

# How Buddhists Deal with Suffering

Lenten Lunches – Holy Wisdom Monastery

3 April 2019

# I. Who Was Buddha?

- Real name: Siddhartha Gautama -- An Indian prince, born 563 BCE
- Called “Buddha” after his enlightenment: “He who has awakened”
- His experience under the “Bodhi Tree”: he saw things as they really are.
- How do we know he woke up?



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## II. How does Buddhism deal with suffering?

### The Four Noble Truths

1. Life contains suffering (dukkha).
2. Suffering is caused by clinging (tanha).
3. To stop suffering, stop clinging.
4. To stop clinging, follow the Eightfold Path

### III. Why does clinging cause suffering?

- A. The answer has to do with two other Buddhist teachings: Interconnectedness and Impermanence
- Everything that exists is part of a vast network or web that is profoundly interconnected and therefore always changing.
  - Therefore the best description of a human being is: a “not-self” (anatta)
- B. Clinging causes suffering because it contradicts the process of interconnecting and change: it causes friction.

## IV. But why do human beings cling?

- A. We are asking about the root cause of self-centeredness
- B. The Christian response: Original Sin
- C. The Buddhist response: Original Ignorance

## V. What do Buddhists “know” or “realize” when they “wake up”?

A. That we are finite expressions (“Forms”) of infinite Inter-Being (Emptiness)

- “Emptiness” is one of the principle terms used by Buddhists for Ultimate Reality (God). Thich Nhat Hanh translates it as “Inter-Being”: the all-pervading, interconnecting energy that pulses within, and connects, everything in the universe.

B. My Tibetan Buddhist teachers describe three qualities of Inter-Being:

1. Spacious: like space it pervades and contains all that exists
2. Aware/conscious: it is the consciousness of all conscious beings.
3. Compassionate: it connects and holds everything that is.

C. As “not-selves,” we live and move and have our being by receiving and passing on the interconnecting energy and compassion of Inter-Being.

## VI. How does “waking up” help us deal with suffering?

A. We experience internal peace and security.

- Realizing we are grounded and held in the compassion of Inter-Being, we find the ability to maintain peace in the midst of whatever happens.
- We find the ability to let-go of things when we have to, and to accept things when we have to.
- “To hold on to nothing is the root of happiness and peace.” Richard Rohr 4 April 2019
- Whatever happens to us is never “the full picture” of what we are.

B. We feel compassion for others.

- The more we can feel compassion for the sufferings of others, the more we can deal with and feel compassion for our own sufferings.
- Our own sufferings become occasions to remind us of, and connect us with, the sufferings of other.

## VII. How do we wake up? How do we stop clinging? -- By following the Eightfold Path

### A. Trust (Right View, Right Intention)

- Trust that the Buddha was on to something; take his message seriously. Try it and see if you like it.

### B. Morality (Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood)

- Don't harm others. ... Buddha's message will lead you nowhere if you are unnecessarily hurting others.

### C. Meditation (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration)

- Buddhists recognize that some form of spiritual practice is necessary by which we can get beyond our usual way of thinking and looking at the world.
- Buddhists do believe, because they have experienced, that through various forms of meditation, it is possible to 'wake up' – to experience a deeper awareness of the Inter-Being that is our life.

## VII. Tibetan Buddhists' particular method for dealing with suffering: "The Compassionate Presence to Suffering."

### A. Step 1: Be mindful of your suffering and "shake hands with it."

- Whatever the difficult feeling or situation you may have or be in, recognize it; let it be; do not fight it. You don't have to like it, or approve of it; just be with it as you would be with a friend who comes to you and wants help in his/her suffering.

### B. Step 2: Let your suffering be held in the warmth and the compassion that is given to you in your Inter-Being.

- You are instructed not to have compassion for your suffering – as if you have to do it. Rather, you are asked to let your suffering be held by a Reality that is both you and greater than you – the Compassion of Inter-Being.
- A Reality that you often can feel through the presence of friends and loved ones who are with you in your suffering.

## CONCLUSION: So what advice does Buddhism offer for dealing with suffering?

- First recognize it, accept it, let it be, shake hands with it.
- And then, let it be held in the warmth and compassion of the Inter-connecting Holy Spirit.
- And know, too, that when you respond to the sufferings of others and hold them in the warmth of your compassion, you will feel your oneness with this connecting Holy Spirit, holding you as it holds others through you.