

Lesson 9 – KARMA AND THE PATH - Enlightenment

After years of having let his body starve and weaken as he lived in extremely uncomfortable conditions in the forest for six years, Siddhartha—sometimes called “the monk Gautama”—had now eaten and regained his strength, and he sat down on a pile of grass under a big tree with heart-shaped leaves called a bodhi tree. He was absolutely determined not to leave that tree until he attained enlightenment, nirvana, the end of suffering.

He began to meditate, feeling the happiness of being alone, away from the busy world. After many lifetimes of practicing generosity, lovingkindness, patience and other good values, as well as mindfulness and meditation, he had full control over his mind, and could unleash the immense power of meditation. His thoughts became still and he focused his mind, feeling the happiness of pure concentration. He let the feeling of happiness fade away so it wouldn't distract him. He became mindful and fully aware, his mind free of being attracted to anything or avoiding anything. He let go of even the slightest feelings of pleasure or discomfort. His fully concentrated mind was totally pure, perfect and steady, and as vast as space.

He directed his mind to finding out about his past lives. He began to remember some past lives, and then more and more—many thousands of lives, through eons of time. He knew the name he had in each life, the way he looked, the food he ate, what pleasures and pains he experienced, the way he died, how he was reborn, and then all about his next life. Then he could see in his mind the details of so many past lives. The last traces of ignorance were disappearing and true wisdom was arising in his mind in the first part of the night.

In the middle part of the night, he directed his mind to finding out about the rebirth of other beings—when beings pass away and are born into the next life. He now had the “divine eye” that could see the past and future lives of different beings. He could see that they die and take a new birth according to their good and bad actions and behavior, in other words, their karmas. He saw that those beings who misbehaved and who hated good-hearted people were reborn in unpleasant situations, even in hell-worlds. And those beings who were kind, had good behavior and did good deeds were reborn into a happy life with pleasant situations, even in heaven-worlds.

He saw the different worlds that beings were born into—the human world, the heaven-worlds, the world of jealous spirits, the animal world, the hungry ghost world, and the hell-worlds. He could see the good actions that resulted in being born in a human or heaven world, and he could see the bad actions that led to being born into the animal, ghost and hell worlds.

He saw beings passing away and reappearing in the next life, happy or unhappy, lucky or unlucky, in better or worse circumstances, and with beautiful or

unattractive bodies. He understood how they were reborn in different situations and circumstances depending on their actions—their good and bad karmas—in their previous lives.

In the last part of the night, he directed his mind to finding out about negative emotions—such as anger, attachment, hatred, jealousy, arrogance, and self-centeredness—and how to get rid of them.

He suddenly knew that life for all beings is full of suffering, which means discomfort, stress, unpleasantness, unhappiness, pain, illness, and grief. Even in the heaven-worlds, beings suffer knowing that their glorious life in heaven will come to an end and they will have to be reborn as a human or in another world. This came to be known as the First Noble Truth.

He also suddenly knew the Second Noble Truth— the cause of suffering—that it arises from attachment, desires, trying to get what we like and trying to avoid what we don't like.

Next, he suddenly knew what became known as the Third Noble Truth—that there is an end to suffering. That is, the suffering doesn't last forever, life after life, but the cycle of rebirth—living, dying, and being reborn over and over again—eventually ends when one attains nirvana. In nirvana, there is no more suffering, desire, hatred or ignorance, so there is ultimate peace and happiness.

Finally, he knew what was called the Fourth Noble Truth, the way leading to the end of suffering. He knew what beings must do to attain nirvana, that they must practice the eight parts of the path to nirvana, the Noble Eightfold Path, the eight parts of which are:

1. Right view—knowing that karmas (good and bad actions) have results
2. Right intention—lovingkindness, determination to not harm others
3. Right speech—avoid dishonesty, speaking abusively, and idle chatter
4. Right action—avoid killing, stealing, and misbehaving
5. Right occupation—earning a living that doesn't harm or cheat others
6. Right effort—increase compassion and kindness, avoid anger and hatred
7. Right mindfulness—being calm and fully aware of the present moment
8. Right concentration—meditating on one thing without distraction.

He knew it was the same ancient Noble Eightfold Path that was discovered by all of the past Buddhas from ages ago.

He understood how everything came into existence and why we are born; all the deepest wisdom arose in his mind.

He also realized that he had attained nirvana, that he was fully liberated, totally free from all desires and all ignorance. He was completely satisfied; there was nothing else he could possibly want. He would never have to be reborn in any

world again. He had accomplished the goal of life, the result of all his efforts over countless lifetimes.



His mind and body were so purified, that sometimes people could see rays of light radiating from him in six colors – blue, yellow, red, white, orange and a mix of those colors.

Siddhartha had now become a fully enlightened Buddha, which means the Awakened One. He was fully awakened from the ignorance of his mind, like a person awakens from sleep and realizes that his dream was only in his mind.

From that time on, he was known as Gautama Buddha, or the Buddha.

Questions:

1. What was Siddhartha determined to attain when he sat under the Bodhi Tree? (enlightenment, nirvana, the end of suffering)
2. What did he do when he first sat under the tree? (he meditated)
3. What did he remember in the first part of the night? (his past lives)
4. What did he see in the second part of the night? (past and future lives of other beings, the different worlds, how good and bad actions affect the future life of beings)
5. What did he suddenly know in the third part of the night? (the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, and that he had attained nirvana, enlightenment)
6. What does “Buddha” mean? (the Awakened One)

What the Buddha said:

“Ārogya paramā lābhā, santutṭhi paramaṃ dhanaṃ, vissāsaparamā ñatī, nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ.”

“Health is the greatest gift and contentment is the greatest wealth. A trustworthy person is the best kinsman, and nirvana is the highest bliss.”

Dhammapada 204 (15:8)

Dharma Discussion – Karma and the Path:

Prince Siddhartha always had great compassion for all beings,
So, from the time he saw people who were very old, ill, or dead,
he was determined to find out why all people must suffer
and how they can put a stop to all their suffering and be truly, completely happy.

When he sat under the Bodhi Tree, he meditated so that he would reach enlightenment.

This would not only end his own cycle of rebirth, meaning he would not have to suffer more births, suffering and death, but also, enlightenment meant that he would have the wisdom to know how to help others reach nirvana.

What does nirvana mean, exactly?

Nirvana means to extinguish, like putting out a fire.

The discomforts and sufferings of life are extinguished.

And all greed (or attachment), hatred (or aversion) and ignorance are extinguished.

How would you feel if you had not even the slightest discomfort, worry, fear, anger, stress, pain, sadness, boredom, loneliness, frustration, or any other bad feeling, and there was absolutely nothing more that you wanted?

It's hard to imagine, because every day, we always experience at least a tiny bit of discomfort, unpleasantness, worries, fears, or stress.

Can you think of any examples? Feeling tired, hungry, annoyed, bored, disappointed.

If all negative feelings totally disappeared, how would you feel?

You would feel total peace and happiness.

So, one who has attained nirvana lives in total peace and happiness.

What does enlightenment mean?

It means almost the same as nirvana, but the focus is on the level of wisdom.

There are different levels of enlightenment.

The Buddha reached the highest level of enlightenment, having perfect wisdom.

He knew everything, and knew answers to any question.

What does karma mean, exactly?

Karma is action that has an effect or result.

If you do something good, then something good will happen to you.
If you knowingly do something bad, then something bad will happen to you as a result.
But if you accidentally harm someone, then there is not a bad result.
So, karma is action that you do with good or bad intent, which leads to a good or bad result.
The result may happen in this lifetime or in a future lifetime.
That is why good people have bad experiences—we all have done some things in our past lives that were bad.
And that is also why misbehaved people sometimes seem to be so lucky—they have done good things in their past lives.

The Buddha saw how people’s behaviors led to so much suffering, and with his great compassion, he wanted to help them, to show them the way out of that misery.
So, what was the way that he saw they could escape from their suffering?
The Noble Eightfold Path.

But what about young people? They have a whole life ahead of them and aren’t thinking about reaching nirvana.
So, should kids just forget about nirvana because they aren’t adults yet? No.
We should know what the ultimate goal is like a person driving should remember where he is going, even if the journey is very long, so he doesn’t get lost and have to suffer more.
How do we get to nirvana? By following the Eightfold Path.
Like the driver must know how to get where he is going by following a map or instructions how to get there.

But, do we follow the Eightfold Path only so we can eventually get to nirvana in the distant future? Or is there any other reason?
We also follow the Eightfold Path so we can be happier right now, in this life.
How do you feel when you help others, speak kindly and honestly, have compassionate thoughts toward others, or develop good habits?
We become happier, more confident, and more peaceful.
So we make our future, and our future lives, happier and more fortunate.
Siddhartha saw this while he sat under the Bodhi Tree; he saw that the good deeds of a person resulted in a better future birth--with a healthy body, intelligent mind, and pleasant experiences.

Activities:

A. Students can memorize the elements of the Eight-Fold Path with the following method:

1. Point to your eyes and say “Right View” (or “Samma Ditthi”)
2. Put the palm of your right hand on your heart and say “Right Intention” (“Right Thought” or “Samma Sankappa”).
3. Point to your mouth and say “Right Speech” (or “Samma Vacha”).

4. Raise your hands in front of you and move your fingers in and out and say “Right Action” (or “Samma Kammanta”).
5. Lower one of your hands on your side and pretend you are carrying a briefcase, and say “Right Occupation” (or Samma Ajiva”).
6. Put right hand to brow as if shading your eyes to look for what is good, left hand held up as if to stop negative influences from coming near, and say “Right Effort” [whole mind and body effort] (or “Samma Vayama”).
7. Point to your head and say “Right Mindfulness” (or “Samma Sati”).
8. Place your hands in front of you with palms up and say “Right Concentration” (or “Samma Samadhi”).

The teacher can demonstrate first a few times, then the teacher does each action and asks students to say the corresponding words until they all say it correctly. Then the teacher asks students to volunteer to demonstrate, one at a time, until each student demonstrates all eight parts of the Noble Eightfold Path.¹

B. Cut paper into the shape of a bodhi leaf, and write the Four Noble Truths neatly on it, and decorate it with markers, glitter glue or sequins.

C. Cut poster paper in the shape of a circle, draw a Dharma wheel with eight spokes on it, and write one of the eight parts of the Noble Eightfold Path on each of the eight spokes of the wheel.

¹ This technique of teaching children to memorize the Eightfold Path was presented by Mr. Souksomboun Sayasithsena.