

# THE EDUCATION OF DESIRE ON THE PATH TO AWAKENING

## *Buddha's Heart-Centered Emphasis on The Caring Life*

*“What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves? This is the most important of all voyages of discovery, and without it, all the rest are not only useless, but disastrous. ... Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance. ... We have what we seek, it is there all the time, and if we give it time, it will make itself known to us.”*

*Thomas Merton*

“They experienced the trials of Job, yet they were a tribe of Walt Whitmans.” This is a paraphrase of Thomas Merton’s observation of the Tibetan Buddhist community in exile in Dharamsala. Merton was visiting India as part of a trip across Asia to deepen his understanding of Oriental wisdom. The equanimity and cheerfulness of the small Tibetan community – which, in 1959, had fled the Chinese persecution of their homeland – so impressed and intrigued Merton that he changed his mind about meeting with the Dalai Lama.

Rather than maintaining his indifference to Tibetan Buddhism, fraught, he thought, with shamanic superstition, Merton embraced the opportunity to meet with the spiritual leader of Tibet. That meeting changed Merton’s life.

The Dalai Lama taught Merton how to meditate in a cross-legged, upright lotus posture, focusing on the yin/yang dynamic of breathing as a way to quiet the mind’s incessant internal dialogue. This meditative stilling is the dharma gate to nirvana.

After meditating together for about half an hour, Merton and the Dalai Lama then engaged in conversation lasting well into the night. Having started with simple, meditative breathing, Merton felt that by the end of their discussion he and Tenzin Gyatso (the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama) had landed – in Jeffery Paine’s description of

the event – “on the far side of the moon.”

Sensing that Merton was overly awed by the profundity of Buddhist psychology and karmic cosmology, the Dalai Lama then reminded Merton that Buddhism is actually very simple, concerned primarily with the overcoming of suffering (*dukkha*), and the cultivation of skillful means (*upaya*) for doing so.

After his meeting with the spiritual leader of Tibet, Merton declared that he was going to devote himself to the study of Buddhism; not in order to become a Buddhist, but to enhance his effectiveness as a Trappist monk, and to deepen his Cistercian commitment to Judeo-Christian *agape*.

The Tibetans in Dharamsala had experienced the holocaust perpetrated by the Chinese on their homeland. Having made the nearly suicidal journey across the Himalayas in winter, this small community of Tibetan exiles set up camp in a small town in northernmost India, in between Pakistan and Tibet, just south of Kashmir.

Given the horrors they had witnessed, how did these Tibetan exiles maintain the equanimity which so impressed Thomas Merton? What is it about Buddhism that allows for maintaining equipoise in the face of such suffering?

The key is Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, also called The Four Realistic Facts. The Four Noble Truths are the root of all forms of Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths suggest what I call *the education of desire*, which involves the cultivation of wisdom, detachment and compassion. Wisdom and compassion (*prajna and karuna*) are the two wings of Buddhism. Detachment is action and reaction free of expectation.

Detached desire – rooted in comprehension of the causes and conditions of suffering, and manifest in the practice of The Noble Eightfold Path – is essential to the Buddhist notion of enlightenment. Enlightenment is the education of desire, not its elimination. This insight is necessary for understanding Buddhism as a profoundly pragmatic, this-worldly philosophy. Buddhism has long been misinterpreted as an other-worldly escape from life. It is in fact a pedagogical and therapeutic formula for embracing life.

Pedagogically, Buddhism seeks to overcome ignorance. Therapeutically, the journey from ignorance to wisdom allows us to overcome suffering. We overcome suffering by learning to tame, temper and redirect our desires. This

“education” of desire leads increasingly to a joyful and fulfilling life.

A joyful and fulfilling life entails equanimity and compassion. Compassion is a function of heart-centered rationality and I-Thou interbeing. Equanimity (*upeksha*) is a function of detached desire.

Detached desire may sound like a contradiction. It is, instead, quite simply, a paradox – the paradox at the heart of Buddha’s “Middle Way.” In the rest of this discourse, I hope to deconstruct the idea of “detached desire” as crucial to the education of desire, and, therefore, as key to the Buddhist path to enlightenment. In the process, I hope to elucidate five points:

- 1) Buddha does not say life is suffering. He says the *unenlightened* life is suffering.
- 2) Buddhism is not an other-worldly escape from life, but a joyful embrace of life as a profound and precious opportunity for learning, evolving and caring.
- 3) Buddha proposes the education of desire, not its elimination.
- 4) Buddhism as a whole proposes that the meaning of life is learning and service.
- 5) The Buddhist concept of emptiness is best understood as interbeing.

Buddhism is famous for being a philosophy of The Middle Way. As such, it is inherently harmonious with Taoism, which emphasizes the S-curving river between yin and yang in the Tao sign. The Taoist name for detached desire is *wu-wei*. *Wu-wei*, literally “not-doing,” signifies equipoise, going with the flow, non-interfering.

Yet Lao Tzu, like Jesus and Buddha, was first and foremost a pacifist; and the doing of not-doing (*wei-wu-wei*) in no way implies indifference to injustice and suffering. Indeed, the *Tao Te Ching*, like the *Dhammapada* and The Gospels, articulates a path to peace, justice, and egalitarian social relations. Other parallels to Buddha’s Middle Way include Aristotle’s “Golden Mean,” Platonic “ratio,” Socratic *sophrosyne*, Pythagorean *harmonia*, the medicinal caduceus (also called The Hermetic Wand), the Middle Pillar on the Qabalistic Tree of Life, and Meister Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit* (letting go, letting be, releasement).

Detached desire – which signifies equanimity – means acting without clinging to expectation of result. Equanimity (*upeksha*) resonates with Epicurean *ataraxia* and Stoic *apatheia*; and Buddha’s commitment to universal peace is

mirrored in the Stoic notion of *Logos* as universal brother-sisterhood.

We might also note that Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, in his translation of and commentary on *The Bhagavad Gita*, refers us to the notion of *tyaga*, which he translates as “desireless action.”

Radhakrishnan argues that *tyaga* – another way of naming detached desire – is the essence of Krishna’s teaching to Arjuna, allowing Arjuna to overcome, at last, his befuddlement and despair.

Buddha’s teaching of The Middle Way arose from his experience. He went from the self-indulgent life of a pampered prince to the self-denial of a forest ascetic. After six years in the forest, and realizing at last that the attempt to eliminate desire is itself a form of desire, Siddhartha Gautama ate a nourishing meal, then sat in quiet meditation beneath the spreading branches of a pipal tree.

Meditating all night, he attained enlightenment with the rising of the morning star. Siddhartha – whose name means “goal-achiever” – then embarked upon a 45-year teaching career, beginning with his first sermon: the teaching of The Four Noble Truths to his first five disciples in the deer park adjacent to the ancient city of Benares.

Buddha began by gesturing with a sweep of his hand, saying, “All *this* is suffering.” By the word “this,” he intended three points in particular.

First, extreme asceticism – practiced formerly by himself and currently by the five disciples who recognized his awakening – is no less self-defeating than its hedonistic opposite.

Second, all forms of dogmatism and extremism are bound to result in frustration and failure.

Third, and most generally and importantly, the unenlightened life – rooted in ignorance, driven by passion, seeking solace in distraction – is perpetually anxious, troubled, disappointing and unfulfilled, because every attempt to secure inner peace by outward means results at best in fleeting, impermanent, disappearing pleasures and their renewed pursuit.

The word generally used to signify Buddha’s First Noble Truth is *dukkha*. It is often translated as “suffering,” but is more precisely defined as “trouble.” Life is troublesome, often tragic. *Dukkha* implies anxiety, alienation, instability; a sense that life is out of joint, off balance, off kilter; and distress, sorrow and

suffering are the evidence for this lack of equilibrium.

We should also note, here, that samsara is *not* synonymous with *dukkha*, though it is often mistakenly used this way. Samsara signifies normal egoic and sensory experience, occurring in a world of constant change. Samsara is the context of *dukkha*, not its equivalent.

We should also note, therefore, that *nirvana* – the bliss, wisdom, grace of enlightenment – is wrongly construed as a separate dimension. Buddhism is a path to nirvana *in* samsara.

The Second Noble Truth asserts that the cause of suffering is ignorance (*avidya*), manifesting as craving, clinging and expectation. Craving, clinging and expectation are symptoms of misdirected and excess desire.

The Second Noble Truth is summed up in the word *tanha*. *Tanha* is a Pali word rendered in Sanskrit as *trishna*, root of the word “thirst.”

In the center of the Tibetan Wheel of Life, depicting excessive and misdirected thirst, are pig, rooster and snake. They signify greed, hatred, and delusion. They also imply: fear, lust, pride, anger, and violence. Called the three passions, or the three poisons, they create and perpetuate suffering.

The Third Noble Truth asserts the possibility of freedom from suffering, and is generally signified by the word nirvana. The more precise word is *nirodha*, which means “cessation.” This is why nirvana is often characterized as meaning “blown out,” like a candle flame. Freedom from *avoidable* suffering is the *cessation* of misdirected and excess desire. Cessation of misdirected and excess desire includes elimination of idle chatter and distracting influence.

The Fourth Noble Truth is The Noble Eightfold Path. “Path” is a translation of *magga*, *marga*, *padha*, and *patha*. The Eightfold Path shows the way from *avidya* to *vidya*: from ignorance to wisdom, from confusion to clarity, from fantasy to reality, from suffering to bliss. It shows the way from alienation to freedom, equanimity and joy. Each step on The Eightfold Path is preceded by the word “right.” The word “right” – in Pali: *samma* – is best understood as meaning “wholesome” or “pure.”

The Fourth Noble Truth articulates eight steps to a wholesome life, achieved by the purification of desire. The purification of desire is the education of desire.

The education of desire *dissolves* the negative habits which obstruct the

experience of our instinctive bliss, our natural stance, the organic symphony of the cellular orchestra.

In sum, the education of desire is purifying and liberating. It overcomes alienation; puts us back in joint; restores equilibrium; opens the dharma gate to nirvana *in* samsara.

For Siddhartha Gautama, enlightenment is a process of recollection and recovery.

The eight steps on The Path are:

- 1) Right thinking.
- 2) Right speaking.
- 3) Right intention.
- 4) Right action.
- 5) Right vocation.
- 6) Right effort.
- 7) Right concentration.
- 8) Right meditation (*dhyana* in India, *Ch'an* in China, *Zen* in Japan).

*Dukkha, Tanha, Nirodha, Padha* – these four terms name The Four Noble Truths.

Insofar as the two wings of Buddhism are wisdom and compassion (*prajna* and *karuna*), and inasmuch as the word “Buddha” means “awake,” Buddhism is all about awakening to the wisdom of caring: for ourselves, for each other, for animals, for the natural environment.

These four aspects of caring constitute the very heart of Buddhism. Feel free to envision them as symbolized by a cross, enclosed in a circle. The circle is care. The four points of the cross are: self, others, animals, and the planet.

Allow me to emphasize the word “self.” Although Buddha famously declares his doctrine of *anatta* – Pali for the Sanskrit word *anatman*, meaning “no-self” – he nevertheless emphasizes the sacredness of individual existence.

A Buddhist prayer asserts: “We give thanks for the preciousness of life, endowed with liberty and opportunity.”

Buddhism is a pedagogical path to self-reliance, self-mastery, and spiritual maturity. Buddha’s founding of the *sangha* – the monastic community – was a

revolutionary, counter-cultural opportunity for individuals to drop out of a militaristic and caste-structured society in order to devote themselves instead, in a context of group support, to the full realization of their humanity (i.e., their spiritual potential).

Now, suppose someone asks you to summarize Buddhism in two words. You could rightly respond: “Take care.”

Take care of what? *Morality, mindfulness and wisdom* – the three categories commonly used to summarize The Noble Eightfold Path.

Morality (*shila*) includes right speech, right action, right vocation. Mindfulness (*sati*) includes right effort, right concentration, right meditation. Wisdom (*prajna*) includes right thinking and right motive.

Our purpose here is to explore the complexity of care as evidenced in the Buddha’s dharma. One meaning of the term dharma is “teaching.” What did the Buddha teach? He taught the education of desire, understood as a pedagogy of care.

Buddha taught that most human suffering results from caring too much about what is only seemingly important, and not enough about what is actually important. He taught The Middle Way between caring too much and not enough.

Accordingly, a summing up of Buddhism might say: “Humans care too much about the wrong things, and not enough about the right things. That is why there is so much suffering, and why such suffering is completely unnecessary. Let us therefore devote ourselves to enlightened caring.”

Meanwhile, the cultivation of detachment is equally important. Caring too much about even the right things leads to zealotry.

Let us now emphasize that caring and awareness go together. “Take care” implies “be aware.”

Aware of what? Three points in particular: *impermanence, karma, and distraction*.

First: Impermanence (*anicca*) points to the folly of craving, clinging, and expectation.

Meditation on impermanence also reminds us of the fact of death. Awareness of death reminds us to appreciate each day, each moment, the

preciousness of life.

In Buddhism and Toltec shamanism, death is our wisest adviser. It reminds us to be impeccable, to choose only those actions which are “a path with heart,” and to do our best to be ready to die at any moment without regret.

Second: Awareness of karma (action and reaction) reminds us that everything we do comes back to us in our experience. Thus Socrates says: “To harm another is to harm oneself.” Jesus says: “As you sow, so shall you reap.” Buddha adds: karma operates in “*body, speech, and mind*” (where “body” is a cipher for behavior). In other words, everything we do, say and think karmically rebounds upon us.

Awareness of karma goes hand in hand with the threefold essence of Buddhist ethics: *Think kindly, speak kindly, act kindly*. Thus Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, says that all we really need, in order to heal *all* of the world’s woes, is to embrace, individually and collectively, “a common religion of kindness.”

Third: Awareness of distraction is especially important in modern society, because most modern societies – media saturated – are in fact *cultures of distraction*. This is illustrated by ubiquitous obsession with fashion, sports, celebrity, and scandal. These obsessions are sustained by relentless and pervasive advertising, and by the mainstream misinformation news media.

Advertising promotes desire. The so-called “news” promotes fear. Fear and desire – they keep the samsaric cycle of suffering in hectic motion, turning our lives into theater of the absurd.

We should also note the tragic fact that the *primary* function of American education is: *to ignore*.

I invented the verb “to ignore” to illustrate what Norman Mailer identified as the schizophrenic contradiction at the heart of what Gore Vidal calls: “The United States of Amnesia.” Largely defining itself as a Christian nation, America praises The Prince of Peace, yet worships at the altar of profit, has the largest empire in world history, and is never not at war in some part of the global village.

Let us recall that Thomas Merton was the first major American public figure to protest America’s Indochina Holocaust, euphemistically called The Vietnam War.

Let us also recall Merton’s declaration of independence from the American



system of compulsory miseducation. Merton wrote:

“The danger of education ... is that it so easily ... devotes itself merely to the mass production of uneducated graduates – people literally unfit for anything except to take part in an elaborate and completely artificial charade, which they and their contemporaries have conspired to call ‘life.’”

The United States, from 9/11 to 2003, having learned nothing from the folly of its recent history, was condemned to repeat it. America’s *Second* Vietnam War was launched by the Bush-Cheney Administration’s morally obscene, cynically mendacious, financially disastrous, and strategically insane invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. John Lennon was tragically correct when he observed more than once that we are led by lunatics.

I mention these facts to keep this discussion of religion tethered to Buddha’s essential message: the overcoming of suffering; the uprooting of ignorance; the necessary awakening from our ethical slumber.

It is only by successfully responding to this essential task that we shall cease to perpetuate what Hegel termed “the slaughter-bench of history.”

*Reporter: “Mr. Gandhi, what do you think of Western civilization?”*

*Gandhi: “I think it would be a good idea.”*

Asked in his dying days to summarize the essence of his 45-year teaching career, Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni Buddha replied: “Do your best; be detached; be a lamp unto yourself.”

*Doing your best* means: being moral, mindful and wise.

*Cultivation of detachment* (which opens the window to recollection) is nourished and sustained by meditation on impermanence.

*Being a “lamp unto yourself”* means recollecting our inherent bliss-wisdom, which Chogyam Trungpa calls “the sanity we were born with.”

Being a “lamp unto yourself” also means: resisting the seductive dangers of religious and political dogmatism. It means cultivating critical insight and heart-centered rationality.

Thus Buddha says, “Don’t believe *in* me. In fact, don’t even *believe* me. Find out for yourself!”

This is echoed by the greatest of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment thinkers, Immanuel Kant, when he declares the essence of the Enlightenment movement: “*Sapere aude*” – “Dare to think.”

The most important first step in liberating oneself from the culture of distraction in which, alas, we live and move and have our being, is to become, as much as reasonably possible, *media free*.

Freedom from is freedom for. Free of distraction, one becomes free *for* the recollection of the essential purpose of human being and becoming: the enlightenment journey.

Let’s recall that “Buddha” means “awake.” To become awake is to become a bodhisattva. To be a bodhisattva is to live a life dedicated to learning and service.

A bodhisattva embodies *bodhichitta*: awakened mind rooted in the love-wisdom of the heart.

*Om mani padme hum* – the “Jewel in the Lotus” mantra – signifies the radiant jewel of wisdom (*mani*) which blossoms from a caring heart (*padme*).

This is mirrored in the Christian celebration of the “sacred heart” at the core of the ministry of Jesus.

Becoming media free, we liberate ourselves for the practice of meditation and critical thinking (*shamatha* and *vipashana*). Critical thinking is another name for *jnana yoga*: philosophic investigation into the nature of reality.

Enlightenment recollects us to the bliss-wisdom-creativity at the core of our being (the quantum field of our interbeing).

Creative bliss, wisdom and love together constitute the *actual*, underlying cosmic field in which we “live and move and have” our *true* being.

Relevant here is an observation by Robert Thurman:

No American politician should be allowed to be president – or a member of Congress or the Supreme Court – until first proving that they can do at least forty minutes of silent, unmoving, Zen meditation. After all, if they cannot exhibit even

a modest amount of self-control, why should they be allowed to have control over the destiny of us all?

Immanuel Kant summarized the issue concisely: “We live in an age of enlightenment, but we do not yet live in an enlightened age.” Even more so now than in his own time, we live in an age of what Kant called “glittering misery.”

Noam Chomsky observes: “The problem is not that people don’t know; it’s that people *don’t know* they don’t know.” Howard Zinn, reflecting on Plato’s parable of the cave, adds: “The truth is so often the opposite of what we are told that we can no longer turn our heads around far enough to see it.”

No wonder Buddha said ignorance is the cause of suffering. Delusion, distortion, deception and distraction are the WMDs of a society mired in sophistry, where devotion to glitter obscures the misery of the many created by the obscene profiteering of the few. Gore Vidal concludes: “Words are used to confuse, so that citizens vote against their own best interest.”

Here, then, is the challenge: As long as we are led by moral midgets with delusions of grandeur, there is little hope for the blooming of the wisdom of the heart. What, then, can we do? We can begin by recalling the words of St. Exupery: “What saves a man is to take a step. Then another step. It is always the same step, but you have to take it.” This is another way of saying that the eight steps of The Noble Eightfold Path are really one step; which is why Zen begins with the last: the *meditative* stilling of what *The Lotus Sutra* calls “monkey-mind,” so that it ceases to cling to “me and mine.”

Meditation is the dharma gate that opens to the insight of Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore:

*“God exhibits love by kissing the finite.*

*Humans show love by kissing the infinite.”*

Recalling Chomsky and Zinn, and reflecting on Siddhartha’s critique of culture, let us now note that ignorance (*avidya*) is not just not-knowing; it is *mis*-knowing. If ignorance is the cause of suffering (The Second Noble Truth), it is because we too often think we know what in fact we don’t. When our values and beliefs are misguided – when, as it were, we see through a glass darkly – our caring and desires are misdirected and excessive. Misdirected and excessive desires cause suffering.

Humans too often mistakenly believe, for example, that they can stabilize and secure their existence by the accumulation of money, luxury, adoration, praise, power, and sexual and weaponized conquest, regardless of the harm inflicted on others.

That is to say, the error at the root of all conflict is the mistaken search for inner security by outward means. Buddhism offers a correction to this human, all too human error. Let us therefore heed the words of the *Gangamala Jataka*. The *Jatakas* are tales of Siddhartha Gautama's previous lives, perfecting the virtues of a bodhisattva. The *Gangamala Jataka* says: "Life is brief. Nothing lasts. Seek freedom. Be kind."

Now, inasmuch as the title of this discourse begins "The Education of Desire ...," allow me to suggest that implicit in Buddhist cosmology is the notion that *desire is the heartbeat of the cosmos*. Desire is here defined as the urge to creative advance.

Thus, in my interpretation of Buddhism, all of reality is, at its most fundamental level, made of trembling, energetic constituents which embody an evolutionary impulse. These constituents are holistically interconnected, assuring cosmos (order) instead of chaos (disorder).

In Buddhist cosmology, therefore, reality is organic, evolutionary interbeing. Therefore also, in Buddhist psychology, enlightenment is best understood as the education of desire, not its elimination.

Insofar as "Buddha" means not only "awake" but also "evolved," Buddhism – understood as Siddhartha Gautama's dharma-teachings – may be called "a pedagogy for evolution."

Zen, which literally means "meditation," provides the necessary stillness and clarity. Tantra uses meditation as a foundation for the quantum leap into Buddhahood Now.

If desire is the heartbeat of the cosmos, it must, I suggest, be conceived as *intelligent* desire.

To clarify, let's backtrack to fourth century CE India, where two brothers – Asanga and Vasubandhu – developed a branch of Mahayana Buddhism which provides the context for my suggestion. Their *philosophic idealism* has its own context in the Madhyamaka – The Middle Way – propounded by the second

century CE sage Nagarjuna. In Mahayana Buddhism, Nagarjuna is considered “a second Buddha.”

Nagarjuna, seeking to articulate the heart of Buddha’s wisdom, made a distinction between *provisional* and *ultimate* reality (also rendered as provisional and ultimate truth). These are not two separate dimensions, but, rather, two modes of perception: samsaric and nirvanic.

The distinction between provisional and ultimate was the cornerstone of Nagarjuna’s philosophy of The Middle Way.

Two centuries after Nagarjuna, another Indian adept, Asanga, modified Nagarjuna’s Madhyamaka into Yogachara Chittamatra: the “mind only” school of Mahayana Buddhism.

Asanga felt that Nagarjuna’s emphasis on emptiness (*shunyata*) veered dangerously close to nothingness. But emptiness, in the Buddhist sense, is not nothingness; it is the *absence* of substantial, enduring, unchanging, utterly separate, isolated identity.

Buddhist emptiness (*shunyata*) explodes the traditional Western notion of “substance.” Emptiness implies impermanence. Impermanence implies constant change. Constant change is a function of interbeing.

Two and half thousand years before quantum physics, Buddha understood that *to be* is to *interbe*. In short, emptiness is best understood as another name for interbeing.

Of course, there could be no interbeing without beings. But all beings are becoming. Buddhism is a process philosophy. The question is: Does all process involve mentality? Asanga and Vasubandhu say Yes.

Let’s review. The Buddhist notions of *shunyata* and *anatta* – emptiness and no-self – go together. Emptiness is absence of absolute, independent substance.

This absence, says Asanga, is a spaciousness which is nothing less than the mindfulness – the wisdom energy – which permeates the universe, from smallest microcosm to multiverse macrocosm.

If desire, then, is the heartbeat of the cosmos, it is not a *blind* evolutionary impulse. It is an unimaginably intelligent mindfulness at work.

In Whiteheadian terms: a teleological thrust toward value-enhancement,

conceived as the never-ending maximization of Beauty.

Asanga's immensely influential Yogachara – appropriated into Tibetan Buddhism – was propagated and developed by his younger brother, Vasubandhu.

In Yogachara Chittamatra, desire and intelligence constitute an underlying, originating, omnipresent energy. In Greco-Taoist terminology, intelligence and desire are the yin and yang of a pan-permeating, primal, creative cosmic force which fuses *Eros* and *Logos*.

Let us now recall the full title of this discourse: “The Education of Desire on The Path to Awakening: Buddha's Heart-Centered Emphasis on The Caring Life.”

To round out my discussion of desire, awakening, and care, let's revisit the notion of karma. Karma implies that by our thoughts, words and deeds, we create our own reality. We always do so, however, in a collective and cultural context. To be is to interbe. Therefore, Buddha's program of reform was as much social as existential. It behooves us, then, to take a look at *Buddha's Declaration of Human Rights*.

A scarcity of key ingredients for wholesome living creates unconscionable suffering, and often leads to crime, violence and more suffering. To alleviate the pervasive pain of the human condition, Buddha recommends a social structure which promotes the welfare of all. Accordingly, Buddha proposes that all humans have a right to the satisfaction of five basic needs:

- 1) Adequate nutrition.
- 2) Adequate shelter.
- 3) Adequate clothing.
- 4) Adequate medicine.
- 5) Adequate spiritual community.

When these needs are universally met, the recollection of instinctive bliss – the actualization of nirvana *in* samsara – becomes increasingly viable, and the joyful affirmation of life comes naturally.

Siddhartha Gautama's emphasis on spiritual friendship and community helps illustrate the revolutionary character of his founding of the sangha. For Siddhartha, humans are walking question-marks. The Buddhist quest for

enlightenment balances Emersonian self-reliance with perpetual dialogue and debate.

The sangha, then, is not merely a quiet environment for meditative practice. It is a stimulating locus for Socratic questioning, rigorous philosophic analysis, and open-minded, conversational exploration of the human condition and human potential.

Meditative insight, says Siddhartha, must always be challenged by dialogical interaction. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Buddhism – first in India, then in Tibet – gave rise to the world’s greatest gardens of learning: monastic universities for the deepening of meditative insight and the cultivation of science, medicine, and the arts.

In India, the monastic university at Nalanda was several hundred times larger than Plato’s Academy; and the university at Vikramashila was even larger, accommodating more than 12,000 residents, and with a library surpassing the one in Alexandria. The tragic burning of the Alexandrian library was paralleled by the Islamic burning of Nalanda and Vikramashila in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The flourishing of monastic universities required a society at peace. Thanks largely to Buddhist influence, especially the impact of Buddhist monastic universities on the social fabric as a whole, India and Tibet, for a while, became two of the world’s most peaceful and evolved societies.

Unfortunately, their relative peacefulness, egalitarian humanism, and increasing disarmament made them vulnerable to militaristic invasion and imperial exploitation – Persian, Greek, Islamic, British, Chinese.

This fact is one of the greatest tragedies of history.

India and Tibet were themselves highly militaristic and imperial cultures prior to the profoundly humanistic and peace-making influence of Buddhism.

That Buddhism was able to have such an enlightened, revolutionary influence shows that peace is possible. It also shows why Buddhism today is one of the world’s brightest hopes for the planetary peace that is now necessary for our collective survival.

Keeping in mind Buddha’s declaration of human rights, we see here, overall and once again, that Buddhism is a profoundly pragmatic, this-worldly philosophy. At its core, Buddhism is very, very simple. Buddha’s recommended path to the

peaceable kingdom is expressed in his three ethical suggestions: *Think kindly, speak kindly, act kindly.*

Let us now conclude by noting that Buddha was a teacher, not a prophet. Buddhism is not so much a religion as a therapeutic path to awakening. The first step on that path entails the rectification of our thinking; the modification of our values and beliefs; liberation from society's Weapons of Mass Dysfunction.

In sum, right thinking is the education of desire. The education of desire is the pedagogy of care. The pedagogy of care is the path to peace.

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