

“What is Buddhism?”

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It's really kind of interesting the different ideas that people have about what Buddhism is? Some people think that Buddhism is a religion, where there's a lot of rites and rituals and that you pray to Buddha for things to happen. But Buddhism isn't that.

The Buddha was a meditation practitioner. And he was so successful at practicing the meditation that he became completely Awake. A lot of times he's described as fully enlightened. But enlightenment is kind of a tricky word. Because if I tell you something you don't know, then you become enlightened. But that's not the same thing as what happened to the Buddha. So I prefer to use the word 'Awakened'. He became fully Awake.

People are walking around in a dream state and mind is very clouded with different kinds of hindrances. Your mind becomes very clouded whenever there's *lust or greed*. It becomes very clouded when there's *anger, hatred or aversion*. Mind becomes very clouded when there is *sleepiness and dullness*. Mind becomes cloudy when there's *restlessness and anxiety*. Mind becomes cloudy when there is *doubt*.

Now, these five things, psychologists like to break down further and further and further and give it all kinds of different names. But basically every emotional state that we have is one of these five hindrances or two or three. You say then, where is fear in that?. Well fear has restlessness and anxiety in it. Depression? It's pretty much the same thing. I can describe exactly how depression arises. And the more people understand how it arises the easier it is to let go of it.

The way the Buddha (the researcher) talks about feelings was that there are three kinds of feelings. There's a pleasant feeling. There's an unpleasant feeling. There is a feeling that is neither pleasant nor

unpleasant. We'll let the neutral feeling go and we'll talk about the other two kinds of feeling; the pleasant feeling and the unpleasant feeling.

An unpleasant feeling arises. It can be from anxiety , can be from not getting what you want. Not seeing what you wanted to see happen. And when that feeling arises, it says, ' I don't like that feeling and I want to push that feeling away.

And then what happens is we have a lot of thoughts about why we don't like that feeling. And the more we think about the feeling, the more intense that feeling becomes and the more depression there is.

Now this psycho-physical or mind/body process is made up of five things. The Buddha talked about this quite a bit. He said we have *a physical body*. We have *feeling*. We have *perception*. Perception is the mind that recognizes and names and it has some memory in that. I'll explain that more in a little bit. We have *thoughts or volition* and we have *consciousness*. Now we're made up of these five things, and they are called the five aggregate That's what this process is.

But when a feeling arises and its unpleasant, the way we get caught and we resist it and it gets bigger until it effects the world around you is, we try to think the feeling away. But feelings are one thing and thoughts are something else. They're not the same thing.

So when an unpleasant feelings arises, a little bit of anxiety, a little bit of fear a little bit of sadness, whatever it happens to be, we think of all the reasons why we have that feeling and how we don't like the feeling and why we want that feeling to stop. And the more you think about this feeling the bigger this feeling becomes.

Now the Buddha (the researcher) was very clear about this sort of thing. So what do we do? You go back to the instructions in the meditation. A sensation arises somewhere in the body, it doesn't matter if it is an emotional sensation or a physical sensation. It is a feeling.

When that feeling arises, you'll notice that the first thing is that your mind begins to think about it or tell a story why it's there. Why you like it? Why you don't like it? Why you want it to be different than it is? Why you want it to stop and go away? All of the thoughts about the feeling makes the feeling bigger and more intense.

So, the first part of the meditation, is, to let go of the thoughts about it, about the feeling. Let the thoughts go. And you'll notice that every time thoughts arise in your mind, there's tension and tightness that arises in both body and mind. So, you relax. You let go of that aversion to the feeling. And then you see that tight mental fist and allow the feeling to be there, because it's the *truth*. It's there. Whether you like it or not, that really doesn't come into this. What you do is allow the feeling or sensation to be there without trying to control it, without trying to push it away, without trying to make it other than what it really is. It's just a feeling.

Let us say somebody in your family dies, there's going to be sadness. That's the truth. And there's going to be grief. Grief is a real big word, but, it's a *concept*. Just like an automobile is a concept. When you're looking for an automobile, where is it? Is it the wheels? Is it the motor? Is it the steering wheel? Is it the windshield? Is it the lights? Where is the automobile? The automobile is a lot of little tiny parts put together to make up this concept.

Grief is the same way. Grief has dislike. It's an unpleasant feeling. There is dislike of the unpleasant feeling. It manifests in a lot of different ways but it's all because of this tightness and the want to have the thoughts and the feelings, STOP, because it's unpleasant.

But when grief arises, it arises as a feeling first. It's unpleasant. There's sadness or there's anger or there's depression. There's all kinds of names that we can give these feelings. But the truth is it's just a feeling, and it is unpleasant and that's fine for it to be unpleasant. Because it's the truth. It's what arose in the present moment.

What you do with what arises in the present moment, dictates what happens in the future. Now I just described Karma to you exactly.

Something happens in the past. Somebody died. Somebody you loved very dearly. And when that happens it arises because you were attached, you didn't want that to happen, that feeling comes up again. Now what you do with that feeling right now dictates whether you are going to suffer in the future or not.

The way we handle grief, or sadness, or anger, or depression is all the same thing. First you see all of the thoughts and the stories about that feeling that attached to that, and you let the thoughts go. Sometimes you let a thought go and you start to relax and the thought pops up again. OK. But, when you really let go of that tightness and tension, in you mind and in your body, there's a brief moment of RELIEF. That brief moment of relief doesn't have any thoughts in it., And you bring that mind back to 'wishing yourself well' or wishing somebody else well.

Now you can just barely get back and your mind goes back to those thoughts and that feeling and trying to control it again. But, again you have to do the same thing. You have to allow that feeling to be there and relax into it. You have to let go of all of the thoughts. <relax> . Come back to the feeling of loving kindness and wishing yourself well.

Now you're going to bounce back and forth very often. Especially if there's a death in your family and you truly loved that person. It's going to keep coming up. Why? Because of *attachment*. Well, I'll explain attachment in a little while.

I'm going to get into *the Four Noble Truths* right now so you can understand more what I'm talking about.

The Buddha rediscovered the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are always here.

But it takes somebody who is completely awake, who truly sees HOW MIND WORKS, to recognize that these four noble truths are for real.

The First Noble Truth, 'There Is Suffering'. There's pain. There's grief. There's sorrow. There's lamentation. There's despair.

The Second Noble Truth is a tricky one, 'The cause of the Suffering'. What's the cause of suffering? You say attachment. That's part of the truth. The cause of the suffering, the Buddha said, is *craving*. Now what's the definition of craving? It's the mind that says 'I like it' or 'I don't like it.' OK, the 'I like it, the I don't like it' mind is craving.

A painful feeling arises and that craving feeling is right there saying I don't like it. I don't want it to be there. I want it to stop. I don't like this pain. I don't like this suffering. Did you hear how many times I said 'I' ?

Now according to Buddhism, *everything that arises is part of an impersonal process*, but we have a tendency to make everything personal. All of our thoughts we take as personal, this is me, this is who I am. All of the feelings that arise, we say this is me this is who I am. And when we get involved in having these thoughts and having these feelings arise, we naturally try to control them and that causes suffering. That's the cause of the suffering.

Now, when you let go of the thoughts and let go of that tight mental fist around the feeling and relax, at that moment you are *seeing the true nature of thoughts and feelings*. They're just an arising and a passing away of phenomena.

Because of past actions, these arise in the present moment. What we do with what arises in the present moment, dictates what happens in the future. *This is where free will is*.

What we do next is our choice. Either we can take all these thoughts and feelings and get involved with the thoughts and the story about the feeling and take them personally and try to control them which makes the pain more intense and makes the suffering much bigger,

OR, we can see that it's part of an impersonal process and allow it to be without trying to control it, without trying to control with our thoughts, without trying to push the feeling around to make it be the way we want it to be.

Every time you let go of any tension and tightness that arises in your head, in your body, in your mind; every time you let it go, You're letting go of that false idea that this is a personal thing. You're seeing the way it really is. This is part of an impersonal process. It's not a personal process. It's impersonal.

Now yesterday, my father died and sadness arises right now. Because of this past occurrence, the sadness arises. What I do with the sadness right now dictates what happens in the future. If you hold on to that sadness and try to control it and try to push it away, you can look forward to having that sadness getting bigger and more intense and stay around for a long, long period of time. And this is what they call grief.

You can make the conscious decision to see this feeling arise. It's an unhappy feeling. True. It's unpleasant. True. And it's alright for it to be there. It has to be alright because that's the truth. So, you let go of the thoughts and you relax. You let go of that tension and tightness. And you let go of that tight mental fist around that feeling. And it might only open up for a moment before it starts closing down again. But that moment that you do that, that you relax and you can bring your mind back to a wholesome object, the feeling of being happy, making a wish for your own happiness or someone else's happiness, it really doesn't matter. But feeling that wish, that's a moment of relief.

And that is the Third Noble Truth. That's 'The Cessation of the Suffering'. It only happens for a moment, and then, your mind will go right back to it. But, when you start to see this as part of a process, instead of tightening down around it and trying to control it, you start letting the process to go the way it's going to go. The moments that you let go and relax and come back to your meditation object, the

feeling of happiness, making a wish for your happiness, will begin to last for a little bit longer.

At first , your mind is going to keep running back very, very quickly and that's suffering and that's hard. But, as you persist, as you continue to see that this is what your mind is doing and this is what your body is doing and you relax into it, and come back, then you'll begin to stay on your wholesome object for longer periods of time.

And it starts to change your perspective. It starts to change your view of the world. You start to see that mind closes down around some feelings, and, mind being what it has been from time immemorial, likes to think about those feelings.

So, as you start to let go of the feelings, relax and allow that feeling to be there, relax and come back to your object of meditation, *you are experiencing the cessation of suffering for that moment*. And that moment begins to last longer and longer as you see the tricks of your mind. And that's how you begin to let go of your attachments.

Now the whole thing with something as big and severe as that kind of shock of somebody dying is a real big example. But I can give you a small example. Somebody walks up to you and they say something you don't like. What happens in your mind? AH. And then because of this tightness, you have *the tendency to re-act* the way you've always acted when somebody comes up to you and says something you don't like. You act again and again in the same way because of our habitual patterns, our habitual tendencies.

So somebody comes up to you and they say something you don't like and you wind up saying something back to them. You're taking their dissatisfaction and you're making it your own and you're throwing your dissatisfaction back at them. Now you're at war! Fighting a lot! And this is when you say things that you wish you hadn't of said and you do things that you wish you hadn't have done.

Now, when that person goes away, what do you think about? `That no good so and so. They said this and I said that. And I should've

said this to them, and I'm right. And they're wrong.' So there is all this pride that starts to come up with defending and justifications. All these different things come up into the mind.

When you've gone away from the situation, you're really caught up in your thoughts and your feelings. You're not paying attention to what you do. What happens if you get into a car and you start driving? Are you really driving now? No. You're thinking. And that's when a lot of accidents occur because you're so caught up in thinking these thoughts and taking these thoughts personally and all of these feelings you are caught up taking them personally that you're not paying attention to what you're doing while you're doing it. Then someone in front of you, while you're driving, puts on the brakes and then you don't see them and then you hit them!

Now, once you begin doing the meditation, like I'm teaching you right now, in earnest, and that means sitting for a half an hour a day, and carrying the meditation with you with your daily activities, wishing other people well, seeing your mind run around thinking about this and do that, and then forget about it for a period of time, and then you see your mind is doing that and then you let go, relax and come back, and wish somebody well again.

Only then you start to see, when someone comes up to you and they start to scold you and they give you their anger, you have a choice right then. You can take their anger, and make it your anger and throw it right back and be at war, or not! That's your choice.

Remember:

What you do in the present moment with what arises, dictates what happens in the future.

Now, if somebody comes up to you and they start scolding you, and they are really reading you the riot act and they are red in the face or black in the face, and their face is very ugly and they're really, tight, and you see that person and *you have compassion* for that person. Now, *what's the definition of compassion?*

Compassion is seeing another person in pain, allowing them the space to have their pain, and loving them anyway.

So a person comes up and they're really angry and they're right in your face. You look at them and you see that they are suffering. They really hurt at that moment. SO, instead of taking their anger and making it yours and you suffer along with them, what you do is, you see that person suffering and you start not paying attention to what they're saying but you start wishing them well. You start developing a feeling of peace and calm in yourself and you wish that for your friend.

Now, there's a couple things that happen after that. Either they'll calm down and you can start discussing what the real problem is, because it's not what they're saying, when they first start out, or they'll go away because it takes two to fight. It takes two to tango! When there's only one fighting, then, change occurs. Your having compassion for someone else, allows the space for change to take place. And this is a change that is a good kind of change.

Now, when they walk away, and they're muttering to themselves, you know what that feels like. But, when you're really practicing compassion, and you're wishing that person well, as soon as they go away, your mind is open, your mind is bright, you're not thinking of anything else. You're ready to be in the present moment and take care of business that needs to be taken care of. It's not easy! But there's sure a lot less suffering when you do it.

Now, when somebody is angry, and you get in a fight with them, the next person you see, you're still carrying some of that anger around with you. So, you snap at them and you say something to them that you wish you hadn't of said. You do some things that you wish you hadn't of done. You might get into a fight with this next person and you might not. But, that doesn't matter. You've hurt their feelings because of this past occurrence. And it kind of goes like that for a period of time. 'Oh , leave me alone. I don't feel good today!' and you go home and to any of your family members you say: 'go over

there. Do whatever you want. I want to be alone!'. And you're exhausted, because it takes a lot of energy to be angry. And when you go to sleep, you don't sleep very well. You kind of toss and turn. When you wake up the next day, you're groggy. You're not clear.

See how one little thing can effect your whole day if you take it personally. And that clouds the way we see the world around us. We get into the habit of looking through these densely colored glasses that we have because we keep on reacting to every situation. We always act with dissatisfaction, dislike. We act with sadness. We act with depression. We act with all of these different things, whatever you want to name them. And we take all of these thoughts and feelings personally and it starts to wear over a period of time.

It's real easy to get depressed and get worse and get worse and get worse because its an unpleasant feeling and you're not getting the kind of rest you need and you're not really being clear with yourself or anyone else around you anymore. It's a continual process of reacting the way we act.

But, when you start to practice the meditation instead of 'reacting', like taking someone else's anger and then making it your own and then throwing it back, *you start 'responding'*. You start acting in a different way. You start changing your perspective, your view of the world. You're not taking a hold of everything so tightly around your heart and causing all kinds of physical problems for yourself and mental problems.

Now, when I was talking about the meditation, one of the things I said about the meditation is that this is a smiling meditation. I want you to smile in your mind. I want you to smile with your eyes. I want you to smile with your mouth, and, I want you to smile with your heart. Why? Because, that's the easy way to let go of suffering. That's the easy way to start changing your view of the world.

It's not just about sitting on the cushion. *This is about living*. Too many times people have this definition of Buddhism as 'Sitting'. 'Sitting in Meditation. That's what Buddhism is all about!' And it's not.

Buddhism is about living a happy life; living a clear life; having a mind that's clear and not pulled down into heavy emotional states; having a mind that has 'joy' in it; having a mind that's uplifted; that's what Buddhism is. *It's about developing new habits that lead to your own happiness.* And when you're happy, everybody around you is happy too. It's kind of contagious.

And another thing is that when you act and react in the same old ways, your perspective of the world is very, very serious. And whoever wrote the book of life, did not come out and say that life is supposed to be serious. I've never seen it written. You're on the spiritual path and you want to know something that's really amazing? *It's OK to laugh and it's OK to have fun, even, while you're sitting.!!* !\ (laughter) \.!

Look at how your mind feels right now. Your mind feels light. Just from a little chuckle! Now, when you start changing your perspective and changing your view of the way things arise and disappear, you start developing a sense of humor. In fact, that's how you tell that you're progressing on the spiritual path, is by your sense of humor. You start laughing with things in a different way.

If anger or dissatisfaction arises and you laugh at yourself for being caught by this one again; 'slow learner, sooner or later, you'd think I would learn after while', and you sincerely laugh, you're not caught by it anymore. You've changed your perspective from, 'I'm MAD!' to, 'Oh. It's only anger. No big deal'. That's a major change. So, developing a sense of humor about yourself is the road to mental health.

When you have joy in your mind. When you're able to develop a sense of humor and laugh, those five hindrances that I first talked about, they won't arise!!! They only arise when we forget the fruition of mindfulness is to remember and then our natural tendency to be serious comes back. Then we get caught wishing it was like this or wanting it to be different than that and all of those different things.

So, there's a keyword in Buddhism that no one ever really takes the time to give a definition to. Everybody is supposed to understand this. 'BE MINDFUL.' What is the world does that mean? *What is mindfulness? Mindfulness is being aware of all of the movements of mind.* Mindfulness is your observing power of how mind acts, reacts, or responds.

Q: Is there such a thing as a higher and a lower mind?

A: Actually no. there is not a higher and lower mind. There is such a thing as wholesome and unwholesome mind. The unwholesome mind is the one that takes everything personally. The wholesome mind is the one that sees everything as an impersonal process.

There are a lot of really deep things in Buddhism and an awful lot of people try to learn what the Buddha's teaching is through reading books that say what other people say the Buddha taught. They get into intellectualizing about all kinds of different things and then they become very confused. Most of my students, I don't want them to read. You don't need to read that right now. Just practice. You'll get to a point where you begin to really understand what you're reading.

Now this is my favorite book for studying Buddhism. It's called the Middle Length Sayings. It's a collection of 152 Discourses by the Buddha and because I use this book a lot, a lot of my students will get that book. They'll try to read it and then say 'uh, I don't understand this stuff at all!' When I give a retreat, I read a Sutta and explain what the Sutta is talking about and this directly relates to your practice. When you get to a certain place in your practice, where you are starting to understand the process, then picking up this book and reading it is really an eye opener. You just kind of sit back and go 'Wow! This is really great stuff.' When three months ago or four months ago you picked it up and tried to read the same thing and you didn't understand it at all. So, in order to understand truly what the Buddha was trying to teach us, means that we have to practice the way he teaches us in the Suttas and see how our own mind works.

So, the Four Noble Truths are the core of the Buddha's teaching.

One time the Buddha was out in the forest and he picked up a handful of leaves and he said, 'Monks, what's more? The handful of leaves that I have, or all the leaves in the forest?'

That's a no brainer! All the leaves in the forest! Of course.

The Buddha said, 'All the leaves in the forest is compared the things I know. But the things that I teach are like the leaves in my hand. I'm just giving you the basic things that you need to overcome suffering.'

The Buddha knew a lot of things but he didn't spend a lot of time on a lot of them because they didn't lead to the cessation of suffering.

Now the Fourth Noble Truth is everything I have been talking about up till now. It is the path to the end of Suffering.

Bhante Vimalaramsi

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