

A Slow, True Path

Pamela White affirms the beliefs of a Buddhist.

By [*Pamela Gayle White*](#)

This I believe: That phenomena do not have any kind of demonstrable, intrinsic existence. That anything that is the composite sum of other parts is, logically, impermanent. That suffering is a given in any form of existence where confusion and ignorance are present. That when confusion and ignorance have been definitively eliminated, and goodness, caring, and wisdom have entirely taken their place, that is true happiness.

These four beliefs define me as a Buddhist and are the ground on which other beliefs are based. For example, I believe the teachings when they point to ego, to self-cherishing, to always being on the lookout for recognition, approval, comfort, and pleasure, as being so many hammers that fatally pound in the barbed nails of suffering. And I believed my teacher, the late great Tibetan master Gendun Rinpoche, when he answered my mother's question saying, "Yes, if you attain enlightenment you'll know it. How? Because suffering will have come to an end."

The Buddhist teachers and teachings I've been taken with have encouraged me to honestly investigate, question, and delve. And time after time, I've had to concur: Trying to build happiness on a foundation of ego is like trying to build a tower on quicksand. But letting go—oh, letting go—is the simplest, most direct path to what I'm always scrambling to achieve with the most ineffectual, hackneyed methods—like crowing about being right, or trying to get something for nothing, or choosing the shortest line, or getting the biggest peanut butter cookie. . .

What do I train in letting go of? Not enthusiasm, or humour, or creativity, or curiosity. I train in letting go of self-importance and its infinite ramifications. Not that it's easy. I am the most important thing in my universe—take me out of it, what's left?

How do I train?

I try to remember that every living being is also the centre of its personal universe—from mite to mackerel to monkey. You are also the epicentre of your universe.

I try to take myself less seriously. I try to remember that every seed that is sown will sprout and ripen one day.

I try to imagine myself in the skin of others. And to love them for their qualities, and for the enlightened spark that underlies confusion. It's hard going, appreciating instead of judging, but every now and then it simply happens, and when it does, I'm happy.

Sometimes I train through meditation, learning over and over again that the fullness and goodness of the present can only be recognised when I'm ready to will my mind to let go of the past and the future.

And sometimes I train by remembering and accepting the inevitability of impermanence and death, making the wonder of the present moment even more luminous.

I try to remember how lucky I am, and to be helpful, and to expect less. I try to understand the teachings of the Buddha, of enlightenment, and to put my understanding into practice. It's a slow path, rarely an easy path, but it is a true path.



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