

**Tibetan Buddhist Center of Philadelphia**  
**Introduction to Buddhism Class**  
**October 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010**  
**The Four Noble Truths and the Theravada Path**  
Presented by Bill Stauffer (Copyright 2010)

**The Kalama Sutta (My disclaimer)** In the Kalama Sutta, the Kalama people tell the Buddha they don't know what to believe because some teachers come and expound and glorify their own teachings while disparaging and reviling the teachings of others. Then a new teacher comes along who expounds and glorifies his teachings while disparaging and reviling the previous teachings. For this reason, the Kalamas say they are uncertain and in doubt about what is true.

The Buddha tells the Kalama people that of course they will be in doubt! He says they should not believe something because of legends, traditions, sacred scriptures, or the words of a teacher. He says they should see for themselves what things cause harm for beings and then abandon those things. He says they should see for themselves what things lead to welfare and happiness and then cultivate those things.

So please don't trust me!! Try to see for yourself what things I am saying seem like they can be helpful and then cultivate those in your life. If some things I'm saying don't make sense then do not practice them! Let them go. Or maybe think about them later and see if they make sense in the future ...

There is also a Buddhist teaching about testing spiritual truth like one would test gold before buying it. Many Buddhist teachers (Master Sheng-yen or HHDL for example) will say about their talks, "Take what you find useful and give the rest of it back to me." It's not good to practice things that don't make sense to us just because someone says we should.

Ultimately, Buddhism is leading towards wisdom and it is insights that lead to wisdom. We need to be seeing the truth of things for ourselves (insight) and not just accepting them on faith because insight is the way to wisdom.

To read the Kalama Sutta do a Google search. There are many translations available for free. A nice translation can also be found in the book: **The Teachings of the Buddha** edited by Jack Kornfield.

**Before discussing the 4 Noble Truths:** we'll talk a little about impermanence, attachment, and the Buddha's own personal quest. Understanding these will help shed light on various aspects of the 4 Noble Truths when we discuss them later.

**Gotama was the Buddha's last name.** I will refer to him as "Gotama" when describing something he did before enlightenment. I will refer to him as "The Buddha" when describing something he did after enlightenment.

**“Dukkha”** is a word from Pali that has no exact English equivalent so I use the word “dukkha” without translating it. This usually gets translated as suffering but the Buddha’s meaning is much larger. As the Buddha used the term, dukkha means suffering but it also means a feeling that things are not fully satisfying. For example, I could have good job and have friends. I might be successful and yet feel that something is missing – I may think “Is that all there is?” This feeling is also dukkha. And everything in between suffering and sense of lack is also dukkha. Dukkha is anything that is unsatisfactory about life. Traditionally, **a life with dukkha is compared to riding in a cart with a wheel that has a flat spot. Instead of a smooth ride we feel klunk, klunk, klunk as we go down the road. This is dukkha.**

**Impermanence: whatever has a beginning has an end!** The Buddha teaches that all phenomena in the world are based on causes and conditions and, thus, all are impermanent because causes and condition themselves are constantly changing. Since they all had a beginning they will also all have an ending –it just a matter of when.

**Example 1: a flower** that comes to life based on the cause (seed) and conditions (sunlight, warmth, water, soil). Eventually the conditions change and the flower dies.

**Example 2: imagine two people developing a friendship based on a shared love of bicycling.** But one person develops a bad back due to various conditions and he can no longer bicycle. Then, his bicycle friendship may end because the conditions that allowed the friendship (shared bike rides) has come to an end.

**Only something not based on causes and conditions would have no beginning and no ending. So something that is Unconditioned is also known as the Deathless. The Buddha uses these two terms interchangeably. Please note that the Deathless is something transcendent – it transcends the impermanent world of phenomena.**

Most people are motivated by and attach to impermanent phenomena. Examples of the typical impermanent phenomena that motivate people are described in Buddhism by **the 8 Worldly Winds:**

- Gain and Loss (material gain and loss)
- Pleasure and Pain
- Praise and Blame
- Fame and Shame

**Trying to find happiness in the 8 Worldly Winds always fails as we’ll see next.**

Attaching to impermanent phenomena leads to unhappiness because:

- Impermanent phenomena are ultimately unsatisfying
- Impermanent phenomena change and they may not turn out as we wish. This causes agitation (one face of dukkha) when we’re attached. (the suffering of change also includes the pain of sickness and death)
- Impermanent phenomena can be lost – fear of losing and pain of losing

**Attachments and Aversion: We’ll discuss them and specifically how they tie to pain.**

The Buddha said: **“Monks, I will teach you agitation by clinging and nonagitation by nonclinging” SN 22:7;III 15-18** Agitation is like waves in the mind, and agitation gets expressed as frustration, sadness, irritation, unhappiness, etc. This **agitation is said to be caused by clinging (i.e., attachment)** For example, if I plan to go to a baseball game and it gets rained out then whether or not I’m unhappy depends on how I held it mentally. To the degree I’m attached to the game I will feel sad or annoyed or etc. To the degree that I am unattached I will simply go on and do something else without annoyance. In other words, to hold something too tightly is an attachment and leads to unhappiness. There is always a sense of “I want” in an attachment. In other words, the sense of self is there. As we lessen our attachments and aversions the sense of self diminishes. In a Western way of speaking, **as we diminish attachments and aversions we become more selfless – this is important to understand! Selflessness is the key to nonattachment and the key to a spiritual life.**

Aversion is just the flip side of attachment. Instead of “I want” it’s a sense of “I don’t want”. In the example above, I don’t want it to rain and because it rains my aversion causes my mind to be agitated which I experience as sadness, annoyance, etc.

**One other reason why attachments cause suffering is the Law of Karma.** The law of karma is a spiritual law. Just as the law of gravity describes how physical phenomena behave, so the law of karma describes how things happen spiritually. A karma is an intentional action of body, speech, or mind. According to Buddhism, every intentional action is like planting a seed that will bear some kind of fruit down the road. Actions that cause harm and suffering in the world are said to yield bitter fruits for the actor as well. Actions that promote well being are said to yield pleasant fruits for the actor. Everything that I experience as pleasant or unpleasant is said to be the ripening of some past karma.

When I am strongly attached to what I want, I am far less likely to consider the effects of my actions on the world at large. Instead I am mostly thinking about what I want. **Thus, when I am attached I will be far more likely to perform actions that cause suffering** in the world and that also yield bitter fruits for me. This is another way in which attachments cause suffering.

For example, assume I am still attached to going to the baseball game and let’s assume it’s a beautiful summer evening and the game is on. But I need to leave work on time or else I’ll be late, and I don’t want to be late. As I prepare to leave work someone asks me a question about a financial acct that seems to have a problem and they want to know if they can spend on it. Because of my attachment to not being late for the game, I tell them it is fine and they can spend based on my memory instead of researching the acct as I should. Giving people financial advice that I’m not sure about is a way of causing harm in the world. This action could easily ripen into a difficult situation that I would need to fix later. It could also damage the trust that people have for me and that would be the painful fruit of my negative karma as well.

### **What was Gotama searching for when he went into homelessness?**

Gotama realized that impermanent phenomena were ultimately unsatisfying and lead to dukkha when clung to. After growing up with a life filled with luxury and with all kinds

of worldly pleasure, Gotama rejected that and left home to search for something that went beyond the 8 Worldly Winds. Many years later (described in the Noble Search Sutta # 26 in MN) the Buddha told his monks why he left home: **“Monks, there are these two kinds of search: the noble search and the ignoble search.** And what is the ignoble search? Here someone being himself subject to birth seeks what is also subject to birth; being himself subject to aging, he seeks what is also subject to aging; being himself subject to sickness, he seeks what is also subject to sickness; being himself subject to death, he seeks what is also subject to death; being himself subject to sorrow, he seeks what is also subject to sorrow; being himself subject to defilement, he seeks what is also subject to defilement.”

“And what is the noble search? Here someone being himself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, seeks the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbana; being himself subject to aging, having understood the danger in what is subject to aging, he seeks the unaging supreme security from bondage, Nibbana; being himself subject to sickness, having understood the danger in what is subject to sickness, he seeks the unailing supreme security from bondage, Nibbana; being himself subject to death, having understood the danger in what is subject to death, he seeks the deathless supreme security from bondage, Nibbana; being himself subject to sorrow, having understood the danger in what is subject to sorrow, seeks the sorrowless supreme security from bondage, Nibbana; being himself subject to defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to defilement, seeks the undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbana. This is the noble search.”

“Monks, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened bodhisatta, I too, being myself subject to birth, sought what was also subject to birth; being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I sought what was also subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement. Then I considered thus: ‘Why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek what is also subject to birth? Why, being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, do I seek what is also subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement? Suppose that, being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, I seek the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbana. Suppose that, being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I seek the unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbana.’”

“Later while still a young man, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the ochre robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness.” Majjhima Nikaya # 26 “The Noble Search”

The Buddha is describing the Noble Search as the search for something beyond just impermanent phenomena. It is the search to realize the Deathless, the unconditioned. **Does this make sense to you? Do you have any ideas about something transcending impermanent phenomena or does this sound like more religious superstition?**

I think the sutta describing the Noble Search and the Ignoble Search is nicely summed up by Jesus in Matthew 6:19 **‘Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rust consume them and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moths nor rust consume and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.’**

**Let’s continue with the Buddha’s personal history.** During his search Gotama meets an excellent meditation teacher named Alara Kalama. From Alara Kalama he learns to meditate in the formless realms, and learns to reach the base of nothingness which is a very high level of meditational attainment. Gotama completely mastered this teaching, and Alara Kalama was so impressed that he asked Gotama to be a co-teacher with him. But Gotama left Alara Kalama and continued his noble search. Why? **Because he hadn’t found the Deathless/the Unconditioned yet.** Gotama realized that the base of nothingness was a high level attainment, but he also realized that it was still only another impermanent phenomenon. It is said to lead to rebirth in the base of nothingness that lasts for 60,000 eons, but then samsara continues. **So Gotama had not found the Deathless/the Unconditioned and he left in order to continue his noble search.**

After leaving Alara Kalama then Gotama found the teacher Uddaka Ramaputta who taught him the highest meditation in the formless realm: the base of neither perception nor nonperception. Gotama completely mastered this teaching, and Uddaka Ramaputta was so impressed that he asked Gotama to become a co-teacher with him. But Gotama left and continued his noble search. Why? **Because he hadn’t found the Deathless/the Unconditioned yet.** Gotama realized that the base of neither perception nor nonperception was a high level attainment, but he also realized that it was still only another impermanent phenomenon. It is said to lead to rebirth in the base of nothingness that lasts for 80,000 eons, but then samsara continues. **So Gotama had not found the Deathless/the Unconditioned and he continued his noble search.**

**NB: Do not think that Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta were not advanced teachers – they were highly advanced.** After his enlightenment, when the Buddha starts to teach, he wants to find students that have “just a little dust in their eyes” and who will quickly understand the Dhamma. The first two students he thinks of are Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. When he realizes that they have recently died and cannot be his students, the Buddha says that is a loss for them because they would have quickly understood.

**When he finally becomes enlightened the Buddha declares** that he has found Nibbana and it is not subject to aging, not subject to sickness, not subject to sorrow. The Buddha describes Nibanna as the “deathless supreme security from bondage”. He declares that “My deliverance is unshakeable.” MN # 26. **So the Buddha has found the Deathless/ the Unconditioned and he is satisfied.**

**In another teaching (Ud 8:3: 80-81), the Buddha tells his monks that liberation is only possible because the Deathless/Unconditioned exists.** The Buddha said: “There is, monks an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned. If, monks, there were no

unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, no escape would be discerned from what is born, become, made, conditioned. But because there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned. Therefore an escape is discerned from what is born, become, made, conditioned.”

### **In Summary:**

The Buddha left home on a noble search. He was searching for something that transcends sickness, aging and death. In short, he was looking for something that transcends impermanence – he was looking for the deathless, the unconditioned.

### **The Four Noble Truths:**

1. **There is dukkha in life.** The meaning of dukkha ranges from suffering to a sense that things aren't fully satisfying ... and everything in between. Traditionally a life with Dukkha is said to be like riding on a cart with a bad wheel. Its not a smooth ride and when we hit the bad spot we get a jolt. That is dukkha.
2. **There is a cause of dukkha: attachments, aversions, and the ignorance that makes attachments and aversions possible.** We've seen above some of the ways that attachments and aversions cause suffering.
3. **There is an ending of dukkha.** Dukkha lessens as we lessen our attachments and aversions and increase our wisdom. As we lessen attachments and aversions (personal desires) we become more selfless. When attachments and aversions are fully eradicated by wisdom, then we are enlightened and dukkha has ended. Enlightenment is sometimes also describes as realizing the Deathless/the Unconditioned.

How can we realize the Deathless when everything in the world around us is impermanent? How do we even begin? Just as all things arise in the impermanent world based on causes and conditions, so does our realization of the Deathless arise based on causes and conditions. In a way, we are like a radio. If we're out of tune we hear only static. As we start to tune in a station we hear some static and some words. Eventually we tune in the station well and all static is gone.

We tune our radio by creating the right causes and conditions, and that is exactly what the eightfold path does. **By living in certain ways we gradually come into tune with the Deathless!** What are those way that we tune in our radios?

4. **This is the way to the ending of dukkha “The Eightfold Noble Path”:**
  - **Right Understanding**
  - **Right Intention**
  - **Right Speech**
  - **Right Action**
  - **Right Livelihood**
  - **Right Effort**
  - **Right Mindfulness**
  - **Right Concentration**

**Right Understanding:** Working to understand spiritual truth. That's what we're doing in pondering these teachings. Spiritual truth is not fully understood unless it is lived. When we live the spiritual truth we have then we're able to learn more. If we don't live it then it becomes less clear and progress stops.

*As Aristotle said:*

**Aristotle:** "Thus our assertion that a man becomes just by performing just acts and self-controlled by performing acts of self-control is correct; without performing them, nobody could even be on the way to becoming good. Yet most men do not perform such acts, but by taking refuge in argument they think that they are engaged in philosophy and that they will become good in this way ... That kind of philosophical activity will not bring health to the soul" (From Nicomachean Ethics, Bobbs-Merrill, Trans. Ostwald)

**Right Intention:**

- **Renunciation** – i.e., renouncing attachments
- **Love** – a heartfelt wish for beings to be well. What can I do to help?
- **Compassion** – a heartfelt wish for beings to be free from harm and suffering. What can I do to help?

To understand the motivation of love and compassion, look back to what the Buddha said his own motivation was for leaving home (renunciation) and going on the noble search.

**What was the Buddha's motivation when he went on his search? Loving-kindness was the motivation of the Buddha and was also the motivation he later recommended for his monks.** In the Gradual Sayings, the Buddha tells his monks what led him to become enlightened: "Monks, there is one individual who arose and came to be for the welfare of the multitudes, for the happiness of the multitudes, out of sympathy for the world; for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans. Who is that one individual? The Harmonious One, the Perfectly Enlightened One."

In a number of suttas, the Buddha recommends that his monks also assume the motivation of loving-kindness. For example, during his last stay at Vesali, Buddha urged his monks to cultivate difficult practices for direct knowledge by telling them: "Monks you should carefully assume these practices which I have taught for the sake of direct knowledge. You should practice them, cultivate them, and make much of them ... This is for the welfare of the multitudes, the happiness of the multitudes, the benefit, welfare and happiness of gods and humans."

In a second example from the Kindred Sayings, Buddha sends his monks out to teach and tells them: "Monks, go and travel around for the welfare of the multitudes, for the happiness of the multitudes, out of sympathy for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of gods and humans. Two should not go on one [path]. Monks, teach the Dhamma that is beneficial in the beginning, beneficial in the middle, and beneficial in the end."

The intention of love and compassion is very important and anyone who is beginning to practice it is already walking a spiritual path. This intention is important in many different traditions. Lets consider how an intention of love and compassion is described by four different thinkers:

**Albert Einstein:** “The search and striving for truth and knowledge is one of the highest of man’s qualities ... [but] certainly we should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality. It cannot lead, it can only serve ... the most important factor in giving shape to our human existence is the setting up and establishment of a goal; the goal being a community of free and happy human beings who by constant inward endeavor strive to liberate themselves from the inheritance of anti-social and destructive instincts.” (Essays in Humanism, Philosophical Library Publishers)

**St. Francis:** “Lord let me be an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy. Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand, to be loved, as to love” (From the Prayer of St Francis)

**Shakyamuni Buddha:** “Let no one deceive another or despise anyone anywhere, or through anger or irritation wish for another to suffer. As a mother would risk her life to protect her child, her only child, even so should we cultivate a limitless heart with regard to all beings. With good will for the entire cosmos, cultivate a limitless heart: above below and all around, unobstructed, without hostility or hate ... this is called a sublime abiding. (From the Metta sutta)

Let’s also consider how the intention of love and compassion is related to bodhichitta (mind of awakening) as described by **Lama Zopa Rinpoche** in his book The Door to Satisfaction. Lama Zopa says that someone who has realized the mind of awakening (bodhichitta) will only be content with a motivation of loving-kindness – nothing else will do: “The thought of bodhichitta is unbelievable. It makes everything other than working for sentient beings boring and unsatisfying. There is no real interest or enjoyment in life apart from this. Anything else is meaningless ... Real happiness and satisfaction start when you begin to live your life for others.”

### **Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood:**

In the Dhammapada v 183: “To abstain from all evil, to cultivate the good, and to purify one’s mind – this is the teaching of the Buddhas” Right speech, right action, and right livelihood can be understood in this context.

#### **Abstain from all evil:**

- Abstaining from false speech
- Abstaining from slanderous speech
- Abstaining from harsh speech
- Abstaining from idle chatter
- Abstaining from killing
- Abstaining from taking what is not freely given
- Abstaining from sexual misconduct
- Abstaining from the use of intoxicants
- Abstaining from making a living from things that bring harm into the world, e.g. , not selling weapons, poisons, intoxicants or living beings, not making a living in way that requires deceit, etc

#### **Cultivate the good (the 10 paramitas):**

- Generosity
- Virtue
- Renunciation
- Transcendent Wisdom
- Diligence/energy
- Patience/forbearance
- Truthfulness
- Determination
- Love
- Equanimity

#### **Purify the mind:**

- Right Understanding
- Right Intention
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration

**Right Effort:** the effort to prevent unwholesome states of mind arise and to let go of those that do arise. It also entails the effort to cultivate unarisen wholesome states of mind and to maintain those that do arise.

**Right Mindfulness:** Being with things as they are without attaching or having aversions: i.e., no grasping and no pushing away. Not taking things personally. Four foundations: body, feelings, states of mind, phenomena.

**Right Concentration:** characterized by calmness and focus. Allows the mind to see more accurately into the nature of things.

