

## Jefferson Quick, Timely Reads

### Mysticism of Buddha: Finding Nirvana Can Be Goal for the World

By: Reverend Charles Brock  
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Buddha (623 – 544 BCE)

Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism. It differs insofar as it does not consider the 2.3-plus million gods of Hinduism necessary, but concentrates on the Upanishad theme of Oneness. There are many forms of Buddhism throughout the world. Japan has Zen, a small group but influential in the United States. “Satori” – enlightenment – may take years for a monk to find, but for them it means everything. Oneness of all people and creation is that which is strived for. Once found, it affects the mind, families, religion, and politics. The main purpose of Yoga is not primarily for exercise of body or mind as in America, but to find Oneness.

Buddha, born Siddhartha Gautama, was a teacher, philosopher, spiritual leader, and founder of [Buddhism](#). Born a Prince, he lived and taught in the region around the

border of modern-day Nepal and [India](#). The name Buddha means “one who is awakened” or “the enlightened one.”

After experimenting with different teachings for years, and finding none of them acceptable, Siddhartha Gautama spent a fateful night in deep meditation beneath a tree. During his meditation, all the answers he had been seeking became clear, and he achieved full awareness, thereby becoming Buddha.

Questions about all he had not experienced led him to take more journeys of exploration, and on these subsequent trips he encountered a diseased man, a decaying corpse, and an ascetic. Siddhartha was overcome by these sights, and the next day, at age 29, he left his kingdom, his wife and his son to follow a more spiritual path, determined to find a way to relieve the universal suffering that he now understood to be one of the defining traits of humanity.

For the next six years, Siddhartha lived an ascetic life, studying and meditating using the words of various religious teachers as his guide. He practiced his new way of life with a group of five ascetics, and his dedication to his quest was so stunning that the five ascetics became Siddhartha’s followers. When answers to his questions did not appear, however, he redoubled his efforts, enduring pain, fasting nearly to starvation, and refusing water.

Whatever he tried, Siddhartha could not reach the level of insight he sought, until one day when a young girl offered him a bowl of rice. As he accepted it, he suddenly realized that corporeal austerity was not the means to achieve inner liberation, and that living under harsh physical constraints was not helping him achieve spiritual release.

That night, Siddhartha sat alone under the Bodhi tree, vowing to not get up until the truths he sought came to him, and he meditated until the sun came up the next day. He remained there for several days, purifying his mind, seeing his entire life, and previous lives, in his thoughts.

During this time, he had to overcome the temptations of Mara, who challenged his right to become the Buddha. Mara’s three daughters pose as Thirst, Discontentment, and Desire. In the Samyutta Nikaya’s *Māra-saṃyutta*, Mara’s three daughters were stripping in front of Buddha but failed to entice them.[1]

Soon a picture began to form in his mind of all that occurred in the universe, and Siddhartha finally saw the answer to the questions of suffering that he had been seeking for so many years. In that moment of pure enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha.[2]



Great Buddha at Nara, Japan

### **The Four Noble Truths**

The four noble truths and eightfold path are the key concepts in Buddhism:

1. **The Truth of Suffering**
2. This world is full of suffering
3. **The Truth of the Cause of Suffering**
4. The cause of human suffering lies in desire or craving.
5. **The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering**
6. The extinguishing of all human ignorance results in a state known as Nirvana.
7. **The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering**
8. The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering is the Noble Eight-fold Path.

### **The Eightfold Path**

1. **Right View or Right Understanding** – Seeing things how they really are, not how you think they are.
2. **Right Thoughts** – Having loving thoughts.
3. **Right Speech** – To refrain from harmful speech and to speak kindly to everyone.
4. **Right Conduct** – To make sure that your deeds are peaceful, benevolent and compassionate.
5. **Right Livelihood** – To earn your living in such a way as to entail no evil consequences.
6. **Right Effort** – To work hard and put effort into understanding the way of the world.
7. **Right Mindfulness** – To cherish good and pure thoughts for all that we say and do arise from our thoughts.
8. **Right Meditation or Right Contemplation** – To meditate and concentrate your mind on the Buddha, his Life and his Teaching.

## Nirvana

*Nirvana* is a mystical transcendent state in which there is neither suffering, desire, nor sense of self, and the subject is released from the effects of karma and the cycle of death and rebirth. It is the final goal of Buddhism. It is unlike the Western heaven because the individual personality is absorbed – not adhered – in the Divine. It is like the water of a river that is absorbed into the ocean. It continues to exist but is indistinct.



The other great mystical concept of Buddhism and part of Nirvana is *Oneness*. It takes a lot for a Westerner to understand this because of our binary background and we are brought up on the “I-Thou” dichotomy – i.e. God is an object and we are the subject. Other people are separate from us as well. We thrive on individualism as part of our heritage, fought for fiercely against mind-shriveling communalisms. Instead, much of eastern thinking posits that there is no final

distinction between subject and object. The famous Hindu formula taken up by Buddhism is “I am you.” God is not only “in you” but you are God. God is you. God is me. God is that table. The Divine is everywhere and there is no distinction between God and me; me and you.[3] That is hard for Westerners to grasp but look at the potential consequences. If I am you, then I have an inbuilt responsibility for you as I would for myself. And then theologize it, corporatize it, politicize it – we just might have a new theological and political ball game that can inform the West without losing our basic Western Exodus tradition.

Why not then apply Oneness to politics and religion in the West? As Republicans and Democrats, Jews and Christians, Muslims and other believers begin to love and appreciate each other and talk together and even confess their national and religious sins together, life will be much better. Not all problems can be solved this way – for example it is a binary issue between Western liberalism and authoritarianism. We had nothing to gain and everything to fear from the fascists, racists, sexists, or white supremacists. But Nixon saw China as reasonable and Reagan saw that reconciliation between America and the Soviet Union was possible and did it. There are still many huge issues to solve: immigration, income inequality, health care, voting rights, foreign affairs, and constitutional interpretation. Some attempts at a “Third Way” were made by President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair as they tried to merge conservative (but not fascist) and liberal (but not communist) philosophies. [4]

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But the point is not just to compromise, but to appreciate others even though opposite of oneself. It is a question of love – love the neighbor but also love the opposite of yourself and views – love the enemy. Merge beliefs together for progress and truth.

Buddhism has much to give to America in Oneness, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path. The method of mysticism of the Buddha finding Nirvana can be a goal for the world. It can help bring peace instead of war and peace of mind to a sorry world. Mindfulness and meditation are key methods to get to that state of mind and thought and action. There are many ways forward here, and there is much to consult from experts in these fields.

Citations:

[1] *Mara*, Wikipedia

[2] *Buddha*, [Biography.com](https://www.biography.com) (altered)

[3] There are some dualists in Hinduism that strongly disagree with monism. Madhva argued that Shankara championed Oneness because he was so stupid that he could only count to one. And there are some monists in Christianity – e.g. my teacher Paul Tillich who called himself “panentheistic” which means God is in all things but also beyond all things.

[4] Whyman, Philip (2005). *Third Way Economics: Theory and Evaluation*. Springer; Freedon, Michael (2004). *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought*. Princeton University Press.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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