect the belongings of others, and to keep sexual relationships harmless to others. Further details regarding the concrete meaning of right action can be found in the Precepts.

For the “householder” or everyday person who is not a monk, right action is the central hub of one’s practice. Life itself becomes a meditation that raises the consciousness beyond the often restrictive do’s and don’ts of rulebooks and social convention to a point where one can simply feel what is ultimately right in the moment. This is also known as “skill in action” which is underpinned by balanced “thinking with feeling”, guided by conscious-awareness. This intuitive ability comes by way of attunement with one’s own heart of wisdom, or Buddha Nature (our personal connection to Supreme Universal Consciousness). When one acts on this level of greater consciousness, one’s action is ultimately appropriate for all concerned. Practice of the Noble Eightfold Path constitutes a journey of evolvement into this important stage of enlightenment.



5. Right Livelihood

Right livelihood means that one should earn one's living in an ethical way and that wealth should be gained legally and peacefully. The Buddha mentions four specific activities that harm other beings and that one should avoid for this reason: 1. dealing in weapons, 2. dealing in living beings (including raising animals for slaughter as well as the slave trade and prostitution), 3. working in meat production and butchery, and 4. selling intoxicants and poisons, such as alcohol and drugs. Furthermore, any other occupation that would violate the principles of right speech and right action should be avoided.

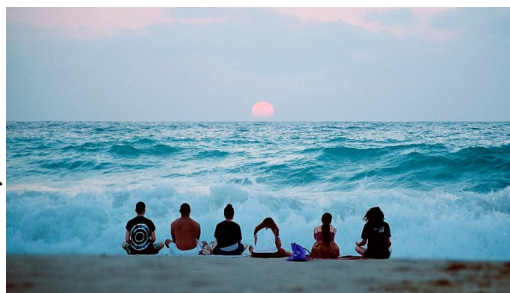


The naming of certain livelihoods is obviously problematic (the obvious limitations of the written word). The question arises, what is more beneficial; a butcher who displays loving kindness and joy to his customers or an angry, judgmental vegetarian? Perhaps at this stage of human development, the kind butcher is of greater benefit. Ultimately, perhaps the best way to find the Right Livelihood is follow your heart. While you are learning to do that, make use of appropriate guidelines for your own life and work towards building a world of peace and harmony without judging others. As the old saying goes, “It is not what you do so much as how you do it.”

Being aware of the bigger picture is essential when considering a sophisticated awareness of ethical conduct. For example, the Dalai Lama admitted to the necessity of lying to the Chinese authorities in order to protect the wellbeing of those who were fleeing Tibet.

6. Right Effort

Without effort, which is in itself an act of taking command of one's will, nothing can be achieved. This will-directed effort must in turn employ the intellect to construct system and order in one's practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. System and order focuses one's power, develops clarity, and facilitates the higher feelings—the essential link to the heart. The ancient texts say this about Right Effort: 1. to prevent the arising of unarisen unwholesome states, 2. to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen, 3. to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen, and 4. to maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen.



Right Effort is also about taking full responsibility for one's own motivations and actions. It is about never giving up. This means steadfastly refusing to see oneself as a victim in the heat of life's challenges, but rather facing all situations with an open heart and mind in order to grow through all these experiences. This courageous approach to life is fortified by our commitment to a support system that nurtures our vulnerable humanness, while motivating us to journey ever closer to the ideal. This is defined in Buddhism as “seeking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This can be translated as: Buddha—to know that you have a personal connection with the living consciousness of Buddha or any other representative of Supreme Universal Consciousness; Dharma— dedicating your life to any path that facilitates genuine enlightenment; Sangha—to associate with others who have dedicated their life to the path of enlightenment. Therefore, Right Effort is a devoted everyday practice of meditation and the process of the Noble Eightfold Path or something like it. It is never giving up.



7. Right Mindfulness

Right Mindfulness is about being completely present and aware of reality as it is in any given moment. Where human minds are concerned, this is rarely the case. I often say to students and clients, “To be mad and to know that you are mad is to be on a journey to conscious illumination. To be mad and not know you are mad is to be on a journey of insanity.” For example, if one equates madness with the pursuit of material possessions with the expectation of finding true fulfillment, then the picture becomes a bit closer to home. It is not that we shouldn't pursue material possessions, but rather to be mindful enough to awaken to the inherent unsatisfactoriness of the exercise. Therefore, the illusion that gathering material possessions will lead to fulfillment is broken, and so is the attachment and greed that leads to suffering.

Mindfulness is being aware of what the mind is up to in any given moment, which enables us to consciously work with our mind and guide it toward enlightenment. Meditation enables one to observe the mind from an increasingly detached and conscious vantage point. From this conscious vantage point, we are able to make better choices. Here is another example. Worry is a common pass-time of the human mind. If we stop for a moment and instead of being consumed by the worry, we choose to step back and observe the mind worrying, we will discover many things about the nature of worrying. For a start, on the emotional level we may notice that worrying hurts. When we observe our thinking patterns we may discover that our thoughts are erratic and somewhat circular, like a rat in a cage. If we observe our will, or desire to act, we may discover that our ability to act is thwarted due to trying to do the impossible of acting on the future while we are still in the present. Thus mindfulness exposes the delusion of worry, i.e., trying to control the uncontrollable, and in



so doing awakens us to seek a better way to use our minds.

Buddha accounted for this with the four foundations of mindfulness: 1. contemplation of the body, 2. contemplation of feeling (repulsive, attractive, or neutral), 3. contemplation of the state of mind, and 4. contemplation of the phenomena (eg: visions, extra sensory perceptions—to observe such sensations without being fooled in to thinking that you have suddenly become enlightened).

8. Right Concentration

Right Concentration is the art of disciplining the mind by bringing it under the control of the will, which in turn serves one's higher consciousness, the divine Will (Love). The objective of concentration is to bring the mind to a still point, usually by focusing on a single object with tighter and tighter control until one literally slips between the moments of existence to what is called samadhi. This is also experienced as a state of bliss, or complete detachment where we let go into pure conscious-awareness where we more directly experience Supreme Universal Consciousness. It is being able to transcend the human mind, with all its noise and limitations. This is not the end but a means to an even greater end, and that is the ability to direct and focus one's mind at will in the service of humanity and enlightenment. It is the ability to galvanize the immense power of one's consciousness.

Some of us have naturally strong wills that can easily bring thoughts and emotions to heel. For others (strong thinkers for example), concentration is a difficult exercise requiring the longer-term development of one's will. It is often mistakenly thought that one-pointed concentration is the highest stage of meditation. However, this ability must be complimented with being adept at the other steps as well, which someone skilled in concentration may find quite difficult. Also, pursuing states of bliss can become a distraction—yet another attachment. If one's process is too narrowly focused on concentration at the expense of a broader, more balanced approach, there is a danger of compartmentalizing one's mind. There can be a tendency toward walling off certain unintegrated areas of the mind, such as fears and insecurities, rather than genuinely facing, healing and integrating them. Higher states of Right Concentration inevitably become blocked and deluded until all the doors of the mind are fully opened and healed through more contemplative practices such as insight meditation (more natural for thinkers) and devotion or love focused meditations (more natural for feelers).

In practical terms for the average seeker, practicing Right Concentration helps us to find the still center that is our conscious-awareness that is the portal into our ultimate potential. The more we can attune to this “heart of consciousness”, the more we can detach from and observe our mind and body with perspective. This practice enables us to realize that we are not our body or human mind (our impermanent self), but pure conscious-awareness (the permanent self where true peace is found).

Every step has its own importance and place in developing our human and spiritual potential, as well as opening the doors to ultimate enlightenment. High attainment of any one step requires the high attainment of the others. The Eightfold Path is an organically evolving interdependent process.

Right View and Right Intent, the wisdom steps, could be regarded as the foundation and ultimate consummation of the path. All the other steps are simply vehicles for the increasing mastery of these two steps, which are the beginning and the end. Right View and Right intent can be equated with Unconditional Love and Total Personal Responsibility—Steps 1 and 2 of the 5-Step Process.

(Adapted and expanded from www.thebigview.com/buddhism/eightfoldpath.html)

