Approaching the Buddhist Path

Chapter 1 Exploring Buddhism

> The world is led by mind and drawn along by mind.
> All phenomena are controlled by one phenomenon, mind. (The Buddha(

The mind includes both our intellect and all our cognitions, emotions and other mental facilities. The Sanskrit word for mind can also be translated as heart. Subduing the afflicted aspect of our mind, our experience of the world is transformed. If we seek to change the external environment and the people in it, we continually meet with frustration and disappointment because we cannot control the external world. It is only by developing the great potential of our mind/heart that we can find a way out of our suffering and truly benefit others as well.

In Buddhism, the obstacles we aim to eliminate are not external, but are afflictive mental states—distorted attitudes and disturbing emotions.[1] The tools we use to counteract them are also mental—compassion, wisdom and other realistic and beneficial attitudes and emotions that we consciously cultivate.

The Purpose of Existence and the Meaning of Life

> For the most part, beings have this wish, desire and longing: "If only unwished for, undesired, disagreeable things would diminish and wished for, desired, agreeable things would increase!"
> Yet although beings have this wish, desire and longing, unwished for, undesired, disagreeable things increase for them and wished for, desired, agreeable things diminish. (The Buddha)

HH. "I believe the meaning and purpose of our life has to do with eradicating the causes of pain and increasing the causes of happiness."

HH. By seeking to bring about happiness, we give purpose and meaning to our lives. The purpose of our life is happiness and peace, an internal feeling of well-being. To bring that about, we need material development and proper education. We

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[1] In Buddhism, **mental afflictions**, kleshas, are negative mental states or destructive emotions and incorrect views that disturb the tranquility of the mind and contribute to suffering and hinder one's spiritual development. The concept of mental afflictions is central to understanding the causes of suffering and the path to liberation in Buddhist teachings.

1. **Ignorance**: This is considered the root of all other mental afflictions. It refers to a lack of understanding of the nature of reality, including the impermanence of phenomena and the interdependence of all things.
2. **Attachment or desire**: This involves an excessive craving for sensual pleasures, material possessions and attachment to things that are transient. Attachment leads to suffering when those objects or experiences are not attained or are impermanent.
3. **Aversion or hatred**: This is an aversion or hatred towards things that are perceived as unpleasant or undesirable. It can manifest as anger, resentment or hostility.
4. **Ignorance of the law of karma**: This is different from the general ignorance mentioned earlier. It specifically refers to a lack of understanding of the law of cause and effect, the consequences of one's actions and the cycle of birth and death (samsara).
5. **Pride or ego**: This is an inflated sense of self-importance or superiority. It leads to a distorted view of oneself and others, hindering spiritual growth and understanding.
6. **Doubt**: Doubt refers to a lack of confidence or trust in the teachings of Buddhism, the path or one's own abilities to follow the path. It can create obstacles on the journey towards enlightenment.

In Buddhist philosophy, the goal is to overcome these mental afflictions through ethical conduct, meditation and wisdom. The process of overcoming them is essential for attaining liberation (nirvana) and reaching a state of freedom from suffering. The practices within Buddhism, such as mindfulness and meditation, aim to cultivate awareness and insight to gradually eliminate these mental afflictions.

also need spiritual development. Spirituality refers to the basic good qualities of human beings, such as compassion, affection, gentleness and humility.

HH. Due to our imagination, we are sensitive on a mental level and experience joy and misery created by our mind. Because mental suffering is created by our mind, important countermeasures are also mental.

A Middle Way between Theistic Religions and Scientific Reductionism.

Happiness comes primarily through ethical conduct as well as spiritual conduct. Depending on how we look at Buddhism, we may describe it as a religion, a science of mind or a philosophy. We do not need to say it is one and not the others, for Buddhism embraces aspects of all three.

In contrast to religions that oppose critical investigation, Buddhism emphasises that we should be skeptical, even of the Buddha's words. We have to investigate whether scriptural passages are reliable and true or not. If we find contradictory evidence, including scientific findings, we should follow what can be proven rather than what the Buddha said. The Buddha himself stated that his followers should not accept his teaching out of respect but after investigation and personal experiment. We have the liberty to examine and test the Buddha's teachings.

Although Buddhism shares respect for logic and experimental proof, it doesn't deny the value of having faith and confidence in spiritually realised beings. It seems that Buddhism is in between science and theistic religions.

Buddhadharma and Other Religions

HH. In terms of transforming human beings' minds and hearts, all religions are in general agreement. They all teach love, compassion, forgiveness, non-harm, contentment, self-discipline and generosity. No matter the religion, a person who practices it sincerely will develop these qualities. In every religion, we see many examples of ethical and warm-hearted people who benefit others.

Buddhism speaks not of an external creator but of the law of causality. Our actions create the causes for what we will experience in the future. If we want happiness—be it temporal happiness or happiness that comes through spiritual realisations—we must abandon destructive actions and practice love, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness and generosity.

If you are interested in following the Buddhist path, I recommend that you first understand the Buddhist worldview. Take your time and learn how the Buddha describes our present state, the causes of our difficulties, our potential and the path to actualise it. Explore the ideas of rebirth, karma and its effects, emptiness, awakening and so on. Then, when you have some conviction arising from thoughtful reflection, you can consider following the Buddhist path.

Religion and the Modern World

HH. "I promote a type of secularism, the essence of which is to be a kind person who does not harm others—whether you are religious or not."

A modern challenge is the clash of materialism and consumerism. Buddhism values ethical conduct, involving delayed gratification, whereas consumerism pushes immediate happiness. Religion stresses inner satisfaction—happiness from a peaceful mind; materialism tells us happiness comes from external objects. Religious values such as kindness, generosity and honesty get lost in the rush to make more money and have more and better possessions. As a result, many people's

minds are confused about what happiness is and how to create the causes for happiness.

A Broad Perspective

Dharma practice is not comprised of just one meditation technique. Our minds are far too complex for one meditation technique or one Dharma topic to transform every aspect of our minds. Although newcomers to the Dharma may want one simple technique to practice and may see progress by sticking to it. In the long term this is not sufficient to generate all the realisations of the path.

You will understand both this life and also the existence of many lives to come. You will also understand your own happiness and suffering as well as that of the countless sentient beings who are similar to you in wanting to be happy and to avoid suffering. This broad view considering many lives and many sentient beings will contribute to your peace and happiness in this life.

A broad perspective of life and understanding the nature of duḥkha—suffering and dissatisfaction—helps improve our life now and in many lives to come.