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# **Guide Posts For Buddhists**

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**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY**



# **Guide Posts For Buddhists**

## **Adapted from Theravadin Buddhist Writings**

By

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# Guideposts For Buddhists

## Buddhists and Buddhism

**O**ne becomes a Buddhist by free determination; not by birth, nor race, nor by nationality; not by consecration, baptism, nor any other legally binding ceremony. Buddhism does not assume to be a state religion, nor can any hierarchy use it as such, for the Sangha (Monks) are merely more earnest than lay Buddhists in the search for truth and right action in practice.

The Buddhist monk at his best exemplifies the heights of evolution possible by meditation, and practice of the Buddha Path. As such he is worthy of honour and is respected, both as an evolved person and as a teacher of the Buddhist Way of Life. If he is not worthy of such honour he is merely disregarded, but not condemned.

According to Buddhist ethics no person or authority

can ever impose upon another any code of conduct lower in morality or humanity than the individual himself desires. Neither can anyone make another act on a higher plane than the individual himself wishes. Each person can act only according to the level of his state of evolution, and has to live by the consequences thereof. Therefore it is the duty of all those who call themselves Buddhists to seek to become progressively more and more evolved by living according to the teachings of the Buddha, whether they belong to any Buddhist congregation or not.

The right to be a Buddhist and to practise the Buddha's way of life is the natural right of all beings. There should never be any compulsion by parents or monks. Hence any one can begin at any time, even discard it if the Way is too difficult for one's state of spiritual evolution. In Buddhism the individual is largely the architect of his spiritual structure ... he may seek instruction, but when he acts it has to be entirely of his own volition, and with the full understanding that he, and he alone can be held accountable for the resulting consequences. No monk or spiritual leader can ever command the conscience of a Buddhist, however humble such may be.

Buddhism when practised even imperfectly, but without hypocrisy, enlightens its adherents as to the real nature of the universe, including laws and forces

operating therein. Buddhism discloses to the earnest seeker the essence of his being, showing him the true nature of the higher destiny which extends beyond this fleeting earth-life; by awakening his slumbering moral forces and faculties, it kindles in him a desire for the good and noble and true. Thus he seeks to become humane, patient, unselfish, and enduring, thereby gaining understanding of life's sorrows, confidence in his ultimate destiny, and courage to seek the highest aim of every living being ... emancipation, consummation, Nirvana, which is a state of errorlessness. In as far as Buddhism does this it is truly a religion!

Buddhism is also a philosophy, for it demands of its adherents not blind faith in any Creator-God, or revealed word, but a personal conviction gained and confirmed by one's own investigation, examination, and experimentation in dealing with the facts as they exist, using the Buddha Dhamma as a guide. Thus the precepts of Buddhism can be verified by earnest reflection because they are not based upon the will of an incomprehensible supreme being, nor upon any supernatural revelation of truth, nor upon the pronouncements of any pope, abbot, monk, patriarch, or any religious dignitary. Instead, the natural constitution of the world and of life as we experience it are freely studied and investigated in order to

become enlightened as to the true nature of reality, resulting in a life so lived that the least harm results to oneself or fellowman.

Buddhism does not ever frighten the wrongdoer with threats of eternal punishment, nor does it bribe anyone with promises of eternal happiness in the life to come. Instead it seeks to clear up the eye of the erring one, who ensnared by delusion becomes confused and frightened. All Buddhism can do is to lead the honest struggler after right action on the way to further spiritual development and moral perfection until everything transitory becomes known to him as worthless. Therefore every desire for vengeance, all acts of angry rebellion or coercion and idle daydreaming, are recognised as being irrelevant, futile, and not conducive to the understanding of reality. Thus every type of prejudice, illusion, and confusion become known and ultimately disappear in the light of knowledge based on facts.

Accordingly it is the duty of the practising Buddhist to correlate in his own life the highest religio-moral principles known to him with the deepest philosophical-ethical truths discovered by mankind. Thus the true Buddhist seeks to gain wholeness both within himself and in unison with the rest of mankind wherever he may be, but he is ever aware that inner wholeness is more important than outward

conformity. To a Buddhist all men are brothers who are born with differing talents and possibilities. Therefore they should be respected regardless of race, colour, creed, or status. Since a Buddhist seeks only to reform himself (though he gladly helps those who seek his aid or advice) he has no other mandate but to live his life without harming fellow beings or himself.

The Buddhist seeks to attain errorlessness [1] in this or in some future state of existence. When errorlessness is attained the life-cycle is ended, hence mere salvation from the consequences of error is not the goal of Buddhism. Instead, it is Enlightenment leading to an errorless life. This is ultimately possible only on an individual basis; any one, being enlightened, may help, but he can not achieve it for another, nor can enlightenment be organised en masse.

## **Avenues of Enlightenment**

1. Through energetic effort—mental, spiritual, physical.
2. Through personal experience and



experimentation with truth.

3. Through trials and temptation—mental, emotional, physical.
4. Through close and earnest investigation of facts as they exist.

All these avenues may be explored individually or with the help of others, but whenever personal action is called for it is the individual who has to assume responsibility for resulting consequences. No Buddhist can ever blame another for his acts.

## **Enlightenment in Action [Righteousness]**

1. Self is recognised as not consisting of an everlasting soul, but as an ever-changing flux that can become progressively more controlled.
2. The interdependence and interrelatedness of all life is accepted as natural, but no effort is made to enforce uniformity or conformity.
3. Because the life-flux is an ever-changing manifestation the practice of all-comprehensive

kindness toward living beings becomes accepted behaviour.

4. Since good consequences are sought it is necessary to practise virtue and wisdom in thought, word, and deed.
5. The development and achievement of spiritual power within oneself rather than power over others is a goal leading to final emancipation.
6. Compassion toward every suffering being is practised in thought, word, and deed, whenever and wherever possible.
7. No remission of the results of error is expected by prayer or supplication to a Supreme Being, but there is willingness and ability to recognise error and work for its amelioration individually or in cooperation with others.
8. The fires of greed, lust, hatred, and ignorance are understood and conscientiously avoided until they cease to function in one's life.
9. Truth in every aspect is respected and searched for as a basis for making value-judgments.
10. Without self-righteousness or arrogance Nirvana is made the final goal of life.

# Nirvana

## All-Comprehensive Truth, Compassionately Expressed

### The Four Ennobling Truths

1. Sorrow is everywhere, and ever present.
2. Sorrow is the result of uncontrolled desires.
3. Emancipation from sorrow is possible for those ready for self-discipline in every aspect of life.
4. The Path to Emancipation is Eightfold.

### The Ennobling Eightfold Path

1. Right comprehension that dissipates delusion.
2. Right aspiration that hurts no one.
3. Right speech that makes for clarity.
4. Right conduct that brings no regret.
5. Right livelihood that causes neither discredit nor hurt to oneself or others.

6. Right endeavour that results in goodness.
7. Right mindfulness that gives controlled action.
8. Right meditation that prepares for Nirvana.

## **Results of Enlightened Action**

1. Neither oneself nor others are harmed.
2. None is forced to act against the dictates of conscience.
3. A sense of inner peace and security is achieved.

## **Ten Cardinal Errors and Where They Originate**

1. Murder, theft, lust: The Body.
2. Lying, slander, abuse, gossip: The Tongue
3. Greed, hatred, misconceptions: The Mind.

By persistent practise of the Ennobling Eightfold Path (in spite of failure and discouragement) the body, tongue, and mind will be progressively controlled, eliminating these errors.

## **Ten Negatives and Positives of Buddhist Living**

1. Kill not, but have regard for life in all its

manifestations.

2. Steal not, neither rob, realising that each is the owner of only the fruits of deeds, good or bad.
3. Abstain from lust and lead a life of self-control, thereby achieving self-respect.
4. Lie not but be truthful, speaking the truth with discretion and kindness.
5. Invent not evil reports nor repeat them, but look for the good qualities of fellowmen, and defend them whenever possible.
6. Swear not, but speak with propriety and dignity, regardless of circumstances.
7. Waste not your time in gossip, but speak to the point or keep silent.
8. Covet not, nor envy, but rejoice at the good that others enjoy, knowing that sorrow is ever-present.
9. Cleanse your mind of malice and cherish no hatred, not even against those who seek to do you evil, because the evil-doer can not escape his own evil deeds, but you can avoid them.
10. Free your mind of ignorance and seek to know the truth in all matters that lead to a good and worthy life, as expounded by the Buddha.

## **The Four-fold Struggle for Perfection**

1. Struggle, without violence, to prevent error from arising.
2. Struggle, without malice, to put away error that has arisen.
3. Struggle, with diligence, to increase the truth that is known.
4. Struggle, with mindfulness, to produce the truth that is not yet known. This struggle for perfection may be carried on either alone or with the cooperation of others of like mind. Waste not time in idle persuasion.

## **The Five Moral Powers to be Cultivated**

1. Self-reliant practice of the Dhamma by the individual, because no one can live another's life for him.
2. Indefatigable persistence in using the guidance of the Buddha will ensure success.
3. Mindful analysis of conduct to prevent errors from creeping in unobserved.
4. Concentration upon Buddhist goals in order to achieve good results in any endeavour.

5. Wisdom culled from personal experience, analysed in the light of Buddhist precepts. Without this, none can achieve Nirvana. These moral powers should be carefully cultivated and consistently practised on an individual basis. They may not be forced upon any one by another, however strong. They should be encouraged and fostered at all times and in every circumstance.

## **The Buddhist Way of Life**

Live quietly amid the noise and haste of life, remembering what peace there is in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons, listen to the opinions of others and seek to understand their ideas, yet be unafraid to speak the truth as it is known, quietly and clearly, without arrogance or self-importance.

Whenever possible avoid loud, thoughtless and aggressive people; they are vexatious to the spirit, causing trouble wherever they are.

Never compare yourself with others, lest vanity or bitterness result; ever remember there will always be persons greater and smaller than yourself; such is the working of cause and effect (law of kamma).

Enjoy achievements and plans, being interested in a career however humble; by so doing, happiness is

possible in this life of uncertainty and change.

Accept the good with the ill, knowing both are merited; but remember none can be his brother's keeper ... the evolved may seek to help another, never to live the other's life for him.

In all business matters exercise caution and intelligence, for always there are dishonest persons whose words are worthless.

Yet never blind yourself to the virtue there is; it is ever present like springs of water in a dreary desert.

Always be aware of the kindness and goodwill of others in all dealings, for without these it is possible to become cynical; remember in the face of all disenchantment that kindness and goodwill can still work wonders.

Above all, be honest, feigning neither affection nor learning; hypocrisy is like a cancer that grows and grows.

Do not be disturbed by dark imaginings about yourself or a fellow man, or doubt and despair may result.

It is necessary to view all life dispassionately, for only thus is calmness of spirit attained, and without it life becomes burdensome.



At all times be reasonable with yourself and others, thus developing an understanding of life's difficulties, and making them serve the purposes of truth and goodness.

Never forget that yourself and others all have a right to be here or they would not be; take comfort from this all-pervading truth ... be they stars, trees, animals, or human, they each follow their own laws and karmic pattern, and are not misplaced.

In all life's situations seek opportunities for performing good and useful acts, thus helping life to unfold with kindness as it should.

Whatever woe betides you, seek to express all the goodness possible, thus growing in graciousness and wisdom.

Develop the courage and wisdom to take kindly the counsel of the years, and gracefully surrender the attributes and excitements of youth, so that one may be better able to serve the needs of youth.

Above all, keep peace within yourself regardless of the noisy confusion around, because life presents opportunities making fullness of living possible, in spite of its many labours and seeming inconsistencies.

Whatever is experienced ... be it shams, drudgery, broken dreams, faded hopes; be it success, fame,

wealth, or glory ... it is well to ever bear in mind that each life is essentially none other than what the individual makes it. It is still possible to live gloriously and well in spite of life's difficulties or worldly success.

Bear in mind that no one can ever take away the individual's initiative in the field of self-development in search of truth, happiness, and peace; this right can only be voluntarily surrendered by each individually; it can not ever be forcibly taken away from anyone, however weak or humble.

Therefore be of good cheer, and unafraid, continue the search for truth; this is the natural right of every human being that seeks to walk the Buddha Path.

## **A Buddhist's Reaction to Life**

A Buddhist seeks to be ever mindful of the following:

1. No life is permanent; all states of mind and matter are in flux, therefore be undismayed.
2. Since all phenomena are impermanent, vanity and arrogance are meaningless.
3. Since all phenomena are consequential, act mindfully at all times.
4. Evolution depends greatly on the karmic pattern,

which is always capable of modification by the individual himself, with or without the cooperation of others.

5. If need arises, dignified and firm opposition to undesirable situations should be expressed by groups or individually, in a spirit of calm goodwill and a sense of humour.
6. Whether life is a challenge or a burden depends on the individual's view-point, not on circumstance or the will of others.
7. Sorrow is ever present; it is increased by the heedless, the careless, the arrogant, the knave, and the fool; it is minimised by the intelligently mindful, the conscientious, the humbly good, and the wise.
8. Even "righteous" anger is a stumbling block to one who would follow the Buddha Path.
9. Life cannot be effective if oriented upon the past or the future; it has to be lived in the ever-changing present, utilising every opportunity to progress toward the ultimate goal.
10. By observing rites and rituals no one can be absolved from the consequences of erroneous action in thought, word, or deed. Compassion and understanding should be extended toward

the erring one, but “forgiveness of sins” is not possible for any god or fellowman to grant, nor can any person achieve it by performing acts of penance or contrition.

1. Delusion is the basic cause of all error and unhappiness; it should be dispelled by understanding the nature of reality, accepted without vain regrets. Error can be counteracted only by investigating facts and acting according to the dictates of truth and goodness.
2. On whatever level the individual seeks to function, careful preparation is necessary for effective living. Those who seek to do this find no disadvantages to achieving the goal of Nirvana.

# Notes

1. "Errorlessness," in the author's terminology, means freedom from ignorance and delusion; and this, again, is identical with the full understanding, the perfect practice of the Ennobling Eightfold Path and the attainment of Nibbāna, which has been called the "errorless state" (*asammosa dhamma*).—Editor [\[Back\]](#)

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