



INTRODUCTION TO THE BUDDHIST PATH

*“Patience is the supreme fortitude.
Patience is the supreme freedom,” thus said the Buddha.
Those who harm others are not true followers of the Buddha,
Nor true seekers, those who oppress others.*

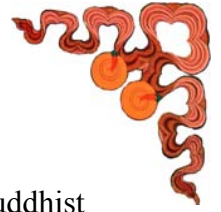
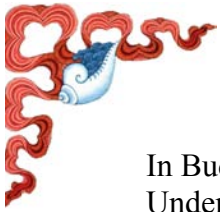
THE FOUR BUDDHIST TENETS

After the Buddha reached enlightenment in Bodhgaya, he taught many levels of teachings on how to overcome suffering. From several of these teachings arose the four Buddhist Tenets (codes and those who follow them), which are: Vaibhasika, Sautrantika, Madhyamika, and Cittamatra. From the teaching of the Four Noble Truths in Deer Park in Varanasi, India, two tenets arose: *Vaibhasika* and *Sautrantika*. From the teaching on Sunyata (emptiness) at Vulture’s Peak (Girdhakuta), arose *Madhyamika*. From the teaching at Vesali, where he taught the Mind Only School, arose *Cittamatra*

- Vaibhasika and Sautrantika accept the teachings of the Buddha as literal, without any interpretation;
- Madhyamika emphasizes the interdependence of all phenomena, the middle way; and
- Cittamatra asserts that everything arises from the mind (mind only school).

The four Buddhist Tenets can be divided into two categories, with Vaibhasika and Sautrantika being seen as Hinayana tenets and Madhyamika and Cittamatra being Mahayana tenets. This distinction is based on the view of emptiness presented by the tenets, as well as the literal or interpretive understanding of the teachings of the Buddha. The first two tenets, as mentioned above, accept the teachings of the Buddha as literal, whereas the final two tenets accept the teaching of the Buddha as holding deeper meaning beyond the literal. Those who follow the final two tenets study the teachings of the Buddha by examining his words, as well as interpreting them to unveil the more profound meaning held there.

The distinction based on the view of emptiness relates to how a person perceives the nature of phenomena, which determines whether a person is aligned with the Hinayana or Mahayana tenets. For example, the first two tenets view the root of suffering to be the grasping at the self, whereas the final two tenets view the root of suffering to be the belief in the inherent existence of the self and phenomena. This distinction found in the tenets relates to wisdom, whereas the method aspect of the path is determined by the role of Bodhicitta (loving-kindness and compassion). Thus a person can believe a Hinayana Tenet, yet be a Mahayana Buddhist or vice versa, depending on their view of wisdom (the tenets) or the method (loving-kindness). Thus, we can see there is a significant difference regarding these two approaches to the understanding of wisdom. In addition, the first two tenets will not refer to the grasping of the self as emptiness. The first two tenets assert that the realization of nirvana (overcoming suffering) is based on the understanding of the grasping of the self of a person, therefore they question the need to realize emptiness to overcome suffering. The Mahayana tenets, however, contend that emptiness (sunyata) is an essential practice to overcome ignorance and become free from suffering (reach nirvana).



In Buddhism there are four essential beliefs, which are also referred to as the *Four Seals*. Understanding and accepting the four seals are what make one a Buddhist as well as a Buddhist philosopher.

The four seals include:

- All products (compounded things) are impermanent
- All contaminated things are suffering
- All phenomena are empty and selfless
- Nirvana is Peace

Each of the four tenets discussed above, offers its own philosophy and distinct understandings of the four seals.

The teachings of the Buddha can also be divided into what are commonly referred to as the *three baskets*: morality (moral discipline of body, speech and mind), concentration (building the focus in the mind), and wisdom (seeing the true nature of reality). For example, in meditation we can see the three baskets as:

- the posture for meditation is morality;
- concentration is focusing on the object of the meditation and not allowing the mind to run all over the place; and
- once the mind is able to focus, it can be used to examine the nature of reality to uncover its true nature, which is wisdom.

A key distinction in the four tenets can also be found in relation to the three baskets, with the understanding of morality and concentration being similar among the four, but differing in their understanding of wisdom. The four tenets all recognize the three poisons (anger, attachment, and ignorance) as the causes of suffering, and agree on the nature of anger and attachment in relation to suffering. While the four tenets hold similar understandings of the pain of suffering caused by ignorance, they each have distinct perceptions of the role and function of ignorance at the root of suffering. Because wisdom is the antidote for ignorance, and ignorance is seen differently by each of the four tenets, the perception of wisdom also differs. Therefore, it is the different perception and understanding of wisdom that comprises the key distinctions in the four tenets.

There are many ancient texts and commentaries on the four tenets, for it is an expansive topic in Buddhism. Monks and nuns will study this subject (the four tenets) for more than 20 or 30 years to gain a strong understanding of them.

