

What do Buddhists consider Wisdom ?

Venerable Mahinda

"Wisdom is a very important quality to possess. But wisdom is too/ the pure accumulation of knowledge and theories. Everytime you radiate thoughts of loving kindness to all sentient beings, you are building your wisdom. Your compassion helps others, removes their fears, and anxieties, and gives them confidence. I hope you will all gain some wisdom from this talk !



Wisdom is the knowledge to confront and overcome suffering. According to the Eightfold Noble Path, which points out the way to a peaceful and harmonious way of life, Wisdom, or Panna (in Pali), and Prajna (in Sanskrit), consists of Right Understanding and Right Thought.

Right Thought consists of:

1. Thoughts of letting go-of leading a life of simplicity and contentment, as opposed to excessive craving and attachment.
2. Thoughts of goodwill and loving-kindness, as opposed to ill-will,
3. Thoughts of harmlessness, as opposed to cruelty.

As for Right Understanding, there are two important aspects, namely the Law of Kamma, and the understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

The Law of Kamma, or the Law of Cause and Effect can be defined in its simplest terms as; good begets good, and evil begets evil. Our present state of being is conditioned by what we have done in the past, and our future will depend on what we do now.

Kamma, in the Buddhist perspective, refers to volitional or intentional action. Our actions which generate a certain force. This force can be positive or negative, depending on mental factors such as greed, hatred, delusion, generosity, loving-kindness or wisdom.

Any thought, speech, or body action, conditioned by greed, hatred, or delusion, will generate a negative or unwholesome effect. On the other hand, those actions that are conditioned by generosity or tolerance, loving-kindness or wisdom, will give rise to a positive or wholesome consequence. When we understand this basic principle of life, we will be able to appreciate the significance of morality and good conduct. - This involves the avoidance of all evil, and the performance or cultivation of the good or wholesome actions.

Morality or good conduct leads to a calm and composed state of mind, free of guilt and remorse. The mind that is composed, and free of guilt or remorse, is conducive to concentration, and the development of wisdom, and penetrative insight.

This leads to the understanding and realisation of the Four Noble Truths. - This is the Noble Truth of Dukkha, its cause, its cessation, and the path which leads to the cessation of Dukkha.

The First Noble Truth is the Truth of Dukkha, which has been generally translated as "suffering". But the term Dukkha, which represents the Buddha's view of life and the world,

has a deeper philosophical meaning. Birth, old age, sickness, and death are universal. All beings are subject to this unsatisfactoriness. Separation from loved ones and pleasant conditions, association with unpleasant people and conditions, and not getting what we desire. - These are all sources of suffering and unsatisfactoriness.

The Buddha summarises Dukkha in what is known as the Five Grasping Aggregates, namely the Aggregate of Form, (or the physical process), feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. These are usually classified as mental and physical processes which are constantly in a state of flux or change. Herein lies the deeper philosophical meaning of Dukkha, for it encompasses the whole state of being or existence.

The Second Noble Truth explains the origin or cause suffering, Tanha or craving, which leads to attachments and aversion, which in turn is the cause of suffering. The Third Noble Truth points to the cessation of suffering. The Fourth Noble Truth explains the path which leads to the cessation suffering. It is called the Noble Eightfold Path.

Avoiding extremes of self-indulgence on the one hand, and self-torture on the other, the Noble Eightfold Path consists of-, Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. These eight path factors may be summarised into three stages of training involving morality, mental culture, and wisdom.

These are aimed at reducing and eliminating the habitual tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion at three levels. Firstly at the level of unskillful speech and bodily action. Secondly at the level of unskillful thoughts. Thirdly at the level of latent unwholesome tendencies, which can only be overcome through the development of insight and wisdom.

When the mind is purified or cleansed of its tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion, then suffering ceases, and one's life is transformed into a truly noble way of life, - Living in peace with oneself, and in harmony with others. This is the outcome of real wisdom.

The knowledge and skills which we receive in schools and universities are sources of information, mainly for our material well-being. It is important that we make the right choice to equip ourselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead a righteous way of life. We should incorporate the path factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, so as to lead a more peaceful and harmonious way of life.

It would be of great benefit if you were able to incorporate the wisdom that is transmitted through the Buddha and Dhamma in your daily life. You should always try to complement your academic studies with the practice of Dhamma, to enable you to have a more balanced and integrated development. This will lead you to greater peace and prosperity.

Venerable Mahinda may be contacted at the Australian Buddhist Mission, at 50 Ross Road, Peats Ridge NSW 2250

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