

Buddhist Doctrines (source: Phillip Novak. *The World's Wisdom*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books. 1994:65-83.)

a. **The Three Jewels** (The Buddha “the Awakened One,” *Dharma* (Sanskrit)/*Dhamma* (Pali) – the way of truth he taught, and the *Sangha* – the community of those who live by that teaching, are called the Three Jewels because of their purity and inestimable value. They are held as essential by all schools of Buddhism. The triple recitation of the following formula is a basic Buddhist act of piety.)

I go for refuge to the Buddha.

I go for refuge to the *Dharma*.

I go for refuge to the *Sangha*.

b. **The Four Noble Truths** (from the Buddha’s first sermon, “Setting Rolling the Wheel of Truth.”)

Suffering (Dukkha), as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and pain and despair are suffering, association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering – in short suffering is the five (groups) of clinging’s objects (the five *skandhas/skandas* or “groupings of existence,” that make up a human individual).

Thus the *origin of suffering*, as a noble truth, is this: It is the craving that produces renewal of being, accompanied by enjoyment and lust – in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being (*Tanha*).

Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is remainderless fading and ceasing, letting go and rejecting, of that same craving (*Nirvana/Sunyata*).

The way leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth is this: It is simply *the eightfold path* of (*Prajna*) *right view* and *right intention*, (*Sila*) *right speech*, *right action* and *right livelihood*, and (*Dhyana*) *right effort*, *right mindfulness* and *right concentration*.

As long as the true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths was not quite clear in me, so long was I not sure that I had won the supreme Enlightenment. . . . But as soon as the true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths had become perfectly clear in me, there arose in me the assurance that I had won the supreme Enlightenment unsurpassed.

c. **The Eightfold Path as the Middle Way** (from the Buddha’s first sermon, “Setting Rolling the Wheel of Truth.”)

Monks, these two extremes ought not to be cultivated by one gone forth from the home-life. What are the two? There is indulgence . . . in the objects of sensual desire, which is inferior, low, vulgar, ignoble, and leads to no good; and there is devotion to self-torment, which is painful, ignoble, and leads to no good.

The middle way . . . avoids both these extremes; it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to peace, to direct acquaintance to *nibbâna* (*Nirvana*). And what is that middle way? It is simply the noble eightfold path. . . .

d. Cultivation of Right Mindfulness and Loving-Kindness (Right Mindfulness is part of the *Dhyana* step, the mental/meditative step in the Eightfold Path. The Satipatthâna Sutra is one of Buddhism's most important teachings on the practice of meditation. Selected passages are presented here. It is very difficult to appreciate as a text, for it yields its treasures only in the context of sustained practice under the guidance of a teacher. It may be compared to a computer manual: hard to read for pleasure but indispensable when coping with a complex circuitry. A *sutra* is a Sanskrit word that, in this context, refers to utterances spoken by the Buddha himself.)

Satipatthâna Sutra

The only way that leads to the . . . end of pain and grief, to the entering of the right path and the realization of *Nirvana*, is by the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. And which are there four?

Herein the disciple dwells in sustained awareness of the Body, in sustained awareness of Sensation/Feeling, in sustained awareness of Mind, in sustained awareness of the Mind-Objects; ardent, clearly comprehending them and mindful, after putting away worldly greed and grief.

1. Sustained Awareness of the Body. But how does the disciple dwell in sustained awareness of the body? (There are five basic ways.)

Watching over in-and-out-breathing. Herein the disciple retires to a solitary place, seats himself with legs crossed, body erect, and mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breaths out . . .

The Four postures. And further, while (walking), standing, sitting, or lying down, the disciple (is clearly aware of) any positions of the body . . .

Mindfulness and clear comprehension of bodily acts. And further, the disciple acts with clear comprehension in going and coming; eating, drinking, chewing, and tasting; in discharging excrement and urine; acts with clear comprehension in walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, awakening,; in speaking and keeping silent.

Contemplation of loathsomeness. And further, the disciple contemplates this body from the sole of the foot upward, and from the top of the hair downward, with a skin stretched over it, and filled with manifold impurities: "This body has hairs fo the head and of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, stomach, bowels, mesentery, and excrement; bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, lymph, tears, skin-grease, saliva, nasal mucous, oil of the joints, and urine."

Just as if there were a sack, with openings at both ends, filled with various kinds of grains, . . . just so does the disciple investigate this body . . .

Cemetery meditations. And further, just as if the disciple were looking for a corpse thrown on a channel-ground, eaten by cows, hawks, or vultures, by dogs or jackals, or devoured by all kinds of worms, so he regards his own body: “This body of mine also has this nature, his this destiny, and cannot escape it . . .”

2. Sustained Awareness of Sensations. But how does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the sensations?

In experiencing sensation, the disciple knows: “I have an agreeable sensation”; or “I have a disagreeable sensation”; or “I have an indifferent sensation”

3. Sustained Awareness of the Mind. (One attempts sustained awareness of one’s changing moods or states of mind.)

Herein the disciple knows the greedy mind as greedy, and the not greedy mind as not greedy; knows the hating mind as hating, and the not hating mind as not hating; knows the deluded mind as deluded and the undeluded mind as undeluded. He knows the cramped mind as cramped, and the scattered mind as scattered, knows the concentrated mind as concentrated

4. Sustained Awareness of the Mind-Object. (One attempts sustained awareness of fluxing mental experiences through the lenses of basic Buddhist formulae.)

The Five Hindrances. He knows when there is lust in him; . . . knows when there is anger in him; . . . knows when there is torpor and sloth in him; . . . knows when there is restlessness and mental worry in him; . . . knows when there are doubts in him; . . . he knows (too) when these hindrances are not in him She knows how they come to arise; knows how, once arisen, they are overcome; and she knows how they do not arise again in the future.

The Five Groups of Existence (Skandhas/Skandas). And further: the disciple dwells in sustained awareness of the . . . five groups of Existence, . . . (see f.)

The Six Sense-Bases. And further: the disciples dwell in sustained awareness in the six . . . sense-bases. He knows the eye and visual objects, ear and sound, nose and odors, tongue and tastes, body and bodily impressions, mind and mind-objects . . . (see i.)

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment. He knows when there is in him “Mindfulness,” “Investigation of the Law,” “Energy,” “Enthusiasm,” “Tranquility,” “Concentration,” and “Equanimity.” He knows when (these are) not in him, knows how (they come) to arise, and how (they are) fully developed.

The Four Noble Truths. And further: the disciple dwells in sustained awareness of the Four Noble Truths (see b.)

The only way that leads to the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering upon the right path, and the realization of *Nirvana*, is by these four foundations of mindfulness.

Metta Sutra (*Metta* – “loving-kindness” – As part of Right Mindfulness within the Eightfold Path, Buddhist practice includes the cultivation of four qualities said to be divine conditions of the mind. They are: compassion, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Here is a scriptural passage on loving-kindness.)

In safety and in bliss
May all creatures be of a blissful heart.
Whatever breathing beings there may be,
No matter whether they are frail or firm,
With none excepted, be they short or small
Or thick, as well as those seen or unseen,
Or whether they are far or near,
Existing or yet seeking to exist,
May all creatures be of a blissful heart.
Or even slight him at all anywhere;
And never let them wish each other ill
Through provocation or resentful thought.

And just as might a mother with her life
Protect the son that was her only child,
So let him then for every living thing
Maintain unbounded consciousness in being,
And let him too with love for all the world
Maintain unbounded consciousness of being
Above, below, and all round in between,
Untroubled, with no enemy or foe.

And while he stands or walks, or while he sits
Or while he lies down, free from drowsiness,
Let him resolve upon this mindfulness:
This is Divine Abiding here, they say.

e. **The Buddha as a Rain Cloud of Universal Grace** (This *sutra* is intended to appeal to a more devotional impulse in humans, with the laity less engaged in meditative practices or with the subtleties of “emptiness thinking.”)

Lotus Sutra

. . . I refresh this entire world
 Like a cloud which releases its rain evenly for all;
 Equal is enlightenment for noble and mean alike,
 For those who are immoral and for moral ones . . .

I preach the *Dharma* to beings whether their intellect
 Be inferior or superior, and their faculties weak or strong.
 Setting aside all tiredness,
 I rain down the rain of the *Dharma* . . .

So the nature of the *Dharma* always exists for the weal of the world,
 And it refreshes by the *Dharma* the entire world.
 And then, refreshed, just like the plants,
 The world will burst forth into blossoms.

f. **The Five *Skandhas* or Groups of Experience** (The *skandhas/skandas* are the Buddha's fivefold classification of the physical and mental factors comprising "reality"; unreflective persons mistake the local interaction of these factors as the *object*, e.g., an ego or personality, rather than bundled groupings of *processes*, or "skeins that hang together as loose yarn.")

And what, in brief, are the Five Groups of Existence? They are materiality, sensation, perception, moods and thoughts.

g. **The Three Marks of Existence** (the formations of the interactions of the *skandhas* create the mask of existence)

All formations are impermanent (*anicca*); all formations are subject to suffering (*dukkha*); all things are "without a self" (*anatta*).

h. ***Anatta* or Without-a-Self** (*Anatta* is a fundamental Buddhist doctrine. It suggests that just as what we designate by the name "car" has no existence apart from axle, wheels, shaft, motor, and so on, that which we conventionally designate "person" or "I" is nothing but a continually shifting combination of impersonal physical and mental phenomena.)

Suppose a person who was not blind beheld the many bubbles on the Ganges as they drove along. . . . After he had carefully watched them and examined them they would appear to him empty, unreal and unsubstantial. In exactly the same way does the student of the Buddha behold all corporeal phenomena, sensations, perceptions, moods, and thoughts. . . . He watches them, examines them carefully; and, after carefully examining them, they appear to him empty, void and without a self.

i. **Dependent Origination** (The doctrine of *paticcasamuppâda*, or “dependent origination” is the counterpart of the *anatta* doctrine. Because all processes are empty-of-self, they co-condition and co-determine each other. Accordingly, reality is a vast field of mutually conditioning events, every event of which arises from the interplay of countless other events.)

Who sees Dependent Origination sees the *Dharma* (Way of Truth); who sees the *Dharma* sees Dependent Origination.

This body, monks, is not yours, nor does it belong to others. It should be regarded (as the product of) former *karma*, effected through what has been willed and felt. In regard to it, the (wise person) reflects on Dependent Origination itself: if this is, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises; if this is not, that does not come to be; from the stopping of this, that is stopped.

Conditioned by ignorance are the *karma*-formations; conditioned by *karma*-formations is consciousness; conditioned by consciousness is mind-and-body; conditioned by mind-and-body are the six sense-fields (taste, sight, hearing, smelling, touching, with mind as the sixth sense in Buddhism); conditioned by the six sense-fields is impression; conditioned by impression is feeling; conditioned by feeling is craving; conditioned by craving is grasping; conditioned by grasping is becoming; conditioned by becoming is birth; conditioned by birth there come into being ageing and dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair. This is the origin of the whole mass of suffering.

(And now the reverse of this process:)

But from the stopping of ignorance is the stopping of the *karma*-formations (and so on until we come to) the stopping of the whole mass of suffering.

This great imaginary net . . . is to be visualized . . . as stretching throughout the entire universe: its vertical extension representing time; its horizontal, space. At every point where the net’s threads interconnect (every point-instant of existence), one images a crystal bead symbolizing an individual existence. Each one of these innumerable crystal beads reflects on its surface not only every other bead in the net but every reflection of every other bead, thus creating numberless, endless reflections of each other while forming one complete and total whole – Indra’s net.

j. *Karma*

Volition: It is volition that I call “*karma*.” Having willed, one (then) acts by body, speech, and mind.

Deeds: All beings are the owners of their deeds (*karma*), the heirs of their deeds; their deeds are the womb form which they sprang. . . . Whatever deeds they do – good or evil – of such they will be the heirs.

Ignorance and Craving: Truly, because beings, obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, seek every fresh delight, fresh rebirth continually comes to be.

k. The Three Poisons: Greed, Hatred, Delusion

And the action that is done out of greed, hatred and delusion, wherever this action ripens there one experiences the fruits of this action, be it in this life, or the next life, or in some future life

l. Samsara

Its Inconceivable Beginnings: Inconceivable is the beginning of this *Samsara*; not to be discovered is any first beginning of beings, who obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.

The Tears Shed on This Long Way: Which do you think is more: the flood of tears, which weeping and wailing you have shed upon this long way – hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths, united with undesired, separated from the desired – this, or the waters of the four oceans?

Long have you suffered the death of father and mother, of sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. And whilst you were thus suffering, you have indeed shed more tears upon this long way than there is water in the four oceans.

m. All Beings Can Reach Salvation in Many Ways

The Buddha himself abides in the Great Vehicle (Mahayana),
And . . . He saves all beings . . .
If men turn to the Buddha, (He) will not deceive them

(Those) who have come into contact with former Buddhas,
(Who) have learned the Law and practiced charity. . .
All of these people have reached the Level of Buddhahood.

Those people who, for the sake of the Buddha,
Installed images, or had them carved,
Have reached the level of Buddhahood.

Those who with a happy frame of mind
Have sung the glory of the Buddha, even with a very small sound,
Or have worshiped, or have merely folded their hands,
Or have uttered one “Namo” (Praise be),
All have reached the level of Buddhahood.

. . . . the Buddhas for the past the Buddhas of the future,
 Their number will be infinite . . .
 All these Buddhas, with an infinite number of suitable means,
 Will save all living beings,
 And enable them to dwell in the Pure Wisdom of the Buddha . . .

n. **Nibbâna** (*Nirvana*; The idea of *emptiness* as the state of *Nirvana* is firmly established in Mahayana Buddhism and can be viewed as the result of a relentless extrapolation of the doctrine of dependent origination, see i. The doctrine of dependent origination teaches that because every thing or event arises from the interplay of countless factors, no thing or event can be said to bring itself into being, and therefore every thing / event is empty of own-being. The Mahayana applied this insight even to the Buddha and his teachings. Because the Buddha's career itself was dependently originated, even the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path are all empty of own-being. This does not mean they are worthless; it means that because they have been conditioned by various circumstances, they are *not truly ultimate*. What then is ultimate? The answer is: emptiness itself. To those of inferior understanding the Buddha taught that we are lost in *samsara* and that we must struggle to win *Nirvana*. But, says the Mahayanist, to the enlightened who see that both *samsara* and *nirvana* (like all else) are empty, these two relative realities "collapse" into the ultimate reality of emptiness. But emptiness is not somewhere else; it is here and now, all-embracing, and inalienable; it is a perfect, unimpeded Total Field of Enlightenment or Suchness – and it is what we are! We are all already Buddha-Nature, if only we realize it. There is ultimately no problem (suffering, *samsara*) and no solution (*nirvana*), because "everything" and "everyone" is always-already enlightened. A final twist: emptiness too is empty. It is not an ultimate "correct" concept but rather a lever to extricate ourselves for the delusion that any concept, including Buddhist concepts, are ultimate. The really Real can be known only by intuitive realization, never by discursive conceptualizing.)

End of Karma: This, truly, is Peace, this is the Highest, namely the end of all *karma* formations, the forsaking of every substratum of rebirth, the fading away of craving, detachment

Eradication of the Three Poisons: The extinction of greed, the extinction of hate, the extinction of delusion: this indeed is called *Nibbâna*.

Deliverance of the Heart: The purpose of the Holy Life does not consist of acquiring alms (or) honor, nor in gaining morality (or) concentration. . . . That unshakeable deliverance of the heart: that indeed, is the object of the Holy Life, that is its essence, that is its goal.

End of Old Age and Death: For those who in mid-stream stay, in great peril in the flood, . . . do I proclaim the Isle . . . of No-beyond. *Nirvana* do I call it – the utter extinction of ageing and dying.

It Is Real: There is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed. If there were not (then) escape from the world of the born, the originated, the created, the formed, would not be possible.

But since there is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed, therefore, escape from the world of the born, the originated, the created, the formed.

Those Who Seek Nirvana Are to be Laughed At: That which the Lord revealed in his perfect enlightenment was not (any of the five *skandhas*) for none of these five components come into being, neither does the supreme wisdom come into being. . . . And how can that which does not come into being know that which does come into being? Since nothing can be grasped, what is the Buddha, what is wisdom, what is a *Bodhisattva* (“wisdom being” or spiritual hero in the Mahayana tradition, who renounces his or her own entry into *nirvana* to be reborn repeatedly to undertake the work of helping all sentient beings reach *nirvana*), what is revelation? All the components are by nature empty – just convention, just names, agreed tokens, coverings. . . . Thus all things are the perfection of being, infinite perfection, unobscured perfection, unconditioned perfection. All things are enlightenment, for they must be recognized as without essential nature – even the five greatest sins are enlightenment, for enlightenment has no essential nature and neither have the five greatest sins. Thus those who seek for *Nirvana* are to be laughed at.

The Great Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sutra (perhaps the densest expression of the Mahayana idea of emptiness)

Homage to the Perfection of Wisdom, the lovely, the holy!

Avalokita (*Chenrezig*), the holy Lord and Bodhisattva, was moving in the deep course of the wisdom that has gone beyond. He looked down from on high, he beheld but five (*skandhas*), and saw that in their own-being they were empty.

Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form. . . .

Here, O Sariputra, all *dharmas* are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete.

Therefore, O Sariputra, in emptiness there is not form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind; no mind-consciousness-element; there is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: there is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death; there is no suffering, or origination, no stopping, no path; there is no cognition, no attainment, and no non-attainment.

Therefore, O Sariputra, it is because of his indifference to any kind of personal attainment that a *Bodhisattva* . . . dwells without thought-coverings . . . and in the end he attains to *Nirvana*.

All those who appear as Buddhas, in the three periods of time, fully awake to the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment because they have relied on the perfection of wisdom.

Therefore, one should know the Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom) as the great mantra (a sacred word or phrase, when spoken aloud, resonates with divine importance), the mantra of great knowledge, the utmost mantra, the unequaled mantra, allayer of all suffering, in truth – for what could go wrong?

. . . . (The) mantra . . . runs like this:

Gone, Gone, Gone Beyond, Gone Altogether Beyond, O What an Awakening! All Hail!

This completes the Heart of the Perfect Wisdom.

o. ***Bodhisattva*** (The *bodhisattva*, literally, “wisdom-being,” is the spiritual hero of the Mahayana tradition. A *bodhisattva* is a person who, out of compassion, renounces his or her own entry into *nirvana* in order to be reborn repeatedly to undertake this infinite work of saving all sentient beings. Amidst this work, however, the *bodhisattva* is aware that there are ultimately no beings to save and no one to do the saving. Without this wisdom, the *bodhisattva* is not a *bodhisattva*! The *bodhisattva*’s wisdom consists in knowing that the “I” who takes a vow to save others is an illusion. Nevertheless she or he compassionately adopts the illusion of selfhood in order to liberate those still confronted by it.)

The Infinite Compassion of the *Bodhisattva*: A *Bodhisattva* resolves: I take upon myself the burden of all suffering I do not turn or run away, do not tremble, am not terrified, do not turn back or despond.

And why? I have made the vow to save all beings. . . . The whole world of living beings I must rescue, from the terrors of birth-and-death, from the juggle of false views. . . . My endeavors do not merely aim at my own deliverance. . . . I must rescue all these beings from the stream of *Samsara*. . . . And I must not cheat beings out of my store of merit. I am resolved to abide in each single state of woe for numberless aeons; and so I will help all beings to freedom, in all the states of woe that may be found in any world system whatsoever.

And why? Because it is merely better that I alone should be in pain than that all these beings should all into states of woe.

From the Diamond Sutra: The Lord said: Someone who has set out in the vehicle of a *Bodhisattva* should think in this manner: “As many beings as there are in the universe of beings – egg-born, born of the womb, moisture-born, or miraculously born – all these must I lead into that Realm of *Nirvana* which leaves nothing behind. And yet, although innumerable beings have thus been led to *Nirvana*, in fact no being at all has been led to *Nirvana*.”

And why? If in a *Bodhisattva* the notion of a “being” should take place, he could not be called a “Wisdom-being.”

And why? He is not to be called a Wisdom-being in whom the notion of a self or of a being should take place, or the notion of a living soul or a person

p. The Essence of the Buddha’s Teachings

To refrain from evil,
To achieve the good,
To purify one’s own mind
This is the teachings of all Awakened Ones.