

8

Buddhism Without Borders

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Introduction

Buddhism is a path to liberation that is often described as a mixture of philosophy and religion taught by the Buddha. If Buddhism falls under the category of religion, it is a religion of enlightenment rather than the worship of a deity, and if it falls under the category of philosophy, it is best described as the scientific examination of the mind. Buddhism does not rely on blind faith, but rather on an exploration of the nature of conscious existence through active reasoning and rationale.

In order to discover the truth as it exists within the mind and disassociate it from outer objective phenomena, a follower of Buddhism needs to apply both intelligence and unwavering faith in one's own intuitive intelligence, or Buddha nature, as well as faith in the wisdom imparted by the great realized teachers of the tradition who have passed before, (although that faith is never blind faith, and instead is based on observation).

Buddhism provides to everyone, without any kind of discrimination, the freedom to analyze and examine the teachings until one can find the truths by oneself. Buddhism contains no policy of expansionism or aim to encourage conversions either through crossing physical or geographical landscapes or conquering mental landscapes of the mind. This is why Buddhism is widely known as a religion of non-violence and tolerance. No enlightened being has any history of a desire related to invading others beyond their borders. True Buddhists, instead, are focused on invading and overcoming their own self enemies of obscurations and delusions in order to liberate themselves from suffering so that they can then show others the way to be free of suffering.

Buddha said:

He overcomes delusions
And from the tower of wisdom
He looks down with dispassion
Upon the sorrowing crowds.

Buddha himself discovered the true path of liberation from the suffering of samsara, and he also laid out the accompanying philosophy that forms the foundation of the path. Utilizing his own experience and practice, he taught his

disciples contemplation of the four noble truths. This practice is essential for beginning the journey towards self-liberation and, equally important, for creating within oneself the motivation to develop great compassion and unconditional love. This great compassion, known as Bodhichitta, inextricably links one's own liberation with the liberation of others. The Buddha strongly emphasized that a great amount of practice is necessary in order to attain liberation, and this is why Buddhist philosophy is very much like modern science which requires extensive research and critical examination of evidence. Along with meditation, a Buddhist practitioner also needs to dig deep philosophically to explore internal emotional states of consciousness, and the nature of external objective phenomena, in order to realize concrete results.

While modern science deals mostly with the outer objective world as a concretely existing field of exploration, Buddhism deals primarily with mind and its emotions, as well as the process of perception of the phenomenal world. That is why many thinkers and philosophers today describe Buddhism as the science of mind. Both modern science and Buddhism are equally relevant for solving the fundamental questions regarding our existence in the world.

The primary purpose of following the path of Buddhism can be condensed into two steps: first, we need to purify or remove obscurations, and second, we need to achieve complete enlightenment. As for obscurations, there are two types: delusion-based obscurations to liberation (*Nyonmong gi dripa*) and obscurations to omniscience (*Shejai dripa*). The moment that these two types of obscurations become purified through the practice of the four noble truths, or by seeing the two truths of the possibility of liberation and of the path leading to liberation, whether through relative or ultimate realization, then enlightenment is attained. There is not even a split second's gap between purification and attainment. It is similar to the way sunrise spontaneously clears the darkness as it rises in the sky. It is not possible that sunshine could come earlier than the darkness giving way, since the two related states of existence proceed simultaneously.

Two Obscurations

Delusive obscurations affect us in broad, rather obvious terms and are a little easier to identify and purify than obscurations to omniscience. It is like dealing with a big pile of dirty laundry that needs only some effort to wash the dirt and stains away. For example, miserliness, unethical action, intolerance, laziness, distraction and ignorance are some delusive obscurations among eighty-four thousand delusions that can plague us. Even while engaging in meditation, there are sixteen levels of delusive obscurations which need to be abandoned. These include the six from the Desire Realm, such as desire-attachment, anger,

ignorance, pride, an incorrect view of the transitory collection and holding either of the extreme views of nihilism or eternalism. If one can abandon these six delusive obscurations, one will never be born again in the Desire Realm.

The five delusions of the Form Realm also include desire-attachment, pride, ignorance, incorrect view of the transitory collection and the two extreme views, and the five delusions of the Formless Realm are desire-attachment, pride, ignorance, incorrect view of the transitory collection and the two extreme views. These delusions can be further categorized into the three negative emotions of ignorance, desire-attachment and anger. These three negative emotions are the root causes of evil actions and suffering. Among these three, ignorance is the root cause of all other delusions.

Therefore, as one can see, because of its philosophical nature Buddhism has no clear boundary, or border, as a religion that needs to be defined, protected or expanded. The teachings of Buddhism can be applied to any religion or moral philosophy because it is fundamentally a careful, methodical and logical analysis of the nature of the mind, and also of the self and the phenomenal world. The only boundaries in the Buddhist tradition are the delusions described above because they are the challenges, obstructions and barriers which we face that block off and obscure the path to liberation. Because of their influence and power, we become confused and are unable even to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

Once our vision is tainted by obscuration, we are blocked from utilizing our innate capacity for pure vision which would allow us to see the clear path with moral clarity for others as well as oneself. Because of obscurations, our suffering tends to increase and grow more and more, until eventually we are able to overcome delusive obscurations through learning and contemplation as taught by the Buddha.

In our fortunate times, the Buddhist path is always available for those seeking clarity. The tradition has held on consistently through time and is always there as a reference for people who wish to contemplate and discover for themselves the true nature of the self and of phenomena.

As for applying direct antidotes to the six delusive obscurations described above, we can cultivate and then apply generosity against miserliness, observe moral discipline to overcome unethical action, learn patience to rid ourselves of agitation (and intolerance), make effort in order to combat laziness, use mindfulness against distraction and lastly, strive for wisdom over ignorance and delusion.

The practice of calm abiding meditation (*shamatha bhavan*) is also another antidote which can be applied to eliminate delusive obscuration. The practice of the six perfections and calm abiding meditation acts as a kind of passport for crossing the border of delusive obscuration and negative actions in order to reach the pure land, or the state of enlightenment. This is the true Buddhist land in which only enlightened and sublime beings can live. It does not require the crossing of many miles in order to reach this border, as it is within the mind itself.

The good news for all practitioners is that on the journey to enlightenment, there is no expiration date! If we persevere, we will eventually remove the obscurations blocking our pure vision and become enlightened, in this or some future lifetime.

The second type of obscuration, related to omniscience, is much more subtle and is extremely difficult to purify. Overcoming it requires extensive analysis utilizing knowledge and wisdom. It is like a more subtle stain that requires special products and great effort to cleanse. There are two types of obscurations to omniscience: the innate obscuration that is related to subtle habitual tendencies within the mind, (*bagchag thramo*) which is the most difficult to get rid of, and intellectual obstacles to omniscience, which also exist as well. There are nine levels of purification involved in eradicating subtle habitual tendencies.

The associated residue is extremely thin and translucent, almost like finger prints on the surface of glass or the smell of the garlic on cooking utensils. Even though the finger print remains unseen except in a certain light, the glass still contains the stain and it needs to be skillfully wiped away with great care and patience. It is also compared to the smell of the garlic that a mortar and pestle retain days after the actual use - the smell of garlic is still within and it is very difficult to get rid of completely. It needs to be washed over and over again, and dried out on the sun in order for the odour to completely disappear. In much the same way, eradicating these two subtle obscurations requires many levels of recognition of the true nature of mind and also the ability to rest in this pure state of awareness at all times.

There are ten levels of Bodhisattva attainment, and in the last three stages, from eight to ten, one is totally free from being ego-centered. In fact, at these stages, one has the ability to reach up to the eleventh stage, and is held back from omniscient clarity only due to the fact that these subtle obscurations have yet to be completely purified. It is only by going through this process that one can become fully enlightened. At the highest stage, there is no existence and even the idea of obscuration-based boundaries to be crossed and navigated from is

obsolete, as one now is in the golden land. Whatever one picks up becomes like gold, and no ordinary pebble or gravel can be found within this location.

The antidote to subtle obscuration is Penetrative Insight meditation, (*Vipasana*), which is practiced alongside calm abiding (*Shamatha*) meditation, which was mentioned earlier. The most secret inner border to be overcome is that of the obscurations which prevent us from seeing the face of primordial wisdom that resides within us. This is the subtle obscuration that ultimately bars us from reaching the pure land.

Buddha taught eighty-four different thousands ways and means for us to cross the border of obscurations, and all of these ways are still available to us. We just need to select the right method to suit our situation according to our own disposition. Once we have crossed the border of obscurations successfully through practice of the middle path, as taught in the three baskets of teachings (*Tripitakas*), we can then call ourselves Arhats, Bodhisattvas, or even a Buddha, for those who are extremely realized.

Actually, at these advanced stages, no desire exists to call ourselves anything, nor is there a desire to be known as even a semi-enlightened being because all desire is extinguished. Those who are truly enlightened would never claim to have reached enlightenment. Those who are not enlightened may claim to be enlightened, but in reality they should use other labels instead, since their thoughts about themselves are only the mental projections of ego of someone still caught in the web of self-deception and delusion. True enlightenment is defined as a state of perfect awareness of our self-nature, where ignorance, anger and greed have been fully purified through the clear recognition of self arising awareness, which is the essence of reality.

Two Bodies (Kayas)

If the two types of obscurations are completely purified, the two Bodies of the Buddha are attained, known as the Rupakaya and the Dharmakaya (Form Body and Truth Body). Having attained these two kayas, one becomes like the rising sun in the sphere of space, which is unobstructed by any darkness because it is always free from darkness and has the power to illuminate the whole world. In the same way, the Dharmakaya or Truth Body remains as it is in the state of perfection, free from all faults, defects or stains. This is the nature of absolute truth. The Rupakaya, or Form Body, is innately reflected within the mind of all conscious beings, and is like a wish fulfilling gem which can fulfill all wishes for all levels of sentient beings. The fully enlightened one has no intention as such because desire has completely been extinguished but still performs all noble activities effortlessly like the full moon's reflection in the waters of a pond.

Dharmakaya, or the Truth Body, is the foundation of all qualities which exist and also the source of the four Kayas or “Bodies.” The four bodies include the Natural Truth Body, (*Ngowo Nyidku*), the Wisdom Truth Body, (*Yeshe Choku*), the Complete Enjoyment Body, (*Longchoed Dzogku*), and the Emanation Body (*Trulku*). The four bodies or kayas can be condensed into Two Bodies or Kayas: the Truth Body and Form Body. The Natural Truth Body and the Wisdom Body fall under the Dharmakaya or the Truth Body. The Enjoyment Body and the Emanation Body come under Rupakaya or Form Body. These two representations of a Buddha are the object of attainment for all Mahayana Buddhists.

These two bodies are also beyond tangible and intangible phenomena as they have no border or element of obscuration, instead they are characterized by two kinds of knowledge related to all conventional phenomena as well as knowledge of all ultimate phenomena.

These two bodies are able to display and appear in the mind of enlightened beings without their travelling anywhere. For example, a practitioner who is totally free from desire-attachment, ego and anger can see the true face of the Rupa kaya or Form Body through his/her own recognition of primordial wisdom while meditating in the sitting posture. If a person is completely free from all five delusions and has instead transformed or manifested the five wisdoms, he or she will be able to see the Truth Body through their own Self-Arising Awareness.

This is why all practitioners aim to attain the Two Bodies through their practice, but the time required to accomplish this will vary from practitioner to practitioner. Some require only a few years or only one life time, however some may need multiple life times to achieve this goal. Therefore, good karma and rebirth are required to attain these two bodies, which in turn are fully dependent on the accumulation of merit from many previous lives.

The Two Merits

There are two types of merit, compounded and uncompounded merit. Compounded merit is normally impermanent and more easy to accumulate. This type of merit is the primary cause for producing the resultant Form Body or Rupa Kaya (*Zuku*) of the Buddha. Practicing of generosity, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration and faith or performing prostrations or making offerings are considered means of accumulating compounded merit which is the cause of the Form Body.

The practice of following the perfection of wisdom results in uncompounded merit which is beyond cause and condition. This type of merit falls under the categories of permanent and non-destructible. This merit can be accumulated only through the recognition of primordial awareness within the mind and by sustaining the state of perfection in every step and moment. Its result allows the practitioner to attain the Truth Body or Dharma Kaya which is totally free from mental fabrications or manipulations. Primordial awareness can be sustained only through the Self-arising Awareness.

The dual accumulation of merit is an indispensable path for Buddhists and as mentioned above, there are many different ways of accumulating merit. As for those practicing the Theravada tradition, training in moral discipline and abstaining from harmful actions are considered a means to generate compounded merit. For Mahayana Buddhists, merit which is accumulated through the three positive doors of body, speech and mind are also regarded as compounded merit due to its association with cause and condition. When merit is free from the causal conditions and is instead accumulated through sustained states of primordial wisdom which transcends any mental fabrication, this is then known as uncompounded merit.

Conclusion

The entire teachings of Buddhism can be summarized into one path of action which is the training of one's mind through application of mindfulness and awareness. If one is able to tame his or her mind fully, the Buddha said this is the true realization of the key teachings of the Buddha.

He never taught his disciple that they should go beyond the borders of various physical landscapes in order to tame others first, but taught that the focus should always be on one's own situation and mind. He also always encouraged his disciples to remain free from all negative emotions, and to cross over the borders of unwholesome thoughts and actions whenever they arise and wherever his students might be - that they should remain as a source of inspiration through the practice of mindfulness, and that sustaining the continuity of the fresh present moment is the ultimate goal when cultivating primordial awareness. This represents the real blessings of all Buddhas and Arhats.

As the Buddha said:

With single-mindedness,
The master quells his thoughts.
He ends their wandering.
Seated in the cave of the heart,
He finds freedom.