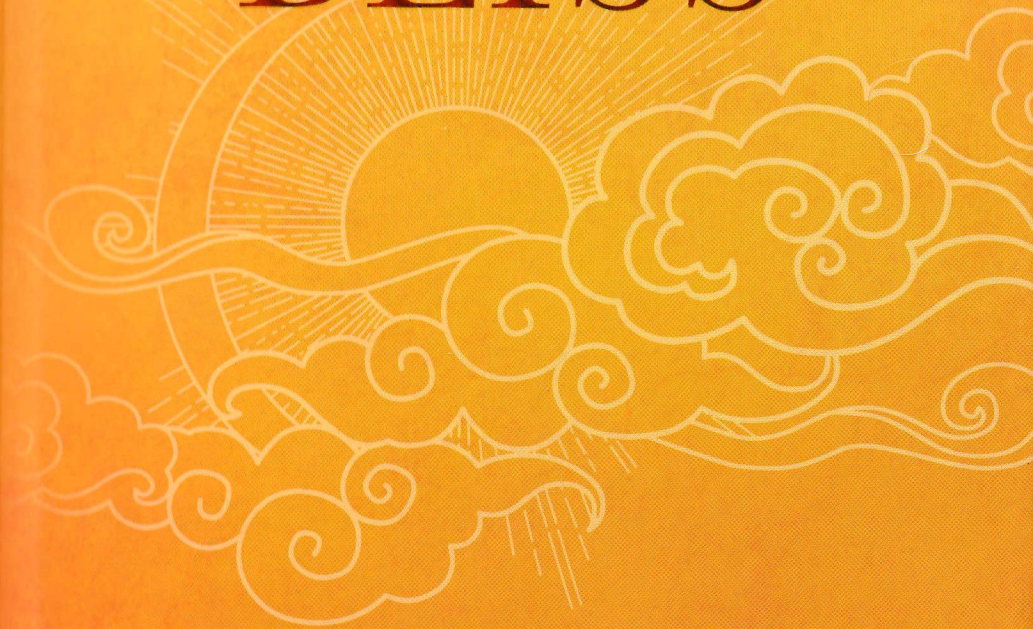


WISDOM

Is

BLISS



Four Friendly Fun Facts That
Can Change Your Life

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Wisdom Is Bliss—Ignorance Not So Much

Luckily, to experience reality as suffering is just a mistake, born of our wrong knowing, the opposite of the realistic worldview. Such deluded experience is not real reality. It is an unreal reality. It is illusory. Reality is bliss-freedom-indivisible. Free of the illusion of alienated self, you know

with mind and body that you have always been sheer freedom, which you have either suffered or enjoyed as a wholly relational, loving, selfless self. When you fully experience the nature of the world, no longer separating yourself from “all the other”—i.e., the not-you world around you—you find real bliss, and you never again really suffer. So the “buddhasmic” experience is true realism.

Since Buddhism is realism, the Buddha’s enlightenment discovery is that of the true nature of reality and thus is a scientific discovery. It is not a mystical, “other-worldly” experience, though it is “out of this world” great. It is the full experience of this real world.

Here we need to talk a bit more about the physical discoveries Buddha made that are the source of his teachings. Buddha made the most extreme effort to penetrate to an experimental (i.e., experiential) insight into the deepest, most ultimate, “absolute,” if you will, nature of physical reality. He put his life on the line to do so—that is to say, he faced death and kept his cool, kept his realistic awareness. He thereby discovered what he called “the clear light of the void”: the peaceful, inexhaustibly vibrant yet quiescent energy-plenum of emptiness, or voidness, which is not really a “foundational” or underlying reality. Rather, it is the very actuality of reality, the matrix of all the differentiated things, each and all relationally present, because void, empty, free of any nonrelative component or essence.

In other words, he fully, experientially, realized the nature of this reality with a nondual, immersive consciousness. In a scientific sense, he was clear that it is inexpressible in words and cannot be captured by any positive final theory. It is the nondual absolute, inexpressibly but utterly inseparable from the relative reality we normally associate with.

What I mean by relative reality is that an unknowing, suffering being is one who experiences her-, him-, or itself as a separate limited entity surrounded by infinite other beings, things, and energies constantly threatening to overwhelm her, him, or it. Luckily, such an intolerable world is only illusory. An awakened buddha being, accurately seeing through the illusion and coming to know the reality, is fully overjoyed by it. She or he or she-he experiences her-, him-, or himself as blissfully and invulnerably indivisible from the infinite whole of all beings and things and energies. From such an omnipresent, multifarious vantage point—from all directions at once, so to speak—such a buddha being can effortlessly shape her-, him-, or himself to fit with what all those beings need to perceive in order to open doors for those beings’ own deeper enlightening experience. This is an inconceivable, wide-open worldview from which universal empathy and compassion become totally natural.

From the very beginning, Buddha taught this reality that he had discovered quite simply as the third noble truth of freedom from suffering: “nirvana.” He allowed people to understand it in whatever way was appropriate for them at particular moments in their development. To some, he allowed them for the time being to think of it dualistically, as referring to a place outside the world that they could reach by overcoming their egocentric ignorance and its attendants, lust and hate. To others, he more precisely presented it nondualistically, as the reality of the here and now.

He acknowledged right away that it is inconceivable and inexpressible, so it cannot be embraced effectively merely as a dogma. Instead, the good news is that you can verify and experience such reality yourself. That is just what the Buddha did. He engaged intensively in scientific

exploration of the world, including within himself. When he finally experienced reality to the fullest, he exclaimed, "Wow! It all is blissful, uncreated, and absolutely free, and has been so always. I am it, and all of you are too!"

With that discovery, he knew that all of us can understand it too. He said, "Don't just 'believe' me, or believe *in* me without any reason. You must explore it all for yourself, critique your misknowing ignorance, be sharp-minded, doubt, and investigate. Doubt what I say! Think it over deeply. You must seek it, and you also can discover the deepest reality yourself through a process of total education. Though you at first see it as inconceivable, you can bit by bit imagine it, you will get more and more used to its possibility, and its taste will lighten up your experience of the illusory, which will cheer you up."

Just so, this is the founding of a tradition of joyful scientific discovery, without a doubt. The process of education derived from it is based on the confidence that every human being can discover the very same thing for him- or herself.

The Yak-Tail Flywhisk Teacher

I love the wonderful Ch'an/Zen story from *The Blue Cliff Record* (Thomas and J. C. Cleary translation). It is a story of the meeting of Pai Chang and his teacher, Master Ma, which Pai Chang told to his newly arrived, soon-to-be chief disciple, Huang Po. Ch'an masters used a yak-tail flywhisk as an authority symbol. They would give a flywhisk to graduating disciples as a symbol of their having developed some level of understanding. As Pai Chang told the story to Huang Po: "Master Ma asked me to pick up the flywhisk and then asked me, 'Do you identify with this? Or do you not identify with it?' I answered by