

The Original Buddhism

and Its Place in Martial Arts Study

by by Adrian Chan-Wyles Ph.D.

Why We Travel The Path

Mankind strives for wholeness and completion. It is a striving that knows no end, or indeed, any limitation. It has to be, by definition, a three-dimensional quest of inner research into the essence of our very being. On the surface, all seems well and tranquil but this facade of 'normality' hides the true nature of mankind's predicament. We are not complete as we are, even if we manage to ignore our developmental urges by disappearing into a morass of experiential phenomenon a morass we tend to call 'everyday life.' This can only be maintained by a firm conviction of denial. We tell ourselves that all is well even if we feel that deep down, this might not be true.

Happiness becomes a flimsy construct a fine, thin veil that we can see through to the dissatisfactoriness lurking behind. This dissatisfaction is always threatening to penetrate through the flimsy happiness and invade the oasis of illusion that society builds its very existence upon. Of course happiness within the context we are exploring is not happiness at all. It is a pseudo-happiness a falsehood declared 'true' by the consensus of 'non-knowing.' The deepest parts of our minds are out of balance with the parts of our minds that are nearer the surface that literally 'interface' between our inner self and the outer world. Society builds its institutions and establishments upon this rather rocky foundation. The pain of separation from ourselves is obscured by the minute details of banal, repetitive procedure: a set of co-ordinated schematics all relying upon one another for existence that reduces human participation to that of mere 'automation.' Society tells us that repetition without apparent error is the way to salvation. We are expected to feel completed by merely not being noticed or standing out from the crowd. It is the dogma of fulfilment by disappearance.

But of course, we never fully 'disappear,' no matter how well we conform to society. No matter how dull we become, 'we' are always present in the existential moment of life. And we have to live with the feeling/knowledge of this state, and the palpable contradiction such an existence entails. We are free to be enslaved. The prevailing ideology encourages the acquisition of material goods in the outer world but totally ignores the acquisition of 'wholeness' in the inner world.



The Buddhist scripture entitled the 'Dhammapada' (Pali: 'Path of Truth') tells us:

"The man whose hands are controlled, whose feet are controlled, whose words are controlled, who is self-controlled in all things, who finds the inner joy, whose mind is self-possessed, who is one and has found perfect peace this man I call a monk." (THE DHAMMAPADA by Juan Mascaro, page 86.)

Martial Arts as a Vehicle to Self-Development

Virtually every country (Buddhist or otherwise) in the far-east has an aspect of its culture that extols martial endeavour in both theory and in practice. China, with its many systems of internal and external kung fu; Japan, with its 'Budo' (i.e. 'Martial Way') arts; Okinawa, with its various forms of 'Te'; Korea with its famous (and relatively modern) Tae Kwon Do, as well its more ancient arts (for example, Muksodo and Tangsodo, etc); Vietnam, with its Vietvodo; Thailand, with its various forms of Muay Thai; Sri Lanka, with its Tamil arts (also practiced in southern India and called 'Kalaripayit'); and a number of other countries including Tibet, Indonesia, Laos and Cambodia. From this brief and incomplete survey, a pattern emerges of a close association between spiritual development and martial art practice. This is not surprising, as the Lord Buddha, living around 500 BCE in north India, was of the 'Kshatriya' (or 'Warrior and King') caste of Hindu society. Such a caste prepared their young men for both action on the battlefield and enlightened leadership upon the country's throne. The Buddha (Siddharta Gautama) was no exception to this rule. The Buddhist scriptures tell us how He was trained in Hindu philosophy, Yoga and martial arts. Hindu society, like its Chinese counterpart, had always acknowledged the link between psycho-spiritual development and that of physical development but more than this, it was also acknowledged that at the highest levels, the distinction between the 'psychological' and the 'physical' falls away, to reveal a clear, pristine Mind that embraces the universe, within which all things manifest including our own physical bodies. This philosophical concept of 'oneness' is further emphasised by the fact that just 'silent sitting' in meditation was not enough to transcend the suffering of life on the physical plane. Simply ignoring the 'physical' world does not make it 'go away.' Practicing the in-depth and diverse movements of the many styles of martial art with a

concentrated and developed mind (acquired through seated meditation) creates the perfect balance of 'mind' and 'body.' For when the physical body is aligned, and that body is merged with the 'One Mind,' universal energy flows and there is nothing that can not be achieved. If the Mind is enlightened through seated meditation, that is its essence; when the Mind moves the body on the physical plane, that is its function. All things accord, and there is peace.

The Original Buddhism

The man who became known as the 'Buddha' (Pali: 'One who knows directly') was a Hindu of high caste birth. Leaving the comforts of home life and taking up a wandering existence with little or no material support, was by no means unique to the Buddha. When he renounced the material comforts of home life, he was participating in a very ancient Hindu practice designed for those who wanted to push their spiritual training to a higher level. The Vedas i.e., Hindu scriptures have rules for virtually every single life event. There is nothing a Hindu can do in life that is not governed by the Vedas except to leave home and 'renounce' the guidance of the Vedas, to find the highest truth in the universe for themselves through meditation and deprivation. These men were called 'Sramana Brahmana,' amongst other names, and they strove ceaselessly in their spiritual search. They had given up their caste and had literally become 'as nothing' within the context of ancient Hindu society. Many thousands (perhaps hundreds of thousands) went on this path. Many realised their own 'enlightenment' and gathered disciples around. This is exactly what the Lord Buddha did. At this time (just after his enlightenment), the formal separation of lay followers from ordained disciples was not yet established and would not be for at least another four centuries after His passing. In fact, the Lord Buddha speaks openly and fully about the 'Bahujana' or lay followers (i.e., those who have not left home). He says that it is the duty of other Sramana Brahmana who follow Him to teach openly all who come for the teachings the emphasis being upon the calming of the mind through seated meditation AND that understanding applied to the rigours of everyday life. Indeed, even the later Buddhist monastic tradition of 'Upasotha' is of Hindu origin, whereby a Sramana Brahmana and his followers would gather together every two weeks (on the the days of the New and Full moons), and recite and discuss the sect's teachings. An early Pali word for the Buddha's sect was 'Sasana' (literally: 'Order'), They would gather on the 'moon' days and recite the core teachings at this early time, what became known as the 'Vinaya' (i.e. 'monastic discipline') was not yet formulated and the eminent late researcher Sukumar Dutt (For a general over-view of Dutt's work see his books entitled: The Buddha and Five After Centuries. Early Buddhist Monachism. Buddhism in East Asia) is of the opinion that the Dhammapada scripture served the purpose of focus for the Buddha's teachings. Centuries later, a formal monastics Sangha (i.e., 'order of monks') was formed that no longer lived in the forest, or dwelled under trees, as the original Sramana Brahmana had done, but rather lived in purpose built complexes called 'viharas.' Laypeople were demoted as mere worshippers of the sangha whose job it was to provide material help to the monks, in the hope that they would get a better re-birth!



Gnosis Self-Knowledge and Understanding

After at least 20 years of martial arts practice, I can say that I am neither layperson nor monk, although over time I have fulfilled both these roles. However, surveying the broad spectrum of the Buddhist philosophical view from ultra conservative Theravada schools that extol a monk or nun but look down on mere lay people to the Tibetan orders that have married copies who engage in a healthy and well-rounded spiritual yoga to understanding 'gnosis.' To me, gnosis (Greek: 'revealed knowing') is the beginning and ending of the original message of the Buddha. It is existential. It is vibrant and applicable here and now and certainly does not depend upon the false dichotomy of 'layperson versus monk,' which was the product of nothing more than a political development from within the Buddhist community whereby one group tried to gain dominance amongst all Buddhist groups which were scattered far and wide over North India. This group created the myth of 'Sangha,' and the myth of the 'Laity.' Both are empty concepts that hinder our progress to gnosis or enlightenment. The Vinaya, in its various forms, developed out of this need to justify and enforce this false and synthetic boundary between human beings. Buddhism calcified around three to four hundred years after the death of the Buddha with the emergence of the self-proclaimed 'Theravada' (or 'Elders School'). There were of course many Buddhist groups, each with their specific understanding of the Dharma. The Mahasanghika school broke away from the Theravada in protest to the extolling of a false premise and enforcement of a false paradigm. In this school, laypeople and monk practiced and worshipped side by side, with no ideology of 'inferior' or 'superior' getting in the way. It was a return to the original message of the Buddha that enlightenment was 'here and now,' not sometime in the unknown future, and that this enlightenment was not dependent upon scriptures, but rather practice and perception. By this time, scripture recitation had taken the place of actual and real mind development. We must not forget the true message of gnosis. We are neither layperson nor monk; we are the essence that underlies both these states and ALL states. All we have to do is realise this essence and merge with it and we will be with the Buddha, who, 2,500 years ago in ancient India, sat under the Bodhi Tree, silently perfecting our Minds in the spirit of compassion. Every new morning, I breathe the fresh air, clear my mind, and set about my Taijiquan practice.

