

# Buddha's Pedagogy: Reviving the Timeless Wisdom

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**ABSTRACT:** Buddhism is typically understood and interpreted as a life philosophy, a religion, a discipline, and a teaching-learning process. Buddha's primary objective in his investigation was to alleviate human suffering by identifying its root cause and revealing the truth about the world. Consequently, the Buddha discovered the 'Four Noble Truths', his first teaching after attaining enlightenment in the sixth century BCE. In the 'Four Noble Truths', the word 'truth' refers to the investigation of reality (Yun 2014). Buddha's teachings emphasized the importance of non-discrimination against individuals based on their caste, religion, gender, or any other form of identity and would not harm any species (Finn 2013; Wei 2003). Buddha devoted 45 years to imparting the *Dhamma* for this reason. Therefore, he embraced the principle of inclusiveness, welcoming all who desired to learn and comprehend the *Dhamma* (Liu & Tee 2014). As a result, he taught the path to enlightenment to achieve happiness. Buddha utilized various teaching methods and approaches: interactive and inquiry-based, question-and-answer sessions, illustrations, narrative, analytical and experimental approaches, mindfulness and critical thinking, examples to clarify concepts, ethical and character education during his lifetime. These techniques are still highly pertinent and applicable in contemporary classrooms. This paper examines the purpose of imparting the *Dhamma*, Buddha's pedagogy, and its application in the present context.

**KEYWORDS:** Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold path, relevancy of Buddha's teaching, Buddha's pedagogy

## Prologue

Education is the teaching and learning process, often described as a transformative journey. This process aims to instil permanent changes in a learner's behavior through classroom instruction. In this context, teaching is regarded as a form of guidance or direction (Piyarathana 2019). In Buddhism, the *Dhamma* is a teaching of Buddha representing wisdom and knowledge or interpreted as 'truth' (Mahathera 1998). So, what is truth, and what are the components of *Dhamma*? According to the Buddha the purity of life is *Dhamma*, comprising three forms of purity: purity of the body, speech, and mind. To achieve perfection in life is also *Dhamma*, which encompasses perfection of the body, perfection of the mind, and perfection of wisdom (Ambedkar n.d.). To live in *Nibbana* is *Dhamma*. In Buddhism, *Nibbana* means gaining enough control over passion or liberation from passion. Therefore, those who can control their passions empower themselves to follow the path of righteousness (Ambedkar n.d.). Buddha also categorized passion into three groups: the first category pertains to the degree of craving, including lust, infatuation and greed (*lobha*); the second category falls under the degree of antipathy, which includes hatred, anger and repugnance (*dosa*); and the third one is related to the degree of ignorance encompassing delusion, dullness and stupidity (*moha* or *avidya*). Thus, renouncing craving is also a part of *Dhamma* (Ambedkar n.d.).

After achieving enlightenment, the Buddha taught his disciples about suffering and how to escape from it. The Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path are the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, the truths that Buddha revealed are called *Dhamma* (Harvard University 2020).

## Timeless teaching of Four Noble Truths

The truth is that which exists. Its Sanskrit equivalence is *Satya*, an indisputable fact—the Buddha who discovered the Four Noble Truths through his intuitive knowledge. Whether or not a Buddha

arises, these truths exist, and a Buddha reveals them to the deluded world (Mahathera 1998). These four noble truths are the noble truth of suffering (*Dukkha*), the noble truth of the origin of suffering (*dukkha-samudaya*), the noble truth of extinction of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*) and the noble truths of the path that leads to the extinction of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gamini-patipada*) (Nyanatiloka 1967).

The first noble truth explains the physical and mental conditions like pain, distress, suffering, anxiety, frustration and dissatisfaction that exist within us (Tsering 2005). The second Noble Truth describes the principle of the cause of suffering or root cause of suffering; it is clinging or attachment with things or desire in English translation, but desire or attachment does not precisely convey the exact meaning of the Pali word *tanha* (Gunaratna 1973). The word craving is, therefore, the best rendering of *tanha*; this element of selfishness in *taṇhā* creates all the havoc for man. Similarly, the Third Noble Truth is the corollary to the Second Noble Truth. If we recognize that craving is the root cause of *Dukkha* (suffering), then it logically follows that the cessation of craving could lead to the cessation of suffering. By eliminating the cause, we can eliminate the effect. This is the fundamental principle underlying the third Noble Truth (Gunaratna 1973). Ultimately, the Fourth Noble Truth presents the path to the end of suffering, a way out. It comprises the Eightfold Path as the recommended course of action to end suffering (Yuan 2017).

Buddha is considered in different forms, such as a teacher, philosopher, founder of Buddhism, physician, and many other roles. In the first two Noble Truths, he first diagnosed the problem (suffering) and identified its cause, akin to a physician. Similarly, the third Noble Truth is the realization that there is a cure. Finally, the fourth Noble Truth is that the Noble Eight Noble Path serves as the prescription to achieve a release from suffering (Reddy 2014).

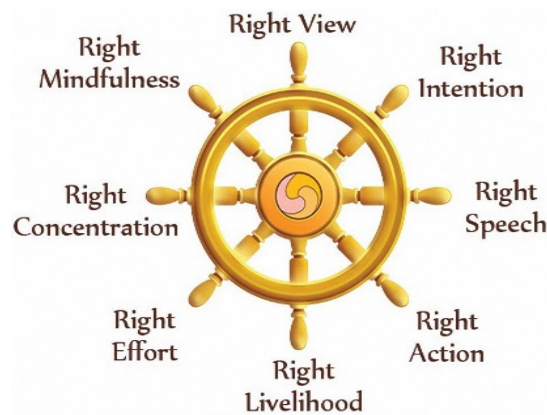


Figure 1. Noble Eightfold Path

The Buddha emphasized the concept of suffering because we must recognize that diverse forms of suffering exist in this world. By understanding the true essence of suffering, we can discover methods of alleviating it. Considering that suffering is just an initial step and an essential part of the process, the goal of discussing suffering within Buddhism is to learn how to overcome it and achieve liberation from its grip (Yun 2014).

#### Four Noble Truths and contemporary life

The Buddha primarily instructed individuals to liberate themselves from the mind that generates different suffering. An unaware mind inevitably produces suffering, affecting both oneself and those connected to it in various ways (*The Rising Nepal*, March 5, 2014). Today's world is globally interconnected, with frequent travel from one place to another, witness to both success and failure, opportunities and losses, as well as experience of war and harmony. Despite the abundance of amenities aimed at enhancing comfort and pleasure, people often find themselves

lacking physical and mental contentment, leading to a sense of insecurity. True satisfaction arises when the mind perceives a sense of safety, free from physical threats. Many countries have experienced rapid development in infrastructure, transportation, trade, and high per capita income for their people. However, individuals still struggle to find fulfilment in their lives. This perpetual dissatisfaction is characterized by persistent craving, grasping, and the transient nature of worldly pursuits (Yellaiah 2023).

Present-day society is characterized by a fast-paced way of life and constant demands to fulfil individual desires. Moreover, this era is characterized by an insatiable hunger for power, status, and wealth. Amid these circumstances, the teachings of Buddha, particularly the four Noble truths, offer a fundamental framework for achieving inner tranquility and contentment in our everyday life (Le 2024). Additionally, mental health has become a significant concern in modern lifestyle, and Buddha's teaching provides comprehensive guidelines for attaining this elusive condition. By incorporating mindfulness, compassion and gratitude into our everyday lives, we promote emotional resilience, mindfulness, compassion, and the development of profound self-awareness, empathy towards others, inner serenity and deep satisfaction. Due to the chaotic nature of today's society, which is characterized by high competition, stress, struggle, worry, and discontentment, the necessity of Buddha's teaching is more evident than in Buddha's time. Its application can positively change people's lives (Le 2024).

### **The Buddha in modern classroom**

The Buddha primarily emphasized mindfulness as a fundamental practice for understanding oneself, natural phenomena and the world. Many studies have demonstrated and suggested that mindfulness meditation (MM) can improve confidence and emotional regulation across various age groups, including young people and adults, and can work as a therapeutic intervention. The significant advantages of practicing mindfulness meditation regularly have been found to be very effective for decreasing anxiety, stress management and depression; enhanced resiliency and attention towards work and study; and improved creativity, empathy and compassion (MacQuarrie et al. 2021). Thus, integrating Buddha's teaching into education helps improve mindfulness and compassion among students. Buddha's experiments and teachings offer unique perspectives that nurture emotional intelligence, resilience, and empathy. As we witness the traditional education system, we observe its emphasis on student's academic achievements, often neglecting emotional intelligence, compassion, and empathy cultivation. This neglect is a significant reason for the pressing need to reconsider the existing education system, which should address individuals' emotional and psychological well-being (Mandal 2023).

Another concept of Buddhism is non-attachment or not becoming excessively attached to material comfort; according to the Dalai lama (2001), attachments is an inherent human characteristic which is also the origin and root cause of suffering, leading to the reification of the ego self. However, attachment can be resisted, and virtues can be cultivated through generosity. Generosity should be performed in the spirit of unconditional love, without attachment or expecting to receive kindness or other things in return. Most of today's students are deeply attached to material comforts and focused on the self (Ngan & Hang 2017). Integrating Buddha's teaching can support understanding compassion, loving-kindness, sympathy, and empathy in becoming actual humans.

### **Conclusion**

Nowadays, Classrooms are becoming more diverse, examples of how students become global citizens who can think and act across national boundaries. Buddha used many effective pedagogical strategies that are still relevant in today's classrooms. He frequently used discussion and enquiry to encourage critical thinking and self-discovery in his students. In today's classrooms,

educators can incorporate inquiry-based and critical-thinking pedagogies, encouraging students to participate in their learning and complete teacher-assigned activities actively. Deeper comprehension and intellectual progress can be achieved by encouraging students to voice their viewpoints, participate in class debates, and engage in critical dialogue.

Buddha highly valued learning from one's observations, reflections, and experiences. Simulations, experiments, field excursions, and hands-on projects are all examples of experiential learning activities that modern educators can use to engage students and make learning more relevant to their lives. It is possible to teach students to focus, manage their emotions, and relax in class by incorporating mindfulness activities, including meditation, mindful movement, and mindful breathing. Buddha also highly valued a student-centered approach, collaborative learning, and the cultivation of moral character. Among the many benefits students reap from these methods is an increased capacity for teamwork, group work, project-based learning, and problem-solving. By bringing Buddha's teachings into today's classrooms, we can provide students with more than just a sound academic foundation; we can help them gain the emotional intelligence, social maturity, and self-awareness they need to succeed in any endeavor.

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