

YOUR MIND YOUR LIFE

a Windhorse Publications sampler



Contents

INTRODUCTION 3

THE UNTAMED MIND 5

We get in our own way 6

Seeing how we create extra suffering in our lives 12

THE LIFE OF THE MIND 23

Day-to-day mindfulness 24

The art of reflection 34

Introducing mindfulness 47

MIND TRAINING 58

The examined life: an introduction to meditation 59

Loving-kindness: learning to love 71

Joy 90

MIND AND LIFE 102

Why practise ethics? 103

Entertaining cancer 116

MIND AND THE WORLD 128

An 'invisible hand' 129

A Buddhist response to the climate
and ecological emergency 138

THE MIND UNBOUND 150

Growing through insights 151

The Buddha 163

Enlightenment, eternity, and time 174

NOTES 188

INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

Hello. What you have in front of you is a sample of extracts from some of the books published by Windhorse Publications. Since our beginnings in 1974 we have become the UK's biggest independent publisher of books on meditation, mindfulness, and Buddhism.

Do you want more from your life? More peace? More awareness? More beauty? Greater ease? A way of making a contribution and leading a meaningful life? Better relationships? Better ways to deal with stress, ruminative thinking, strong impulses, and addiction? Truth? Integrity? Freedom?

Between verses from one of the oldest Buddhist texts – the *Dhammapada* (The Way of Truth) – you'll find extracts from fifteen of our most accessible books. They introduce key ideas and insights from the Buddhist tradition.

We've organised these extracts as a path, a sequence, a development. They offer a toolkit of ideas and practices to help you work with your mind to make the most of your life.

Beyond these accessible introductory books, Windhorse Publications publishes more specialist books that interpret traditional Buddhist texts, go deeper into meditation practice, explore Buddhist philosophy, and present a vision for a life lived in accordance with the Buddha's teachings.

So, flip through, savour a passage here or there, pass it on to your friends; and if you're interested in one of these books, come on over to www.windhorsepublications.com.

Warmly,
Dhammamegha
Publishing Director

THE UNTAMED MIND

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows even as the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the ox (drawing the cart).

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs.

From *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*,
translated by Sangharakshita (p.13)

We get in our own way

From

It's Not Out There

by Danapriya

It's very common for us to look for someone to blame for any sort of suffering we are subject to. We might blame the local city council for having failed to mend a paving slab that was sticking up, one that we tripped over. But who was walking? Who was not looking where they were going? The world, as we fully know, is not perfect. Paving slabs do stick up here and there.

I have found that my life is much happier, and my stress is greatly reduced, when I take full responsibility for my life, for my actions, words, and thoughts. And when I don't blame anyone by becoming resentful, angry, or self-righteous. This doesn't mean that I won't write to the city council to ask that the paving slab be mended. It just means I can avoid the suffering of self-created negativity. The truth is, the slab was sticking up. I tripped because I was not paying attention to the path where I was walking. By writing to the council about it, I can do something to help avoid the likelihood of someone else tripping on the same paving slab. Positive actions are created like this. Then there is no need for me to go around telling people how dreadful the council is and getting more and more wound up as I tell this story more and more.

To give a more serious and far-reaching example, when I was fifteen my Mum left the family home. She was the heart and soul of the home. Two years later my Dad told me to leave, because his new wife did not want to look after his children. I had done nothing wrong, yet my life was turned upside down. I have to admit to being fully in blame, anger, and resentment mode for some years following that experience.

Some years later again, after some counselling sessions, I suddenly woke up! I saw clearly how all along it was me who was perpetuating my own suffering. I was holding on to the pain of events that had happened years earlier, and which was still ruining my life. Yes, it would have been much better for me if my Mum had not left, and my Dad had not thrown me out. The truth is Mum did leave, and Dad did throw me out. I just seemed to be in the way of their new lives.

There is, of course, the pain and suffering which is appropriate when traumatic things happen. However, in my case it was me who, for years, continued running over the same resentful and angry stories in my mind, without being able to let go of them, or forgive the people involved. Through counselling and personal growth work, I came to see that I had in fact chosen to be a victim. I had not been able to take full responsibility for my mental states in relation to this particular situation. When I saw what I was holding on to and realized I could let it go, I experienced such a huge relief. I could see how all along I had been getting in my own way – and how, in order to be happy, I would need to get out of it my own way.

Things happen in our lives that we don't want, and unfortunately they have a habit of continuing to happen.

What we do with our mind regarding difficult events in our lives will create a pleasurable or an embittered life. These two lives are very different: we can choose either one. The choice is ours, but we don't often see clearly the reality of the situation.

Stop

Look

Feel

Listen

While on holiday last Christmas I met a lovely couple. Over a meal, one of them opened up to me about her pain concerning her best friend of fifty years: they had had a falling out. This woman was upset about what her friend had said and done; she was blaming her old friend for her own pain. We were sharing dinner on a cruise ship in the Caribbean, on a holiday of a lifetime, and my fellow passenger had chosen to bring along this pain which was so strong that I felt it tangibly. In the midst of what could have been a most joyous time, she was choosing to keep feeding a grudge from the past.

Pain certainly arises when difficult things happen between individuals, but we don't need to hold on to it: we can forgive and move on. At times, we all do things that other people don't like. Generally, we don't intend to upset someone, but that's just how life is, particularly where other people are concerned, because we are all different. We all see differently. Yet when we choose to perpetuate the problem by continually ruminating over it we create so much hurt for ourselves. The good news is that there is a way out of this impasse. We can try to heal the rift and dress the wound by being generous. We can be the first to speak, or send a card, for instance. One thing is certain: both

people will be hurting, and life is too short for that to benefit anyone.

How many of us do this kind of blaming someone, or some event, or some past relationship, when things don't go the way we wish? A neighbour parks their car in front of our house, and we say, 'How dare they!' In this way we create 'dis-ease' for ourselves. Instead, we could choose to be generous to our neighbour, who is really just like us at heart. They, too, want to love and be loved, and also need to park their car somewhere. By being generous we could enjoy whatever we are doing, without getting into a stew about something that in the scale of things doesn't matter one jot.

Only this week I watched a neighbour become extremely anxious, because she wanted to go to the supermarket without losing the parking space outside her house. She decided to stay home rather than go shopping, even though there is plenty of parking around where we live. We do so limit our lives by our thoughts! Probably we have come across thousands of similar situations during our life, some big, some small, some in-between. I hope you are recognizing how we are almost programmed to get in our own way. And getting in our own way prevents the experience of freedom, ease, happiness, and contentment. It all depends on what we choose to dwell on.

There is actually no one to blame for anything; there are just circumstances. This certainly doesn't mean that when people do nasty things, they should not be brought to justice. It merely means that we don't need to continue agonizing for years over past wrongs and injustices, ruining our lives in the process, and often the lives of others close to us, too. I know that this area

is very difficult to understand, and hard to agree with, initially. We have to stop, look, feel, and listen to the truth, to reality, and to our mind and what it's dwelling on.

There is a Buddhist teaching known as the Two Darts. A painful event happens. That's the first dart. The painful event hurts, and in an attempt to avoid the pain, our mind immediately clicks in with a story. That's the second dart. The first dart is momentary – the event has happened – but the second dart can remain with us sometimes for a lifetime, if we are not aware and careful. Unpleasant events in our lives are bound to happen from time to time; some will be our own fault, some not. Still, once the event has already happened we can choose whether we get in our own way or not. The first dart we can't normally prevent, but the second dart we most definitely can.

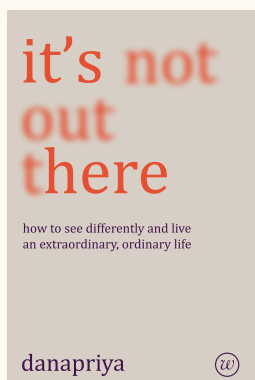
Bigger pains take time, such as the situation with my Mum and Dad. It took me years to come to terms with that, because I was not aware of what I was doing to myself. I didn't think I had a choice. I had not yet woken up to the realization that I choose my own thoughts and can therefore change them.

With the help of counselling and meditation, I began to see a different perspective. My parents did the best they knew how to. When I calmly thought about them as people like me, and saw their lives from their perspective, I could understand. I knew their parents, my grandparents, and knowing something of my grandparents' childhoods helped me to understand enormously. My great-grandmother died when my Grandma was just eleven years old, so she had had no mother figure to look to. And in 1939 my Grandma had had my Mum sent away at the age of six because of the Second World War. They didn't

see one another for twenty years, until Mum was twenty-six and pregnant with me: my Mum had not had a mother figure either. Although she doted on us three children, obviously her own history gave her the permission to be able to leave us.

There will always be much more to each story than we realize at the time or could ever fully be aware of. Knowing this, we can develop compassion for all people, who, after all, are in the same human predicament as we are. And we can make our lives freer right now, better for ourselves and others, by not choosing to get in our own way.

Getting out of my own way has enhanced my life.



Excerpt taken from

It's Not Out There

by Danapriya

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Seeing how we create extra suffering in our lives

From

Eight Step Recovery

by Valerie Mason-John and
Dr Paramabandhu Groves



The Buddha taught that one of the main ways we create suffering is through craving, and aversion, which is the flip side of craving. This is the second noble truth.

Craving is the urge to have a different experience from the one we are having now. It is the intense desire for a particular experience. It is the overwhelming sensations that arise in the body and manifest as an obsessive urge for things like food, drugs, sex, or any other experience. When we crave something, we are holding on to the desire for the pleasurable aspects of an experience, while denying or ignoring its painful and unpleasant aspects. Craving is inextricably linked to suffering. We can be abstinent and still crave the experience we have abstained from, which is why it is important for us to cultivate sobriety of mind: a mind that is free of craving, calm, and clear-sighted.

Aversion is wanting to push away an experience that we are having, especially a painful experience. It is the intense dislike



of something and the avoidance of unpleasant and painful experiences. Aversion is also the separation of ourselves from the rest of the world.

Craving can take many forms: craving to have and control things; craving sensual pleasure; and craving fame. Aversion may be directed toward unpleasant sensations, whether physical pain or mental discomfort, such as fear, anger, or jealousy. Craving and aversion often arise as responses to pain, but, in seeking to escape our pain, we bring ourselves more suffering.

It is helpful to distinguish between unpleasant experiences that have already arisen, and the further discomfort we may cause by our response to them. We can call the former “pain,” and the results that follow from our response to pain “suffering.” The suffering we create is summed up succinctly by the American meditation teacher Shinzen Young, who says: “Suffering equals pain multiplied by resistance.”¹ Therefore, the more we resist pain, the greater the suffering we create in our lives.

Given that pain and suffering are inevitable, at some point we need to develop different ways of responding to them.

For now, just notice how you respond when something painful happens in your life. Maybe there is something happening right now. Perhaps your shoulder is aching or you are thinking about a conflict you are in with a colleague or a neighbor. Or you could bring to mind a recent painful experience, such as a toothache, a big bill arriving in the mail, or being let down by a friend. Notice what your reaction is. Does your mind want to blame the other person or life in general? Do you want to hide



away from the pain or make it vanish, perhaps with a drink, a snack, or watching TV? Do you feel self-pity, or find yourself thinking that things like this always happen to you? Do you notice any thoughts like “Life is not fair”? Is there a thought deep down that this should not be happening to you? Whatever the response, try to be curious; try to be willing to let it be there, just for now (since it is already here).

The common ways we deal with suffering

There are four common ways of dealing with suffering, which we may notice if we pay attention to how we react to painful experiences: we avoid or deny it; we blame other people; we blame ourselves; or we fall into self-pity.

Avoiding

Most of us want to get rid of our suffering: our fears, anxieties, anger, and jealousies, and all the painful thoughts that go with these emotions. So we may try to push them away and avoid them, or attempt a quick fix to make them go away. And why not? In the short term it can work. Sometimes it can be helpful to distract ourselves from our difficulties, especially if it is done consciously. We might decide that, just for now, we will watch a movie or read a novel to take our minds off something difficult.

The problem is that pushing away painful thoughts and emotions usually makes them stronger if we never allow ourselves to face the pain. It's like trying not to think of a pink elephant – the more we try not to think of one, the more pink elephants show up in our minds.



Addiction is one way to avoid suffering. When something difficult shows up, we have a drink, eat some chocolate, reach for something external like sex or gambling, or take a substance. Many of us try to brutally eradicate our thoughts and feelings with our choice of self-medication. And guess what? The feelings and thoughts just bounce back again once the medication has worn off.

One of the clients we have worked with was a compulsive eater. Her overeating began at age nine when her father died. People brought food every day for a month to comfort her and her mother. Thirty years later she was still eating away her feelings. She was still suffering the loss of her father. The only intimacy in her life was the food.

As our addiction grows, this behavior becomes more and more the default for any sort of discomfort. It becomes a vicious cycle, since the more we use the addiction to deal with difficulties, the less able we are to handle suffering in other ways, and so the more we resort to the addictive solution. It is like a nightmare in which the harder we try to escape our difficulties, the worse they become.

- The trigger: something happens, which we experience through one or more of our senses.
- The feeling: the trigger produces feelings in us – often of upset or hurt.
- The thought: this is where we can interpret our feelings as the result of having been violated, abused, or whatever is our habitual take on what happens to us. This is where we tell ourselves the story, and we lose clarity as we get more and more caught up in our story.



- The action: we pick up a drink, a pharmaceutical pill, a stimulant; we may even act with verbal aggression or physical violence. Whatever action we take, there will be an impact.
- The gain: we may gain several things: feeling calmer for a while, or avoidance of our hurt and pain.
- The cost: our actions can often lead us into all sorts of trouble, and leave us feeling more angry or ashamed – so much so that we sink even more into our addiction. This is where the cycle is perpetuated. The trigger becomes irrelevant. We are back at feeling pain, back into the toxic thinking, back into numbing our pain by our choice of action, once the small gain of feeling momentarily better has worn off, and back into the cost of feeling angry and awful. The cycle is so toxic that we get to the point where our thoughts, actions, and gains become so irrelevant that we are thick into the huge cost of our decisions without awareness.

And so the cycle continues.

Avoidance of pain doesn't just happen through ingesting something; we can equally lose ourselves through burying our heads in work, mindless television, or surfing the Internet. One of our patients described how she was unable to part with articles that she had compulsively cut out of newspapers and magazines and stored in boxes. The act of cutting out stories and saving them had a mind-altering effect that took her away from any painful feelings. Some people find a way to phase out or go numb when suffering appears. Sometimes this can go on at quite a subtle level. We may find ourselves with discomfort in



meditation that we thought we had acknowledged, only to later realize we had been tensing up around it, gritting our teeth until the end of a period of meditation.

Blaming others

Blaming others is a popular strategy for dealing with pain. For example, we can't find something at home. An unpleasant feeling of frustration, upset, or anger arises, and we automatically move away from these feelings. Our mind jumps to blaming anyone who might have moved what we're looking for, or even kicking the cat out of the way. This type of behavior can be very seductive. It can make us feel like the problem is no longer our fault and we get off squeaky clean, often with the full moral conviction that goes with righteous indignation. Blaming masks the uncomfortable feelings because, when we blame, we often feel in control of the situation and powerful.

So when we are rejected by a friend, or our partner leaves us, we blame them and make it their fault. That way we don't have to look at ourselves, but in the end we can fall into the hole of self-pity. A parent dies, and it was because the medical profession didn't do enough to keep them alive. We go into battle with the health-care system, which can drag on for years. Blame doesn't allow us to grieve. We have not fully accepted the demise of our loved one. The sister failed to call when her nephew was in trouble with the police, and from then on her brother holds her at a frosty distance, which somehow displaces the discomfort about his son being in trouble. Or our boss at work is seen to be against us. We think that's why we never get promoted, and we get sick with stress.



Of course, sometimes people do hurtful things, make mistakes, or are negligent. However, holding on to blame, without looking at our contribution and our response, keeps us stuck and unable to move on. It is as if we keep stoking a fire burning painfully within us.

Blaming ourselves

The other side – blaming ourselves – keeps us stuck just as much as blaming others. It's not that we recognize our mistake, but that we won't let it go and keep tormenting ourselves with it. The child blames herself for not standing up to protect her mother against a violent father, and continues to hold on to that blame as an adult. A son commits suicide and the father blames himself for something he said the last time they spoke. It is as though, by taking on all the blame, we have it under our control, as though there might be a magical way of changing the past. Blaming ourselves can also divert us from facing a pain beyond our control or, by getting there first, help us avoid the frightening prospect of other people blaming us.

Self-blame can keep us in addiction or lead us back to it. For example, one client we worked with was rear-ended in a car. He suffered whiplash. It wasn't his fault. However, a day later he proceeded to beat himself up with phrases like: "I hate myself; how stupid of me – I should have pulled away faster." This self-flagellation went on so much that he relapsed into his addiction. He couldn't cope with all his negative and self-belittling thoughts.

We might experience the consequences of our self-blame when we try to get up in the morning. We may not be able to get



out of bed because we have binged on our stimulant, or have gambled away so much money that we can't bear to face the reality of our misdeeds.

Self-pity

Self-pity is another way we can keep ourselves stuck. For example, a friend cancels a meeting. We feel sad, and then fall into self-pity (perhaps thinking: "No one likes me").

Self-hatred can be an aspect of self-pity. It's as if we fall into a pit from which there is no way out. Although it's a painful place to be, it can also be alluring because it can mean that there is nothing we have to do about it; we are helpless. We fall ill and sink into self-pity. This lets us off the hook of taking action about our illness and working with our mental responses to it. Or we stay in a destructive relationship. It's unpleasant, we are full of self-pity, but we fail to do anything about it.

We can even become addicted to self-pity and self-hatred. Every time something painful arises in our lives, we can flee to the place of self-pity because it's familiar, and we do not have to face up to what is happening in our lives.

Addiction can run alongside or alternate with any of the latter three responses. Our drinking is blamed on other people. We feel self-pity at the mess our lives are in from all the gambling debts. Or we blame ourselves for our lack of moral fiber in being unable to stop bingeing – which in turn just leads to more bingeing. The ex-wife is blamed for alienating the son from his father, which induces feelings of self-pity at the loss of contact with the son. Drinking is used to cope with the sorrow, and its



effect on the new girlfriend leads to self-recrimination, which is blocked out with more drinking.

Blame may make us feel better, but it can also keep us angry. Blame can be the Band-Aid to keep our pain at bay. But that Band-Aid will not stick forever. We have a choice: we can remain angry for the rest of our lives, hold on to resentments and ill will; or we can begin to let go of our addiction, let go of blaming and create a space where we can feel our sorrow and let it go. Where there is sorrow there will be joy if we are patient, if we allow the law of cause and effect to take its natural time.

Craving as the cause of suffering

The Buddha said that craving is the chief cause of suffering. Craving is the default response to pain or pleasure. We have a visceral urge to move away from pain (that is, aversion) and to seek pleasure, or at least the alleviation of discomfort. This is a completely natural and understandable response. Our bodies and minds shrink from pain and the drive for pleasure is like an inbuilt thirst that cannot be tempered. The result is that most of us are searching for something outside of ourselves to make us happy, to complete us.

When we are addicted, we can often think: “If I have a drink, a line of coke, a meal, a quick fix of something, this will make me happy.” And for a moment it does. Once the brief moment of happiness has passed, however, we are likely to become dissatisfied and so it’s back to pain, again. We want the feeling of happiness never to end. It has been said that heroin is so addictive because, when people take it, all their



troubles disappear. Every issue or problem just melts into the background. This appears to give users a reprieve, until they come down off the drug and feel absolutely rotten. So we go round and round, a cycle of craving, running after pleasure or being chased by pain.

The cycle of craving may come into being from an initial thought, such as: “I want a drink.” This thought can arise and cease, and cause us no more suffering at all. However, sometimes craving arises and manifests as thoughts that become a story or a rationalization. This story is often intoxicating. Craving and thinking feed each other. As each becomes stronger, we become more likely to act on our thoughts, and are in danger of using or relapsing. Beware of this stinking thinking.

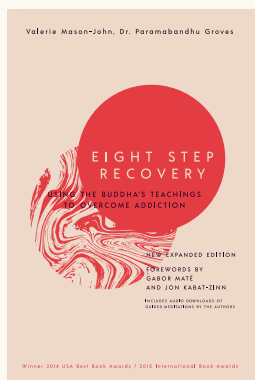
We can think of wanting a drink, but not act on it. We may then fight against this thought. But when we fight it, we have not let go of the thought. We have identified with it, by listening to it and believing it, and this stinking thinking eats away at our resistance. We may think we have dealt with the thought because we did not act on it that same day. But beware. When our guard is down, we can be taken by surprise. Two days later we may well be reaching for that drink or that drug we thought we had control of. Our minds will play games with us.

A relapse may be caused by a strong identification with a thought, or a trigger that occurred through one of the senses two months ago. We may have mistakenly taken a sip of a drink, had a small slip with food, hung out with people who were taking drugs, had a small flutter with gambling, or glimpsed a piece of porn, and told ourselves that it didn't make



us relapse. We were fine the next day. Then one or two months later, we find ourselves in a relapse and can't understand why.

We have to learn to let these thoughts arise and cease, without identifying with them, acting on them, or fighting them. Have the courage to sit with the discomfort of a thought about indulging in our addiction, without fear, trusting the thought will arise and cease on its own. Fear is often the anticipation of the danger of a relapse for many people with addictions. When we anticipate a relapse we are at risk, which is why it is important to be calm when the waves of craving arise and cease.



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THE LIFE OF THE MIND

Mindfulness is the Way to the Immortal,
unmindfulness the way to death. Those who are
mindful do not die, (whereas) the unmindful are like
the dead.

From *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*,
translated by Sangharakshita (p.18)

Day-to-day mindfulness



From

Life with Full Attention

by Maitreyabandhu

Mindfulness of small things

Have you ever walked into the kitchen to get something, only to forget what it was you were looking for? Have you stood at a ticket barrier searching your pockets for train tickets? Have you forgotten an appointment; lost your car keys; forgotten your passport; mislaid a vital piece of paper and had to go through the contents of your wastepaper basket? You are not alone. Something like 130,000 items of lost property are left in public transport and taxis in Greater London every year. This includes around 10,000 mobile phones, 7,000 umbrellas, and 6,000 pairs of glasses. If we imagine multiplying that across all the cities of the UK and across Europe, it adds up to an awful lot of forgetfulness! Each lost item causes pain – a wince of realization, a pang of regret, a fit of accusation.

The predominant feeling of contemporary life is of lots of bits – bits to be finished, started, filed, read, applied for, cancelled, organized, emailed, tidied, sent, remembered, checked, documented, or binned. It's a recipe for stress. But it is not going to go away. So we need to pay attention to this bitty aspect of life. We need to explore day-to-day mindfulness.

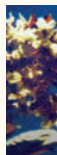


When we practise mindfulness, we are trying to learn that small things can have a big effect. This is true of our emotional life, our communication with others, and our day-to-day mindfulness. How much time do we waste looking for the remote control or trying to find our house keys? We have statistics for how much of our life we spend in the bathroom or surfing the internet, but how much time do we spend looking for our address book, our sunglasses, or our train tickets? And we can forget that, when we lose something, we often get in a bad mood, which in turn sets off a chain reaction: we get bad-tempered with a work colleague; they get tetchy with the receptionist; they take it out on the cleaner. We pass on our irritations like pass the parcel.

When we are unhappy, frustrated, or angry, we so often look to the big stories – childhood traumas, the state of the world. We would be better off looking to make small, practical changes to how we lead our lives. For most of us, life is not full of momentous events and overwhelming emotions but of small things: the car to be serviced, toys to put away, an online booking to be made. Life goes better, runs smoother, is happier, if we attend to the small things. So mindfulness needs to start here: remembering the baby-wipes, double-checking our flight-departure time, prioritizing our to-do list. This is day-to-day mindfulness.

Take day-to-day mindfulness seriously

For some reason it's difficult to take this aspect of mindfulness seriously. The things we forget are usually fairly trivial – a mislaid document, a forgotten appointment. We can usually



make do. And after the panic, the rush, the searching, and the blaming, we usually forget about it. Being a ‘scatterbrain’ can even become part of our personal charm; it can even be another way of getting people to do things for us! Then there is the question of temperament – some people do seem to be more naturally organized than others.

One of the reasons we find it hard to take day-to-day mindfulness seriously is because we fail to understand that actions have consequences. This simple fact of life is central to our path of full attention. Again and again, as we explore each new dimension of awareness, we’ll find ourselves trying to learn that actions have consequences – for ourselves, for others, and for the planet. As with so many other so-called ‘small things’ – from how we joke about other people to how we eat our supper – we can easily think, ‘Oh well, it doesn’t matter, it’s not worth making a fuss about.’ We forget to add up all those acts of unmindfulness. We don’t notice their cumulative effect. We fail to realize how much happier we could be if our lives ran a bit more smoothly. And we often find it hard to see that our lack of day-to-day mindfulness affects other people – that we make their lives harder when we forget to call them, mislay books they’ve lent us, or turn up 20 minutes late.

Remembering things, finishing what you started, planning – they are all part of growing up. As children, our parents check we have our packed lunch, our mittens, and our schoolbooks. They remind us to go to the toilet before long journeys. They get us to put things away. Parents are a child’s mindfulness. So growing up means taking responsibility for all this – not waiting around for someone to tidy up after us or remind us to do our



income tax returns. Mindfulness, spiritual life itself, is about growing up.

Fail better

Day-to-day mindfulness is surprisingly difficult to practise. There are so many things competing for our attention. We write to-do lists, scribble little reminders, but inevitably things get forgotten, mislaid, or overlooked. So right from day one we need to remember what Samuel Beckett, the Irish playwright, wrote: ‘Try again. Fail again. Fail better.’² If we’re afraid of failing, we’ll fail to learn. This is as true for table tennis as it is for day-to-day mindfulness. We need the courage to fail, to persist with failure. This means not losing heart, not giving ourselves a hard time, not expecting perfection, and not condemning ourselves. It also means admitting failure, coming clean with it. Failure is a part of life. There’s nothing wrong with it. Our failures are only negative if we try to wriggle out of responsibility for them. All we need to do is ‘Try again. Fail again. Fail better.’

It has already happened

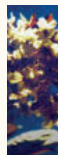
Day-to-day mindfulness needs to be practised with patience and a sense of humour. Getting into a terrible mood because we have lost something will only make matters worse. We need to remind ourselves that whatever it is that has just gone wrong, just been mislaid or broken, it has already happened. Mindfulness is what happens next. If we reverse our car into a post because we’re not concentrating on what we’re doing, that’s our fault. But going over and over it in our minds



and berating ourselves won't improve matters. We need to accept responsibility, say sorry, and do the next thing: phone the garage. We need to accept the situation we're in. It has already happened. We cannot make it un-happen. We take full responsibility for what we've done (or not done) and admit it; we're even willing to say, 'It's my fault, I'm to blame.' We need to make reparation if needs be – pay for the bumper to be mended – but none of that is helped by self-condemnation. We need to accept the situation with kindness and patience, and say to ourselves, 'It has already happened.'

First practice week

Day-to-day mindfulness means attending to the small things so that we can concentrate on the big ones. We need to find strategies that help us get on with what's important in life and stop us having to think about what isn't. Take kitchen scissors, for example. You probably have a pair in your cutlery drawer. They are useful for opening vacuum-packed coffee bags or packets of pasta. If you try to open this kind of packaging with a kitchen knife or your bare hands, they tend to split or tear badly – spilling coffee grounds or pasta shells over your worktop. So it's handy to have a pair of scissors. But they often go walk-about – your daughter goes off with them to cut pictures out of a glossy magazine, your roommate takes them to his room. You end up searching the cutlery drawer and going through the drainer. You become irate. You start blaming someone. You tear the coffee bag open and spill the contents. You have to get the dustpan. It's a small thing, I know. But if the scissors were in the drawer where they're meant to be, then you wouldn't have to think about them at all: you would



use them, have your breakfast, and then go off to work feeling happier and calmer.

Mindfulness is sometimes talked about in terms of doing everything very slowly and deliberately – noticing every movement of the body, every flicker of feeling. Whilst this can be useful, especially on retreat, what is really needed is the kind of mindfulness that allows us not to have to think about the whereabouts of the kitchen scissors, or where we keep our passport.

So this first week of full attention is about sorting out the small things so we can attend to what's important. It's a week of setting up the conditions for mindfulness to arise, a week of looking at how we structure our life – how we pattern it, organize it, and order it.

Set up positive routines

We could start by establishing positive habits. Routine is a way of building shape in our lives. It helps us to persevere when we feel under-motivated. It is a way of making time for activities – Spanish lessons or trumpet practice – that our hectic timetable could easily overwhelm. Routines are sustaining and have a morale-boosting effect. People who don't have them don't usually have much energy, are not very effective with their time, and tend to miss out on things. Of course, routines have dangers as well – it is tempting to pack too much into them, and they can become rigid and inflexible – but without them we usually don't develop the kind of spiritual stamina we need in order to make progress. There is a value in doing something out of 'force of habit'. If our circuit-training class takes place



every Sunday, the habit of going protects us from the whim of the moment – from whether we feel like going or not. In the same way, meditation needs to become a positive habit (as we will see). This is often a sticking point for people who come to the London Buddhist Centre: they value meditation, they see the benefit of it, but they struggle to make space for it. Regularly getting to the meditation cushions is the biggest challenge. Habit is the biggest helpmate. Once a positive habit is established, it helps us to meditate or go training without having to exert willpower.

Check your diary

So, this week, think about the place of sustaining routine in your life. Are there things you want to do that you somehow never find the time for – attending yoga classes, learning to swim, cooking a meal at home? Why don't you get around to them? Think about the shape of your week. Are you burning the candle at both ends? Would it be worth planning a quiet night in once a week so you can read, relax, or do nothing? Does your week have some kind of shape to it that sustains you, or is it all very ad hoc? Is it too full of self-improving activities? Are you out every night?

Try to set up some sustaining routines for the next week – or two, or eight! You could decide to get up every morning half an hour earlier, pencil in going to the gym twice a week, or take the longer walk home through the park every Friday. You might think about your work routines – are they productive? Do you have work routines?



Make two resolutions

Try and come up with two resolutions. It might be that you (1) go on a creative-writing course, and (2) go swimming twice a week. Then, see if you can think of something you could actually do – something that commits you to your intention, confirms that you mean it. For instance, you could book for that creative-writing course, or you could buy a pair of swimming goggles. Using the help of others – your mindfulness buddy for instance – could be invaluable in this. For instance, you might agree to meet a friend at the pool. Or you might talk to them about your habit of leaving 10 minutes late for work. You might promise that for the next week at least, you'll leave on time. Then make a date at the end of the week to talk to them about it. Write down your two resolutions and accompanying actions in the 'week review' below. But remember: positive habits can take a long time to establish, so you may well need to be patient. What will help you most is some action that confirms and strengthens your intention.

Motivation

There is a common misconception that we should want to do something before we actually do it. If we don't feel like it, we take that to mean that we don't want to do it. This is fine for chocolate or beach holidays, but it is not useful when it comes to many of the things we find sustaining and satisfying. Very often we only feel the motivation to do something when we are actually doing it. Take swimming. The idea of going for a swim, particularly if it's raining, is not very appealing: the changing rooms are draughty, the showers feeble, the tiles cold and slippery. Then there is the question of how to get into the water – the macho



dive into the deep end, or the gradual, painful descent from the shallow? But once you've got your head under the water and are moving, you start to enjoy it. You start to feel you want to go swimming. By the time you leave – your skin tingling, your body glowing – you're convinced of the value of swimming. You know that you'll need to remember this feeling the next time you resist the idea of a cold changing room on a November morning. Waiting for motivation to arise before you do something is demotivating. Just do it. You'll soon want to.

Cultivate a sense of mastery

We need a sense of 'mastery'. Mastery is that pleasant sense of achievement when a task is completed – when that chaotic pile of documents has been filed away, when you have made the phone call you had been putting off for days, when that annoying bit of DIY is finished. Mastery is a sense of being in charge of what you do – instead of being at the beck and call of whatever happens to happen to you. It is the satisfaction of accomplishment.

Starting and finishing

Routines for starting and finishing can help foster mastery. They help you become more in control (in the positive sense) and more organized, as well as less rushed. When you get to work, for instance, do you plunge straight into your inbox? Emails are easy work. You don't have to think about what you want to do in that day, or what you need to prioritize. So it might be better to start by writing a list of the things you want to achieve before you log on. It's often suggested, for instance, that you don't start your working day doing emails. Instead, get on with something



you can complete, or make substantial progress with. Otherwise it's easy to end up feeling that even though you've done lots of work – made lots of phone calls, sent lots of emails – you haven't really achieved anything. And it's that sense of achievement we're after. And just as starting well is important, so is finishing well. I write two or three mornings a week. I usually have lunch with someone. If I am not mindful, I write all the way up to the time I'm supposed to meet them. I keep forgetting that there are always a few things to do before I leave the house – back up my work, gather up my keys, turn off the computer. All this takes time. And I feel much better if I give myself that time, if I finish things off properly. When I do that, I experience mastery: I have done what needs to be done, backed up what needs to be backed up. I have not left the room with papers scattered everywhere, I have not forgotten my keys. Feeling self-possessed and calm, I can give someone my full attention.



Excerpt taken from
Life with Full Attention

by Maitreyabandhu

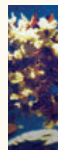
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The art of reflection



From

The Art of Reflection

by Ratnaguna

First there is a mountain then there is no mountain then there is.

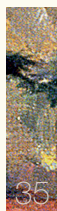
Donovan

This is a book about reflection as a spiritual practice. Reflection comes from the Latin *reflectere*, which is made up of two parts: *re*, meaning ‘back’, and *flectere*, ‘to bend, curve or bow’. *Reflectere* therefore means bend back, turn back, or turn round. A reflection on the surface of a lake or a mirror is the effect of light being turned back from that surface, and when we reflect, our thoughts turn back, or turn around, on a subject. To reflect, then, means to think about something, although it’s a certain kind of thinking. While we’re awake we’re thinking most of the time – that is, thoughts are going through our head – but we’re not always reflecting. Reflective thought takes practice and discipline. It’s an art. The dictionary tells me that in this context art consists in ‘the principles or methods governing any craft or branch of learning: the art of baking; the art of selling’.³ I like those two down-to-earth examples. Just as you can learn how to bake or sell, or become better at baking or selling, you can also learn how to reflect, or become better at it than you are now.



In the repertoire of Buddhist practices that are available to us, reflection is one of the most neglected by contemporary writers on Buddhist practice. In fact, reading some books, you'd think that Buddhists aren't supposed to think at all, as if thinking somehow contaminates the mind. Of course, if we're honest, we have to admit that a lot of what we think about does contaminate our minds, but that doesn't mean that *all* thinking is bad. Someone who eats only junk food will become ill, but they shouldn't stop eating altogether; they need to eat nutritious food, and similarly, we shouldn't stop thinking, we just need to be careful what we think and how we think about it. It's also possible to think too much, to over-conceptualize, to be 'too much in our head' as we say, and when we do that we lose touch with our actual lived experience. The remedy for this is not to stop thinking altogether, but to learn to think more consciously and when it's appropriate.

Thinking of any kind is discouraged by some writers and teachers, probably because they consider meditation to be the most important Buddhist practice – and thinking is a distraction when you're trying to meditate. But again, that doesn't mean that thinking is in itself a bad thing, it just means that thinking and meditating don't go together very well – they are different practices, to be done at different times. We know from our experience that there are many activities that don't go very well together: reading a book and having a conversation; cooking a meal and re-potting your plants; making love and answering the phone. None of these activities is inherently bad, but it's better not to do them simultaneously. It's the same with thinking and meditating.



At the time of writing this book, some Western Buddhist teachers and writers are tending to place a strong emphasis on awareness of the body. I'm sure that this is a good and necessary corrective for many Westerners, susceptible as we are to the tendency to think too much and 'live in our heads'. We need to include the whole of ourselves in our practice, including our bodies. However, some of the advocates of body awareness go to the other extreme and suggest that thinking is somehow unspiritual, incompatible with treading the Buddhist path. But we have a brain and we need to take that with us too! Enlightenment is a state of wholeness which includes the body, heart and mind, and we won't achieve wholeness by denying any part of ourselves.

This book then is unashamedly about thinking, considering, pondering, wondering, cogitating, reasoning, imagining, contemplating – in a word reflecting – within the context of Buddhist practice. I've tried to show how important reflection is if you want to understand yourself, other people, and the world at large better, and how that understanding can go some way to alleviating your own and other people's suffering. I've also tried to show how enjoyable reflection can be, as well as (sometimes) challenging, and how you need to bring the whole of yourself into reflection so that it's not merely a mental exercise. I've suggested a number of different ways to reflect, and how to develop and deepen your reflections; and I've tried to encourage you to take yourself seriously as a practitioner of reflection. While this book isn't exactly a workbook, with exercises etc., it *is* primarily a practical manual. It's a 'how to' book. Before we plunge into the practicalities though, I want to situate reflection within the Buddhist tradition. If you're not



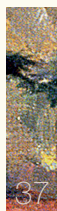
particularly interested in that, you can skip the next bit and go straight onto the section headed ‘Dimensions of Reflection’ on page 19.

The Buddha and Reason

The Buddha was actually a great thinker, and he valued reason very highly. There is a record in the early Buddhist texts of a conversation between the Buddha and the follower of another spiritual tradition, in which they disagreed on a fundamental point of doctrine. The Buddha said: ‘If you will debate on the basis of truth, we might have some conversation about this.’ A little later, when his interlocutor had contradicted himself, the Buddha warned him to ‘pay attention how you reply! What you said before does not agree with what you said afterwards, nor does what you said afterwards agree with what you said before.’⁴

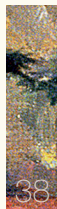
Not that the Buddha valued reason above all else. He wasn’t a rationalist philosopher; his insights into the nature of reality went ‘beyond the sphere of reason’ as he put it, but he was never *irrational*. Some people think that when the Buddha said that his wisdom was beyond the sphere of reason, what he meant was that he had left reason behind – discarded it because it was of no value. However, the word ‘beyond’ can be understood in two different ways: we can go beyond something in the sense that we leave it behind, or in the sense that we include *more than* that something, while continuing to include it.

Let’s say that one day, while walking in the countryside, you get lost, and you ask a local farmer for directions to a certain village. He tells you to ‘go beyond the wood, and you will come



to the village'. Beyond in this sense means leaving the wood behind to reach the village. Let's imagine now that this farmer is gregarious and that he engages you in conversation. At one point in the conversation you ask him how far his land extends, and he replies: 'You see the road down in the valley? My land extends beyond that as far as the tree line at the top of the next hill.' Beyond in this sense means further than, but *including*, the road in the valley. The Buddha's wisdom is beyond the sphere of reason in this second sense: it is greater than anything reason is able to reach or describe, but it doesn't leave reason behind.

Well, it may leave it behind temporarily. Let's imagine that you have your conversation with the farmer while standing in one of his fields. It's a large field, and he tells you that it used to be much smaller. The easternmost fence used to run on this side of the oak tree, but a few years ago he decided to enlarge the field, and the new fence lies beyond the oak tree. The field used not to include the oak tree, but now it does. Let's imagine the farmer putting up the new fence on the other side of the oak tree. While he's doing this, he is not simultaneously standing in what used to be the old, smaller field. He has had to leave the smaller field behind in order to enlarge it. Once he has finished putting up the new fence though, he takes a walk around the whole field to get a sense of its new dimensions. The old small field is now included in the new large field. In a similar way, when the Buddha experienced direct insight, he was probably not thinking very much, if at all. So we could say that at such times he did in fact leave reason behind. His insight was non-rational, or supra-rational. But later he reflected on his insight and put it into words. When he did that his insight *included* reason, even though it was beyond reason, in the sense that



there was more to the Buddha's insight than reason could fully describe.

The distinction I've just made between beyond as 'leaving behind' and as 'more than but including' is important because if you think that the Buddha's wisdom is beyond reason in the first sense, it's easy to conclude that reason is of no value, even that it's a hindrance to the spiritual life. After all, if you want to get to the village it's important that you *do* leave the wood behind, otherwise you'll be stuck in the wood forever and never reach your destination! Some Buddhists seem to consider reason to be like the wood: something to be left behind, like greed and hatred. This attitude is often accompanied by an over-valuation of faith and intuition, which leads, in turn, to a dogmatism which makes discussion difficult if not impossible. Someone who regards reason as unimportant might say 'I can't explain it, I just know it's true', but if they can't explain it to others, do they really understand it themselves? I'm not suggesting that faith and intuition are not to be trusted at all – in Chapters 4 and 5 I argue that they are valid forms of knowledge – just that we can't rely on them absolutely. The Buddha once said that 'something may be fully accepted out of faith, yet it may be empty, hollow and false; yet something else may not be fully accepted out of faith, yet it may be factual, true and unmissaken.' Therefore, he said, faith doesn't give us adequate grounds for coming to a definite conclusion that 'only this is true, anything else is wrong.'⁵

If the Buddha's wisdom had left reason behind, there would be no connection between them, which would mean that he would have been unable to teach what he had learned through direct



insight. Although the Buddha's insight was greater than reason, they are still connected – there is a relationship between them.

The Three Levels of Wisdom

There is a teaching which includes reflection as a necessary stage of the Buddhist path, called the Three Wisdoms or Three Levels of Wisdom. They are: 1) Wisdom through (or by means of) Listening; 2) Wisdom through Reflecting; and 3) Wisdom through Contemplating. The first level, Wisdom through Listening, is so called because the Buddha never wrote his teachings down – he only taught verbally. The Buddha's immediate disciples in fact were called *sāvakas*, which means 'listeners'. For the first few hundred years of its existence Buddhism was an oral tradition: teachings were passed on by word of mouth, so listening was the only way of learning from others. This level of wisdom then represents learning from the wise, and these days it includes reading as well as listening.

The second level of wisdom is gained through reflecting. Once you have heard (or read) a teaching you then need to think about it. Talking of the ideal disciple, the Buddha once said: 'Having heard the Dhamma (i.e. the Buddha's teaching), he memorizes it and examines the meaning of the teachings he has memorized; when he examines their meaning, he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings.'⁶ Obviously if you don't have access to the written word, so that listening is your only way of learning teachings, it's important to remember what you've heard, otherwise you can't really examine it. Reading allows us to examine the meaning of a written text without having to memorize it. Clearly there are advantages



to being able to read texts, but there is an advantage to memorizing teachings too: it allows us to reflect on a teaching at any time, in any situation, without the need for a written text.

When you think about something you've learned, you go deeper into the meaning. You see implications that you may not have noticed on first hearing. You may also encounter problems, things that you don't fully understand or that seem to contradict other teachings, and you have to work out the solutions for yourself. Or you may question something – 'Is this really true?' Or you may think about how the teaching might apply to you, and in this way you 'translate' what may be a general and theoretical teaching into something more specific and practical. As a result of reflecting in this way you come to a deeper understanding of the teachings than you did when you first heard them, and this deeper understanding the Buddha called a 'reflective acceptance'. You now accept the teachings, not out of faith – not because they have come from the Buddha and therefore they *must* be true, or because you think that you *should* believe them – but because after careful examination you can see that they make sense.

It's important to understand that reaching a reflective acceptance of a teaching is not the same as having direct insight into it. It means that, after giving it serious consideration, you are now intellectually convinced. That conviction is not a guarantee that the teaching is true, or that you have fully understood it. I quoted the Buddha above, telling us that having faith in something doesn't mean that we can be certain that it's true, but he said the same about reason: 'Something may be well reflected upon, yet it may be empty, hollow and false;

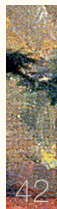


yet something else may not be well reflected on, yet it may be factual, true and unmistakable.’ Therefore, he said, reflection doesn’t give us adequate grounds for coming to a definite conclusion that ‘only this is true, anything else is wrong.’⁷ Insight *is* beyond – in the sense of greater than – the sphere of reason.

The third level – Wisdom through Contemplating – is the practice of meditating on a teaching. It differs from reflecting in that when you contemplate you don’t *think* about a teaching, you simply hold it in your mind and allow it to percolate through the whole of your being. At this stage we try to go beyond the sphere of reason, in that we try to have a direct experience of the way things are, unmediated by concepts. This experience is often known by Buddhists as *insight*, which is a translation of the Pali term *vipassanā*. I discuss contemplation and insight in more detail in the second half of the fifth and the whole of the sixth chapter.

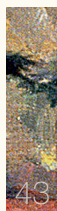
Progressing through the three levels

An ancient Indian school of Buddhism called the Sarvāstivāda gave a memorable simile that describes the process of moving through the three levels. Imagine that you are standing on this side of a very wide river, wanting to get to the other side. There is no bridge and you can’t swim, so how are you going to get across? If you know anything about Buddhism you’ll probably recognize this image. This side of the river represents ignorance, while the further shore is Enlightenment. You’ll probably also be familiar with the standard way to cross over – you need to gather some logs and tie them together to make



a raft, and then use this raft to ferry you across to the other side. The raft is the Dharma; the teachings and practices the Buddha taught. Once you've made it to the other side, you step off the raft onto the shore. You don't need it any more – the Dharma is a means to an end, not an end in itself, and once you're Enlightened you no longer need it.

Crossing the river on a raft is one of the most famous metaphors in Buddhist literature and teaching, but the Sarvāstivādins (the followers of the Sarvāstivāda school) suggest another way of crossing: they say you need some 'swimming apparatus'. Considering that this school existed in India some 2,000 years ago, the swimming apparatus won't consist of a rubber ring or a pair of armbands. It will be something much more basic – something like a log. So, you find yourself a log, you throw it into the water, and you hang on to it, kicking with your legs. Remember, you can't swim, so you'll be hanging on to that log for dear life. However, as you move slowly towards the other shore you begin to feel a little more confident in the water, so you let go of the log for a moment to see what happens. That's a bit scary, and you take some water into your mouth, so you grab hold of the log once again. After a while though, you try letting go of the log once again, and this time it's a bit easier – you're gaining confidence. However, you still can't swim and so you catch hold of the log again. This goes on for some time – hanging on to the log – letting go – hanging on – letting go – all the time getting closer to the other shore. Then there comes a time when you let go of the log and realize that you don't have to go back to it – you can now swim – so you can now make your own way, leaving the log behind *before* you have quite reached the other side.⁸



In this simile, hanging on to the log represents Wisdom through Listening. When you start practising the Dharma you need to ‘hang on’ to the teachings of those who are wiser than you. You need their wisdom. Alternately letting go of the log and then going back to it represents Wisdom through Reflecting. Thinking requires a certain amount of independence: you need to have the freedom to entertain the possibility that the teachings you’re considering may not be true. If you don’t have that kind of freedom then you’re not really thinking. So you have to ‘let go’ of the teachings in order to think about them, but you also have to keep returning to them because you are still a learner – you haven’t yet had a direct insight into the way things are, so you still need to rely on those who have. Letting go of the log and swimming the rest of the way represents Wisdom through Contemplating. Now you can swim so you no longer need any assistance from outside yourself – you no longer need others to tell you how things are. At this point you become what the Buddha called ‘independent in the Dharma’.

Do we leave previous levels behind?

This simile suggests that as we progress through the levels of wisdom we go beyond the previous level in the sense that we leave it behind. In a way we do, and in a way we don’t. We have to remember that similes have their limitations, and while ‘letting go of the log’ describes one aspect of the process, it doesn’t do justice to another. One way of understanding the progress through the three levels is as a movement from reliance on external authority to reliance on internal authority. When we practise the first wisdom – listening – we rely on the wisdom of others (we hold onto the log). The result of practising the third



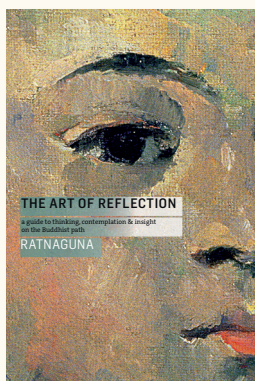
wisdom – contemplation – is reliance on our own wisdom (we let go of the log and swim). The second wisdom – reflection – represents the midway point in that movement (we alternately let go of and catch hold of the log). Understood from a modern, Western perspective this might mean that when you reach the third stage you have gone beyond the teachings, in the sense that you have left them behind, and you now have your own unique wisdom – ‘your own truth’, in the common phrase. However, we need to be careful to try to understand what this progression means from a Buddhist perspective. When you reach the third stage you have had an insight into what your teachers and texts have been trying to describe. It’s not ‘your’ wisdom. You’ve simply seen what others before you have seen. What you’ve gone beyond is not their teaching but your own previous merely rational understanding of that teaching.

This difference of interpretation is important. Modern Western society places a high value on the notion of ‘thinking for oneself’, the goal of which is to have one’s own original thoughts on everything. This is not the aim of Buddhist reflection, which is to see things as they are. Others have seen things as they are before us, so any insights we may have will not be original. We may express them in an original way, and of course we live in a very different society to those in which the ancient sages lived, so we’ll have new, perhaps original things to say about our society, but originality of thought is not the aim of Buddhist reflection. Depth of wisdom is what we’re after.

The Sarvāstivādins, who gave us the simile of the swimming apparatus, taught that reflection functions as an intermediary between the first and third levels of wisdom. In this context they call the first level ‘the word’ and the third level ‘the experience’



– experience, because here they mean not the *practice* of contemplation but the *experience* of direct insight brought about by contemplation. They ask a question: how do you get from the word to the experience? That is, how do you transform the teachings you have learned into direct insight? The answer is: by means of the second level – by reflecting on those teachings. They then ask another question: how do you get from the experience to the word? Now you may wonder why that would be necessary. There are a number of reasons, but I'll mention just one here. When you have an experience that you interpret as insight, how do you know it's genuine? You need to check it against the teachings, and you do that by means of reflection. So there is a two-way movement between listening and reflecting, as there is between reflecting and contemplating.



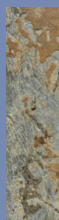
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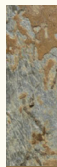
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by Bhikkhu Anālayo

Dimensions of mindfulness

Key aspects of mindfulness are learning to be more fully in touch with what takes place instead of acting in autopilot mode, remaining in the present instead of mentally wandering off, and learning to slow down and come to our senses. Receptivity to the present moment can be related to the memory nuance of mindfulness, since being fully with the here and now makes it easier to recall later what happened.

Besides being directed within, mindfulness can be applied externally as well, in the sense of discerning how what happens impacts others. Such external deployment of mindfulness will naturally tend to strengthen our concern to maintain and improve the kind of ethical conduct that avoids harming others and ourselves, a concern that lies at the core of compassion. The breadth of vision that results from cultivating mindfulness internally and externally also relates to compassion, which can similarly foster a broad, open-minded, and even boundless mental attitude.

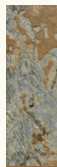


In daily life, an anchor of mindfulness can be established in the body through awareness of our bodily posture. This can serve to counter distraction and the tendency towards fragmentation in sensory experience. Embodied mindfulness cultivated in this way reveals both a grounding quality of mindfulness and its role of providing protection. Mindfulness protects oneself and others by introducing a moment of simple receptive openness before reacting, thereby enabling us to take informed action rather than blindly acting out our first impulses.

In early Buddhist thought, mindfulness can be “right”, in the sense of being supportive for progress to awakening, and “wrong”, in the sense of being opposed to the same. In addition, some modalities of mindfulness do not seem to fall neatly into either of these two categories.

Although mindfulness is so versatile that it can collaborate with a range of other mental qualities, including focused attention, on its own mindfulness does not come with an exclusive focus. Instead, it is more of an inclusive quality, characterized by a breadth of vision rather than a narrow focal point. The idea that mindfulness plunges into its object is a later development.

When cultivated in the form of four establishments, mindfulness comes with a clear emphasis on the present moment and is concerned with overcoming desires and discontent. In the context of the four establishments, mindfulness collaborates with diligence and clear knowing; the latter is responsible for engendering meditative wisdom through the skilful employment of concepts for the purpose of clarity of understanding.

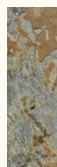


A particular modality of mindfulness takes the form of bare awareness. This can help to discern, and to some extent counter, the constructing nature of the mind, evident in perceptual prediction. With mindfulness established, it becomes possible to avoid the mind becoming afflicted when the body is afflicted, and to learn to face mortality. The latter can counter two strategies of denial, by bringing home the fact that death affects all of us and that it could even happen right now.

The Buddha is on record for having taken the challenge of mortality seriously enough to set out in search of the deathless. During his quest for awakening, the potential of mindfulness appears to have become clear to him in various ways. Key aspects seem to have been awareness of postures, monitoring the impact of feeling tones, recognition of the condition of the mind (distinguished into wholesome and unwholesome types), and a practical exploration of the conditionality of the mind. All of the contributions made by mindfulness to the Buddha's own progress to awakening would have led to the central role mindfulness was to take in his teachings. This role evolves from its pre-Buddhist precedents, where mindfulness had a central but not exclusive relationship to memory, or better, to "keeping in mind". In its early Buddhist usage, mindfulness features in a variety of contexts and applications, making it a versatile and adaptable mental quality.

A history of mindfulness

The developments surveyed in the last two chapters show the arising of two significant perspectives on mindfulness in later Buddhist tradition. In one of these, mindfulness came to be

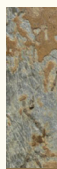


understood as invariably wholesome and intrinsically related to wisdom. Moreover, mindfulness was seen as involving a plunging into the object of meditation practice, whose purpose was to enable a direct experience of the momentary nature of reality. In the other, mindfulness was instead seen as a quality present in any state of mind. Here mindfulness has to stay aloof from concepts and the subject–object duality in order to enable a recognition of the already awakened nature of the mind.

Now some degree of cessation can indeed be experienced at every moment in the mind, otherwise there would be no room for something new to arise and be cognized. Yet, continuity in the mind is also experienced at all times, otherwise any learning from the past becomes impossible. In this way, each of these two perspectives is a partial truth and fails to encompass the complete picture.

In both cases, mindfulness serves to confirm the respective doctrinal perspective, be it the momentary or the luminous nature of the mind. In order to fulfil this function, mindfulness necessarily has to be circumscribed. Either it has to involve discrimination and concepts or else it must dispense with both. Either it needs to be actively pursuing an object in a methodical manner or else it has to remain uninvolved to the point of being completely aloof from any method or object.

Each of these two constructs of mindfulness has developed from an antecedent in early Buddhist thought, subsequently taking on its own characteristic understanding of what mindfulness is and how it should be deployed. The same holds for contemporary mindfulness used in the clinical setting and education, etc. This, too, has adopted aspects of early

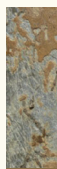


Buddhism, explored in Chapter 1 on mindful eating and in Chapter 8 on healing, developed these further, and formulated its own characteristic understanding.

Contemporary mindfulness in secular usage differs from the two constructs of mindfulness discussed in the last two chapters. It lacks the discriminating dimension of the insight tradition and also the non-dual absence of concepts. Instead of being a further development of either of these two, it is yet another independent branch growing out of the roots of early Buddhism.

The different constructs of mindfulness that have emerged in the course of time could be compared to different parts of an elephant. A well-known simile describes several blind persons each touching a particular part of an elephant, such as its tail, its legs, or its ears (Anālayo 2017b: 163n102). When questioned about the nature of an elephant, the blind persons each present their own particular view, grounded in personal and direct experience. Not realizing the limitations of their respective personal experience, the blind persons start quarrelling with each other about who got it right.

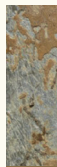
Quarrelling about the “right” definition of mindfulness by privileging one of these constructs over the other would be similar to the predicament of these blind persons. Adopting a historical perspective by seeing their similarities and differences as results of a gradual evolution can help transcend the limited view that leads to contention. There is nothing wrong in taking hold of the part of the elephant that is within reach in order to have a direct experience of it. A problem only arises when the part is mistaken for the whole.



Globalization of mindfulness

Having spread around the globe and into a range of different parts of society, mindfulness offers a timely tool to face the current ecological and climatic crisis (Anālayo 2019i and 2019l). The destruction of the environment and climate change have reached dimensions that, if unchecked, will eventually threaten the very survival of humanity on this planet. The possible future scenarios are truly devastating: oceans turning acidic and fish dying, extinction of the majority of animal species, large areas of fertile land turning into deserts or being flooded by the ocean, massive depletion of drinking water supplies, crop failure, large-scale migration and warfare in competition for dwindling resources. Such scenarios are so horrible that we would rather not even think about them. Yet, avoiding thinking about them is one of the factors contributing to the present crisis.

Here mindfulness can offer a much-needed solution. It can become a central tool to enable us to face the horror and take the steps needed to transform what might well be the most serious challenge human beings have ever faced in their history into a great opportunity: an opportunity to raise the level of global awareness and move to a level of interaction among human beings that gives precedence to the common welfare over the individual benefit. The challenge posed by the crisis, if handled with mindfulness on a broad scale, can become an opportunity to work together to maintain the living conditions required for the survival of human civilization. This requires stepping out of the narrow confines of self-centredness, based on rigidly held racial, political, religious, and social identities.

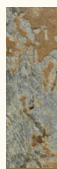


At this stage, it is no longer possible to privilege the individual over the communal, the regional over the national, and the national over the international. Instead, we must come to appreciate what we all have in common, the potential to become what so far we have not yet really become: *homo sapiens sapiens*, truly “wise” human beings.

To actualize our human potential requires the support of mindfulness to enable a stepping out of three types of reaction to the crisis: denial, anger, and resignation. I propose to map these to the three root defilements recognized in early Buddhism: greed, aversion, and delusion.

When faced with information about ecological destruction and climate change with their potential repercussions, it is a natural reaction of the untrained mind to want to avoid and forget about it, in order to be able to continue enjoying the pleasures of this world without having to worry too much about the consequences. In this way denial, which I consider to be predominantly an expression of the root defilement of greed, prevents us from reacting appropriately to what is happening. The forces of greed are strong enough to have made denial an intentionally cultivated strategy by leading politicians and high-level executives of companies who would be affected if action were taken to prevent a worsening of the crisis. A common mode of such denial is to pretend that the information we have is not sufficiently well established to be taken seriously.

Yet, we have regular reports by international committees of scientists, which summarize our current level of knowledge. There can be no doubt that the situation is serious and that it demands swift action. Note that it is enough for us to know

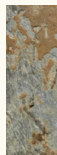


that a threat is probable; we do not need to be absolutely certain. This is part of how our perception works, which involves “perceptual prediction”. On suddenly seeing a dangerous animal in front of us, we will react on the spot. We cannot afford to wait until all possible information about the animal has been gathered and we are completely sure that it is indeed intent on attacking us, since by then it may be too late. Similarly, faced by the probable outcomes of the current crisis, it is time to act now, before it is too late.

This remains a challenge for each of us, as long as the forces of the root defilements are still present in our minds. The tendency to want to avoid and forget about it all can exert a strong influence that is hardly noticed, unless mindfulness is established. From this viewpoint, the global crisis can become an opportunity for mindfully scrutinizing our own mind in order to detect the potential influence of the root defilement of greed, however subtly it might manifest, in fostering denial.

The second type of reaction is anger. As just mentioned, some leading politicians and high-level executives are actively working to prevent appropriate changes from taking place. Yet, getting angry with them is not a solution. For one, we are all part of the problem, even if unintendedly. Let the one of us who has never driven a car, taken a plane, eaten food imported from abroad, worn clothing manufactured in a distant country, etc., throw the first stone.

Besides, I fail to see a place for righteous anger in early Buddhist thought. There is definitely a place for stern and strong action, but this should come with inner balance. If we operate from a position of inner balance, sooner or later

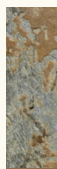


it becomes clear to us that those “bad ones” in politics and economy are in the end simply in a condition of being at the mercy of defilements. They do not know what they are doing.

From the viewpoint of mindfulness practice, getting angry at them is not the appropriate response, because in doing so we succumb to one of the root defilements and thereby to what has led to and sustains the crisis. Anger is a problem and not a solution. A solution can be found only when the mind is unhindered by defilements, at least temporarily, and therefore able to know and see things accurately. The present situation, within and without, calls for mindfulness in combination with clarity of understanding, embedded in the right intention of non-harm. These are the appropriate qualities with which to face our internal responses and to counteract those external manifestations of the root defilements that are related in one way or another to a deterioration of living conditions on earth.

The third type of reaction is resignation, which I relate to the root defilement of delusion. It manifests in a sense of feeling overwhelmed and helpless. As a single individual, it just seems so hopeless to try to effect any change. What is the point of even trying? Yet, society is made up of individuals and does not exist apart from them. The question is not whether a single individual can bring about all required change alone. The question is rather whether every single individual can contribute to the required change. This is indeed the case.

From this viewpoint, the small steps we might take in our daily lives acquire significance as an embodiment of our mindfulness practice. Be it living more simply, shifting to a vegetarian diet, recycling, or forgoing unnecessary travel. All of these become

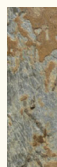


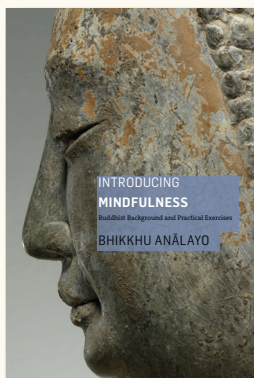
meaningful not because the world will change if one individual acts in this way. They become meaningful because they embody our awareness of the global crisis and express it on the individual level as a form of training in mindfulness.

Of course, the more of us who act in this way, the greater the effects will be. This ties in with the internal and external dimensions of mindfulness. It is precisely through embodying what needs to be done on the personal level that the external level can be positively affected. In this way, the quality of protection inherent in mindfulness can become the way to protect ourselves and others.

Just as mindfulness enables us to be with physical pain without either switching off or else resisting, similarly mindfulness can ease the mental pain of facing the horror of what we human beings are doing to ourselves. This is the first and most important foundational step. It is by training ourselves to be able to face the crisis with mindfulness that we will be able to share this attitude with others and inspire them to cultivate the same, and it is based on this attitude that any ecological activism to confront the crisis has the greatest potential.

Just as mindfulness can gradually expand into accompanying various daily activities, so we can expand our awareness to embodying our understanding in various ways. Just as mindfulness has internal and external dimensions, similarly our ability to learn to face the current ecological and climatic crisis can find expression in a variety of ways and activities. Each of us can find our own suitable ways to embody how the crisis is best faced: with mindfulness.





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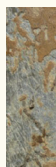
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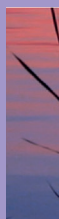


MIND TRAINING

(The mind) is frivolous and difficult to control,
alighting on whatever it pleases. It is good to tame
the mind. A tamed mind brings happiness.

From *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*,
translated by Sangharakshita (p.23)

The examined life: an introduction to meditation



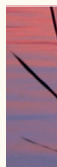
From
Wildmind
by Bodhipaksa

Common problems for new meditators

Everyone's experience is different, but there are some problems that many people face when they are learning meditation. Telling you about them probably won't prevent them, but perhaps you'll recognize them more quickly if you know about them in advance. You might also be spared the agony of thinking you are the only person to have experienced these particular outcomes. Some of the most common are:

Feeling that you have to do it perfectly

You sit down to meditate, and it's supposed to be blissful, instantly – right? But instead, your mind is all over the place, your left knee aches, and there's an unbearable itch in your right ear. Obviously, you think, you're not cut out for this meditation lark, and you'd do as well to give up. Feeling that we have to do it perfectly turns into the realization that we can't do it perfectly, which leads to our beating ourselves up and quitting.



But as G.K. Chesterton wrote, ‘If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.’⁹ That is not a typographical error, and I believe there is great wisdom in this saying. If a thing is worth doing, it’s worth doing badly. Anything that is very rewarding, from parenting, to painting, to meditation, is likely to be very complex. There is by definition always a lot to go wrong, so you’ll make a lot of mistakes. It’s natural and inherent in meditation that you will experience, for example, a lot of distraction and sometimes realize that you haven’t a clue what you’re doing. And that’s all right. If you keep doing it, you will learn; you’ll learn from your mistakes and learn to get results that you want rather than results you don’t want.

The fact that you experience distractions in meditation is not a sign that things are going wrong. Here’s a typical comment from one of my students, a management consultant. ‘I certainly found my attention wandering – sometimes it focused on past events from today, at other times I was anticipating what would come next, at other times I was impatiently waiting for the meditation to end. But overall it was good; I certainly felt more calm and relaxed and centred when it was over.’ Do you see how it’s possible both to experience distractions and to experience beneficial effects from meditation? The more you can accept that distractions are inevitable, the more likely it is that you will appreciate those benefits.

We may feel that we have limitations that affect our ability to meditate, but so what? Who doesn’t have limitations that affect their ability to meditate? What we have to do is simply keep on working within our limitations until we find we’ve transcended them.

I sometimes call Buddhist practice ‘the fine art of making mistakes’, since the point of practice is to pay attention to what you do, to learn from it, and to keep doing it differently until the results you get are more to your liking.

We need to learn to forgive ourselves if we are going to meditate, and if we commit ourselves to meditation we have a strong incentive to forgive ourselves in order to make life more enjoyable and less frustrating. Making mistakes is inevitable – so inevitable, in fact, that it seems ludicrous to me to think in terms of mistakes. When we walk we are always catching ourselves as we fall. That is how we move from one place to another. To single out the part of our meditation where we get distracted or frustrated, and to label it ‘failure’, seems to me about as helpful as to single out the part of our walking where we fall forwards and to describe it as a ‘mistake’.

The poet David Whyte points out that ‘to find the real path we have to go *off* the path we are on now, even for an instant, and earn the privilege of losing our way. As the path fades, we are forced to take a good look at the life in which we actually find ourselves.’¹⁰ I believe this is absolutely true. The path we are following in meditation is not like one that is clearly laid out in front of us. The journey we are taking is an internal one, and although others have followed similar paths during their own spiritual journey they cannot leave trails where we need to go. We can only have a sense that we are following that invisible trackless track within by straying to its very edges and beyond – by losing our sense of balance and by stumbling on the rough ground of our own ego. As we begin to tread this inner path we

cannot know where its edges lie without blundering into them. In fact, this inner path is not so much found as created.

Trying to make your mind go blank or chase thoughts (or noises) away

This doesn't work, and it isn't what meditation is about. In meditation, your mind will often become calmer and quieter. Sometimes you might even stop thinking in words. But your mind never goes blank (unless you are deeply unconscious); if it did, you wouldn't know you'd succeeded, would you?

When it comes to outside noises, there is no point in trying to push them away. If you push them, you are holding on to them. The harder you push, the more deeply entangled you'll get. Instead of trying to push noises away, just let them be. Allow them to pass through you unhindered. If you keep doing the practice, one day you'll realize that you just hadn't noticed them.

The situation with thoughts is somewhat similar, except that we have more choice over whether a thought continues or not. In becoming more aware of our propensity to generate thoughts, we can learn to let go of those thoughts when that seems to be appropriate. Thoughts can be let go of, but they cannot be chased away for more than a few seconds. We cannot successfully chase thoughts away any more than we can chase clouds out of the sky because we prefer the sunshine. Instead we need to learn patiently to let go and accept that a busy mind is what we are working with.

Trying to make something happen

We may have expectations about what meditation is going to be like, and even try to make our expectations happen. We may strive, for example, to experience bliss because we think that meditation is supposed to be blissful. Or when we do begin to experience some rapture arising, in the form of energy or pleasure, we may try to grasp and hold on to it, convinced that this is the beginning of some deeply spiritual experience. But what happens is that we kill the developing positive quality as surely as if we'd crushed a small bird in the palm of our hand.

Sit loose to your experience. You'll have ups and downs, and your meditation will vary considerably. Observe these changes without attaching too much significance to either the ups or the downs. We often respond to these changes as if they were permanent – so we get elated when something pleasant happens and we become despondent when things don't go the way we'd hoped. In meditation, elation and despondency are unbalanced and unhelpful. Rather than become elated or despondent, maintain as much equanimity as you can, realizing that the changes you are experiencing are just part of the ever-changing flux of your life.

Confusing being aware of something with thinking about it

'Being aware of' is not the same as 'thinking about'. We can be aware, for example, of how our body is, without keeping up a running commentary. Being aware of your breathing (something we'll be doing a lot) is not the same as describing your breathing. Try simply to experience. If thoughts arise, don't push them away but also don't indulge them. Instead, just let go of them

and let them evaporate. At first you might have to do this over and over again, but eventually the number of thoughts bubbling up will decrease, and your mind will become calmer.

Helpful habits in meditating

Over the years I've noticed a few traits that crop up in people who are successful at establishing a regular and long-term meditation practice. All these traits can be cultivated, so that any of us can learn, over time, how to set up a successful meditation practice.

Noticing and appreciating small changes

Many people give up meditation because they want to see major changes in their lives, and they want to see them now. They don't realize that most major changes are composed of a great many small changes – just as a long hike is made of many small steps. Each step might not get you very far, but when you add them all up they take you a long way.

The most successful meditators do notice and appreciate these small changes. They see every small change as important in its own right and take delight in it. Those who don't do this are likely to give up, which is a bit like giving up on a hike after the first few steps because they don't seem to be taking you very far. They then often look for some other form of meditation (or other method of personal change) and give up on that too. They end up getting nowhere. Meanwhile the meditators who recognize and appreciate the small changes they are making are finding they've come a long way.

An aspect of this quality of noticing and appreciating small changes is to describe your practice in terms of degrees on a continuum rather than as choices between good and bad. If you tend to describe your experience in terms of good and bad, this tends to be demotivating. Basically, you're working with a very crude descriptive system that doesn't allow you to notice small changes, and therefore you'll tend to place yourself and your progress at the 'bad' end of the spectrum. If, however, you see things in terms of better or worse, rather than good or bad, you'll be able to make finer distinctions. Rather than saying your meditation was bad, you'll be able to say it was 'worse than yesterday, but better than last month', for example. In this way you're seeing your progress as part of a continuum of possible states of mind. You're also implicitly reminding yourself of the possibility of better meditations, since you're making comparisons with those times.

Reminding yourself of progress

If you don't sometimes step back from your practice and note what changes have taken place, you may end up assuming that no changes have taken place. It is very useful, especially in the early stages, to take note of what you've learned. If you keep a meditation journal you can use the end of each week to summarize what you've learned. This will help you to maintain your motivation and your confidence.

Seeing opportunities, not problems

Successful meditators see opportunities where others see problems. Seeing problems as opportunities is almost a cliché in

the business world, but clichés generally become clichés because they happen to be true. Frustration leads to breakthroughs; confusion leads to insights. Instead of moaning about something that's not going as well as you think it should, instead of assuming that you must be a lousy meditator, give yourself the opportunity to learn from any frustrations that crop up.

We all have access to intuitive wisdom, if we are prepared to listen to ourselves. In the midst of the random noise of our distractions there is often a quiet voice pointing the way forwards. Listen and learn. You know more than you think you know.

Tenacity

When the going gets tough, the tough keep meditating. Meditating when you feel like it will only take you so far – and that's not very far at all. What's needed is an attitude that you will keep meditating come what may. Meditation needs to be as essential as brushing your teeth. Most adults (fortunately) don't just brush their teeth when they feel like it – they see it as a regular and necessary part of life. If we keep on meditating even when it gets boring, or when it's positively frustrating, we'll be able to make breakthroughs – such as the intuitive problem solving that we just talked about.

Having clear goals

Something that supports the ability to notice progress, to solve problems intuitively, and to stick tenaciously to practice, is having a clear goal. You may realize that you need to develop more happiness and enjoyment in your meditation. You may

notice that you tend to be harsh toward yourself and that you could do with developing more kindness. Or perhaps you need to work on strengthening your concentration. If you're clear about what you want to achieve in life, and in your meditation, you can tell whether you are making progress towards that goal.

When you encounter obstacles your subconscious mind will be able to generate new approaches if you have a clear sense of where you want to go. It's hard to find a way from point A to point B if you have no idea what point B actually is.

And if you have a clear sense of where you want to go in life – what kind of qualities you want to have, what kind of person you want to be, what kind of achievements you want to be remembered for – it's much easier to stick to the path that is going to take you towards those goals. If you have an unclear sense of where you want to go, it's going to be hard to maintain any sort of regular practice.

At the same time you'll distress yourself if you cling to the idea of attaining your goals quickly. When we do this we tend to become upset and frustrated, but we can bear a goal lightly in mind, so that we use it as a guide to orient ourselves and don't beat ourselves up for not having attained it yet.

- Noticing and appreciating small changes
- Reminding yourself of progress
- Seeing opportunities, not problems
- Tenacity
- Having clear goals

These are all traits we can cultivate, both inside and outside of meditation. I'd suggest that you get into the habit of practising

these attitudes in your daily life, thereby generating some momentum that will help you to take these qualities into your meditation as well.

Notice small changes around you – in the weather and in the natural world, in the way people dress, in their moods – and within you – the ever-changing pattern of your moods. Whenever possible, comment on positive changes that you notice. Remind yourself of progress in your relationships and in your work by taking a few minutes to review your day. When problems occur at work or at home, see what you can learn from those situations. Keep going, even when the going is tough, and develop and stay focused on clear goals that you set yourself in all areas of your life.

Can anyone learn to meditate?

Yes, just about anyone can learn to meditate. Sex, age, nationality, religion, previous experience are all unimportant. Forget any ideas that you have to be ‘spiritual’ (whatever that means) to meditate. You don’t need any innate ability, any more than you need special powers to be able to learn to walk or ride a bike.

People with mental illness should be cautious about taking up meditation. Those who have experienced schizophrenia, serious depression, or bipolar disorder should consult their doctor before learning to meditate, and discuss their history with their potential meditation instructor.

This book is written by a Buddhist, but it’s not a book about Buddhism. I just want to share with you something that I (and

many other people through the centuries) have found useful. You certainly don't have to be a Buddhist to do any of the practices you'll find in this book. You can continue to practise the religion within which you were brought up and make use of what you find here. You don't have to find a guru or make any radical change in your lifestyle, like shaving your head. Lots of normal people meditate. You could walk past them on the street and never know.

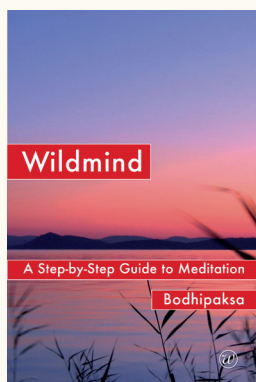
There's nothing in this book that will seem particularly 'religious' (in fact, many people think the term 'religion' isn't a very accurate way of describing Buddhism itself). Meditation is just a way of getting to know yourself better, and learning to take responsibility for what you find, so that you can learn how to be a happier, more fulfilled person.

We so often label ourselves in ways that limit us. We say, 'I'd like to meditate, but I'm just too distracted. I could never do it.' These labels may start off as simple descriptions, but they end up as prison cells. Our description of ourself confines us and prevents us even trying. The truth is that you can learn to meditate if you want to.

A Buddhist teacher once explained the Buddhist path to a class. One young man said, 'What you've said sounds great, but I don't think I could manage to do that. It sounds too hard for me.' The teacher replied, 'Really? What makes you think you're so special?' From a Buddhist perspective it's just as conceited to tell yourself that you are special due to some supposed lack of ability, as it is to believe you are naturally superior to others. This is a challenging perspective, but we cannot grow without challenges, and possibly the first challenge we have to face is to

accept that our growth is our responsibility, and that we have what it takes – simply by being an aware human being.

The most important thing is persistence – keeping at it despite the natural ups and downs you’ll experience. Sometimes it will be easy; sometimes it won’t. Some discomfort is to be expected when we step outside the known and undertake a challenge, but unless we go beyond what we have already mastered, we will never grow.



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Loving-kindness: learning to love



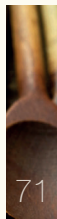
From

Buddhism: Tools for Living Your Life

by Vajragupta

Although we may aspire to being more kind, or patient, or calm, the heart doesn't always respond the way our head thinks it should. We need other ways of connecting to a heart that is more open and at ease, more able to love.

Loving-kindness can be defined as a warm, concerned, awareness of ourselves and other people. When we love, we want others to be happy and to have what they need to be truly happy. This sounds very nice in theory, but a difficulty arises when another person's needs or wants do not coincide with our own. It is in these situations that our relationships with people are really tested. Loving does not entail ignoring our own needs, but neither does it mean always putting our needs above those of everyone else. Sometimes you meet people who behave in one or other of these extreme ways. The martyr constantly sacrifices himself or herself, but deep down is full of resentment, while the immaturely selfish person goes about life completely oblivious of other people. The art of loving lies in nurturing awareness of both our own and others' needs, negotiating between them appropriately and with kindness and generosity of spirit.

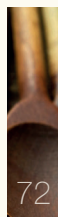


There is a meditation practice designed to help develop this loving heart, known traditionally as the *metta bhavana*. These are two Pali words, the first of which is usually translated ‘loving-kindness’, the second as ‘cultivation’ or ‘development’. So in this chapter we are going to be exploring the cultivation of loving-kindness. We will consider how we can develop love and positive emotion by looking at how this particular meditation practice works.

The meditation is performed in five stages. While sitting quietly, you cultivate this well-wishing attitude first towards yourself, then towards a good friend, then a ‘neutral’ person (someone you don’t know well, or don’t strongly like or dislike), then towards someone you find difficult, and then to as many living beings as possible – gradually expanding out and including more and more. Thus we can see that the loving-kindness meditation is structured in a way that reflects the need to be aware of self as well as of others.

When we first take up this practice, we might do it very simply. For example, as you choose a person to bring to mind in each of the five stages, you just quietly say certain words or phrases to yourself, such as ‘may I/they be well’, ‘may I/they be happy’, ‘may I/they be free from suffering’, ‘may I/they fulfil my/their highest potential’. Just dropping these phrases into your heart can be like dropping pebbles into a deep pool – a ripple expands outwards. It may be surprising that something so simple can work, but currents of more positive emotion can indeed be coaxed into being, or positive emotion that is already present can be given more momentum and strength.

However, as we saw in the previous chapter when we explored the mindfulness of breathing, meditation involves more than



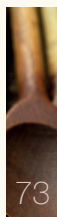
mechanically counting breaths or reciting phrases. As we gain experience in the practice, we learn to take a broader, more varied approach. It is good to experiment and use our imagination – any method that helps us be more emotionally aware and develop loving-kindness is valid. We will now look at the meditation stage by stage and examine some possible techniques.

Ourselves

People are sometimes surprised that a meditation in which we are learning to love should start with ourselves. But the practice is just acknowledging the psychological truth that we cannot go out to others in an emotionally positive way unless we have positive emotion for ourselves. We first need a sense of our own self-worth and an appreciation of life and its potential. In our culture this seems difficult for some people. An unforgiving self-criticism, or subtle, underlying sense of worthlessness, is surprisingly common.

Most of us talk to ourselves; there is an internal voice providing us with a running commentary on our day. What is the emotional tone of this voice? Are we talking to ourselves in a way in which we wouldn't dare talk to others? Is the voice harsh, moaning, or over-critical? If so, can we soften the voice, and let it be kinder and more forgiving?

Or is it a voice of self-pity, feeling let down by other people and blaming the world for our misery? Such self-pity is corrosive. Even if we *have* been let down by others, it is no use wallowing in these feelings. Eventually we need to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and start again. In order to be able to do this,

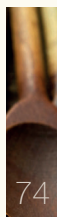


we need to acknowledge our pain, admit to ourselves that we were hurt, and bring to this hurt a sense of kindness.

Perhaps our inner voice isn't usually so negative, but we notice that it can become so in certain situations. When things don't go our way, this might trigger a particular way in which we speak to ourselves. It might be worth exploring all this in meditation and in daily life.

This first stage of the meditation may also help us find the emotional resources to deal with stress and difficulty in our lives. If life is currently hard or painful, we can practise 'self-empathy'. We take the time to listen to ourselves, to hear about what is difficult, with kindness and understanding. We do the same with ourselves as we would with a friend who was suffering – we try just to listen with empathy.

On some occasions I have taught this practice to groups of carers – people who are caring long-term for a severely ill or disabled family member. They are ordinary people from whom so much energy and self-sacrifice is required on an ongoing basis. They relate very easily to this need for self-empathy, for the time to look at their own emotional resources, in order to be able to go on coping with the daily demands of caring. Sometimes they have to deal with feelings of guilt. If the pressures on them are great, they can understandably start to feel anger towards the person for whom they are caring. On top of this, they feel guilty about feeling anger. Self-empathy can help bring to this a kindness and understanding of one's humanity and limitations. At other times they can feel equally uneasy about feeling good – why should they feel happy when their near and dear one is in pain? Self-empathy can help them



realize that they are human beings who deserve happiness too. Also, if they are able to feel more emotionally buoyant and resilient, this is not selfish because it means they will have the emotional resources to carry on helping others.

As well as working with negative feelings towards ourselves, we can also remind ourselves of our positive qualities. We can look at our lives and see that we do act with loving-kindness much of the time, even if it is sometimes mixed with other motives, or even if we don't always feel hugely positive. But we can give ourselves credit for what we have done that was good or helpful.

Extending on from this, we can also use this stage of the practice to strengthen positive qualities, or to develop new ones. I often work by imagining qualities that I would like to develop. I try to envisage what it would be like to have those qualities. For example, if I've noticed myself getting irritated in meetings at work, I imagine how it might be possible to make my points in the meeting without the irritation, and with more kindness to others. I sit trying to be open to the possibility. Sometimes this imaginative approach helps me see my potential more clearly. I can sense quite tangibly how I *could* be different. Then I actually start to *feel* different.

We might also spend time reflecting on all that is good in our lives, cultivating a sense of gratitude and appreciation (a bit like the reminder of the preciousness of life in Chapter 1). By doing this, we can gain a different perspective on the things we tend to moan about – we realize that they are not that bad. We can feel richer, more expansive, and warmed up – ready for the subsequent stages of the practice.

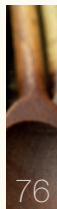
Exercise – Imagining new possibilities

You can try the various ideas and approaches suggested above in your meditation practice. It would probably be best to spread them out over a few weeks, rather than trying them all at once. You could take notes as you go, and see if there are some you find more helpful than others.

If you already do the loving-kindness practice, you can incorporate them into that. If not, you could start by spending five minutes on one of the approaches suggested above. For example, after relaxing the body and watching the breath for a while, you could try imagining new possibilities. Bring to mind particular, specific situations in which you have a desire to be different, and recall what you are like in them, how you actually feel in your heart, mind, and body. Allow a sense of how you could be different to emerge, of how you could approach those situations in a new way.

A good friend

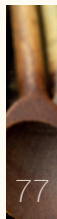
In the second stage of the loving-kindness meditation, we bring to mind a good friend, someone towards whom it will be relatively easy for us to feel warm and appreciative. In this phase of the practice, we can work to see them more deeply, see what their qualities are – their own, unique sparkle that makes them the person they are. Maybe we can imagine this sparkle, this quality, shining in them more and more brightly. This is what we desire – for them to be at their very best and happiest.



If our friend is currently happy and healthy and life is going well for them, we bring their good fortune and good qualities to mind and try to respond with a sense of gladness and celebration. In the same way, if we know they are experiencing difficulties and unhappiness, we can bring that to mind, be as fully aware of them and their situation as we can. We can then try to cultivate a response of empathy and well-wishing.

When this practice is taught to people for the first time, it is often recommended that we do not put someone to whom we are sexually attracted in this stage of the practice. It is also recommended not to include someone who has died, or who is a lot older or younger than us. This is so that our feelings of loving-kindness can be developed without confusion with feelings of sexual or romantic attraction, grief or remorse, or parental or filial feelings. It is not that there is anything wrong with such feelings, but that we are trying to cultivate loving-kindness towards someone with whom our relationship is relatively straightforward, so that we can get a clear idea of what the practice entails.

However, it is also important to emphasize that this is only the case when you are new to the practice. Once you have got an idea of how it works, it is good to include all sorts of people. Indeed, we want to be able to respond with loving-kindness to everyone and anyone, including those we are close to and with whom we are enjoying an intimate relationship. People can sometimes get into the habit of not including certain people, and go on not including them when it would be very appropriate to do so.



Exercise – Celebrating friends

You could start off this phase of the practice with an emphasis on celebrating and appreciating your friend's good qualities. It might seem obvious what their strengths are, and what you value about them, so that thinking about it doesn't seem necessary. However, if you allow time for reflection, a deeper appreciation can emerge. You can start to discern what combination of qualities it is that is uniquely theirs. In other words, they become more special, more loved for who they really are.

You can do this by bearing a friend in mind, or seeing them in your mind's eye. Think of them at different times and in different situations, and with different people. What are they really like?

Do they have distinctive qualities you've not fully noticed before? Are there aspects of them, or memories of times spent with them, that you have not thought about for a long time? We can bring all this to mind and allow appreciation to emerge.

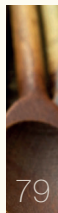
A neutral person

In the third stage we think of a neutral person. Here the practice is presenting us with a particular challenge, that of overcoming indifference. We are being asked to be concerned for someone in whom we have no personal investment. In the second stage we like the person, enjoy their company, and want their friendship. In the fourth stage we are going to be thinking of a difficult person, someone whose company we would rather be without. In each case, a different 'vested interest' is at stake.

But the neutral person is in between. We have no particular feelings, or interests, either way.

The neutral person might be someone we see quite often, but we have no real connection with. It might be a man at work whose name we know, but whom we've never really spoken to, or a woman who runs the local corner shop. So in this stage of the practice we are trying to develop well-wishing towards such a person. Even though we don't know them personally, and may never know them, we want our attitude to be one of desiring their happiness.

Sometimes we can find this stage difficult precisely because we don't have a connection with that person. How can we think about someone if we don't know anything about them? We can try using our imagination. Although we might not know very much about this person's life, we can imagine what it might be like. We can do this in a way that seems realistic, and take a view of what life might possibly entail for them. What would it be like to work in that shop all day long? You hope she enjoys her work, and that the business is doing well. You imagine where she grew up, what her life might have been like. Though she might be neutral to us, to some other people she is far from that. Perhaps she has a family, and we can hope that they, too, are happy and well. When we are in a hurry, people like her can seem to be two-dimensional figures. They are always there behind the counter when we nip in for our pint of milk or bar of chocolate. In this stage of the practice we are trying to see them more as alive, three-dimensional, human beings. We start to see that we are connected to them more than we think. It is only because she works all those hours that we can call in just when we want to.



Exercise – Putting ourselves in their shoes

If you are not already doing the full loving-kindness practice, you can now try incorporating this third stage into your meditation. Start building up the practice stage by stage. Spend a few minutes on stages one and two every day, and then move on to stage three.

You can do this by bringing to mind someone you see at work, in a shop, or on the bus. Try to imagine being in their shoes. What would it be like to live that life? Fill out as much detail as you can, but obviously there will be aspects of their life you cannot know about. At these times, you can just dwell on the ‘mystery’ of the other person.

It is good to choose one person and keep them in your practice for a week, or even longer. Then you might want to choose someone else for a while.

You can also do this reflection while you are sitting on the bus, or walking down the street, just looking about you and having a sense of curiosity and kindness towards the people you see about you.

A friend of mine once told me the following story. He used to work in a restaurant where there was a man who came in for lunch every day. He was quiet and never said very much, and the staff in the restaurant used to refer to him as Mr Customer. One day my friend started putting Mr Customer in his neutral-person stage. A few days later, when serving this man, without any particular intention, he started chatting to him. (Let us hope he didn't call him Mr Customer to his face!) This story shows the effect the practice can have. My friend naturally and

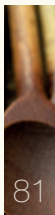
spontaneously started seeing that man differently. We encounter scores of neutral people every day, and it is worth remembering that, before we knew them, our dearest friends were, to us, just neutral people.

People sometimes make astonishing sacrifices for total strangers. There are many stories of people giving their lives trying to save others in a disaster or emergency – rushing back into a burning building, or diving into freezing cold water. They are only ‘ordinary’ people, but such stories provide food for thought about our potential for self-transcendence and concern for others. Perhaps you could even say there is only such a thing as ‘society’ to the extent that we can identify with ‘neutral’ people. If we didn’t have any concern for neutral people, society would soon break down.

The person we find difficult

In the fourth stage of the practice, we become aware of someone we find difficult, irritating, or antagonistic. We try to overcome any ill will and, instead, cultivate a concern for their welfare. This is very challenging indeed, and we may feel a resistance even to the idea of attempting it! But, although it seems counter-intuitive, the best chance for our own happiness consists in thinking about the happiness of others.

When we are new to the practice, it might be best to start with someone we experience as just mildly awkward or irritating, rather than someone we find really difficult. Otherwise we may end our loving-kindness meditation with gritted teeth and steam coming out of our ears! With time and experience, we learn how to work in this stage of the practice and may feel robust

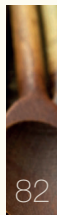


enough to take on those whom we find more seriously difficult. I know many people who have gradually transformed deep negative feelings towards certain people, or vastly improved key relationships in their life that have been problematic.

In this stage of the practice we first simply acknowledge our feelings, owning any anger or ill will, and just trying to soften, relax, and let it go. We can reflect on how useless such feelings are. They just cause pain and disturbance in our minds and, if we act on that basis, they also cause pain for others.

When we are in a state of hatred, we don't see the other person as they really are. We see what we dislike writ large, so that we can't appreciate other aspects of them. In the meditation we can work against this tendency, bringing to mind their positive qualities, and reflecting that, although we don't like them, there are probably other people who do. Our view of them is only part of the story.

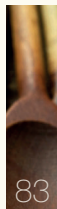
It is worth being aware of assumptions. Someone we don't like arrives late for a meeting, and we complain to ourselves: 'She is always late. She's just avoiding this meeting because she knows it's not going to go her way.' Then she turns up, full of apologies, and explains that on the way to work she found a little boy who'd lost his mother, so she had to help him. We sit there feeling glad we'd not criticized her out loud! Perhaps our policy should be to give people the benefit of the doubt, trying to assume the best about them and their motives. Maybe we need to be especially careful with those we find difficult, when we can often be overly suspicious of their motives. Of course, this does not mean being naive. If we know full well they are taking us for a ride, we need to do something about it. But we



should be careful that we do know for sure, rather than jumping to a conclusion.

As well as trying to loosen *our* narrow, subjective view of the person we find difficult, we can go even further and attempt to look at the situation from *their* point of view. For example, I'm irritated because someone is being a bit antagonistic towards me at work. He makes the odd sarcastic comment and seems opposed to anything I suggest. Perhaps in the meditation I can reflect on why he might be doing this. There will be a reason. He did it because, rightly or wrongly, consciously or unconsciously, he thought it would make him happy. He, like everyone else, and like me, just wants to be happy, so he acts in ways that he thinks will produce this happiness. But how was it that he thought being sarcastic could contribute to his happiness? Perhaps I was a bit short with him the previous day and, feeling hurt, he is trying to show me his determination not to be treated like that. Realizing this, I can try to take his point of view into account. I can try to speak to him more sensitively.

Or perhaps I recently got promoted to a post that he'd also applied for, and I realize he is feeling rather competitive at the moment. In this case, although his feelings are not my fault, I can still be aware of what is going on and act appropriately. Perhaps I am careful to be extra appreciative of him in the next few weeks (without making it too obvious, of course). Rather than acting on the basis of my irritation, I have looked deeply and seen the situation from the other person's perspective. I can try to act in a way that helps him and, in fact, this will be what helps me too. I'm responding with compassion to his mistaken idea of what will make him happy. Such a compassionate



response is more likely to help him towards a better idea of where happiness is to be found.

Exercise – Understanding the difficulties of others

Now you can try incorporating this fourth stage of the meditation into your own practice. Allow a few minutes for each stage until you arrive at the ‘difficult person’ stage.

You bring this person to mind as in the other stages, and notice and acknowledge your feelings towards them. Then choose one of the approaches explored above.

If your feelings are strong, it might be best just to work on letting go. When you notice your mind following an irritable train of thought, notice the thoughts and then try to give them up. When you notice anger in your heart, or a physical sense of tightness and tension, see if you can soften and let go. You can ask yourself if these negative feelings are worth holding on to, and who benefits from them.

Or you can spend time thinking about this person’s positive qualities, which you do not usually notice or give them credit for. Or you might try to understand why it is they behave in a way you find difficult, try to see the situation from their point of view.

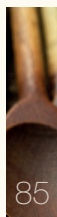
Again, it is good to vary the approach over time, to take notes, and notice what works for you.

Sometimes, if your feelings are strong, you cannot deal with them in one meditation. Don’t worry about this. If the negative feelings persist, leave that person for a while and come back to stage one of the practice, or just to physical relaxation of the body, or watching the breath.

This is, of course, much harder in practice than in theory. In real life, events unfold so quickly. Our feelings of hurt smart and burn, they seem instantly to transform themselves into indignation or irritation, and then we can't seem to stop ourselves acting on them. But that is why loving-kindness is something we have to practise both within meditation and without. We gradually learn to see things from a more objective, compassionate point of view.

Another aspect of loving-kindness, and of seeing people in a more rounded, realistic way, is forgiveness. My Buddhist teacher once said, 'I am much worse than you think I am, but also much better.'¹¹ He was asking his followers, who perhaps had a tendency to put him on a pedestal, to try to see him more as he really was – as a person with a mix of good qualities and human weaknesses. The aphorism is true of us all. We are probably all capable of acting in far worse ways than we'd like to think, but we are also capable of much more good than we dare imagine. Human life is complex, and we can only learn as we go along, by making mistakes. When I look back on my life and see the times when I've caused most harm to others, it was not out of a deliberate wish to do so, but out of an insensitivity born of inexperience, or sheer naivety, or because I was blind to the needs of others because of my own desires. Because we will all make mistakes, we need to be able to forgive. We need self-forgiveness and forgiveness towards others. As William Blake said, 'Mutual forgiveness of each vice, such are the Gates of Paradise.'¹²

When someone has done us a serious wrong, forgiveness can be very difficult and may take a long time. However, the example of South Africa is inspiring. When apartheid came to an end,



and South Africans had their first democratic elections, there was much debate about how to bring to justice those who had committed atrocities. People eventually realized that retribution through the courts was not an option. Apart from the practical difficulties of providing evidence, there was fear that the whole process would lead to more bitterness and violence. For this reason, some people called for a general amnesty and writing off of crimes. Others argued that this would be to ignore the principle of justice. So a Truth and Reconciliation Committee was formed. Perpetrators were offered amnesty, but only if they came forward and admitted their crimes. Victims were also encouraged to tell of the terrible atrocities that had been inflicted on them or their families. The committee ensured that these stories were heard, including by those who had probably committed the crimes. The victims would not have to live with those experiences for the rest of their days without having them acknowledged, or with the rest of the country in denial. And forgiveness – restorative justice rather than retributive justice – was encouraged. There are stories of remarkably courageous acts of forgiveness from many people – both black and white.

Having difficulties with people is, of course, inevitable. We are all so different, and human communication and interaction are bound to be complex and problematic at times. So perhaps it is helpful to realize that difficulties are normal; it is how we deal with them that matters. We cannot expect to get on with everybody all the time, but we can try to bring awareness, understanding, and honesty to the problems that crop up.

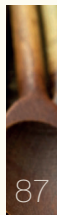
Expanding outwards

The final stage of the loving-kindness meditation has two aspects. First, we think of the four people in the practice so far (ourselves, the good friend, the neutral person, and the person we find difficult), and try to cultivate this sense of well-wishing towards them equally. Then, secondly, we gradually include more and more people. We can do this in a number of ways. We could try to sense loving-kindness radiating out in all directions, or even visualize it in the form of light or a colour expanding outwards. Or we might imagine people in different parts of the world.

In our imaginations we can travel north, south, east, and west, trying to get a sense of all the people we might meet. Or we can bring to mind people in different situations. At this very moment babies are being born and old people are breathing their last few breaths, some people are going to bed and others are getting up to a new day, some are facing terrible suffering, while others experience joy.

Sometimes we find this stage of the practice difficult. It may have been going along quite well, but then trying to hold all these people and situations in our imagination is too much and we lose the thread. If this happens, we can take a more modest approach: just thinking of a few people and situations. We can even let go of thinking of particular people and just go with a sense of *metta* radiating outwards. The principle is simply to emotionally expand in whatever way we can.

Whatever technique we use, we are trying to bring about a warm well-wishing to all that lives. We want anyone and everyone to be happy. This is a high ideal, but sometimes,



when this stage of the practice goes well, it feels as though loving-kindness is flowing through us. We can feel energized, expansive, and open-hearted.

Exercise – Reaching out into the world

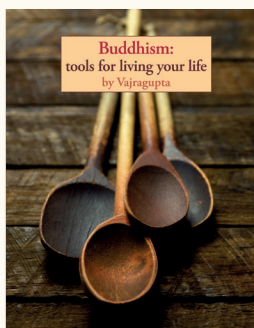
Now incorporate this final stage into your loving-kindness meditation.

You could start by thinking of people in a distant place you have recently seen on TV or read about in a newspaper, putting yourself in their shoes in the same way as in stage three. Or, if this does not help you to connect emotionally, you could try thinking of a distant place you have visited, and the people who are there right now. Alternatively, you might imagine a part of the world where you have a relative or a friend, and then imagine other people around them. The trick is to find some way of establishing an emotional connection, but not being impatient if it doesn't always work, or takes a long time.

Through this meditation, and through using the same principles in our actual daily life, we can radically transform our emotional attitudes. We can come to a much better understanding of our own emotions and learn to see others more kindly.

Of course, we will never completely understand other people, and should be careful of being too keen to analyze and

think we understand them. All of our histories, influences, and hidden potentials are too deep and subtle for that. We should always hold our opinions about people with a degree of tentativeness. In fact, we will never completely understand ourselves, let alone other people. As we grow older, one of the things we realize is that we will always be, to some extent, a mystery, even to ourselves. There will be parts of ourselves we never fully perceive or comprehend. Despite this, our understanding of ourselves and of others can always go deeper, and so, in consequence, can our ability to love.



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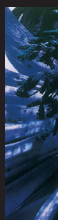
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Joy



From **A Deeper Beauty** by Paramananda

Over the years that I have practised Buddhism, I have noticed that although Buddhists tend to be noticeably more mindful than non-Buddhists, perhaps more helpful and considerate too, they have not struck me as more joyful. Some Buddhist centres even have a rather sombre atmosphere. I once took a Buddhist friend, who was over from England, to a large American Zen centre. After we had looked around, he commented that the place felt like a mausoleum, which seemed to me a fair assessment. Sangharakshita, my teacher, who spent many years in India, has remarked that much English Buddhism often seems a very worthy but rather sanctimonious affair (or words to that effect). Yet he found it quite different in India, where people seem to approach their practice of the Buddha's teachings with real joy, particularly at celebrations such as Buddha Day.

Some years ago I visited a Tibetan Buddhist centre in France. They had recently held a ritual for an important teacher who had died. This ritual was conducted by two Tibetan lamas, who seemed to be sharing a private joke, and some of the students were quite upset at this attitude, which they felt indicated a lack of respect for their departed teacher. While it is understandable



that they were upset, this does seem to me to illustrate both a different attitude towards spiritual practice and, perhaps, more profoundly, towards life itself.

More recently, I visited a number of Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. I was moved by the combination of devotion and cheerfulness the non-Western pilgrims displayed. In particular, many of the Tibetans seemed delighted to see a Westerner turning the prayer wheels or kneeling beside them at the shrines. While they spoke no English and I spoke no Tibetan, they would often stop me with beaming smiles and thumbs-up signs, and leave me in no doubt as to the happiness they felt in our shared devotion.

There does, by contrast, seem to be a lack of joy in Western Buddhism. This may be due partly to temperament and partly to inherited ideas of what religion is. There are of course exceptions to this, but I suspect these are naturally joyful people, and their quality of taking delight in the spiritual life has managed to withstand this more gloomy atmosphere. Perhaps in the West we have been conditioned to regard spiritual development as a serious and sombre affair?

Perhaps, also, people's approach to the Dharma is often dominated by a negation of themselves that stems from a superficial understanding of the idea of 'non-self', and such terms as 'overcoming the ego'. Buddhists often seem to be more concerned with what they shouldn't do than with what they should do (which of course very much includes the cultivation of a happy and joyful attitude towards the ups and downs of life). It seems that many Westerners understand the Buddhist precepts (ethical guidelines) primarily as prohibitions, rather than seeing



them as opportunities for the positive expression of awareness and compassion. Western Buddhists often seem a little stiff, as if, in them, the valuable practice of mindfulness finds its emotional energy in the will, rather than from calmness and clarity. A clear, still pond ripples at the slightest breeze. A calm, clear mind is forever ready to respond to the world around it.

Mindfulness is not primarily a matter of restraint, although that is sometimes valuable. It is better understood in terms of a freshness and responsiveness to all aspects of our experience. I have sometimes wondered if a lot of meditation is good for Westerners if it is not balanced by a joyful expression of some sort. Meditation can help us to realize that we can, and need to, experience ourselves fully, in an unrestrained manner – without always expressing it outwardly. Realizing that we can make a choice about how we behave in the world based on a fuller awareness, rather than on repression, is of fundamental importance in maintaining joy in our lives. While it is important to avoid inflicting our negative emotions on others, it is just as important to give ourselves the freedom to fully express positive mental states.

Within meditation we have a chance to become more familiar with our emotional energies within a context that provides a sense of containment and clarity. We learn that the full range of our human emotions can be experienced without the necessity to act them out. Meditation allows us the leisure to experience the richness of the human heart, but it also teaches us that there is a choice – and a difference – between experience and expression.



Directing Our Minds

Related to this alienated kind of mindfulness, and lack of joy, there often seems to be an emphasis on meditation being a struggle, and on the eradication of the natural liveliness of the human mind. The aim of meditation is to direct the energy of the mind, not to control the mind by repressing its natural curiosity and spontaneity. Meditation aims to encourage a state of awareness characterized by openness and flexibility, free from anxiety and fear.

Our approach to meditation should not be one of wanting to dominate the mind or of seeing ourselves locked in some epic struggle with an evil ego. Such an attitude is often based on a kind of inverted inflated view of ourselves. Self-flagellation is not part of the Buddhist tradition, which regards severe asceticism as just as misguided as unheeded hedonism.

Nor, when we experience difficulties in meditation, should we give up. This often happens if our practice is too idealistic. If we have an unrealistic notion of ourselves – Enlightenment or bust – the chances are we will bust. The false notions that we are likely to gain full Enlightenment some time next week, or that we are so bad that no amount of practice will ever do more than scratch the surface of our dark souls, are equally undermining in the long run. So when things get a little difficult we should try to lighten up a little and see things with a bit of humour.

Our minds are often like those of small children. We can try to deal with a situation through stern discipline or we can enter into a more playful and interested relationship with ourselves. Of course, completely free parenting does not work; we need



a balanced approach. So while there is a real need for some degree of discipline if we are serious about meditation, to get ourselves to the cushion on a regular basis, we do not need to be too rigid. I have known some people who, when for some reason they have been unable to meditate at their usual time, become quite distressed. It is as if they regard their meditation as a daily fix and they will go into some awful DTs if they are unable to do it. Of course we have to be careful that we are not just being lazy and finding all these good reasons why we can't meditate today, but fretting about the rare occasion when it really is not possible seems to me a little neurotic.

It is hard to talk about what really goes on in meditation. We are using the mind to work with the mind. It is like massaging one hand with the other. It is very difficult to separate clearly the sensation of one hand from the other. The self-reflective part of our awareness is not clearly distinguished from the rest of our mind, of which it is aware. For any sort of meditation to happen there has to be some element of this self-reflective awareness. We have to be aware that we are aware. It is then very easy to see the mind as dualistic, one part of it trying to control the other. A good part, a 'grown-up' part that wants to be a 'good Buddhist', tries to control another part that is seen as, well, evil, or at least rather naughty. For most people it is rare to become sufficiently concentrated to experience the mind as an integrated whole. While it often feels as though there is a good mind versus a bad mind, this is not a very useful attitude to take.

So while we can talk about meditation as the mind working directly on the mind, we should try not to regard those aspects of our experience that are less under our conscious control as



something requiring eradication. Through a patient, kindly approach we can gradually involve all our psychic energies in our meditation. Indeed, it is the engagement of the aspects of our mind that are not subject to our will that gives meditation its depth and richness. Meditation is a place where our wilful ‘should-be-ness’ can be relaxed. We move towards an experience of ourselves as a textured and complex individual, where the sometimes conflicting aspects of ourselves can at least get a sense of each other. If meditation is a mental training, it is a training based in love rather than force. It is a means by which we can begin to heal the internal conflicts that thrive in the black-and-white atmosphere of dualistic thought, the good mind versus the bad.

Big Mind

We each have only one mind, even though at times it doesn’t feel like it. The good mind and the bad mind are one and the same, as expressed in the wonderfully prosaic term popularized in the West by Shunryu Suzuki, ‘big mind’.¹³ Big mind captures the experience of heightened awareness that can occur in meditation. It is not the self-reflective part of us watching over us like Big Brother, but our whole mind, saturated with awareness. Although our actual experience of what we can call big mind might be quite limited, we should nevertheless strive to bring such an understanding to our meditation. Although our mind often feels fragmented or divided against itself, we should remember big mind, and remind ourselves that behind the confusion is at least the possibility of a sense of clarity and expansiveness where all our conflicting mental and emotional experiences disappear

into a calm, pure awareness. We can perhaps think of a vast ocean that on the surface is whipped into mighty waves, but further down, in the depths, is calm.

Big mind is like big heart – it is open to what is actually there. It is patient and it is forgiving. It does not enter a situation with the idea of a fixed outcome. ‘This situation will be like this’ is not the attitude of big mind. The first thing is to take an interest in what is actually going on. If we go in with an idea of how things should be, and they are different, we get very frustrated. Perhaps our parents thought we would enjoy playing the piano, but we didn’t – it was a fine day and we would have preferred to play with our friends. Even our parents hated the racket we resentfully made. If we want someone to learn we need to sit down and learn with them. To enjoy playing a piano a child needs the parent to be actively interested in what is happening, and the parent needs to be open to learning in order fully to take part. Similarly, if we pit one part of our mind against another in meditation, we will find it very hard to find real joy. There will always be some resistance to what we are doing.

Big mind takes in the whole situation. It enters into the situation completely. It is not one part of the mind trying to impose its will on another.

The most common way we split the mind is into intellect and emotion. We think we should do something, but we have no real emotional energy invested in it. Depending on our personality we might do it anyway or we might just give up. One of the reasons we meditate is to try to bring these two facets of ourselves together and encourage a unification of heart and mind. Big mind is the ability to encompass the



divisions that exist within ourselves and to seek a creative way of working with them.

It is sometimes necessary to do things even when we do not feel wholehearted about them. With meditation, too, there has to be some discipline. We may not always feel like doing it, but this does not mean that we cannot at least acknowledge the part of us that isn't very interested. We have to be able to pay attention to ourselves in this way, to see both sides of ourselves. When we do this a third element can arise that is not so dualistic, but more concerned with working with the whole of us. This part of us is what we meditate with. It is a self-awareness that is above, but also encompasses, the conflicting parts of ourselves. This kind of self-awareness can arise when there is some kind of dialogue between the divergent aspects of our mind. The 'good idea' part of us has to value the energy that is pulling in another direction.

This energy is often where our imagination is. It is only when we are able to engage this kind of energy that some real sense of vision can arise, and it is this sense of vision that sustains us in the spiritual life. There needs to be a sense of excitement and joy in our practice, a sense that what we are doing is of real worth. This also has to be nurtured outside meditation. We cannot expect it just to be there when we sit down to meditate, if the rest of the time we neglect it. This means that we need to stimulate the emotional side of ourselves, and in particular find ways of cultivating a sense of excitement about the spiritual life and, through reflection and reading, reminding ourselves of the benefits that meditation and ethics can bring.



Flexible Awareness

I have often been struck by the number of people who do not seem to enjoy their meditation, especially those who have an established practice. In some ways it is laudable that they keep trying. If you meditate regularly there are bound to be times when it is difficult, but in order to sustain a beneficial practice there needs to be a strong element of enjoyment at least some of the time. It is not enough that we think meditation is good for us and we therefore force ourselves to do it. Rather, the direct experience of meditation needs to be sustaining. Part of the problem is having a fixed idea of what should happen when we meditate, what our mind should be like.

It reminds me a little of the local gym, where many people appear to be at war with their bodies – no pain, no gain. They seem to want to force their bodies into an unnatural shape that conforms to some idea they have, but bears little relationship to their particular type of body. Why do people meditate if they do not enjoy it? Why do they continue to approach it in the same old way if it brings them little joy?

I recently led a workshop for quite experienced meditators. One woman, who had been meditating for seven years, had been taught the form of Mindfulness of Breathing in which one counts the breaths. She said she had never found this counting useful. Counting made her tense and anxious. I asked her why, after seven years, she was still counting her breaths. Her response was that this was how she had been taught. This situation highlights the need to get into dialogue with other meditators, especially those with more experience than ourselves, if at all possible. I suggested she tried it without the



counting to see if it worked better, for although this approach seems effective for most people, perhaps it was not the best one for her. The main thing seemed to be that she needed to enjoy her breath rather than seeing the practice as a chore.

I was reminded of the story of the devoted peasant who was given a mantra by a passing guru, which he misheard so that the sacred syllable ‘hum’ was replaced by a similar Tibetan word meaning ‘cow’. The peasant chanted this mantra to good effect until the guru returned to the isolated village to check on his progress. On discovering the mistake he carefully corrected the pronunciation. However, the correct mantra seemed not to work, and the beneficial effects of the practice were lost. Some time later, on a third visit, the guru gave his pupil special permission to revert to his original version, and once again the peasant began to experience the benefit of his heartfelt invocation of the cow.

We need to trust our experience and feel free to try different approaches that might work better. There are forms of the Mindfulness of Breathing that do not employ counting. The initial delight we find in meditation is often lost because we become too rigid in our employment of technique. Our practice becomes a routine that we go through regardless of our experience, like going to the gym and feeling we have to do so many press-ups or swim a certain number of lengths.

The most important quality we try to encourage when we meditate is awareness. The various techniques are there to help us do this. We need to keep in mind the nature of the awareness that we are trying to develop – not a rigid awareness that is insensitive to our real experience, but an open, flexible awareness that can respond to our actual situation.



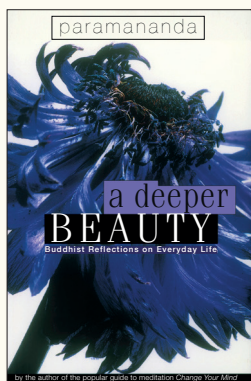
A friend and I were once walking along a beach, and we were passed by a number of joggers. Most of them seemed to be in some state of distress. We then came upon a young woman exercising. I don't know if she was employing some system of exercise or just making it up as she went along, but what she was doing reminded me of the spontaneous joy of a young child. She was jumping and skipping, throwing her arms in the air. It was quite wonderful to watch. Her body seemed to be full of joy and life. She seemed open to the wind and the sea, and appeared to be really enjoying herself. At the same time her movements were graceful and co-ordinated, all in striking contrast to the desperate joggers. I thought, 'This is what the mind should be like when we are meditating.' It reminded me of Milarepa's 'Song of a Yogi's Joy'.

Milarepa was an eleventh-century Buddhist poet famous for the depth of his meditation and the expression of his profound experience in spontaneous song:

*The greater the distress and passions,
The more one can be blithe and gay!
What happiness to feel no ailment or illness;
What happiness to feel that joy and suffering are one;
What happiness to play in bodily movement
With the power aroused by Yōga.
To jump and to run, to dance and leap, is more joyful still.*

*What happiness to sing the victorious song,
What happiness to chant and hum,
More joyful still to talk and loudly sing!
Happy in the mind, powerful and confident,
Steeped in the realm of Totality.*

Milarepa is clearly expressing a profound state in which dualism has been overcome. What comes through is a real sense of joy. We might be a long way from being able to respond to our distress in the same manner as Milarepa, but we can encourage an attitude of interest and joy. On the most basic level we need to frame our practice in a manner that allows us to take delight in it. We could think of ourselves as poor human beings lacking in awareness and compassion, desperately needing to meditate in a frantic attempt to improve a little. But such a view does not allow for the possibility of joy and delight in meditation; it limits us even before we take our seat. Conversely, we can encourage the idea that as humans we have a tremendous potential, that we can build on our existing awareness and nurture the kindness that we already experience.



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A Deeper Beauty
by Paramananda
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MIND AND LIFE

Whatever foe may do to foe, or hater to hater, greater is the harm done (to oneself) by a wrongly directed mind.

Neither mother nor father, nor any other relative, can do one as much good as a perfectly directed mind.

From *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*,
translated by Sangharakshita (p.24)

Why practise ethics?



From

Not About Being Good

by Subhadramati

I remember taking my nephew to his swimming lesson when he was three years old. It was a difficult time in his young life; his mother was seriously ill – that’s why I was looking after him – and he was prone to being unsettled. I had been nervous about the lesson, but at first all seemed to be going well. Then suddenly he turned against me. Something – I’ve never to this day found out what – had made him furious with me. He started trying to kick me away from him, but as soon as he was on the verge of breaking free he was forced to grab me again as he couldn’t swim and hated his head going under the water. It was a tragic scenario. Sobbing bitterly with rage and frustration, he was literally trying to push me away and hold on to me at the same time, so the two actions were cancelling each other out. Inexperienced as I was with childcare, it was obvious that I had to take control of the situation. I had to get him out of the pool, get him dry and warm, and throughout this, even though he was by now causing pandemonium, stay as calm as I could myself to allow him to calm down.

When we’re children, we’re not integrated. We have different forces pulling at us; we can’t follow a single action through. I remember as a toddler, in some temper or other, deciding



to run away from home and cycling as hard as I could on my little tricycle – all the way to the top of the street before remembering there was Swiss roll for tea on Saturdays and turning back. A good parent will hold these extremes for their children and be a steady presence and influence amidst them.

It's similar when someone's drunk. Any teenage girl will know not to trust her friend's big brother when, after a bottle of cheap wine, he tells her he loves her. Even though he might believe he means it sincerely – at the time. Someone drunk can't follow things through; you can't take what they say seriously. They can't really handle themselves. In this way they're a bit like a child too. With luck, they have some more clear-headed friends around who can act as their conscience, take their car keys away, or bring them in out of the cold.

Integration

Becoming integrated means growing up, learning to be more adult, becoming more clear-headed in relation to yourself, learning to handle yourself. It means getting all your energies and different parts of yourself working in the same direction. It means being able to follow things through. And, in particular, it means learning that your actions have an effect in the world.

Another of my nephews was born and has lived all his life in France. His mother is Scottish and speaks to him in English; his father is French and speaks to him in French. By his fourth birthday he could understand English perfectly and speak it if you asked him to, but he naturally spoke in French. Around that time he came to Scotland for a family party. There were lots of kids his age playing in the garden, but my nephew was slightly apart in the midst of them, wandering around



with a little frown. The other children were speaking to him in English, which he could understand perfectly, but he was answering them in French, which they couldn't understand at all. A few weeks later he impressed the family – obviously having pondered the matter – by announcing decisively, 'When I come to Scotland again I will speak English.' He'd made the connection. He'd realized that he himself was an agent in the baffling mystery that had gone on at the party. He'd made a significant step in awareness of himself as an agent in the world. He'd realized that the world wasn't just a perplexing series of events whirling around him, sometimes benign, sometimes difficult. He'd realized that he himself was part of the world and that he himself could have an influence in it.

And this process of growing up enough to realize that we ourselves are agents in the world is of greater significance than just being able to communicate with others, for example – important though that is. In fact it forms the foundation principle of Buddhist ethics and therefore of Buddhist practice.

At the Buddhist Centre, I rarely talk about ethics without inviting people to do a simple exercise first, so that they get an actual experience for themselves of this principle rather than it just being something I'm telling them – see the exercise below, 'Reflection: actions and consequences'. I find this really helps people understand any Buddhist teachings that follow in a more meaningful way.

So it would be really good if you actually did this exercise before reading any more – even if you already know a lot about Buddhist teachings. It's probably best if you read through all the steps first and then try it. You'll need a pen and a notebook or paper too.



Reflection: actions and consequences

Sit quietly, close your eyes, and spend one minute on each of these stages.

- Bring to mind, as vividly as you can, something mean or unkind you've done recently.
- Tune in to how this makes you feel physically.
- Tune in to how it makes you feel about yourself.
- Tune in to how it makes you feel in relation to the world at large.
- Open your eyes and write three or four words about how you felt physically, three or four words about how you felt about yourself, and three or four words about how you felt in relation to the world at large.

Now close your eyes again and bring to mind, as vividly as you can, something kind or generous you've done recently, no matter how small. Again, spend one minute on each of these stages.

- Tune in to how this makes you feel physically.
- Tune in to how it makes you feel about yourself.
- Tune in to how it makes you feel in relation to the world at large.
- Open your eyes and write three or four words about how you felt physically, three or four words about how you felt about yourself, and three or four words about how you felt in relation to the world at large.

Now just sit quietly for another minute to absorb the experience.



When they do this exercise at the Buddhist Centre, most people report that bringing to mind their unkind action makes them feel physically tense and contracted, ashamed of themselves, and fearful and isolated in relation to the world. Bringing to mind their kind or helpful action, by contrast, makes them feel physically warm, proud of themselves, and ‘rightfully on the earth’ and connected with the world at large.

I often think that, if only I reflected like this every day after meditation, or every night before I went to sleep, I’d become quite a different person. This is because the reflection gives me a direct experience of the relationship between my actions and their consequences. It helps to teach me that my actions always have repercussions, whether I’m conscious of that or not. It helps to teach me that my actions aren’t detachable from me. They are part of me and they are modifying me, changing me, all the time, because I’m doing things all the time. I can see that deepening awareness of myself as an ethical agent, as someone who has an effect, would lead me, quite naturally, to take more responsibility for my actions.

If you act as though your actions can be detached from you, when they are actually part of you, you are setting up forces of conflict and disintegration within yourself. My friend Canute, mentioned in the Introduction, said that the more he meditated the more he recognized that getting drunk and then getting into fights was having a bigger negative effect on him than he’d previously realized. The increased awareness he was gaining from meditation made him realize that his behaviour was putting him in all kinds of states of mind that were painful in themselves and at the same time actively working against what he really wanted. He increasingly felt the unsatisfactoriness,



even the agony, of that. He made some changes but he was still addicted to the nightlife and all that went with it. The climax came when he got into a really serious fight and lost his licence to be a doorman. Out of work, he had time to reflect. He realized he couldn't continue to meditate and change his inner state without more radically changing how he was acting on the outside. He had to make some decisive changes – such as giving up working in the nightclubs altogether – to bring the one more into line with the other. This realization and the steps he took as a result marked a critical moment in his spiritual development. From that moment, he says, 'I gradually started growing into a whole person rather than a person of two paths.'

Canute's life story is fairly dramatic. Perhaps yours is less so. But you too probably find yourself as 'a person of two paths' – or more – to a greater or lesser extent. Maybe you can easily give presentations at work but find yourself overcome by shyness at your art class. Or maybe you treat your mother as just someone to do your washing, but are the height of chivalry with your girlfriend. Or maybe you never swear when you're at a place like the Buddhist Centre but swearing is the natural mode with the friends you go to the pub with. But then one day your pub friends come to the Buddhist Centre, or you go to dinner with your mum and your girlfriend, or someone from work joins your art class and you don't quite know which one of your selves to be. One of the reasons many people can often feel a bit nervous before these encounters is that their multiple selves will be exposed.

I remember something that happened to me once, which highlighted this area. A young student had come to the Buddhist Centre and asked if she could interview me about



Buddhism for her project. I can't remember what I said but no doubt I spoke eloquently about the principles of Buddhism and I do remember my glow of satisfaction as she shook my hand at the end and thanked me profusely. A few weeks later I was in a department store and I noticed I'd been overcharged and pointed this out. I was redirected to customer service, for which there was a slow-moving queue. By the time I reached the front I was filled with exasperation, which, I'm ashamed to say, resulted in me speaking irritably and in raised tones to the customer-service lady. Suddenly I heard a shy 'Hello' behind me. It took me a moment to recognize the speaker, but when I did I blushed with shame as I realized it was the young student who'd interviewed me. I was well and truly caught out. There I'd been, talking about Buddhism in the comfort of the Buddhist Centre. And here I was in the store, acting quite differently, believing I could take 'time out' from being a Buddhist, proving how far I was from being a whole person who has brought her actions into line with her deeper values.

Canute's story also illustrates that the more awareness you bring to the fact that your actions cannot be detached from you, that they're having an effect on you all the time, the more painfully you'll experience the dissonance between how you know you'd like to act and how you actually do act. This in turn will tend to make you feel impelled to bring your actions into line with your deeper values.

But his story also illustrates that waiting for change to happen naturally might not be enough. If you want to grow and develop, you will have to take action to help yourself become more and more of a complete person. In other words, you will have to actively work at becoming more integrated. Otherwise



all the different competing impulses within you will pull against each other, which will not only be painful in itself but will also stop you being able to grow: to the extent that your energies are pulling against each other, you won't be able to commit yourself to any particular course of action. You won't be able to follow your intentions through. In the next section, I'll suggest some specific ways to cultivate more integration.

Taking responsibility

My first suggestion is to practise taking responsibility for your own moods instead of giving in to the tendency of blaming circumstances – or other people.

My French nephew took a significant step into 'grown-upness' by realizing that the world wasn't just something that he was at the mercy of, but that he could make a creative choice that completely transformed his experience. It's the same for us. We too can step into more maturity when we realize that, although we may not have any choice about the events that life presents to us, we always have a choice about how we respond.

This isn't easy. The instinct to blame is very strong. I remember once, when a friend of mine asked how I was, I replied that I'd been fine, really positive in fact, until so-and-so came along and started venting their negativity, and then left – leaving me in a bad mood. 'Well', my friend said, with a roguish twinkle, 'you obviously weren't in as positive a state as you imagined you were, Subhadramati!' He was pointing out that a truly positive state is one that can be sustained whatever life brings along, not one that will disintegrate at the first difficulty. Once I got over the shock (I had been hoping for some sympathy), I realized that I felt surprisingly exhilarated. In fact that exhilaration is



still having a ripple effect nearly twenty years later. It wasn't that I hadn't heard this notion of taking responsibility before, but in that moment it entered my mind and heart more deeply. In that moment I realized there was the potential for freedom.

I realized a little more deeply that things that happen to me, whether they are pleasant or painful, whether they've arisen from external circumstances or in my own mind, just are. They've already happened. It's how I respond that's the crucial thing. Whatever happens, even the unpleasant things, there's always the potential to respond skilfully, in other words to maintain positivity. It's true that some circumstances will make this feel very difficult. That's why it's good to start practising 'not blaming' in small matters. And it's important to remember that 'not blaming' someone doesn't mean you have to agree with them, condone their actions or even like them. And it doesn't mean pretending that some experiences are not unpleasant when they are. It simply means taking responsibility for your own mental states. I can experience the unpleasantness of someone complaining to me for twenty minutes, but it doesn't mean I have to be in a bad mood for the rest of the day. That's where the freedom lies. Eventually this practice of not blaming may completely turn around your view of the world. What you may have seen as obstacles to skilful action, to positive states of mind, will become opportunities. This is what the eighth-century Buddhist monk Shantideva was getting at when he said that even an enemy is a help on the Buddhist path, because an enemy is giving you the chance to perfect the virtue of patience!¹⁴



Keeping your word

My next suggestion of a way to cultivate more integration is to practise keeping your word, keeping to what you say you'd do, keeping your side of the bargain. Keeping your word will sometimes test you because you won't be able to give in to your resistances, the parts of you that want an easy life, the parts that don't really want to change. Maybe you promise a friend that you'll help her paint her living room at the weekend. But then another friend offers you a spare ticket for that play you'd been hoping to see – and it's for the very afternoon you'd committed. Or maybe you tell a sick neighbour to let you know if there is anything you can do to help. Then just as you're feeling warmed by the glow of your own altruism, they come back to you and say, 'Actually there is something' – and it turns out to be something you'd much rather not do. Each time you give your word, your level of integration – your ability to follow through – is tested.

We sometimes give our word implicitly too. When I borrow books from the poetry library there's an implicit agreement that I'll take them back by the due date. I'm afraid I'm not very good at this. I love getting new books out and I know, of course, that part of the deal is to bring them back on time. I probably sort of mean to, but once I've got what I wanted that awareness, which is obviously not nearly as developed as the desire, subsides. Losing interest like this is a childish attitude to life. Author and teacher Maitreyabandhu compares it to 'a teenager who litters the pavement after unwrapping a chocolate bar'.¹⁵ In my case I often let the books become overdue and each time I do so I prove my own lack of ability to keep my promises. I prove my own lack of integration.



If breaking your word is a sign of lack of integration, as well as being disintegrating in itself, keeping your word will mature you. You can become integrated by intentionally keeping your word. You could, for example, practise being on time for appointments rather than habitually late. You could follow up on the suggestion you made to meet your workmate for coffee sometime instead of keeping it deliberately vague. You could decide not to pull out of an arrangement to do something because a more tempting offer has come up, or because by the time it comes round you've let yourself get overcommitted.

In Buddhism we often use the image of a lotus flower as a metaphor for spiritual development, our own growth being likened to its petals naturally unfolding. But, when I think of integration, quite a different image comes to mind, one that is less gentle and more forceful. The image I think of is that of a laser beam.

I always loved the lasers in the physics laboratory with their beams of beautiful, pure, scintillating colour – although of course you'd never look at the beam head-on or it would burn right through you. When I saw one for the first time I had never seen anything remotely like it before. It was nothing like the ordinary light from a bulb or torch. I like to think that acting with the awareness of ourselves as a moral agent in the world, as opposed to acting without that awareness, is like the difference between laser light and light from an ordinary torch. Lasers are far more than just very good torches. A laser starts off with weak light and keeps adding more and more energy so the light waves become ever more concentrated. The light from an ordinary torch contains lots of different light rays of different wavelengths – that is, different colours – which are



incoherent or out of step with one another. But in laser light, all the light rays have the same wavelength, which means they are one pure colour and they are absolutely in step. Because they are in step, they don't cancel each other out in the way the out-of-step light from the torch does. (Or in the way my first little nephew's actions did.) They add together. Not only that, carefully placed mirrors mean that all the light that is emitted moves in the same direction rather than just being scattered about. This is what makes laser light such a powerful concentration of energy.

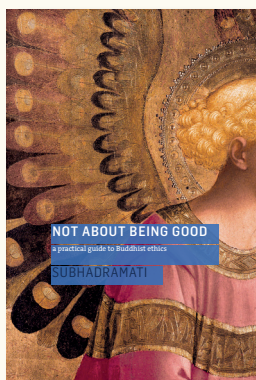
So you could think of adding more and more ethical awareness to your actions, so they become purer, like the pure colour of a laser beam, more coherent – or integrated – and all go in the same direction. Instead of being weak, diffuse, and all over the place, they would become more and more powerful and potent.

If you work at becoming more integrated, you will begin to feel more self-confidence because you'll be able to rely on yourself. Others will tend to trust you more too because there will be a certain consistency in your behaviour and your attitude. You won't be at the mercy of sentimental emotions or your whims and fancies. Your friends will trust that you won't be subject to liking them one day and disliking them the next. There will be something steady and enduring there to relate to. Years ago, when I was teaching in the Dublin Buddhist Centre, someone realized the benefit to his friendships of being trustworthy in a rather charming way. We'd been debating whether or not one should always be truthful in speech. The conversation was in danger of getting a bit literalistic, even legalistic, when suddenly Matt had a 'light-bulb moment'. 'If I always told the truth,' he said, 'everyone would trust me. I'd be walking down



the street and they'd call out "Here comes Matt-who-tells-the-truth!" I'll never forget how Matt seemed to grow in stature as he imagined this, how he embodied positive pride, freedom, and confidence. I hope he's still there in Dublin, striding down the street, trusted for his consistency in telling the truth!

And just to add, being integrated and reliable doesn't mean that you'll become boringly predictable. A Buddha would be absolutely reliably compassionate, wise, and fearless, but how those qualities manifested would be free and spontaneous. The more integrated you are, the more your ethical awareness will act like a touchstone for you, so the more free and spontaneous this will allow you to be.



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Entertaining cancer



From

Entertaining Cancer

by Devamitra

Confirmation

A few days after the retreat I was back at the hospital for the biopsy results. A young woman came through the swing doors and called out my name. I stepped forward.

‘Hello,’ she said, before conducting me to her consulting room. Seemingly she was in charge of my case.

‘Oh, I was expecting to see Mr Jones,’ I said.

‘No. He’s a urologist. I’m an oncologist.’

‘I see,’ I said, immediately understanding the implication.

‘So, you are going to confirm that I have prostate cancer.’ My response seemed to throw her; she hesitated before replying.

‘Well... yes, but you are a few steps ahead of me.’ Moments later I was sitting opposite her in a windowless room as she explained that there was a spectrum of prostate cancer from mild to aggressive, and that mine was towards the aggressive end. My treatment would begin immediately with leuporelin (hormone therapy), which would continue for three years. In



case I should be in any doubt, she said, ‘You have a serious disease.’ My conviction too – and then, ‘Are you able to have erections?’ Gosh. The women in this department seem obsessed.

‘I believe so. I mean, I don’t exactly try... It’s an embarrassing question.’

‘Not for me. I ask it of men forty times a day.’ Really? (I could imagine my mother’s response in her Teesside accent, ‘Ee, whatever next, lad?’)

The next step was a positron emission tomography (PET) scan to see whether or not there was any ‘activity’ elsewhere in my body.

‘I do expect both lymph nodes to light up,’ she warned, ‘but I will be surprised if anything else does,’ she continued, more reassuringly. ‘However, we need to be sure about that before we can move on to the next phase of treatment. If the scan highlights nothing new, this will further confirm that the cancer is still contained within the pelvis and is therefore curable.’ I would then receive six infusions of chemotherapy, at intervals of three weeks, followed later in the year by eight weeks of daily radiotherapy. ‘You might like to read these.’ It was information on chemotherapy and ‘locally advanced prostate cancer’.

‘Thanks, but I probably won’t bother,’ I said, taking them. She then gave me a prescription for the hormone therapy. I was to begin with a short course of tablets to prevent a testosterone flare. This would then be followed about a week later by a first injection of leuporelin, to be given at my GP’s surgery and repeated every twelve weeks.



Leuporelin would inhibit the production of testosterone, which generates the prostate cancer cells. There might be side effects, she pointed out with a hint of amusement, ‘Similar to those of a postmenopausal woman: mood swings, hot flushes... You may also develop some tissue.’

‘You mean man boobs?’ I asked, slightly alarmed at what this might mean at the swimming pool.

‘Possibly.’ Crikey. We said goodbye and I went to collect my prescription.

As I was leaving the hospital, I recognized Jayamitra, one of my fellow Order members, on his way in.

‘Devamitra! Bless you! What are you doing here?’ I told him. ‘That’s what I’ve got.’ Thursdays seem to be the day for prostate patients. Unfortunately, in his case the cancer had spread into his bones, meaning that it was terminal. The first indication of anything wrong had been back pain from a tumour that had spread there, by which time it was already incurable.

I felt grateful for the flood of vermilion that had fled with my urine, months before. It was not yet a death warrant, but a warning that I had heeded. I had had no other symptoms. How else could I have known?

Now that the cancer was confirmed, I needed to reflect further. I must not become complacent and assume that the PET scan would be clear. Milarepa, a great medieval Tibetan teacher and poet, warns constantly against hope and fear;¹⁶ the English poet Shelley speaks of ‘Hope and despair, The torturers’.¹⁷ Hope



often arises out of fear, but, when it fails, despair frequently displaces it. I did not wish to indulge hopes that may turn traitor. Resisting the temptation of hope was a growing point, an opportunity for me to rise above and beyond the reach of its unwholesome companions.

The real battle I faced was not with my body, but within my mind. I had understood this the moment I walked out of my GP's surgery with 'suspected' prostate cancer. What I feared most was not death or pain, but loss of mental equilibrium. So far, I had succeeded, but there were tougher tests ahead. One came from an unexpected quarter.

Informing others

As there was no longer even a theoretical doubt that I had cancer, I wanted more of my friends to know and I decided to email some of them. The responses I received, as you would expect, were all concerned and sympathetic, but, in some cases, there was an element of anxiety – not mine, but theirs – and this could be quite difficult. They seemed to need to talk about it in a way that I did not. I simply wanted them to know and would have preferred to leave it at that, as I did not want cancer, or talking about it, to dominate my life more than was absolutely necessary. Naively, it had not occurred to me that some of them might need to talk with me about it more than I cared to do so. Occasionally I found myself in the anomalous position of having to reassure them about cancer – as if I was helping them to deal with their own fears.

If one of my friends was anxious, I could react to their anxiety with my own. Negative emotions can be contagious. When this



first happened, I was rather thrown and asked myself why I had suddenly become anxious. As I reflected, it became clear that it was not *my* anxiety but theirs, and I needed to respond with positive emotion – patience, sympathy, or perhaps even compassion. From a Buddhist point of view, these positive emotions are all simply manifestations, varying in tone according to context, of the fundamental Buddhist virtue of metta, or universal loving kindness.

Something similar happened when I received a letter from my GP's surgery inviting me to make an appointment to talk about my care plan; the letter began with an expression of regret at the news of my 'serious diagnosis'. Suddenly there was a butterfly in my stomach. I have never been a violent man, but I am at ease with the more forceful elements inherent in manhood and value them. Consequently, consistent with my aggressive character, I gave this flutterer the short shrift it deserved: 'Damn it! Leave me alone.' And it left me in peace. Such an approach may not work for everyone, but I have always been attracted by the heroic dimension of the Buddha's character and teaching, and have sought to emulate it.

I crumpled the letter and cast it away as if it were contagion. Although well-intended and clearly meant to be supportive, such comments can be counterproductive. Fundamentally I felt upbeat about my diagnosis. I regarded it as a challenge – not one that I would have chosen, but, since it was there, all I could do was meet it with the heroic spirit underlying the entire Buddhist tradition that was stirring within me. I must embrace it – even enjoy it for what it was. However, to do that I needed all the positive emotion that I could muster.



I made an appointment with an Order member who I knew was working as a locum at my surgery. I had noticed that it was she who had signed a prescription enabling me to have a hormone injection that I had had some trouble getting. This in turn had made it possible to receive the injection at an appointment I had made several days earlier with one of the surgery's nurses, which otherwise I would have had to miss.

When I met her she kindly asked if I was happy to talk about my 'care plan' with her, which of course I was. Not that there was much to discuss. I did not need a counsellor as I had an excellent community and many friends with whom I could talk about anything that troubled me (not that I could think of much, apart from dealing with the administrative inefficiencies of the NHS, wonderful though the NHS is in most other respects). The difficulty over my prescription had been caused by the hospital not properly requesting it of the surgery, apparently. I could well imagine, however, that the hospital would have had a different tale to tell.

Calvin's support

A few days later I phoned the urology nurse to let her know that I had had the leuporelin injection, but there was something else bothering me. Ever since my GP had manually examined my prostate, I had been aware of discomfort both in my groin and further down. I had assumed that this was to do with my tumour, but I thought I had better ask the nurse as it was getting increasingly painful, and I mentioned rather gingerly that my right scrotum was so tender that even walking was painful.



‘Oh, no!’ she laughed, ‘your tumour is inside your body, not your scrotum sac. Do you wear boxer shorts?’ It is astonishing the intimate facts that one has to share with these ladies.

‘Er, yes.’

‘Try something more supportive – trunks, for example.’

‘Ah, yes of course.’ I thanked her for her suggestion, quickly concluded the call, lest we stumble into the erection question again, and promptly acted on her suggestion. Matters certainly improved with a little help from Calvin Klein.

Heightened awareness

Despite these minor concerns, in many respects my life had never been better. I rarely slipped into negative mental states, and even then, not for long. Many times, I walked around the lake at Victoria Park in East London appreciating its winter beauty, thrilling at the sudden flash of sunlight on a cormorant’s wings or the brilliant green of the parakeets, the subtle winter colours adorning the trees highlighted by the sun’s lateral rays.

No doubt this was all heightened by my medical issue, and I am grateful to the cancer for that. It is not that this was new, but I felt it yet more vibrantly and I have no doubt that that was due to my heightened sense of my own impermanence – precious moments that I must cherish fully, because I knew they would not, could not, last.

One such moment caught me unawares on a trip to Canterbury. Sitting alone, I was looking out of the train



window at the rather dreary prospect as we sped by, when I felt overcome by a sense of detachment from the world and its problems. They were no longer mine to sort out. I was not being grandiose – of course, *I* cannot sort out the problems of the world – but somehow, they seemed not to be mine. It was not that I no longer cared, more that they seemed impersonal, beyond the purely personal, and as I continued to stare out of the window I was blessed by a deep tranquillity – the perfect mood to appreciate the seat of Anglicanism.

I had not been to Canterbury before and could not have imagined the impact that its wonderful cathedral would have on me. I have seen many of Europe's great churches, including plenty that are far more beautiful, but none that has affected me so powerfully. I cannot easily account for it, but I was swept away, as I wandered around, in awe of something I could not identify.

PET

Always at the back of my mind was the forthcoming PET scan; constantly, I reminded myself to resist expectations – to prepare myself for any outcome. This was a valuable tool – it was driving my heightened awareness of impermanence. I was beginning to think that the scan would find cancers elsewhere. Despite Calvin Klein, my nether regions were getting more painful, glands in my neck were swollen, and my upper rib cage had developed a rattle.

I should have gone to the GP, but figured that all would become clear with the scan and that therefore there was no need. I half expected to be told that I had not only prostate cancer, but



also testicular and rattling-rib-cage cancer, with perhaps throat cancer thrown in as a bonus.

Finally, after further administrative problems, I had a date for the scan in the basement of the hospital and a week later I got the results. Oncology was running very late. As I entered the waiting area, I noticed Jayamitra sitting with his sister. However, rather ungenerously, I wanted to keep my mind focused and did not want to engage in conversation. Besides, I could not sit in those dreadful plastic chairs as they worsen my chronic back pain, and I always paced up and down when waiting, even if that meant for two-hour stretches or more, which it often did. But he had seen me and came over to say hello.

I was ashamed of my lack of friendliness, but was glad that he had given me the opportunity to make amends. Though I was sorry to hear that he was finding things increasingly difficult, both emotionally and physically, I was also suddenly confronted once more by my own predicament, as I was bracing myself to be told that I too might now be heading in that direction – at least physically if not emotionally.

Without thinking about it, I just said, ‘Equilibrium of mind is more important than life,’ to which he quipped, ‘Yeah! Equilibrium of mind is more important than life. Discuss!’ I had meant to say that it was more important than death, because I had often dwelled on this thought. However, I enjoyed his jovial response. Soon afterwards he was called in for his appointment, and shortly after that I was called in for mine.

It took a while for the registrar to get on to the scan results, which she mentioned only in passing, casually indicating that



nothing new had been revealed and that we could now get the chemotherapy organized. Somehow, she lost me and I could not quite believe what I thought I had just heard. Not wanting to be in any way impolite, I did not wish to interrupt the discourse on chemotherapy, but I could not suppress the rising fit of giggles that disturbed it.

She was evidently taken aback by my strange, if not eccentric, response, but proceeded, 'You realize you will no longer be able to have children?'

I could contain myself no longer and laughed out loud, 'I'm sixty-eight, for heaven's sake. I'm an old man!'

'Oh, I don't know about that. One of my patients fathered a child at seventy-two,' she replied, having caught my humour.

'And Picasso fathered one at eighty,' I responded (this was not true, though I believed it at the time), 'and I'm no Picasso.'

As we were veering dangerously close to the erection issue, I distracted her with a question about fasting. I had read about the research of Valter Longo, which suggested that fasting for a few days before and after chemotherapy both increased its effectiveness and diminished its side effects. I was keen to try it.

'One of my patients tried it and it just made her miserable,' she objected with a hint of irritation. It seemed pointless to pursue the matter there and then.

Finally, we got down to dates for chemotherapy, which would start within a couple of weeks, after I had been briefed by a chemotherapy nurse.



Later, I discussed my thoughts of fasting with a nutritionist friend. Though he did not doubt that I could maintain positive mental states, he was concerned that four days of fasting, especially under the influence of chemotherapy, might make me feel faint. Thinking of the narrow, steep staircase that led down from my room, he asked, ‘What if you fell and broke something?’ They would probably stop the chemotherapy then’ – and so reluctantly I decided against it.



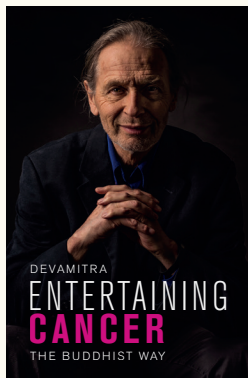
So, I did not have testicular cancer, but something was not right below. Two days later my right testicle had swollen to an alarming degree, looked very red, and was excruciatingly tender. As it was a Saturday morning I could not see a GP. Two of my community members urged me to go to A&E, so, resignedly, I walked bandy-legged (to minimize any contact between the top of my thigh and my swinging, overburdened scrotum sac) to my local hospital. Was I relieved to get there!

I was discharged two hours later with painkillers and antibiotics. I had had an infection resulting in epididymo-orchitis, which, I was informed, is an extremely painful condition. That was good to know; I felt less like a wimp. I was further assured that it had nothing to do with my cancer – although I suspect that there was a connection, as the whole episode was probably triggered by the manual examination of my prostate by the GP.

Consequently, for almost three months, I had tolerated the pain unnecessarily, understanding that cancer is a painful disease and having believed that the pain was from my tumour. One



of the problems with cancer is that, if anything goes wrong, if you experience any pain, it is easy to assume that it is simply a symptom of the cancer itself.



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by Devamitra

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MIND AND THE WORLD

There has not been, nor will there be, nor is there anyone now, who is absolutely blamed or absolutely praised.

From *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*,
translated by Sangharakshita (p.81)

An 'invisible hand'

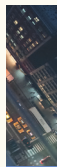


From

The Buddha on Wall Street

by Vadḍhaka

Margin Call is a film that tells the story of a fictional Wall Street company.¹⁸ When it realizes that the majority of its assets are basically worthless mortgage-backed securities, it launches a desperate attempt to save itself. A decision is made to sell the worthless securities to an unsuspecting set of clients, who buy them at grossly inflated prices compared to their real value. The more the company's sales team is successful at lying and offloading the securities, the greater are the bonuses they earn: more than a million dollars per person. The story might seem far-fetched. And yet, it emerged in 2011 that the US-based Citigroup, one of the largest financial services companies in the world, had to pay a \$285 million fine to settle a legal case. In 2007, it had sold a package of worthless mortgage-backed securities to unsuspecting customers – securities that it knew were likely to go bust. In addition, Citigroup, unknown to the customers buying the securities, had engaged in another financial manoeuvre that was in essence a bet that the securities would indeed go bust and end up worthless, a bet that it won handsomely. The result was that those who invested in the deal lost hundreds of millions of dollars while Citigroup made \$160 million in fees and trading profits. As a journalist



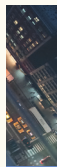
for the *New York Times* commented, ‘It doesn’t get any more immoral than this.’¹⁹

Was this a random immoral act or was it an act based in a more deeply rooted set of values, of modern capitalism? To begin to understand the basic values of modern economics and capitalism, we must return to Adam Smith and *The Wealth of Nations*. In particular, we need to look at what he called ‘an invisible hand’. Advocates of neoliberal capitalism and free market economics have seized upon the idea of the ‘invisible hand’ and placed it at the core of their beliefs, although Adam Smith only ever mentions it once in *The Wealth of Nations*. He writes:

‘It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages.’

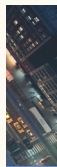
And he continues:

‘Every individual . . . necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it . . . *He intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.* Nor is it always worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.’²⁰ (my italics)



He is arguing that what motivates the butcher or the brewer or the baker – what drives them – is their own self-interest, their own profit. And this, he says, is a good thing because as long as every individual in society pursues their own gain or profit, chases after their own self-interest, then, through the working of the market, everyone in society benefits. All this comes about through the operation of an ‘invisible hand’. Where did Adam Smith get the idea of the ‘invisible hand’ from? Most probably, he took it from a religious metaphor that was in use in his time. In other words, the working of the economy and the benefits of the pursuit of self-interest and profit are God-given. This is how God made the world.

Later the ‘invisible hand’ also came to be associated with the more secular idea of the ‘survival of the fittest’ from Darwinian theories of evolution. Just as the survival instinct drives the process of evolution, so it drives economic success. In this way, it is believed, economic progress depends on the ‘survival of the fittest’. In fact, Darwin did not use the term until the fifth edition of his book *On the Origin of Species*. Before that, he used the term ‘natural selection’.²¹ He borrowed the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ from Herbert Spencer. Because Spencer was associated with economic theories supporting unrestrained capitalism, Darwin inadvertently encouraged a narrow interpretation of his theory by economists and others. In reality, he had a broader view of evolution. In his book *The Descent of Man*, he argues that the human species has succeeded because of characteristics such as sharing and compassion. ‘Those communities’, he writes, ‘which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring.’²² Nevertheless, the damage



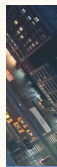
was done, and the link between economics and the ‘survival of the fittest’ was established.

But whether the ‘invisible hand’ is believed to come from God or from the theory of evolution, the implication drawn by neoliberal capitalists and free marketeers is the same. The pursuit of selfishness promotes the well-being of the whole of society. This mantra has become the core ethic of modern neoliberal capitalism. It is the ethical principle that supersedes other ethical considerations. As the Nobel prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz has said, ‘To the morally uninspired, it’s an appealing idea: *selfishness as the ultimate form of selflessness*’²³ (my italics).

If you are a businessman or a banker, it doesn’t matter how selfish your behaviour is. You can always justify your actions by saying that at the end of the day, you are selflessly giving of yourself to promote the interests of all.

At this point, the reader may have noticed that I have slipped from talking about *self-interest* to talking about *selfishness*. To act in one’s self-interest means to act in pursuance of one’s own interest. To act selfishly is to act not just in one’s own interest but to deliberately act to the exclusion of the interests of others. To take Adam Smith’s example of the baker, I can imagine someone setting up in business as a baker because they believe that they can provide tasty and nutritious food at a reasonable cost to customers and thereby make a living, make a profit, provide for themselves and their family, and put money aside for improvements in the machinery necessary for the manufacture of their products.

In Adam Smith’s ideal world, competition in the market is the chief means for matching the ambition of the producer

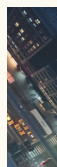


with the wishes of the consumer, and it then decides who will succeed and who will fail. In my view, there is nothing inherently wrong with this kind of self-interest and personal ambition. It's one of the main sources of the creative energy and dynamism of capitalism. Problems arise when the motivation shifts to a desire to put others out of business and to increase profits out of greed, when the concerns of others are ignored and when selfishness takes over. For neoliberal economists, selfishness has taken over.

But let's turn to the teachings of the Buddha and compare the basic values of Buddhism with the values of neoliberal capitalism.

Of course, the Buddha lived 2,500 years ago, far removed from modern capitalism. But he was an astute observer of the emerging economy of the Ganges plains, being very familiar with the working activities of farmers, merchant traders, and crafts people. He gave advice to business owners on how to run their businesses and to use their wealth and to rulers on their social and economic policies. Most of all, he had unrivalled insight into human nature and the causes of suffering. To illustrate this, I'm going to look at a teaching in the *Aggañña Sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Long Discourses of the Buddha.²⁴

In the *Aggañña Sutta*, the Buddha tells a mythological story of the beginnings of our world and its socio-economic structure. Because it's a myth told by the Buddha, we don't have to believe the story literally. Some believe that this discourse is a parody by the Buddha of Brahmin creation texts. Nevertheless I think it contains important truths about human beings and the development of human society. In the story, the Buddha

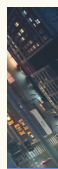


identifies *taṇhā*, thirst or craving, as an important part of the human condition. Once *taṇhā* has arisen, it causes humans to crave and exhaust one foodstuff after another. After they exhaust various foodstuffs, the crux of the story comes when humans are dependent on rice for food. The rice grows wild and replenishes itself overnight. But because the rice has to be collected every day, eventually some become tired of this. They begin to hoard, and accumulate increasing amounts of rice so that they don't have to go out and gather it every day.

As the rice is hoarded, problems arise with its supply. People start to divide the land and to establish boundaries and to grow their own supply of rice. This is the emergence of private property. Then, driven by *taṇhā*, some begin to steal others' crops of rice. Violence and the threat of violence appear.

Eventually the problem becomes so severe that people decide to appoint one of their number to oversee the division of the land and crops and to administer punishments to those who steal. In return, they give a share of their rice to the appointed ruler. Government and taxation appear. And later on, people divide themselves further, into Brahmins, traders, ascetics, and servants. 'Servants', the largest group, work for the other classes. The Buddha comments that 'servants' experience mean and cruel lives. The caste system appears.

What can we learn from this myth? Firstly, I think the Buddha is telling us that the socio-economic order of society is made by human beings; it's not god-given. Secondly, he is telling us that the restless search to quench *taṇhā*, to satisfy thirst and craving, is at the heart of the human condition and is a key driver of our individual and collective behaviour. The Buddha combines

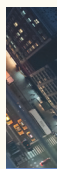


this fundamental insight into the nature of the human condition with what he could no doubt observe happening 2,500 years ago in the emerging socio-economic structure of the Ganges plains to tell the myth of the *Aggañña Sutta*. In it, he is showing us how suffering and the causes of suffering arise in dependence upon *taṇhā*.

Does this mean that the Buddha would agree with those who argue that selfishness and greed are a fixed characteristic of human nature, a dominant part of our evolutionary inheritance that cannot be transcended? No. In his teaching of the four noble truths, the Buddha tells us that the suffering described in the *Aggañña Sutta* is not inevitable and that there is a way to remove suffering. Suffering exists (first noble truth) and arises from *taṇhā*, the restless search for the satisfaction of our desire (second noble truth). We seek the satisfaction of our desire in craving and clinging to things that are impermanent and subject to change; and when they change, we experience *dukkha*, suffering or unsatisfactoriness.

Things that are impermanent and change in dependence upon conditions are incapable of giving us lasting fulfilment. Because of our ignorance, we do not see this. This is the ‘ignoble’ search, the *anariyapariyesenā*, the restless and fruitless search to satisfy desire with conditioned and impermanent things.

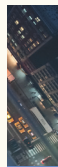
But there is an alternative. It was the realization that seeking satisfaction and fulfilment in conditioned and impermanent things was bound to fail that led to the Buddha leaving home and starting out on the *ariyapariyesenā*, the ‘noble’ search. The Buddha channelled his *taṇhā* into a desire to find a deeper and lasting source of fulfilment. When he gained Enlightenment,



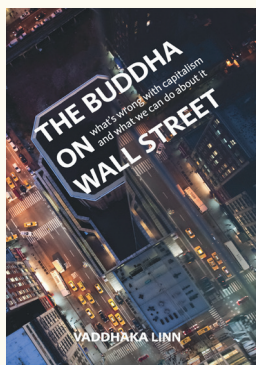
he succeeded in this noble search. He overcame craving and showed that it is possible to end suffering and find a lasting source of peace and fulfilment (the third noble truth). The Buddha teaches us that the way to end suffering is through cultivating another, equally powerful side of human nature, that of caring and compassion. With generosity and loving-kindness and the practice of ethics, with meditation, and with reflection and the gaining of wisdom, a path opens up to the gaining of Enlightenment and the end of suffering (a path spelled out in the noble eightfold path, which is the fourth noble truth).

Those who start out on the Buddhist path may be motivated by self-interest, by a desire to overcome their own suffering, but they learn that to achieve their aim they must attend to the needs of others. But we are living in an economic society dominated by, and dependent on, the kind of *taṇhā* that manifests in the restless, ignoble search. Two present-day commentators illustrate this very well. The first, Charles Handy, is regarded as one of the most influential business gurus of the second half of the twentieth century and the second, Tim Jackson, is Professor of Sustainable Development at Surrey University and the author of an important book *Prosperity Without Growth*. Charles Handy writes that ‘Economic growth depends, ultimately, on more and more people, wanting more and more, of more and more things.’²⁵

And Tim Jackson says, ‘It’s a story about us, people, being persuaded to spend money we don’t have, on things we don’t need, to create impressions that don’t last, on people that we don’t care about.’²⁶



The treadmill of economic growth relies upon an ever-growing army of consumers who must desire more and more of more and more goods and services. To this end, potential consumers are bombarded with advertising that pushes them into spending beyond their present means on things they didn't even know they needed, to keep up appearances with the spending patterns of people with whom they have very little meaningful connection. We are deluded into wanting more and more in the belief that it will bring us happiness. The Buddha, however, is telling us that we have a choice. We can go down the path of selfishness and greed that perpetuates suffering or we can follow the path of generosity and kindness, the path of altruism, a path that leads to liberation and the ending of suffering.



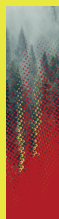
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A Buddhist response to the climate and ecological emergency

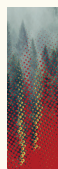


From
The Burning House
by Shantigarbha

If we continue abusing the earth this way, there is no doubt that our civilization will be destroyed. This turnaround takes enlightenment, awakening. The Buddha attained individual awakening. Now we need a collective enlightenment to stop this course of destruction. Civilization is going to end if we continue to drown in the competition for power, fame, sex, and profit.

Thich Nhat Hanh²⁷

It can be helpful to go back and look at how we dealt with previous emergencies as we turn to face this one. In the 1980s Ugyen Sangharakshita wrote a booklet entitled ‘Buddhism, world peace and nuclear war’.²⁸ Much of what he says about the threat of nuclear war can be applied directly to the current climate and ecological emergency. Both are global threats, and we can only address them if we realize that humanity and the natural world are indivisible and consistently act on that realization. We belong to the whole of the earth, rather than any particular section of it.



We are responsible for it all. This is the voice of sanity and compassion. This is what is reasonable and valuable. By reminding ourselves in this way, we may even be able to touch on what is most valuable in our lives.

When we bring pressure to bear on our governments, I suggest that we make it massive, unanimous, unmistakable, and strictly nonviolent, until the threats are averted. Apart from bringing pressure to bear on governments, we also can bring pressure to bear on our fellow citizens, especially those in our own national community. We can do this by disseminating information about the extent of the threats and helping people to develop a more positive attitude towards other national communities, species, and ecosystems.

We can encourage our fellow citizens to learn more about the lives of other nationalities and species. We can teach our fellow citizens the *metta bhavana* (loving kindness meditation). We can model sanity, compassion, and a love of humanity and of the earth as a whole. In order to do this, I suggest that we intensify our commitment to the great ethical and spiritual principle of nonviolence or love.

The climate and ecological emergency, like the threat of nuclear war before it, has shown us the consequences of collective violence (greed, hatred, and delusion) towards the earth, and given us a much deeper appreciation of the real value of nonviolence. Can we imagine a world in which our relation to the earth is governed by the principle and precepts of nonviolence?

Is it too late to avoid runaway climate change? It depends on who you listen to. Myles Allen, one of the lead authors

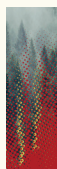


of the IPCC reports, says that greenhouse gas emissions are definitely fixable if the fossil fuel industry cleans up its waste. He advises that we should not allow people to sell products that cause climate change. This needs a clear steer from governments, moving from hidden fossil fuel subsidies to carbon taxing and other regulations. However, this doesn't address the carbon that's already in the atmosphere, so perhaps he is too optimistic.

It may well be too late unless we reduce our emissions to stay well below a 2°C temperature rise. 2019 saw a sea change in public attitudes, fed by media coverage from David Attenborough, Greta Thunberg, the school strikes, Extinction Rebellion, and, in the USA, the Sunrise Movement and the Green New Deal. With this growth in awareness there is an opportunity for further radical campaigning to put pressure on political leaders, including nonviolent disruption.

Will short-sightedness be our undoing? We are a long way from the universal sense of responsibility that Sangharakshita recommends. We have been trading off today against tomorrow. To address the present emergency we can extend our horizons to the longer-term future. We can value the future. The basic question for us is, what kind of ancestors do we want to be? Could we be the ancestors who planted trees whose shade we probably won't live to enjoy?

Is there still hope for us? If you're already treating the climate and ecological emergency as an emergency, then yes, there's hope for us. If you're not treating it as an emergency, there's no hope for us!

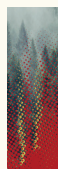


What do we have hope in? In the Buddhist tradition, there is no creator god that we can petition to intervene on our behalf. The Buddhist equivalent of hope is *sraddha*, confidence or trust. However, *sraddha* is not hope or faith in the ordinary sense. *Sraddha* represents a higher or broader perspective, our connection with vision. It signifies an emotional response to our ideals. In terms of the burning house it represents the father's cry of inspiration.

According to Buddhist psychology *sraddha* provides the bedrock for all positive (skilful) mental states.²⁹ It is made up of three elements: a deep conviction in what is real, lucidity as to what is of value, and a longing for those qualities that we can attain.

When we're engaged with the potentially divisive and depressing issue of climate and ecological emergency, we need to keep a bigger perspective. What precisely gives Buddhists this bigger perspective? At the highest level, we have *sraddha* in the Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The Buddha jewel symbolizes Gautama the historical Buddha, and the ideal of human Enlightenment, which is present at all times and in all places. The Dharma jewel symbolizes the Buddha's teaching, which is the path to Enlightenment. The Sangha jewel symbolizes the assembly of Enlightened beings down the ages, and more broadly the community of those practising the Dharma.

So when we're talking about hope in a Buddhist context, what we're really talking about is our emotional response to these three ideals. I have *sraddha* that the climate and ecological emergency has the potential to awaken us individually and collectively to Enlightenment. It shows us in the starkest

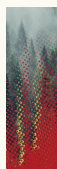


possible terms the consequences of our collective greed, hatred, and delusion. It's as though a giant mirror has been held up to us. Naturally we find looking in this mirror very unpleasant. It goes against the way we want to see ourselves and the way we want others to see us.

We can also have *sraddha* in the Dharma, the Buddha's teaching, perhaps the most famous conceptual formulation of which is dependent origination, that things emerge in dependence upon conditions. An emergency implies *emergence*. We can have *sraddha* that things will arise dependent upon conditions. Sometimes we're not aware of those conditions, like the extreme sensitivity of our climate and civilization to temperature rises, until we perceive the unwelcome consequences. Nevertheless, we can have *sraddha* in the emergent quality of phenomena, and remember that, in an emergency, we can trust in emergence.

We can also have confidence and trust in karma, *how* actions have consequences. Actions based on greed, hatred, and delusion will lead to suffering for ourselves and others, and actions based on generosity, love, and awareness will lead to happiness. As quoted earlier, Martin Luther King said, 'Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.'³⁰

To put it into perspective, even if we succeeded in addressing the climate and ecological emergency on its own terms, we would still be faced with the greater problem of what to do with our lives. Where do we find meaning? We would still have to face the problems of impermanence and death. What is born has to die. Everything is impermanent. Even the Buddha had to die. We can be certain of our death; this is an essential



aspect of our humanity. The Buddha sought Enlightenment or awakening. He faced up to the problem of birth and death. The climate and ecological emergency is an alarm call for us to wake up from the sleep of unawareness.

Given that actions have consequences depending on the motivations with which they are performed, it's not just what we do but *how* we respond that is crucial. How we respond now will provide the template for future responses. Acceptance, compassion, cooperation, and empathy will lead to different outcomes from aggression, competition, blame, and denial. I suggest that you take your best aspirations and engage in social action based on them. If you have the impulse to benefit society or benefit the world, nurture it and act on it as best you can. Whatever the outcome, doing this will certainly change you, and that is the start of the change you want to see in the world.

In the last chapter we considered nonviolent disruption as a response to the scale of the emergency. It makes a difference *who* is doing the disrupting. A line of meditators creates a compelling image of human potential, in stark contrast to the seriousness of the climate and ecological emergency. Tejopala, whom we met in chapters 5 and 8, organizes interfaith climate and ecological actions. He notices that climate activists, even hard-core atheists, are moved when religious people of any tradition show up and are willing to get arrested. Their presence stimulates faith and represents a bigger perspective, that of a kind of 'moral authority'.

Yogaratra, who appeared in chapter 14, told me about a venerable UK rabbi, Jeffrey Newman. Video footage shows him sitting on the street outside the Bank of England as part of an



XR action and being arrested while holding objects sacred to Jews. It's difficult to overstate the impact of this kind of action by a faith leader. Moments before being arrested and dragged away by police, he said, 'If it takes an arrest to try to find ways of helping to galvanise public opinion, then it is *certainly* worth being arrested.'³¹

As Thich Nhat Hanh starkly points out in the opening quotation, if we continue to abuse the earth there is no doubt that our civilization will be destroyed. The goal of Buddhism is to wake up to reality. We can wake up to what is going on around us, what we are losing in terms of quality of life, loss of biodiversity, and loss of wellbeing for future generations. This requires a collective awakening.

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the power of solidarity, resilience, equity, and responsibility in our societies. We've seen again that shared risk creates a sense of community. People willingly accepted their part of the collective hardship, benefiting from a greater sense of common purpose and social belonging. Most nations, through the agency of their governments, have prioritized health over economic competitiveness. However, the pandemic has also laid bare long-standing social inequities. As it plays out, it provides an opportunity for a social reset. It also provides an opportunity for a climate and ecological emergency reset.

Could we imagine a world in which there is no fossil fuel pollution, and all energy is renewable? In this world we could end the slaughter of billions of animals annually, and instead grow nutritious, healthy plants. The earth could recover and replenish again the richness that was enjoyed by previous generations.



How can we bring such a world into being? In chapters 7 and 13 I made some suggestions of steps we could take. Broadly, we need to *decarbonize* our individual lives and collective economics and *recarbonize* the earth through protecting existing carbon sinks and rewilding other areas. Doing this will entail a transition from the Industrial Growth Society to Life-Serving Systems. None of us can act on our own in such a way that we can bring about this transition. Collectively we have a voice and can bring about change.

As part of this transition, what are you personally wanting to offer? Do you buy things that will last and look after them? Could you eat less animal and more plant protein? What are you spending your money and resources on? Could you do without a car and avoid flying? Could you commit to learning about the science behind the climate and ecological emergency and tell the truth about it in whatever forums you participate in? Could you recognize that *we* are the ones who are endangering the lives of future generations?

Are your savings managed in a way that will lead to decarbonization of the economy and recarbonization of the environment? If you are part of a company or institution, do you have a plan to do this? How can it be improved? The climate and ecological emergency requires concerted action that transcends conventional political lines. Do you have a plan for how you can support social change without necessarily taking a party political stance? Will it involve nonviolent disruption? The most important shift in community organizing is from being someone who turns up at an action organized by others, to being someone who asks others. Are you willing

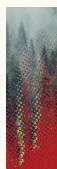


to organize actions yourself and ask others to participate in them?

When it comes to society-wide changes it's important to ensure a just transition. The climate and ecological emergency has increased inequalities. How can we bring about decarbonization in an equitable way? Can we support the welfare of those currently working in fossil fuel industries? Can we support the welfare and dignity of People of Colour, the poorest members of society, and indigenous people? Do we need to ensure universal basic services? How can we support girls' education and access to family planning – two changes that combined would produce the greatest impact on climate emissions of any societal changes? How can we care for the soil, introducing regenerative agriculture?

In the field of engineering, we already have the capacity to make radical changes. We can electrify everything that can be electrified, provided that we can clean up battery production. We can green power generation, transport, and industry. We can continue to research and use biofuels. We can introduce efficiencies in building design and construction. We don't currently have the technology to cut around 25 per cent of emissions, so we need to look into carbon capture and even geo-engineering, without relying on these untried technologies for a solution.

To do all of this requires a strong political consensus. Over 125 countries have already committed to carbon neutrality, or Net Zero.³² This means balancing emissions of carbon dioxide with its removal, often through carbon offsetting or by simply eliminating emissions altogether.



This is a move in the direction of decarbonization, although actual regulations and policies are slow to come. Nevertheless, values are changing, and people are re-evaluating their choices in this area. Politics is also a market, subject to sudden swings in opinion!

For example, what can your country offer in relation to decarbonization and recarbonization? Does it have a plan? Can it be improved? How can we encourage citizen engagement at every level of society?

When it comes to finances, we can transform our notion of value and remember that ‘Not everything that counts can be counted.’³³ Western nations have been in the grip of the ideology of free market capitalism since the 1980s. Those who subscribed to this ideology tried to liberate free markets in every aspect of our lives and push against collective action of any kind. But the free market was never going to do anything about the climate and ecological emergency that it created. To give an analogy, once common land has been made barren by overgrazing, companies can move their cattle elsewhere. However, this only works a finite number of times and ignores the impact on locals, who are left to deal with barren common land.

Can we shift from GDP (gross domestic product) as a measure of a nation’s wealth to measures of wellbeing? How effectively are people’s needs being met, on different levels? Are their physical needs being met, for food, water, shelter, and security? Are their emotional needs being met, for connection, care, empathy, and community? And are their spiritual needs being met, for meaning, value, creativity, freedom, beauty, and wholeness?



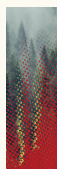
Specifically, the fossil fuel industry benefits from the support of governments amounting to a colossal hidden subsidy. Nearly all of what the climate and ecological emergency destroyed is not financially valued.³⁴ With each tonne of carbon emitted, the harm to society (its contribution to global warming) isn't accounted for or taxed. This results in unreasonably high profits for fossil fuel companies and encourages carbon-emitting activities. Some governments, such as the USA, also directly subsidize the price of fossil fuels to the consumer. The IMF projected these hidden subsidies to be \$5.2 trillion in 2017.³⁵ Rather than subsidizing fossil fuels, can we tax emissions to stimulate decarbonization? Are you willing to campaign on this issue?

Is there any priority to any of these areas: individual choices, a just transition, engineering, politics, and finance? No – to protect the future of life on earth, I suggest that we do everything, and do it now.

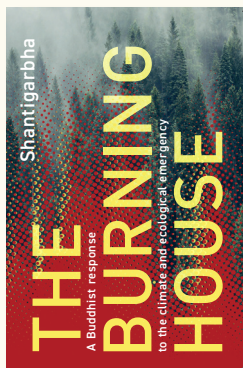
My statement turns out to be part cry of anguish, part cry of inspiration. Perhaps we need both, the beauty and the terror. Could we hold both in our hearts? Could we hold the earth, and life itself, as beautiful precisely *because* they are transient? As the famous Diamond Sutra says,

So shall you think of all this fleeting world:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.³⁶

I hope that these reflections have stimulated your own thoughts, and of course your resolve to act! This is my witness statement.



A new world is just waiting to be born. On a quiet day, I can hear it breathing.³⁷



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THE MIND UNBOUND

'All conditioned things are impermanent.' When one sees this with insight (paññā) one becomes weary of suffering. This is the Way to Purity.

'All conditioned things are painful.' When one sees this with insight (paññā) one becomes weary of suffering. This is the Way to Purity.

'All things (whatsoever) are devoid of unchanging selfhood.' When one sees this with insight (paññā) one becomes weary of suffering. This is the Way to Purity.

From *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*,
translated by Sangharakshita (pp.95–96)

Growing through insights



From

A Path for Parents

by Sara Burns

This is a short extract from an email I wrote to a friend and mentor some years ago, describing some reflections as I waited for the kettle to boil one evening. It was one of the seeds that germinated to become this book.

It is 9.30 in the evening. I have been delousing my children – again. What is it now – eight, maybe nine, years of combing hair? I am very tired, and quite low with the tiredness. I am reminded of a Greek myth featuring gods whose names I can't remember. One god is sentenced to an eternity of pushing a boulder uphill. As soon as he gets to the top, the boulder rolls back to the bottom and he has to start again. As soon as I am about to break the breeding cycle of the common head louse, my children rest their head against that of another child in their class, or they go to their father's for a few comb-free days, and we have another infestation. It is grindingly repetitive, continuous, never-ending.

Except, of course, that it isn't. As the kettle boils I reflect on how Jai's head of almost white-blond curls has given way to almost straight brown hair, the once unmanageable mane cut



neatly into something that will avoid standing out and teasing at school. Ella's early frizz that matted at the slightest breeze is unrecognizable, now beautifully thick, long brown hair, usually in two plaits as mine was at her age. Instead of the uncomprehending screams of protest at this unjust torture from someone who was supposed to love them, they both engage with the combing. They alert me if their head is itchy. Jai enjoys the attention of being groomed, and Ella combs half her head while I do the rest. We marvel at the quantity, size, or, tonight, the sparseness of the crop. I tell them how much lice appreciate clean hair, destigmatizing the affair the same way my mother did, to avoid the further discomfort of my children's neurotic reactions to the little creatures.

Not long after I wrote this email, Jai locked me out of the bathroom and took responsibility for his own hair, now long and unruly again – and lice-free. Their father had long since got on the case with a louse comb, but this experience stayed with me. It is one example of a small, felt experience of – or insight into – the essence of Buddhism. The Buddha's first conceptual description of his Enlightenment experience as recorded in the Pali Canon says,

*This being, that becomes;
from the arising of this, that arises;
this not becoming, that does not become;
from the ceasing of this, that ceases.*³⁸

In other words, everything is conditional on something else, or on complex combinations of things, so nothing and no one is either completely independent or permanent. Instead, we live

amidst a constant flow of cause and effect, arising and falling away, of one generation of head lice after another.... This is the law of conditioned co-production and is the foundation of all Buddhist teachings, a common ground for all schools of Buddhism. The whole of Buddhism can be seen as an attempt to communicate this vision, what this means for how we live our lives, and how we too can become Enlightened.

The reality of impermanence

This can all seem quite obvious at first glance. Yet after his Enlightenment under the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya in India, the Buddha hesitated to communicate the truth he had realized, thinking it could not be fully understood using concepts or intellect. Even if it does sound logical intellectually, look a little closer. Do you respond to everything you encounter from this basis? It is one thing to read conceptual descriptions and reflect on cause and effect. It is another to have these ideas deeply affect the way we live our lives.

As an older friend of mine put it so eloquently, she can embrace the reality of impermanence as she watches leaves fall from the trees, but contemplating her own death terrifies her. On a much smaller level, I know in theory that my computer is not permanent, that it will go wrong and wear out. But you'd be hard pressed to recognize that if you saw the extent of my indignation and disbelief when it doesn't work properly. You might have experienced similar reactions to a car that won't start or a punctured bicycle tyre. We are told that the Buddha's spiritual experience of 'seeing things as they really are' transformed his entire being. We live surrounded by the



reality of change and impermanence, yet we only absorb it on a certain level. In order to grow spiritually, Buddhism teaches us that we need to realize this reality at deeper and deeper levels, so that it actually shifts the ways we relate to life, bit by bit. That is why insights are so helpful.

Experiences such as the head lice combing did shift something in me, and it can still affect how I respond in small ways. When I am in a similar situation and my mind is telling me that what I am facing is endless, that experience sometimes pops up in my memory and reminds me that, no, it may feel that way, but it is not endless, nothing is, it will shift. I can place my immediate frustration in a broader context and get more of a sense of the change and the cause and effect inherent within it. As with most things to do with children, it will change pretty quickly – not necessarily for the better, but it will change. This reminder can also help how I respond in the moment, encouraging me to hold more lightly to whatever it is that feels so endless.

Insights tend to be a felt experience, realizations that may be felt in our bodies as well as an ‘ah-ha!’ moment in our mind. They may often be accompanied by lightness or joy. By the time the kettle boiled that evening, I was smiling to myself, the weariness and pressure having evaporated, and I almost laughed. From that new perspective, there suddenly seemed to be something faintly ridiculous in becoming so lost and entrenched in one small moment that was all I could see and became my reality. Stepping back, I could see the flow and change of life not only through the trying fact that one louse can lay hundreds of eggs, but also contact the fact that my mother – and countless generations before her – went through

the same process, and that my practical, non-neurotic response to lice was so directly influenced by hers, which gave rise to love for her. The image of my children's changing heads of hair inspired love for them and the preciousness of each brief stage of their lives. Something about experiencing myself and my children's lice as part of a bigger picture, arising and passing for generations, was what brought on that lightness.

Raising children is full of precious opportunities to live close to the reality of impermanence and open ourselves to the possibility of insights that transform us, tiny bit by tiny bit, in our heights and our depths, and in the ways we respond to the world. We all have these moments of felt experiences, of insights, though sometimes we might not recognize or value them. Making a note of them can help, whether in a journal or an email. We can also consciously open ourselves to opportunities for insight by bringing ourselves face to face with how things constantly change.

We might notice aspects of the cause and effect of some of our experiences and, when we have a few moments, reflect on them, seeing how what is immediately in front of us is part of a bigger picture. Or, rather than mental reflection, we might notice how we feel in our bodies when facing this flow of change, and try to take this truth on board by feeling it in our guts, with the awareness that we are aiming to live our lives based on that awareness.

When my children were small, I got used to the fact that as soon as I had found a pat answer to describe one stage of development, they had moved on and I found myself having to change the description. It's not very different even now.

Children simply do not stay the same. Neither do I, of course, and nor do my friends or family, but our development is slower and reminds me of impermanence less often than my children.

Another mother I interviewed talked about how her family would regularly reach a stage where she thought they had it all sorted; they had a nice routine and everything was great. Then her sons would grow a bit more, their comfortable routine suddenly no longer worked, and they had to find a new one. Sometimes there are big changes, such as a child starting school or leaving home. There are also lots of smaller opportunities to notice change. Some parents said living with teenagers helped them be aware that experiences are fluid by watching how rapidly their children's moods changed.

Opportunities to notice how things change can arise even before our children are born. I have several friends who had their first child in their early forties. They were long-awaited and much-wanted babies. One such friend, pregnant at last, had an anxious time with scares about miscarriage throughout her pregnancy. She watched things change from hour to hour, including her fear of losing the baby. She felt as though it was the first time she had consciously observed impermanence within herself from moment to moment. Her thoughts, moods, and feelings had swung around before, but never in such a rapid succession, and never before had she kept so still to watch them. At times, she recounted finding a deep sense of contentment in watching the speed of change, and the rise and fall of her emotions, moving from intense anxiety and fear to acceptance and calm, knowing that however bad she felt at a given moment, it would not last, just as the periods of relief where the risk seemed to subside also passed.



By the time this book was in its second draft, this friend and her husband had two healthy children. While she may have less time to sit still and watch the changes in her thoughts and feelings, a felt experience of this sort does stay with us, especially if we recognize that what we are seeing is part of a flow and change that happens all the time, for everyone. We can bring this to mind when we feel stuck. Through immersing ourselves in impermanence, we can move more and more towards a state in which we don't just believe in the concept that everything is subject to change, but become an increasingly more willing and conscious part of that change, of the constant flow of life. The more we live with this awareness, the more we effectively step back and allow our view to become more expansive, and the more we can see the extent of this truth all around us. And the more we see this web of cause and effect, the better we are able to make choices based on how things actually are.

Living with the fear of death

A particularly vivid image was painted for me by one friend when she described the simple daily task of emptying the dishwasher while heavily pregnant with her first child. Whenever she learned over, she became uncomfortably aware of the knives and forks pointing up from the cutlery holder towards the large bump of her belly. Logically, she knew there was no danger, but she was shocked to realize that she was concerned for her baby's safety before it had even been born. In that moment, she realized she might feel that fear for the rest of her life, that fear of death and loss was an integral part of being a parent.



Despite the fact that her own two sons were long since grown up and left home, another mother I interviewed vividly recalled how she was struck by an awareness of mortality when her first child was four days old. It was the middle of the night and she was very tired. She had picked him up and walked him up and down to get him back to sleep. She felt a sudden flash of anger towards him for not letting her sleep, then the shock of the realization, ‘He is mortal. He will die.’ It struck her as strange that this hadn’t occurred to her until her children were born. It wasn’t just an intellectual thought, but a felt experience in her body, and an insight into that reality. She understood that the realization came in the wake of a flash of anger because she became aware of her son’s vulnerability. Her next thought was, ‘What have I done?’ She had no idea what she was opening herself up to by choosing to have children, the magnitude of the potential loss, and the effect that might have on her. The question was how to face that and live the rest of her life with the possibility of that potential loss. It was that question that set her on a quest that led her to Buddhism. While she did not believe she had found an answer when I interviewed her more than thirty years later, she saw the question as a spur to growth: to be able to hold the question and live with the reality of loving someone who would one day die.

So how is that helpful? How can becoming more aware of death help anyone? Does spiritual progress mean aspiring to a state in which it would be fine if one of our children died before us? Not at all. But when we shut out any aspect of life, we close down to much more than that one aspect. Death is part of life. Selective awareness doesn’t really work. It just does not work like that, at least not over time – though I must admit

I sometimes fervently wish it did. The more of life and our experience we push away from ourselves, the harder it becomes to open and embrace any aspect of life.

As I write this, I am looking at the last of the November colours in a beautiful Essex woodland, enjoying the leaves on the ground, and nudging at the edge of my awareness is the fact that leaves are not the only things that die. Head lice have a life cycle of about two weeks, leaves fall once a year, the nearby rabbits live perhaps five years, our cats maybe twenty years if they are lucky and careful, and people, well, getting longer and longer, it seems, but still a finite life cycle. Yet life goes on. The times when we feel more expansive and calmer are opportunities to acknowledge our fear of death and the reality of loss and hold them within a bigger perspective.

Sometimes it seems as if the line between our children being alive or dead is far too thin. One moment they are holding our hands to cross the road and we may have fearful images of them running out in the path of an oncoming car. Your own child might once have had an accident, or you might have gone through a process of torturing yourself with thoughts of a near miss or what might have happened. As parents, we do tend to think about the death of children because we fear it, and that is why being a parent provides such ample opportunities to contemplate death and to bring awareness to the effect that has on us. I came across a copy of a letter I wrote to a friend when Jai was a baby. She had her first child a few months later, and must have written to me describing how she was living in fear that her healthy newborn baby would simply stop breathing. In my reply, I wrote,

Dear Carolyn, Just before reading your letter I had gone in to check Jai was still breathing (He is.) I don't check as often as I used to, but I still check a lot. Someone recently said to me, 'Of course, you feel so vulnerable being a parent,' and that summed it all up for me. Welcome to the world of never (again?) being able to control happiness. More than ever before, there is now someone else on which that depends. That's what I feel anyway. Sometimes I am philosophical and think what it would be like if Jai died, and I think at least he would never have become disillusioned with the world and with human nature, that he has had a happy seven-and-a-half months thinking everyone is nice and loves him. But, as you can see, it is at the front of my mind, and even the thought makes me cry and I don't think we're alone. It's just a part of life now.

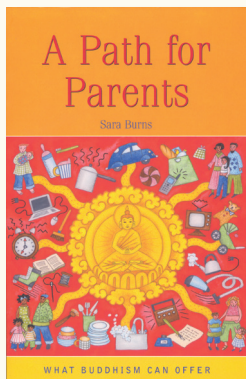
I doubt whether I really could control my happiness before I had Jai, but maybe that was the first time I became conscious just how little control I do have. Parents share an experience of extreme terror of losing someone that might not apply to the same degree in other relationships. Yet, at least sometimes, I want to try to stay open, not shut down and push away those fears, because I want to be able to stay present and open to life in all its richness. That includes trying, bit by bit, to hold the reality of death as part of life. If you have the opportunity to be aware of the feelings in your body, you might catch the contracting effect in the area around your heart when this fear arises. You can try consciously bringing a kindly curiosity to the feelings in your body, or thoughts in your head, when fear is present, just noticing them without judging. You might, like my friend, notice how feelings shift, and the associated relaxation and openness in your body if there is more trust and acceptance in your experience.

An increased fear of death does not automatically lead to spiritual growth, of course. Like so many of the opportunities presented by parenting, there is a potential pitfall. The danger is that we become even more likely to shut down to the world around us, to protect our family unit, and try to control our environment to give us a sense of security and certainty. Once again, it is what we do with our awareness and how we respond to it that counts. We can let awareness of death remind us that life does not last for ever, and that we should make the most of our precious time, appreciate the people in our lives, and simply sit with how difficult it feels to hold both love and the awareness that life is finite.

Our children's mortality can feel unbearable. To live with that awareness can have a strong effect. We are not aiming to reach a point at which we do not care if our children suffer and die, but for a deep and pure response of love and compassion. True compassion arises when a loving heart meets suffering. It is infinitely powerful and not clouded by blame, indignation, disbelief, or lack of acceptance. We are aiming to love at the same time as taking in – on deeper and deeper levels – the reality that everyone we love will one day die.

Having children can also put us in touch with our own mortality. Our own life suddenly matters more, because someone else is dependent on us, or so it seems. I have cycled around London for many years, but it was not until my first child was born that I started to wear a helmet. I used to curse when I had near misses, but over the years I trained my response to a more moderate shout of 'Be careful!' because having people swear back at me is pretty unpleasant. However,

I realized something had shifted in me one day as I swerved to avoid a car and, without thinking, shouted, ‘Oi! My life is precious too!’ The proximity of death, if only in our fears, provides us with an opportunity to embrace life and its preciousness. Every life is precious; ours too. This is true before we have children, and it is no less true for non-parents, yet as parents we can use the fact that death may be present in our minds to make us more aware of the preciousness of human life.



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The Buddha



From

Introducing Buddhism

by Vadanya (Chris Pauling)

‘Buddha’ is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘One who is awake’. The founder of Buddhism was not a god, a prophet, or a messiah. He was a normal human being who, by his own efforts, became completely awake, both to his own potential and to the nature of the world around him. This state of being fully awake – usually called ‘Enlightenment’ – is what Buddhism is all about. Since the Buddha’s time many other men and women have also achieved this state of Enlightenment, but the title ‘Buddha’ is usually reserved for the trail-blazer, the man who discovered the path to Enlightenment and erected the signposts for others to follow.

Siddhartha Gautama – the man who became this trail-blazer – was born into a prosperous aristocratic family of the Shakya clan of Nepal and northern India some time around 560 BCE. Some traditions say that his father was king of the Shakyas, and although this may not be historically accurate, it seems certain that as a child and young adult Siddhartha lived a very opulent life. We can imagine an existence of undisguised luxury, with exquisite food, gorgeous clothing, and many servants, lived out against the backdrop of a sub-Himalayan India which at that time must have been close to being an earthly paradise.



But despite all this he was not happy. The pleasures that surrounded him on every side could not drown out a deeper sense of dissatisfaction, a deeper desire for meaning. This may strike a chord with many people today in the West, where material needs are satisfied relatively easily, and where the opportunities for leisure and amusement would be the envy of previous generations. Yet a glance at the faces of the passers-by in any Western city will show that this prosperity does not necessarily bring happiness. Like Siddhartha many of us find a life devoted to material pleasure to be empty and unfulfilling.

Siddhartha's dissatisfaction with his luxurious existence reached a head when he was twenty-nine years old, when he made the decision to leave his family home and his life of luxury, and to become a wandering seeker after truth, his only possessions a begging-bowl and a simple robe.

The world into which Siddhartha launched himself was technologically primitive by our standards, but philosophically it was very rich – far more so than the modern West. The early Buddhist scriptures give the impression of a society with a deep interest in the fundamental questions of existence. Competing meditation teachers and philosophical schools were rife, and religious debate was a popular pastime.

In this atmosphere Siddhartha spent six years wandering, meditating, and learning what he could from the teachers he met, strenuously determined to find what had been lacking in his pampered life at home. For a while he even devoted himself to extreme asceticism, going without food and sleep in the hope that this would help him to realize the truth. He then realized that denying the body was not a useful spiritual practice



and, turning his back on ascetic practice, devoted himself wholeheartedly to meditation.

At the end of his six years of determined effort, on the night of the first full moon of the month Vesakha in the year 528 BCE, Siddhartha Gautama sat down to meditate under a pipal tree on the banks of the River Niranjana, at the site which later came to be known as Bodh Gaya, vowing not to get up until he had found what he was looking for. By now his determination had become unstoppable. He entered a state of deep meditation, and as the night wore on his awareness penetrated layer after layer of the nature of reality, until he achieved a total and direct perception of the truth. By the time he saw the morning star rise over the eastern horizon he knew that his liberation was unshakeable. Siddhartha Gautama had become the Buddha, the Awakened One.

The entire Buddhist tradition exists to help others experience this same awakening and liberation for themselves, and later we will have much more to say both about the nature of the Buddha's Enlightenment, and about the practical means that Buddhists use to help them follow in his footsteps. But first we will describe the rest of the Buddha's life, and the extraordinary effects his awakening produced in the society he was born into – effects which are still echoing around the world 2,500 years after his death.

For several weeks after his Enlightenment the Buddha continued to meditate near the River Niranjana, digesting the full implications of his experience. At first he thought that he would never be able to communicate his realization – that nobody would or could understand what he was talking about



– and he was tempted simply to pass the rest of his life enjoying the bliss of his liberation, leaving the rest of humanity to its own devices. But he quickly realized that the very nature of his awakening ruled out this sort of selfishness. His sense of unity with all living beings meant that he felt impelled to share his experience, no matter how impossible this seemed.

We are told that during this period he had a vision in which he saw humanity as a lake of lotus plants in bud. Some buds were still buried in the mud of the lake bottom. Others were growing up through the water, but were still muddy and tightly shut. A few buds had already reached the surface, and needed only a little prompting to allow them to open in the sunlight. This image of men and women as developing beings growing out of the mud and darkness towards the light gave him the encouragement he needed. Heartened by the fact that a few people might already be developed enough to receive his teachings, while others could be helped to grow until they reached this stage, he set out to communicate the incommunicable.

A week later he gave his first discourse in the Deer Park at Benares, about a hundred miles from Bodh Gaya. Here he came across a group of ascetics who had known him in earlier days, and who had been disgusted when he renounced asceticism. Now at first they refused to listen to him or even to greet him. But one by one they were convinced by the overwhelming force of the Buddha's words and being, and one by one they became his followers.

For the next forty-five years the Buddha spent nine months of every year walking the length and breadth of a vast tract of



northern India spreading his teaching, and again and again this pattern would be repeated. Again and again he would talk to men and women from all classes and walks of life, singly, in groups of tens or even of hundreds, and again and again the power of his presence and his words helped them to see life with different eyes. Again and again they would express their commitment to living by the vision the Buddha had revealed to them, and would become his followers.

Of course not everyone who came into contact with the Buddha was convinced. But in an age with no telecommunications and primitive transport his teachings and personal influence spread through northern India at a remarkable rate. During his lifetime his following grew to such proportions that he was accused of disrupting society. By the time of his death at the age of eighty his teachings had exerted a profound social, cultural, and spiritual influence within seven nations covering an area of some 50,000 square miles. The rulers of the two major kingdoms of northern India and many other leading figures of the day were among his disciples. And he had established a 'sangha' or spiritual community drawn from both sexes and all castes and levels of society which is still thriving today. All this was achieved despite the fact that his teachings on social issues were often unpopular and subversive, in particular his criticism of the caste system and his outspoken comments on the religious pretensions of the hereditary priestly caste.

How do we explain the Buddha's phenomenal success in attracting followers and spreading his teaching, at a time when so many other spiritual teachers were competing to be heard?



No doubt this achievement stems partly from the teachings themselves, which can still strike many people as being so obviously true they feel they must always have known them. But the Buddha's words on their own are probably not enough to explain his success – the nature of the man who was speaking the words played the decisive role. The Buddha was not just talking about Enlightenment or the way to achieve it. The Buddha was himself Enlightened, and – for anyone with eyes to see – his Enlightenment showed. He himself was walking, talking proof of the truth of his teachings which only the most stubborn witness could deny.

The picture of the Buddha we get from the earliest Buddhist writings is of a man of great dignity who towers above the circumstances in which he finds himself, a man of complete fearlessness and unshakeable self-confidence whose mental composure is quite unaffected even by pain, illness, and his own imminent death. At the same time this awe-inspiring figure is open and approachable, willing to devote his time to anyone regardless of class, education, or intelligence. We see a man of great compassion, a man without anger who treats conflict and stupidity with gentle, affectionate irony. In his dealings with pig-headedness or foolishness on the part of his followers we see the gentle, humorous touch of a man who has seen through to the core of reality, but who retains great warmth, sympathy, and respect for those who are still trapped in delusion.

Finally we see a leader who is regarded with awe and reverence, but has no desire to be followed blindly, and who now and then shows a hint of good-humoured exasperation at the unwillingness of some of his followers to think and act for themselves.



This picture, faded as it is by the passage of twenty-five centuries, gives us a glimpse of what the Buddha looked like *from the outside*. But to have any idea of the Buddha's real nature we need to consider not just how he appeared to an external observer in his day-to-day life. We need to consider his nature from the inside – to consider the nature of Enlightenment itself.

Enlightenment

Enlightenment is the final goal of the Buddhist path, and anyone with an interest in Buddhism will obviously want to be told exactly what it is. Unfortunately this is impossible! To try to *describe* Enlightenment is like trying to describe the colour blue to someone who has been blind from birth – words simply are not up to the job. An often-quoted analogy from the Zen tradition compares talking about Enlightenment to pointing a finger at the moon. The finger can point out where to look to see the moon, but it is not the moon itself – and if we end up staring at the finger we have made a serious mistake. Having said this we will try to point a very shaky finger at Enlightenment.

Enlightenment is a state of being, and because being has many different facets, Enlightenment too can be approached from several points of view.

Looked at from the point of view of wisdom, Enlightenment is direct insight into the nature of reality. It is a direct experience of the truth behind and beyond the world, and behind our part in it – which is something quite different from holding intellectual views about the nature of life and the universe.



The effect of this aspect of Enlightenment is often described in quite negative terms, as an annihilation of the sense of self. But this transcendental insight does not so much annihilate our sense of self as expand it far beyond our normal narrow view. By stepping beyond the boundaries of any one small self the Enlightened being becomes something much larger, and sees the universe from the widest possible perspective. The whole of Buddhism can be seen as an attempt to persuade us to expand our vision of who and what we are, and so move towards the vast perspectives of Buddhahood.

Although we have used words like ‘insight’ and ‘perspective’, Enlightenment is as much about feeling as it is about knowing. Transcendental insight goes hand in hand with the deepest possible transformation of the emotions – it brings a sense of oneness with all other beings, and a huge, compassionate heart for all that lives.

Traditionally Enlightenment is sometimes spoken of as the ‘Heart’s Release’ – for many people a much more evocative phrase than ‘insight into reality’, and one that brings home a little of these more emotional aspects. If from one point of view Buddhism can be seen as a way of gradually expanding the boundaries that define what we regard as ‘ourselves’, from another it can just as validly be seen as a way of allowing us gradually to open our heart. And each step towards a more positive and loving approach to life – each small opening of the heart – makes us happier and more fulfilled, and moves us a little closer to the final heart’s release of Enlightenment.

We have talked about Enlightenment mainly in terms of wisdom and compassion. But it has also been described in



several other ways: as a state of complete liberation and limitless energy; as the end of all our worries, all our sorrows, all our unhappiness; as the bliss of pure being.

It sounds marvellous. But does it really exist? If it does, and if we really can achieve it, we would surely be very foolish to run around after anything else. But how can we be sure?

On this as on all other points Buddhism does not ask for blind faith – a very un-Buddhist ‘virtue’. Instead it encourages us to develop a reasoned confidence. We can develop a reasoned confidence that Enlightenment exists as a real possibility both because we see evidence of it in others, and because we have an intuition of the potential for Enlightenment in ourselves – an intuition which becomes progressively stronger as we take even our first faltering steps towards our own ‘Heart’s Release’.

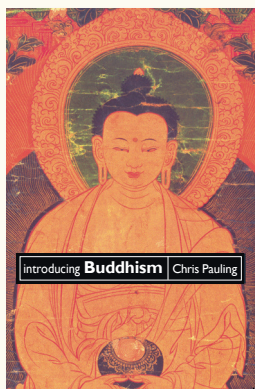
Some Buddhists are lucky enough to have close contact with a teacher who is near enough to Enlightenment to provide living evidence of its existence, in the same way that the Buddha provided this evidence in his lifetime. But even at a lower level, as we become involved with people who have systematically worked on themselves over a period of years, we begin to meet people who, although they may not be fully Enlightened, are certainly closer to this state than we are. We also see that these people themselves keep growing, keep moving in the right direction. This gives us a firm confidence that real, significant spiritual growth is possible – and that if there are any limits to growth – which Buddhism denies – these occur somewhere very far beyond where most of us are at the moment.



But even without the evidence of other people, we have all seen at least a distant glimmer of the Enlightened state within ourselves. We all carry the potential for Enlightenment, in much the same way that an acorn carries the potential to be an oak tree. It is this seed that allows us to respond to the ideal, and which occasionally gives us a dim echo of Enlightenment in the best moments of our lives – those moments of beauty, love, or inspiration, when the small personal preoccupations that normally cast such dark shadows in our minds melt away like mist.

Not only do we all carry the seed of Enlightenment within us, we also have a natural urge to grow towards the liberated state, like the urge of a plant to grow towards the light. Most of the time this urge may be drowned out by the confusion of our everyday lives. But when we do respond to it we know instinctively that we are moving in the right direction. Every step we take towards Enlightenment brings a sense of expansion, and makes us feel happier, healthier, and more fulfilled. This is not abstract theorizing. It is a matter of direct personal experience for many people. The best way to develop confidence that Enlightenment exists is to take even a small step towards it, and see what happens.





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Enlightenment, eternity, and time



From

A Guide to the Buddhist Path

by Sangharakshita

The Buddha is a distinct, unique type of human being, one who cannot be classified or categorized. To help us comprehend all that the Buddha is, tradition came to draw a distinction between the Buddha's *rupakaya*, his physical, phenomenal appearance, and his *dharmakaya*, his true form. *Rupakaya* literally means 'form body' and *dharmakaya* means 'body of Truth' or 'body of Reality'. *Rupakaya* is the Buddha as existing in time; *dharmakaya* is the Buddha as existing out of time, in the dimension of Eternity.

We know, even from our ordinary experience of life, that there are many different angles, or points of view, from which we can look at the same thing. We can also look at one and the same object from different levels of existence, or reality. For instance, we can look at something from the standpoint of time and also from the standpoint of what we may call 'Eternity', above and beyond time, disconnected from time altogether. In the first case, when we see things in terms of space and time, we see them as processes. In the second case, when we see things in the dimension of Eternity, we see them as unchanging realities.



(In using the word ‘unchanging’ I do not mean that those particular phenomena remain unchanged within the temporal process, but that they are outside time, above and beyond time, in a different dimension altogether.)

We are familiar with the main details of the life of the Buddha. We know that the Buddha was born in the Lumbini garden, we know about his education and how he left home. We know how he gained Enlightenment at the age of thirty-five, how he taught the Dharma, and how finally he passed away. But we don’t always bear in mind one fact about the biography of the Buddha, which is that it deals, in a sense, with two quite different people (we may call them ‘Siddhartha’ and ‘the Buddha’), who are divided from each other by the event of the Enlightenment.

The Buddha’s Enlightenment was the central event of his life. But how do we think of this? We usually think – graphically – of the Enlightenment as a peak in the Buddha’s life, of his life before the Enlightenment as a gentle slope up to the peak (his going forth, his meditation in the jungle, etc. mark stages on the ascent), and of his life after the Enlightenment perhaps as a gentle slope down from the peak. We think that after his Enlightenment the Buddha was more or less the same as he was before – except of course that he was Enlightened.

Had we ourselves been with the Buddha a few months before and a few months after he was Enlightened, we almost certainly would not have been able to perceive any difference in him. After all, we would have seen the same physical body, and probably the same clothes; he would have been speaking the same language and had the same general characteristics.



Therefore we tend to regard Enlightenment as a last finishing touch to a process which has been going on for a very long time, as the hair that turns the scale – that little difference that makes all the difference. But really it is not like that at all.

Enlightenment – the Buddha's or anybody else's – represents the point of intersection of time and Eternity. Strictly speaking, it is only a line which can intersect another line, and though we can represent time as a line, we can't represent Eternity as a line, so we can't really speak of Eternity intersecting time. We should perhaps rather think of time as a line which, instead of propagating itself indefinitely, at a given point just stops. At this 'point of intersection' the first line, time, is not intersected by another line but just stops. Or it disappears into a new dimension. We may compare time disappearing into the new dimension of Eternity to a river flowing into the ocean. This simile is rather hackneyed, but if one doesn't take it too literally it is still useful. We can possibly improve on it by imagining that the ocean is just over the horizon and therefore just out of sight. Then it seems as though the river just stops (at the horizon) or flows into nothingness. So time just comes to an end at Eternity, is succeeded by Eternity. And this is what we mean by Enlightenment. From the standpoint of time, Siddhartha becomes the Buddha, evolves into the Buddha. But from the standpoint of Eternity, Siddhartha ceases to exist, disappears – just like the river disappearing at the horizon – and the Buddha takes his place, or simply is there, because of course he has been there all the time.



The Story of Angulimala

The story of Angulimala³⁹ illustrates this matter of the two dimensions of time and Eternity. Angulimala was a famous bandit. He was living in a great forest, somewhere in central India. Angulimala had a rather unpleasant habit. He used to catch travellers who were passing through the forest and chop off their fingers. He kept all the fingers and strung them together into a garland, which he wore round his neck. It was because of this in fact that he was called Angulimala, which means ‘one who has a garland of fingers’ (anguli is ‘finger’ and mala is ‘garland’).

When the story begins the Buddha was about to pass through the forest. The villagers, who knew about Angulimala, told the Buddha of the danger and tried to dissuade him from going. But of course he ignored their warnings and set off. That very day, as it happens, Angulimala had been getting a bit desperate. He apparently had ninety-eight fingers at this time and wanted to have a hundred. His old mother was living with him in the forest. She used to cook for him – a devoted old soul. And he had just decided to have her finger, because he was fed up with waiting any longer – maybe she used to nag him a bit too. He had resolved to take her finger, so that then he would only need one more to have a hundred. But as soon as he saw the Buddha coming he changed his mind. He thought, ‘I can always come back and chop off her finger. I’ll go and get a finger from this monk.’

We are told that it was a beautiful afternoon. There was a very peaceful atmosphere. The only sound was that of the birds singing in the trees. The Buddha was walking slowly, meditatively, along the little trail that wound through the forest.



Angulimala's plan was to creep up on the Buddha from behind, spring on him, and chop off a finger before he could protest or struggle. So he emerged from the shadows of the forest and stealthily started pursuing the Buddha.

He was following the Buddha for quite a while when he noticed that a rather odd thing was happening. Though he seemed to be moving much more quickly than the Buddha, the distance between them was not decreasing. The Buddha was there in front of him walking slowly along. He was behind moving much more quickly, but getting no nearer to the Buddha. So he quickened his pace until he was running along. But again, the Buddha was just the same distance in front, still strolling along, slowly and mindfully. When Angulimala realized what was happening he broke out into a terrific perspiration, with fright and bewilderment. He decided to make one last effort, a last dash. He summoned up all his strength and sprinted along. But yet again he got no closer to the Buddha, and if anything the Buddha seemed to be walking even more slowly.

In desperation Angulimala called out to the Buddha, 'Stand still!' The Buddha turned round and said, 'I am standing still. It is you who are moving.' So Angulimala, who despite his fear had considerable presence of mind, said, 'You are supposed to be a monk, a *sramana*, how can you tell a lie? You say that you are standing still, yet I can't catch up with you even though I am running as fast as I can. How can you say that you are standing still?' The Buddha said, 'I am standing still, because I am standing in nirvana. You are moving, because you are going round and round in the samsara.' This was the Buddha's reply. Angulimala of course became the Buddha's disciple.



Angulimala could not catch up with the Buddha because the Buddha was moving – or standing still, which is the same thing here – in a different dimension. Angulimala, representing time, could not catch up with the Buddha, representing Eternity. However long time goes on, it never comes to a point within time where it catches up with Eternity. Angulimala could be running now, still, after 2,500 years, but he would not have caught up with the Buddha: the distance between them would be the same now as it was then.

The Great Death

To return to our main topic, we have seen that the attainment of Enlightenment represents entry into a new dimension of being, not a prolongation of the old one, however refined. After his Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha is a different, even a new, person.

We tend unfortunately to think of the Buddha's Enlightenment in terms of our own experience of life. In the course of *our* lives, over so many years, we undergo various experiences, learn different things, go to different places, and meet different people, but underneath we remain recognizably the same person. Perhaps we are the same person *now* that we were twenty or thirty years ago when we were a child. Very often this is the case. We do not succeed in outgrowing the attitudes of our early childhood, and we often remain deeply, dramatically, and sadly, conditioned by our infantile past. Any changes that take place in us in the course of our lives are comparatively superficial. We even encounter Buddhism and take refuge in the Buddha, but the change is not very deep.



But the Buddha's experience of Enlightenment was not like that. It didn't represent just a little, peripheral change in him, a change only on the surface. It was something much deeper and much more dramatic than that. It was more like the change that takes place as between two lives, when you die to one life and are reborn in another, and there is a great gap in between. The Enlightenment experience is more like death. In fact in some Buddhist traditions Enlightenment is called the 'great death'. When you are Enlightened, everything of the past dies, is annihilated, and you are completely reborn.

In the case of the Buddha, Siddhartha dies. It is not that Siddhartha is changed, improved, patched up a bit. Siddhartha is finished. Siddhartha dies at the foot of the Bodhi tree and the Buddha is born. The Buddha comes into existence *only* after the death of Siddhartha. We say that the Buddha 'is born', but it is not actually even like that. Really at that moment when Siddhartha dies, the Buddha is seen as having been alive all the time. (By 'all the time' we really mean above and beyond time, out of time altogether.)

Another important reflection of Buddhist thought, and of metaphysical thought in the West, is that time and space are not – as we usually think they are – things in themselves. We think of space as a sort of box within which things move about; we think of time as a sort of tunnel along which things move. But they are not really like that. Time and space are really forms of our perception: we perceive things under the form of time and under the form of space. When we see, or experience, things under these forms, through these 'spectacles', through these dimensions, we speak of them as phenomena.



These phenomena make up the world of relative, conditioned existence, or what Buddhists call ‘samsara’. But when we enter the dimension of Eternity, we go beyond time and space, and therefore we go beyond phenomena – which are only realities as seen under the forms of time and space. We go beyond samsara and, in the Buddhist idiom, we enter nirvana, or, in the Hindu idiom, we go from darkness to light, from the unreal to the real, from death to immortality.

Enlightenment is often described as awakening to the truth of things. It is seeing things as they really are, not as they appear – seeing things in their truth, free from any veils; seeing things with perfect objectivity, without being influenced by any psychological conditionings. It is also spoken of in terms of ‘becoming one with things’, becoming one with Reality. The Buddha, the one who has awoken to this truth, the one who as it were exists out of time in the dimension of Eternity, may be regarded, therefore, as Reality itself in human form. The form is human, but the ‘substance’ is Reality. This is what is meant by saying that the Buddha is an ‘Enlightened human being’. There is a human form, but there is not the ordinary conditioned human mind. In the place of the conditioned human mind, with all its prejudices, preconceptions, and limitations, there is the experience or the awareness of Reality itself. Therefore, the Buddha symbolizes, or represents, Reality in human form.

The Pathless One

The Buddha is an altogether distinct, indeed unique, type of human being, and as such he cannot be classified or categorized. This is the moral of the story of the Buddha’s



encounter, shortly after his Enlightenment, with Upaka, the naked ascetic.⁴⁰ Upaka tried to categorize the Buddha as a deva, a yaksa, a gandharva, even as a human being, but the Buddha repudiated all those categories and said that inasmuch as he had transcended all the psychological conditionings on account of which he might have been called a deva, or yaksa, or gandharva, or human being, he was simply a Buddha – one free from all those conditionings.

Often people want to categorize you. In India, especially in southern India, one of the first questions asked – anywhere, by anyone – is ‘What is your caste?’ If they can’t classify you according to caste they don’t know how to treat you. They don’t know whether they can take water from your hand or not, whether they can get to know you or not, whether you might marry their daughter or not. All these things are very important.

It is just the same in the West, although here we are not so direct. People try to worm the same sort of information out of you. They ask you what sort of job you’ve got – from that they may try to work out your income. They ask you where you live, where you were born, where you were educated. By taking these various sociological readings, they can gradually narrow down the field, until they’ve ‘got’ you, until they feel that you are neatly pigeonholed.

But you can’t do that with a Buddha (you can’t really do it with an ordinary human being, though you can try and even succeed to a great extent). When Upaka found that he couldn’t pin the Buddha down, he did not know what to do. According to the account, he just shook his head, said, ‘Well, it may be so,’ and went away. He couldn’t categorize the Buddha.



We find the same idea – that the Buddha cannot be categorized – expressed in the first verse of the ‘*Buddha-vagga*’ of the *Dhammapada*, where the Buddha says:

*Whose conquest is not to be undone,
Whom not even a bit of those conquered passions follows,
That enlightened one whose sphere is endless,
By what path will you trace him – that pathless one?*⁴¹

The Buddha doesn’t go on any particular path; he is like a bird flying through the sky. You cannot trace a bird by following its path in the sky – it doesn’t leave any track there. You can’t trace the Buddha because he belongs to a different dimension, the Transcendental dimension, the dimension of Eternity.

The same idea is expressed again in the *Sutta-nipata*, where the Buddha says:

*There is no measuring of man
Won to the goal, whereby they’d say
His measure’s so: that’s not for him;
When all conditions are removed,
All ways of telling are removed*⁴²

When all psychological conditionings are removed in a person you have no way of accounting for that person, and this is what the Buddha is like. The same idea is expressed more abstractly in four of the list of ‘Fourteen Inexpressibles’. These four positions are: whether the Buddha existed after death, or not, or both, or neither. Some of the ancient Indians were quite obsessed with the question. They used to go to the Buddha and say, ‘Please tell us, when you die will you go on living, or not, or both, or neither?’ The Buddha always used to repudiate all four positions.



He would say, 'It is inappropriate, it is inapplicable, to say of a Buddha that after death he will continue to exist; it is also inappropriate to say that after death he will cease to exist; it is inappropriate to say that he will continue to exist *and* cease to exist; and it is inappropriate to say that he will neither continue to exist nor cease to exist.' He would go on to say, 'All these are inapplicable and inappropriate because even during his lifetime – even when he sits there in a physical body – the Buddha is beyond all your classifications: one cannot say anything about him.'

The Buddha is the person about whom one cannot say anything, because he doesn't have anything; he isn't anything, in a sense. This is why in the *Sutta-nipata* again, there is an epithet for an Enlightened being, *akincanna*,⁴³ which is usually translated as 'man of nought' – one who has nothing because he is nothing. You cannot say anything about such a person. That is very baffling for the human mind.

Many of the Buddha's Enlightened disciples felt that there was something very mysterious about the Buddha, something which even they – who were themselves Enlightened – could not understand or fathom. There is a story about Sariputra in this connection which is typical.⁴⁴ Sariputra was once in the presence of the Buddha and, out of his excess of faith and devotion, said, 'Lord, I think you are the greatest of all the Enlightened Ones who have ever existed, or who will ever exist, or who exist now.' The Buddha was neither pleased nor displeased by that. He did not say, 'What a marvellous disciple you are. How wonderfully well you understand me.' He just asked a question, 'Sariputra, have you known all the Buddhas



of the past?’ Sariputra replied, ‘No, Lord.’ Then the Buddha said, ‘Do you know all the Buddhas of the future?’ Sariputra acknowledged that he didn’t. The Buddha asked, ‘Do you know all the Buddhas that now are?’ Again Sariputra had to admit that he didn’t. So the Buddha asked, ‘Do you even know me?’ Sariputra said, ‘No, Lord.’ Then the Buddha said, ‘That being the case, how is it that your words are so bold and so grand?’ This shows that even the wisest of the disciples, Sariputra, did not succeed in fully fathoming the Buddha.

Rupakaya and Dharmakaya

After the death of the Buddha this feeling on the part of the disciples that the Buddha was unfathomable, that even though they were Enlightened, presumably just as he was Enlightened, they couldn’t really fathom him at all, found expression in a list of ‘Ten Powers’⁴⁵ and ‘Eighteen Special Attributes’ which they attributed to him to mark him off from all the other merely Emancipated and Enlightened disciples.

All this crystallized eventually into a very important distinction that was made with regard to the Buddha. That is the distinction between what came to be called his *rupakaya*, his physical, phenomenal appearance, and his *dharmakaya*, his true form, his essential form. *Rupakaya* literally means ‘form body’ and *dharmakaya* means ‘body of Truth’ or ‘body of Reality’. *Rupakaya* is the Buddha as existing in time; *dharmakaya* is the Buddha as existing out of time, in the dimension of Eternity. It is the latter, the *dharmakaya*, that is the real body. This is clear, for instance, from the Buddha’s admonition to Vakkali. Vakkali was a monk who was very devoted to the Buddha. He

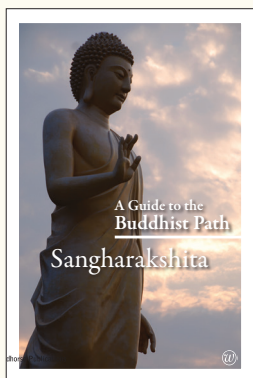


was fascinated by the appearance and the personality of the Buddha, so much so that he would spend all his time just sitting and looking at the Buddha. He didn't want a teaching; he didn't have any questions to ask; he just wanted to look at the Buddha. One day the Buddha called him and said, 'Vakkali, this physical body is not me. If you want to see me, see the Dharma, see the *dharmakaya*, see my true form.'⁴⁶ The same point of view is found in two famous verses of the Diamond Sutra, where the Buddha says to Subhuti:

*Those who by my form [i.e. my physical appearance] did see me,
And those who followed me by voice
Wrong the efforts they engaged in,
Me those people will not see.
From the Dharma should one see the Buddhas,
From the Dharma-bodies comes their guidance.
Yet Dharma's true nature cannot be discerned,
And no one can be conscious of it as an object.*⁴⁷

Most of us, like Vakkali, try to see the Buddha in the wrong way. It is not that we should ignore the *rupakaya*, the physical body, the form body, but we should take it as a symbol of the *dharmakaya*, the true form and the true body – a symbol of the Buddha as he is in his ultimate essence, above and beyond time, in Eternity.





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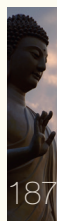
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