

# WHAT WE LEARN FROM BUDDHISM

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Everyone is seeking happiness. Of all the needs of the human race, nothing seems to be stronger than the pursuit of happiness. In any age, needless to say, happiness has been sought by all men as a constant and ultimate goal so that the unpleasant and painful experience could possibly be avoided. But what are we actually having? Are we having a nice time always?

The wish for happiness is often characterized very vaguely. To a child it means some immediate satisfaction, like receiving an electric train or a beautiful doll, to a teenager it means popularity in school and having many friends and dates, and those who are out of school it means a good job, a happy marriage, a comfortable living. However, such things do not always bring happiness; sometimes we experience boredom and a deep sense of dissatisfaction. We think money will bring happiness, and no doubt it does satisfy some of our needs, but a well-off man is not necessarily happy at all times.

## Two Kinds

Then, what is happiness? It can be defined in various ways, but I think it is the manifestation of our spiritual and sensual pleasures. Perhaps it would be helpful to explain two points of view which, I feel, characterize “pleasure”.

First, pleasure is a state of mind which we achieve with expanded effort. For example, reading books, conquering seemingly unscalable mountains, or even leaping to new heights with a pole vault constitute this sort of pleasure. It requires some effort, at times even hardship, to attain the goal or fulfill the purpose set forth by ourselves. In short it is the satisfaction gained by setting goals and through endurance and courage, actively overcoming the physical and mental obstacles in the path of achievement.

The second variety of pleasure is a passive one which can be acquired without taxing our physical or mental energy. Sitting in a comfortable chair, seeing a movie, drinking wine, and smoking cigarettes – all these serve to satisfy our feelings and offer very little challenge. Therefore, it is a passive pleasure for which we need not put forth any effort or endure any hardships since the means are conveniently provided to us.

The former can be said to be “spiritual pleasure”, and the latter, “sensual pleasure”. As we see the modern trend of pleasure, we can hardly ignore the fact that most people are actively seeking the latter – sensual pleasure.

Why are we seeking sensual pleasure? It is because our life is insecure and threatened at all times. Meeting of hated ones and separation from loved ones, loneliness and emptiness, guilty consciousness and inferiority complex, and finally the thrust into the jaws of death – all these make us feel that this life is full of misery and sufferings, and we want to possibly avoid or forget such facts of life.

Therefore, because of the discontent of life, we are apt to stake our lives on immediate satisfaction, that means, sensual pleasure. But, is the indulgence in this kind of pleasure a true search for happiness? As far as the possibility to seek sensual pleasure is rendered because of money and health, it seems to be all right, but is it really helpful for use to make our limited span of life an unmeaningful one?

The answer is definitely “No”. Because this kind of pleasure does not become a part of ourselves, but is always attracting us from outside. If the means which pleases our feeling disappears, we are unhappy and discontented. The true pleasure is not given but acquired regardless of external conditions.

### **The Purpose**

Usually people ask: “Who are you?” with respect to name or nationality, but hardly provoke the question, “What are you?” When the people in India asked the question to the Buddha. “Are you a god?” the Buddha said “No”, “An angel?” “No”, “A saint?” “No, “Then, what are you?”

The Buddha answered, “I am awake”. His answer became his title, for this is what the Buddha means. The purpose of Buddhism is to awaken man to the attainment of highest happiness (clear understanding of life) as the Buddha attained 2500 years ago, and release him from the bondage of the illusion of happiness. The illusion of happiness is what we call the pursuit of sensual pleasure which is being sought by the majority of men, and this state was described by the Buddha in one word: dukkha (misery and suffering). This kind of pursuit will never end in the attainment of highest happiness.

Life itself is contentment. We say it is full of misery and suffering, only because man is not satisfied with his life. If man is able to remake himself, eliminate the cause of misery and suffering and realize contentment, life becomes meaningful. We color the universe and the world according to what we think about them. When we look at them with the Buddha’s eyes, we can see the universe and the world as they really are and acknowledge that they are nothing but manifestation of the Oneness of life (sunyata) where all things, animate and inanimate, exist interdependently.

On this basic ground of life, man sets up distinctions and separates what is “mine” from what is not “mine”. This discrimination arises from a deep source

of attachment in man, called blind craving.

Blind craving differentiates. Oneness into a plural world of Manyness, and there arises conflicts, misunderstandings, and frictions within man himself. From this blind craving comes the conscious self, affirming its essential selfishness. Because of man going against Oneness by affirming the blind craving within, he creates an illusory world of Manyness which is not a real world but a world created in the imagination of man.

If we understand the importance of the Oneness of life, we can partake other's joy, being happy with and for other's happiness since we are one and the mistreatment of another is none other than the mistreatment of self. On the other hand, if we fail to understand it, we lead an antagonistic life in Manyness. Here we do not partake of other's joy, but rather show envy and jealousy at the success of even our best friend whether it be in school or in sports or on the dance floor. Man lives in an unnatural state of Manyness which, because it is unnatural, creates tension in his living.

As far as we stick on the selfish Manyness of life, we cannot move in a state of naturalness and contentment, since it does not accord with the rhythm of nature. It does not mean the discord of our personality in mass media, but it is the sublimation of our selfish individualism into a higher stage of personality.

Oneness is, therefore the highest truth, and one who realizes this highest truth is called the Buddha, the Enlightened One, the one who has attained clear understanding of life. However, can we easily tread on the same way of Oneness as the Buddha did, and showed unselfish loving-kindness and compassion to others? It seems to be very easy to do so, but in actuality it is very difficult.

So far many people have adopted every possible means in order to attain the Oneness of life, but they seemed to fail because of the limitation of human capacity. They feel that the more they try by their own effort the more they fail.

Clear understanding, prajna, is the goal of Buddhism – it is the awakening to the highest truth, and our real and abiding happiness is to be found only in the highest truth. This state of attainment is called Nirvana, the extinction of all misery and suffering which hinder the discovery of our true self.

When we deeply realize that our life is limited and yet meaningful, we cannot lie idle for a moment. Then we keep in mind the image of the smiling Buddha.

Also, we are able to know where we are going – conscious goal toward which we are striving; have few inner conflicts; live primarily for long-term values, rather than taking what we want at the moment. We do not show fear nor anger regarding non-essentials; if an emergency arises – whether it be the problem of

a job, the loss of a loved one, or a war – we are not upset for long, but face it with poise and hope, continuing in the same direction toward our goal.

Everyone is seeking happiness, and does not want to suffer. Setting aside all the suffering which we confront, and leading toward the ultimate happiness, this is the way we should tread, and this is the way Buddhism is aiming at.

(World Buddhism)

