

## Opening Speech

Good morning and thank you for attending today's ceremony.

We gather today to celebrate the birth of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, whose wisdom and compassion continue to illuminate our path. Over 2,500 years ago, the Buddha was born into this world, embarking on a journey that led to enlightenment and the sharing of the Dharma—a teaching that offers peace, wisdom, and liberation to all beings.

Today, as we honor his birth, we also reflect on his message of kindness, mindfulness, and the interconnectedness of all life. This is a time to renew our commitment to living with wisdom and compassion, not just within these walls, but in our daily lives, bringing light to the world through our thoughts, words, and actions. Our world definitely needs it!

Let us celebrate together with open hearts and a deep sense of gratitude. May this day inspire us all to cultivate peace and understanding, both within ourselves and in the world around us, and may the Buddha's teachings continue to guide us all.

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## Dharma Talk: Back to the Beginning...

### Four Noble Truths

This was Buddha's first teaching...he was worried people wouldn't accept it because it was too simple, too straightforward

Mahayana's / Zen's focus on emptiness and Bodhisattva path and Don't Know Mind

Vs Theravada (insight into 4 Noble Truths are the key to liberation: happiness and freedom are the main goals)

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**First truth (pain):** accurate diagnosis of the human condition: life is suffering/dukkha

*dukkha* could best be translated as 'the friction of the wheel on the wagon-axis'. We experience a similar friction during our life's journey. —dissatisfaction runs throughout our lives:

birth, endless change, grief, sorrow, despair, not getting what one wants, accidents, unpleasant encounters, painful separations, and the inevitable sickness, old age, pain, and (the elephant in the room) death

Summary: First Truth: Being alive involves suffering!

Show of hands: Who has never suffered?!

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### **Second truth (The origin of pain & suffering):**

Everything is impermanent including ourselves (thus no soul in Buddhism); every atom in our body changes annually! much unhappiness is self-inflicted from not understanding the nature of reality and self

in the end we die, giving up our identity (ego) and everything and everyone we spent a lifetime building

We are caught between thirst for pleasure and the fear of pain:

#### The Three Poisons:

**greed** (craving, desire, thirst, the pain of want); Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body/touch and consciousness are pleasurable and enjoyable, that is where this desire comes from and takes root.

We are attached to and even crave this unsatisfactory existence.

**hatred** (aversion, aggression): desire also manifests itself in the form of not wanting something

**delusion** (ignorance, confusion)

Countering the 3 poisons: generosity (dana), compassion, wisdom (prajna)

\*\*\*Suffering is made entirely by our minds

The defilements: ignorance (not seeing things as they really are: not seeing impermanence and the interdependent nature of reality): these give rise to all the other delusions

**Dependent Origination** (the most radical and original of Buddha's teachings):

“When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.”

Everything is interconnected and nothing exists independently; this process perpetuates suffering because we believe in a permanent self; so, we are trapped in the cycle of samsara

**Ignorance**, leads to **mental formations** (thoughts, emotions), leads to **consciousness** that requires **material form** that has **six senses** that create stimuli that generate **contact** that gives rise to sense impressions that generate **feelings/sensations** that generate desire/**craving** that leads to **grasping** (or pushing away) that produces **existence/becoming** (identifying with the situation) which leads to life/**birth** taking form around the grasping that leads to **suffering/dissatisfaction, old age and death**.

Three Examples: #1: Page 104 example in Buddhism 101

Example #2: Imagine a person sees an advertisement for a new smartphone (**contact**). They feel excited and desire it (**feeling** and **craving**). They then develop an attachment, believing that owning the phone will make them happy (**clinging**). They work extra hours or take a loan to buy it (**becoming**). When they finally get the phone (**birth**), they are initially pleased, but over time, it becomes outdated, or they see a newer model (**aging and death**), leading to dissatisfaction and a renewed cycle of desire.

Example #3:: A person **feels lonely** (contact and feeling).

They **crave companionship** (*taṇhā*).

They **cling to a relationship** (*upādāna*), believing it will bring lasting happiness.

Over time, the relationship **changes** (*anicca*), and they experience **pain** if it ends.

If they don't understand impermanence, **suffering repeats**, looking for new attachments

This cycle of ignorance, craving and desire creates karma which results in future rebirths; *Samsāra* can be translated as 'the endless wandering'...the cycle of life and death

continues unless one gains wisdom and breaks free from craving and attachment

Summary: The Second Noble Truth explains the origin of suffering

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**Third (The cessation of pain):** prognosis of our human condition; end suffering by eliminating cravings and attachments

Summary of Third Noble Truth: This is the hopeful message of the Buddha: Liberation is possible through meditation which develops concentration, which leads to insight and wisdom

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**Fourth (The path leading to the cessation of pain):** practical prescription; the Eightfold Path leads to Dharma leads to nirvana

The four stages of liberation:

1. Stream-enterer: Rx: Meditation and studying the Dharma  
realizes there's no fixed identity (non-self), impermanence, suffering
2. Once-Returner: deepening purification; sensual desires and anger, hatred and resentment are weakened  
  
Rx: insight meditation, path of moderation, moral/ethical discipline laid out in the Eightfold Path
3. Non-returner: Rx: deep insight meditation where the mind experiences joy and peace; cutting off sensual cravings  
  
complete elimination of attachment to sensual pleasures and ill will  
  
Reborn in the Pure Abodes (Pureland Buddhism): they reach enlightenment there
4. Arahat: fully enlightened beings/complete liberation; they realize emptiness and dependent origination; they are in constant mindfulness and deep equanimity (i.e. Dalai Lama); they have eliminated "I" as well as ignorance and agitations of the mind  
  
Rx: Nirvana: not a place but a state of being: ultimate peace and freedom and happiness;

no cravings, no attachment, no ignorance, no self (anatta) no rebirth (samsara),

Any truth must be experienced firsthand and not just taken on the authority of a teacher (“If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.”)

### **Summary of Four Noble Truths:**

Life is suffering

Suffering is made entirely by our minds

Suffering can be eliminated through meditation, insight and wisdom

The Eightfold Path is the path of moderation leading to Nirvana

### **The Eightfold Path: A Roadmap for Buddhist Living**

Zen is Non-theistic! It’s on us!

A path to avoid extremes: The middle way

Moral/ethical discipline is the foundation of concentration, concentration is the foundation for wisdom, and wisdom leads to liberation

“All experience is made by the mind.” Buddha

**Wisdom (#1 and 2): Prajna:** understanding suffering and impermanence; thinking with kindness and letting go of greed; seeing reality clearly amid the constant flow of human experience and change

1. **Right view:** Heart Sutra!: Humans are a set of five aggregates: material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations (impulses), and consciousness—all involve clinging and all are impermanent—

involves a correct understanding of the teachings of the Buddha (Dhamma) and The Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination; delusion is the main cognitive defilement;

actions have consequences; the goal is to live life by minimizing harm to yourself, others and the world;

Right View is holding no view! See the world as it really is!

Wrong view (delusion) leads to suffering

2. **Right intention/thought/resolve:** the intention of renunciation (abandoning desire), the intention of good will (counters ill will, anger, and aversion) and the intention of harmlessness (compassion as opposed to cruel, aggressive or violent); generosity

Understanding frees the mind from desire

intentions/selfless service; move away from ego (small I, my, me); non-violence and avoiding hateful conduct; not attached to views or opinions, keeping a before-thinking mind that wants to help all beings, lovingkindness

Negative attitudes we hold toward others spring from negative attitudes we hold toward ourselves

What we dwell on mentally becomes the inclination of the mind

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**Ethical Conduct (#3-5):** Morality in Eastern thinking is about harmony of the mind, harmony with others and harmony with Karma. The goal is to abstain from evil, cultivate good and purify one's mind: follow the Precepts

compassionate heart and mind...this is the indispensable foundation in Buddhism

3. **Right speech:** "The tongue has no bone, but it can do a lot of damage." avoid lies, slander, abusive language (insults, sarcasm), speaking too much (idle chatter), gossip, creating enmity;

Chinese proverb: "One word spoken. Four strong horses cannot pull it back."

Speak truthfully, kindly and with a beneficial purpose

A Bodhisattva can break all the precepts (48 of them!) except not speaking the truth

4. **Right action:** Do no harm! Avoid stealing, taking life, destroying property, overindulging (sexual conduct)

Follow the precepts!

5. **Right livelihood:** avoid doing harm through your work (no trading in weapons, living beings, meat, liquor, poison); our work is helping others and benefiting society; so be a teacher instead of pushing fentanyl!

**Mental Discipline: Meditation/concentration (#6-8): samadhi**

6. **Right effort:** getting rid of improper thoughts and cultivating wholesome thoughts; always trying hard in your meditation practice; Buddha stressed the need for effort, diligence, exertion and unflagging perseverance (retreats!); each of us has to work out his/her own deliverance

Prevent the five hindrances:

- sensual desire (craving for sense pleasure—sights, sounds, smells tastes and touches),
- ill will (anger, hatred, resentment, repulsion toward oneself or other or situations),
- dullness and drowsiness,
- restlessness and worry,
- doubt

Goal: to become a master of one's thoughts rather than the subject of them

7. **Right mindfulness:** mindfulness meditation: discovering the truth of our own experience; living your life in the moment—paying attention; being conscious of what one is doing;

mindfulness grounds one in the now--stripped of commentary and interpretations which result in delusions; it's about not thinking, not judging, not planning, not imagining, not wishing;

mindfulness of breathing;  
feelings arising and dissolving in a continual flow; results in tranquility which leads to concentration, serenity and insight

The mind watches its own process

The goal is to take mindfulness into everyday life

8. **Right concentration:** Developing deep states of meditation: keep coming back to a certain point (what is this?); keep a mind that is clear like space; this results in attentiveness, clarity and tranquility
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Buddha compared the untrained mind to a fish flapping on land when removed from the water

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**The Path of the Precepts: ethical foundation (moral conduct, mental discipline and developing wisdom)**

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1. Abstain from taking life
2. Abstain from taking things not given
3. Abstain from conduct done in lust (be faithful in relationships; respect boundaries)
4. Abstain from lying (Is it true? Kind? Necessary?)
5. Abstain from intoxicants taken to induce heedlessness (alcohol or drugs but also food, social media, news! can create a lack of care or concern)

Dharma Teacher: 3 are about what comes out of our mouths!

6. Not talk about the faults of others (judgment)
7. Not praise myself or put others down
8. Not to be covetous: be generous
9. Not to give way to anger: be harmonious
10. Not to slander the three jewels (Buddha, dharma, sangha)

Senior teachers:

11. Vow homage to the Buddha
12. Vow homage to the dharma
13. Vow homage to the sangha
14. Vow generosity to people
15. Vow compassionate speech and action toward people
16. Vow together action and to become one to attain the Buddha Way

Without ethical conduct, meditation is unstable, wisdom does not develop, and nirvana is not possible

So, Buddha offered a philosophy and a path for transformation: each moment is an opportunity to practice these teachings in our daily lives to move toward inner peace, clarity and liberation from suffering

Our job is to support each other on this path.

Seung Sahn: “Try, try, try for 10,000 years and never give up.”

THE END....