NOTES ON BUDDHISM

The Life of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha)

Siddhartha Gautama was born in 563 BC, a prince of the a royal family in ancient Nepal. Prior to Siddartha’s birth, certain Indian holy men prophesied to his parents that their son, when he grew up, would become either a great king or a great spiritual leader, renouncing all worldly pursuits. His father, a king himself, wished his son to follow the path to political glory and so arranged to maintain the young prince in a life so full of luxury and pleasure that he would never be tempted to renounce the world.

Birth
Youth
Marriage & parenthood
The Four Passing Sights (aging, sickness, death, renunciation)
The Great Renunciation
The Great Going Forth
The Great Enlightenment
The Great Ministry
His teachings gained immense popularity, and the rest of Buddha's life was spent practicing and explaining his philosophy. He died at the age of 80.
The Great Decease, 483 BC.

The Middle Path (from the Pali Canon)

There are two extremes to be avoided by one who has renounced the world: (1) immersion in sensual pleasures, which is pathetic, low, vulgar, dishonorable, and which leads to no true fulfillment; and (2) excessive self-denial and self-mortification, which is painful and dishonorable, and which leads to no true fulfillment.

Avoiding these two extremes, a Tathagata [enlightened one] discovers a Middle Path, which opens the eyes, which bestows understanding, and which leads to peace of mind, to wisdom, to full enlightenment, to Nirvana. And what is that Middle Path? It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, Right Views, Right Intent, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. This is the Middle Path . . . .

A Tathagata [enlightened one], does not seek salvation in austerities, but neither does he immerse himself in worldly pleasures, nor does he live in abundance and luxury. He follows the Middle Path. You can’t become spiritually purified by abstaining from fish or meat, nor from going naked, nor from shaving the head, nor from wearing matted hair, nor from dressing in a rough garment, nor from covering yourself with dirt, nor from sacrificing to the gods. What you need is to become free from delusion. Similarly, you can’t achieve spiritual purity through reading the Vedas [the sacred scriptures of Hinduism], nor through making offerings to priests, nor through sacrifices to the gods, nor through self-mortification . . . , nor through many penances performed for the sake of immortality. What you need is to become free from delusion.

It isn’t eating meat that makes us unclean. It is anger, drunkenness, obstinacy, bigotry, deception, envy, self-praise, disparaging others, arrogance, and evil intentions . . . .

He who practices extreme self-denial and self-mortification experiences a suffering that produces confusion and sickly thoughts in his mind. This is not conducive even to worldly knowledge. Much less does it lead to victory over the senses! He who fills his lamp with water will not escape the darkness, and he who tries to light a fire with soggy wood will fail. How can anyone become free from self by leading a wretched life of self-mortification? That is not the way to quench the fires of lust or the passion for pleasure. He who has extinguished the ego is free from lust; he desires neither worldly nor heavenly pleasures. For such a one the satisfaction of natural needs does not defile him. Practicing moderation, he eats and drinks in accordance with the actual needs of the body.

It is true that sensuality is debilitating. The immoderate and self-indulgent man is a slave to his passions, and pleasure-seeking is degrading and vulgar. However, to satisfy the necessities of life is not evil. To keep the body
in good health is a duty, for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom and keep our mind strong and clear. Water surrounds the lotus-flower, but does not wet its petals . . . .

**The Four Noble Truths** (from the Pali Canon)

1. Now this is the Noble Truth of Suffering [*dukkha*]: Birth is suffering, aging and deterioration is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering. The presence of hateful objects is suffering; the absence of lovable objects is suffering; not getting what we desire [that is, getting what we don’t want and not getting what we do want] is suffering. To put it briefly, the fivefold clinging [attachment] to existence [through the body, sensation, consciousness, perception, and volition — the five *skandhas* or components of human personhood] is suffering.

2. And this is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering: The cause is selfish craving [*tanha*, “thirst,” “desire”], which leads to rebirth and which is accompanied by lust for pleasure, seeking satisfaction now here, now there. This selfish craving takes three main forms: (a) craving for pleasure, (b) craving for [continued] existence, and (c) craving for the cessation of existence.

3. And this is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering: Suffering ceases with the complete cessation of selfish craving — a cessation which consists in the absence of every passion [Nirvana, “no passion,” the “blowing out” of *tanha*]. Suffering ceases with the laying aside of, the giving up of, the letting go of, the being free from, the rejection of, and the dwelling no longer upon this selfish craving.

4. And this is the Noble Truth of the Path that Leads to the Cessation of Suffering [and thence to Nirvana]: It is the Noble Eightfold Path, that is to say, Right Views, Right Intent, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

**Elaboration of the Noble Eightfold Path**

**I. Wisdom (intellectual discipline)**

1. **Right Views (philosophical principles):**

   a. The Four Noble Truths

   b. Other philosophical principles:

      ➢ The “anti-philosophy” of Original Buddhism: positivism, pragmatism, and non-theism

      ➢ The doctrine of no-soul or no-self (*anatta*)

          o Transitoriness (*anicca*): impermanence of all things

          o The five components (*skandhas*) of human personhood:

              Body (*rupa*)

              Person

              Mind (*nama*)

              Sensation (*vedana*)

              Consciousness (*vinnana*)

              Perception (*sanna*)

              Volition (*sankhara*)

          o Dependent origination: the relativity and interdependence of all things [no individuality and no separateness?]

      ➢ The doctrine of karma and rebirth (but what is reborn?)

      ➢ The nature of Nirvana (state of mind, state of being, a spiritual place, God?)

2. **Right Intent (resolution):** commitment to follow the Noble Eightfold Path persistently
II. Conduct (moral discipline)

3. **Right Speech:** no lying, no slander, no harsh or rude talk, no profanity, no impolite or abusive language, no gossip, no idle or foolish chatter; strive to use language meaningfully and usefully, with wisdom and kindness; learn to maintain “noble silence.”

4. **Right Conduct:** “The Five Precepts” – refrain from (1) harming and killing, (2) stealing, (3) lying and deceitfulness, (4) unchastity (sexual immorality), and (5) use of intoxicants. In general, strive to act in the interests of peace for oneself and for others. [Monks and nuns must follow five more precepts:(1) eat moderately and not after noon; (2) stay away from dancing, singing, and dramatic spectacles; (3) do not use garlands, scents, unguents, or ornaments; (4) do not use high or broad beds; and (5) do not accept gold or silver [money in general?] ].

5. **Right Livelihood (or vocation):** Professions that promote life, peace, and spiritual progress should be pursued (especially life in the Sangha). Specifically prohibited professions: poison peddler, slave trader, prostitute [and pimp], butcher, liquor [and drug] manufacturer and trader, weapons manufacturer and trader, tax collector, caravan trader (?).

III. Meditation (meditative discipline)

6. **Right Effort:** Purification of the mind by (1) preventing evil and unwholesome states of mind from arising, (2) getting rid of such states of mind that may already exist, (3) bringing about good and wholesome states of mind, and (4) developing and perfecting good and wholesome states of mind that are already present.

7. **Right Mindfulness:** Focusing of the mind by concentrating (1) on activities of the body, (2) on sensing and feeling, on (2) perceiving, and (4) on thinking and consciousness in general. Strive to understand what these processes are, how they arise, how they disappear, and how they are developed, controlled, gotten rid of, and linked together.

8. **Right Concentration:** Concentration on “the Beyond.” Transcendence of the mind itself; achievement of total, pure consciousness; union with the Totality of Being [the cosmic Buddha-Nature]; entering Nirvana.

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From the ReligionFacts website: [http://www.religionfacts.com/buddhism/beliefs/basic_points.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/buddhism/beliefs/basic_points.htm)

**The Basic Points of Buddhism**

In the 2,500 years since the Buddha was enlightened under the Bodhi Tree, Buddhism has spread over many countries, split into numerous sects, and adopted a wide variety of beliefs, practices, rituals and customs. However, an essential unity centered around the teachings of the Buddha underlies these differences.

In 1966, a leading monks from both the Theravada and Mahayana traditions met in Sri Lanka with the goal of bridging the differences between the two groups and identifying the essential points of agreement. The World Buddhist Sangha Council, as they called themselves, unanimously approved the following “Basic Points Unifying the Theravada and Mahayana”:

1. The Buddha is our only Master.
2. We take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.
3. We do not believe that this world is created and ruled by a God.
4. Following the example of the Buddha, who is the embodiment of Great Compassion…and Great Wisdom…., we consider that the purpose of life is to develop compassion for all living beings without discrimination and to work for their good, happiness, and peace; and to develop wisdom leading to the realization of Ultimate Truth.
5. We accept the Four Noble Truths, namely Dukkha, the Arising of Dukkha, the Cessation of Dukkha, and the Path leading to the Cessation of Dukkha; and the universal law of cause and effect…(Conditioned Genesis or Dependent Origination).
6. We understand, according to the teaching of the Buddha, that all conditioned things... are impermanent (anītya) and [subject to] dukkha, and that all conditioned and unconditioned things... are without self (anaatma).
7. We accept the Thirty-seven Qualities conducive to Enlightenment... as different aspects of the Path taught by the Buddha leading to Enlightenment.
8. There are three ways of attaining bodhi or Enlightenment, according to the ability and capacity of each individual: namely as a disciple..., as a...[self-enlightened] Buddha, and as a Samyak-sam-Buddha (perfectly and Fully Enlightened Buddha). We accept it as the highest, noblest, and most heroic to follow the career of a Bodhisattva and to become a Samyak-sam-Buddha in order to save others.

We admit that in different countries there are differences with regard to the life of Buddhist monks, popular Buddhist beliefs and practices, rites and ceremonies, customs and habits. These external forms and expressions should not be confused with the essential teachings of the Buddha.