

# The Four Noble Truths

We all have the potential to be free of suffering and to find happiness

*An introduction to Buddhism*

Compiled by Albert de Booij

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*Tiger's Nest Monastery in Bhutan*

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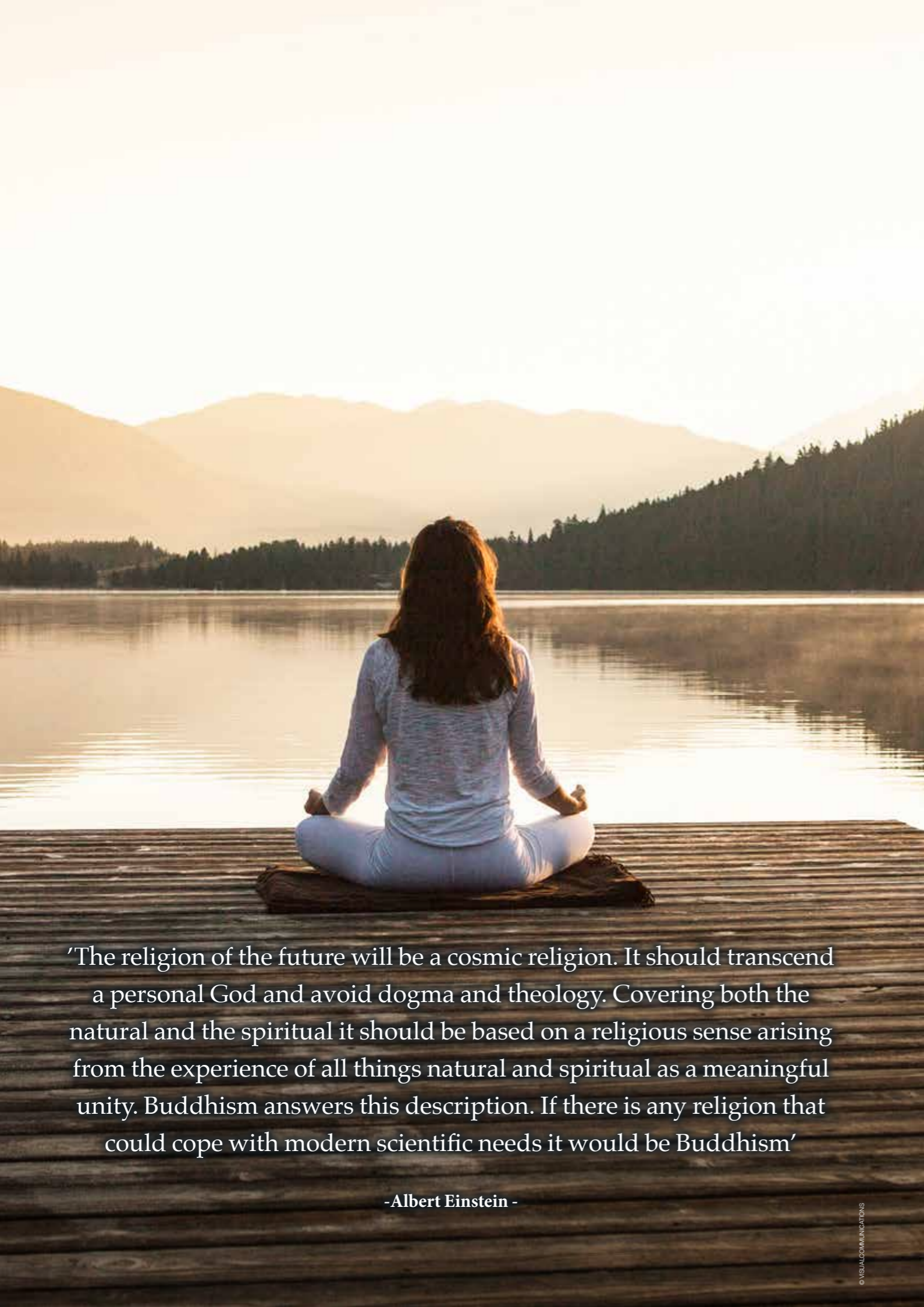
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*Golden Buddha - Tiger Cave Temple / Thailand*



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'The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that could cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism'

-Albert Einstein -

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## *A brief history*



*Buddha figurine with incense*

*About 2.500 years ago Siddharta Gautama reached enlightenment at the age of 35. He was born into the royal family of the Indian Shakya nation around 563 BC. His father was king Suddhodana, ruler of Kapilavastu, and his mother was queen Mayadevi. He was named Siddharta, 'He who accomplishes his goal'. An old hermit, Asita, visited the family and predicted that Siddharta would become a great world emperor or a spiritual leader of the world. The father definitely wanted his son to become an emperor and decided to raise him in the palace and to keep the outside world far away from him. Siddharta was surrounded with luxury and lived in abundance. At 16 years old he met Yashodara, a beautiful and noble girl. It was love at first sight. Soon their son Rahula was born.*

**A**t 29 he decides to leave the palace as he is curious to investigate the world. He is accompanied by his driver Chandaka. First he sees an old man, then a sick man and then he is confronted with a dead corps alongside the road. Siddharta is shocked and realizes that the world outside the palace is full of suffering. He is determined to find the truth and a solution for all suffering and decides not to return to his wife

and son before he is enlightened. He visits several ashrams (communities) but rejects the teachings he discovers there. He needs deeper answers. He meets five companions and lives with them in the woods for six years. He almost dies of starvation. When he is offered some food by a young girl he decides to accept the gift. He strongly now feels that the road to happiness and truth does not lie in extremes, such as ascetism or wealth, but in the middle way (Madhyama-pratipad). The true path

lies between indulgence and deprivation. Realizing this, he now decides to sit under a tree close to Bodhigaya in the north of India, and to meditate until he finds the truth, until he gets enlightened. "Here I will sit and will not move from this spot until my work is done; until I have awakened to the perfect enlightenment; until all is clear and calm and the way is certain". The devil, the demon of death, Mara, tries to tempt him, but vanishes from the scene when he understands he has no power to persuade Siddharta. At fool moon in May, Siddharta gets enlightened.

He attains the perfect understanding that frees him from suffering. Siddharta was renamed Shakyamuni, "Sage of the Shakyas". He now is 35 years old and fully awakened (Buddha: 'the one who has awakened').

Buddha now decides to share his knowledge with the world. To his five ascetic friends at Deer Park at Sarnath he reveals for the first time the Four Noble Truths. Together with the Noble Eightfold Path it forms the nucleus of Buddha's teachings. The five ascetics are the first members of the Sangha (community).



At 80 years old Buddha dies at Kushinagar and his ashes are spread throughout the Indian subcontinent in Stupa's (important pilgrimage sights). Followers collected after Buddha's death his sayings (sutra's) and developed texts to instruct on meditation, ethics and mindful living. The teachings of the Buddha are important regardless the religion you identify yourself with. You can

be a Christian and a Buddhist. Or a Jew and a Buddhist. Goldie Hawn, the famous actress, calls herself a JewBu.

**'Emptiness means that you are full of everything, but empty of a separate self'**

**- Thich Nhat Hanh -**

In the third century before Christ, emperor Ashoka turns to Buddhism and he sends monks and nuns on path to spread the dharma. (Buddha's teachings are called the dharma.) In Buddhism it is very important to take refuge in the Three Jewels. By this is meant Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The Sangha is the community, where friendship is essential. Taking refuge in The Triple Gems does not mean self-surrender or total reliance on an external force or third party for help or salvation. Dharma (the teachings in Buddhism) exists regardless whether there is a Buddha. The ultimate objective in Buddhism of practitioners is enlightenment and liberation from Samsara.

There are some major traditions in Buddhism. Three important ones are: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Theravada is the oldest and most orthodox with a strong focus on meditation. It believes three essential things (the three marks of existence). These are dukkha (unsatisfactoriness, suffering), anitya (impermanence) and annati (no self, egolessness). The 'world out there' is constantly changing, everything is impermanent and it is impossible to make a permanent relationship with anything at all. To learn that there is no self is perhaps the most profound discovery that can be made in meditation: search as hard as you will, you can never point to anything in yourself that you can definitely say is the self. Neither the body, the form, nor the thoughts,

ideas and imaginations, nor the feelings and emotions can be self, for they are unsatisfactory and impermanent. All this we can observe, while the observer remains ever elusive, standing outside the field of sense perception, outside the world. Theravada lies emphasis on monk life and reincarnation.

Mahayana is younger and more accessible. It includes schools like Zen. You can reach enlightenment in a single lifetime and you don't need to be a monk to achieve it. Mahayana knows the phenomena of Bodhisattvas; beings that delay nirvana by helping others to reach enlightenment.

Vajrayana (tantric Buddhism) is the crown jewel of Buddha's teachings because of its strong and effective transformational methods. Enlightenment means here the full development of the mind, without any veils and without fixed concepts. It fully means to understand how the

ultimate reality is. As soon as we know how to transform basic emotions, such as fear, anger, proud, jealousy, greed and ignorance, into new insights, our unlimited potential becomes visible and useful to help others. Vajrayana is influenced by the Tantra scriptures. Tantra is the ritual practice of the Vedic tradition aimed to reach mental liberation.

We can transform anger and hate into loving kindness and compassion, greed into generosity. When you feel proud you can transform this emotion/feeling by realizing that other beings are not less than you. Ignorance can be transformed into wisdom by understanding of all that is happening. Instead of being jealous, wish the other happiness.

Today, approximately 500 million – 750 million people of the world population are Buddhist. Buddhism is considered the 4th largest religion in the world.



*Tibetan prayer wheel in the area of Rumtek monastery near Gangtok, India*



*Large antique Buddha statues in the local Thai market*

'Buddhism is about revolution, not reform. It is not about improving lifestyle or easing our suffering in transient or superficial ways. It is about cutting suffering at its root. That requires radical changes in who we are, the ways we act, and how we see reality. Buddhism turns everything upside down. That's called enlightenment.'

*-Melvin McLeod, Editor-in-Chief, Lions Roar*

## *Is Buddhism a religion?*



*Buddhas at Wat Arun, Bangkok, Thailand*

*It is important to understand that to follow the educational path of Buddha you need friends and teachers. Buddha engineered a social and cultural revolution with his basic prescriptions. A religion is based on a belief system and Buddha taught the need for freedom from belief systems in order to develop the power of critical wisdom. If we want an ethical behavior, he taught us that a scientific understanding of reality is the way to go. It is not about believing, it is about understanding. Buddhism is an educational movement. Buddhism has no God, no prophet (Buddha is a truth seeker, not a prophet), no holy book. Siddharta is just a person like you and me. Anyone can be a buddha when he/she masters him/herself. All what we are is what we have thought. The mind is everything. The whole universe is mental. What we think we become. True reality is total freedom, and our knowledge of that leads us to the fulfillment of our highest destiny.*

**S**o, Buddhism is not a religion, although many think so. Everyone takes ownership. You will find happiness if you follow the path. No one can save us and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path. According to the Dalai Lama there is only one religion, Kindness. Everyone in the world understands kindness and compassion. Buddhism exists without Buddha. Our origins are

irrelevant, because the most important thing is the ever-present now. That means letting go of the past and the future. If you are depressed, you are living in the past, if you are anxious you are living in the future and if you are at peace you are living in the present. The biggest cause of suffering is the 'ego', the concept that we are a separate self. Buddha advises not to take anything for granted. No matter where you read it of who has said it, not

*Floating lantern in Wat Phan Tao, Chiangmai, Thailand*

even if he (Buddha) said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense. True happiness begins where ignorance ends. Reality is based on perception. By shifting awareness to a higher level, we are changing our reality. And we change ourselves. Awareness is the biggest agent for change. While it is true that the majority of Buddhist practitioners believe in reincarnation, many do not. They are allowed to believe in whatever they wish while they practice the teaching. No one is forced to do anything.

The highest teachings Buddha gave to pupils who did not consider him to be a god or a man, but who saw him as a mirror for their own mind. In his 45 years of teaching he gave 84.000 lessons,

advices and insights. Divided in four groups of each 21.000 lessons. The first three groups are called sutra (thread/guideline) and the last one is called tantra, the most advanced part. Buddhism is a very pragmatic 'religion'. It does not indulge in metaphysical speculation about first causes. There is no theology, no worship of a deity or deification of the Buddha. Nothing is based on wishful thinking. Everything the Buddha taught was based on his own observation of the way things are. Everything he thought can be verified by your own observation of the way things are. We have invented the idea to secure ourselves. Because of this we feel uneasy and anxious, It is only when we completely abandon clinging and cravings that we feel any relief from our queasiness.



*'My religion is very simple, my religion is kindness'*

*- HH Dalai Lama -*

## *The Four Noble Truths*



*Dambulla cave temple - Buddha statues, Sri Lanka*

*The teachings of Buddha are all about man, not around a God. We create our own suffering. This path of suffering lies within us. And also the path to set us free from suffering. Buddha teaches his first five sangha members the Four Noble Truths. To attain Nirvana, the ultimate happiness, is deceptively simple. Buddha articulated this in the Four Noble Truths.*

### **1. Dukkha**

The world is full of suffering. The word dukkha means suffering with a wide spectrum of connotations. Buddha is NOT saying that there is only suffering. There is also a light side (sukha, pleasure, happiness). Buddha stresses dukkha because it is problematical, whereas sukha is not. Things may be fine with us, at the moment, but, if we look around, we see other people in the most terrible condition, children starving, terrorism, war crimes, plastic oceans, hatred, slavery, corruption, exploitation of others, prostitution, intolerance, people being tortured. We ourselves will some day grow old, get sick and die. No matter

how we try to avoid it. Even though we try to avoid thinking about it, there are constant reminders that it is true.

### **2. Trisha**

Suffering has a cause. The root of suffering is attachment. We are attached to impermanent things and because of this we have to suffer. We also suffer from hate, jealousy, greed, and most of all, from ignorance. We must liberate ourselves from the grip of our own desires. We suffer because we are constantly struggling to survive. The harder we struggle to establish ourselves and our

relationships, the more painful our experiences become.

### 3. Nirvana

There is a way to stop the dukkha and to reach nirvana. Keep calm and stop craving and escape the suffering. The cessation of suffering is through dropping attachments. You must want what you have. Control your desires. You must change your outlook not your circumstances. Turn Ignorance into Wisdom, Anger into Compassion and Greed into Generosity. Nirvana is freedom from suffering. We must live each day at a time, then we can become happy and free. We will end suffering by abandoning our expectations about how we think things should be.

### 4. Magga

The liberation from suffering is through the Noble Eightfold path. This path helps you to do it. We have to recognize that everything is impermanent. By following this path we can transform ourselves. The highest wisdom is seeing that in reality, all phenomena are impermanent and incomplete. True wisdom is not simply believing what we are told but instead experiencing and understanding truth and reality. It requires an open, objective

mind. The path requires courage, patience and intelligence. And above all, willingness. The central theme of this path is meditation. This means the practice of mindfulness or awareness. When we abandon our expectations about the way we think things should be, we begin to develop awareness about the way things really are. We begin to develop the insight that things are really quite simple, that we can handle ourselves and our relationships very well as soon as we stop being manipulative and stop complicating things.

#### Tips to the reduction of suffering

- *Simplify your life*
- *Meditate and concentrate*
- *Follow the wise*
- *Live your life in a mindful way and be free of judgements*
- *Embrace change*
- *Live in the moment*
- *Want what you have*



# The Noble Eightfold Path

## The path to enlightenment



A Dharmachakra on the roof of Jokhang Temple in Lhasa

### Prajna (wisdom)

#### 1. The Right View (samma-ditthi)

The Right Understanding, Right View, Right Insight. Complete vision and understanding. Vision of the nature of reality and the path of transformation. Understanding Dukkha and the Four Noble Truths.

You must see the world in the right way. Wrong view occurs when we impose our expectations onto things; expectations about how we hope things will be or how we are afraid things might be. We must see things simply, as they are. We abandon hope and fear and take joy in a simple straight-forward approach to life.

#### 2. The Right Thought (samma-sankappa)

The Right Thought, the Right Intention. Act out of love and compassion. Teach you heart and feelings and mind to practice letting go. Keys are: non-violence, harmony, loving kindness and compassion. If we are able to abandon our expectations, our hopes and fears, we no longer need to be manipulative. We work with what is. Our intentions and thoughts are pure.



## ***Sila (morality)***

### **3. The Right Speech (samma-vacha)**

The Right Speech. Clear, truthful, uplifting and non-harmful communication. No lies, no insults, no harsh words, no nonsense. No gossip. Once our intentions are pure, we no longer have to be embarrassed about our speech. Since we are not trying to manipulate people, we don't have to be careful about what we say, nor do we need to try bluff our way through a conversation with any sort of fake confidence. We say what needs to be said, very simply in a genuine way. We don't show all the time that we know better. We say what we think and we think what we say.

### **4. The Right Action (samma-kammanta)**

The Right Action, the Right discipline. It covers the five precepts. 1: Do not harm other living creatures, don't be open for corruption. Abstain from taking life. 2: Do not steal (don't take what is not given). 3: No sexual misconduct. 4: Don't harm other sentient beings, or lie to people with words. 5: Do not take intoxicating substances.

## ***Samadhi (meditation and concentration)***

### **6. The Right Effort (samma-yayama)**

The Right Effort. Complete Energy or Vitality. Wrong effort is struggle. Avoid or conquer/eliminate bad thoughts. Consciously directing our life energy to the transformative path of creative and healing action that fosters wholeness. Conscious evolution. Develop good thoughts and actions. Abandon all wrong and harmful thoughts, words, deeds. Instead they should be opposite: good words, good thoughts, good deeds. When we see things as they are, we can work with them, gently and without any kind of aggression whatsoever.

### **7. The Right Mindfulness (samma-sati)**

The Right Mindfulness (being aware). Complete or thorough awareness. Conscious of the body, of feelings of the mind and mental objects. It is about precision and clarity. There are five barriers to conquer: desire, bad will, laziness, sceptic doubt and fear. We are mindful of the way we talk, the

We must not complicate things. We practice simplicity. We give up all the unnecessary complications that we usual try to cloud our relationships with.

### **5. The Right Livelihood (samma-ajiva)**

The Right Livelihood is based on correct action, the ethical principal of non-exploitation. The basis of an ideal society. No business that harms others. Avoid weapons, meat-industry, dairy-industry, intoxicants (alcohol, drugs), poisons designed to kill. No slavery, no prostitution. Non-exploitation of oneself and others. Most of us feel that our job is in keeping with the image we want to project. The truth is, that we should be glad of our job, whatever it is. We must want what we have.

Sila includes the Buddhist Ethics. Essentially, the ethical and moral principles are governed by examining whether a certain action is likely to be harmful to one's self or to others and thereby avoiding any actions which are likely to be harmful.

way we perform our jobs, our posture, our attitude towards our friends and family.

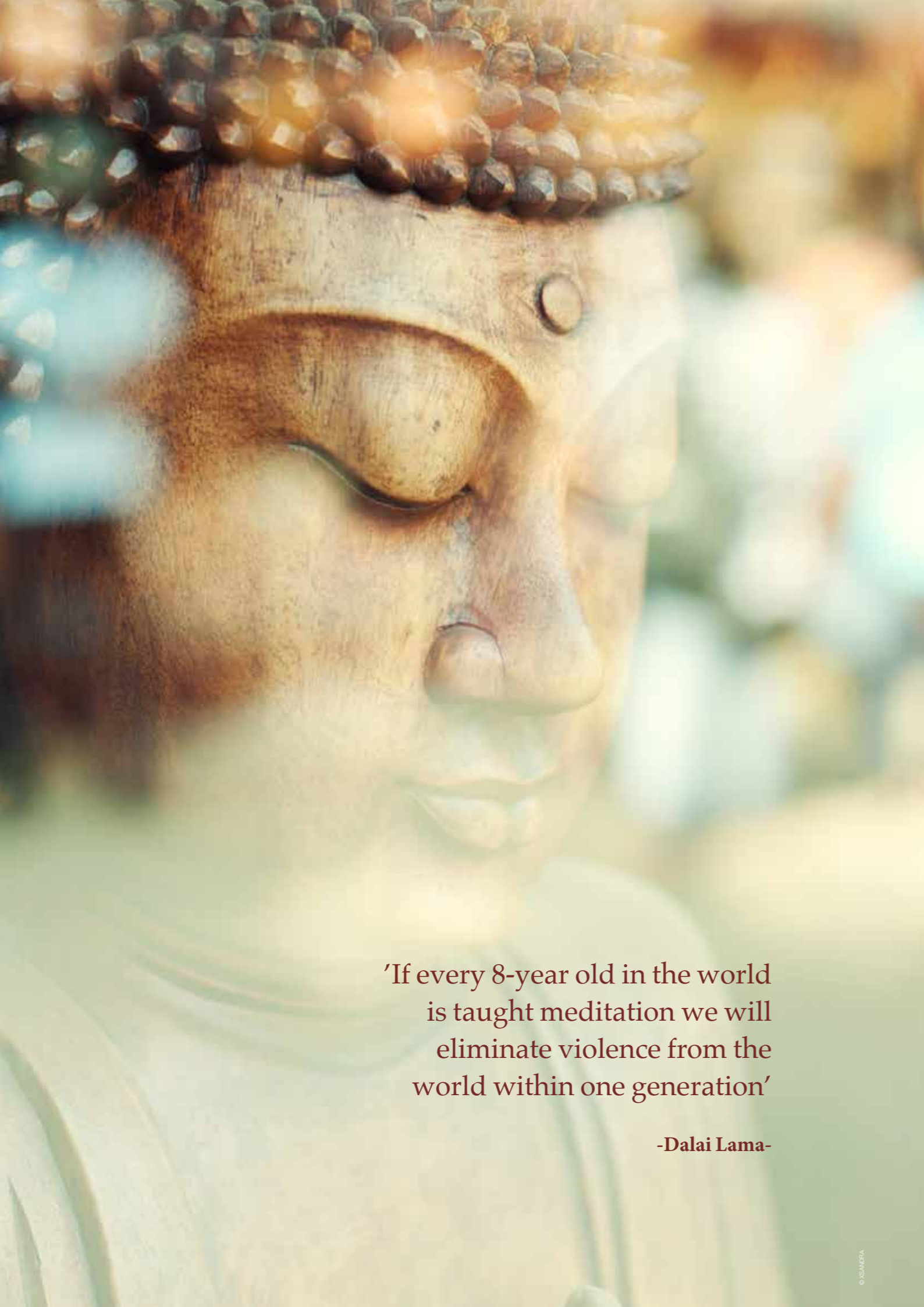
### **8. The Right Concentration (samma-samadhi)**

The Right Meditation, Concentration, Attention. Meditation plus full concentration leads to awakening. Our minds are mostly completely captivated by all sorts of entertainment and speculations. Right absorption means that we are completely absorbed in nowness, in things as they are. This can only happen if we have some sort of discipline, such as sitting meditation. Sitting meditation provides a space or gap in our preoccupation with ourselves.

The final goal is to reach nirvana. And this simply means cessation of passion, greed, aggression and ignorance, the cessation of the struggle to prove our existence to the world. We don't have to struggle to survive. We have already survived.

Summa: whole, proper, thorough, integral, perfect (related to the English word summit). In Zen mostly understood as 'pure'. Right also includes 'compassionate'.





'If every 8-year old in the world  
is taught meditation we will  
eliminate violence from the  
world within one generation'

-Dalai Lama-

## *Why is Buddhism becoming so popular?*



*Buddhism has answers to many of the problems in modern materialistic societies. It also includes a deep understanding of the human mind which prominent psychologists around the world are now discovering to be effective. Buddhism is science of mind. Buddhists are real psychonauts. Buddhism agrees with the moral teachings of other religions but goes further by providing a long term purpose within our existence through understanding and wisdom. Buddhism is tolerant and not concerned with religions like Christianity, Islam or Hinduism. That is why there have never been wars fought in the name of Buddhism. Buddhists do not preach and do not try to convert. They only explain, if an explanation is sought. Buddhism depends more on understanding than on faith.*

### **Compassion (Karuna)**

Compassion includes qualities of sharing, readiness to give comfort, sympathy and concern. Compassion is about caring. Through wisdom to understand others.

### **Karma and Rebirth**

Every action, no matter whether it is mental or physical has an effect. If a cause occurs, an effect must necessarily take place. And no effect can occur without a cause. The effect

can manifest immediately or later in time. Karma is a cornerstone in Buddhism. Karma refers to an important metaphysical concept concerned with action and its consequences. A person who is aware of this law understands the consequences of all his deeds, speech and thoughts. Basically everything causes karma if it is not in harmony with the true nature, or is produced by the ego. Rebirth in Buddhism is based on the concept of the wheel of samsara or the wheel of rebirth,

which is forever turning. It is the rebirth of karma, generation after generation. In this life you have the opportunity of ending the cycle of reincarnations permanently

### **Loving Kindness (Metta)**

Loving Kindness and Compassion to all living beings include animals.

### **Non-attachment (Aparigraha)**

Buddhism goes beyond doing good and being good. One must not be attached to good deeds or the idea of doing good, otherwise it is just another form of craving. A famous quote on non-attachment is: "Non-attachment does not mean we don't own things. It means we don't allow things to own us". Attachment is our unwillingness to face that reality". Letting go of attachment is the secret to really enjoying life and to loving others.



*Left to right: Sister True Wonder, Albert de Booij and Sister True Dedication at Plum Village France*

### **Insight (Vipassana)**

Meditation and concentration are important in Buddhism. Buddhism emphasizes Vipassana (insight) meditation as a powerful tool to assist one in seeking liberation and enlightenment.

Vipassana is a practical technic that offers a universal remedy for universal problems. Part of the eightfold path. It is a process of self-observation with the purpose to purify the mind at its deepest layers of negativity and poisons such as anger, hate, greed and fear. As negativity diminishes positive feelings arise such as wisdom, love, compassion, joy and equanimity.

### **Satori**

Satori, also called awakening is when you recognize that your true nature is eternal and when you intuitively understand that the ego does not exist as a constant. Therefore you don't have to cling to the ego. This realization can happen in meditation if you have emptied your mind of the ego. You then feel the true things of nature and you have now experienced emptiness. As a matter of fact you yourself are this emptiness, and you are immortal.

### **Enlightenment**

In this stage you must deal further with your ego and the unconscious and you have to purify your karma. The result is self-recognition, a deep understanding. Buddhism is the teaching of Enlightenment. Five hindrances block the path: sensual pleasure, ill-will, laziness, restlessness/worry and doubt. These hindrances get nutriments of evil modes of life (bodily, vocal and mental wrong-doing)

### **Nirvana**

You reach the state of nirvana, the final state, if you succeeded in permanently releasing all karmic effects. You made peace with yourself and the world and you have entered into the flow of emptiness. You are now freed from all the energy you needed to protect and build up your ego.

### **Emptiness (Sunyata)**

This doctrine asserts the transcendental nature of Ultimate Reality. It declares the phenomenal world to be void of all limitations and that all concepts of dualism are abolished. You know that you are empty of a separate ego.

### **Samsara**

Samsara is the cycle of death and rebirth without beginning and without an end. The perpetual cycles of existence or endless rounds of rebirth will only end when a sentient being attains Nirvana.

### **The three poisons**

The three poisons are a concept in Buddhism and can lead to the creation of karma. These are greed, hatred and delusion. All related to the ego. Greed means having and is the opposite of being. Greed may have different aspects. It may be the greed for recognition, for being right, for being loved, for material or immaterial things. Anything that helps us to forget suffering and fear. The cause of hatred is located in our powerlessness over not really being able to influence anything in the world and not being loved by others. If you cannot create anything, you want to annihilate life itself, by eliminating oneself or others. Hatred is a form of self-hatred. This is destructive.

## **'The three poisons in Buddhism are greed, hatred and delusion'**

The cause of hatred and greed is delusion. This consist of viewing our ego as being real, and then clinging to and following it. This happens because we feel insecure deep inside, because we do not know who we are. We get a desire to have things that we use to try to feed our ego. And if we cannot satisfy our greed, suffering ensues. This causes feelings of hatred. In addition, we cling to our selfish desires. A

form of delusion is also our desire to have one particular thing, or wanting to live a certain way as a result of other people or advertising suggesting that to us.

In the long term, no-one can be spiritually and physically healthy without knowing what his true nature is. The true nature however, is hidden by the ego and the ideas, feelings and concepts produced by the ego. Because we unconditionally follow our egos, we usually cannot find our true nature again throughout our entire lives. If you would make an autopsy to a body you will never find the ego. This concept therefore is mental.



*Albert de Booij & Sister Chan Khong (Sister True Emptiness) at Plum Village France*

### **Consciousness**

We have six types of consciousness: ear-consciousness, eye-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness and body-consciousness. The sixth sense is the mind and the corresponding object (the ideas), therefore we have a mind-consciousness. A mind or intellect is a sense organ just like an eye or an ear. Along with six types of consciousness, we have two more: the rational 'I', 'mine', the self-image and the consciousness which includes rebirth, causing the origination of a new existence.



*Myanmar Novice monks walking together*

## *Famous Buddhists*

Angelina Jolie  
Brad Pitt  
David Bowie  
George Lucas  
Goldie Hawn  
Herbie Hancock

Hermann Hesse  
Jackie Chan  
Jennifer Lopez  
John Cleese  
Kate Hudson  
Keanu Reeves

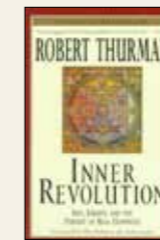
Mark Zuckerberg  
Oliver Stone  
Penelope Cruz  
Philip Glass  
Richard Gere  
Sarah Jessica Parker

Sharon Stone  
Steven Seagal  
Sting  
Tiger Woods  
Tina Turner  
Uma Thurman

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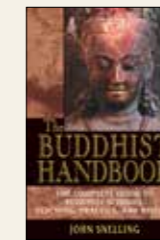


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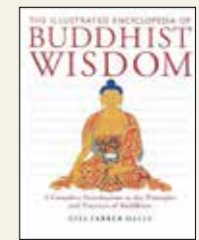
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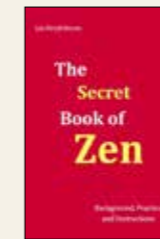
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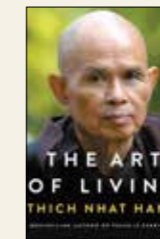
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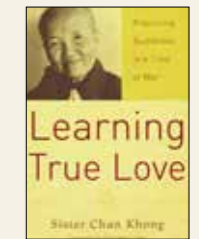


***The Secret Book of ZEN***  
By Jan Hendriksson


*Inspirational sources: Robert Thurman, John Snelling, Gil Farter-Halls, Jan Hendriksson, Lion's Roar Magazine, HH Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hahn and the Sisters True Dedication, True Wonder and True Emptiness (Sister Chan Kong) from Plum Village in France.*



***The Art of Living***  
By Thich Nhat Hanh



***Learning True Love***  
By Sister Chan Kong



'Don't try to use what you learn from Buddhism to be a Buddhist, use it to be a better whatever you already are.'

- HH Dalai Lama -

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