

What is Buddhism? - Part 4

Robert Cusick concluded his four part talk on Buddhism on 8/26/09 with an overview of some essential practices.

Most Westerners equate Buddhism with meditation, but meditation is just a part of what it is all about. There is an entire lineage to integrate into our lives, beautiful teachings that could get lost in the complexity of reality crushing in on us. The talks on “What is Buddhism?” just gave us a 35,000 foot view. What next?

The path of purification in Buddhism has three components, The Three Noble Disciplines. The first, and most important, is *sila*, or cultivation of virtue. Sila is the essence of Buddhism, and is essential to its practice. The second is *samadhi*, or meditation. If you went to Asia, you might find that very few Buddhists meditate. The main concern is with practicing virtue. The third component, *panna*, or wisdom, arises out of *sila* and *samadhi*. Wisdom takes us to the doors of liberation.

Five Hindrances

There are five main obstacles blocking the path to spiritual progress. These are known as the Five Hindrances:

1. Sensual desire
2. Ill-will
3. Sloth and torpor
4. Restlessness and remorse
5. Skeptical doubt

See <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel026.html>

The hindrances do not have to be banished from our minds in order to resume spiritual progress. If we note and recognize the hindrances as they arise, we are putting the brakes on them. We do not have to conquer the hindrances before making progress; if we recognize them and watch them, they weaken. It is as simple as noticing where your feet are.

The hindrances can be further weakened by applying the antidotes. Typically, the antidote involves meditating on the opposite. For example, to weaken ill-will, meditate on loving-kindness. In addition, two weakening factors common to all hindrances are the antidotes of good company and suitable conversation:

Good Company (“noble friendship”)

The entire holy life, Ananda, is noble friendship, noble companionship, noble association. Of a monk, Ananda, who has a noble friend, a noble companion, a noble associate, it is to be expected that he will cultivate and practice the Noble Eightfold Path.

— SN 45:2

Suitable Conversation.

If the mind of a monk is bent on speaking, he (should remember this): "Talk which is low, coarse, worldly, not noble, not salutary, not leading to detachment, not to freedom from passion, not to cessation, not to tranquility, not to higher knowledge, not to enlightenment, not to Nibbana, namely, talk about kings, robbers and ministers, talk about armies, dangers and war, about food and drink, clothes, couches, garlands, perfumes, relatives, cars, villages, towns, cities, and provinces, about women and wine, gossip of the street and of the well, talk about the ancestors, about various trifles, tales about the origin of the world and the ocean, talk about what happened and what did not happen — such and similar talk I shall not entertain." Thus he is clearly conscious about it.

-- MN 122

Antidotes for the Five Hindrances

Six things are conducive to the abandonment of sensual desire:

1. Learning how to meditate on impure objects;
2. Devoting oneself to the meditation on the impure;
3. Guarding the sense doors;
4. Moderation in eating;
5. Noble friendship;
6. Suitable conversation.

Six things are helpful in conquering ill-will:

1. Learning how to meditate on loving-kindness;
2. Devoting oneself to the meditation of loving-kindness;
3. Considering that one is the owner and heir of one's actions (*kamma*);
4. Noble friendship;
5. Suitable conversation.

Six things are conducive to the abandonment of sloth and torpor:

1. Knowing that overeating is a cause of it;
2. Changing the bodily posture;
3. Thinking of the perception of light;
4. Staying in the open air;
5. Noble friendship;
6. Suitable conversation.

Six things are conducive to the abandonment of restlessness and remorse:

1. Knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures (Doctrine and Discipline);
2. Asking questions about them;
3. Familiarity with the Vinaya (the Code of Monastic Discipline, and for lay followers, with the principles of moral conduct);
4. Association with those mature in age and experience, who possess dignity, restraint and calm;
5. Noble friendship
6. Suitable conversation.

Six things are conducive to the abandonment of doubt:

1. Knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures (Doctrine and Discipline);
2. Asking questions about them;
3. Familiarity with the Vinaya (the Code of Monastic Discipline, and for lay followers, with the principles of moral conduct);
4. Firm conviction concerning the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha
5. Noble friendship;
6. Suitable conversation.

The Sixteen Mental Defilements

1. *Covetousness and unrighteous greed.* *Covetousness* is desire for and attachment to one's own belongings; *unrighteous greed* is (desire for and attachment to) the belongings of others.
2. *Ill will* The nine cases of aversion.
3. *Anger* being angry, angriness, hatred, hating, hatefulnes, irritation, irritability, irascibility; opposition, resistance, displeasure of mind.
4. *Malice* In the past there was anger, later there is malice. It is the accumulation, persistence, strengthening of anger. It is anger after it again and again envelops the mind.
5. *Contempt* It is the disregard of favors done towards oneself. In the case of lay people, if one is poor and someone, out of compassion, sets one up in a high position, later one disregards the favor done, thinking, "What did he do for me?" In the case of a monk, after one becomes famous and respected, one disregards the instruction and guidance one's elders gave to one when one was a junior monk.
6. *Insolence* The sense of competitiveness that arises overpowering someone else, for example, towards a learned person one thinks, "What is the difference between you or me?"
7. *Envy* The envy, envying, enviousness, that arises towards the gain, honor, respect, esteem, veneration, and reverence shown towards others.
8. *Miserliness* Miserliness, meanness, stinginess, unwillingness to share; Miserliness regarding dwellings, families, gains, praise, and Dhamma. Inability to endure sharing one's own fortune with others.
9. *Deceit* Someone misbehaves with the body, by speech, by mind. For the purpose of concealing it, he forms the evil wish, "May others not know this of me!" Such

deceit, deceptiveness, excessiveness, crookedness, craftiness, hiding, concealment, etc., is called deceit.

10. *Craftiness* Someone is crafty, utterly crafty, etc., this is called craftiness. A trickster shows himself to others and says to them, "I will be your companion, your benefactor, and I will never desert you." And they think, "He is devoted to us, loyal to us."
11. *Obstinacy* Stiffness, harshness, single-mindedness, inflexibility. Unyieldingness, rigidity, high-headedness; being like a bellows filled with air.
12. *Rivalry* This is twofold, as unwholesome and wholesome. The unwholesome: A layman sees another person dressed up in ornaments and there arises in him the thought of surpassing the other person twofold; a monk hears of another who has learned so much Dhamma or preaches so much and, by way of conceit, thinks to outdo the other twofold or threefold. But when a layman sees another give a gift and, from a desire to give, thinks that he himself should give two or three gifts; or when a monk sees another learn one Nikāya and, without depending on conceit, entirely from a desire to learn, thinks that he should learn two Nikāyas, it is wholesome. But here the unwholesome is intended.
13. *Conceit* Elevation of the mind on account of social class, etc.
14. *Arrogance* Extreme elevation of the mind.
15. *Vanity Mada* concerns social class, clan, etc.; in suttas, related to youth, health, life (as opp. to age, sickness, death). The aspect of grasping vanity
16. *Heedlessness* Letting the mind roam among the objects of sensual pleasure.

See <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.007.nypo.html>

Stages of Enlightenment

Stream-enterer

The first stage is that of "one who enters the stream," with the stream being the Noble Eightfold Path regarded as the highest Dhamma. The stream-enterer is also said to have "opened the eye of the Dhamma"

A stream-enterer is guaranteed enlightenment after no more than seven successive rebirths, and possibly in fewer. The stream-enterer can also be sure that he will not be reborn in any of the unhappy states or rebirths (an animal, a hungry ghost, or in hell). He can only be reborn as a human being, or in a heaven.

The stream-enterer has attained an intuitive grasp of Buddhist doctrine ("right view"), has complete confidence in the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha) and follows sila.

Once-returner

The second stage is that of the "one who once comes". The once-returner will return to the human world only one more time, and will attain Nibbana in that life.

Non-returner

The third stage is that of the "one who does not come". The non-returner does not come back into human existence, or any lower world, after death. Instead, he is reborn in one of the "Pure Abodes", where he will attain Nibbana. Some of them are reborn a second time in a higher world of the Pure Abodes, but in no case are born into a lower state.

Arahant

The fourth stage is that of Arahant, a fully enlightened human being who has abandoned all fetters, and who upon decease will not be reborn in any world, having wholly abandoned the cycle of death and rebirth.

The elimination of defilements in the four stages of enlightenment

- (1) The path of *stream-entry* eliminates contempt, insolence, envy, miserliness, deceit, and craftiness
- (2) The path of *non-returner* eliminates ill-will, anger, hostility, and heedlessness
- (3) The path of *arahantship* eliminates covetousness-&-unrighteous greed, obstinacy, rivalry, conceit, arrogance, and vanity

See <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/study/stream.html>

Four Brahmaviharas

The Brahmaviharas are the divine abodes, or sacred shelters. Cultivating these states provides protection from suffering.

1. *Metta*: loving-kindness towards all; the hope that a person will be well; loving kindness is "*the wish that all sentient beings, without any exception, be happy.*"
2. *Karuna*: compassion; the hope that a person's sufferings will diminish; compassion is the "*wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering.*"
3. *Mudita*: altruistic joy in the accomplishments of a person, oneself or other; sympathetic joy, "*is the wholesome attitude of rejoicing in the happiness and virtues of all sentient beings.*"
4. *Upekkha*: equanimity, or learning to accept both loss and gain, praise and blame, success and failure with detachment, equally, for oneself and for others; equanimity means "*not to distinguish between friend, enemy or stranger, but regard every sentient being as equal. It is a clear-minded tranquil state of mind - not being overpowered by delusions, mental dullness or agitation.*"

Each of the Brahmaviharas has a near enemy and a far enemy. The far enemy is an opposite. The near enemy of a Brahmavihaya is a subtle danger. It is a state that is similar to a Brahmavihara, but it is not – it is a detrimental look-alike. Here is a list of the Brahmaviharas and the enemies:

Brahmavihara	Near enemy	Far enemy
Metta Loving-kindness	Selfish affection, conditional love	Hatred, anger
Karuna Compassion	Pity	Cruelty
Mudita Joy with others, Joy for others	Exuberance	Envy, Resentment, Hypocritical admiration
Upekkha Equanimity	Indifference	Anxiety, Doubt, Worry, Craving, Clinging

The Eight Jhanas

There are 4 stages of deep concentration which are called the *Rupa Jhāna* (Fine-material Jhāna):

1. **First Jhāna** - To attain this jhāna, the meditator must fix his mind on the meditation object to reduce and eliminate the lower mental qualities which is called the Five Hindrances (sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt) and promote the growth of five jhāna factors (applied/directed thought, sustained thought, rapture, bliss and one-pointedness). In this stage, only the subtlest mental movement remains. The ability to form unwholesome intentions ceases.
2. **Second Jhāna** - To attain this jhāna, the meditator must reduce and eliminate the two initial factors of the first jhāna itself (applied/directed thought, sustained thought), the three remaining jhāna factors still possessed by the meditator are the rapture, bliss and one-pointedness. In this stage, all mental movement utterly ceases. The meditator acquires complete confidence and internal assurance.
3. **Third Jhāna** - To attain this jhāna, the meditator must reduce and eliminate the third initial factor of the first jhāna itself (rapture), the two remaining jhāna factors still possessed by the meditator are the bliss and one-pointedness. Three additional components are possessed by the meditator (equanimity, mindfulness and discernment).

4. **Fourth Jhāna** - To attain this *jhāna*, the meditator must reduce and eliminate the fourth initial factor of the first *jhāna* itself (bliss) and replace it with another *jhāna* factor (equanimity), the two remaining *jhāna* factors still possessed by the meditator are the equanimity and one-pointedness. In this stage, the meditator enters a state of supreme purity, equanimity, and pure consciousness.

Beyond the four *jhāna* lie four higher attainments in the scale of concentration, usually referred in commentarial literature as the *Arupa Jhāna* (Immaterial/formless Jhāna). The *immaterial jhānas* are designated as:

1. Dimension of infinite space.
2. Dimension of infinite consciousness.
3. Dimension of nothingness.
4. Dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jh%C4%81na> and <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/gunaratana/wheel351.html> for more information.

Seven Enlightenment Factors

Further says the Buddha, "Just as, monks, in a peaked house all rafters whatsoever go together to the peak, slope to the peak, join in the peak, and of them all the peak is reckoned chief: even so, monks, the monk who cultivates and makes much of the seven factors of wisdom, slopes to Nibbana, inclines to Nibbana, tends to Nibbana." (SN 46.7)

The seven factors are:

1. Mindfulness (*sati*)
2. Keen investigation of the *dhamma* (*dhammavicaya*)³
3. Energy (*viriyā*)
4. Rapture or happiness (*pīti*)
5. Calm (*passaddhi*)
6. Concentration (*samadhi*)
7. Equanimity (*upekkha*)

See <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/piyadassi/wheel001.html>

A Final Thought

*"...a mustard seed of faith can shift a mountain of doubt."
St. Francis of Assisi*