

The Heroic Stoic

Happiness Through Outlook & Effort – A Rich, Fulfilling Successful Life through Philosophy: Mental/Physical Fitness and Self-Improvement

Zen



I suppose I should have just titled this page Buddhism, but Zen has a better ring to it. There is a difference between Zen Buddhism and other lineages, but I will use them synonymously for simplicity. In any case, Buddhism is a philosophy that you may find runs through my writing, and it affects my views on how to live a happy life.

First, a short history. The historical figure known as the Buddha was born a prince named Siddhartha Gautama. As the story goes, he lived a sheltered life as a young man, and he was shielded from as much suffering as his father could manage. Despite his father's efforts to hide him from any suffering whatsoever by keeping him within the walls of the sheltered palace, Siddhartha decided to leave the palace at the age of 29 and was said to have seen several instances of death, sickness, and suffering. This troubled him so much, that he decided to search for how to relieve the suffering of this world.

He tried several paths, which eventually led him to living a life of extreme deprivation and fasting. During this ascetic period, he met a little girl who offered him some food and drink, which he graciously accepted. Feeling the nourishment within his body after such a long period of fasting, he determined he would sit beneath the **Bodhi Tree** until he was enlightened with the truth. He emerged from his long sitting, and what he shared after he was enlightened were the basic tenets of Buddhism, and what came to be known as the **Middle Way**—recommendations for a life not of extreme deprivation, nor of luxury or extravagance (sounds lot like Stoicism, huh?). The basics of the teachings are what follows:

The Four Noble Truths:

1) Life is Suffering – This is very similar to the Stoics concept of fate and control. The beginning

of our path to tranquility is to acknowledge that suffering exists.

2) Suffering is Caused by our Attachment – The essence of all that troubles us is that we do not accept that everything is temporary. When we have it good we want it to last forever, but even then we are always grasping for more. “If only I had _____, then I would be happy.”

3) There is a way to Stop the Suffering – Through the eight-fold path, the Buddha shows us how we can cease our attachment to illusory things, and thus stop the suffering in our lives.

4) The Path to Stop the Suffering – The Eight-Fold Path below

The Eight-Fold Path:

1. Right View – It means to see things through, to grasp the impermanent and imperfect nature of worldly objects and is a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths. It is also the ability to see what is wholesome and not, especially within ourselves.

2. Right Thought – This is the foundation for right action. When we have right thinking we are deep within the present moment, not drifting off into the future or dwelling in the past.

3. Right Speech – We should tell the truth, not exaggerate, speak friendly, warm, and gently, encouraging those around us with our speech, and talk only when necessary. Our speech should not cause unnecessary suffering in others or in ourselves.

4. Right Action – Simply acting kindly and compassionately, being honest but respectful, respecting the belongings of others, and keeping sexual relationships harmless to others.

5. Right Livelihood – One should earn one's living in a righteous way and that wealth should be gained legally and peacefully. In the Buddha's view, occupations like weapons manufacturing and those that lead to killing of other beings, including animals, will not lead to happiness.

6. Right Effort – We should put all our will and effort into following the path. This of course takes great amounts of energy.

7. Right Mindfulness – We must have a clear perception that penetrates the initial impressions we have. We should not get carried away with how we think things are or should be. Right mindfulness enables us to be aware of the process of conceptualization in a way that we actively observe and control the way our thoughts go. It is to be aware of right now...to be present in this moment.

8. Right Concentration – Concentration on wholesome thoughts and actions. The Buddhist method of choice to develop right concentration is through the practice of meditation. The meditating mind focuses on a selected object, and thus strengthens its ability to focus and be still.

So, in essence Zen reminds us that our attachment to worldly things and our thinking that they are permanent cause us great suffering. Our grasping for these pleasures leads to our troubles, and our happiness really can be found in the present moment. So, refraining from grasping will lead to

happiness. We should strive to be helpful and not harm others with our thoughts, actions and speech, and live in the present moment to have tranquility and contentment.