

***Buddhism: The Super mundane philosophy  
transcending across the centuries.***

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**Introduction:**

Religion has been an inalienable part of human life transcending all time and space on this planet. History provides that the life of average citizen has been widely influenced by the impact of the practising religions of the land, be it Hinduism. Philosophy and religion, thus; from the very beginning of the mankind have shaped the life of the individual right from his birth till his death. The duties of human beings towards each other, including those of the king towards his subjects had been based on certain laws and canons evolved from time to time by the enlightened saints, philosophers and exponents of religion and culture. However, the nature and form of impact of the religion had varied from region to region, from state to state and from races to races. Evidences suggest that of all the philosophies and religions, Buddhism has possessed the imprint of such expressions to mould the life of the people throughout this large Indian subcontinent. And among the ancient Indian Kings who, in the spirit of a true follower of a religion or a dharma, had undertaken from time to time upon themselves the duty of organising activities of public welfare through state sponsored activities.

The fundamentals of real Buddhism are contained in the three assertions of faith:

Buddham Sharanam Gachchhami (I take refuge in the Buddha),

Dhammam Sharanam Gachchhami (I take refuge in the Dharma) and

Sangham Sharanam Gachchhami (I take refuge in the Organisation).

The first of these, Buddham Sharanam Gachchhami, essentially proclaims recourse to faith in the teachings of the Guru, who in this case happened to be Gautam Buddha. This has been,

since the earliest times, an essential characteristic of traditional Hindu. For one instance, the Mundaka Upanishad expressly prescribed taking refuge in the Guru, who would in his own way instruct one about the Self

The second article of faith, Dhammam Sharanam Gachchhami, stands for adherence to the Dharma, obviously, by implication, for adherence to Dharma as against Adharma, and not against any other Dharma.

Third assertion of faith, Sangham Sharanam Gachchhami, proclaims the recognition of a hierarchical social system among the religious. It involves a general formulation of religious discipline and accreditation of religious achievement.

Buddhist thinking tends in the direction of what we call pragmatism. The value of a thought is to be judged by what you can do with it, by the quality of the life which results from it. Wherever one finds evidence of such qualities a detachment, kindness, serene self-confidence, etc, one would be inclined to believe that the 'philosophy' behind such an attitude had much to say in its favour.

Lord Buddha was a great harbinger of peace and happiness of the mankind. He preached for the compassion, social harmony, social equality and human dignity. He freed the mankind from dogmas and false beliefs. He showed the right path to the householders to spend their earnings, to lead a happy and peaceful domestic life. He spent his whole life, till his last breath, moving on foot from village to village, from town to town and from one Janapad to another for the welfare and happiness of mankind, *Sabbe Satta Sukhi Hontu* (Be all beings happy)

Although all religions claim that they are humanitarian, but Buddhism surpasses all other religions in this regard. Its broad-mindedness and liberality remove all hindrances in the way of adapting and following Buddhism. Factors like caste, creed, age, sex, nationality and rituals find no place in Buddhism. This shows the profound altruistic elements in Buddhism. Grace and compassion are the hallmarks of Lord Buddha's personality and preaching's and it is due to this fact that his Dhamma has crossed the apparently insurmountable geographical and national boundaries and captured the imagination of the whole world.

When he advocated that the human recourse from all the social inequality is possible, he had to address the issue from the personal to the societal level and hence his identification of the The Four Noble Truth and Eight Fold Path.

The four Noble Truths are –suffering (Dukkha), Cause of Suffering (Dukkha samudaya), Cessation of Suffering (Dukkha – nirodha) and way to cessation of suffering (Dukkha-nirodhagámini Patipatá). To get rid of suffering, it is most essential to follow rightly the fourth Noble Truth – Dukkhanirodhagáminipatadá. This Fourth Noble Truth is Arayastanika Marga – The Noble Eight Fold Path.

The Noble Eight Fold Path is as follows –

१. सम्मा दिट्ठि सम्यग्दृष्टि	Right View
२. सम्मा संकप्प सम्यक् संकल्प	Right Thought or Right Intention
३. सम्मा वाचा सम्यक् वाचा	Right Speech
४. सम्मा कम्मन्त सम्यक् कम्मन्ति	Right Deed or Right Action
५. सम्मा आजीव सम्यगाजीव	Right Livelihood
६. सम्मा वायाम सम्यक् व्यायाम	Right Effort
७. सम्मा सति सम्यक् स्मृति	Right Mindfulness
८. सम्मा समाधि सम्यक् समाधि	Right Concentration

The Eight Noble Fold Path addresses the source of Buddhist moral conduct. If followed rightly would enable to get salvation also. On the similar line after going through these phases, it also emphasises the Eight Self-Realisation which leads to tremendous Self introspection.

**The Eight Realizations:** The Sutra of the Eight Realizations of great being, can be divided into two parts.

- a) The first part is the first realization.
- b) While the second part is the remaining seven.

This First Realization is concerned with the Buddha's analysis of this world; in this realization he discusses Impermanence, Emptiness, the Nature of Mind, and the Cycle of birth and death. The next seven realizations are concerned with his teachings on the nature of the human mind and how to live in this world. If we understand the principles discussion in the first realization, we will be in a very good position to understand how to apply the teachings of the next seven realizations to our lives.

The most important ideas in the **First Realization are Impermanence and Emptiness**: Emptiness is the non-difference between ‘Yes’ and ‘No’, and the truth escapes us when we say ‘it is,’ and when we say ‘it is not’; but it lies somewhere between these two. The man who dwells in emptiness has neither a positive nor a negative attitude to anything.

The Buddha’s explanation of life in this world is founded on the idea of impermanence. He taught that everything changes and that nothing stays the same. The Buddha emphasized impermanence not to discourage us, but to make us realize the true nature of existence. If we understand that everything is impermanent, we will behave differently than if we mistakenly believe that this world is not subject to constant change. People change; phenomena change, our thoughts, dreams, feelings, ideas, and lives change all the time. Nothing stays the same.

Change occurs in two basic ways: from Moment to Moment, and over longer periods of Successive or Continuous change.

Momentary change is apparent all around us. The wind blows, sounds come and go, our hearts beat, our eyes blink-everything in us and around us changes from moment to moment.

Successive change is also apparent all around us, but some thought is required to see it. Successive change means a continuous accumulation of momentary changes in something that we normally think of as enduring over time, such as a nation, a geological formation, a sports team, a traditional way of doing something, a language. As the years go by, a vast number of momentary changes accumulate in such entities. Eventually, they will not even resemble their original states. The erosion of sea coasts or the evolutions of species on earth are also good examples of successive change. In the moment we do not notice these changes, but over time they are very large. When the Buddha says that nations are unsafe and unstable, he is referring to the idea of successive change.

Once we are convinced that all things change, there are two basic ways that we can use this information. We can use it to prepare ourselves to accept that which we must accept, and we can use it to inspire ourselves to look toward the future with a hopeful and positive attitude. Most people feel gloomy when they contemplate the truth of impermanence because they only imagine good things turning to bad. But just as good things can turn to bad, so also can bad things turn to good. Change leads us out of difficult situations, it relieves us of our cares, and it is the process by which we transform ourselves into Buddha. If nothing changes, we would never grow. All things that arise must change and decline and they are but false appearance without any stable essence. This means that if we believe that anything has a

stable essence or that it is not subject to change, we are being distracted from the truth by a false appearance. All things that arise must change.

The concept of impermanence goes hand in hand, with the Buddha's teaching on emptiness means that nothing has a permanent "self-nature" or essence. Emptiness is a special term in Buddhism. It means "having no permanent, definite, or absolute aspect whatsoever". The Buddha taught that everything within the phenomenal universe is empty. Nothing within it has any permanent, definite, or absolute aspect whatsoever. Emptiness simply means that nothing has an unchanging essence or self-nature that is independent of other things. To believe otherwise is to be deluded. When we understand emptiness, we change the way we live and the way we feel.

When we do not understand emptiness, we tend to cling to things and have strong emotional reactions to what are really only transitory appearances. The concept of emptiness flies in the face of basic human psychology, for one of our strongest tendencies is to treat ourselves, other people, and the things of the world as if they were permanent, enduring entities that can and should be imbued with all of the significance our passion would like them to have. When emptiness is fully understood, our minds grow beyond the confinements that hold us fixed in a deluded assessment of the conditions of our lives. The teachings of the Buddha are at once practice, philosophical, and mystical, for to experience his teachings is to experience life as you never have before.

After claiming that the four elements are empty, the Buddha adds that there is no self within the five skandhas. This means that the self or the personality is empty. Just as all things, all ideas, all phenomena, and all phenomenal states are empty, so too are all people. The word skandha is a Sanskrit word that means "heap."

The five skandhas are the heaps of psycho-perceptual data that make up the world of delusion. The five skandhas are form, sensation, perception, mental activity, and individual awareness.

They are the building blocks, or the five basic stages, of deluded awareness. The question arises , Why did the Buddha teach the five skandhas? The answer lies he taught them to help us cure three forms of delusion and all that follow from them.

The three forms of delusion are: the delusion of having a self-nature, the delusion of having a self that perceives, and the delusion of having a self that acts".

If we can see our minds for what they are, the Buddha said, ‘we will know how to use them to help rather than harm the world we live in. When we do not understand them for what they are, we tend to become selfish and to be motivated by greed, anger and ignorance’.

- a) The first skandha is Form: A form can be an object, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, a memory, a thought, a dream, or anything else that stimulates further mental activity.
- b) The second skandha is Sensation: Following the appearance of a form, there is a sensation that the form is agreeable, disagreeable, or neutral.
- c) The third skandha is Perception: Perception follows the sensation of a form.
- d) The fourth skandha is Mental Activity: Once a form has been perceived, mental activity begins. Memories arise, reactions begin, and behavioural habits start functioning. Each unit of mental activity can itself be analyzed as a form. Taken all together, these myriad forms of mental activity make up a whole that is quite complex. Upon this whole is built the last skandha-individual awareness.
- e) Fifth Skanda Individual Awareness: It is based upon the four skandha that precede it. Since it is itself a complex construction that is dependent on many parts, the Buddha said that it is empty. Though we may believe that our individual awareness is real and that it endures over time, a clear understanding of the four skandha that underlie it should show us that it is not a self-contained entity that endures over time. It is a “false appearance”, a delusion. Our minds create the world’s we live in seeing through the five skandhas is not a mere intellectual exercise. It is both a profound experience and one of the principal goals of all Buddhist practice. When we see beyond the five skandhas, the container self, which confines the fullness of human consciousness, is washed away and the world appears, as if reflected in a great mirror.

The **Second Realization**, in this realization, the Buddha emphasizes excessive **Desire or Greed**. Buddha emphasizes, realize that excessive desire is suffering; healthy desires included reasonable social activity, temperate sexuality and a balanced pursuit of hobbies or other amusements. “Excessive desire” means going beyond these parameters. Sometimes it takes wisdom to know when we are going too far in one direction or another, but for the most part, most of us know where our limits are. When we exceed them, we cause suffering reasonable desires do not preoccupy us, and they are not distracting or extreme.

Excessive desires strain our health, impair our concentration, and often cause us to become angry or envious. They seduce us into both to ourselves and to our friends.

The Buddha taught that excessive desire is a principal cause of our attachment to the false appearances of this world. Coupled with anger and ignorance, excessive desire binds us to the cycle of birth and death, and to the recurring illusions that keep that cycle going. In modern times, there are literally thousands of ways that we can indulge our desires.

The profound carving of our being, issue from a level that is far deeper than anything that can be satisfied by sensual gratification. Our deepest longings are an intimation of a truth that transcends all false appearances and all sensory needs. The Buddha taught that the way to find this truth is to understand that the false self is an illusion and that it maintains itself through greed and anger. When we give ourselves over to our desires, they quickly destroy us. When we moderate them, they gradually lead us to the centre of our lives.

In the storehouse of our deep mind there lies dormant the realization, that we already are complete and that nothing needs be sought. Human desires are inexhaustible, and yet that which can be fulfilled them is limited. The way to overcome excessive or misplaced desire is to understand what causes it. When the cause is understood the sure is much easier to see.

They are what we draw on for most of our worldly behaviour. Of course, the human character also contains intimations of enlightenment, love, kindness, joy and all of the many promptings that lead us toward Buddha hood. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to use this second group of traits to overcome the first group.

Generally, our harmful fixations work together as a group. Few of us have only one of them. People who are greedy also tend to be prod, quick to anger, ignorant of the consequences of their behaviour, and doubtful that life could ever hold more for them than what they desire from it. They also tend to have many wrong views.

The **Third Realization** focuses on; **Contentment is the source of Happiness**. It is to be realized that the human mind is insatiable, and that it constantly strives for more, thus adding to its transgressions and mistakes. Contentment allows us to make wisdom our only concern. If we are impatient and dissatisfied with our lives, we will be given to angry moods and to pursuits that waste our energies and only worsen our situation. Words can only serve as aids to our improvement, never as substitutes for life itself. Buddha emphasizes that the Dharma not to tell us what to do, but to help us learn the truth for ourselves. When he advises us to be satisfied with what we have, he is not issuing a command or preaching to us.

The **Fourth Realization, Laziness leads to downfall**, under this we need to realize that laziness leads to downfall. Be diligent and break the hold to harmful fixations. If we want to make progress, he said, we must swim against the current, for if we do not, we will be carried downstream. Laziness leads to downfall because it is based on ignorance and self-defeating behavior. When we emphasize those things that are negative or frightening in life, we tend to withdraw from the world and to dislike everything that happens to us. When we emphasize those things that are positive in life, we tend to reach out to others and to find pleasure in doing what we know we must do anyway. Negative or lazy ways of thinking tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies. Discouraging thoughts tend to create discouraging outcomes because the conditions that prevail within our minds eventually become manifest in the events of our lives. Diligence is that which helps us “break the hold of harmful fixations” and bad habits. It is based on a deep resolution to become a better person, and not a superficial infatuation with mere concepts of goodness or piety. When we are really determined to do something, powerful, forces often will come to our aid. Diligence can unleash strengths in us that we never knew we had.

The **Fifth Realization** is about **Study widely, listen carefully**: It is to realize that ignorance gives rise to the cycle of birth and death. Buddhist wisdom is different from what most of us think of as learning or intellectual achievement, for the wisdom that the Buddha has taught is always concerned with life and the many ways that we can benefit the living around us. The modern world presents us with many example of wisdom that has caused more harm than good.

People are capable of discovering marvellous inventions, but when these inventions are used to harm others their implementation cannot be called wise by any stretch of the imagination. True wisdom is deep insight into the nature of being. It is profound understanding of motive and intention. Wisdom is that which guides us to benefit both ourselves and others at the same times. It is that which leads us from the delusive cycle of birth and death.

The **Sixth Realization, the importance of being Generous**: It is to realize that resenting poverty and suffering leads only to more of the same. The realization concerns our attitudes toward poverty and wealth. There are two basic things to understand about the meaning of this realization. The first is that neither poverty nor wealth is permanent states of being. No material condition is permanent.

The second important thing to understand about this realization is that the dualistic pair – poverty and wealth – can have many different meanings. The Buddha is not just talking about material poverty and wealth, but also about intellectual, moral, and spiritual poverty and wealth. All of us surely have known someone who was spiritually wealthy though materially poor. Generosity is very important virtue, coupled with patience; it is basic to all social activity. Generosity is that virtue which reaches out to others, while patience is that which allows us to tolerate the unkindness with which we are met. Emotional generosity means giving of ourselves. Buddha described this form of generosity as teaching others not to be afraid. Fear is the great unrecognized emotion. It leads us to selfishness, anger, resentment, cowardice, and many other negative states of mind.

The **Seventh Realization**, emphasizes on **Morality fosters Self- control**: This realization suggests that the five desires bring nothing, but trouble. Though we live in this world, we do not become stained by worldly pleasures. Roughly speaking the five desires are the desire for wealth, sex, fame, food and sleep. In a more philosophical context, they can also be understood to be any sensual craving associated with seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching.

However we define them, the five desires of this realization are material desires that are wholly of this world. This is why the Buddha also says ‘though we live in this world, we do not become stained by worldly pleasures’. The way to enlightenment requires dedication to the beings to this world, but not to the incidental sensual pleasures that may arise from this dedication.

The origin of all suffering can be found among the “three poisons” of greed, anger, and ignorance. The five desires are a more detailed description of greed. Greed, anger, and ignorance are called the three poisons because they kill spiritual joy and ruin goodness. Sometimes they are also called the ‘three fires’ because they consume out joy, if we let them.

The five desires draw us in by a kind of selective hypnosis that emphasizes certain details of our craving while ignoring others. Desire is like honey on the blade of a knife. If we are careful about sampling it and if we know that the sharp edge is there, we will probably not harm ourselves. But if we are ignorant of its true nature, we will surely cut ourselves on the steel that lies concealed beneath the sweetness.

As we progress in spiritual studies, there comes a point when we realize that morality is not something that confines us or limits us, but that it is the only means we have to truly become

free. By using morality to learn a more enlightened kind of behaviour, we free ourselves from the complications that inevitably result from a life devoted to indulgence and sensual pleasure. The Buddha's teachings on morality are an inestimable gift, for they help us to discover who we really are.

The **Eighth Realization** and the final one is the **Mahayana Vow**: in the final one the concept of life and death are like flickering flames and that its suffering is endless. So Vows strengthen the mind and harness its powers. They provide us with the impetus to keep going when we feel weak and distracted. A vow is the mind telling itself that it must become better, stronger and purer.

A vow is an act of consciousness that alters the nature of the consciousness that makes it. Vowing is an immediate and powerful way to improve ourselves. When we vow, we make a conscious change in our inner dialogue. Vows raise our awareness by changing what is happening in our minds. First we restrain ourselves by refraining from harming others, then we listen to ourselves in deep meditation and lastly we change ourselves by consciously internalizing the wisdom of the Buddha.

Vows naturally arise from a deep understanding of this process. The Dharma teaches us how to approach the awakened state as only the mind can overcome the mind.

**Conclusion:** Owing to its deep humanistic concerns the message of Lord Buddha is as relevant today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it was in the past. A religion is an organization of spiritual aspirations which rejects the sensory world and negates the impulses which bind us to it. The wisdom schools had always maintained that we are troubled because we falsely identify with our true self, something we find in our empirical self. In reality all things and thoughts are, but mind-only. The basis of all our illusions consists in that we regard the objectifications of our mind as a world independent of that mind, which is really its source and substance.

The Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse expressed very beautifully in the Tao-Te king (chapter 7):

“Heaven is lasting and earth enduring.

The reason why they are lasting and enduring is that they do not live for themselves;

Therefore they live long.

In the same way the Sage keeps himself behind and he is the front;

He forgets and he is preserved.

Is it not because he is not self-interested That his self-interest is established?"

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