

Buddhism in a Nutshell

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

The FWBO is the Friends of the Western *Buddhist* Order. It is a movement that derives its inspiration from the Buddha. Buddhism is a tradition of teaching and practice that helps people to unfold the inner riches of love, wisdom, and energy that lie within us all. It is a treasure house of guidance and help for those who wish to develop ever higher levels of being and consciousness. It is a path, which culminates in Enlightenment, or Buddhahood.

The word 'Buddha' means 'One who is awake' in the sense of having 'woken up' to Reality. It is therefore not a name but a title, first given to a man called Siddhartha Gautama, who lived 2,500 years ago in northern India. At the age of thirty five, after years of striving, he gained Enlightenment while in profound meditation. During the remaining forty five years of his life he walked over much of northern India, spreading his teaching about the way to Enlightenment. This teaching is therefore known in the East as the *Buddha Dharma* the 'teaching of the Enlightened One'. Traveling from place to place, the Buddha taught numerous disciples, many of whom also gained Enlightenment. They in turn taught others, and in this way an unbroken chain of teaching has continued, right down to the present day.

The Buddha made no claim to divinity; there is no concept of a creator god in Buddhism. He was a human being who through tremendous efforts transformed himself and transcended the human predicament with its attendant sufferings. The state of Enlightenment which he reached has three main facets. It is a state of wisdom, a total understanding of the true nature of things. It is also a source of infinite compassion, of boundless love for all beings, which expresses itself in the spontaneous desire to help them free themselves from suffering. Lastly, it is the total liberation of all the energies of the psycho physical organism, so that they are at the service of the fully conscious mind.

Buddhism sees life as being a process of constant change. This process can be confined to a single 'level', or it can consist of development and evolution. The decisive factor is always our own mind. An ancient Buddhist text begins: 'Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.' Buddhism has developed a number of highly effective methods for working on the mind, methods which allow people to transform themselves positively.

As there is no creator (or judging) god, there is no idea in Buddhism of anyone *having* to be a Buddhist. Buddhism has never, in its 2,500 years, looked for converts with 'fire and sword'. Love and non violence are essential Buddhist principles. Naturally, Buddhists would say that one can become a happier and better person if one decides to follow the Buddhist path, but Buddhism offers itself as an opportunity: its methods and teachings are available to all those who want to make use of them. People are welcome to take as little or as much of Buddhism as they feel ready for. They may simply practice some meditation to gain peace of mind and relief from psychological difficulties, or they might want to go all the way to Enlightenment.

To become a Buddhist in the full sense means committing oneself to the *Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha* sometimes referred to as the 'Three Jewels'. One centers one's life upon gaining Enlightenment as the Buddha did. To do this one takes advantage of the Dharma the various teachings and practices of the Buddhist tradition as tools of self transformation. One also needs to be in contact with a Sangha other people who are trying to transform themselves in the same way. Thus one can share experiences, offer mutual help and friendship, and learn from those more advanced than oneself.

Buddhism is a path to freedom. The gate to that path is open to all: men and women, young and old, people of all nationalities, races, and backgrounds.

The Four Noble Truths

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one, truth of suffering

the Buddha's

discovery of the solution to the problem of suffering began with the recognition that life is suffering. This is the first of the Four Noble Truths. If people examine their own experiences or look at the world around them, they will see that life is full of suffering. Suffering may be physical or mental.

physical suffering

takes many forms. People must have observed at one time or another, how their aged relatives suffer. Most of them suffer aches and pains in their joints and many find it hard to move about. With advancing age, the elderly find life difficult because they cannot see, hear or eat properly. The pain of disease, which strikes young and old alike, is unbearable, and the pain of death brings much grief and suffering. Even the moment of birth gives pain both to the mother and the child that is born.

The truth is that *suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death* are unavoidable. Some fortunate people may now be enjoying relatively happy and carefree lives, but it is only a matter of time before they, too, will experience suffering. What is worse, this suffering must be borne alone.

mental suffering

Beside physical suffering, there are also various forms of mental suffering. People feel sad, lonely or depressed when they lose someone they love through separation or death. They feel irritated or uncomfortable when they are forced to be in the company of those whom they dislike or those who are unpleasant. People also suffer when they are unable to satisfy their limitless needs and wants.

happiness in life

When the Buddha said that there is suffering in life, He did not deny that there is happiness also. On the contrary, He spoke of various kinds of happiness, such as the happiness of friendship, the happiness of family life, and so on. But all these kinds of happiness are impermanent and when one loses them, one suffers. For example, one may like a pleasant and charming person and enjoy his or her company. But when one is separated from that person, the happiness turns into suffering. One suffers because of one's attachment to pleasures that do not last. People often remain unaware of the inevitable sufferings of life because they are distracted by temporary pleasures.