

Don't hold your breath!

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In 1958, the German Buddhist, George Grimm, published "The Doctrine of the Buddha, the religion of reason and meditation." On the other hand, we have late forms of grace-based Buddhism where merely calling on the name of a Buddha or a Sutra will bring us succour, if not salvation, itself.

Yet, the suttas tell that Buddhism, or at least, the true experience of the Dhamma, is "beyond reasoning" (*atakkâvacara*) (S 12.68)¹. The suttas also tell us that only **one** buddha arises in our universe (or space-time continuum) at a time, and that prayers do not work—but physical effort and mental diligence will bring us what we want or need in a beneficial way.

The Middle Way

Buddhism, as taught by the Buddha, then, is the middle way between Reason and Faith. The Big R Reason is simply the non-Buddhist reason, logic, intellectualism, dogma, etc. The Big F Faith is the non-Buddhist faith, unquestioning and blind faith. Reasoning (Big R) is to listen only to the Head or to fill it with things (views). Faith (Big F) is to listen only to the Heart without checking with true reality.

We can even say, for our purposes here at least, that Reasoning has its roots in **ignorance**. Faith has its feet cast in the cement of **craving**, and so simply sinks with it. Buddhism, at least early Buddhism (the Buddha's teaching), lies in between, that is, beyond both, rising above both. The Buddha's teaching avoids both Reason (which works best with computers) and Faith (which blinds us, so that we are stuck right where we are).

Reality and truth

In an important sense, early Buddhism has both reason and faith (with the small r and the small f). This means that these tools occur **naturally**, that they have to do with the real and true nature of things.

The **real** nature of things is that whatever we experience (see, hear, smell, taste or touch) all happen by way of causes and effects (note the plural). What we experience (like seeing a rainbow) is the result of many causes, and its effects are different on different people. Early Buddhism accepts reasoning in the form of "causes and effects," that is change. This means impermanence. The rest we can work out for ourselves.

True nature of things

The **true** nature of things depends on **how** we see, hear, smell, taste and touch. It depends on how our mind works. In other words, how we **think**: that is how we will see, hear, etc.

¹ See **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, [SD 33.1b \(6.2.2\)](#).

On a deeper level of truth, **what** we think also influences **how** we think; and **how** we think influences **what** we think. When we keep on thinking of what we want, we come under the power of craving—we become subhuman, especially as asuras (exploitative) or as pretas (addictive). When we are subhuman, we are caught in "snake-bite-it's-own-tail" way of thinking.

Truth and beauty

Hence, to see the **true** nature of life and things, we must understand and accept that all our experiences—**what** we see, hear, smell, taste and touch—are all made up in our own mind. In this sense, they are not real. They are only virtual reality: we have projected those realities from our own greed, hate, delusion and fear—in a word, from our “views.” This is a simple explanation of what the Buddha teaches as “emptiness” (suññatā).

To see the **real** nature of life and things, we must fully **feel** what is right before us directly experience them. This is **how** we see, hear, smell, taste and touch: they are all **impermanent**, changing, becoming other all the time. We cannot cling to any of them: we can only let them come and let them go.

Truly enjoying life

The **streamwinners** who enjoy sensual pleasures truly feel the pleasure of the moment, and fully enjoy it because they let it in like the in-breath, and they let it out, like the out-breath. Hence, they are less likely to cling to what is not real than a worldly person would.

In this sense, we can say that early Buddhism is a teaching of **truth and beauty**. Truth lies in the seeing and understanding how our mind makes everything up, and we smile and let go of this; beauty is the seeing and acceptance of impermanence in all our experiences: we smile and let go of this, too.

Just as we take in a precious breath, we cannot hold it back too long: we have to let it go, give it back to nature, as it were. That is how we truly and beautifully live. Hence, to live well: don't hold your breath! Just let it come, let it go.

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