

## Tony Bernhard 9-29-2010

Tony Bernhard is one of Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders. He sits on the board of the Sati Center, is a member of the Spirit Rock Planning Committee and hosts sitting groups and teaches dharma in Davis, CA.

What is the purpose of the dharma talk? Like a docent or realtor, the Buddha points out features.

The Buddha brought five new things to the table, which had not been present before.

1. The first innovation was that salvation is up to you. There is no need for mediation by priests. As the buddha said in the Kalama Sutta

*"So, as I said, Kalamas: 'Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, "This contemplative is our teacher." When you know for yourselves that, "These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness" — then you should enter & remain in them.'*

Nirvana is a verb in the Pali language. It is something you do. It is a process, not a thing.

The idea of rebirth was already present in the culture, was not something introduced by the Buddha. The Buddha is said to have said, "I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering.

Suffering, or dukkha in the Pali language, means more than just suffering. In Pali, the meaning is broader, and encompasses discomfort and dissatisfaction. Modern North America has so many conveniences, that it would be considered a heaven realm by those in other countries and those from the past. Yet, there is still dukkha.

Often, people think "If I only had X, then I would be happy. Yet, when they achieve their ambition and get X, after a while the satisfaction wears off, and dukkha returns. This is a never ending cycle.

2. Unlike most "religions" the Buddha taught nothing of "evil". The only subject was the elimination of suffering.

The Four Noble Truths is just one truth seen from four viewpoints.

3. The Buddha taught that intention was everything. This is in contrast to the Brahmins whose role was to keep the earth running by executing precise rituals. It didn't matter what you thought, so long as the ritual was properly performed, to the letter. To the Brahmins, the rituals meant everything. To the Buddha, the rituals meant nothing, only intention counted.

The precepts were guides, not commandments. If you were hiding Anne Frank, and the Germans came to the door, asking if anyone was hidden, it would not be a violation of the precept about lying, if you were to deny that anyone was hidden there. This would be skillful.

There are three skillful intentions, and three unskillful. The unskillful are:

- Greed
- Anger or ill-will
- Cruelty.

The skillful intentions are:

- Generosity
- Metta, or loving kindness
- Compassion.

Intentions are the only thing that matters. It doesn't matter what you do, only what you intend.

#### 4. Mindfulness or Vipassana

There was already a tradition of meditation prior to the Buddha. This was a concentration meditation, leading to a state of blissful awareness, however this is not a path to nirvana. Concentration meditation, while desirable, is only temporary. Insight meditation is the path to nirvana.

#### 5. Anata, or dependent origination.

The Buddha taught that

- All things are impermanent.
- There is nothing capable of providing satisfaction.
- All things are not-self. That is, there is nothing that is the self.

There are really no things, just processes. Everything, including our bodies, is changing. Everything is dependent on everything; that is all *things* are really just processes. The closest we have to a thing called self is just a feeling of self.

*The non-doing of any evil,  
the performance of what's skillful,  
the cleansing of one's own mind:  
this is the teaching of the Awakened.  
Patient endurance: the foremost austerity.  
Unbinding: the foremost, so say the Awakened.  
He who injures another is no contemplative.  
He who mistreats another, no monk.  
Not disparaging, not injuring,  
restraint in line with the Patimokkha,  
moderation in food,  
dwelling in seclusion,  
commitment to the heightened mind:  
this is the teaching of the Awakened.  
- Dhammapada 183*

Go forth and cling no more.