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Basic Buddhism

Excerpt from *If You Can't Let It Go, Work It Through*

The Buddha's Journey

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gotama approximately 2,500 years ago. As a young man, he began to notice that suffering was an inevitable part of human existence. Driven by a profound desire to understand and overcome this suffering, he left his family to embark on a spiritual quest for answers.

His journey led him to Bodhgaya, where he made a solemn vow: he would not leave that spot until he either died or discovered the solution to human suffering. After 40 days of deep meditation, as the morning star rose on the final day, he found the answer he had been seeking.

The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha's awakening revealed what became known as the Four Noble Truths, the foundation of his Middle Way teachings:

1. **The Truth of Suffering:** Life inherently contains suffering
2. **The Truth of the Cause of Suffering:** This suffering has identifiable causes
3. **The Truth of the End of Suffering:** It is possible to overcome this condition
4. **The Truth of the Path:** There is an eightfold path that leads to the end of suffering





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The Eightfold Path

The Buddha outlined eight interconnected aspects that form the complete path to liberation from suffering:

Right Understanding: understanding the core Middle Way teachings and how they address and alleviate needless suffering.

Right Thought: cultivating positive intentions that avoid attachment, hatred, and harmful intent while nurturing compassion and kindness.

Right Speech: speaking truthfully while avoiding gossip, harsh words, and idle chatter.

Right Action: acting compassionately and ethically by avoiding harm to others, including killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct.

Right Livelihood: earning a living through honest and ethical means by avoiding occupations that cause harm to others.

Right Effort: actively working toward self-improvement and maintaining mindful awareness.

Right Mindfulness: becoming more aware of your body, speech, mind, and environment around you through present moment awareness.

Right Concentration: cultivating focused, single-minded attention through meditation to develop mental clarity and equanimity.





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The Three Characteristics of Existence

The Buddha also identified three fundamental characteristics that define our reality:

- Impermanence: All things are constantly changing and transitory
- Suffering: All conditioned existence involves some form of dissatisfaction or suffering
- No-Self: The concept of a fixed, permanent self is an illusion

The Middle Way Practice

The Buddha's teachings, preserved through oral tradition, emphasize that each person should receive instruction according to their individual nature and capacity. A key teaching found in the Satipatthana Sutta states: "If the causes of suffering do not arise, suffering does not arise." Buddhist practice recognizes two types of suffering: suffering that is needless and suffering that is inevitable. While we learn to accept inevitable suffering without hardening our hearts or closing our minds, the practice outlined in this text focuses on alleviating unnecessary suffering. Through mindfulness and lovingkindness, we come to terms with our sensitivities, recognize the impacts we experience, and make peace with our reactive nature. Often, our reactivity creates additional suffering for ourselves and others—this is precisely what Buddhist practice aims to transform.

