BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

This chapter describes the three pillars on which the Buddha's teaching rests: Knowledge, Meditation, and Holding the Level.
It deals with the levels of meaningful conduct on which one achieves liberation from suffering, the attitude of developing for the sake of all beings, and the highest view with which one becomes enlightened. This most commonly used division into **Theravada (school of [religious] elders), Great Way (Mahayana), and Diamond Way (Vajrayana)** refers both to different emphases of the Buddha's teaching and to different levels of application. All three levels of Buddha's teaching are independent paths.

When asked why and what the Buddha was teaching, he replied, "I teach because all beings want to be happy and avoid suffering. I teach the way things are".
Buddha's teaching is extremely diverse. It includes a total of 84,000 teachings that he gave over the course of 45 years. Traditionally, the teachings are divided into three "collections," the "baskets," which from a western perspective can also be understood as three pillars of a Buddhist building. Each pillar is divided into three levels.

The first pillar includes the necessary knowledge about Buddhism. Here it is about all the topics that one can intellectually grasp, study and pass on. If questions arise, one gets the appropriate answers. However, it is not enough for a Buddhist just to know.

Therefore, **the second pillar** refers to the transformation of knowledge into experience. This is done with the help of a rich treasure of different meditations that bring about corresponding insights and realizations. These meditations are practiced regularly so that the knowledge becomes a living experience.

The third pillar focuses on implementation. Everyday life, with all its challenges, distractions, and pitfalls, reveals the extent to which one has actually internalized the teaching as a Buddhist. Buddha taught how to secure the knowledge and experience from meditation and make it stable and lasting.

From another perspective, the teaching can also be divided into three levels. Although Buddha himself never taught this division in this way, different paths or "vehicles" emerged, each focusing on different approaches and methods. It is important to understand that these are different approaches that complement and build upon each other.

The first level of Buddha's teachings, **Theravada**, is the foundation for all Buddhist schools. It addresses people who seek their own liberation and desire to leave the cycle of suffering as soon as possible. For these people, Buddha primarily explains cause and effect (karma) so that they consciously set only causes for happiness and avoid the causes for suffering. With the understanding that positive actions lead to happiness and negative ones to difficulties, one can take full responsibility for one's own life.
Through appropriate meditation methods, the mind becomes calm and stable. Because of the mindfulness that arises, one no longer follows habits that cause suffering. At the same time, the insight grows that the basis of all difficulties - the "I" or "self" - has no independent existence, and one becomes free. Thus, one becomes an arhat (sanskr.) or "enemy conqueror" who has realized the state of mind tranquility beyond suffering. All mental tendencies that keep him in the cycle of rebirths are defeated.

The second level of Buddha's teachings, **the Great Way (Mahayana)**, is for altruists, people who have power and surplus for others. The motivation in the Great Way is to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings and also to lead all beings to liberation and enlightenment. One needs compassion and wisdom for this. One wants to help beings who are caught in the cycle of suffering due to ignorance to achieve lasting happiness. With wisdom one recognizes what the beings need for their development.
The meditations aimed at this involve all beings.
In this way one removes the separation between oneself and the world "outside". This is practiced through the so-called liberating actions (sansk.: paramitas). In addition, one develops an understanding or feeling for the emptiness of things. Emptiness means that nothing arises from itself, but everything is composed and happens in dependence, constantly changing and eventually dissolving.
In order to hold the level of insight achieved through

meditation, one learns above all to avoid anger, to experience pleasant things as blessings and difficult things as a learning process. Often used by lay people, this path emphasizes the underlying motivation or attitude. The methods are aimed at perfecting one's abilities to benefit all beings in the best possible way. The ultimate result of this path is Buddhahood, in which all spiritual qualities are brought to full maturity.

The third level of Buddha's teachings, **the Diamond Way (Vajrayana)**, appeals primarily to people who can identify with the goal of enlightenment. One's own development is never separated from the welfare of all beings. At this level, one realizes that Buddha is the mirror of one's own mind and that all enlightened qualities - fearlessness, joy, energetic compassion and wisdom - are already inherent in every human being. This potential is Buddha nature. Nothing needs to be added from outside.
The structure of meditation is focused on identification, on becoming one with enlightenment. As aspects of meditation one uses Buddha forms that express certain qualities of enlightenment and awaken corresponding qualities in our mind. At the same time, one works with the awareness of the mind, beyond form. One's own mind is experienced as rich and playful. Here, everything is fantastic just because it is happening. This is the view of a Buddha, beyond all conditions and limitations.
As a realizer, one practices raising everything to the highest and purest level possible in every encounter and situation. In this way, it becomes possible to experience the richness contained in every situation of life. Ultimately, through identification with one's Buddha nature, all mental veils fall away and one reaches the goal - Buddhahood or enlightenment.
On this path, one finds highly realized teachers, the so-called "realizers" (yogis), who often teach in an exemplary manner using unusual methods and who have detached themselves from restrictive social norms and generally accepted ways of life.

The roof of the building is formed by the highest and most powerful teachings, which directly aim at the nature of the mind. They are called "The Great Seal" (sanskr. Mahamudra) or "The Great Perfection" (sanskr. Maha Ati). Here one practices the unity of foundation (the perfect nature of mind), path (meditation practice) and goal (liberation and enlightenment) - beyond expectations, hopes, fears and conceptual notions. One behaves like a Buddha until one has become a Buddha.