

WHY WE SUFFER

AND THE
BUDDHA'S
TREATMENT PLAN



Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA)
and
Heartland Zen

Text and artwork by Carol Corey

WHY WE SUFFER
and the
BUDDHA'S TREATMENT PLAN

Produced and distributed by
Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA)
and
Heartland Zen

Text and artwork by Carol Corey



To order additional copies contact:
Mid-America Buddhist Association
299 Heger Lane
Augusta, MO 63332-1445
(636) 482-4037
office@maba-usa.org

For more information, visit
www.maba-usa.org **www.heartlandzen.org**

First edition, 2019
St. Louis, Missouri



Contents

7 From Riches to Rags

10 Don't Make it Worse

11 The 4 Noble Truths

13 The Eightfold Noble Path

16 See For Yourself

17 Some Core Teachings

18 The 3 Refuges

20 The 3 Pure Vows

22 The 3 Marks of Existence

24 The 3 Poisons

26 The 4 Heavenly Abodes

28 The 5 Precepts

30 The 6 Perfections

32 Meditation and Instructions

34 The Major Traditions

36 Map

From Riches to Rags

Many people would do whatever it takes to live in a palace. They'd make sacrifices and work hard.

Or maybe find other ways to reach their particular idea of fame and fortune. For the Buddha it was just the opposite. He went from riches to rags!

As a young man he had it all: a beautiful wife and child, a palace, servants, all he could eat. According to historians, the Buddha grew up as a prince in northern India more than 2500 years ago. His name was Siddhartha Gautama and his father had big plans for him.

His father, who was a famous king, did his best to keep his son from ever experiencing or even seeing pain and suffering, poverty and death. He kept the young man confined to the palace and away from what people were experiencing on the outside.

But a ride with his driver through the village showed him that his life of privilege was just one side of the story. What he saw shocked him to his core and changed his life. This may be a legend, but it reflects the profound change that any of us might experience when we begin to question and look closer at the way things appear.

The prince observed what later came to be called ***The Four Messengers: a sick person, an elderly person, a corpse, and finally a sage sitting in serene meditation.*** His new understanding of the nature of reality changed the course of his own life and of history.

He didn't look for an escape, or turn back to the pleasures of the palace. He sought a way to live in a world of suffering with freedom and equanimity.

After a long and difficult spiritual search that lasted six years, the homeless prince-turned-wanderer entered a state of deep meditation where he learned to see the impermanent and ever-changing nature of his own mind.

Sitting under a sacred fig tree in northern India, Gautama experienced a profound awakening. He knew that he had realized something very important and had to decide what to do about it.

He saw that the nature of reality is ever-changing. What we think is solid and permanent only appears that way. Everything happens because of certain causes and conditions coming together in particular ways—and then changing again. What appears to be death is also a manifestation of this process.

Nothing is permanent and unchanging. Not even your ***self***. This means we can let go a little and not cling so tightly to what we think or believe is true. In fact, ***you don't have to believe everything you think.***

Buddhism is now recognized as a world religion, but when the homeless Prince Siddhartha sat under a tree and experienced what we sometimes call enlightenment, he wasn't thinking about it that way.

After his realization, the Buddha spent the rest of his life traveling the countryside in northern India, teaching and showing others how to live in the world more harmoniously.

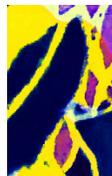
As the years passed, he gathered many devoted followers, who found freedom by putting his teachings into practice and offering them to others.

The Buddha never claimed to be a god, or to have an explanation about the origin of the universe, or have any magical powers. He was simply a man who observed how things worked and realized this way of viewing the world could help reduce suffering and lead to liberation.

He became a wandering monk, living simply, and with a spirit of generosity. His purpose in life was to show how suffering actually operates, how to reduce or eliminate its causes, and to show that our response to a situation **can either make it better or make it worse.**

The Buddha dedicated the rest of his life to investigating the causes of human suffering. His project was to teach and demonstrate a more skillful way of living in the world. He didn't set out to create a religion, but rather encouraged people to test what he was saying for themselves. It was his followers who established the various traditions of Buddhism that are found throughout the world today.

The Buddha never returned to the riches of his father's palace, but his insights and teachings have influenced and benefited multitudes.



Don't Make it Worse

Nothing can be done about the date of your birth or who your parents are, so why stress about it? You'll have more energy for taking care of your life as it is, not as you wish it would be.

Humans seem to be programmed to seek happiness and to avoid pain. **But it's more complicated than that.** Getting what we think will bring happiness often does just the opposite. Wishing for things to be other than they are can be a recipe for heartbreak, and fighting against reality is a losing battle.

Did you ever finally get that special new pair of shoes, only to soon start thinking of them as just okay and wishing for a different model?

Buddhism also teaches how impermanent everything is, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Difficulties and change can bring wisdom, compassion and new opportunities to our lives. Reacting with anger or revenge can only make a bad situation worse.

When we start with the way things are (impermanent and often beyond our control) and go from there, we're much more grounded and realistic.

We can look at the situation with clear eyes instead being angry about things that can't be changed, or hanging on too tightly to things that we want to last forever.

A little creativity can go a long way.

The 4 Noble Truths

You could say the Buddha was a doctor who studied the symptoms, made a diagnosis, and provided a treatment plan. Like any patient who wants to get well, it's best to follow the directions as closely as possible. What are now called the *Four Noble Truths* are considered the essence of his teachings.

1. THE DIAGNOSIS:

Suffering is a result of being alive.

2. THE CAUSE:

Attachment, aversion, clinging, and delusion.

3. THERE IS A REMEDY:

Follow the directions.

4. THE TREATMENT PLAN:

The Eightfold Noble Path.

AS TRADITIONALLY STATED

- 1. The Truth of Suffering or Stress**
- 2. The Truth of the Cause of Suffering**
- 3. The Truth of the Ending of Suffering**
- 4. The Truth of the Path leading to the ending of Suffering, known as the Eightfold Path.**

In Other Words...

1 **Life is stressful and we suffer**

Birth is difficult, sickness is difficult, old age is difficult, and death is difficult. Even when things seem good there's often a feeling of unease. The word for all of this in the Buddha's time was *dukkha* and it's still used today. It refers to the unease and unsatisfactoriness that humans often experience as a part of daily life.

2 **The cause of stress**

Our attachments and preferences can lead to all sorts of difficulties. It often comes down to wanting pleasant things and being upset when we get what we don't want. Or being granted a wish, then fearing that we're going to lose it. Often it's not so much the pain or situation itself, but our reaction to it that can become a problem and result in suffering.

3 **The Treatment Plan**

The Buddha saw that most of the time we have a choice about what the next step is going to be.

Anger? Revenge? Heartbreak? A helping hand?

What will it be? There are options. How we respond can lead to more complications and danger—or to harmony and peace, at least some of the time.

The Buddha taught that it's clinging to how we think things should be that causes much of our stress.

And he spelled out how to be more skillful and compassionate. Habits and objects of desire can be overwhelming, but we don't have to be at their mercy.

4

The Eightfold Path

You'll know you're on the right path when things hurt less, or you don't react so quickly with anger, or you respond with a kind word instead of something mean.

'Right' doesn't mean good as opposed to bad, or right as opposed to wrong, or right as opposed to left. The guidelines are not commandments or rules.

You could substitute the words **skillful** or **wise**, and maybe see a little better what the Buddha was getting at.

It's a view that promotes a wider view of our circumstances and a deeper decision-making process.

The Eightfold Path is the cure. It's a practical set of guidelines meant to show how to live more skillfully and in ways that will be of benefit to ourselves and others.

It might look like they are steps to be followed one after the others, but it's more like seeing how one of the steps relates to the others and how they work together. They are all equally important.



1. Right (Wise) View or Understanding

Seeing the big picture.

It is taking a step back and noticing how our words and actions affect other people and the other living things that share our planet. It is paying attention not only to immediate consequences but those far into the future; It is taking full responsibility for what we say and do.

2. Right Thought or Intention

Skillful thinking rather than wishful thinking.

Right intention sets action into motion, along with the consequences that follow. **How** do you want to be in the world? This is a more important question than **what** you want to be. Right intention would mean deciding to be of benefit to ourselves and others, rather than causing harm or distress.

3. Right Speech or Skillful Speech

Ask yourself one or more of these questions before speaking:

Is it true?

Is it timely?

Is it spoken with kindness?

Is it beneficial?

Is it spoken with good intention?

Would it be better to remain silent?

4. Right Action

Our actions have consequences. Right actions are compassionate, honest, and respectful.

Ask yourself:

Do people feel safe around me?

Can I be trusted?

Am I dependable?

5. Right Livelihood

What we do for a living should be legal, honest, and beneficial. Or at least not cause harm. This can be complicated, but try to be mindful of the consequences of your work on others and on the planet. Often how a job is done is more important than the work itself.

6. Right Effort

Staying on the Eightfold Path requires effort because much of the world is going in the opposite direction. We often don't even know why we have certain reactions, so it takes determination to look a little deeper and develop qualities like generosity and kindness. And to prevent greed and anger from taking hold.

7. Right Mindfulness

This entails the ability to switch from being a participant to an observer. To watch the moment without judgment, comparing, or comments. It's moment by moment awareness, rather than being lost in thought and separated from what you are doing. Awareness increases insight. It takes practice and remembering to come back to the present and to what you are actually doing. By sitting still and being mindful it's possible to see how everything arises and passes away due to causes and conditions. Practice begins right where we are.

8. Right Concentration

This is where meditation comes in. The practice is to focus on an object of meditation and stay there, maybe only for the length of one breath. It's not always easy or peaceful, but we begin to see how the mind works (usually jumping from one subject to another.) This leads to insights, such as the realization that thought come and go randomly and don't really have any substance.

See for yourself

All religions change over time, and Buddhism is no exception. The Buddha traveled the countryside of northern India giving talks and teachings for 45 years after his awakening, but there are no recordings of what he said. So we have to rely on the memory of his devoted disciples. He often spoke in lists, which made his instructions and sermons easier to remember. Plus, people at that time had better memories than most of us do today.

Councils were held, and sometimes there were arguments over what the Buddha said. Then, as people traveled to other countries, they took the teachings with them. Starting in India, the religion spread first to China, then on to the many other countries shown in the map on page 17.

The Buddha wasn't concerned about how the universe was created and didn't give an opinion about God, or gods, or the soul. He was more concerned about day to day living and the many decisions that we face from morning to night.

So you can practice his teachings along with any other religion you might be interested in. He saw a way out of suffering and wanted to let others know about it. But he never said he was a god or divine.

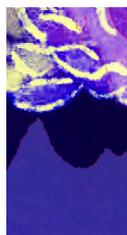
He observed how things work and believed that his insights could help reduce suffering. ***His advice was to see for yourself if his words were helpful and true—not to just take his word for it.***

Some Core Teachings

The Buddha's talks were never written down during his lifetime, but his followers had very good memories. His teachings have become known as *sutras* and were collected and organized, as people repeated what he said. Over time, a vast collection of his talks (and commentaries by others about them) were created by numerous monastics, as well as philosophers and religious thinkers. Now, with global communications and the wide reach of the internet, we have more access to his wisdom and instructions than ever.

The lists found on the following pages provide some of the primary teachings of the Buddha and his followers. As they took hold in other countries, interpretations and commentaries by others were added and soon monasteries and temples were constructed, rules were established, and it became clear that a major new religion was taking form.

In some countries, meditation stands out as a primary teaching, but the Buddha warned that training of the mind had to be combined with moral and ethical behavior. How can a mind be peaceful when actions are harmful? Skillful and beneficial behavior come from a non-reactive mind. One follows the other, like the wheels of the cart follow the hooves of the horse.



The 3 Refuges

(Sometimes known as the 3 Treasures)

1. I take refuge in the Buddha
2. I take refuge in the Dharma
3. I take refuge in the Sangha

Life is difficult and we often need shelter from the storm. The refuges are meant to encourage and support our efforts to become liberated. And be a safe haven.

1. The man known as the Buddha lived and died over 2500 years ago. **The word Buddha** means *the potential for waking up from delusion*. So refuge is not so much in a person. It's more that we He was an example of what wisdom and compassion looks like. He saw that there's

2. Dharma refers to the Buddha's teachings: life lessons meant to benefit us no matter what our current situation may be. It can also refer to the ever-changing nature of the universe. We can use these insights to be of service to others and live a more meaningful life.

3. Sangha means our support system if we are around people who also are making an effort to be of benefit to others. It was a word that first applied to the monks and nuns who were followers of the Buddha, but it has expanded to include anyone who is making an effort to wake up from delusion and habitual thinking.

**An important Buddhist teaching is to
take care of your life.**

This means to take care of whatever is right in front of us, right now. This includes our personal possessions, as well as the people around us, and our planet.

Even though all things change, our books, clothes, tools, etc., should be treated with respect and appreciated while they are in our care.

Then, when it's time, we can thank them and let them go.

This makes for a more orderly environment, which can be a refuge for us, even though it may only be the size of a cot or a bunk bed.

Our refuge also includes friends and teachers who support our efforts to become wise and peaceful. It can be a community of two or many.



The 3 Pure Vows

(Sometimes known as the 3 Pure Precepts)

- 1. I vow to do no harm**
- 2. I vow to be of benefit**
- 3. I vow to clarify the mind**

Nothing new here. Until you dig a little deeper.

According to Buddhist teachings, evil is not caused by an outside force (such as Satan) that stirs up wrong doing. And we're not just born that way. It's more of a spectrum, with a whole range of possibilities.

Harm is created by our own thoughts and deeds, especially when they are influenced by the three "root poisons" known as greed, anger, and ignorance (delusion.) More on the poisons can be found on page 24.

Good has a different meaning as well. It's more like being wise and skillful in all of our actions, rather than just obeying rules—although it is often wise and skillful to follow the rules.

In many cases good deeds come from having compassion for others and trying to be helpful, no matter what the circumstances are. It also means not always looking for 'what's in it for me?'

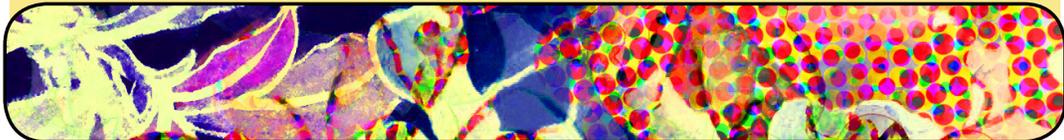
**Ask yourself:
Do people feel safe around me?**

The vows can be a framework for our actions and our social interactions.

We don't always know in advance what the results of our actions will be. And today's issues are complex, to say the least. But if we can sometimes give without expecting a reward or a good review, it's helping to make the world a better place.

It's difficult to be helpful if your thinking is clouded by drugs, alcohol, or other influences, such as social media. Try to be mindful of what you are taking in so it's more of a decision rather than habit or addictive behavior.

The three pure vows would make the world a safer place if more people practiced them.



The 3 Marks of Existence

1. Impermanence.
2. Suffering (Dukkha)
3. Non Self or No-Self

Sometimes known as dharma seals, they are fundamental to Buddhist teachings.

1. Impermanence. Everything that arises, ceases. All things are made up of parts that come together under certain conditions and will eventually end or change.

2. Suffering. Human life is stressful and everyone experiences a certain amount of pain and fear, which can be severe at times, or it may be just a feeling of unease. Recognizing this can lead to compassion for what others may be going through.

3. Non-self. Scientists are beginning to confirm what the Buddha saw during his enlightenment experience. There is no fixed, permanent identity. In fact, nothing exists totally on its own.

Instead, each person is the result of multiple causes and conditions.

We can see this in a sheet of paper that is made up entirely of non-paper elements: wood, trees, rain, clouds, humans who cut down the trees and process the wood. The next time you pick up a book, look for the clouds.

**Are you the same person you were a year ago?
Yesterday?**

The three marks are descriptions of reality that we may try to deny, but they are really not so threatening if you look closer. Seeing that everything is changing can actually be liberating, because it means living our lives based on the way things are, rather than the way we think they should be. Or wish they were.

In order to bake an apple pie from scratch, you need to start with the Big Bang!

This may be an exaggeration, but it points out the interconnection of everything. Nothing comes from nothing! We exist because of the causes and conditions that have come together to appear in this particular form. But it's never permanent.

The Buddha's teachings encourage us to examine how this natural law operates in our lives.



The 3 Poisons

1. Greed or attachment
2. Hatred or anger
3. Delusion or ignorance

The Buddha identified these human tendencies as the root causes of unhappiness.

1. Any satisfaction is temporary, and low-level craving can lead to addiction. This 'never-enough' scenario is what the Buddha warned about in the *Four Noble Truths*, when he talked about the origins of suffering.

2. One reaction to suffering is to try and push it away. Or to react without thinking of the consequences. Irritation can turn to anger and outright hatred in a heartbeat. It's good to be aware of how this works.

A response that takes in everything (like the ocean receiving rain) allows us to step back and respond with more compassion and kindness.

3. The third poison is the belief in a fixed separate self, rather than seeing that the true nature of reality is just the opposite: ***each individual being is made up of certain causes and conditions and nothing exists on its own.*** The delusion of a separate self leads us to focus on our likes and dislikes and sets us up for conflict and all kinds of problems.

"If only..."

"I wish..."

"How long is this going to take?"

"I'll be happy when _____"
(fill in the blank)

These are all ways of saying that we don't like the way things are and want them to be different. But when you look closer, it becomes clear that it's often the wishing that is causing the stress and suffering.

When you start with the way things are and go from there, you can usually make better decisions and see more options. Even in very difficult circumstances.

We're often so conditioned to react in certain ways that it takes some effort to see that there are alternatives. The mind likes to create stories and we can get stuck there. Meditation and mindfulness can be a good place to see how the process works—and maybe change the ending.



The 4 Heavenly Abodes

1. **Loving Kindness (Metta)**
2. **Compassion (Karuna)**
3. **Sympathetic Joy (Mudita)**
4. **Equanimity (Upekkha)**

These four states of mind can be a place to live. A safe house for our mental health.

1. Loving kindness is a wish for the well being of others. And for yourself. It's a remedy for negativity. Other words for loving kindness would be friendliness, care, and goodwill. It's a wish for others to be well.

2. Compassion doesn't look away from the suffering of the world. It's a feeling that motivates us to try and alleviate the suffering of others. Sometimes it takes wisdom to know the best way to do that. Wisdom and compassion work together like the wings of a bird.

3. Sympathetic Joy is a feeling of happiness for another person's good fortune. It replaces jealousy and competitiveness with contentment and goodwill.

4. Equanimity. The world needs more balance and stability. In our own lives we can start by thinking less in terms of "me" and "mine." The concept of no-self is not easy to understand, but it's basic to Buddhism.

Never homeless.

At first we probably need reminders and have to make an effort to practice these wholesome mental states. But with practice they will become a first response to everyday situations.

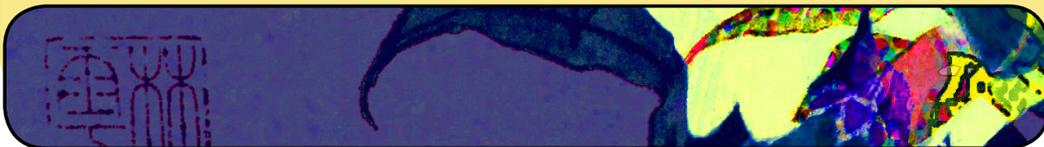
Maybe you're not ready to forgive someone, but you can wish them well.

Life is not easy for anyone. See if you can feel compassion when you see someone struggling.

Instead of feeling a twinge of envy when a friend receives praise, be happy for them.

Try to see both sides of an argument. Equanimity avoids preferences and strong positions. Apply wisdom to the situation instead of making it personal.

The Four Abodes give us a way to be more selfless—which can be a big relief!



The 5 Precepts

- 1. Do not kill.**
- 2. Do not steal.**
- 3. Do not misuse sexuality.**
- 4. Do not lie.**
- 5. Do not cloud the mind with intoxicants.**

Here are the precepts in the form of a vow:

- 1. I will not take the life of any sentient being.*
- 2. I will not take what is not given.*
- 3. I will not engage in sensuous misconduct.*
- 4. I will abstain from false or harsh speech.*
- 5. I will not cloud my mind with intoxicants or other addictive substances.*

Here's another version:

- 1. To maintain respect for all forms of life.*
- 2. To practice generosity.*
- 3. To practice respect for others' body and boundaries.*
- 4. To practice speech that promotes truth, accord and clarity.*
- 5. To respect consciousness by maintaining a clear mind.*

Without these universal precepts, humans would not be able to live together, form families or set up communities. Sometimes it might seem like we're witnessing a breakdown of respect and order in our world. The truth is we need more people who see the value in these simple (but not easy) teachings and will put them into practice.

They are not commandments. The idea is more that there are consequences to our actions, and that it's better for the planet and our individual lives if we set an intention to apply these precepts as best we can.

Actions have consequences

These are high standards, guidelines for a lifetime. For example, if you are not be ready to become vegetarian, try to be mindful of where your food comes from.

1. All forms of life want to live, including animals and insects. It can get complicated, but at least give be mindful of the actions you're about to take and see if there are any other options.
2. In addition to taking material objects, avoid taking someone's reputation or peace of mind.
3. Be aware of how your actions can cause suffering by breaking commitments or taking advantage of others.
4. Words can be harmful, especially now when it's so easy to say hurtful things anonymously through social media. Use words wisely and with kindness, whether face to face or online.
5. Pay attention to what goes into your mind and body. We can't control everything around us, but once you start noticing the effects, you can decide to take in only substances that are healthy and nourishing.



The 6 Perfections

1. Generosity
2. Morality
3. Patience
4. Diligence
5. Meditation
6. Wisdom

Medicine for the challenges of everyday life.

The Buddha's advise to his followers was to practice these qualities in order to do no harm, to solve problems, to avoid being the victim of strong emotions, to keep calm in difficult situations, and more.

Meditation leads to wisdom, which is needed to determine what's the best course of action to take. It helps eliminate confusion and mistakes. Together, or one at a time, these states of mind can be our friends.

One of the purposes of practicing the six perfections (also known as the *paramitas*) is to lessen our strong identification of what we think of as our self. They help us to feel less separated from others as we go through the day.

They are states of mind that require practice and commitment, since so many forces are telling us to choose sides.

Remedies for mental obstacles like anger, greed, jealousy and laziness.

Generosity. To give without an expectation of getting something back. It's the opposite of greed and self-centered behavior. The gift itself is not as important as the willingness and intention.

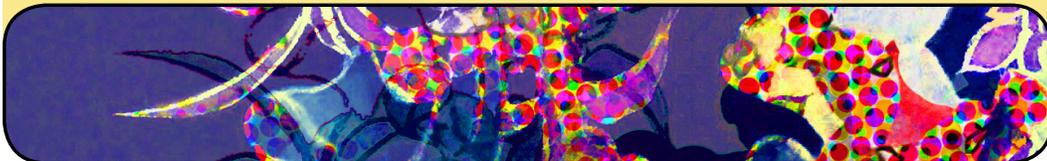
Morality. The intention to live a virtuous life and being willing to practice skillful behavior in every day situations. It's hard to be peaceful with a guilty conscience.

Patience. Often a remedy for anger and useful in situations when we want things to be different than they are.

Diligence. Effort and commitment, but also the joy that comes from what is virtuous and beneficial.

Meditation. Although meditation can be a simple technique, there are many layers of awareness that are available to long term practitioners. Provides insights into how the mind works.

Wisdom. Clarity. At a deeper level, wisdom is the recognition that all things are without a fixed, and permanent identity.



Meditation

Traditionally, there are four aspects of mindfulness in meditation.

- 1. Awareness of the body, the movement of breath and the ever-changing bodily sensations.*
- 2. The experiencing the constant play of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings.*
- 3. Awareness of the various mind states that arise, whether contracted or open-hearted, selfish or generous.*
- 4. Recollection of the things that can get in the way of an open heart (such as greed or anger) and the path leading to generosity and peace: the Eightfold Path.*

The Buddha was in a state of meditation when he achieved his realizations and woke up to the nature of reality as always arising and ceasing, always dependent on causes and conditions.

Meditation is training for your mind, similar to fitness training for the body. There are different techniques, but one of the skills is to observe your thoughts as they pass through your mind like clouds passing across the sky. Try not to get involved in the story, but you don't need to push them away either. Just observe without judging and return to the anchor of your breath.

You can start with just five minutes and work up to longer intervals. If you'd like to start a meditation practice, do your best to sit quietly at about the same time, and if possible in the same place, every day, even if it's just for a few minutes.

MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sit in a comfortable chair or on a cushion with your back straight, legs crossed or feet flat on the floor. Either close your eyes or keep them just slightly open.
2. Don't try to control the breath; just breathe naturally and quietly through the nose.
3. Focus your attention on the breath and on each inhalation and exhalation. If your mind wanders, return your attention back to your breath.
4. Don't try to stop your thoughts. It's impossible. But it's interesting to observe how non-stop they actually are. If a thought or feeling is uncomfortable, try to notice it without pushing it away. It will change on its own, like a cloud passing across the sky.
5. Observe ideas, feelings, sensations as they appear and disappear, without judgment or comments.
6. Meditation is not complicated. It's simple, but not always easy. You don't have to set up a goal or be disappointed if nothing magical happens. The idea is to sit still, keep your back straight, and pay attention to what's going on, and keep showing up.
7. This is a practice that will change over time and can last for the rest of your life. It's a way to become friends with your mind.

*Did you ever try watching your own thoughts?
You might be surprised!*

THE MAJOR TRADITIONS OF BUDDHISM

The teachings of the Four Noble Truths can be traced back to the insight the Buddha received after he gave up the extremes of worldly pleasure and deprivation. He was awakened to the truth of our human condition and spent the rest of his life teaching men and women how to deal with their suffering and difficulties.

His disciples recognized the importance of these teachings and memorized the hundreds of sermons the Buddha gave during his lifetime. Later they were written down and translated. Commentaries were composed and all these writings form the basis of the Buddhist traditions that continue today.

There are several schools of Buddhism, each with its own rituals, forms, and scriptures -- ***Chan, Tibetan Buddhism, Insight Meditation, Pure Land, and Zen*** are some of the better known. Some put greater emphasis on meditation, or on chanting the scriptures, or on certain rituals, but all of them include the core teachings of the Buddha.

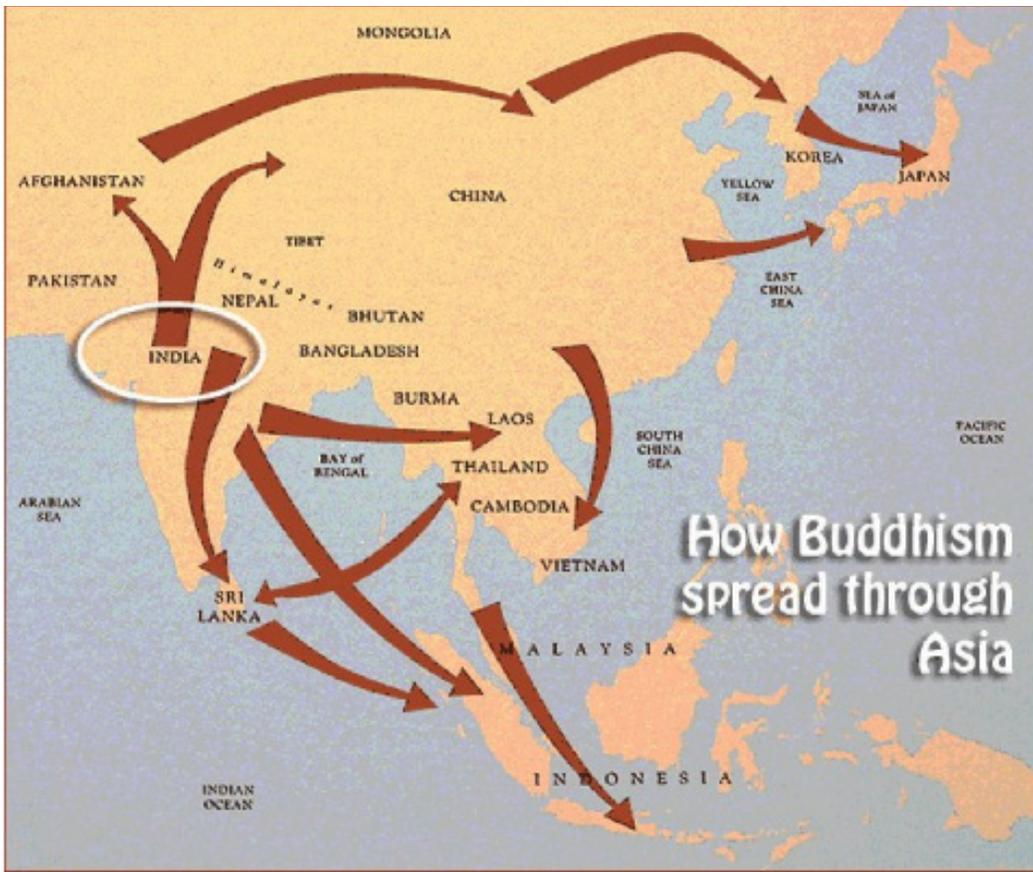
As Buddhism was introduced to new cultures it changed and adapted, often taking on some the characteristics those cultures. In this way the teachings spread to China and other parts of Asia.

In the last century or so, Buddhism has taken root in the North and South America, Europe and other countries around the world. Some new forms, rituals, and styles of practice are developing alongside traditions that have been practiced for thousands of years.

How should these teachings be applied to the challenges facing all of us now in this rapidly changing world? How do we best respond to these changes and dangers, in order to live our lives with dignity and be of benefit to ourselves and others?

Those who are now practicing with these ancient teachings are answering these questions and the evolution of Buddhism continues.





A map illustrating the spread of Buddhism from its origins in India in the 5th century BCE with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama — the Buddha. (Zen, Be. “The Spread of Buddhism.” Ancient History Encyclopedia. 10 Feb 2013.)

The Buddha died around 483 BCE, but his teachings didn't. His followers worked diligently to collect and organize his sayings and teachings, and before long a new religious movement spread from India to China, Malaysia, Japan and beyond. Buddhism today exists throughout the world, and is taking a new shape as people discover its wisdom and many benefits in Europe and the Americas.

Although he lived more than 2500 years ago, the Buddha was ahead of his time in understanding the nature and tendencies of the human mind. He's sometimes referred to as a psychologist and a neuro-scientist, as well as a doctor.

Scientists and others today are now realizing that countless causes and conditions have to come together before any action or object can appear in our experience.

*“If you want to bake an apple pie from scratch,
you need to start with the Big Bang!”*

And if we try meditation and observe how the mind seems to have a mind of its own, we are sometimes shocked to realize we're not as free to make decisions as we thought we were.

The Buddha's earliest teachings are like a doctor's diagnosis and prescription for at least some of the suffering that just seems to be a part of being human. He acknowledges how vulnerable we are, often due to our resistance to the way things are, and then shows us how to not make it worse.

His treatment plan is sometimes known as the Noble Eightfold Path, eight wise ways to see our world, and to change the reactivity that could lead to unfortunate consequences when we're not paying attention. And to more peace and harmony when we do.

