

THE PATH OF THE PRATYEKABUDDHA

SECOND EDITION

BY

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PREFACE

I began this search for getting my act together when a friend of ours invited us to a meeting of a group of Nicherin Buddhists. This is the American version of what a twelfth-century monk in Japan came up with for distributing Buddhist thought to the masses.

One of the tenets of the sect is that you have to have faith in the fact that it will work, until it works. The word 'faith' automatically triggers aversion in my thinking. I am inclined to use reason and thought to work on my life, not faith. After all, it was the statement in Episcopal Sunday School that you had to have faith in God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit for it to work miracles in your soul. Me, being the quietly rebellious person that I have been all my life, immediately started asking 'why?' It wasn't long until I was a persona-non-grata and my Sundays were my own again.

That wasn't necessarily good, since that meant that I had a lot of idle time on my hands, and I got into several minor tiffs with neighbors and others. I was a true 'wild child'.

To make a long story short, I continually made my life more complicated than it needed to be because I was continuously asking 'why?' This does not endear you to employers and even close relationships.

Once into the Nicherin group, I sensed that there was more to the picture than the monk was giving out. Even Nicherin himself referred to other Buddhist teachings that he assumed everyone knew. I didn't, and most of the followers don't either.

I started researching the basics of Buddhism and found that it possessed the ways to get answers to questions that I had always had about people and how my mind worked.

Buddhism at its heart isn't a religion but a philosophy. It contains the seeds of how we can make our lives better and how to be a much happier person.

To be fair, most of what the general public perceives about the philosophy is the dogma and image created by

saffron-robed monks beating gongs and drums. Much of it is seen to be chanting mantras and begging for sustenance.

That isn't the philosophy I found. There are many sects of Buddhism for a reason. Various people require different methods of finding what they think is enlightenment. Were it not true, these sects would have died out centuries ago, or never formed in the first place.

The philosophy I found was one of finding out truths, questioning them until I found for myself that they were true, and then advancing on to the next proposed truth. In each case, they had to be questioned, analyzed and found to be correct **FOR ME**. It was a requirement of the philosophy.

I also found that depending on what source you chose to look at, there could be massive discrepancies in what various authors thought the Buddha taught. Winnowing out these biased viewpoints takes some work.

One of the things I have learned over time, is that the closer you can get to the source of the information that you're after, the more accurate that information will be.

I therefore went back to the closest sources I could find, namely the Theraveda sutras. This sect is the original descendant of what Buddha taught and the information and practices are as close to the source as it is possible to get. The Theraveda tradition is classical Buddhism. All other traditions and sects have come from it.

I knew that I was going to have to distill this information for myself, and I accumulated over a hundred texts and sutras that were pertinent. This volume is the result.

I wrote it for me. No other reason. I had to put down on paper (or a computer screen) for myself what I found and understood and make it workable for me.

It meant deciding on how much dogma should be included from any number of Buddhist sects with different viewpoints and practices (if any). It meant trying to put into plain language some concepts that are difficult to understand.

This volume is the result. I hope that you find it as fulfilling as I did to understand how your mind works (or

doesn't) and what to do to make it work better. It has changed my life for the better. I hope it does yours as well.

Patricia Whitney
Eagle, Point, Oregon
November, 2017

INTRODUCTION

What're we doing here?

This book is directed at the serious individual who is not afraid to tangle with their own mind and come out the winner. It does not portend to be a manual for anyone that doesn't want to put in the hard work necessary. If you're just wanting information, then this is not the volume for you.

If you need the dogma, ritual and an object for adoration, this isn't the place for you. It won't satisfy your needs, nor will it do you any good unless you totally understand the basic principle of self-responsibility with no recourse for blame when things go wrong. When you do that, you've eliminated the need for the dogma, ritual and a supernatural entity anyway. We'll get more about this in the first chapter, if you're still chugging along with me.

Be forewarned. Don't get your knickers in a twist if you prefer dogma and protocol, because you won't find that here. Nor will you find a lot of hierarchical thinking or any stringent requirements for either conduct or appearance or anything else. Neither will you find any kind of adulation for anything other than principles laid out in fundamental Buddhism. If any of these aforementioned things are your bag, you'll be disappointed.

It would seem that if you are reading this book, you have a need for something more worthwhile in your life than you currently have. The ideas that follow in this volume may help in that search.

Most of what is presented here does not conflict with any organized religion. It is not my intent to conflict with those institutions in any way. In fact, most of the ideas that will be presented here will reinforce the basic premises of most religions, and will strengthen those concepts.

A major difference is that the emphasis is on the individual, and both the self-reliance and responsibility that each of us has for what we do and how we do it. Reliance on a 'higher authority', while not conflicting with what is presented

here, may coexist within you without conflicting with the material you will work with here.

For most people starting off, mentioning the word 'Buddhist' brings up visions of religion and esoteric concepts - monks involved in self-immolation and similarities with the Hari-Krishnas which all of us have experienced in a major airport at some point.

Nothing could be further from the real truth. Please leave all these preconceived notions right here and now, and approach this with an open mind. The concepts that you will encounter are not religious and call up equivalences more of the 'enlightenment' movement than of any religious tone. They do not involve faith or commitment - except faith that this practice can help you live a better life, and a commitment to achieving that goal.

This volume is not about Buddhism (the religion) - it is about incorporating the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy into our everyday lives and practicing these fundamentals so as to improve that life. As you proceed down this path, you will find that your interactions with others also become smoother and your life will simplify.

I hear you already saying that 'if something sounds too good to be true, it usually is.' Most of the time, that's correct. But in this case, it's a pretty good bet that you'll find some good out of what you learn here.

There are drawbacks, however.

- You only get out of it what you put in.
- There is nobody but you that can make it work for you.
- Gurus are few and far between that won't have an agenda.
- You'll basically be doing this alone.

In 'The Path of the Pratyekabuddha', what I'll try to do is give you some concrete ideas that you can sit down, think about, apply to your daily life and use to get on the road to enlightenment.

I ran across a manuscript on the Internet a while back that summarizes all my feelings about this whole thing in just a few paragraphs. It was written by a Buddhist monk in Thailand, named Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. I quote:

"Buddhism" means "the Teaching of the Enlightened One." A Buddha is an enlightened individual, one who knows the truth about all things, one who knows just what is what, and so is capable of behaving appropriately with respect to all things. Buddhism is a religion based on intelligence, science and knowledge, whose purpose is the destruction of suffering and the source of suffering. All paying of homage to sacred objects by means of performing rites and rituals, making offerings or praying is not Buddhism. The Buddha rejected all this as foolish, ridiculous and unsound. He also rejected the celestial beings, then considered by certain groups to be the creator of things, and the deities supposed to dwell, one in each star in the sky. Thus we find that the Buddha made such statements as these:

"Knowledge, skill and ability are conducive to success and benefit and are auspicious omens, good in their own right regardless of the movements of the heavenly bodies. With the benefits gained from these qualities, one will completely outstrip those foolish people who just sit making their astrological calculations." And: "If the water in rivers (such as the Ganges) could really wash away sins and suffering, then the turtles, crabs, fish and shellfish living in those sacred rivers ought by now to be freed of their sins and sufferings too." And: "If a man could eliminate suffering by making offerings, paying homage and praying, there would be no one subject to suffering left in the world, because anyone at all can pay homage and pray. But since people are still subject to suffering while in the very act of making obeisances, paying homage and performing rites, this is clearly not the way to gain liberation."

To attain liberation, we first have to examine things closely in order to come to know and understand their true nature. Then we have to behave in a way appropriate to that true nature. This is the Buddhist teaching; this we must know and bear in mind. Buddhism has nothing to do with prostrating oneself and deferring to awesome things. It sets no store by rites and ceremonies such as making libations of holy water, or any externals whatsoever, spirits and celestial being included. On the contrary, it depends on reason and insight. Buddhism does not demand conjecture or supposition; it demands that we act in accordance with what our own insight reveals and not take anyone else's word for anything. If someone comes and tells us something, we must not believe him without question. We must listen to his statement and examine it. Then if we find it reasonable, we may accept it provisionally and set about trying to verify it for ourselves. This is a key feature of Buddhism, which distinguishes it sharply from other world religions.¹

¹ Handbook for Mankind; Buddhadasa, Bhikkhu; 'Looking at Buddhism'; 1956; found on the web at <http://www.buddhanet.net/budasa2.htm>

At this point, I must point out that this treatise (this present one that you are reading) is not for everyone. It is aimed at the 'thinking individual' who intellectually can cope with the introspection and application of those findings to alter their mind's operations. This is where the original form of Buddhism was aimed - at the Brahmin elite. You'll understand more about this in a minute.

One of the things that happened in Buddhism was that the original concepts and fundamentals were presented at first as intellectual exercises to the Brahmins of India. It was not intended for the masses, at least not at that point. But the masses found it, heard it, and responded anyway. In the process of trying to make it understandable to the rank and file, it became not only distorted, but it perverted one of the pillars of the philosophy - namely that of no deity. This was not the fault of the monastic orders, but of the people themselves. The masses gradually came to deify not only the Buddha, but also many of his disciples; some Bodhisattvas; and many other incarnations of the Buddha himself.

Buddhism at its root core isn't a religion - it's a philosophy of life that promises a state of mind that is at peace with the universe. Those that approach it as a religion most times lose sight of these basic tenets because they get wound up in the dogma, disciplines and practices. It's far easier to do a groupthink and abide by rules without thinking much about them.

Those sects that do the groupthink with monasteries, monks and such will tell you that they are following the basics of Buddhism - and they are. Buddha himself formed the monastic orders. It's just that the basics in this setting get wrapped in exercises and rituals that detract rather than enhance those basics, because the followers get to believing in the ritual rather than doing the hard stuff of cleaning out the mind. The progression is inevitable.

In another sense, for the vast majority of the population, it was a question of time available. In the case of Buddhism (and most other religions/sects as well), at the time that the

philosophy started, life was pretty much hardscrabble work, just trying to make enough coin of the realm to feed and clothe their family (who were working as well). The people didn't have time for philosophical discourse or learning - or if they did have time, they were too tired to engage. Hence most of the population had to have these principles spoon-fed to them in simplistic terms that they could understand without much education, and in the process came the deification of all the folks we mentioned earlier.

Understanding the Four Noble Truths and the EightFold Path in any depth was probably out of the question, not only from non-understanding, but also from having the time available. The Buddha solved this by doing two things - first by couching the teachings in easy to understand parables that concentrated on one or two points of a teaching at a time, and brought the hearers along slowly so as to be able to grasp more advanced concepts.

Secondly, the Buddha formed a small cadre of monks and nuns, and separated them from the community at large by dress and appearance, as well as poverty. This gave the monks the time and incentive to study and meditate, and probably gave them a little status as well. This was tightly interwoven with the social fabric of the time, which was massively driven by caste and family. By differentiating the monks from the community and making them reliant on alms from that same community, he created a caste of his own. The monks provided the teachings of the Buddha (and their own sect's interpretations of them) to the community. They also provided the ongoing continuity of the teachings to future generations.

You can see where this is going, right? Once we establish this separation, and the community accepts the monks as teachers, we head into the realm of religion since we tend to elevate those with 'mystical knowledge' to almost super-human status. If you doubt this, look at the Dalai Lama, who claims to be a regular mortal, but is deified by millions of Tibetan Buddhists. From this point on, the dogma takes over, the rituals are instituted, and we get into the realm of non-analytical philosophy - wait - not even that. It's more like

unquestioning faith in whatever the people are fed - which is definitely not what Buddhism is supposed to be all about, at least to my way of thinking (nor to the monk quoted earlier).

There was a reason for the religious aspects, however, back in the day. Since Buddhism was mostly an oral tradition, it was necessary to have a cadre of 'storytellers' in order to get the philosophy/religion out to the ordinary type person. This is what the monk's/nun's job was primarily about. With most of the population illiterate, the oral telling of the philosophy was the only way to give the population at large even an inkling of what it was all about.

With the advent of the written word and the modern Internet, however, I think the necessity of having the religious aspects has diminished, except for those to whom the dogma and spectacle give meaning and satisfaction. If they need that, more power to them. But at its fundamental teaching level, it is entirely an independent, individual thing - one that you and only you can do without using much outside help.

One other thing that you'll find in this volume is that I'm not going to dumb down the language to help those with a vocabulary deficit. I may use words that aren't used very often, and if you're vocabulary challenged, I suggest keeping a dictionary handy. Sometimes, I may make up my own verbiage. In truth, I'm torn between making it more accessible to people whose command of the language is not that great and using words that accurately describe what I'm trying to say. I tend to lean in the direction of brevity and accuracy because of the constraints of the printed page, and because I'm simplifying far too much already just to get an entire philosophy jammed into a single volume. I may not be able to do it, in which case there may be follow-on tomes that will be even better than this one for curing insomnia.

I am neither a Buddhist scholar nor a far-eastern language translator nor Southeast Asian historian. I rely on the works of other scholars and translators who are far more acquainted with the 84,000+ volumes of Buddhist lore than I am. What I hope to do is bring to the table is an ability to

distill things into a usable core of ideas that an ordinary human being in the twenty-first century may be able to use in their everyday life. This is not an ego trip for me - if it was, I would be selling these volumes at a profit instead of giving them away. But then, if they are free, are they as valuable to people as if they paid for them? Hmmm – Nah - they're free.

If you extract any understandings and concepts from this, it is most excellent. If you only gain an insight into the fundamentals of Buddhism, it is also excellent. But I suspect that in either case, you'll be rereading this volume and finding nuggets here and there with every read-through. If so, all my effort has been worthwhile.

We approach the subject of fundamental Buddhism from the original teachings of the Buddha, the bedrock Theraveda (Hiniyana) aspects of the practice. It is these aspects that generate the core values and precepts upon which all the others are based and descend from. It is essential for any practitioner of Buddhism to have knowledge of these basics.

One other thing - everything in this entire book is worth exactly what you paid for it - nothing. Nothing, unless you take these principles to heart and use them to guide your insight into your mind, and the conduct of your life. After all, it IS your life we're talking about.

Patricia A. Whitney
Eagle Point, Oregon
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CHAPTER 1

THE PATH OF THE PRATYEKABUDDHA

If you're like me, you many times skip the preface and introductions to books. This is usually because they are self-serving and devoted to thanking various people for help in making the volume possible. That is not true in this case.

If you have skipped these two sections, I strongly urge you to go back and read them. They contain information that you have to consider before getting any further into this practice.

As I stated in the introduction, most of the forms of Buddhism that are group-oriented don't work for me personally. I have neither the time nor patience for a long, drawn-out practice that won't get me much in terms of practical accomplishment within my lifetime. Nor do I want to be held back to the level of the slowest learner. And just chanting to an idol or blindly following the edicts of an order isn't my bag either. It just isn't my way of doing things. I want my enlightenment and I want it NOW! (Just kidding).

However, there is a route in Buddhism for people like me. It's called the Path of the PratyekaBuddha. Here's the common definition(s) of what a PratyekaBuddha is and does ...

Pratyeka Buddha (Pali 'paccekabuddha')

- A solitary Buddha; one who has achieved Awakening through insight into the dependent origination of mind and body. Pratyekabuddhas lead only solitary lives, and they do not teach the Dharma to others nor do they have any desire to do so.
- A 'solitary awakened one'. Sometimes used as a term of reproof, to refer to students who get entangled in personal striving for illumination. One of the characteristic marks of pratyekabuddhas is that they do not teach.

While I obviously don't agree with the part of the definition about teaching, I can understand where it comes

from. As with all religions, more converts means more power and money, and to have someone try to achieve enlightenment (Awakening) outside of the normal routes of practice and theology is usually considered to be a form of heresy, or at the very least a non-productive (and non-profitable) route for the sect.

In addition, if I were true to the definition, I wouldn't be writing this - because it in itself is a form of teaching. As I have stated elsewhere, I am not technically a Buddhist - I am a follower of the practices of the Buddha. To be a true Buddhist requires more than just the practice, in my opinion. To be a 'religious' Buddhist means to me that you have to adhere to the dogma of your particular brand of Buddhism, and practice its version of group-think.

My personal path (and for some others as well) doesn't fit the herd mentality of the dogma and theology crowd, nor does it lead to the veneration of any teacher - just an acceptance and use of the teachings and principles. Far too often, the dogmas and theological canons that grow up around the basic teachings obscures them, and make them difficult if not impossible to find.

In addition, the hierarchy of most sects eventually assumes a gatekeeper role between you and whatever deified teacher happens to be their particular object of veneration. If I were to classify myself, I would have to admit to being a semi-Brahmin (as elitist as that sounds) - they were the original recipients of Buddha's teachings anyway. The Brahmins were the intellectual class of Indian culture when the historical Buddha¹ first began to formulate his teachings. OK, so that sounds elitist - but it is the historical truth.

My path, which I refer to as that of the PratyekaBuddha (minus the negatives of the definition), is one of meditation, insight, introspection, and a **full acceptance** of the basic principles of Buddhism, without the dogma and additional

¹ I refer to the 'historical Buddha' rather than just the Buddha because in Buddhist theology, there have been many incarnations of the Buddha, and the historical Buddha was just one of them. Using the term 'historical Buddha' refers to a specific time in history and significant personage that promulgated the teachings that we will undertake in this volume.

layers of theology that later adherents have put on top of those basics.

In bygone days, a teacher was necessary because of the difficulty of obtaining the material in any other way. The path I'm describing does not require a teacher other than access to the sutras and commentaries (although sometimes it would be nice if you could find a teacher without an agenda of their own).

Basic human nature says that in teaching and passing on what a teacher knows, it is invariably and subliminally altered in subtle ways by their own experiences and views on the subject. Of course, the same could (and will) be said here about this volume. Likewise, if the teacher doesn't truly believe in it, they won't be sincere in their teaching of it. The students always know when the teacher is working by rote recollection and doesn't have their heart in it.

With the advent of the Internet, most of the material that would have been available only from a teacher is a few clicks away on your computer screen.

What this path does require is a complete venue of self-introspection and a healthy dose of skepticism (with emphasis on the introspection part). Everything that you run into, read, or hear must be challenged until you see for yourself that the information and concepts that you are dealing with are actually true; that they apply to you and your life; and that your acceptance of it is both necessary and mandatory if you truly desire to walk this path. This fulfills many of the six precepts of getting a point across (who, what, where, when, how, and why) which are the stock and trade of any writer of non-fiction. The who is you. The what is the information that you need to get there. The where is where you want to get to (in this case, enlightenment). The when is now (as in the 'now' now.) The how is sequentially (or sometimes in a burst of understanding) working on your mind to quiet its outbursts and make it look not only at itself, but also at where you want it to go. The why is somewhat redundant, given that you have chosen to look for enlightenment in the first place.

This path also requires a complete **acceptance of responsibility for everything that you do** as a result of your own volition (actions), since you (and only you) are the only one involved in doing it. Forget fate, being tempted by the devil, or being moved by divine guidance.

Buddhist practice, by definition, does not recognize the existence of any divine entity or creator. But it does not forbid you from believing that while pursuing the practice, either. It is possible to both believe in a supreme being and do meditation to quiet the mind and become enlightened.

But eventually, you will come to the conundrum/paradox that if you do something, there is nobody but you doing it. If you believe in a supreme being directing your life and actions, then you have to accept that you are not being responsible for ALL the actions that you perform in your life. The two ideas are mutually exclusive. Either you are responsible for your actions or your supreme being is. You can't split the baby. It's the same situation that many people find themselves in when it comes to abortion and the death penalty - you can't be for one and against the other without being hypocritical. And hypocrisy isn't allowed here.

In actuality, look around. Nobody's moving your body for you or forcing you to think in any particular way (if they were, you wouldn't be reading this in the first place). Nobody's force-feeding you any mindset. Nobody's forcing you to read this. You may accept those external mindsets as your own, but if you do so without questioning it, you have totally abdicated your responsibility to yourself. You are accepting whatever you are getting verbatim, without any questioning on your part. That won't work here, either.

If you're still with me, let's take a look at what we (you) are going to do on this path.

First, we're going to go into a basic premise of the human mind, probe the depths of the Four Noble Truths, and explore the EightFold Path. Along the way, I'll try to show you some exercises and analogies to prove points, and help you focus the mind on what it is that we're trying to accomplish. It's not

an easy process, and there will be times when you may think that I'm totally wrong - which is where the challenge part of it comes in. If I'm even partially wrong, prove it for yourself and let's have a dialog. You may convince me otherwise. But for you to examine and challenge every part of this practice is essential and required. You must prove to yourself that this truly works, or you won't achieve the results that you seek.

I've called this particular way to enlightenment the '*Path of the PratyekaBuddha*.' That's my adaptation of the Buddhist term for it. But in actuality, each and every one of us has to find our own way of navigating their own path and finding their own way, no matter where you start or what sect of Buddhism you adhere to (if you do).

All I can do is plunk down some signposts and suggest directions for you to investigate. I can't erect mental barbwire fences and reflective signposts in your mind to keep you from making detours or getting blown up in the mental minefields. Actually, that's also part of the process. At least half of getting through this is also finding what **isn't true or doesn't work** for you.

I can't manipulate your mind nor can I say with certainty that any of the things I put forth will work for you. But if you're willing to give this process a try, I think you will find gains beyond your wildest imagination, and happiness that you could never have foreseen. Your path will be your own, and you (and only you) will be the one that marks it out and travels it. I may be on a parallel path a few feet away, but I'm on my path - not yours.

Read on, if you dare ...

CHAPTER 2

A DEFINITION AND THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH

As with all things we have to define our terms up front, or we won't be talking about the same things later on.

Suffering can be defined as physical, mental, or anything that causes you pain of any kind. We like to avoid pain. Pain is not our friend (or so we think). In actuality, pain is a great teacher - it tells us when we screw up and that we need to look at what we're doing, or that there's something amiss in the physical body (or mind, if you're hypochondria-oriented).

But suffering also exists in the mental realm and suppresses happiness. Note that I'm saying that it suppresses happiness.

You see, in actuality, happiness isn't something you gain (although it may seem that way) – in fact the whole concept of happiness actually works backwards. You don't achieve happiness by getting more of it, but by letting it out.

Suffering is actually something you lose, and the end result is the realization of all the happiness you innately possess. Happiness is inherent in all of us. It's there. It always has been and always will be. All you have to do is remove the barriers to being happy so as to see and enjoy it. In Buddhism, it's called the 'Buddha Nature' within us all.

We don't create happiness and serenity, we allow all this other stuff to suppress it, cover it over, and make it appear that happiness isn't present.

In strip mining for coal (with apologies to my ecologically minded friends), to get to the coal seam, you have to remove the rock and dirt above the coal (the overburden) before you can mine it. The amount of coal hasn't decreased, but the obstacles to your getting to it have. The same is true here with removing the overburden of suffering to get at the happiness. Not a great analogy, but you get the point.

If we say that we don't suffer, it is because we are blind to the facts of our own internal condition. Almost everyone suffers. It's a fact. But that suffering is different for every individual and no one can directly relate to another's suffering because we don't have the same set of

experiences or surroundings that they have had in their lives.

The corporate executive who has a fat salary, nice home, fancy cars, and lots of prestige probably doesn't see in person the misery and hardship that they have caused by their layoffs and firings and plant closings. They may discuss it over a martini at the country club, but it doesn't directly affect them for the most part - at least in their conscious thought process. Yet at some level, they have to know that they are responsible for these negative things that affect so many other people. I have found, however, that most people at these levels are totally ignorant of what happens out on their factory floors or are blinded by the opportunity for greater profit. The people affected become numbers, and the personal relevance disappears. Do they suffer?

Moving that plant to China was great for the company and their personal bottom line, but it devastated that town in Georgia and bankrupted the workers that lived there. The suffering for this corporate individual may come later when either their karma kicks in, or when some morning they have a flash of insight while looking into the mirror and wonder "why is all this stuff that I have accumulated not making me happy?" Or it may not come at all in this lifetime. Go figure.

Suffering is the basis for the First Noble Truth.

"All is suffering" or "There is suffering."¹

First, we have to remember that all these sutras and quotations suffered massive translations between Pali to Sanskrit to Chinese to Japanese - and so on. Meanings and even direct quotes get lost or mangled. It's sometimes difficult to dig thru the mass of verbiage and find the truth of the matter. It's somewhat akin to going back to the Dead Sea Scrolls to figure out what early Christianity was all about. Add the Gnostic texts to the mix, and you've got enough disparate material to really force an examination of what you believe and why you believe it. To make things even more complex, mix in the social norms and political interactions of the time, and it's almost impossible to glean the nuggets of truth from the mass of information.

A classic example are the prohibitions on conduct contained in the Bible within Leviticus. Unless you take (for instance) the situation at the time, and the lack of scientific understanding, the prohibitions against

¹ Alternative translations have it in both vernaculars. Actually, I prefer the latter translation.

eating pork or shellfish don't make much sense. Toxic shellfish and trichinosis are well known today, but to the ancient Palestinians, they would have been mysteries to be prevented by abstention. The same goes for many other of the restrictions contained there. Without the context of the times, they don't make much sense.

The same thing is true of Buddhist teachings. Once again we have to go to the earliest suttas (sutras) for this information. Many of these were the result of the first Council's work, when they actually started writing down the oral tradition.

Some of the happiest people I've ever seen were those with little to nothing in the realm of worldly things. I hear you thinking, "Well, they're just ignorant of how poverty-stricken or deprived their existence is. They don't KNOW how bad off they are." Only one problem - the ignorance is on our part, not theirs. They have learned to handle their situation, and will continue to (at least to their own understanding of it), unless our 'advanced values of civilization' force a different reality upon them - at which point they will become stressed, develop ulcers, and carry briefcases. But I digress ...

The Pali word for suffering is 'dukkha', which also means impermanent, temporal, and changing, which is interesting because suffering for the most part is always changing and morphing from one thing into another, courtesy of our beloved minds.

All is suffering ... There is suffering.

This is the First Noble Truth.

"What? No happiness? Where's the happiness? I have happiness in my life. I have everything I ever wanted. I'm not suffering." If you have said these things (which, incidentally, I have done many times myself), then you may not need to proceed quite yet. But if there is even the slightest hint that there may be more to your life than what you perceive it to be or if your happiness has gaps in it, then you should be open to thinking about this.

I actually prefer the second translation ("There is suffering"), because I still have trouble with the concept that 'ALL' is suffering. There are some things in life that do not entail suffering (at least as far as I can tell through my limited vision) and to say that 'ALL' is suffering

is a bit of an overreach for me. So I'll stick with 'There is suffering.'

Angst, despair, apathy, anger, lust - these are all synonyms for the kind of suffering that the Buddha was talking about for the most part. Milder forms can be disappointment, unfulfilled lust or any number of things like that. Note that we do not use the statement that 'suffering is anger' or whatever else we want to assign to it. As you will shortly see, all these definitions as to what suffering is, are secondary to the fact that suffering is suffering. Period.

OK, so is it any clearer yet?

Not, huh.

Let's try again.

Suffering is not only physical. While sickness, accident or old age can cause us physical pain, the Buddhist definition goes much further to include the mental aspects. It looks at the fact that I am not completely satisfied with my life and that there is something lacking in the basic way that I'm living. This can be in the form of a subtle uneasiness in dealing with myself and what I'm doing and thinking - all the way up to the intense moral crisis of 'What have I done?' when severe problems kick in. It can be the severe emotional trauma of a broken relationship, or the ethical twinges of money versus people in the corporate world. It can be the emotionally devastating crisis of an unfulfilled addiction. It can be a humiliating defeat in the political realm and the loss of 'face' with its demoralizing aftermath.

In any case, it's suffering. Notice the distinct lack of "What are **they** doing to me?" in these instances (even though that's said far too often). It is happening to us, after all - nobody else. This is the first inkling of the individual responsibility that we eventually will have to achieve.

We all have suffering, unless we've achieved enlightenment. Um - not the Werner Erhardt / EST kind of enlightenment, by the way. The enlightenment that we're talking about is the liberation **of** ourselves **from** ourselves (in spite of the fact that Werner copped that phrase and corrupted it).

It is freedom from all the baggage that we're carrying. It's freedom from the mind rot that we've accumulated over a lifetime of experiences,

ideas, thoughts, precepts, concepts and knowledge (not wisdom).

I hear you saying to yourself, "I won't be me if I manage to eliminate all that stuff. What would I become if I shed all those memories and experiences?" Actually, all of that stuff will still be there - it just doesn't force its way into your equation for action. You can still use them all if you wish, but you won't be doing it to your detriment (hopefully).

If I can cut through that clutter and allow me to be myself and not what I think I ought to be, I can then achieve happiness. 'Achieve' isn't the right word - ummmmm - OK - we can then begin to let that happiness out. Wait - that's not right either. The happiness is there, we just have to eliminate the layers of dreck that prevent us from achieving it and it seeing the light of day. We can eliminate the suffering that we cause ourselves and be truly happy.

So is suffering a little clearer now? All suffering is actually internal, by the way. Even physical pain can be controlled - ask any Yogi lying on a bed of nails or doing some other 'mind over matter' exercise. (It isn't a trick, by the way.) If you don't believe this, check out the firewalkers of the South Pacific and southeast Asia. They claim that ANYONE can do this, and have proven that it can be done through mental preparation. So much for externally-caused suffering!

At it's root, suffering is all based on our perceptions of reality and how our mind conditions those perceptions before we even become aware of it. 'I feel your pain' doesn't actually exist in this realm. Well - in an enlightened compassionate sense it somewhat does, but we'll get to that later.

So you suffer. You're hurt because you didn't get that job. You're angry because somebody cut you off in traffic. You're incensed that the store clerk overcharged you. You're agonizing over the loss of a loved one. You're pissed because the weather is aggravating your arthritis. All these are suffering of one kind or another.

But actually all this suffering is conditioned by your mind - even the physical kind.

It doesn't matter that you found a better job eventually. You're still hurt.

It doesn't matter that you weren't involved in that accident which the idiot that cut you off caused five minutes later. You're still angry.

It doesn't matter that the clerk overlooked that item on the bottom of the cart that more than made up the difference on the overcharge. You're still incensed.

It doesn't matter that you found someone new to love. You still hurt over the original loss.

It doesn't matter that it's a beautiful fall day and the colors of the turning leaves are gorgeous. You're still pissed that you have to rake the yard, your arthritis is hurting at some physical level and you can't appreciate the beauty of nature around you.

Simply said, suffering is anything (and everything) that serves to cover up your innate happiness (commonly referred to as your Buddha Nature), and is, in almost all respects, caused **by you to you**. The trick (which the Buddha teaches) is to recognize this and to kick it out of your mental processes, which in turn will elevate your happiness level (or reduce your unhappiness quotient, if you prefer).

There's a physics experiment with balloons that is somewhat appropriate here. If you blow up a balloon to a given size, then tie off the neck, the only way that you can increase the size of the balloon is to either increase the air inside the balloon, or reduce the pressure of the air surrounding it. In this case, since the balloon is tied off and can't change, the only option is to reduce the pressure on the outside somehow.

Substitute your happiness for the balloon and suffering for the surrounding air, and it becomes clear that to increase the happiness factor, you have to reduce the pressure on it, which is the reduction of suffering. Of course, the end result of lowering the pressure a lot is the explosion of the balloon - which in this case happens to be the infinite expansion of the mind into a state of nirvana or enlightenment.

"Herein endeth the lesson ..." (Shades of my Episcopal upbringing.)

So this is all suffering. Where does it come from? Why do we do it to ourselves? How can we eliminate it? Walk with me, grasshopper, and we shall attempt to have you answer your own questions ...

CHAPTER THREE

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH

Having ‘suffered’ through the last chapter about suffering, you’re probably wondering where we're going with this. Here's where ...

Noble Truth Number Two:

Suffering is the result of desire (Theraveda definition) and/or ignorance (Mahayana definition).¹

Desire here is a much broader definition than we normally consider it to be in Western thought. Most people think of desire as ‘I want it’ or ‘I’ve got to have it’, whether it be the latest widget, that new flashy car, the coolest in shoe styles, or something that will impress the neighbors. In the Buddhist definition, we expand it to include the reaction to loss, which in reality is the same thing. We lose something, and we want (desire) it back!

Desire in this context also extends to intangibles such as lust and greed and all that dreck. While we see that it applies a lot to ‘things’, it also encompasses personal relationships and non-physical things such as social status, tribal/group acceptance, and financial security. Note that almost all of these have to do with external influences. And they are ALL ‘desires’ - maybe not for physical things, but desires, nonetheless.

The other half of this equation is ignorance. Ignorance is not the normal definition here, either. Ignorance in the western world is pretty much a narrow definition of “not knowing about something.” Note that it is different than not being able to comprehend or learn. In the Buddhist sense, you may have known what you did, but you were ignorant of the

¹ Theraveda is the original sect from which all others eventually sprang. Mahayana evolved later and contains a lot of teachings that expanded the reach of Buddhist thought.

fact that it wasn't the appropriate thing to do or you were ignorant of the right way to go about it or of its consequences.

"Ignorance of the law is no excuse" as you're being jailed for violating some obscure town ordinance that nobody ever publicized is one example. But the end result of ignorance is still pain and suffering.

'Ignorance' in Buddhist terms becomes much broader. It encompasses an entire spectrum of 'not knowing' to include everything from producing technology that kills without considering the consequences, to lacking compassion for your enemy. If we do not see the results of our actions, we're ignorant.

Put another way, we are ignorant of how to NOT make ourselves suffer. "WHAK!!!" Pay attention - make sure you understand that last phrase. It means that ignorance really is one of the parents of suffering, along with desire._

Desire and ignorance are actually related. Desire is the driving force for many (if not most) actions that we take. Addiction is desire on steroids. Ignorance is the other parent, in that it causes us to take actions without thinking about or understanding the results - either karmic or actual.

Ignorance (primarily of the four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path) causes us to act in ways that cause us pain either in the 'now' or in the future. Either we suffer because we don't know better, or we don't know better so we suffer. Take your choice.

Many of the scientists who developed the atomic bomb during WW2 later expressed regrets at having made it into a weapon of mass destruction. Imbued with patriotism or national fervor at the time, they blinded themselves to the longer-term results. Robert Oppenheimer, at the Trinity test in 1945 of the first atomic weapon, quoted from the BhatvaGida, "I have become death". Many others (including Albert Einstein) urged President Truman not to use the weapon. They knew that the results of their research would be catastrophic, but most went ahead with the project anyway.

Most of us will never have the opportunity to cause as much suffering as was caused by nuclear weapons in 1945

and its aftermath even to the present day. However, all of us have the ability to cause relatively massive destruction to ourselves (and others) through both desire and ignorance.

Suffering is the result of both the desire and ignorance that clouds our thinking about the real world. You may not think that you're in that position and that you have a clear view of what's outside your eyeballs. But once you start on this journey, your ego in that respect will suffer immensely when you have to recant that theory. It's actually you that is causing your own suffering, not anything external! You'll see.

So it probably isn't clear yet exactly what suffering, desire and ignorance really are. Or your mind is working overtime to say to you that "I'm not suffering, nor am I ignorant. My desires are for the most part fulfilled. I possess a PhD in astrophysics (or music or whatever), therefore I'm not ignorant." I must at this point gently remind you that **knowledge is not wisdom**, my friend, and to be awesomely savvy in something is not necessarily knowing how to use that knowledge in the right way. Just because I can genetically mutate a virus that will kill millions of people, doesn't mean that I **should** do that development.

Lets see ... how can I make this a little clearer?

We'll get into the eightfold path a little later in the program, but in the Right Speech part of the Path, lying is defined as one of the greater no-no's of the path. Now, if we're ignorant of that precept, it does not change the negative results of our speaking a lie as if it were the truth. We still pay the price for the lie. Did we know it to be a lie? Maybe - maybe not. But that action caused us the pain/suffering. Not as much as if we did it out of ignorance instead of doing it deliberately, but still, the pain results.

Going back to basics, it is we/us/ourselves that cause all the damage to we/us/ourselves. **There is no way that we can absolve ourselves of this responsibility. 'They' (or 'God' or whoever) are NOT doing it to us.**

At this point we always run headlong into the situation where the person apparently has absolutely no control over the situation. This is where the person has no voluntary control of what happens – or appears not to have that control.

The classic example of this is where the woman gets raped in the dimly lit outlying parking lot of the mall late at night. Someone she didn't know attacked her, and she had no idea it was coming.

Her defenders will say it wasn't her fault in any way, shape, or form. She had no control over the situation at that point and couldn't have foreseen the event. The same could be said for an auto accident that wasn't their fault, or being hit with a tornado.

Buddhists would say conversely that she should have known the risk, and taken action to mitigate it. She could have gotten someone from the store to walk her out to her car, or waited until there was someone else around, or done her business during the day, or carried Mace or a concealed weapon. Any single one of these decision points would have altered or prevented the eventual outcome. Fate has nothing to do with it. We do. If there is a perceived risk, we are responsible for mitigating that risk. That's just a 'what's so.'

I know that there are those that will violently disagree with the preceding paragraph. "You're blaming the victim!" Now wait a minute before you go off the deep end.

The auto accident might have been prevented if a little more diligence and situational awareness had been present. The tornado is an 'act of God', and while there is no avoiding its destruction, the construction of a 'safe room' or not living in that part of the country could mitigate the risk.

To you I would ask the question: 'If I accept totally the idea of personal responsibility for all my voluntary thoughts and actions, can I in good conscience accept that I can become a victim?' The answer is that, again, by evaluating the risk, you can mitigate the result. However, if the situation was the direct (or even indirect) result of my own actions, then I can never assume the mantle of victim.

Victimhood implies that someone or something else is doing something to me against my will. But you have to be

completely free of voluntary action and thought in regards to it, otherwise you are complicit in the situation. This leads to your having to define where the line is on your responsibility for yourself in these situations (which cannot be accurately drawn and leads to all kinds of mental shenanigans).

We can't go much further without addressing the whole question of risk.

Risk and responsibility go hand in glove. When it finally becomes clear to you that you are responsible for everything that happens to you, you get a lot more sensitive to the risks you take.

The daredevil who tries to jump nine school busses on a powered tricycle is taking a pretty large risk of both physical failure (a trip to the hospital or the morgue) and/or the failure expressed by the crowd ("Yer an idiot!!!") You (my reader), on the other hand, take equally as great a risk every time you head to the store in the family car, although the traffic regulations you abide by mitigate that risk significantly (most of the time).

In both cases, the risk is either avoidable or manageable. The daredevil wears a protective suit and the tricycle has a roll cage, or he doesn't jump. You strap the kids into their safety seats, click your seatbelt, and make sure the airbag light is out before you leave the driveway. Any one of your actions decreases the risk, but can never eliminate it.

As I said, risk and responsibility go hand in hand. Think about it.

Regardless of whether you understand the consequences of your actions (or inactions) or not, you're still responsible for them - you took the risk. If you do something (or don't do something), you and only you are responsible for the result. By the way, consciously not acting and allowing a problem to manifest is equally risky. Again, however, you probably think I digress - this apparently has nothing to do with desire or ignorance. Or does it?

What happens to us in this lifetime is mainly up to us, excepting that which we have no voluntary involvement in.

If any of you are thinking of exercising your right to stop reading and put this manuscript in the garbage bin or the fireplace, just bear with me a little longer.

It is our desires and ignorance that generate the responses to both the natural world through our senses, and our perceived world through our minds.

If we perceive something, we also get all the dreck that our mind applies to it. By the time that perception gets to our consciousness, our mind has added connotations, biases, risk-assessments, and prior-similars, just to name a few. It now has a whole host of other things hanging off of it like a combat camouflage ('gillie') suit. It can totally disguise the actual thing that was perceived and cause much grief. It can also provoke an action that furthers the chain. The person (read underlying desire) is still inside the suit, but is unrecognizable to the untrained eye. And, since snipers in warfare are the closest analogy to this idea, the un-recognized mind-krud in camo will do just as much damage to us as the sniper in hiding on the battlefield.

Likewise, if we consciously act without understanding the consequences (ignorance), our reaction to that action likewise gets filtered through our perceptions, biases, and whatever else the mind can throw into the meat grinder. By the time it comes to a conscious level, it may not even remotely resemble the actual input/situation and cause further reaction and/or pain and suffering.

Our minds are incredibly adept at rationalizing and revamping things to correspond to what it thinks you (the mind's operator) are supposed to be and/or do. Note here that we keep referring to the mind as a separate entity from us. Why? Because it is. Now there's a great explanation, huh? But it really is!

It's our filter, processor and gatekeeper of our senses. **It isn't really us.** The mind is trained to look outward and we most often tend to think of it as who we are rather than what we really are inside.

In order to get this idea of the mind being separate from 'us', we have to tentatively accept the concept that we have a

mind and we have 'us' (two separate entities). The mind is what stores knowledge (or doesn't) and filters what we perceive (much of it subliminally). The problem occurs for us (the person operating the mind) when we realize that it's all housed in the same three pounds of jelly called the brain.

But if you recall from high school biology (I know, that hurts), that there are three known parts of the brain - the autonomous part that controls all the housekeeping functions and keeps the body alive; the reptilian part that controls muscular coordination, posture and balance; and the higher brain that does all the cognitive stuff like processing and conceptualizing, 'thinking' and directing action.

I would propose that there is a fourth area of the brain that supervises (in a sense) the other three, and in most cases, has allowed the cognitive brain part to take over that supervisory function. It's like the president of a company sitting back and watching middle management do whatever they want, basically running amok without direction. This leads to an out-of-control situation that, if it doesn't doom the company, surely impedes it severely. This fourth sector of the brain may indeed be 'us'.

It knows things like basic right and wrong, the right things to do, and what makes us happy. These get clouded over when the mind takes control, so that we no longer know what is 'us' (that supervisory part). This invariably leads us to a question of what 'us' consists of, and how it 'knows' this stuff.

I don't know, quite frankly. But I know that I don't know, and I suspect at that supervisory level, that there is the company president (me) that is trying to gain control of the company like I was supposed to be doing all along. From now on, by the way, that supervisory functional part will be 'me', 'you' or 'us', and the mind will be just 'the mind'.

It is only through constant effort that the mind can be either quieted or at least sidetracked so that while it may still yammer a lot, that yammering is just out there - not affecting your making decisions and generating actions.

How do we eliminate suffering and ignorance? That is the subject of the Third Noble Truth, which, incidentally, is the next chapter's subject as well. Hey, doo-doo occurs ... or to be more polite, manure manifests.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH

... which is:

‘Suffering can be eliminated by eliminating desire and ignorance.’

You might think that the third Noble Truth is nothing more than a logical progression stemming from the second one. If **‘Suffering is caused by desire and ignorance’**, then it might seem that it logically follows that **‘Suffering can be eliminated by eliminating desire and ignorance.’**

This may sound much like the old ‘Hee-haw’ shtick of the man going to the doctor and complaining ‘Doc, it hurts when I do this (action)’ - the doctor then whacks him with a rubber chicken and says ‘Well, don’t do that!’

Most people today will immediately see that if you are being hurt by desire and ignorance, then if you do away with desire and ignorance, you will cease to be hurt. (Cue the rubber chicken.)

As with most things in Buddhism, the simplest statements are probably the most complex and hardest to grasp. There’s more to this than a casual observation will show.

‘Suffering can be eliminated by eliminating desire and ignorance.’

It would be oh so easy to dismiss this as a logical inversion and move on, but we would be doing ourselves a disservice if we did so.

Why did Buddha find it necessary to include what seems to be such a logical progression that it would seem that anyone with any sense at all would see it?

Much of our daily life in this day and age is mundane and rote action. We get up, feed the kids, go to work, go home,

feed the kids, and go to bed. We don't think about such things as desire, ignorance and all that they entail.

If we go retro and try to imagine people in the fifth century BC (or BCE if you're a purist), you would find that even existing was a hardscrabble life. From waking to sleeping, it was a grind. People existed by farming or making basic things, and didn't have the time to waste on esoterics. They would probably not have made the connection that if you have cause A making result B, then eliminating A would make B go away.

Remember that Aristotle's "Logic" contained many ideas like this at about the same time in Greece. If Aristotle felt it necessary to define logic at this basic level, then it is 'logical' to assume that Buddha understood the same principles of human nature in terms of how to explain this concept.

Most of us never think of what causes our 'suffering'. We just attribute it to 'this' or 'that' and keep going. Unless, of course, it's someone (or something) else that's doing it to us, and then "we're going to get that SOB" or "I must have really pissed God off!"

We almost never attribute it to anything we're doing, nor want to take responsibility for it - particularly if it's bad news.

But if we accept the Second Noble Truth (that what's happening to us is because we possess ignorance and desire), we equally have to accept the logical progression of eliminating them to eliminate the suffering. Of course, if we aren't suffering, then there's no need to eliminate desire and ignorance, right? Right!

Moving right along ...

We still need to look even deeper into what Buddha is saying here, however. The first Three Noble Truths may seem to form a logical progression, and indeed they do. But in a very profound way, if you don't accept and understand the first or second or third one, then the entire line of reasoning falls.

This entire line of reasoning never explicitly states the underlying principle that you invariably have to come to grips

with - that of your individual responsibility for everything that happens to you or that you do as a result of your voluntary actions. Without this, all else is null and void.

Even if you accept that 'All is suffering', many people will try to assign external blame for it. Humans almost invariably try to find causes for their misery outside of themselves. It can be through belief in a higher power, or a mistrust of human nature, or whatever gives them cover so as to not be responsible. To them, it is usually never 'their fault'. Why is this?

It could be that religious dogma enters into it, in that if I muck things up and it's my fault, I may not earn salvation and God will be pissed at me. However, if it isn't my fault, Allah will forgive me and I'll go to heaven with my 47 virgins and live happily ever after. It's all in the perspective.

If I can assign external blame for my own voluntary actions, it means that I don't have to take responsibility for what happens to me. Many religions absolve their adherents from this responsibility and thus it becomes 'God made me do it', or 'It's God's will.' Or worse, I can go to confession and 'God will forgive me for this and I don't have to feel guilty any more.' It is now externalized, and no longer my fault.

I witnessed this first hand back in the early '60's in New Mexico. About thirty miles north of where I was going to college, there was a sleepy town populated with Spanish-speaking people who were overwhelmingly Catholic. They had lived there since the sixteenth century and were old-school, descended from Coronado's Castilian Spaniards. It was a well-known fact that the only time that the State Police officer stationed there could take vacation was during Lent. Then, once Easter hit, they had to send in two more officers for two weeks to tamp down the violence and drunkenness. It seems that the predominant religious practices served to suppress the natural tendencies towards rowdiness during Lent, and then took the lid off, once Easter passed by. 'God says behave during Lent, and it's all OK afterward.' You gotta wonder.

If I accept the Second Noble Truth even a smidge, I have to take at least some responsibility for my suffering. And once that door is open, the camel's nose is under the tent and all hell will break loose (mixed metaphors intended.)

If I accept the Second Noble Truth, then the Third Noble Truth inexorably follows. It's only logical. And Buddhism is, if nothing else, impeccably logical (most of the time).

This progression means that we have to think about what those desires are that caused my suffering, and what that ignorance could be that makes me hurt. We start to think about why we desire things, and start probing in the muck of the mind to find what it's doing in terms of hiding stuff it thinks we don't want or need to know. At this point, the trumpets of attack start sounding and the battle is joined - or not, in which case we continue blithely on our way.

That battle plan is what the Fourth Noble Truth is all about. It holds the key to the kingdom of 'us'. It's next.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

The first two of the Four Noble Truths line out both why we're unhappy, and the root cause(s) of our unhappiness and suffering. The Third Noble Truth points specifically to these causes and (in a very general sense) how to deal with them.

The Fourth Noble Truth is as simple in written form as the other three:

The Noble Eight-fold Path can eliminate desire (and dispel ignorance).

As is so true of Buddhist thought, it is remarkably simple, yet incredibly complex. Taken as a whole, the Four Noble Truths carry the seeds of enlightenment, from which germinates not only the Noble EightFold Path, but also an entire spectrum of schools, Buddhist theologies, and interpretations.

The Noble EightFold Path is the Theravedan way of looking at and expanding the Four Noble Truths. Zen doesn't teach it, nor does Pure Land or Nichiren. What they have done in its place is to develop ways of either shortcutting the process or totally ignoring it as unnecessary. Zen, in fact, mandates that its followers not take any writings, ideas or anything else for anything but side dishes to a main course of quieting the mind through meditation, mental exercise, and discipline.

To my way of thinking, however, just quieting the mind is not quite enough. If that's all you do, then the stuff that causes you the suffering isn't eliminated, just suppressed – waiting for that unguarded moment when the mind isn't quiet to reach up out of the swamp and remind you that you haven't taken care of business quite yet.

For me, while I'm not a process person for the most part, my feeling is that if you don't have a roadmap of how to get to where you want to go, shortcuts and byways can become traps that prevent you from ever getting there, or indeed sidetrack

you entirely. Of course there's always the occasional traveler that actually got to where they were going by using them, but they're probably the exception and not the rule.

I'm also a believer in going back to as close to the source as you possibly can get for the unvarnished/unaltered/uninterpreted version of what you're trying to find out. As I have found out through a lifetime of technical and scientific experience, there is much to be lost by translation and interpretation.

The Pali Canon is the earliest of the teachings of the Buddha. It is the root from which all the other schools emerged and flourished. It is also the most detailed and earliest school, having been compiled from those closest to Buddha and meticulously preserved through the centuries.

Here's the Theravada process in a nutshell:

The Theravada form of Buddhism is dominant in southern Asia, especially in Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. For this reason it is sometimes known as "Southern Buddhism."

Theravada means "The Way of the Elders" in Pali, reflecting the Theravadins' belief that they most closely follow the original beliefs and practices of the Buddha and the early monastic Elders.

The authoritative text for Theravadins is the Pali Canon, an early Indian collection of the Buddha's teachings. The later Mahayana sutras are not recognized.

The purpose of life for the Theravedan is to become an Arahāt, a perfected saint who has achieved nirvana and will not be reborn again. As a result, Southern Buddhism tends to be more monastic, strict and world-renouncing than its Northern counterpart, and its approach is more philosophical than religious.

There are four stages to becoming an Arahāt:

Sotapanna ("stream-enterer") - a convert, attained by overcoming false beliefs
Sakadagamin ("once-returner") - one who will only be reborn once more, attained by diminishing lust, hatred and illusion
Anagamin ("never-returner") - one who will be reborn in heaven, where he or she will become an Arahat
Arahat ("worthy one") - one who has attained perfect enlightenment and will never be reborn

Because of this focus on personal attainment and its requirement that one must renounce the world to achieve salvation, Mahayana Buddhists refer to Theravada Buddhism as the "Lesser Vehicle" (Hinayana).

In Theravada, it is thought to be highly unlikely, even impossible, that a layperson can achieve liberation. Because Mahayana disagrees, it regards itself as providing a "Greater Vehicle" to liberation, in which more people can participate.¹

Southern Buddhism, if you hadn't gathered it, is basically Theravada Buddhism, while Northern Buddhism (practiced primarily in China, Japan and Korea), is the Mahayana version. They seldom agree on much, yet stem from the same root. Think Christianity with Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox branches. We also have to acknowledge the roots of Aceticism, Hinduism and Jainism in the early Buddhist concepts - 'Arahat' is one of those inherited ideas.

The idea of the Pratyekabuddha doesn't enter into the Theravadan practice to my knowledge, which is leading me to look again at the whole idea of the EightFold Path from a different viewpoint. It is my contention that the EightFold Path is great as a guide, but no amount of monastic life and dedication will substitute for the understanding and use of the Path in our daily lives, and for the introspection and meditation that using it brings to us. If we apply the EightFold Path as the Buddha describes it (worked over slightly for the modern age), I am firmly convinced that we can achieve Arahat

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or Bodhisattva status (read enlightenment) in a single lifetime. Even Buddha admits that this is possible in the later Mahayana Lotus Sutra.

If you hadn't gathered this yet, I'm not a great fan of any of the more organized forms of Buddhism, and even less of other religions and cults. Invariably, the more organized and hierarchical an organization gets, the more it becomes interested in its own survival and less interested in providing the basic service that it was originally tasked with. The organization becomes bureaucratic and unwieldy, and the rules become stiff and unyielding.

Now don't get me wrong. Each Buddhist school/sect has its adherents that require the type of discipline or teaching that it provides for them. If it didn't, then the sect would have disappeared long ago through attrition. And we can never forget the value of the monastic tradition, without which we would have not had the sutras or the teachings at all. That goes for almost any religion that survived the Dark Ages in Europe as well.

Buddhism wouldn't have survived to this day if it didn't have solid roots of practice that worked. For the majority of people, the plethora of Mahayana schools and sects work for their adherents, since they don't emphasize the total self-responsibility that the Pali Canon and Theravadans require. But for me, the monastic emphasis and the basic principle that one cannot achieve Arahant status within a single lifetime - not to mention working through the hierarchy, makes Theravada equally unappealing as a dogma, while the basics are still totally valid.

Another thing to remember throughout all the study of Buddhism is that of his audience at the time. Most people didn't read or write. Much of the verbal language was probably limited to things that affected their daily lives, and didn't deal extensively with esoteric mental concepts - particularly those of dealing with the mind. There are those that assert that much of today's audience is still in the same state of ignorance and semi-illiteracy. It's possible.

The limited abilities of the audience would require the use of parables, stories and allegories in order to get single points across - many times having to use multiples of those vehicles so as to get a single complex principle understood.

The Fourth Noble Truth is also intertwined with The EightFold Path, in that a full understanding of the Four Noble Truths is necessary for the EightFold Path to really take hold and work within our minds.

The EightFold Path lays out an interrelated roadmap to enlightenment. What we'll do from now on is to look at each element of the EightFold Path, and see how we can enhance its ideas within our own existences.

In the next chapter, we'll look at an overview of the EightFold Path, and then, in subsequent chapters, examine in detail the various parts of the Path while passing on a few mental exercises to allow fuller understanding and adherence to its principles. We'll also try to show the interrelations between the various parts of the EightFold Path - one to another.

I am trying to make this as painless as possible, but any introspection of the mind and spirit is bound to hurt when the realizations of how we've suffered because of our own actions and thoughts come to the surface and are seen - many for the first time. We are also not requiring a teacher for you to gain these understandings. Just applying the understanding that you will gain through this Path of the Pratyekabuddha is all that is necessary. Your spirit and mind will do the rest.

CHAPTER SIX

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Any overview of anything must be vague and non-detailed by definition. No overview, as such, will provide much in the way of detailed insight about any single part of its scope. The same is true here.

When we start looking at the EightFold Path, it seems a daunting exercise, because of its interlocking nature.

An analogy might be of looking at a thing called a continuous feedback loop, where a mechanical/electronic controller exercises control of a mechanical device. The device, in turn returns information back to the controller via some type of sensor. The controller then uses that data to alter how the device operates. This is a continuous process, and any break in the loop will destroy the continuity of the process and alter the final product. The only way to work on and maintain these loops is to examine each part without disconnecting it from the rest of the system.

This is the approach that we will take with the EightFold Path. We'll examine each element in turn, but also look at the linkages between that individual element and the rest of the Path's parts, thus never eliminating the interlocking nature of the entire structure.

The parts of the EightFold Path are as follows:

- **Right view,**
- **Right resolve,**
- **Right speech,**
- **Right action,**
- **Right livelihood,**
- **Right effort,**
- **Right mindfulness,**
- **Right concentration.**

“Right View” is both a starting point and an ending point for our analysis of the EightFold Path. It serves as the initial vantage point of what we want to accomplish and where we want to go. As we go further in practicing the Path it becomes our guide as to whether we are straying from the path that we have set, through applying various principles to check both our progress and our course. Eventually it also comes to mean that we truly believe in and understand the Four Noble Truths, using them as guideposts to travel further.

“Right Resolve/Intention” is the process of focusing our attention and intention so as to amplify the other factors of the Path. It allows us to use intention vs. where we are to see if we are holding to our intended goal of enlightenment. It serves to limit our deviations from this course so as to expedite our progress.

“Right Speech” is more than just politically correct verbiage. In the context of the EightFold Path, it involves far more than just the words - it takes into account the context, the timing, the underlying reason for the words you are speaking, and the effect that the speech/writings/verbiage will have on those that encounter it.

“Right Action” again involves far more than just the action itself. It requires us to look at the reasons behind the action, the effect of the action, and what path we took to generate it. This applies to whether we actually implement the action, or just think about it. There are also certain negative actions that are highly discouraged, and their positive counterparts that are equally encouraged.

“Right Livelihood” takes up the issue of what we do as contributors within the community or society. It examines what jobs and careers are good for both the community and us, and why that is so, not to mention that it comports with the principles laid down in “Right Action”.

“Right Effort” looks at funding the Path with the energy to accomplish what we have set out to do. If we don’t provide the energy to do what is required, all the Right Intent in the cosmos won’t help us along.

“Right Mindfulness” shows us how to quiet the mind and accept only sensory input that does not possess all the overburden of preconceived notions and biases. We see things as they are, not as what we wish them to be.

“Right Concentration” is more rightly called “Singularity Focus”. It allows us to zero in on what we’re interested in with ever increasing narrowness of view, looking at only that which applies to what we’re doing or thinking.

I'm sure that these vague definitions are doing more to confuse you than clarify things at this point. These are **VERY** simplified descriptions of each segment of the EightFold Path. Each will become clearer in turn and I'll try to show you how each section applies and interlocks with the other parts to provide you with a unified whole. The singular whole that you wind up with will become ever clearer with practice. When you use these tools to examine each and every facet of what your mind is providing you, you'll frequently find that you're discarding those things provided by the mind that do not apply or apply incorrectly.

Buddha describes the EightFold Path as the ‘Middle Way.’ Buddha encountered many extremes in the existing religions of his day, from total sensual immersion of all kinds to the extreme asceticism of denying the body any pleasures at all, including food. What the Buddha discovered was that both total denial or total immersion left the body and mind unable to support the person and thus denied the individual any chance of ever achieving enlightenment or even basic serenity. The EightFold Path is that balance point between these two extremes of life - thus the ‘Middle Way’.

The communal monastic life of having nothing of your own focuses the mind. In actuality, the monastics are neither

ascetic in the extreme nor are they exposed to sensualities to the maximum - therefore they may indeed (for them) be following a 'Middle Way.'

I prefer to look at it from a more personal vantage point, which perhaps allows me a broader overlook and acceptance of my own total personal responsibility. Not being swept up in ceremony and rigorous schedule would seem to be a more realistic path to enlightenment than the abdication of my will to a lockstep ritualistic environment. In fact, the Buddha actually says not to become involved in ritual and ceremony, as it tends to deify both the teachings and the original teacher. In addition, the minute you do this, you wind up being required to have faith in place of doubting, challenge and verification. Under these circumstances you are not required to prove and accept what you don't understand on your own terms. It is only through that rigorous proof and required introspection that any of this can be achieved.

In addition, the Buddha says:

"Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering' — then you should abandon them...

"When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness' — then you should enter & remain in them."¹

It reminds me somewhat of a commercial that one of the cruise lines runs, where they ridicule the rigid schedule of when and with who you share a dinner table; exercising on a timetable; and how you spend your time in general. The analogy holds - the end result is that you have more choice in how you spend your time to make yourself happy. After all,

¹ Anguttara Nikaya 3.65

you're paying for the cruise. And with the EightFold Path, you're proceeding on your **OWN** journey to serenity and enlightenment.

I cannot stress the fact enough that this entire process is not something that these words on paper can spoonfeed you. If you only take what is here and understand what they say without putting them into practice, you will be wasting your time. All that these words can do is send you in a direction that you can look at and perhaps learn from. They in and of themselves cannot and will not provide you with the way to enlightenment. It is your responsibility both to yourself and your 'Buddha Nature' that you apply these precepts to your life and being. No one else can do it for you. If you run into things that don't seem to be true, then you have to question, research, and introspect them - and if they prove untrue, discard them. It is only through your own work and digging that you will find the way to make this work for you.

If you do keep doing it, you may achieve enlightenment and Nirvana. If you don't, you may be doomed to repeat the cycle of birth, suffering and death for a while yet until you get whacked with a cosmic two-by-four to get with the program.

While it may seem a daunting task to deal with this much material at first encounter, it's like an eight-course meal - each course being delivered in sequence to provide a wonderful overall experience and each part supporting and enhancing the others.

Eat on in great gustatory mental fashion, my friends ...

CHAPTER SEVEN

KARMA

When I started writing this revised and expanded version of the Four Noble Truths and the EightFold Path, I thought I had a pretty good handle on karma. I said it was probably a cosmic savings account that you put stuff into, and stuff came out - but there was something about it that was bugging me pretty badly.

I decided to go back and reread some of my source material, and all of a sudden, I found that in some instances, I didn't really know what I was talking about yet. It was one of those 'oh crap' moments when you discover something that you thought was publically proven wrong. Only this time, the 'oh crap' was that I truly had gaps in what I was trying to write about. I was finding that my knowledge of it was superficial at best in some areas, and conflicted with other parts of my Buddhist knowledge. I then pushed away from the keyboard, thought about it for a while, and I'm back to try it again.

One of the most misunderstood and wrongly-defined terms in the western world is that of "karma' (kamma). It's used for a multitude of meanings ranging from an equivalent of "God's gonna get you for that", to being tied in with full reincarnation. In reality, most people don't have a clue about what the term really means. I didn't either, until I really dug into it for a while. It's so damn easy to get confused when you're playing with some of these concepts.

Karma is the Sanskrit spelling; *kamma* is the Pali version. It originated way back in the dawn of ancient Hindu tradition and migrated pretty much unchanged into the Buddhist lexicon. It's translation literally means 'a voluntary action'. In fact, a lot of the original ideas for Buddhist theory come almost directly from Hindu tradition. Of course, it varies in a number of ways, which will be dealt with as we encounter them.

Buddhist philosophy is the ultimate shrine to individual responsibility. Karma is the end result of the voluntary actions that you are responsible for. Note here that actions don't necessarily have to be overt. In many cases, just thinking about doing them can also make problems for you.

In it's simplest definition, the meaning of karma (kamma) is 'voluntary action'. This is not just 'action' for action's sake. Implicit (and explicit) within the term is the responsibility for that voluntary action. Karma provides that ultimate responsibility. Any volitional (voluntary) action carries with it the karma that the action generated. In the Buddha's words:

"Beings are the owners of their actions, the heirs of their actions; they spring from their actions, are bound to their actions, and are supported by their actions. Whatever deeds they do, good or bad, of those they shall be heirs."¹

William Shakespeare in 'The Tempest' states: "What's past is prologue." The similarities to what the Buddha said are striking. You can never escape your past – no matter how hard you run away, there you are. Whatever your past and its' deeds, it's with you and you have to deal with it. Karma is the manifestation of your past deeds – and you have to accept that.

Reduced to its most fundamental form, Karma is ultimately a mental action. The Buddha makes clear that there is a distinction between voluntary and involuntary action. It is voluntary action that creates the ethical significance and Karma.

"Monks, it is volition that I call action (kamma). Having willed [it], one performs an action through body, speech, or mind."²

The Buddha here makes the inclusive definition that includes physical acts, speech AND mind actions. Why mind? Because if you're thinking it, that can influence other more overt actions as well.

¹Anguttara Nikaya, 3:33

²ibid, 6:63

This at its basic level is karma - or is it?

Previously, I thought that it was akin to a cosmic savings account where it was 'Karma in – Karma out'. While this is true to a point, it's far too simplified. The accumulated balance isn't exactly lumped together as a bank account would be - I would say now it's more of a repository or maybe a warehouse of bits and chunks of karma which reappear when the time is right. No single piece or bit of karma is combined with any other - they're just there in storage. Some may all come out at the same time, but they're still independent of one another.

I also thought that karma was the result of deeds performed during a lifetime that would haunt the individual later on, when the circumstances were right for its emergence. Superficially this is true. Upon examination, this is also far too simplistic.

Buddhism lays down a series of moral imperatives that are used to judge the implications of an action. There are three divisions and ten subdivisions:

Actions by the body:

- Destroying life
- Taking what is not given
- Wrong conduct in regard to sense pleasures

Actions taken by speech:

- False speech
- Slandorous speech
- Harsh speech (vacikamma)
- Idle chatter

Actions taken by thought:

- Covetousness
- Ill will
- Wrong view

We'll take these ten types of action into far greater detail when we get to the three Moral Discipline parts of the EightFold Path (because this is where these actions live and where they are truly defined), but for now, it suffices that they

make up the fundamental moral code that Buddhist thought is based upon. Each of these volitional actions carries a karmic value, depending on its **intent**.

Going further, I personally believe that this moral code is based on an even more fundamental level - one that I call 'personal space'. This idea is founded on the premise that all beings have to have their own personal space - physical, mental, and emotional. If my actions intrude on another being's personal space as **they** define it, then I have violated that space - at least in their eyes. Think about it ...

If I kill, steal, or invade them sexually (sensually), I definitely have invaded their personal space. If I lie to them, willfully separate them from their beliefs, or berate them, I definitely have invaded their personal space. If I covet something of theirs or bear them Ill Will, it will have invaded their space even though it wasn't physical.

I have purposely left Wrong View out at this point because it requires far more investigation than we have time for in this chapter. We will cover it subsequently, I promise.

It seems to me that social interaction at its most fundamental level (starting with primitive man) will dictate that these moral precepts will emerge of their own accord - and they have. It is the inherent idea of personal space that underlies all social interaction. It is intuitive, instinctive and inviolable.

This social interaction generates a basic and almost subliminal moral compass for each and every individual. It may get clouded over or point in a wrong direction, but at least it was there to begin with, and is probably still there under tons of debris or an altered set of perceptions.

Having established the existence of the moral compass, we need to emphasize that there are varieties of volitional action. There are actions that generate 'wholesome' or good karma, and those that generate 'unwholesome' or bad karma. A third variation on the theme is action that generates no karma whatsoever, which is the one that the monasteries and monks/nuns try to generate so as to nullify all volitional karma and generate none.

Bad actions (which generate bad karma) are initiated from three very basic underlying root causes: Greed, Aversion, and Delusion.

Greed is a need for more. It can be a want of things and experiences that is never satisfied, or an ego trip for prestige, power and status.

Aversion is negativity in many forms. Aversion probably isn't the right word here. Maybe actions and thoughts resulting in negative results would be better. It can be rejection of others, or irritation, anger, violence, or a host of other emotional negative responses. Note the emphasis on the emotional value of the negativity.

Delusion is defined as a mental darkness where ignorance and insensitivity block understanding and compassion.

Of course, these three categories are broken down into a multitude of subsets. I'm sure you could come up with a hundred or so without trying too hard. As defined above, these three major categories are understandably unwholesome. They never lead to positive results (at least in terms of happiness and enlightenment).

If we're ever going to succeed in elevating our actions to 'wholesome', then we will have to find counterparts for the three categories of negative actions. It's easy to do. Just turn 'em over.

It's time to acquaint you with an old (Asian) Indian fashion of speaking. It's the idea of 'non-something'.

When I first ran into this phenomenon, it took a while for it to penetrate. You will find it all over in the sutras and the Pali Canon. Buddha speaks of "this" and "not-this". Normally in western thinking, when you say "not-this" it's a total negation of the original. This is also pretty much true in Aristotelian logic. Not so here in Indian/Buddhist thought. Just making it "not-this" doesn't imply a negative, just a different, altered or possibly inverted view of the subject. A "not-this" isn't a "non-this" or a "no-this". 'Not-this' is just different, not necessarily non-existent. This may seem like

splitting verbal hairs, but it's a very important concept that you will keep running into throughout this philosophy.

Thus when we speak of 'not-greed' within the categories we talked about above, we are not just saying that we are zeroing out the greed - we are saying that 'this isn't quite it' or that it has taken a different form. It may be something else, but it isn't this exact definition. It may be an inversion, but it doesn't have to be. Thus while greed may involve the active pursuit of ego pleasures, 'not-greed' might involve the active pursuit of non-ego-driven passions. It is not merely negation or zeroing-out when we do this; it's actively inverting or changing a negative to a positive (or visa-versa).

Not-greed in this context would involve generosity without payback or quid-pro-quo; detachment from those actions that do good (doing the actions with no expectation of return), and renunciation of those actions that would harm others.

Not-aversion would encompass gentleness, sympathy and loving-kindness to everyone, particularly those with whom you disagree or have trouble dealing with.

Not-delusion would imply wisdom and clarity in how to see reality and would blow away the ignorance that clouds our thinking.

All resulting actions from these 'not-roots' are considered to be wholesome actions, as opposed to the three unwholesome roots that generate unwholesome action and negative karma.

Returning to the karma relating to actions. I can find no better description of how it works than to quote Bhikkhu Bodhi:

"The most important feature of karma is its capacity to produce results corresponding to the ethical quality of the action. An imminent universal law holds sway over volitional actions, bringing it about that these actions issue in retributive consequences, called vipaka, "ripenings," or phala, "fruits." The law connecting actions with their fruits works on the simple principle that unwholesome actions ripen in suffering, wholesome actions in happiness. The ripening need not come right away; it need not come in the present life at all. Karma can operate across the succession of lifetimes;

it can even remain dormant for eons into the future. But whenever we perform a volitional action, the volition leaves its imprint on the mental continuum, where it remains as a stored up potency. When the stored up karma meets with conditions favorable to its maturation, it awakens from its dormant state and triggers off some effect that brings due compensation for the original action. The ripening may take place in the present life, in the next life, or in some life subsequent to the next. A karma may ripen by producing rebirth into the next existence, thus determining the basic form of life; or it may ripen in the course of a lifetime, issuing in our varied experiences of happiness and pain, success and failure, progress and decline. But whenever it ripens and in whatever way, the same principle invariably holds: wholesome actions yield favorable results, unwholesome actions yield unfavorable results.”³

Again, we have to emphasize at this point that karma has to do with volitional action - i.e. those actions which you willingly put out there with forethought. If it's a good volitional action, good karma will return to you in kind. If it's bad actions that you've initiated, then a similar set of bad circumstances will come back to haunt you later. The circumstances of the return of karma will be much like the circumstances surrounding the generation of it.

The key idea is that the action has to be volitional - meaning that you have to consciously initiate it. It is possible that the idea of self-defense on a reactionary physical level is involuntary - it makes some sense if it's in the moment and an instinctive reaction. If something gets killed or hurt accidentally in the process of doing something worthy, then the karma is probably not going to be as severe as if you killed someone in the process of taking something that didn't belong to you.

As a minor distraction, we need to take a look at the whole idea of reincarnation and its karmic relationship.

There are a plethora of viewpoints in Buddhist thought about how this works. Is it a direct reincarnation of a person

³ The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering, by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Source: The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS. (Available on line @ <http://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/waytoend.html>)

as the Tibetan Buddhists think? Or is it just a buildup of karmic force that some other being inherits at the time of their conception? Or is it none of the above?

My own idea is that karma is real. It exists. I'm at a loss for the actual mechanism that allows it to work, but I'm pretty sure it does.

I still have trouble seeing it as spanning multiple lifetimes, and affecting sentient beings yet to be born or created. Perhaps, it might just be an ancient version of the idea that your children learn from you and inherit your genetic makeup. Therefore, the karma you create is picked up by them - which fulfills the ongoing idea of karma being extended into the future. Or the idea that returning karma (particularly revenge) can be taken out on the offspring of a deceased individual led to this idea of the spanning of lifetimes for karma. Buddha lived without knowledge of DNA and heredity, so it would have been difficult to explain inherited traits in any other way.

Another aspect of this is the residual effect that leaders of nations have on the legacy that they leave their countries. The Hitler legacy has taken generations to subdue and has yet to fully be eliminated from social constructs in certain areas.

Another facet of karma is the 'Joe Bftlspk'⁴ type of person who is the recipient of so much bad luck that it's tough to believe that it can happen. These people seem nice enough on the outside, but their lives seem to be a series of massive crises, one after another, that never really get resolved. You can't determine that they ever did anything wrong or hurtful, and yet they suffer mightily.

I once worked with a guy whose travel karma was so bad that it was almost dangerous to travel with him. If you were on the same flight, your luggage would be lost (in addition to his), your plane would have mechanical problems, or run into weather and be very late. His car was continually in the shop for something, and even getting to work was a hassle for him.

⁴ Joe Bftlspk was a character from the 'Lil Abner cartoon strips in the mid-twentieth century. He was the perpetual bad luck person, and was pictured as having a permanent dark raincloud over his head at all times.

On the other side of that coin, I also can't ignore that there are some people that move through life without having a care in the world, and nothing bad ever happens to them. They're nice people, but it's maddening to see them forever being lucky or consistently in the right place at the right time without ever having a major meltdown or crisis. They NEVER run into these problems - they travel with impunity and without difficulty, and their cars run 100,000 miles perfectly without an oil change. They find twenty-dollar-bills on the street. Their lives operate like clockwork and absolutely nothing ever happens to them. It's maddening for those of us who live in the real world.

I can't ignore these kinds of situations. Maybe karma does span multiple lifetimes. Maybe not. We report, you decide.

There are four laws of karma. Yeah, in Buddhism there's laws for everything.

Here they are:

- Results are similar to what caused the karma in the first place. If I have caused a particular kind of suffering to others, at some point I have also created the same kind for myself.
- There are no karmic results without a cause. Something had to create the karmic event to begin with. It can't appear suddenly out of nowhere.
- Once a karmic event is generated, it is never lost. It can't just go out into never-never land and disappear. If generated, it **will** come home to roost at some point.
- Karma can expand. If I generate a negative karmic result and the action that created it becomes imprinted in the mind, it may become habit-forming and multiply the negative aspects of that karma.

Karma, being a creation of the mind, comes back when the retributive time arrives. We can avoid allowing the karma to fully manifest by working with the Four Powers of Purification. (Oh damn, another set of rules.)

If you want to avoid the consequences of past negative karma, you have to do something with right motivation. A singular ingredient to using this is that you have to be brutally honest with yourself - no punches pulled whatsoever with yourself. Sometimes it helps to have someone to mirror for you, accurately reflecting what you're telling them. I've found that this concept of brutal honesty with that caveat is probably the toughest one I've ever dealt with.

The Four Powers of Purification:

- Power of the object. Think of all the sentient beings (people) that you may have hurt. A safe bet is to include all sentient beings in this category, otherwise you can't be sure you've gotten them all.
- Power of Regret. Examine your actions with regards to these beings and *truly be sorry* for those actions that allowed them to feel hurt. This isn't guilt or self-recrimination, but a true and deep regret for helping their suffering to amplify and a realization that those actions were unwise and unwarranted.
- Power of Promise. Put effort into avoiding repeating these bad actions in the future. Make a promise to both those sentient beings and yourself to refrain from performing those and similar actions that cause suffering. Make absolutely sure you're honest about it with yourself.
- Power of Practice. Do good positive actions with good motivation. It will benefit you greatly in mitigating the effects of any returning bad karma.

What this means in a nutshell is that there are ways to moderate and mitigate karma - even though once generated, each piece of karma cannot be altered in and of itself. That mitigation has to do with how you live your current existence

and seek to make sure that the karmic balance is swung to the good side. This is to mitigate, spread out or nullify the **results** (not the karma itself) of any bad karma that you may have generated for yourself, or maybe inherited from the past. It's a balancing act - well not really, unless you just want to stay neutral. Personally, I'd like to swing the scale to the positive side even if I'm not expecting any negative stuff to be rolling in.

We've covered a lot of ground in this chapter. It's a tough subject to explain, and I've not done as much as I would have liked ... but I encourage you to find your own definitions of karma that you can live with. The Internet has myriads of sites that you can Google for various Buddhist ideas, so Google away. You have to find your own path anyway ... remember?

Next up, an underpinning of the mind.

CHAPTER EIGHT

UNDERPINNINGS OF THE MIND

When we think of our mind, the first thing that we think is that it's a three-pound lump of protoplasm and cells that controls our entire existence. Everything we perceive, do, think, perform or otherwise accomplish in our lives is created, controlled, and implemented from there. It is us. The brain.

Psychologists and medicals of all stripes will tell us that there are three parts to the brain – the reptilian part that controls our autonomous functions (breathing, heartrate, digestive process and so on); the sensory part that translates our senses of touch, feel, smell, taste, and sight; and the frontal lobes where all the creative thinking, analysis and decision-making takes place.

Only one of these three is involved in making our lives miserable or happy. That's our frontal lobes. Humans are 'the animal that imagines' and it's solely due to that part of the brain. We think, feel, and act, based on how that part of the brain functions (or doesn't).

We like to think that we act on rational thinking, but much of what we do also has roots in an unconscious emotional response as well. Those frontal lobes do our decision-making, but much of that is based on emotional reactions (if we let it). We'll get into this a lot more later on, but suffice it to say here, that at least some of the time, our emotions define (or at least directly affect) what our actions will be.

We all know the basics of emotion - love, anger, lust, greed - the whole range of stuff that the news cycle and the soap operas feed on. All of these emotions are ingrained into our psyches at a fundamental level. It is my contention that these emotions are, in turn, affected by an more basic underlying trait (not an emotion in and of itself) that influences all our emotions - addiction.

It is my belief that everyone has a basic addictive trait that affects everything we do. We normally don't even think about it, and when we hear the word 'addict' we immediately think that it's some spaced-out druggie on meth or heroin or an alcoholic. In truth, this widely held notion is all about physical addiction, and not the one that we're talking about here (although there are similarities.)

This addictive underpinning is sometimes called the 'pleasure gene'

or the 'happiness drive'. It's the urge (sometimes obsession) to do things that we think will make us happy to excess or obsessive levels. Whatever you wish to call it, it lies beneath ALL of our emotions and clouds our judgement. Unless it is recognized and controlled, it will drive us to require more of whatever we're striving for that we think will make us happy. This happens in all kinds of human endeavor. That need for 'more' can even become obsessive or elevate to madness of a sort.

To prove this point, you only have to think of people you know that are driven to constantly acquire or achieve in an infinite variety of subjects, occupations, and deviances. We're not talking the run-of-the-mill physical addiction to mind-altering drugs here, but a true psychological addiction to something that triggers your pleasure center. We're talking about being mentally addicted to a goal or behavior that gives you pleasure and to which you devote immense amounts of energy in pursuit of it.

This affects all areas of human endeavor.

Addiction can manifest as a need for physical attention, in the form of requiring physical sex, being physically appreciated, or obsessive body-building, to mention but a few.

It can manifest as an obsessive need for money and power, as in a hedge-fund manager or billionaire. It can also be a need for control of others (politics) or a requirement to be controlled by others (masochism).

It can appear as a need to help the downtrodden and poor (Mother Theresa or almost any altruist).

It can be seen as a need to protect the environment (environmental activists).

I could go on for many more paragraphs listing various forms of these tendencies and goals, any and all of which are based on addiction, and all of which, when taken to excess, become self-sustaining addictions in and of themselves.

We **all** have these tendencies, and there is not a single one of us that is immune from becoming addicted to something. Some things that we become addicted to are beneficial to us, and others can become overwhelmingly harmful to not only us, but others.

There are those few in our world that are addicted to killing. It gives them pleasure.

There are those that enjoy the risks of extreme sports such as auto racing or free-climbing sheer cliffs, with the possibility of catastrophic injury or even death. The common name for this is 'adrenaline junkie'. If

this isn't an addiction, I'd be hard pressed to find any at all.

From needing to climb Mt. Everest to obsessing over making billions of dollars or baking the perfect chocolate-chip cookie, it is my opinion that these are all forms of addiction poking its head out of the swamp of our most primitive mind-levels.

We are all addicts. It's just the variety and level of addiction and how we let it control our lives that determines both the quality and happiness of our existence, as well as being harmful or beneficial to others.

I bring this up here, because I believe that if we identify and understand the part of our minds that are addictive, we can better use the teachings and practices that we will encounter as we progress.

As you will see, the concepts that come out of Buddhist teachings are fundamental to both controlling our addictive tendencies and making our interfacing with the world a whole lot smoother.

We're on the way and you've learned a lot about your mind already. Now it's time to hit the Path for real.

CHAPTER NINE

RIGHT VIEW

KEEPING THE SCOPE VALID

The Buddha addressed the monks:

“And what is right view? Knowledge with regard to stress, knowledge with regard to the origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the cessation of stress, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.”¹

I hear it already! “Now wait a minute! You can’t fool me! This looks a lot like a rehash of the Four Noble Truths.” Guess what - you’re right. But I didn’t rehash it, the *Digha Nikaya* did. In a nutshell, Right View is just that - understanding and applying the Four Noble Truths. It is just a restatement of the Four Noble Truths substituting ‘stress’ for ‘suffering’ - which if you think about it, is really true. At this point we don’t have to know the details, just that it (stress/suffering) exists and we tentatively accept that the Four Noble Truths are accurate and that they can possibly work in my life.

Put another way, it means simply to understand yourself and ‘know’ about the stress/suffering; how the origins of it apply to you; accept that it can be eliminated; and that maybe there is a path to doing just that. That’s the theory, anyway.

When we look at the definition of Right View, it isn’t obvious at first what it is, and why we start with it. How do I know when I’m stressed - and what can I do about it? Well, at some level we know that we’re stressed, but there are a lot of times when we’re stressed and don’t even recognize it. And what, pray tell, is the ‘way of practice leading to the cessation of stress?’ After all, how am I supposed to ‘know before I know’ about all this?

Yeah, I know, this is like looking through a jar of blackstrap molasses. Since you’re thoroughly confused and

¹ Digha Nikaya 22

and about to throw this manuscript across the room, let's backtrack and see if there's another approach to this.

When starting off on the Path towards enlightenment, it is imperative that you start with an idea of where you want to go. But what is enlightenment, anyway? After all, when you start on a journey, it's nice to have some idea of your destination unless you just want to play philosophical gypsy. In Buddhism, that direction is Nirvana – the state of bliss that one can achieve - breaking the cycle of birth and death (more on this later). “But,” you ask, “How do I know what path to follow if I'm not sure of where they lead?”

Excellent question, grasshopper.

Right View at this point is an overview to give you an indication of the fact that you CAN indeed overcome all this stress and desire and ignorance that you possess and find relief.

Right View at the beginning of your journey asks that you accept the Four Noble Truths as a definition that seems to be true and correct. That's all that it requires at the start - a tentative belief that the idea of suffering/stress exists; that you might be able to eliminate it also exists, and that you're willing to give them a chance through practicing some exercises.

Later on, Right View reintroduces itself when we develop the wisdom to see the actual structure of suffering and we get into the bedrock essence of the Four Noble Truths through concentration and new-found wisdom.

The fourth Noble Truth says that the EightFold Path is the way to make the first three work, and the Right View of the EightFold path requires in the beginning a rudimentary understanding of the Four Noble Truths. So how can this circular juggernaut be broken down into some kind of sensible process?

Actually it isn't all that bad. You currently have an rough idea about the Four Noble Truths and the EightFold Path. You've gotten a **very** rough overview of the Moral Disciplines

(Right Actions, Right Speech, and Right Livelihood). You also have a broad but shallow concept of the Concentration section (Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration). The part you don't have yet is the Wisdom section (Right View and Right Resolve).

The Buddha said at one point that only when you have all eight parts of the path can you have Right View. That's true, to a point. However, we have to start somewhere, and this is where most scholars start it - with this overview.

I've spoken before of the interlocking nature of the EightFold Path. Here's the first major example of that interlocking nature. It now becomes necessary to take a superficial view of the other seven parts of the EightFold Path, and see how they will provide the guideposts for you to follow. Here I recommend you plod forward even though you haven't yet figured much of this out. When you get through the whole manuscript, come back and start from this chapter with the things you remember from the others. This stuff takes some rereading (and much rethinking) before it becomes clear - trust me.

By this time, you're asking yourself 'How the hell do I manage to find a viewpoint if I don't know the direction to look?'

Here's how. With even a cursory overview of the EightFold Path, you've seen that there are some things that you can do to identify and minimize your karmic deviations from the enlightenment path. "Enhance, the positive - eliminate the negative." In fact, that in a nutshell encompasses the whole of Buddhist thought. While too simple and not usable in that form without a lot of introspection and digging, it is still true and valid.

Right View, at this stage, is just about accepting the Four Noble Truths and saying 'I want to stop this or that suffering/stress.' It's about saying to ourselves, 'This is what I want to eliminate.' OK, but where do I start?

Part of the challenge of finding our own way on the Path will be finding things that don't work for us, as well as finding the things that do. It's about challenging everything that you're going to be presented with along the way, and either agreeing with it or saying that it's wrong for me. DO NOT TAKE ANYTHING ON FAITH OR FOR GRANTED!!!! If you think a part or concept is wrong for you, ask 'why' and 'what am I not seeing?' Why ask this? Because the truths and the path do work. If you don't want to accept what they're telling you, then you have to find out why they bother you and work on them until you can accept and apply them - unless you give up in disgust.

Starting with Right View also means setting some basic boundaries that we'll try not to cross. It's about seeing how we want to live our lives from now on.

Previously, we found that there were ten areas of karma-generating actions that everyone usually has a few pieces of - if not all of them. If we accept these as being true, or even just accepting one of them to be true, it gives us a place to start with the Right View.

Repeating what the Buddha said:

"And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong view as wrong view, and right view as right view. This is one's right view. And what is wrong view? 'There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no priests or contemplatives who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.' This is wrong view..."²

This is one of those statements from the Buddha that you just shake your head over - until you understand it. A subtle clue is in the second sentence. You just know what is a wrong view, and what is a right view - unless you're a sociopath or psychopath. Gut feel stuff.

² Majjhima Nikaya I 17

Wrong View, on the other hand, describes a world where there is nothing ventured, nothing believed in, and nothing gained. It refuses the concept of karma, and describes a totally zero world. In Buddhist thought, this worldview cannot exist; therefore it is a Wrong View, since it can't be true. At least that's what I get from this. It is a nothing place.

In this excerpt from the Buddha, a couple of things are noticeably absent in his description of wrong view - individual responsibility and karma. Of course, if you accept the concept that you totally own your karma, it goes without saying that both are present, since karma requires responsibility for it. If you don't understand or accept Right View, of course you will think that there will be no karmic boomerangs for you, and any bad things that happen are always God's (or someone else's) doing. Of course, you'll take credit personally for all the good things that come your way. Of course you will.

Western religions tend to give the adherent absolution for almost everything, referring it to "God's will", which basically alleviates any need for introspection or individual responsibility. It requires little or no thinking, and it mandates following whatever pieces of dogma are thrown out to them. In thinking about it, Islam seems to be even more dogmatic and authoritarian in its application of this.

As Bernie Ward of KGO (San Francisco talk) radio fame used to put it in regards to many fundamentalist religions and sects: "Check your brains at the door and pick up your crayons and coloring books as you go inside."³
But I digress ...

OK, so we've now maybe gotten a basic definition of right view. If not, just keep reading. The definition we gave back there is rather ambiguous. It's not really usable as it stands. Let's try again ...

"And what is right view? Knowledge with regard to stress, knowledge with regard to the origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the cessation of stress, knowledge with regard to the way

³ Bernie Ward, former KGO San Francisco radio talk show host, on his Sunday Show "God Talk".

of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view."⁴

So Right View is basically a rehash of the Four Noble Truths ... yes? Yes, and no.

At first look, you'd think so. But at this stage of your knowledge, just understanding that stress/suffering can be conquered and seeing that it exists at all are the major requirements.

One thing that must be noted here is that in the western world, 'knowledge' is many times used in place of 'wisdom'. Not so in Buddhist thought. As is stressed throughout the teachings, knowledge does not equate to wisdom - knowledge being the 'how to', and wisdom being the 'when, where, and why.' Just knowing about the origination of stress and its cessation does not automatically mean that you are capable of doing something about it.

I include here a longer excerpt from the Buddha, again explaining the whole issue of right view / wrong view:

"There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person... does not discern what ideas are fit for attention, or what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to ideas fit for attention, and attends instead to ideas unfit for attention... This is how he attends inappropriately:

- Was I in the past?
- Was I not in the past?
- What was I in the past?
- How was I in the past?
- Having been what, what was I in the past?
- Shall I be in the future?
- Shall I not be in the future?
- What shall I be in the future?
- How shall I be in the future?
- Having been what, what shall I be in the future?

⁴ Digha Nikaya 22

Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present:

- 'Am I?
- Am I not?
- What am I?
- How am I?
- Where has this being come from?
- Where is it bound?'

As he attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him:

- The view 'I have a self' arises in him as true & established,
- or the view 'I have no self'...
- or the view 'It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self'...
- or the view 'It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self'...
- or the view 'It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self arises in him as true & established',
- or else he has a view like this: 'This very self of mine — the knower that is sensitive here & there to the ripening of good & bad actions — is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity'.

This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones... discerns what ideas are fit for attention, and what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to ideas unfit for attention, and attends to ideas fit for attention... He attends appropriately. This is stress ... This is the origination of stress ... This is the cessation of stress ... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress. As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: identity-view, doubt, and grasping at precepts & practices."⁵

⁵ Majjhima Nikaya 2

Again, this usually requires re-reading a few times to understand what is being said. The whole idea of 'self' is one that we will deal with later, but for the time being, consider it the outer façade that we present to the world as being 'me, myself and I.' It is almost never the same as the core 'me', just what I want the outside world to think of as 'me'.

In this last excerpt, the Buddha gives us our necessary starting point. The first section deals with what we shouldn't give thinking time to. If you look a little closer at that first section, you'll find that they are all questions that have no answers. They are unknowable. Therefore pondering the imponderable (unless you're a Zen Master) is a futile and time-wasting process. Likewise for the second set of questions. They are also unknowable.

If you DO insist in pondering the imponderable and coming up with conclusions that are inconclusive and totally theoretical at best, then you arrive at a viewpoint that is diametrically opposite to the basic tenets of Buddhism. You will have a totally self-centered viewpoint regarding the 'self' and its importance. This 'self' claims to be able to know the unknowable, probe the unfathomable, and is eternal and constant. None of these claims are sustainable in Buddhist philosophy.

The Buddha also claims that the 'self' is not immune to stress and suffering. Well, if you try to ponder the imponderable, you will probably wind up with frustration and stress. It stands to reason.

In the last paragraph of the quote, the Buddha also lays out a modified version of the Four Noble Truths, substituting stress for suffering (we saw this before). Actually, when you think about it, they are tightly linked. If you're stressed, you are suffering and conversely, if suffering, you are stressed.

Another way of looking at it may be this: Views determine action. Action implies consequences. Wrong views initiate actions that perpetuate suffering ... right views eliminate suffering.

In another sutra, the Buddha says:

"Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering' — then you should abandon them...

"When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness' — then you should enter & remain in them."⁶

Here the Buddha invokes the individual responsibility issue once again (and not for the last time by a long shot.) He is advising not to go with anything that you don't intuitively understand about what you're doing, and how you're defining your scope of action. You DO know what's right and wrong and how your actions relate to that. It's implicit at a fundamental level.

The section about the teacher is also ultimately important. It may be helpful to have a direction pointed out to you for contemplation and meditation. But if the person pointing the way may have a dogma of their own, so be careful that they do not do more than point the way.

And from another Buddhist monk:

"Buddhism is a religion based on intelligence, science and knowledge, whose purpose is the destruction of suffering and the source of suffering. All paying of homage to sacred objects by means of performing rites and rituals, making offerings or praying is not Buddhism. The Buddha rejected all this as foolish, ridiculous and unsound. He also rejected the celestial beings, then considered by certain groups to be the creator of things, and the deities supposed to dwell, one in each star in the sky.

...

⁶ Anguttara Nikaya 3.65

To attain liberation, we first have to examine things closely in order to come to know and understand their true nature. Then we have to behave in a way appropriate to that true nature. This is the Buddhist teaching; this we must know and bear in mind. Buddhism has nothing to do with prostrating oneself and deferring to awesome things. It sets no store by rites and ceremonies such as making libations of holy water, or any externals whatsoever, spirits and celestial being included. On the contrary, it depends on reason and insight. Buddhism does not demand conjecture or supposition; it demands that we act in accordance with what our own insight reveals and not take anyone else's word for anything. If someone comes and tells us something, we must not believe him without question. We must listen to his statement and examine it. Then if we find it reasonable, we may accept it provisionally and set about trying to verify it for ourselves. This is a key feature of Buddhism, which distinguishes it sharply from other world religions.”⁷

There are two axioms that I try to remember in this regard:

“If you see the Buddha on the road, kill him”

and

“The meaning of the word ‘guru’ is he who points the way ... not he who leads, nor he that walks with you, nor he who teaches ... the true guru only shows you the direction to look for yourself.”⁸

Again, the emphasis here is that it's your road, gentle reader, and nobody is going to walk it for you. Killing the Buddha is a little extreme, but the point is that all you can do is ask the Buddha for directions (or ask your internal Buddha nature), then do the work. The Buddha isn't going to come and elevate you to Nirvana with a magic wand of Buddhadust.

Or, from another famous book:

⁷ Handbook for Mankind by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Translated from the Thai by Ariyananda Bhikkhu (Roderick S. Bucknell); First Electronic Edition: December 1996.

⁸ I picked these up many years ago, and don't remember where. Please forgive.

“Seek and ye shall find; ask and it shall be given unto you; knock and the door shall be opened.”

‘Nuf said.

This then is “Right View”. At the beginning of trying to figure out the EightFold Path, it is a very cloudy view, and the scope of right and wrong view is also unclear and far from brightly lit. That’s very understandable and normal at this stage. But it will serve as a starting point for dealing with negative karma and actions, accentuating positive karma and actions, and alleviating the stress that you didn’t even know that you had.

Next up ... Right Resolve.

CHAPTER TEN

RIGHT RESOLVE (RIGHT INTENT)

The Buddha said:

"And what is right resolve? Being resolved on renunciation, on freedom from ill-will, on harmlessness: This is called right resolve."¹

Whenever we deal with the mind, there's always the tendency to try to separate parts of it into different functions. There's this part of the brain that does "this" and over here it does "that". But that's far too simplified. We run into far too many things with the mind that we try to reduce to simple ideas, when in fact they are anything but.

Right View teaches us to try and hold the 'workable' ideas concerning our conduct and thinking, and understanding the Four Noble Truths. Right Resolve will help us keep the intent to hold those views when we become distracted or otherwise involved.

As we keep saying, all of the factors of the EightFold Path are intimately intertwined, and each of the factors influences the other seven. It is impossible to separate one out and examine it in isolation. It isn't going to happen, Dude (or Dudette, as the case may be).

Right Resolve is based on intent. When I do or think something, what is my intent? Why do I want to do this?

That correct intent can be broken down into three basic categories:

- the intention of renunciation
- the intention of good will
- the intention of harmlessness

¹ Samyutta Nikaya 45.8

As is always the case in Buddhist thought, this ultimately simple version of things requires a significant amount of explanation.

“Intention of Renunciation” sounds like something out of a Catholic catechism manual. But it isn’t, and is pretty much removed from anything to do with Catholicism.

The intention of renunciation is the direct opposite of desire. If we want to curb our minds and reduce our suffering, the elimination of desire is foremost on the list of things to blast out of our existence. The elimination of desire works by renouncing (read ‘*giving up*’ or *abandoning*) the desire itself. Do I REALLY need this thing (or person) or do I merely desire it (them)?

At this point, we have to differentiate between the terms of ‘desire’ and ‘need’. Need is what I need to survive at a reasonable level. After trying both extremes, Buddha renounced both the ascetics who tried to purify the body by going to extremes of physical deprivation and those who sated every desire. This, by the way, is where the term “Middle Way” came from, because it went to no extreme and found a median path which allows a course to be set for Nirvana that neither extreme (asceticism or decadence) can accomplish. Buddha found that if you deprived the body of its necessities, it could no longer support the mind, and if you indulged every desire, you’d wind up so distracted that you’d never get back to working on what you were trying to accomplish to begin with.

Need is when we are without food, shelter, or whatever in our modern society that we truly cannot do without. Needs are the basics. Perhaps a reasonably gas-efficient car. A reasonably well-insulated house. Enough food to keep us alive and able to use our minds well. These are basic needs.

Desire, on the other hand, is lust in overdrive. It takes lust and expands it out of all proportion. Where a gas-efficient clunker might suffice for everything you really have to do, desire dictates that you get a turbocharged, hemi-equipped, modified suspension, custom interior, late model vehicle that you think will make the neighbors drool. Where a basic nice-

looking dress would do, an expensive but simple little Chanel just HAS to hang in your closet. When baldness and wrinkles set in, the normal processes of nature just won't abide, and you HAVE to go to the hair transplant clinic and you head for the Botox doc.

You get the picture.

The intention of renunciation means that you consciously renounce, push back, or eliminate desire when you identify it. Renunciation means getting rid of a desire (as opposed to a need) and keeping it from achieving any kind of action. At first, eliminating it is difficult, and even suppressing it for a while takes a lot of effort.

Ill will is the bane of many of us. It is far too easy to dislike, hate, rebuff, repel, slander or otherwise use words and deeds to actively depress the other person or thing in our minds. These things allow us to rationalize the negatives in our own thinking, create actions to minimize the other person, and allow us to feel better about ourselves.

The intention of good will is the antidote to ill will. Sounds simple, doesn't it. But of course, it isn't. It's far easier to blame, begrudge, hate, or otherwise find some way to make what you feel about someone or something legitimate. That negative ill will stuff that comes up has to be consciously renounced when you find it, and stuffed back in the hole it came up out of (or at least early on, ignored). Most of it is emotionally driven, which makes it that much harder to deal with.

The intention of harmlessness is the opposite of harmfulness. Like you couldn't have guessed that one, huh? When we find that we're doing and/or thinking something harmful, we have to recognize and sidetrack it. This can be the result of being hurt or used and you now want revenge. All kinds of rationalizations come into play here, not just revenge. Harmfulness is tightly linked to Ill Will, and many times is the result of it.

Said another way, having a wrong view will lead to a wrong intention, resulting in a wrong action. “I know people are out to get me. I intend to get them first. I’m going to aggressively go after them.” Good example. The basic view or thought process leads to an incorrect intention that, in turn, generates a wrong action. Bikkhu Bodhi puts it succinctly, with a definite correlation to modern American politics:

“When wrong views prevail, the outcome is wrong intention giving rise to unwholesome actions. Thus one who denies the moral efficacy of action and measures achievement in terms of gain and status will aspire to nothing but gain and status, using whatever means he can to acquire them. When such pursuits become widespread, the result is suffering, the tremendous suffering of individuals, social groups, and nations out to gain wealth, position, and power without regard for consequences. The cause for the endless competition, conflict, injustice, and oppression does not lie outside the mind. These are all just manifestations of intentions, outcroppings of thoughts driven by greed, by hatred, by delusion.”²

All of these Right Intentions lead to less suffering when practiced.

So how do we generate these Right Intentions?

Once we understand how the first three Noble Truths affect us, we begin right then and there the renunciation part of Right Intent. If we understand that we’re suffering (and we are), and if we accept the idea that desire and ignorance are the major roots of that suffering (they are), then the elimination of desire and ignorance will lead to less suffering. Thus we’ve already started using Right Intent to our advantage. We say to ourselves, “I don’t want to suffer, therefore I have to curb my desires when I find them.” You’ve got the first part of Right Intent and it didn’t hurt a bit. Well, maybe just a little, but it was worth it.

² The Noble Eightfold Path; The Way to the End of Suffering by Bhikkhu Bodhi. The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS. Copyright © 1998 Buddhist Publication Society. Access to Insight edition © 1999. Chapter III.

Seeing the application of the Four Noble Truths to our own lives gives us a little insight into Right Intent. When we expand our horizons a bit, and look at how they affect others, we then see the other two parts of Right Intent come into view. Those two are the intent of harmlessness, and the intent of goodwill.

Whereas the 'intention of renunciation' deals with us and only us, the other two factors deal with the outside world and other sentient beings.

Backing up a little, the combination of Right View and Right Intent counter the root causes of suffering, those being Delusion, Greed, and Aversion (otherwise known as Ignorance).

The definition of delusion is holding a wrong view or perception of some external (or internal) idea or concept (a deluded or incorrect viewpoint). Right View counters this root cause. Likewise, the Intents of Harmlessness and Good Will counter the other two main causes, greed and aversion.

Greed, of course, is the desire component on steroids. Its antidote is likewise the Right View of where do I want to go, and what do I REALLY NEED to get there?

Again, aversion is the holding of ill will towards another being. Cultivating Goodwill and Harmlessness counters the contents of aversion (hatred, anger, hostility, resentment, bitterness, cruelty, aggression and destruction).

If we embark on using the intent of harmlessness, it means not harming other sentient beings, physically, mentally or morally. The urge to reach out and touch negatively (both physically and mentally) comes from the same source ... Aversion.

So how do we determine whether we have Right Resolve or not? The Buddha explains:

"Whenever you want to perform a bodily act, you should reflect on it: 'This bodily act I want to perform — would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily act, with painful consequences, painful

results?' If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful bodily act with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily act of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then any bodily act of that sort is fit for you to do.

"While you are performing a bodily act, you should reflect on it: 'This bodily act I am doing — is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily act, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.

"Having performed a bodily act, you should reflect on it... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful bodily act with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it ... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed and joyful, training day and night in skillful mental qualities.³

Having described how to look at physical actions, the Buddha then goes on in this teaching to describe the same thing for the other two types of actions, verbal and mental.

The basic premise here is to always evaluate **everything** we do in terms of whether it will harm or afflict someone else, both of us, or me alone. If we catch it in time, we must find a way to negate it prior to action, or sidetrack it before we put it into any kind of willed event. The karma that is generated if we

³ Majjhima Nikaya 61

let these get to fruition WILL be generated and come back to haunt (or help) us in the future. In fact, just the thought leading to a negative plan of action will also boomerang on us, as you'll see later.

What might be apropos here would be to use the old railway-crossing slogan ... **“Stop, look and listen.”** When we undertake an action, we need to **stop**, take time to **look** at what we're doing, and **listen** to our Buddha Nature as to whether this is a proper thing to do. Notice I didn't say 'right thing to do'. 'Right' carries a lot of baggage left over from all kinds of social conditioning and political correctness. What might be 'right' could be improper in the Buddhist sense. By exercising the death penalty, you might be 'right' in terms of the law, but improper as to the outcome in the Buddhist world. We have to really take a step back and look within at what we're doing and why. Right Resolve helps us do that, in combination with Right View.

In another sense, Right Resolve (or Intent) helps to keep the Right View in place and pushes back at us when we lose focus.

Basically speaking, Right View is the correct way of seeing what we're doing to ourselves, and Right Intent is the resolve to do something about it (or do nothing if appropriate).

In the next chapter, we'll start on the parts of the path having to do with Right Speech, Right Action and Right Thinking.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MORAL DISCIPLINE

Right Speech

To be repetitively redundant, we must remember that the EightFold Path is an interdependent set of practices. Each one relies on the other seven in order to make a whole that is far greater than the sum of the parts. While each part can survive on its own without the others and be useful, they can never achieve individually what the group is able to. The Moral Discipline portions of the EightFold Path represent a significant part of the entire endeavor. Without them, the entire interlocking structure falls apart, or at least is damaged significantly.

What these three principles actually represent is a basis for civil conduct within any society, not just as a starting point for making your personal life much better. In addition, if followed, it constrains actions that would otherwise generate negative karma for you and suffering for others.

In order to set the background for these ideas of the Moral Discipline section, we (as always) have to do some definitions.

When we say the words “Moral” or “Morality” in western culture, for the most part we are referring to Judeo-Christian ideas specifying various rules of conduct laid down by ‘God’ or a supreme being, that have various spiritual penalties involved for infractions.

In Buddhism, we have to redefine ‘moral’, since there is no divine being to attribute these edicts to, and thus no penalty from that divine being for violation (other than the karmic problems that you cause for yourself).

So what, then, does it mean when we say “moral discipline” in the Buddhist sense?

‘Moral’ becomes purely personal. That doesn't mean that whatever direction that your moral compass points is OK. The Buddha laid out guidelines to follow so that we could make life easier for ourselves and generate less negative karma. They

aren't rules in the normal sense nor are they laws that have to be blindly followed. They carry no retribution if violated save the problems that we cause ourselves within the society that we live in (and the karma we generate, of course).

In fact, there is very little that is classified as 'right' or 'wrong' in the Buddhist philosophy. 'Right' and 'wrong' implies that there are absolutes backed up by force from some external source. Take the idea of killing another human being. Under certain circumstances it's OK (i.e. 'right') to do, like in self-defense. In most other cases it's not (i.e. 'wrong'). But if we consider that 'right' and 'wrong' are absolutes, then we have an inherent contradiction. I have to note here that this contradiction is ignored in most societies, who set up a regimen of laws to control social conduct, and justify murder in certain circumstances and with various intents.

In Buddhist thinking, however, it's more the idea of helpful and unhelpful in a personal and karmic sense. It is the definition of harmfulness to ourselves and others that serves as the main restraint of what is called 'morality' within Buddhist teachings.

After all, the objective of the EightFold Path is to eliminate suffering for us personally ... and lessen that part of it that we cause for those that we interface with. This 'Moral' portion of the discipline (as is the entire practice, for that matter) is totally internal and non-altruistic. Disruption and disharmony, both internally and externally, certainly lead to that suffering.

It is ironic that almost all the suffering that we encounter **we generate for ourselves**. What we perceive (or not) of our external and internal interactions is in and through our mind, which is acting as the filter/data retrieval system. Therefore, it's totally possible that the mind perceives events and makes conclusions even when the facts don't justify that conclusion. It is these incorrect conclusions and projections that get us into trouble every time. Note that we do not use the word 'wrong' in this sense. Again, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' in this process - it is only your decision as to what goes forward. Hopefully that decision will be based on the teachings that you're learning here.

The actions that we take which are not in tune with the 'Moral discipline' guidelines almost certainly will lead to creating more problems for ourselves and others (primarily us).

Anger and hatred are only two of the symptoms of the three negative root causes for action (they have inversions, too, as you will see). These symptoms are: greed, aversion (of which anger and hatred are a part) and delusion (ignorance). Any of these can lead to the generation of the incorrect actions or speech that we're dealing with. We want more of whatever; we go negative emotionally because we can't get it; and we probably don't see either of these factors because we're not looking at them.

In order to get a handle on the internal, we first have to get a handle on the external, which is what the Moral Disciplines are all about. Once we get a handle on what we put out, what comes in is far easier to deal with. Controlling our actions and speech is the first step to controlling our environment. When we begin to see what caused an action or utterance and why we reacted the way we did to the causal stimulus - the insight takes us into the depths of the mind where we usually don't go.

This is doesn't even register on a karmic scale yet, although that enters into it in a big way later on. When we perform negative voluntary actions, (either physical, verbal, or mental), those actions have external consequences for us that can be immediate. If we can eliminate those actions that cause those pesky negative consequences in the 'now', and karmic ones later, why shouldn't we stop sending them into the external world?

Right Speech is the first of the three 'Moral Discipline' sections. As the name implies, it has to do with what we say, who we say it to and when we say it. As is true of all Buddhist teachings, it has both negative and positive aspects. There are four areas of concern with Speech:

- False Speech
- Slandorous Speech
- Harsh Speech

- Idle Chatter

OK, not much there, say you. *Au contraire, mon cher*. Let me explain a little further. Again, the simplest statements have far reaching results.

Let's go to the Buddha for some insight.

The criteria for deciding what is worth saying:

- [1] "In the case of words that the Tathagata [another word for Buddha. ed] knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, unendearing & disagreeable to others, he does not say them.
- [2] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, unendearing & disagreeable to others, he does not say them.
- [3] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, but unendearing & disagreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them.
- [4] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, but endearing & agreeable to others, he does not say them.
- [5] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, but endearing & agreeable to others, he does not say them.
- [6] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing & agreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has sympathy for living beings."¹

Let me put it into simpler terms.

1. Don't lie.
2. If the words are true, but won't help the situation, shut up.
3. If the words are true, and would help, but the time isn't right to say them, shut up for now, and use them later.

¹ Majjhima Nikaya 58

4. If the words are untrue and unhelpful, but would be pandering, shut up.
5. If the words are true, agreeable to others, but won't help the situation, shut up.
6. If the words are true, beneficial, and agreeable to others, make sure of the proper time and place to say them.

As is many times the case, there are both positive and negative aspects to this teaching. To start off with, it would seem that these guidelines rule out a lot of things that we would normally say, particularly in the case of used car salesmen, lawyers, and politicians. Maybe that's why you don't see a lot of Buddhists in these professions.

But you have to look critically at the factors that the Buddha uses for determining what to say and when to say it. Right speech not only encompasses content, but timing. Saying the right thing at the wrong time is just as bad as saying the wrong thing at the right time.

There are five main factors in what you want to say that must be considered:

- Is it factual?
- Is it true?
- Is it beneficial?
- Is it endearing and agreeable to others?

To these I would add:

- Is it timely?

Let's examine these.

The first two of factuality and truth translate into lying. Well, kinda sorta.

At first blush, the first two would appear identical, but in reality, they're not. Something can be factual, but the conclusion based on it can be false. If you have a hypothesis about Einstein's Law of Relativity that is based on facts, but reaches an incorrect conclusion, it isn't true, but it is factual. The result is wrong, but the basis for the conclusion is OK.

Can something be true but not factual? Yes. If you have an intuitive sense of something or someone, you might be correct (have a true conclusion), but the factual basis for it is lacking, because there is no proof or the proof concludes otherwise. So you see that the two are not necessarily linked.

OK, so I'm splitting hairs here, because the Buddha uses them interchangeably in the quote, and one never opposes the other. But there has to be a reason that he included the two different versions of the concept, and I believe that it was to make sure that you know that there has to be proof for truth. But that's just a guess on my part. Your mileage may vary. After all, you **are** required to prove to yourself that all this stuff works.

The second is the attribute of "Is it beneficial?" If you speak truth to someone that isn't capable of understanding it, then you may be introducing frustration into their lives and they may react negatively. Likewise, if you speak a truth to someone who understands what you're saying, but doesn't want to accept your viewpoint, a similar negative reaction may occur. Likewise, pointing out their personal flaws to someone who is emotionally unstable is also not beneficial. Violence may ensue.

The point here is that speech which does not benefit either you or the recipient does no good. One of my favorite adages goes:

"Never try to teach a pig to sing.
Not only does it waste your time,
But it annoys the pig."²

Whether it is beneficial or not is a little trickier because the issue of motive becomes entangled here. It is possible from anger or hate that you speak correctly to hurt the other person. The motive that generates the speech, of course, is not positive to begin with. However, as a secondary effect, you can mitigate the action by not saying it and thus not cause

² Unknown.

yourself or others any more damage than the anger/hatred does to begin with.

On the other hand, withholding a truth because of anger/hatred is just as bad, because of the harm that may ensue because they didn't have the information and made a wrong decision that hurt them. Whichever way you go, you have to consider all the angles.

“Is it endearing and agreeable to others?” The first thing I thought of when I encountered this statement was the word ‘pandering.’ How is this different?

It’s nice to have everyone like what you say. “But,” I thought, “doesn’t the truth override what may not be what they want to hear?” Yes and no. If it isn’t ‘endearing and agreeable to others’, are they going to hear and remember it? Maybe they will for all the wrong reasons, but you’ll have to fight to get it accepted.

Which brings us also to the fifth item that I added ... ‘Is it timely?’

Saying the right thing at the right time is OK, saying the right thing at the wrong time is not. Telling your best friend prior to the wedding that the one they’re marrying is unfaithful and has lied is OK, but speaking up in the middle of the ceremony is not. Timing is everything. In the first case, it may be endearing and agreeable that you got them out of a potentially rotten relationship, but in the second, it probably is too late, and the ship has sailed, not to mention the chaos, screaming and loss of friendship that will follow.

Likewise, telling your boss that one of his ideas won’t work and supporting it with numbers is probably endearing and agreeable prior to implementing it (depending on how you present it), but raising hell after it fails probably won’t get you much except the satisfaction of saying ‘I knew it would fail to begin with.’ You’ll know how they took it when the next round of cutbacks comes along. And telling them this in private prior to implementation beats bringing it up in a meeting with all their enemies present.

What I hope you're seeing is that when we get to any of these actions, that they all have interconnections. Popping off in the wedding may be the result of resentment or jealousy, or raising hell after your boss's idea goes splat may be caused by anger or hatred or a desire to see him fail so you can get his job. On the other hand, doing it at the right time may be the result of love and understanding, or (with your boss) a genuine desire to see them not fail. You'll see how this operates as we go along in detail, but for now, I hope you see the broader overview.

Returning to the narrower issue of Right Speech, we first look at the wrong side of the issue.

False speech is somewhat self-explanatory, but not entirely. The one thing that pops out right away is lying. This carries penalties if you're caught, and even if you're not. OK, so I said there were no penalties for this stuff in Buddhism. There aren't in the normal sense of Buddhist morality, but in terms of social interaction and harmony, there most certainly are if you get caught. They may not be divine, but they are nonetheless real. The karmic results, however, will come back to haunt you at some point.

The positive side of this one is to try to always speak the truth, as hard as that may be for some of us. Telling the white lie isn't as bad as the huge one, but it is still a untruth. If we can catch that smaller lie, then catching the big ones becomes easier.

Slandorous speech isn't what we would normally think of here in the western world. Slandorous speech in the Buddhist definition is that speech which seeks to divide or set one group or individual against another. This could be hate speech (ala the KKK or Nazis) or it could be anything that generates divisiveness between religions or cultures or even two individuals.

On a side note here, speech in this context doesn't have to be spoken - it can be handwritten, splattered on a wall with

a spray can, mass-mailed, printed up, or thrown out on the Internet. This is true for all forms of speech in these contexts.

Harsh speech is the abusive kind. While it may not be slanderous or false, it can be difficult to take depending on how it is delivered. Tone and delivery are key here (not to mention timing). Be careful how you say it, even if it's right on target and timely. Calling someone out in public in a harsh manner may be true, but you'll not gain any friends or influence very many people - not to mention the karmic problems you'll bring down around your ears.

Idle speech is a type that even the Buddha concedes is going to happen no matter what. It includes all the normal pleasantries of everyday living. "Hi there, how's the wife and kids?", even though you don't really care. It's this kind of chatter. But it also includes gossip and junk that is not necessary to our lives. This stuff is mostly a distraction and not necessary. But to totally do away with it (unless you're in a Catholic Trappist monastery under a vow of silence) is almost impossible. The Buddha admonishes us not to do it to excess, recognizing that the general society requires some of it in order to make things work.

So how do you keep from doing wrong speech?

[The Buddha speaks to his son, Rahula:] "Whenever you want to perform a verbal act, you should reflect on it: 'This verbal act I want to perform — would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful verbal act, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful verbal act with painful consequences, painful results, then any verbal act of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful verbal action with happy consequences, happy results, then any verbal act of that sort is fit for you to do.

"While you are performing a verbal act, you should reflect on it: 'This verbal act I am doing — is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful verbal act, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.

"Having performed a verbal act, you should reflect on it... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful verbal act with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful verbal action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed and joyful, training day and night in skillful mental qualities."³

If this sounds somewhat familiar, it's just another version of what we had in the last chapter regarding bodily actions. In other words, think about what you're saying before, during, and after. 'Nuff said. Stop, Look and Listen, remember?

Another area associated with Right Speech that takes great skill and practice is the art of admonishment. Dealing with another when the objective is to alter their behavior is always a potential powder keg. The Buddha basically tells us to make sure our own chicken coop is mucked out before complaining about someone else's. We must ask ourselves:

- Am I one that practices pure action? Am I clean of what I'm going to lean on them for?
- Am I one who practices pure speech myself? Are all my motives clean here?
- Is my heart coming from a position of goodwill, without malice? Do I have any axes to grind here?
- Am I within the bounds of Right Speech?

³ Majjhima Nikaya 61

- Is this the right time to admonish?
- Am I being factual?
- Am I being harsh?
- Are my words going to have the proper effect?
- Will what I say create more problems than it will solve?

All these factors must be consciously taken into account before, during, and after the process of admonishment.

All in all, Right Speech isn't so new, and yet this approach is probably new to most of you. All of us know at a basic level what it's all about. Returning to the concept of personal space, it fits right into that concept. Don't violate the personal space of another with words.

Right Action is next.

CHAPTER TWELVE

RIGHT ACTION

PART 1 KILLING

Right Action is exactly what it says it is. I know, I know - circular logic, using a phrase to define itself. That's not logical, nor is it helpful, because without explanation and reasons, it is not only self-undefined, but has no substance. And without definition and substance it is meaningless. After all, what does 'right' mean, anyway?

Right Action is the set of guidelines that the Buddha laid down as the basis for freeing up the mind. These guidelines define what actions are good and wholesome (and generate good karma) and those that are bad for us (and generate rotten karma). As you saw in the last chapter, the whole idea of 'right' and 'wrong' doesn't really apply, at least in our westernized way of thinking. What might be a better way of calling it might be 'what works' and 'what doesn't work.'

As usual, the bad comes first in the definitions list, and their inversions require a little thought. You can understand the negatives a lot better if we take them up in the beginning.

First, we have the prohibition against killing other sentient or semi-sentient beings.

This may seem simple on its face, (and it is) but the devil is in the details, as always. This generates a lot of questions right off the bat. What's sentience? How far up the tree of life does it extend? Do we equate bacterium with our own lives? (We'll return to this one in about twenty chapters or so.) How far does this extend? What exceptions (if any) are there? Am I allowed to defend my property and myself? And the list goes on.

These are but a few of a multitude of questions that this prohibition raises. Let's take some of these and see if there are any answers that make sense.

What's sentience? Let's see - one dictionary says it is the ability to be self-aware. Another defines it as the ability to be cognizant and make abstract thought. By these standards, there are a lot of lawyers, corporate executives and politicians that obviously wouldn't qualify. But I digress ...

Which leads us to the question: Where does the boundary of sentience lie? Are cattle and sheep sentient? Is there some basic level of self-awareness there? Or are we incorrectly placing anthropomorphic values¹ onto animals? This can get us onto really shaky ground if we let it.

It used to be thought (and still is by many) that only human beings are sentient. Then we ran headlong into Koko, the gorilla, who could communicate abstract thought through sign language and recognized herself (verifiably) in the mirror. The research was proven beyond a doubt. This threw a giant monkey wrench (no pun intended) into the presumed sanctity of human superiority that hasn't been fully resolved in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

It has also been proven that chimpanzees and various other primates have intricate social orders (as do whales and dolphins), and do abstract thought, although at a much lower level than we do (at least as far as we currently know). Dolphins have been proved to have a form of language that communicates information. We could probably extend that premise to many other species of mammal that we have yet to verify. Even the research that has been done so far on octopus implies that there is some rational thought and a degree of intelligence that many are having trouble accepting for invertebrates.

It has been found now that even bees can make decisions on their own as to whether to pay attention to another hive member's 'food dance' or dismiss it as bad information.

So much for limiting 'sentience' to mammals.

¹ The placing of human values and traits on animals that may or may not possess them.

Any cat owner will agree that domestic cats definitely think for themselves and have an intricate and intimate relationship with their owners/staff and other cats (assuming a multiple cat household). I say staff, because dogs have owners whereas cats have staff to serve their every whim. Dang - another pesky digression.

So this mucks up our definition of sentience to a royal degree. Can we really use this definition to find our limits of what we can or can't kill? This now becomes an incredibly difficult problem to slog our way through.

If we take these definitions to heart, we vaguely begin to commence to start to see a hazy concept out there somewhere. The suttas (sutras) and sects of Buddhism vary greatly as to the scope of this prohibition. Some view it as an absolute, even going so far as to not defending yourself and dying before returning violence. Others go only as far as not killing other humans willingly, with wide latitude as to how far this goes. There was even one instance of a Buddhist temple in southeast Asia that had become overrun with fire ants, and rather than exterminate the ants, the monks chose to rebuild the temple elsewhere rather than eradicate the ants. This is taking the premise to a rather extreme position, but it is what some pious believers choose to do.

I would guess that within the western application of Buddhist principles, it now becomes a purely personal definition as to how far you take it. But bear in mind that it carries a varying karmic price regardless of where you find yourself.

It is impossible to avoid killing at some level. Since we as human beings are incapable of eating only raw minerals and remaining alive, we have by strict definition killed something if we're up walking around and reading this book. It is inevitable.

OK, we've ruled out the absolute. We're now faced with the relative. At what point do we draw the line? Some say that the line gets drawn at the level of the vegetable. They say that all of us should become 'vegans'. While that has seeming

merit, that 'one size fits all' proposition isn't appropriate to everyone.

The Buddha prohibits the monks and nuns from eating meat - saying that it creates an odor and aura that puts people off and creates a negative space around you. In his day and age, it might have had some social implications, but I can't find any modern reason for denying it, save the original prohibition. It seems possible that the prohibition stemmed from the practical side, in that there was no refrigeration in a tropical area, and the storage of meat for any time at all was problematic to say the least, and could lead to disease and food poisoning. But also remember that to the Hindu population of the time (and even now), that cows were sacred, and couldn't be killed or butchered. Is there a connection to the local custom or is it realization of sentience in some form for all living beings? After all, many of the premises of Buddhist philosophy seem to have had their roots further back in the Hindu/Vedic traditions.

If you want to take this theory of universal sentience even further, it has been proven that plants react to various types of music in their growth patterns, and that adjacent plants will move (slowly - very slowly by our timetable) away from ones that have been killed or are sick or injured. Is this sentience on a much more subtle and lengthy timeline? Inquiring minds want to know ...

But bringing us back to reality, we **have** to come back to the fact that we can't eat dirt and survive. We have to have consumed SOMETHING living that has processed the raw elemental materials and produced an edible substance for us to consume (either themselves or a product - think bees). Indeed, almost the entire food chain is based on each successive level killing and consuming the ones below it. So is the premise based on sentience scientifically sound? Or is it more of a social construct for the creation of harmony within the culture?

Fact! We have to kill at some level to stay alive.

Fact! All life probably has sentience at some level and timeline.

Fact! We have to deal with it.

Could it be that the Buddha was taking a simplistic approach to the problem and setting an arbitrary standard? Was the prohibition misinterpreted somewhere along the line to include other than human life?

We'll probably never know for sure, but I'm willing to bet that it was probably applied only to human life for social reasons, much the same way that Old Testament biblical edicts (as in Deuteronomy and Leviticus) were never actually originated in divine law. They were, however, social constructs couched in divine wrappings so as to make them carry more moral weight for the society that generated them. As is always the case, those that wrote this stuff down probably included all kinds of extra stuff for their own ends and agendas.

We would probably find that if we could take a time machine back to the time of Buddha, we would find a much different interpretation of what he meant than much of the later literature would allow for. I'm guessing that he wouldn't recognize much of what passes for Buddhism today as being a part of what he started. Of course, neither would Abraham, Jesus, or Mohamed recognize their respective faiths, either.

So where are we at this point?

We've pretty much thrown out the sentience argument, since everything could possibly have some degree of sentience. This leaves us only the social harmony aspect of the prohibition against killing.

But how far does this really take us? Does it include those outside of our own social structure? Or is it merely within our own scope of influence?

It is a universal concept that "Thou shalt not kill." It's in the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament of the Christian and Jewish faiths. It's in the Koran. It's contained in the Hindu traditions. It's all over the place as a basic social construct.

We as a species have only a thin veneer of civilization between us and the caves and savannas from whence we

came. The social fabric grew out of the need to protect and defend ourselves, our individual families, and our social groups - in that order. The further we extend this priority (to our extended family, religious group, political subdivision or country), the less likely we are to accept any edict against killing - and this is only with human beings.

It is basic human nature to be afraid of something or someone that isn't like us, from which the problem of racism evolves. The ultimate extension of this would be a 'first contact' situation where a peace-loving alien in a flying saucer lands in a cornfield in Kansas and is met by a shotgun-toting farmer who is scared out of his ever-lovin' mind. You can predict the result.

An additional problem evolves when we adopt a 'no-kill' policy and our enemies/neighbors don't. It doesn't take rocket science to understand that our society would have no policies (or anything else) to adopt in pretty short order. We'd be assimilated or just plain wiped out.

There have been societies that indeed adopted such a policy. They do not exist today except in isolation or places surrounded by societies that believe in the same ideals.

Killing is in our nature. The Buddha (I believe) meant the prohibition to hold only within our own society/family/group. I cannot conceive that in the time that Buddha lived, with all the strife and internecine warfare that was going on between the Indian Princes, that he would have said that you do not have the right to defend yourself. But it becomes murky when you extend it beyond humans to say all sentient beings. Do I have a right to defend my family against a predator attack that would see my children killed? I would think so.

Our definitions have now become really fuzzy, and we may indeed make a wrong decision as to sentience that will generate bad karma for us but which we truly believe it to be the right decision. And if you say all sentient beings, then you eliminate the self-defense validation immediately.

Another factor to consider in this bailiwick is the reason behind the action of killing. Is it from the emotional basis of

rage or revenge? Or is it because of desire for something that the other has? Is it jealousy or a love affair gone bad? Is the killing just in cold blood or is it self-defense?

All these have to be taken into account in the evaluation. How many of these could be justified as self-defense? If not, then it definitely carries karmic consequence. Even if so, to what extent was it necessary to defend myself and my property from harm? How far can I take this use of deadly force? Can I chase the perpetrator for miles and years to get my pound of flesh? Or can I merely use enough force to remove the threat? If I can eliminate the threat without killing, am I justified in going any further? All these questions enter into the equation and are derivative of the one simple sentence ... 'the prohibition against killing other sentient or semi-sentient beings.'

I have to believe that the prohibition on killing has to stem from the same root as the Biblical Commandment, as a social necessity to maintain order and comity within the society. Hence it becomes a personal choice once we get outside the realm of our own species or even our own families.

I personally don't like killing animals, but so long as it's done humanely, I can't find a basis for not doing it. One of my weaknesses is red meat, but as to growing my own and giving it up for slaughter, I'll opt for the plastic-wrapped, personally unidentifiable variety in the supermarket case. It just isn't within my purview to define that prohibition for anyone else - it's all about that personal space thingie again.

In a nutshell, the prohibition against killing is viable and absolute when it comes to human beings except in self-defense. Carrying it on beyond our own species is problematic, and is self-destructive when taken to the ultimate extreme. I realize that the various sects and communities within Buddhism would take issue with this as to its extent, but at its fundamental core, this is what **I** believe the Buddha meant and would have us follow. To go to the ultimate extremist view would diminish the number of Buddhists in fairly short order.

More on Right Action in the next chapter ...

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RIGHT ACTION PART 2

STEALING

The second major division in the Right Action section involves ‘the taking of what is not given.’

This sounds a lot like the Biblical admonition against stealing, doesn’t it. It probably stems from the same basic social root. Again we find ourselves trying to not get bogged down in definitions and technicalities.

While ‘Thou shalt not steal’ is pretty definitive in Biblical terms, it leaves a lot of wriggle room in the Buddhist venue as to how you define not only the intent of the taker, but the intent and scope of the giver or owner.

Can I take what I believe doesn’t belong to the other guy? Is it thrown out as trash? Is it community property that I can take and then give back? When is it a loan? What if it was shared property and there’s a dispute over the share division? Does everything have to belong to somebody?

All of these things are derivative of social constructs that the Buddha must have known, as a student of human nature.

What this precept does is to bring into focus again the idea that these prohibitions on conduct stem more from maintaining social order than as edicts of a divine nature or at the very least, rules for a civil society. Or it could just be a derivation of the whole ‘individual space’ idea.

Of course, the threat of karmic retribution isn’t an idle threat. To the Buddhist believer, it’s an everyday reality. The only parts subject to debate are the intensity and extent. But it is a factor in every one of the parts of the EightFold Path. Indeed, it is the inversion and/or prevention of the negative

karmic energy that we generate for ourselves which is the entire reason for the EightFold Path to exist at all.

Let's examine this 'taking of what is not given' a little further.

The obvious first analogy is stealing. This is taking what is not given at its boldest and most obvious form. This obviously isn't a good thing for any society. It definitely creates dissension in any social construct. Mankind's basic nature has the tendency to have things that are 'mine' or 'ours' and maintain property that is personal.

Stealing, in terms of the personal space theory, is right up there as a no-no. This definitely could land you in trouble, particularly if you get caught. But the ramifications of hiding what was stolen, of living with the guilt (providing you feel guilt) and all the myriad of other factors doesn't make for a peaceful existence (unless you're a psychopath, and then all bets are off).

But there are less obvious varieties of this that we have to examine as well.

What about when you're unsure about who owns something? If you find a cow that bears no identifying marks as to its owner, is it rightfully yours if you want it? It wasn't given to you. Of course, the right thing to do is to try to find an owner for it. At the extreme, you can't claim ownership, since it wasn't given to you, you hadn't bought it, and you didn't raise it yourself. Therefore should you just let it go? Hmmmmmm ...

What about when you steal something intangible, such as someone's reputation or identity (to move the discussion into the twenty-first century)? If they're not damaged directly and they don't have to pay for what you got fraudulently, where's the beef? Again, it's stealing, because somebody had to pay either directly or indirectly for what was taken by fraud.

What about property that is thrown out as trash? If the property is obviously discarded, then it's probably fair game. But when is it obviously discarded? If it's an old car on my

own property that can't ever be driven again, is that trash? So long as I still maintain possession of it, it's mine - it's my scrap metal and memories.

There's an interesting parallel with a different outcome in regards to maritime wrecks. Several people have gotten into trouble by trying to salvage cargo or artifacts from old wrecks that the original owners (or their insurance companies or the country in which it sank or the country that the ship sailed from) have never relinquished title to, even though it wasn't until modern technology came to the fore to get items from the wreck. In this case, while you might think it had been abandoned, it in legal reality hadn't. It's a technicality of maritime law, to be sure, but still theirs nonetheless. And there might be a parallel in the 'trash' situation mentioned above.

We get into what would be considered massive legal tangles in this day and age when we try to define too narrowly the extents of the laws and regulations for our modern society. An example would be the extent to which a homeowner's association within a subdivision can regulate how your house and surroundings look. Especially difficult is when membership is required when you bought the house. But in a Buddhist sense, are you really and truly stealing from the neighbor's property values if you keep two junkers on the driveway or don't mow your lawn? After all, the perceived property value is an arbitrary number, and the only trespass on your neighbor is their belief that you're an eyesore to the neighborhood and bring down their property values - and that's their problem, not yours (that is, until they legally make it yours). Democracy in action, and usually, if you live there, you signed a contract that is enforceable under the law. We report, you decide ...

Unfortunately, that's modern society for you ... and the modern legal system built on Judeo-Christian principles. Once again, the basic premise was good and valid, but the overlays of what people do with the basics can get into social morasses that defy belief sometimes.

So you can see, the whole issue of 'taking what isn't given' has an infinite number of shades of gray.

But taking it back to the whole concept of 'personal space', it becomes abundantly clear what Buddha had in mind.

If you invade someone's space in any way, it's against the principle here. It's just that simple. Now you're going to have to evaluate for yourself where the boundaries are. If the cow has no markings, but it's definitely a domesticated cow, you would be taking if you claimed ownership and didn't make an effort to find the owner. And you have to be ready to give it up if the owner shows up and claims it, showing proof of ownership.

Now if you appropriated a cow that belonged to the community as a whole, it would be outright against the principle. No question. Because there was community 'space' that belonged to all, you mangled the 'space' thingie. Obviously, if you don't buy into the idea of community property (aka public places and communal things), then you're going to have a dispute on your hands. But that idea didn't seem to enter into the definition during Buddha's time.

If I remember rightly, that wasn't a valid concept back then, because everything belonged to the ruling prince, and you borrowed/leased/squatted on the land at their pleasure. And provided you paid your taxes and didn't scream too loudly, there wasn't much interference in your life. Hmmm, not much seems to have changed - the land is yours until the government decides differently for whatever reason. At least it's usually not for a frivolous reason (most of the time). But I digress ...

So where does this leave us? 'Taking what is not given' as a prohibition has to be (as is true in Buddhism universally) part of the individual responsibility that lies at the heart of the philosophy. If you violate this section, you also mangle the underlying principle of that responsibility, and therefore all the other parts of the EightFold Path and its ramifications become seriously unstable in your life.

I can't stress too much the principle of individual responsibility and self-determination that is the bedrock tenet of Buddhist thought. If I violate that core principle, it's like weakening the foundation of a huge skyscraper so that the slightest breeze will cause it to topple and fall. At the very least, the law of karma dictates that there will be payback, if not to you within this lifetime (maybe), then to some poor soul that inherits your karmic account.

The third section of actions by the body deals with sensual/sexual relations.

It's pretty simple, and pretty easy to understand.

Don't have a sexual relationship with another person's mate. Don't have a sexual relationship outside of marriage or betrothal. Don't do the nasty with underage kids. Don't have sex with protected people (betrothed, mentally incompetent, or consecrated).

On it's face, it would seem fairly straightforward. It would seem to be clear to all what the boundaries are. It would seem to fit into our concept of personal space. But as usual, the devil is in the details.

What about if you didn't know it was someone else's fiancé? What if they appeared to be older than they really were? What if they didn't tell you they were married? What if it was consensual on both sides, regardless of existing marital ties? Here we go again with the shades of gray, huh ...

If you enter into these kinds of relationships in good faith, not intending to violate the precepts, the karma generated probably won't be as bad as if you did it willingly and knowingly. But you have to do your 'due diligence', as if you were buying a house - ya gotta know what you're getting into.

Sometimes the hormones and pheromones get the better of you, and you think that there's no choice but to go with the relationship. Been there, done that, got the T-Shirt. But in retrospect, I knew that it wasn't the right thing to do for

whatever instinctive reason. I just didn't heed the little voice inside saying, "Run away! Run away NOW!"

All the things we've dealt with in these two chapters so far are volitional - they are things that we willingly do, after thinking about them. That's why they're called volitional. We voluntarily do them. Hopefully, when we perform a volitional act, we've thought about what we're doing, and why, and if it's the right thing to do. This involves Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration - looking at what we're about to do, what we're doing, and what we've done. We'll get to these in detail a few chapters from now.

In the next chapter, we'll deal with Right Livelihood.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

Now why in the world would the Buddha concern himself with this whole idea of what jobs people should pursue within the society? Good question.

Society (and human nature) has a bad tendency to pigeonhole people according to what they do, not who they are. And there is a natural tendency to structure the cooperative nature of the society with a caste system (formal or informal) - and the job or vocation has a large part to do with that structure. It's all about how we fit into the social structure.

It must be remembered that Buddha was a member of a rigid caste society, and many of his teachings have to be considered in that context. The whole issue of Right Livelihood has to be taken in this light.

"A lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in human beings, business in meat, business in intoxicants, and business in poison."¹

In other texts, the Buddha goes on at length with other forms of livelihood for monks and nuns that are prohibited. That list is quite long, but boils down to additional prohibitions against fortune telling of all kinds, prophecy, and the like.

Additionally, there are other texts dealing with certain professions that the Buddha says are not to be taken up, such as acting or soldiering. These additional ones have negative consequences derived from Wrong Actions.

Right Livelihood is integrally tied to Right Action. What you do for the community should be aligned with what you do for yourself. What you do for the community is your profession or job.

¹Anguttara Nikaya 5.177

All of these prohibited jobs derive from the inverses of Right Action or Right Speech.

Dealing in weapons has a direct impact on the ability of human beings to kill. While you do not directly participate in the killing, you are indirectly responsible if you deal in the buying and selling of those weapons. There is a question of whether it is legitimate to kill in defense of your property or your life and limb. If you provide a weapon to someone who uses it to kill a third party - are you indirectly responsible for their being able to kill?

We went into this area quite a bit a couple of chapters back, and we left it to the discretion of the individual as to what amount of karma they were willing to generate for themselves. Of course direct killing for no reason, or for greed, or other reasons is never justified under any circumstances and the karma generated is quite severe.

Some would say, "If I don't sell this stuff, someone else will and I won't make the profit." While this is true, it doesn't negate the generation of karma involved in providing the means for someone else to kill. This is not as if you directly did it yourself, but you are penalized for aiding and abetting those that did or will.

Dealing in slavery or bondage isn't good for your karmic index, either. This prohibition is interesting, given that it was generated in the midst of an intense caste society. While most of the society wasn't technically in slavery, it probably amounted to the same thing in effect. There was no breaking out of your social caste without major penalties. And captives of conflict were almost invariably put to work as slaves or conscripts.

Trafficking in human beings is not allowing them their free will and the ability to exercise their responsibility for their own existence. Being enslaved not only restricts their ability for physical and social mobility - it dampens their own ability to think for themselves. Slavery, of course, prevents any notion of the self-determination that is at the heart of Buddhist philosophy.

Selling meat probably derives its onus in part to the Hindu tradition of sacred animals, however this is tenuous at best. Again, is this prohibition a moral one, or a social one? I rather believe it to be a social one, stemming from the inability to keep and preserve meat for any length of time in a hot, humid climate, and the sicknesses that come from rotten meat. This one is open to individual interpretation.

The ban on business in poisons derives from its intended results. Poisons are used primarily to kill things or people, and making a living from it violates the previous ban on killing, even indirectly.

The ban against producing intoxicants derives primarily from the harm that consumption to excess produces. It's an indirect problem, but nonetheless it is counterproductive to the society as a whole.

A ban against acting is interesting because the reason for it isn't obvious. This profession creates illusion (which equates in Buddhist thought to delusion or the clouding of reality), which is one of the things that the EightFold Path teaches us to try to eliminate.

Soldiering is also in the no-no category for some, because it causes us to kill in other than self-defense of our home and family. Yet if you are in the front lines and 'they're coming atcha', you're in self-defense mode. Another nebulous one.

All these moral precepts in the 'Moral Discipline' section deal with social issues within the community. Some may take them as being the equivalent of the Judaic laws of Deuteronomy and Leviticus in the Christian Bible, or the moral law of the Sharia in the Koran. Such an argument could indeed be made, but its validity would be subject to question by the faithful who accept it as divine law.

Going back to the basic concept of personal space (with which we are wired at a very primal level), these moral precepts all can be traced back to that one idea. The violation of personal space, whether physical or mental, results in an injury to the person.

Killing, injuring, stealing from or lying to/about, are all violations of the personal space concept. Even 'Right Livelihood' can be construed to be helping the individual to not karmically injure himself or herself.

This base concept lies at the root of almost every religion, society or philosophy that I can think of. These moral constructs all relate back to the idea of personal space and the violation of it.

There have been times, however, when it has been morphed into a situation where everything belongs to the king or monarch, and the people are granted use of the land while not owning it. Even so, in a de-facto sense, the people were left pretty much alone within the confines of their homes and land - unless you failed to pay your tribute or tax to the Grand PooBah of the region, in which case you might find yourself evicted or worse.

When you're ready, the idea of Right Effort is just around the corner in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE CONCENTRATION DIVISION

In the last three chapters, we've talked about the Moral Discipline part of the EightFold Path - dealing with Right Action, Right Speech, and Right Livelihood.

Those three parts dealt with handling the external world in such a way that it leads to a better relationship with the society you find yourself in, as well as your own personal environment. Once you've calmed down your daily existence, it's easier to turn inward to watch the workings of your mind. In other words, when you don't have to focus so hard on the daily grind, you'll have more time and effort to devote to thinking on 'why' you're doing what you do.

Another way to look at this progression is to say that we've tried to narrow the range of action, speech and livelihood to tone down the aggravations of our everyday lives. When this happens, we are more likely to be able to look internally at what we're doing to ourselves and why.

Of course, the best way to do this is to become a hermit, and have Costco deliver whatever you need and leave it on your doorstep. But that's a fantasy that few of us ever achieve. I know I haven't. Going into permanent asylum and meditating continuously isn't something that most of us can achieve in any meaningful manner.

But once we have begun to use the moral disciplines with even minimal success, we can start pulling back the curtains and begin to see what's behind our actions (or speech, or livelihood). What drives these external actions? How do we modify these internal drives to keep them from going external? Or better yet, keep them from ever occurring in the first place?

Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration give us the tools to find and eliminate these negative drives, and enhance the positive ones. These three parts of the EightFold Path make up the Concentration division.

Bhikkhu Bodhi explains it thusly:

The purification of conduct (i.e. Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood ... ed.) established by the prior three factors serves as the basis for the next division of the path, the division of concentration (*samadhikkhandha*). This present phase of practice, which advances from moral restraint to direct mental training, comprises the three factors of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. It gains its name from the goal to which it aspires, the power of sustained concentration, itself required as the support for insight wisdom. Wisdom is the primary tool for deliverance, but the penetrating vision it yields can only open up when the mind has been composed and collected. Right concentration brings the requisite stillness to the mind by unifying it with undistracted focus on a suitable object. To do so, however, the factor of concentration needs the aid of effort and mindfulness. Right effort provides the energy demanded by the task, right mindfulness the steadying points for awareness.¹

Once again, the total interconnectedness of the EightFold Path shows itself. We perform Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood, which pave the way by eliminating many external distractions. Once undistracted, we can start looking inward. We can employ concentration to focus the mind; use effort to support the concentration; and have the mindfulness to see that we're focusing on the correct things.

Zen seems to work by shutting down the mind with discipline and emptying it of all thought until true enlightenment comes about. In actuality, it's employing the same parts of the EightFold Path, but in a different way that seems to alter Buddha's 'Middle Way' theory of 'all things in moderation.' But it works for its adherents and that's ok.

In a nutshell, we will (in the next few chapters) examine how we get to the point of being able to see our mind in operation. Once we see what's happening, we can start to identify and eliminate those negative reactions that it generates that get us into so much karmic (and other kinds of)

¹ The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering, by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Copyright © 1998 Buddhist Publication Society, Access to Insight edition © 1999. The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS.

trouble. After all, 50% of solving any problem is identifying the problem to begin with.

While the whole EightFold Path seems to be a progression of ideas, in actuality, it's just part of the same upward spiral. Are we going around in a circle? Yes, but it's not because we're lost; it's because we're finding ourselves advancing in an upward spiral that gets us to enlightenment.

Right Effort deals with getting fully behind and enabling the curiosity (and determination) to delve into all that mind muck that you've been avoiding all these years. In order to look inside the mind, it requires a LOT of energy and concentration (not to mention drive and willpower), and it can only be done by the individual who makes the extra effort to do it.

Right Mindfulness shows us the way to investigate our minds. If the way we go about has holes or incorrect methods in it, then the results of that process will be equally flawed. Using Right Mindfulness, we begin to make sure that the methods we use and support with energy are good and sound.

Right Concentration, as its name implies, teaches us to focus intently, until we see exactly what is generating the actions (either internal or external) and emotions that we're trying to discover and modify. Eventually, Right Concentration will allow us to see the total reality of the world around us, and see through the delusions we hold about that reality. We don't yet realize that we even have delusions about that reality, but I guarantee you that they're there. No one is initially immune.

As we've said many times before, this path isn't for lemmings. It requires brutal honesty, steadfast adherence, and providing the energy necessary so as to stay with the program. It isn't easy, particularly in this age of instant gratification, to work on going deep into your own mind, when there are so many distractions and more interesting things to do with your time. In actuality, this investigation into your mind is one of the most absolutely intriguing things that you can ever do, unless you're scared of what you may find.

However, when we couple all the distractions with the requirements placed on earning a living and caring for a family, it's a recipe for falling off the path or approaching it without the time, energy and effort necessary to accomplish much.

But if you approach this with an open mind, and make the time and energy to investigating and using the EightFold Path in your daily life, the rewards are amazing. It truly can be a totally life-changing experience. But it only works if you as an individual take charge of doing it, and work at it.

This isn't spoon-fed material. This isn't rote memorization. It isn't 'read and heed'. This isn't anything but you yourself going after it with a dedication that borders on obsession. Once you get to a certain point, it actually becomes an internal obsession to find why you think the way you do and alter it if necessary. **But it requires you and you alone to do it.** The Buddha won't help you out except to point the way and give you directions on how to get to where you want to go. He challenges you to make it work for yourself.

Many people consider this a religion. Indeed, Buddha himself probably wouldn't recognize much of what Buddhism has become. But what he would recognize and offer up is the practice of the EightFold Path and the Four Noble Truths along with the idea that it is possible to achieve enlightenment within a single lifetime.

Personally, the more I work with this, the less religious it becomes. The rituals become unnecessary, as does the dogma and the hierarchy. (See the Introduction for what the Buddha actually said about this if you doubt it.) It becomes a way of life that is constantly improving and evolving. The one thing that overrides it all is that the individual is responsible for doing all of this for themselves. Without the commitment of time and energy and effort, it will all be for nothing, until a cosmic 2x4 timber manages to give you enough of a whack about the mental head and shoulders to get your attention.

Let's get on down the path.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

HEADING INTO THE MIND

The Moral Discipline part of the EightFold Path is also called ‘the Five Precepts.’ They are:

1. *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.

2. *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.

3. *Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.

4. *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech.

5. *Suramerayamajja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.¹

Sound somewhat familiar? It should be. It paraphrases major parts of the Moral Discipline portion of the EightFold Path.

Adhering to the precepts is a major step forward and proves difficult for a lot of folks. Keeping even a part of the Moral Disciplines is more than many people can say that they honestly do on a daily basis.

What keeping the precepts does is keep you from releasing negative actions into the real world (and reaping the associated karma), while we’re trying to deal with the internals of the mind. If you’re adhering to the Moral Discipline part of the path, you’re keeping your negative actions to a minimum in the outside world, which in turn gives you more time and

¹ "The Five Precepts: *pañca-sīla*", edited by John T. Bullitt. *Access to Insight*, May 26, 2010.
<http://www.accesstoinight.org/ptf/dhamma/sila/pancasila.html>.

ability to concentrate on what's going on the inside of your mind.

And here the incredible interconnectedness of the EightFold Path comes into play once again. Funding the energy necessary to work on this stuff is somewhat wasteful if you don't have the Right Resolve to use it. And if your Right View is looking elsewhere from seeing the suffering of the Four Noble Truths, all that energy and the resolve to use it are pretty irrelevant. Again, the whole thing is all tied together, very much like the fundamental Buddhist concept idea that all things are universally interconnected - but that's a much later concept that we'll get to later.

We'll be getting to the first section of the Concentration division of the EightFold Path, namely Right Effort (the other two being Right Concentration and Right Mindfulness) but, in order to build a foundation, we have to go back to basics and see how the mind generates this stuff - which will in turn lead us to the ways to work with it.

Again, finding out what the problem really is, is at least half of solving the problem. If you don't know what to fix, then you're 'shotgunning' the problem with minimum probability of success.

In terms of the processes that the mind uses, there are four phases:

- Sense Faculty (the actual sensory input itself) - what we get as raw visual, aural or whatever data
- Sense Object (defining that sensory input) - what was that?
- Feeling (the emotional content of the Sense Object) - was that a good input or should I run like hell?
- Perception (the evaluation of all the Feelings about the sense object) - Oh, that was just a car backfire, no need to worry.

So how does this process work? It usually happens so fast that we never see the process in play. But let's try to break it down a little.

First, a Sense Faculty receives an input (sound, sight, etc.)

Next, the mind immediately takes over and tries to identify the input (bird chirp, car sounds, exhaust smell, truck moving, etc.) This is the Sense Object.

The third phase is how we feel about the object (good, bad, or indifferent) and a risk assessment (dangerous, safe, don't know).

Last but not least comes perception, where the identification, feeling, and perception all come together, along with any other combined Sense Objects, and Feelings. At that point we have a unified idea (not necessarily correct) about what that the original sense input was. This is called Perception.

Lets take an example:

I hear a gunshot. I see a man running. I smell gunpowder residue. I see another man lying down in the gutter.

Now most of us would take these sensory inputs and immediately conjecture that there has been a shooting, and that the man running has shot the man lying down. But is that really the case?

Hearing the gunshot, you identify it as such. Feelings about gunshots are usually bad, unless you're in the Middle East and it's festival time (it still may be bad, though). You subliminally add the things you know about gunshots, and your mind starts making assumptions.

Seeing the man running is another input. Now in actuality, it could be that he forgot to feed the parking meter, or is just in a hurry to get to work because he missed the bus, or he's running away because he also heard the shot. It results in an indeterminate feeling - doesn't move me one way or the other. By the way, there's no gun in evidence with the running man.

Smelling the gunpowder residue could just be a coincidence, but probably not.

Seeing the other man lying down could be that he's drunk, sleeping on the street or needs medical attention. He could also be a Vietnam vet that took cover instinctively after having served over there.

The perception that is generated by the combined senses is a general one that something bad just happened. While each input is possibly non-coincidental on its own, the mind has combined them all to provide a basis for determining action (or not). In this case, most of us would assume that a shooting just occurred and the running man did it. In fact, it may have just been a car backfire, the running guy is in a hurry to get to work, your nose misidentified the smell, and there's a drunk in the gutter.

Perception in this case is based on a whole series of assumptions, based on identifying what the sensory input means. Some of the time it's right. Sometimes it's wrong. The more complex the set of inputs, and the more connections the mind has to make, the more likely it is that you'll make a wrong assumption and thus make an incorrect decision on action. Many times, you may accept someone else's interpretation and go with it, however erroneous it may be ... because you can't make up your own mind on the initial perceptions.

Now if you **see** the running man point a gun and fire before he starts running, you've got a better handle on things. But he still could have missed hitting his target, your nose could have erred on the gunpowder, and the guy in the gutter is still drunk.

If the running man fired the gun, and the guy in the gutter fell as a result, then you've got much more evidence that you were correct in your original assessment. The smell aspect becomes minor, since you have overwhelming visual evidence as to what went on.

But you still don't know if the guy in the gutter got shot, do you? He might just have been taking a dive for cover and the running man missed or wasn't aiming for him at all. If the gutter guy was indeed a Vietnam vet, the dive for cover is a good possibility.

You now begin to see that it is a complex set of equations and assumptions that the mind is dealing with. In many cases it is drawing on experience at the perception level, without even going back to make sure that the feelings or even the sensory input is correct. This can be fatal if the prior experience was incorrect or got out of control. It's called 'reactionary' thinking.

Let me use another analogy to help understand what's going on here. They are called 'prior similars'. It's where the mind thinks that this situation is just like a previous one, and recommends actions. Those actions may or may not be appropriate.

Suppose you, as a child, were playing on the sidewalk when a man wearing sandals and sporting a red beard comes by and kicks you (physically) off the sidewalk. You go screaming into the house, but by the time your mother gets outside, the guy is gone and eventually you forget about the incident.

Fast forward forty or so years. You're now in charge of a division of software engineers at a large company. You're looking for a new programmer, and the prospective employee before you is one of the best in the business. His resume and references are impeccable. He's wearing sandals and has a long red beard. What's going to be your reaction?

I'd bet you try to find every reason not to hire him, even though he's the best candidate for the job by far. I'd bet additionally that you don't even realize that you're being driven in your mind by that faraway incident that happened years before.

So can you trust your mind? Not really, unless you learn to control it. If you manage to make it only give you correct information, you can actually trust it, because you now have it doing what you want it to do, and not going off on its own.

More now on 'prior similars.' I see a large animal downtown. It has four legs, it is black and white, and it has horns. I immediately identify it as a Holstein dairy cow. It

could be a fiberglass model, particularly if it is on a pole outside a creamery. If that same fiberglass model was in a field, I could be misled because I didn't do my homework and waited to see if it moved or mooed. Of course, it could be a mutant yak, or even two guys in a cow suit. You've **assumed** it is a dairy cow.

Deer hunters make these mistakes every year, and cause all kinds of other things to be shot, including humans. Of course, the requisite beer factor enters into far too many of these incidents ... but I digress.

Magicians rely on our assuming that certain things can't be done, and that our eyes and ears can't be tricked. Magical illusions are ALWAYS not what they seem, and the woman isn't really sawed in half. But all your senses tell you that it really happened. It just couldn't be otherwise. "I saw it with my own eyes." Just because you saw the woman enter the box, you saw what you THOUGHT were her feet being tied down; you saw the box being sawed in half, and then she reappears whole and unhurt. Your senses and experience tells you that it can't be done. It's against the laws of physical nature that this could happen, or so you've been taught. We've judged the truth of what we have experienced and, in this case, have contradictions. This is why they're called 'illusions'.

Many times we make moral judgments based on incorrect or incomplete assumptions. Take the battered wife who, after 25 years of abuse, reacts and kills her husband. You make a moral judgment as to whether she was justified. The neighbors say they were a perfect couple ... never argued. But the neighbors weren't inside the house, nor did they know them very well. Inside the house could have been a totally different situation. Can you say that you would have taken the abuse and not reacted? Your input is what you are told and/or shown, along with any physical evidence that you see, but you may have made a judgment that isn't necessarily true because you don't have all the facts and situational awareness.

How many times have you suddenly seen a side of someone that you've never seen and never suspected was

there? Almost everyone has facets of their personalities that are not usually shown ... even to their closest friends.

We make these assumptions pretty much in the dark as far as how our mind got to where it did. There is nothing quite as scary as someone who is ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN of what they saw or heard and then is supremely confident of the accuracy of their perception of it. Even worse, when presented with the proven facts of what really happened, they refuse to believe it and stick with what they think they saw to begin with..

In the computer industry, there's a term called GIGO. It stands for 'garbage in, garbage out.' While the program may be absolutely accurate in what it is supposed to do, if you feed it inaccurate data, you will achieve an inaccurate result. GIGO. But if you provide accurate data, and the program is flawed, the result is highly inaccurate and whatever output is gotten is also subject to gross error. If we consider the inputs to the mind as only being partially right, and the processes to work that data over as being flawed (which they usually are), you can see that the mind's output to a conscious level is really subject to question much of the time.

There are a number of factors that prevent us (or at least deter us) from finding out how the mind works. These are called the Five Hindrances.

The Buddha defines these five states of mind that prevent us from looking at what the mind is doing. They are also known as the Unwholesome States.

The Unwholesome States (bad stuff):

- sensual desire,
- ill will,
- dullness and drowsiness,
- restlessness and worry,
- doubt.

We have to learn to deal with these hindrances so as to clean up the window through which we'll see how the mind

works. Some of them we already have a passing acquaintance with, while others are new to us.

Why are they hindrances? Because they detract and derail your ability to see your mind's inner workings. They distract, gloss over and misdirect you when you try to look at those inner workings. Let's see how.

Sensual Desire isn't just the satisfaction of the senses. Nor is it the fulfillment of sexual desire, as many people confuse the words 'sensual', with 'sexual'. Sensual contains sexual as part of itself, while the inverse is not the case.

It's true that some people require more sensual gratification than others, with sex, food, beauty, or a host of other sensual inputs. It can sometimes become an obsession, to the extent of locking out many other things. Some extremeophiles get sensual satisfaction from running huge steam locomotives, NASCAR racing, skydiving, offshore powerboat racing, climbing Mt. Everest, or some other incredibly hazardous vocation. These people are also known as 'adrenaline junkies.' Think Evel Kneivel.

But there is a broader definition of sensual desire that brings into focus a much greater scope of things that will deter and distract. That definition includes anything that can become even mildly obsessive in the real world. That can be money, power, fame or a host of other desires that defy the normal definition of 'sensual'. In short, anything that is chased to excess can be within this definition. Collectors of virtually any category fall into this category - particularly high-end art and car collectors. Even obsessive hoarders fit this definition. After all, "it is **MY** trash, and I'll fill up my house with it if I want to." Maybe a better definition would be the broad classification of Greed and Lust. Remember the roots of action? Greed, Aversion and Delusion. Anything to excess is a derivative of greed, and a root of action. Right Action (as we talked about earlier) will sometimes preclude acting on anything that results from this kind of greed. Note again the interlocking nature of the entire EightFold Path.

Ill Will is a subset of Aversion, which includes hatred, anger and a whole set of negative emotions, among which are resentment, revulsion and many others. In short, Ill Will is the response to a situation that causes negative emotional responses to people, things, or objects. Again, Aversion is the second root of action. Right Action says you should try not to act based on Aversion.

Dullness and drowsiness are pretty much self-explanatory. If you feel dull and out of sorts, there's not much energy there. Likewise, if you're drowsy, then sleep is just around the corner - not conducive to action and energetic behavior - nor does it lead to investigating the mind. This is somewhat different, in that it isn't covered directly in the Moral Discipline section. It can be inferred, however, from the satiated condition brought about by too much booze, food, or sex. Any of these will bring dullness and drowsiness about.

On the other end of that energy spectrum are restlessness and worry. If you're restless, then your mind is obviously heading in seventeen different directions at the same time. Worry makes you focus on external circumstances, and provides a distraction from really focusing energy on what you need to be doing. This is a factor usually caused by Aversion, where the nervousness and worry are brought about by some generated emotion such as anger, revenge, or whatever. It can also come about by fear, or even lust that has the potential for non-fulfillment.

Doubt is the last of the Five Hindrances. This is one of the most difficult to observe and prevent. This has to do with the negative perception of your ability to actually go through working on the EightFold Path and achieving results, or of achieving anything at all in your life. Doubt is somewhat the inverse of Right Resolve, where if you don't possess the resolve/intent, you can totally counter any good that your path excursions give you. Doubt can also be your mind's perception that you won't be able to fund the energy or do the

path, in spite of the fact that you may have resolved to make the trip and are achieving results.

As is usually the case in Buddhist thinking, the Five Hindrances to mind exploration have counterparts plus two ... (Wholesome States). You guessed that, huh ...

The wholesome states (good stuff):

- mindfulness,
- investigation of phenomena,
- energy,
- rapture,
- tranquility,
- concentration,
- equanimity

These are also commonly known as the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. They, as you might have guessed, help you fund the energy and force to advance the Path.

We start with mindfulness. To begin with, we do our best to merely bring the sensory inputs to heel without any bias, interpretation or any other mind junk. Try to use only what the senses say it appears to be, not what our minds may think it is. It's being 'mindful' of the reality around us. It looks like a dog, it sounds like a dog, it acts like a dog ... so its possible that it's a dog. But it isn't a certainty. Without more information, you can't be sure.

Coupled with this is the 'investigation of phenomena' ... the second Wholesome State. 'Phenomena' here is the situation as it is presented to you by your mind. This is one level up from mindfulness and is comprised of all the extra stuff that your mind thinks is necessary.

Now, investigate the object of your perception without bias, or any per-conceived notion of what we think it should be (working without the bias and notions is referred to later as 'Emptiness'). Look at what it is, was, and will be. Again make sure you see it for what it is - not what our 'prior similar' adapted mind wants it to be.

Whereas mindfulness is passive, investigation is active. With mindfulness, we gather the sense inputs passively, performing no work other than to accept the sense inputs at face value. When we start to investigate, we then look actively so as to check out every facet of the object/phenomena that we're observing and our mind gives us. Does it look like a hyena or a dingo? Maybe, maybe not.

This takes energy, which is the third Wholesome state. This works in three increments.

First, we gather the energy to dispel any mental sluggishness and become enthusiastic for what we're doing. 'Let's find out if it's a dingo.'

Next, we persevere in the investigation, not backing off of the effort that we're making to check out this object, situation or phenomena. 'Let's Wiki what we have here and see.'

Eventually, we fund the effort with enough energy that it gathers an unstoppable momentum that carries it on despite any of the 'Hindrances' to the investigation that come up. 'We're going to go thru fifty entries on Google to find out.'

Number four on the Wholesome State list is rapture. This is the satisfaction that we get when we really start to understand the reality of what it is that our senses are telling us. You're starting to see stuff as it really is for the first time. This gradually increases with practice until you run up to ecstasy - rapture being the definition. This is not 'the rapture' in the Christian sense, but an all-around state of joy and bliss that overtakes everything. An accompanying factor would be fervor. 'Hooray!!! It's not a dingo or a hyena, just a mutt!!!'

This state will probably cause you to become agitated and restless. As you progress, however, it leads to ...

Tranquility is the number five entry on the Wholesome State list. Rapture always eventually subsides, becoming subdued with familiarity and we proceed serenely and without undue haste. You arrive at a state where you're just calm, collected and not bothered by much of anything.

Tranquility brings concentration to the fore - sharpening and enhancing the ability to focus our attention in directions that we determine, rather than those that the mind wants to go. 'Ahhhhh. Good to know it's just a mutt.'

As we concentrate and hone this skill through practice, equanimity comes to the forefront. Equanimity is a state of balance that brings a steady pace to our progress to enlightenment. When (not if, because we at some point will slow down) we become lethargic in our progress, we have to kick it up a few notches, but also we have to restrain becoming too excited and take off in unwanted directions. Equanimity is the 'steady-state' condition where the mind just watches the scenery go by without going off on tangents or going to sleep on you.

We'll see this entire subject of the Wholesome States again in a later chapter.

A lot of this seems to be overkill in terms of defining this or that with a tone that sometimes borders on mysticism. But I've found in this practice that the definitions are important, even though they don't seem to be at this point. For instance, if you get caught up in ecstasy and never progress beyond it, without the definition, you won't know where you are in the process, or where to head for next.

I know, sometimes it's booooooooooooooooooooooring. But eventually you'll refer back to these definitions to see where you are, and then you'll pick up and get farther up the process.

With this background, we can now go into the next section, that of Right Effort.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

RIGHT EFFORT

Working our way down the Eightfold Path requires energy and effort. But directing that effort is necessary as well. That's why the previous parts of the Moral Discipline section (Right Action, Right Speech, Right Livelihood) help by confining your actions and reactions to only those that are helpful in creating the atmosphere of tranquility. These other parts of the Path eliminate negative distractions by limiting what actions that you can take, which if participated in or left unchecked, will fuel further negativity.

When we get to Right Effort, we start ramping up both the support of good intent and the constraints on action to support Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

What is Right Effort? A trip to the archives reveals this quote from the Buddha ...

The definition (the four Right Exertions): [I know ... more definitions ... yecchh]

"And what, monks, is right effort?

[i] "There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen.

[ii] "He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the abandonment of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen.

[iii] "He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen.

[iv] "He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen: This, monks, is called right effort."¹

¹ Samyutta Nikaya — SN 45.8

Bikkhu Bodhi condenses this into more readable language ...

- to prevent the arising of un-arisen unwholesome states;
- to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen;
- to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen;
- to maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen.²

And to be repetitively redundant, I'll paraphrase it in my own words.

- The directed effort necessary to prevent bad stuff from coming up
- The directed effort necessary to stop bad stuff that's already here from acting
- The directed effort necessary to stimulate good stuff that hasn't gotten here yet
- The directed effort necessary to keep good stuff that's already here going

In the last chapter, we went through the wholesome and unwholesome states. Once we have identified them, it now means that we have to deal with them.

This is where Right Effort comes in.

And at the risk of beating this dead horse once again, the Buddha says repeatedly that each and every one of us is responsible for our own enlightenment, which means it's totally up to us to implement it and provide the energy and effort to do it. Dang, there's that pesky responsibility thing again. The Buddha can only point the way - it's up to us to walk it, and gain the wisdom contained there. (Spoonfeeding not available.)

Right Effort involves **actively** snuffing out the Unwholesome States, and **actively** encouraging the Wholesome States to evolve and grow. Defining those states

² The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering, by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Copyright © 1998 Buddhist Publication Society, Access to Insight edition © 1999. The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS.

was necessary in the last chapter, so we could see what we were dealing with. In this chapter, when we say ‘actively’, we mean using the necessary energy to ‘actively’ pursue this goal.

Let me quote from Bikkhu Bodhi once again:

“Energy (*virīya*), the mental factor behind right effort, can appear in either wholesome or unwholesome forms. The same factor fuels desire, aggression, violence, and ambition on the one hand, and generosity, self-discipline, kindness, concentration, and understanding on the other. The exertion involved in right effort is a wholesome form of energy, but it is something more specific, namely, the energy in wholesome states of consciousness directed to liberation from suffering. This last qualifying phrase is especially important. For wholesome energy to become a contributor to the path it has to be guided by right view and right intention, and to work in association with the other path factors. Otherwise, as the energy in ordinary wholesome states of mind, it merely engenders an accumulation of merit that ripens within the round of birth and death; it does not issue in liberation from the round.”³

Remember last chapter, when we discussed the unwholesome states of mind? They were *sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry, and doubt* ... along with their antidotes: *mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity*.

What the Bikkhu is saying here is you have to employ wholesome energy (of the seven wholesome states of mind kind) along with Right View, Right Intention AND the Moral Disciplines to lift yourself above the ‘ordinary’ wholesome states of mind. It is, of course, a good thing if you have incorporated all these previous parts of the Path into your daily life prior to taking this on so that you don't have to try to remember to use them in addition to this new part of the Path.

Also, if you scatter your Right Effort as directed by your normal states of mind without restriction (without the Path's constraints), the net effect will be zero, as if you were blasting away at your demons in all directions without aiming.

³ The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering, by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Copyright © 1998 Buddhist Publication Society, Access to Insight edition © 1999. The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS.

However, if you direct your wholesome states of mind in accordance with the EightFold Path's suggestions, the effect will be mightily increased.

In order to actually deal with this, we have to go back to basics (again) for a just a little while. Stop groaning! It won't hurt (much).

What triggers this whole process is a sensory input. That input isn't directly seen by you (you being the mind's supervisor) without the mind mucking with it. This mucking involves taking what you sensed, the feeling associated with it, and all the prior-similar, biases, and perceptions that may (or may not) apply. Any or all of these may be wrong or misplaced. The trick is seeing the chain of events. But how can we get those Unwholesome State(s) kicked up the chain so we can consciously see them? It's actually quite easy to generate them - the hard part is slowing them down enough to be able see how they're linked.

The answer to that question is in the restraint of the senses. Note that I said the 'restraint', not the suppression of the senses. And that isn't totally correct - we're going to try to restrain what the mind does with the senses, not the senses themselves. There is a BIG difference. Obviously, we can't withdraw from the sensory world - after all, it's our only interface to it. Only schizophrenics do the total withdrawal bit very well (kindof). But if we can stop the processing between the sensory input and the final combined perception or at least slow it down, then we have a chance to keep those faulty addons from the mind from getting through. The first step in doing this is trying to slow the process down.

In looking at how the mind embellishes the sensory inputs, we have to remember that the senses are just that - the raw data of sensory input. We have to go back to this level and examine the raw data for what it truly is - without drawing conclusions and inferences. Those should only come later, and be included under strict control.

To do this, you have to be quick. The time between the raw sense data and the final perception is just an instant or two. The mind responds to the data, grabs it, and identifies it.

Once the ID is made, there's a short window of opportunity to find and stop it from getting further up the chain. Right Mindfulness gets into the picture by keeping the process at this level or even lower on the chain (as you'll shortly see).

"That's a person. That's my ex." Stopping right then and there without adding the thoughts of "Gawd I'm glad I didn't stay with them. Sucker still owes me child support and alimony." I know. I know - how the hell do you keep those additional thoughts from coming up? They're quick and deadly. By the way, I deliberately chose this situation, because it is usually one of the worst cases of having to tamp down your mind, since you're so emotionally involved and so quick to jump into the mental fray.

Note the words 'emotionally involved.' We're emotionally involved with a lot of our sensory inputs (once the ID is made). We either like them, dislike them, or don't care one way or the other. These emotions/feelings play an important part in the generation of the extra garbage that the mind attaches to the sensory inputs. Each and every sensory input has a feeling associated with it once we ID it. We'll deal with using them to our advantage in a later chapter when we get to play with exercises to trap the mind. But back to the 'ex' ...

One way is to view them as just another person. Regardless of how you feel about them, just deal with the situation at hand, not what went before. It's tough to be dispassionate, because you may be provoked or even generate your own provocation. Once you approach it with some tranquility, however, things may seem to smooth over somewhat. On the other hand, if you don't react and refuse to involve yourself in a screaming match, it'll drive 'em nuts trying to figure out why.

Here we have to differ with the definitions a bit. In Buddhist lore, they designate the six sensory inputs:

- Sight
- Sound
- Taste
- Touch
- Smell

- Mind

Here is where we have a problem (or do we?). In my way of thinking (scientifically and western-thought based), it is more of a linear process than a circular or cooperative one. Normal Buddhist definition says that all six must be acknowledged as inputs.

I used to be a little ambivalent on this one, since for the MOST part, the mind is triggered by one (or a combination) of the first five recognized senses. However, I have to admit to having mind objects that arise from either memory or logical progression that were not triggered by anything discernible, but are the product of the mind only. In other words, I make stuff up.

Normally the mind processes the five senses, and that is its main job. But it is also possible for the mind to independently arrive at perceptions or ideas of its own, not based on any tangible sensory input.

We must consider the mind itself as a sensory input that is presenting ideas or perceptions on an equal playing field with the other physical inputs. Maybe it's not so much of a sensory input, as a memory storage device that sometimes triggers on its own with independent stuff.

This brings into focus the idea of 'the mind investigating the mind', which is a circular logical exercise that can get us into deep trouble if done incorrectly. Examining the mind strictly on an observational basis will likely lead to an escalating series of conclusions that become a case of the 'tail wagging the dog'. This leads to conclusions that serve no useful purpose - at least in terms of gaining enlightenment. This is especially true if we're not up to admitting that any of this stuff is really important or that our minds are actually doing this to us. We have to remember that there's two parts to this mind of ours, the supervisory function (which is doing the investigating) and the mind itself.

I know, now you're thinking that to become enlightened, we have to be schizophrenic to become enlightened. Not really.

Remember that the mind itself is relatively linear. Our conscious thought patterns run pretty much one after another, except for the background processes that we're trying

to get to. What we're doing is grabbing the perception of the sense object and backtracking to where that perception, its associated feeling and attached garbage came from.

There's no duality of the mind in this case, but just a way of grabbing stuff and seeing what it's made of.

The objective of quieting the mind is best served if we can observe, backtrack and understand why it is presenting these erroneous conclusions, and actively discredit them. Quieting the mind is tightly associated with killing the extra triggers that provide all the junk and confuse the inputs.

An exercise to help you recognize this problem and work on solving it might be to take an example of something that you hate doing, and when it's time to do it, watch your mind as it does its mental gyrations.

The example follows:

You have cats. If you have indoor cats, then cleaning the litter box is a necessary and regular occurrence. Most of us hate the job. Watch your mind as you go through the process.

"I hate this. It stinks. There's litter all over the floor. Why do cats have to be this way? Why is it always me that has to do this?"

Remember the three root causes of action? Here's one in all its glory. Aversion. Nobody **wants** to do this. It's why people have come up with all kinds of gadgets to do it for them painlessly. But we all try to avoid this because it's dirty, smelly and takes time, plus the collateral cleanup. But it's one of the prices we pay to have the company of indoor cats.

When it's that time, if you grab the negative perceptions of the job and try to replace them with the positives of having cats to begin with, you're on the right track. I know, I know - overcoming the stench of a ripe cat box is daunting (almost as daunting as dealing with the ex), but balance that against not having your kitty snuggling up against you on the couch, and you can counter many of the negative emotional eruptions. It's a price you have to pay if you want indoor cats. With this, you get that.

Another example:

To those of you women that are fashion-addicted, this one will make sense.

You see an outfit that you KNOW you'll look fabulous in. You start drooling at the thought of seeing your friends turn green with envy. You try to figure out ways to justify spending the exorbitant amount of money on it, in spite of the fact that you have five other ones in the closet that are equally stunning and chic.

Hola!!!! Greed gallops fast to the fore. I gotta have more. I gotta have that 'one-better' on your friends. When this one jumps out at you, it should be easy to recognize, but it's hard to quash in the heat of the moment. One way to do it, is to say to one's self, "Self, how often would I wear it? How long would it be in style? Would my friend Sophie not go out and get one better?" And further, "Why do I want this at all?" Of course, the answer to that last one is that your ego and pride strolled up and took over.

This will get you into the mode of examining what you're doing and why you're doing it. Some of the situations that come up are pretty ridiculous.

This also involves how you perceive yourself and the facade (eggshell) that you put up for others and the world at large. We'll get into that a little later.

There's a drunk in the bar. He's being obnoxious and making crude statements about people. You're just trying to have a quiet drink and relax after a hard day. But he's focusing on you, and getting personal. He makes a statement questioning your mother and your legal parentage.

Many people would get angry and start to engage with the idiot, either vocally or physically. But why?

First and foremost, he's drunk and obviously doesn't know what he's saying.

Second, he's never seen you before in his life, and wouldn't know your parents if they slapped him silly.

Third, there is no way he could know your parentage or legitimate birth status.

So why are you reacting with irritation and/or violence, instead of being calm with the idea that he has absolutely no basis for saying what he's saying?

The point here is that if you just stop in that instant, and throttle those reactions, you may get a good laugh out of the whole situation. Of course, if you start laughing at him, you may get him aggravated, and have to move down the bar. But then it's the bartender's problem, not yours (unless he's really aggressive, and then it's both your problems.)

If you really want to counter your negative emotions and reactions, you might think about offering him a ride home, or paying his taxi fare to get him there. The positive effort here might just counter all the negatives that you've generated.

If you do this often enough, you eventually get to the point of having these reactions and perceptions just sitting out there in the breeze flapping and doing their thing, while you choose rationally how to react. They're still there, but they're obvious to you and you're no longer driven by the sense input or the other stuff. You can examine it and rationally choose a course of action. You're choosing an action instead of reacting directly to the input without thinking. Besides, when you don't react to these negative inputs, it drives people nuts.

Now, you say, what does this have to do with the mind (storage unit)? You may not have encountered this kind of behavior before or at least not in this place. Well, you have a point. This can very well be the 'fight or flight' reflex. It's not the same as a direct remembrance. But what it has in common is that you have to put the same amount of effort to countering these reactions as to those generated by memory. The same efforts are there and required to not emotionally react to a situation as are present in one presented by the mind without external stimulus.

Of course, it takes the dedicated effort (as in Right Effort) to catch this and make it work. And again, this is not

something that anyone can do for you. Nobody else can get inside your mind and force it to shut down its erroneous processes. Itz yew, baby, jest yew.

To recap ... remember what the Wholesome and Unwholesome States are?

The unwholesome States (bad stuff):

- sensual desire,
- ill will,
- dullness and drowsiness,
- restlessness and worry,
- doubt.

These are also known as the Five Hindrances.

The wholesome states (good stuff):

- mindfulness,
- investigation of phenomena,
- energy,
- rapture,
- tranquility,
- concentration,
- equanimity.

These seven states are collectively also known as the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

To wrap it up over and over again, first and foremost in the realm of Right Effort is to provide the energy for the prevention of Unwholesome States from arising in the first place. After all, if an Unwholesome State doesn't come up, you won't have to deal with it. This involves the non-processing of the sensory data, as we spoke of earlier.

Second, we have to quickly throttle those Unwholesome States that have arisen and are running amok. Again, the recognition and countering of them is the ideal way to deal with it. It takes Right Effort.

Thirdly, encouraging those Wholesome States to arise helps keep the mind at bay. Again, Right Effort HAS to be there or you're shotgunning.

Fourth, helping those Wholesome States to sustain themselves is the ideal situation to prevent other Unwholesome States from coming forth or continuing. Right Effort is in the middle of this.

The important thing to remember in Right Effort isn't so much the 'how' or the 'why' - the important thing is to constantly generate the effort to do the work. We've given you now a basic tool for recognizing the five Unwholesome States, but it's up to you to give that recognition process the sustained push that it needs on an ongoing basis. STOP, LOOK, and LISTEN.

As you'll see in the following chapters, the interconnectedness of the EightFold Path becomes ever clearer. Having the Right View (defining the Path) and Right Intent (wanting to travel the Path), coupled with Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood (keeping us within some bounds to prevent negative results) interlocks with Right Effort (dealing with the right and wrong States and energizing the RIGHT states of mind). This provides the basis for Right Concentration, assisted by Right Mindfulness, which incidentally is the next chapter. Ta-Dah!!!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

RIGHT MINDFULNESS (PART ONE)

Right Mindfulness is the first time that we actually get into the whole process of domesticating the mind. An overview is needed here. In my opinion, Bikkhu Bodhi makes this overview best. Read it carefully ...

“What brings the field of experience into focus and makes it accessible to insight is a mental faculty called in Pali ‘sati’, usually translated as “mindfulness.” Mindfulness is presence of mind, attentiveness or awareness. Yet the kind of awareness involved in mindfulness differs profoundly from the kind of awareness at work in our usual mode of consciousness. All consciousness involves awareness in the sense of a knowing or experiencing of an object. But with the practice of mindfulness, awareness is applied at a special pitch. The mind is deliberately kept at the level of bare attention, a detached observation of what is happening within us and around us in the present moment. In the practice of right mindfulness the mind is trained to remain in the present, open, quiet, and alert, contemplating the present event. All judgments and interpretations have to be suspended, or if they occur, just registered and dropped. The task is simply to note whatever comes up just as it is occurring, riding the changes of events in the way a surfer rides the waves on the sea. The whole process is a way of coming back into the present, of standing in the here and now without slipping away, without getting swept away by the tides of distracting thoughts.”¹

Amazing, isn’t it? Had you tried to read this at the beginning of our discourse, it would have been difficult to understand. Now, it’s right there, and you understand it. At least I hope you do. More from Bikkhu Bodhi ...

¹ “The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering”, by Bhikkhu Bodhi Source: The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS.

“It might be assumed that we are always aware of the present, but this is a mirage. Only seldom do we become aware of the present in the precise way required by the practice of mindfulness. In ordinary consciousness the mind begins a cognitive process with some impression given in the present, but it does not stay with it. Instead it uses the immediate impression as a springboard for building blocks of mental constructs which remove it from the sheer facticity [factualness ... ed.] of the datum. The cognitive process is generally interpretative. The mind perceives its object free from conceptualization only briefly. Then, immediately after grasping the initial impression, it launches on a course of ideation by which it seeks to interpret the object to itself, to make it intelligible in terms of its own categories and assumptions. To bring this about the mind posits concepts, joins the concepts into constructs — sets of mutually corroborative concepts — then weaves the constructs together into complex interpretative schemes. In the end the original direct experience has been overrun by ideation and the presented object appears only dimly through dense layers of ideas and views, like the moon through a layer of clouds.”²

One word here that may be a little difficult is ‘ideation’. This is another way of saying that we receive the original sensory input and overlay it with all kinds of other stuff from the depths of our memory that may or may not be relevant.

“The Buddha calls this process of mental construction ‘papañca’, ‘elaboration,’ ‘embellishment,’ or ‘conceptual proliferation.’ The elaborations block out the presentational immediacy of phenomena; they let us know the object only “at a distance,” not as it really is. But the elaborations do not only screen cognition; they also serve as a basis for projections. The deluded mind, cloaked in ignorance, projects its own internal constructs outwardly, ascribing them to the object as if they really belonged to it. As a result, what we know as the final object of cognition, what we use as the basis for our values, plans, and actions, is a patchwork product, not the original article. To be sure, the product is not wholly illusion, not sheer fantasy. It takes what is given in immediate experience as its

² Ibid

groundwork and raw material, but along with this it includes something else: the embellishments fabricated by the mind.”³

This, in a nutshell is the basis for all of the work yet to come. We now know that absolute reality is the goal. Now we can start to take up the weapons and tactics necessary to implement that goal. Right Mindfulness is the next part of the methodology implementation (wow ... two five syllable words back to back.)

Remember that “Delusion (*moha*) means mental darkness: the thick coat of insensitivity which blocks out clear understanding.” Ignorance also has a slightly different meaning here (here being Buddhaland), in that it has no negative connotation, but is merely another definition of **not knowing**. It does not mean you’re the country bumpkin ignoramus that has never been taught anything, but that you are ignorant of the fact that your mind is doing tricks for you (and to you, for that matter.)

Right Mindfulness, boiled down to its essence, is the ability to see the object of your attention as it is at the instant of attention, with none of the mind-generated dreck that usually accompanies it. Not as it was a moment ago, or what you want it to be a moment from now, but now – this instant. A ton of garbage is usually thrown into the mix, and we have to train our mind to either remove it from the equation, or not give the additional stuff unless we ask for it.

One more time with Bikkhu Bodhi...

“The task of right mindfulness is to clear up the cognitive field. Mindfulness brings to light experience in its pure immediacy. It reveals the object as it is before it has been plastered over with conceptual paint, overlaid with interpretations. To practice mindfulness is thus a matter not so much of doing but of undoing: not thinking, not judging, not associating, not planning, not imagining, not wishing. All these “doings” of ours are modes of interference, ways the mind manipulates experience and tries to establish its dominance. Mindfulness undoes the knots and tangles of these “doings” by simply noting. It does nothing but note, watching each occasion of experience as it arises, stands, and passes

³ Ibid

away. In the watching there is no room for clinging, no compulsion to saddle things with our desires. There is only a sustained contemplation of experience in its bare immediacy, carefully and precisely and persistently.”⁴

It sounds so elegantly simple to hear it described this way. All you have to do is stop doing something! Ah, if it were only this easy. After all, the mind has had years of practice and training to get to this point of giving you tons of what is possibly erroneous information. There is an edge of familiarity and trust that has been built up with you over time, much as the computer ‘HAL’ in the movie ‘2001”. Stripping the additional stuff goes against everything that you’ve ‘learned’, and to now go back and not trust what the mind is giving you is difficult. To do so, we must disarm it somewhat.

We can prove the point about the compiled version of reality that the mind gives us being incorrect. Some of the worst and most mistaken witnesses in court have been multiple eyewitnesses who claim to have seen the same exact incident, and then came up with totally conflicting versions of what happened and what they *thought* they saw. How can this be? Actually, since all of us have different experiences in life, and different viewpoints on things, it’s only logical that we possess different overlays for the perception of the incident. This, of course, leads to contradictory results. Note I said ‘contradictory’, not wrong. Each person thought they saw what they saw (in their own mind), given their overlays. Their mental processing may have been incorrect for the sensory input, but in their view, they were not wrong.

A mind is a terrible thing to - ummm = what’s the right word? Ah - trust.

The mind absolutely loves to play with all this stuff. Many is the time that I (and you, I’m sure) have tossed and turned all night because the mind kept bringing up stuff that really didn’t need to be brought up, but it kept rerunning the same thing in various forms for hours, no matter what I did. It wouldn’t quit. Nice. Thanks for a bad night. This is but a very

⁴ Ibid

small example, of course. The really bad stuff that it kicks up is the stuff you don't even see, and blithely go forth acting on.

But do not despair - there is hope. That light at the end of the tunnel actually is not an oncoming train. It indeed is the light from the world of enlightenment shining through.

Right Mindfulness, when accomplished, leads to two places. When used correctly, it leads to serenity, and eventually to insight.

Right Mindfulness is the process of making the mind confine itself to the factual world. This means dealing with only the sensory data, not conceptualizing. It is also the process of keeping distractions from altering what the mind is supposed to be doing (think sidetracking). Also, in addition, it deals with suppressing the Unwholesome States and elevating their counterparts, the Wholesome States. When you get it right, it leads to the first part of Right Mindfulness, which is serenity and profound calmness.

The second portion of Right Mindfulness is deep insight. This is the distillation of what we perceive through the senses at a basic level, without the garbage that the mind tends to overlay it with. This second area of Right Mindfulness allows us to discern clearly and precisely the nature of whatever object or situation you are observing at the time without distortion. It is a snapshot of reality - a slice of frozen time, much as a photograph shows what the camera saw without any interpretation whatsoever (unless it was PhotoShopped, of course.)

To accomplish Right Mindfulness, we have to un-train the mind. For our entire lives, we've relied on it to give us what we *think* is the correct information, only to find that it's been either lying to us or shading the truth in most instances.

“And what, monks, is right mindfulness? Herein, a monk dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief concerning the world. He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings... states of

mind in states of mind... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief concerning the world.”⁵

At first reading, the previous quote from the Buddha seems to talk in circles. Gobbledegook. Without a little explanation, it makes not much sense.

The Four Contemplations, as they are called, are said by the Buddha to be the only way that will lead you eventually to insight, wisdom and Nirvana.

The first of the four is the Contemplation of the Body. This is not just concerned with the ‘body’ as we normally think of it, but the entire raw sensory input structure of the real world outside ourselves (including the mind itself as an independent sensor).

The second contemplation is the Contemplation of Feeling. This is where we contemplate that a sensory input has a feeling associated with it - it can be a pleasant feeling, an unpleasant feeling, or a neutral feeling. Each and every sensory input has one of these - I suspect it can tie into the old ‘flight or fight’ type of subliminal reaction to a degree.

The Contemplation of the State of Mind is the third contemplation. Here we move from the narrow confines of a feeling associated with an individual sensory event(s) to the broader scope of how the mind will react to it. There are sixteen defined ways that the mind may react to the sensory event - among which are the mind with and without lust, the mind with and without delusion, etc. There are some other factors here that will be dealt with later.

The fourth and last contemplation is the Contemplation of Phenomena. This is where we begin to look at the entire range of reactions that the mind gives us when it encounters any sensory input - from the initial receipt of the sensory stimulus to the complete conjecture that is finally presented. It involves almost all of the factors that we’ve learned already and combines them in finding how the process works (or

⁵ Digha Nikaya 22;

doesn't.) And, in addition, we'll be able to see that whole process in motion, now that we have the tools to do so.

So it's time to start training the mind. Just tell it that 'Resistance is futile', and 'You will be assimilated.' If you're not familiar with the phrases, you're obviously not a 'Startrek - Next Generation' fan. The point is that you CAN do this, and you can quiet your mind, focus like a laser and see things as they really are, not as your mind thinks they are. It is not nearly as impossible as your mind will tell you it is.

Let's get started ...

CHAPTER NINETEEN

RIGHT MINDFULNESS (PART TWO)

In the last chapter, we started to look at the Contemplations - the first of which is the Contemplation of the Body. What this Contemplation does for us is to begin to gather the mind into a single direction, rather than letting it bing-bang like the electronic ball in a Pong game all over the place. (Yes, I'm showing my age.)

We have to start with forcing the mind to focus solely on what it is that WE want it to focus on. Focusing on the body is a great place to start, since our bodies are always with us - unless you have frequent out-of-body experiences, in which case all of this may be a moot point.

One of the primary exercises that allows us to contemplate the body is called the 'breathing exercise.' The Buddha himself used it to achieve enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and returned to it in his retreat meditations to focus on the body. It is deceptively simple. But as with all things Buddhist, these deceptively simple things can be some of the most difficult to accomplish.

The starting point with this Contemplation is with the breath.

Mindfulness of breathing is valuable to practitioners of all levels because it is always available to us. After all, if we're not breathing, we probably have little use for the exercise (or all this learning) anyway. In this exercise, we utilize our breathing to calm down and focus the mind.

Here's how it works. We get into a comfortable position, close our eyes, and focus fully on the breath. The point to concentrate on is just at the nostril, where the breath can be felt as it enters and leaves.

Listen to the noise of the air as it enters and leaves. Feel it on your lip and in your nose. Feel your lungs fill with air. Determine the following:

- Is it a long or short breath?
- Is it deep or shallow?
- Is it regular or is it segmented?

As you do this, concentrate on these things and watch in your mind this single breath. Not the last one, nor the next one. Don't try to evaluate it nor give it meaning. Just concentrate on the sensory input alone. 'Ah - that was a regular short, deep breath.' Or 'that was an irregular segmented, short, shallow breath' (grab the inhaler for your asthma.) Use just these simple parameters. As you do this, it is inevitable that your mind will wander out of its barbed wire enclosure and start doing other things. When (not if) this happens, and you catch it off the reservation, just gently bring it back to concentrating on the breath. After some time, you'll find that it is easier to maintain the concentration, and the mind breaks out of its prison fewer times during the practice. What this also accomplishes is to keep us focused in the present, rather than in the past or future. As you know, one of the indirect objectives of the EightFold Path is to keep our minds in the immediate 'now', without projecting into the future or dwelling in the past.

As you progress in this exercise, and it becomes easier and easier to keep focused on the breath, start looking at it from start to finish - from the beginning of the inhaling breath to the point where it stops, and then from the beginning of the exhalation to the end of the breath in greater detail. Did it change during the breath? Was it even? Did this one draw deeper than the last one? Now we're expanding a little bit.

The final phase of the exercise is to consciously quiet the breath until it becomes difficult to track it. In the process of doing this, also calm the body and whatever it is doing. I find that I tense up significantly in the dentist's chair, and using this exercise makes me relax and concentrate on the breath, and not whatever medieval torture instrument they happen to be using on my mouth at the time.

What this does is to start to exercise control over the body itself, in addition to the mind. There are more refinements that are contained in many other Suttas and

documents, which you can investigate if you want to further refine the process. They're all over the Web, and available if you can type 'Google' and 'Buddhist breath exercise'.

If you're still being a Pong ball, here's another exercise that may help.

From the Satipatthana Sutta:

“(2) The four postures

Furthermore, bhikshus, a monk,

1. while walking, is aware, 'I walk'.
2. Or, while standing, he is aware, 'I stand',
3. Or, while sitting, he is aware, 'I sit',
4. Or, while lying down, he is aware, 'I lie down'.

In whatever way his body is disposed, that is how he is aware of it.”

While, once again, this may seem simplistic on its face, it is in reality a sophisticated exercise.

What it requires is that you focus on what the body is ACTUALLY doing, and not the 'why, when, how' or anything else in any way, shape or form. 'It's a nice day' should not enter into the focus. 'I need to answer the phone' should not enter into the focus.

The trick here is to learn to ignore ALL the external inputs until you are ready to acknowledge them, and concentrate SOLELY on what the body is doing - and subsequently, what you told it to do (or not to do).

Again, if you find the mind wandering off as you are contemplating what your body is doing, gently pull it back and refocus on the object of your contemplation, in this case, what the body is actually doing.

Further from the Sutta:

“So he dwells observing the body in the body internally,
or, observing the body in the body externally,
or, observing the body in the body both internally and externally,
or, he dwells observing states that arise in the body,
or, he dwells observing states that pass away in the body,
or, he dwells observing states that arise and pass away in the body.

Or else, he maintains the mindfulness that ‘There is a body,’ merely for knowing and awareness.
And he dwells independent, not clinging to anything in this world.
And that, bhikshus, is how a monk dwells observing the body in the body.”

Ah, the subtleties of the Oriental mind. ‘Body in the body’? What does that mean? Observing the body in the body merely means that you look at the internals of what the body is doing from within the mind. The sentence structure is a little awkward, but if you break it down, ‘observing the body’ could be almost anything, whereas ‘observing the body in the body’ means that it’s YOUR body we’re talking about, since you can’t get into anyone else’s body. And it means that you’re observing it from within that body, not from any exterior position.

This advances the difficulty a little bit, by not only determining what the body is doing, but doing so by looking at the external positions of the body, and what it is doing internally as well.

In addition, by observing ‘states’ we get to start seeing how we deal with pain, with discomfort, and other things related to how the body reacts to these positions. How do I feel? Am I uncomfortable? Am I in pain? What’s changing in my body?

An alternative (in the next sentence) is merely keeping a watch on your body noting that it’s there, and what it’s doing. Just being constantly mindful of your body is this alternative.

One thing here that may be a little confusing is the use of the word ‘clinging’. Most people don’t realize that they’re clinging to anything, but we invariably do. It can be clinging to a child once they’re fully grown. It can be clinging to past glory once we’ve passed the peak of our careers. It can be hoarding stuff, from the mundane to the truly obsessed collector. All of these are clinging of one nature or another. But they all represent hanging onto stuff that we no longer need or even want many times - but the mind trucketh on. Clinging onto ideas and concepts that are incorrect is also part of this. Much more on clinging in a later chapter.

Another exercise from the Satipatthana Sutta, which expands on the previous one:

“Furthermore, bhikshus, a monk,

- (1) While going forward or going backward is clearly aware of what he is doing.
- (2) While looking forward or looking back, he is clearly aware of what he is doing.
- (3) While bending or stretching, he is clearly aware of what he is doing.
- (4) While carrying his upper robe, outer robe and bowl, he is clearly aware of what he is doing; while eating, drinking, chewing and tasting, he is clearly aware of what he is doing.
- (5) While voiding or urinating, he is clearly aware of what he is doing.
- (6) While walking, while standing, while sitting, while asleep, while awake, while talking, or while remaining silent, he is clearly aware of what he is doing.”

This amplifies the previous exercise to include actions, not merely static states of the body. It requires not only for you to observe the posture, but the physical action of the body at each instant. To do this and ignore the distractions of what else is going on requires some pretty significant practice and concentration. But it is doable.

The term ‘clearly aware’ requires a little further explanation. It has four parts to it ...

- Understanding the purpose of the action. We must realize the purpose of the action, and why it is occurring. Why am I doing this?
- Understanding the suitability of the action. Does it fulfill the objective most efficiently to achieve the ends desired?
- Understanding the range of meditation. This involves keeping the mind in a meditative state, even when the body is in action and doing other things. Focus is on the action.

- Understanding without the delusions of the ego.
Asking why I am doing this action, and is it out of an ego-driven state of mind?

This puts a few more things on the plate, huh?

Let's take a little longer look at this.

The purpose of the action requires that we evaluate why we're doing it to begin with. Is this action driven by wholesome or unwholesome states or ideas?

Secondarily, does it fall within the Buddhist moral disciplines? Is it spawned from Right Speech or Right Livelihood? Is it a correct action spawned from Right Action?

Understanding the 'suitability of the action' involves looking at all the ways we could accomplish the process of getting to the end result of the action itself. In other words, how are we going to accomplish the end result? Is this the best way to get there? And does the way to accomplish the action fall within the Moral Disciplines?

Now we're at least one level removed from the action itself and analyzing the 'why' and the 'how' of the cause of the action (not just the action itself).

Next, we have to look at whether and how we stay in this meditative mood while we're doing the action - catching the mind in operation, as you will. This is the 'range of meditation.'

Remember the old saying 'When you're up to your ass in alligators, it's difficult to remember that the objective was to drain the swamp?' This is akin to trying to remember to do these evaluations of what you're doing, when there's a lot going on around you. But once you start to do this, even in a minor way, it becomes easier each and every time you do it. Keeping the mind 'in a meditative state' requires effort and attention to what the mind is doing, regardless of what you happen to be doing at the time (in the outside world).

Going one level deeper, we have to analyze 'why' we're doing the action at all. What prompted the action? Was it a reaction at an instinctive level (fight or flight)? Was it driven by

the mind for reasons of its own out of ego or greed or any of the other hindrances? And if so, can I call back the action before it generates karma that will come back to haunt me later?

Again, we start to see the intricate interweaving of the EightFold Path and the Four Noble Truths, in that each part relates and modifies the others.

What should be obvious by now is that the outside world (outside the mind and the senses, that is) has little to do with what's going on inside besides providing the mind with inputs to play with. Once those inputs have arrived, the monster 'puter in your head goes to work, providing what it thinks is insight and analysis of whatever those inputs **seemed** to mean. Do these sensory inputs match a previously recorded template? Are you sure? If so, is the action that your mind is recommending a valid one? And on ... and on ... and on ...

An interesting sidelight is to contemplate what your mind would be doing if you were deaf, dumb and blind or if you were placed in a sensory deprivation tank. You'd be left with pretty much only the mind's input. What then? You'd quickly find out that the mind is indeed capable of taking and manufacturing things for you to think about regardless of whether you are sensorially stimulated or not. Even the smallest sensory inputs (which are amplified beyond belief) become grist for that monster 'puter of the mind.

An appropriate analogy would be the computer HAL in Stanley Kubrick's movie '2001'. HAL had been given the ability to do much of what we do in our minds, including the mashing together of sensory inputs and coming up with results that were totally counterproductive. HAL had supposedly been programmed to protect the occupants of the spacecraft, but because of faulty data comparisons and assumptions, wound up trying to kill the very humans that it had been tasked to protect because they performed illogical actions.

This is PRECISELY what the mind does, and what we're trying to get it to stop doing.

What we're working towards with all this stuff is to get the mind to stop automatically providing the overburden of prior similars and misinterpretations of the incoming sensory data. We want the mind to only give us correct and simple identifications and solutions for us. Easier said than done.

As I'm sitting here, my mind is trying to flit around like a solitary bee in an acre of flowers, or in the vernacular of the countryside, 'It's busier than a one-legged man at an ass-kicking contest.' The fridge is going; I'm minding my 'puter to make sure it doesn't take off and lose all my work; the artwork on the wall grabs my attention as I glance up from the screen; I'm still tasting the remnants of dinner; I wonder if that pain in my wrist is the first glimmerings of carpal tunnel; etc... etc...

You get what I mean? Even trying to make sure that I'm holding together the threads of what I'm trying to say, all these things keep coming to the fore and interfering with the process. Obviously I have a lot of work to do yet.

Next up ... Contemplation of Feelings.

CHAPTER TWENTY

RIGHT MINDFULNESS (PART THREE)

The second Contemplation is the Contemplation of Feelings.

We all know we have feelings. There have been enough songs and poems and essays on 'normally defined' feelings to paper the entire Midwest a half-mile deep. Almost all of them have to do with sex and love - unless you're a country & western music addict, then it's love, sex, and revenge. Oh, and don't forget the beer.

But as is always the case, in Buddhist thought, the meaning is somewhat different from that of the Western World.

A feeling in Buddhist terminology is one of three modifiers that the mind attaches to sensory inputs. The raw sensory input can generate a positive feeling, a negative feeling, or a neutral feeling. Of course, it's not that cut-and-dried at all. It is more an almost continuous spectrum that has not only direction (positive and negative), but magnitude (think vector for you math geniuses). You can mildly dislike something, or you can REALLY HATE it. You can enjoy the sight of a Renoir painting, or you can OBSESS that you have to have it at all costs, up to and including stealing it.

Most of us rarely get to the extremes of feeling that border on obsession (or do we?), but at least we almost surely possess these feelings with every sensory input. The only exception I can think of would be a sociopath, and then there are degrees.

Every sensory input generates a feeling that is tied to it. If I see a dead hummingbird, the feeling associated with the sight is negative - I hate to see it die. But the sight of a live hummingbird suspended in mid-air generates a positive feeling - it's a beautiful sight. Same bird, different circumstances, different feeling.

Women who wear too much perfume can introduce a feeling of 'sheeze', whereas the slight scent can be appealing and enticing to nearby males. This feeling automatically kicks in without our having to think about it.

The sound of a Russian choir singing Rachmaninoff gives me a great sense of serenity and goodness, whereas a punk rock band almost immediately assaults my hearing with what seems to me to be negative noise and irritation. These are feelings, again.

The point here is that each and every sensory input, both simple and complex, (including those that the mind comes up with by itself) has this parameter of feeling. It can be neutral - if you're annoyed, it could be 'I could give a flying f#&@...' or maybe just a 'ho-hum'. It can be positive, as we mentioned above, or equally it can be negative. But regardless of the intensity and direction, it is there in minute or grandiose amplitude. And the mind generates them for each and every input.

OK, why is this important?

I'm so glad you asked that question, Grasshopper! Actually, it's important because once you learn to concentrate and focus the mind on the mind, you can begin to see the feelings that the inputs bring up. And with those feelings, you can start asking yourself 'OK, why does this input (or set of inputs) bring up this or that feeling?' Remember that we're not interested in anything else right now (memories, ideas, etc.), just the feeling that is associated with the input.

It happens in a flash, and at first it may seem that it is almost impossible to catch the mind at work while it's pulling up all this stuff. But it's not impossible. Once you can bring the focus and concentration to bear on catching the raw input (along with its associated feeling), you'll be on the right track. Of course, if you're the parents of teenagers, it requires reflexes in the microsecond range to grab these feelings as they arise. Once we can grab onto the feeling without acting on it, we're making progress.

Let me use a highly charged example.

I'm Caucasian, semi-elderly and female. Instinctively, if I'm on a sidewalk and I encounter a group of young African-American males in my way, I still will cross the street rather than have to pass within grabbing distance of the group. This behavior is almost certainly unwarranted, but I **feel** that I have to do this for my own safety. Actually, it is not only unwarranted, but also probably offensive to the men on the corner. Chances are that I have absolutely nothing to fear from this group, **but** I still cross the street.

At this point, we can say that the incoming sensory inputs all come together to generate a highly negative feeling about the situation, while all the logic in the world tells me that it isn't anything to be worried about. In this case, the emotional charge totally overrides the logic. Obviously logic and feelings are worlds apart here. Or are they?

So how do we get from point 'A' to point 'B', anyway? What generates this feeling?

At this point, I have to go back to Patti's Perennial Parable of the Red-Haired Man with Sandals and Beard. You remember - the guy interviewing at your software company that has red hair, a beard and sandals, just like the guy that kicked the dickens out of you forty years ago when you were a kid. Sure you're going to hire him - Uh-huh - right! (unless you already know all this stuff - but then, you wouldn't be reading any of this, would you?)

Every feeling that comes up in response to a sensory input has to have some basis in the past for generating the feeling. Some are instinctive - Stove = hot = burn - so you don't muck with stoves that are hot after one experience (or so we hope). That's a simple one. But the more complex the input, the bigger the calculation that the mind goes through to generate you a concept based on these inputs. And that generates a complex feeling to go with the final concept as well as the input - which is why we sometimes wind up with 'mixed emotions.'

But dealing with concepts is going to have to wait until the next chapter or so. Here we're just dealing with feelings - period. Back to it.

So we go back to the stove - hot = burn = pain = negative feeling. But stove + hot + smell = dinner = full stomach = positive feeling. So it would appear that the feeling is also context driven. The same initial sensory input, when combined with context, can generate a number of feelings, both positive and negative at the same time. It must be dinnertime, but I have to be careful around the stove.

Most of the time, we never even realize that the feeling and its context are even there. The point of this exercise is to make sure that you understand how to see these feelings and realize that they're generated by prior-similars for the most part. Even prior-similars that have never happened to you, pop up from somewhere that perhaps you read or saw on TV or heard somewhere.

OK, OK ... the exercise ...

Pick out something in the room. It doesn't matter what. Get an input (probably visual). Ask yourself "How do I feel about this object?" If it's inanimate, it'll probably be neutral. Pick something that you don't like and examine the feeling that it generates. Do the same for something you like and examine the feeling. **JUST THE FEELING, DAMMIT!!!** Not where you got it; not who gave it to you; not the memory of where you got it and who you were with at the time. Just stick with the feeling (if you can) and try not to deal with the context.

I have to add here a subject that I still have problems with. It has to do with those nights when your mind won't shut off and it keeps dredging up all kinds of memories (usually uncomfortable or just plain ugly).

This is where you relive situations that usually turned out badly or could have had bad repercussions. The mind picks on them and reruns them in a continuous loop, along

with the hugely negative feelings that these situations generate.

What I have found is that in order to deal with this, I have to grab the start of the situation, and remember it in vivid detail, warts and all. And then do it again, consciously. After a few runthrus, the feelings start to abate, and you are able to look at the situation more dispassionately. Eventually, you can remember the whole thing and not get caught up in the emotionality of it at all. The repetition is the key. The feelings are still there, but they're out there flapping in the mental wind while you're re-evaluating the actual occurrence and figuring out ways to not repeat the incident.

This examination of the situational combined remembrance is the next thing on the agenda, the Contemplation of States.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

RIGHT MINDFULNESS (PART FOUR)

Sheeze, the fourth part and we've got a couple of more to go just for this. I'd bet you didn't think it would get this involved, did you? Well, 'Nobody said it was going to be easy. If it was easy, EVERYBODY would be doing it.' Give yourself a pat on the back and have a beer (or glass of wine if you're not a beer swiller) for just slogging this far with me.

The Contemplation of States is the next leg of the journey through the swamp of Right Mindfulness. OK, so it isn't a swamp. Sue me.

Remember what the Wholesome and Unwholesome States are? Well, just in case you don't, here they are again.

The unwholesome States (bad stuff):

- sensual desire,
- ill will,
- dullness and drowsiness,
- restlessness and worry,
- doubt.

These are also known as the Five Hindrances.

The wholesome states (good stuff):

- mindfulness,
- investigation of phenomena,
- energy,
- rapture,
- tranquility,
- concentration,
- equanimity.

WAIT A MINUTE!!! Didn't we talk about these in an earlier chapter? Yes we did, but we're reinforcing them from another angle now. Bear with me.

These seven wholesome states are collectively also known as the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

Remember that each of these also has a 'not' state, which is not necessarily the zeroing of the state, but a state that is 'not' the state that we're looking for (usually not helpful).

You may have noticed a pattern here. We're building each of these chapters pretty much on what the last one gave you. We went from Contemplation of the Body (which taught us to concentrate to a point), to Contemplation of the Feelings (which taught us to become aware of the process between the senses and the feelings associated with them using the concentration we just learned.)

The third part of this subject is the Contemplation of States. Concentration is the 'how' of starting to work with the mind, feelings are the unseen 'what' that the mind generates, and states are the 'why' part of the voluntary actions that we generate. States are behind much of not only the prior-similar and memories, but they underlay the feeling associated with these recollections.

Buddhist mind states are pretty much the various states of mind that you find yourself getting into. Why do we have to contemplate them? Because you need to recognize what state of mind you are in, so as to be able to figure out where you need to go to get out. Remember that defining the problem is fifty percent of the solution.

If you aren't sure what state you're in while looking at something or are in the middle of, then you can't be sure what path to take in dealing with it. In worst case of this, you come to a multiple fork in the mental road, and find yourself doing wheelies in the intersection because you can't make up your mind as to which direction to go (read as a path to take to resolve an input). Or, you take a path from a position of a negative state(s) and wind up making the situation worse instead of better.

In other words, if you're not sure where you're coming from, how can you tell if where you're going is valid?

OK, OK ... still not clear. Let's try again.

If you're trying to make a decision and you're not clear on what got you here and how you're feeling about it, you're probably not going to make the best decision on what to do about it.

It's somewhat like being on a road trip, and trying to figure out where to go without knowing how and/or why you got to this particular place.

This is where figuring out what the feelings are (note the plural - there's rarely just one) that are associated with the situation, and then adding your state of mind to the mix, we can begin to sort out what we have to deal with when we take an action (which can include thinking about the situation in a different way.) If I'm in a state of anger, I'll approach something differently than if I'm in a state of doubt or apathy. So let's dive into the deep end of the pool and figure out what this 'state' stuff is all about.

Let's get the bad states out of the way first.

Sensual desire is basically greed and lust. If something's driving you to that obsessive place that you absolutely, positively, no-holds barred, stay out of my way, have to have it, it's probably a variety of Sensual Desire. If you're a Wall Street investment banker, you might consider that obsessing over making money is a cost of doing business. But it's not. In fact, most of these types are stressed out, 'type A' individuals who have sacrificed their moral judgments on the altars of greed, lust and pride.

The satyr and the nymphomaniac also enter into the picture here. Sensual desire isn't totally relegated to the cerebral. If you're driven by sexual desire and lust, it's equally as distracting as getting caught in the money trap (or maybe more so). Also included in this area are the obsessive eater, the obsessive collectible accumulator, and a variety of other things that people crave, desire and must have sooner than yesterday.

Ill Will isn't as simple as it sounds. It encompasses a variety of things; among which are anger, malice, hate, and all

the negative emotions that you can bring to bear against something or someone external. They can grab hold and not let go for a while, while hiding their very existence. Needless to say, it isn't one of the best states to be in when you're trying to do something positive. Holding a grudge against someone easily fits into this category as well as obsessing and stalking a person that you are fixated on.

Dullness and drowsiness are when you're trying to think through a shower curtain, or swim through thick mental mud. It just isn't going to happen very fast, if at all. This can be physical, pharmacological, or just plain lack of sleep. In any case, trying to make headway on some situation while in this state is not in your best interests.

Restlessness and worry are on the other end of the spectrum from Dullness and Drowsiness. This is where you're acting like a superball thrown into an empty boxcar bing-banging off the sides almost endlessly. Here your mind is flitting from one thing to another, never stopping long enough to see where the next bounce will take you. Since you have no idea where you're going in this state, and you've been all over the place, it's no time for deciding on what action to take.

Doubt is one of the worst states to work from. Because it introduces uncertainty on almost all facets of your viewpoint, it basically paralyzes you from ever getting to a decision point. One of the worst sub-states is doubting your ability to make a difference in your life through the use of the EightFold Path. After all, if you're not confident of what you're dealing with or your own capabilities to cope, how can you move forward?

If you doubt your own self-worth, it becomes a spiral dive that leads to depression and worse.

What's even more confusing, you can have multiple states all working together to totally muck up your decision making process. You can be angry, doubtful, restless, and obsessive all in the same instant. Try that one on for size! Each state can comprise any number of feelings - a point that

is essential to remember. Last chapter, we worked with picking out objects and identifying the feelings that they generate - positive, negative, and neutral. Now we begin to work with the types of feelings and states that these objects (read senses and combinations of senses) generate.

Also note here that not only can these states be instantaneous, they can be built up over a period of time, with a variety of sensual inputs and layer upon layer of mind's interpretation. As the complexity of the situation or object increases, then the feelings and states associated with it become more complex and confusing.

The Buddha talks about the Ten Worlds, which I believe are actually states or are analogous to states. In order to work on the problem of keeping your World Index (1-10) on the upswing you need to identify what world you're operating in at any one time. What makes it worse is that you can be operating on all of them simultaneously (and usually are to some extent). But if you can start by identifying one of them, such as Anger or Hell (as Buddha defines them) then you can say to yourself "OK, why am I in this world, and how the hell do I get out of it."

Let's take a look at the definitions for the Buddhist 'Ten Worlds. I quote from 'The Winning Life' published by the World Tribune Press (A Nichiren SGI organization).

- **Hell** --- This is a state of suffering and despair, in which we perceive we have no freedom of action. It is characterized by the impulse to destroy ourselves and everything around us.
- **Hunger** --- Hunger is the state of being controlled by insatiable desire for money, power, status or whatever. While desires are inherent in any of the Ten Worlds, in this state we are at the mercy of our cravings and cannot control them.
- **Animality** --- In this state we are ruled by instinct. We exhibit neither reason nor moral sense nor the ability to make long-range judgments. In the world of Animality, we operate by the law of the jungle, so to speak. We will not hesitate to take advantage of those weaker than ourselves and fawn on those who are stronger.

- **Anger** --- In this next state, awareness of ego emerges, but it is a selfish, greedy, distorted ego, determined to best others at all costs and seeing everything as a potential threat to itself. In this state we value only ourselves and tend to hold others in contempt. We are strongly attached to the idea of our own superiority and cannot bear to admit that anyone exceeds us in anything.
- **Humanity** --- (also called Tranquility). This is a flat, passive state of life from which we can easily shift into the lower four worlds. While we may generally behave in a humane fashion in this state, we are highly vulnerable to strong external influences.
- **Heaven** --- (or Rapture). This is a state of intense joy, stemming, for example, from the fulfillment of some desire, a sense of physical well-being, or inner contentment. Though intense, the joy experienced in this state is short-lived and also vulnerable to external influences.
- **Learning** --- In this state, we seek the truth through the teachings or experience of others.
- **Realization** --- This state is similar to Learning, except that we seek the truth not through others' teachings, but through our own direct perception of the world.
- **Bodhisattva** --- Bodhisattvas are those who aspire to achieve enlightenment and at the same time are equally determined to enable all other beings to do the same. Conscious of the bonds that link us to all others, in this state we realize that any happiness we alone enjoy is incomplete, and we devote ourselves to alleviating others' suffering. Those in this state find their greatest satisfaction in altruistic behavior.
- **Buddhahood** --- Buddhahood is a dynamic state that is difficult to describe. We can partially describe it as a state of perfect freedom, in which we are enlightened to the ultimate truth of life. It is characterized by infinite compassion and boundless wisdom. In this state, we can resolve harmoniously what appear from the standpoint of the nine worlds to be insoluble contradictions. A Buddhist sutra describes the attributes of the Buddha's life as a true self, perfect freedom from karmic bonds throughout eternity, a life purified of illusion, and absolute happiness. Also the state of Buddhahood is physically expressed in the Bodhisattva Way or actions of a Bodhisattva.

The first six worlds represent our interface with and dependence on the externals of our lives. Seven through ten represent the internals of the mind and its incarnations.

Buddha's teachings say that we possess some measure of all the Ten Worlds at any one instant. And indeed, if you think about it, it's totally true. There is some portion of each of these worlds present in your personality at any instant that you choose. The trick is to identify them, and track them back to their source, and stop them from operating if they're negative.

What is the difference between the Ten Worlds and the Five Hindrances (states of mind)? In my humble opinion, the Five Hindrances are gross descriptions, whereas the Ten Worlds define them much more clearly. They both seem to deal with the same thing.

I took an 'enlightenment' course many years ago that took the same tack but used a different hierarchy of "worlds", calling them states. They were:

- Apathy: The absence of any feeling at all. Totally in the basement of the outhouse.
- Despair: Nothing but "Oh poor me. I'll never get ahead." Slightly more active than Apathy, but just barely.
- Limbo: A place of non-action, but not despair. No goals, and no despair or apathy. No reason to do anything different.
- Anger: We all know what this one is. A very powerful emotion that causes all kinds of effects.
- Lust: This can be greed, gluttony, physical lust, or anything that creates a want (not need) that simply has to be satisfied.
- Pride: This state is the most powerful of the lower states, because it can drive the other five and cause all kinds of havoc in thinking.
- Courageousness: The state wherein you recognize the states that you operate in, and try to modify your thinking to incorporate alternatives to negative thoughts.
- Acceptance: The state where you accept what you are, and can see the lower six states in operation, but aren't greatly affected by them.

- Peace: This is the state where you are truly one with the universe and no external effect will generate a cause or an effect on your part unless you want them to.

Again note the fact that the last three of the nine correspond very well to the higher four Worlds of the ten, and the lower six, while varying slightly, fit pretty well with the Buddhist descriptions of the external Worlds.

Most people never recognize what state they're in. They just muddle through, bad decisions and all. But we're about to change all that, aren't we?

Of course, it's easy to talk about, but not so easy to really get a handle on. Just how do we get our hands around these damn states - especially when they're ganging up on you and rattling around like a tennis ball at Wimbledon Center Court?

We can start by selecting a situation that involves an object, and try to identify the feeling(s) associated with it. The object itself can generate feelings in us, but it is those memories or prior-similars that give the feelings life or generate more of their own feelings.

It could be that stuffed teddy bear that your late mother gave you, or it could be that new laptop that you bought and are prouder than hell of. It could be your new Jaguar XKE, or that beautiful lawn you've worked on so hard. OK, now try to identify the feeling that it generates in your mind.

The teddy bear might generate sadness at the loss of your mother, or the laptop might bring up a feeling of 'neener, neener' to co-workers. Likewise, the XKE might be the envy of the neighborhood, and the lawn gets you dirty looks from the next-door neighbors, whose own lawn is infested with crabgrass.

In actuality, though, it isn't the things (objects) themselves that hold the key to the feeling, it's the memories, prior-similars, deeply held prejudices and such that count here. Maybe you're not out to impress the neighbors but you really like the lawn and your XKE. Neighborly hate in this case is just a byproduct.

But these things are just things - objects - widgets that mean something to you and maybe nobody else. These 'things' probably have no real meaning to anyone but you.

Many of us have had to go through your parent's houses and clean them up after their lives ended. Invariably you wind up having to go through the photo albums and the trinket collections. When I had to clean out my mother's house, I was amazed at the number of photos for which I had no clue who the people were, nor what the occasion was that prompted the recording of an instant in time. Nor could I begin to figure out what the significance of the trinkets was. But the items were definitely meaningful to her, or she wouldn't have kept them for decades.

I know people that whose entire houses are filled with knickknacks and souvenirs from every place they've ever been. To me it's just meaningless junk, but to them it's a lifetime of memories. The various states based on the memories that these items generate are meaningful only to them.

This illustrates very well the idea that states based on sensory inputs are personal, not universal. They're yours, and yours alone. I can't identify your states for you or for your objects - only you can do this through introspection.

Looking at the states that are generated by objects (things) that you perceive or collect is a fundamental part of that introspection. Working with these states and identifying them goes a long way to killing their generation by the mind. Once you recognize them, you can then choose to ignore them if you want and make much better choices for your life. Or you can recognize them, and choose to not deal with the situation at the present time until you can come at it from a better state.

Contemplation of phenomena is next ...

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

RIGHT MINDFULNESS (PART 5)

In this last section of Right Mindfulness, we'll build a little more on the last four chapters, and, to a certain extent, combine all of them into a usable procedure to see what your mind is really doing. This contemplation has to do with the 'Contemplation of Phenomena.'

In western thinking, the word 'phenomena' usually means some occurrence that's big and out of the ordinary. Not so here. Phenomena is a much broader term that defines any experience requiring the integration of many sensory and other inputs (including those from the mind that we've been trying to work with in the last four chapters.)

In other words, it's the end product of what your mind puts together when it adds all the stuff to the sensory inputs. It's the stew in the bowl that was made from all the fresh ingredients and lovingly cooked in the Crock-pot. All the veggies that were cut up and added, the meat that was braised before it was added to the mix, the beef stock that the whole thing was simmered in and the skill of the cook to put them into the pot in the right proportions - all of this is equivalent to what the mind does between your sensing a situation and having it presented to you.

The short definition of this 'contemplation of phenomena' is that we examine situations as presented to us and try to deconstruct them down to their components (figure out what's in the stew after it's served). This is so you will be able to see the validity (or not) of what your mind presents to you. Since we're now all experts in getting to the initial sensory data, and concentrating on this alone, we'll now do a total flip and let the whole thing run - breaking it up into pieces as we see them as phenomena (analyze the stew).

First order of business - getting a situation. This is definitely not the hardest job in the world. It can be the

situation that your teenage daughter wants to go out and take the car, even though she's grounded for another three weeks. Or it can be (wait for it) the old (by now) Parable of the Red Haired Man with the Beard. Almost anything can generate phenomena. They're everywhere.

So let's deconstruct the first one ... your teenage daughter.

Input data:

Daughter is grounded.

Daughter wants sooooooooooooo bad to get out of the cage.

Daughter wants sooooooooooooo bad to get hold of the car.

Daughter is in your face and screaming because you said no.

Let's face it - teenagers aren't exactly the most logical and obedient creatures in the universe. So the phenomena in this case is that you have a ragingly hormonal person that is giving you every guilt trip in the book plus a few that you've never heard before - and all at a pitch and volume that would make Billy Mays¹ proud.

The visual is your teenager being very angry. The audio is words, strung into varying degrees of guilt, anger and distrust.

The visual analysis (very angry) is based on your experience in watching people and making judgments as to their emotional states. However, most actors are expert at presenting the external facade of this stuff, so it stands to reason that taking this visual at face value (literally) is probably not too valid of a premise. Is it real anger? Maybe or maybe not.

The audio is likewise subject to question. The kid wants out of the cage in the worst way. The words are carefully strung into sentences or phrases calculated to instill a range

¹ Billy Mays (for the uninitiated) was a TV pitchman noted for a voice with the capability of shattering glass and scaring small babies. He usually hawked the 'only \$9.99 and that includes shipping' products. His voice is unique in that he can be clearly understood through locked doors and low TV volume. His shouting style of sales is notorious to those of us who inhabit the insomniac world of infomercials at 3AM.

of emotions from guilt to rage to depression to pity to ... you get the picture.

All this comes together in the mind to present a phenomenon to you that almost guarantees a conflict. Unless, of course, you're sitting there saying to yourself "that's interesting - I've never heard that guilt trip before." And if you're deconstructing the situation as you go, it gets almost laughable - except to the teenage daughter, who is by now apoplectic that the tirade isn't working in any way at all. The piece-de-resistance is of course, the flounce back to her room, with the obligatory door slam and the classic phrase, 'You don't love me any more.'

Now, I know that dealing with family and especially YOUR kids is an emotional roller coaster and you can get wrapped up into a royal screaming match before your analytical mind manages to even get into low gear. But I find that kicking the mind into deconstruct mode at the first sign of trouble can at least get you one step up into analysis mode.

The second part of this is seeing whether the analysis that your mind is giving you is valid for this situation. Has daughter thrown these kinds of tantrums before? Then this might be a prior-similar. The prior-similar can't be taken for granted, though. Each one may be similar, but there may be different underpinnings for this particular episode. Or, it may just be raging hormones looking for an outlet - it's for you to decide (lovingly and calmly of course.)

However, if this is a new phenomenon, then what's up with this? It's time for some more intense analysis. What is your mind giving you? Is it the super ball rattling around the box-car or is it a 'What the f..k?' moment? If it's a new phenomenon, then the mind is probably giving you all kinds of alternatives as to what this is and why. In this case, step back and return to the initial inputs. What were the starting causes of this (maybe we need to find out)? Does the kid have a valid beef (initial reaction is probably not)? But a dispassionate look at where this is coming from is definitely in order. Now I realize that doing this in the face of a screaming teenager is probably akin to watching a train bearing down on you at ninety miles an hour and you're stuck in the grade crossing.

But the whole Contemplation of Phenomena is based on just this premise - that you can face down your teenager calmly and analytically, just as you'd calmly get out of your car and watch it be smashed to smithereens by a hundred-plus-ton locomotive. Neither situation is amenable to logical thought without training the mind. In both of them, the mind is probably yammering it's head off in panic mode of some sort, while the supervisory part of the mind is watching all this happen, and ignoring the more radical outputs of the mind's projection section.

This is what the Contemplation of Phenomena is all about - getting the mind to only give you what you need in order to make sense of the situation. In a strange sort of parallel universe, the military trains their special forces people in this kind of thinking in a much more brutal manner, by overloading them with sensory input until they learn to discard most of it and just use the ones necessary to get the job done without panic or emotional reaction. But the result is the same under the stress conditions of combat as we're doing combating the teenage daughter. Unfortunately, this is whack-a-mole all over again for the military folks, because their followers may blow up into violently reactive situations once they get home. These are usually where no such reaction is indicated or called for in civilian life. The military here has treated a symptom, not a cause. If they taught the entire Buddhist philosophy - but I digress - Ummmm - I can't leave this oxymoronical example alone. Of course, if they taught the entire Buddhist philosophy, the military special forces people wouldn't do the job the military wants them to do. I do shake my head sometimes - and try to move on.

The almost-worn-out parable of the Red Haired man still rings true here as well. Your reaction to him at the hiring office would most times be emotional, unless you grab the whole Contemplation of Phenomena thingie and put it to use. An analysis of the situation while ignoring the emotional side of your yammering mind will get you the best programmer in the business for your firm and probably let you meet that project deadline on time, thus getting you a bonus. But it

wouldn't happen if you didn't deconstruct the underpinnings of your initial reaction.

By the way, just a side thought here. Think back on the past few chapters and ask yourself if we've done anything religious here? Is this a way to just make my life better, or is my probable association between Buddhism and it as a religion going to have to change? Just a thought ...

Contemplation of phenomena is a very real thing. But it is the whole idea of quieting the mind and using it to the best advantage for me that matters, rather than emotionally reacting and making situations worse. To coin a phrase - 'Think about it' or 'Stop, Look, and Listen!'

One more thought before we charge ahead. 'Quieting the mind' is a bit of a misnomer. If we truly quieted the mind, we wouldn't be able to get much out of it. Maybe the term should be 'organizing the mind'. That would mean that we have channeled it to provide what we need, rather than letting it flail at random. Just another thought ...

Onward and upward ...

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

MEDITATION (and other things)

Let's sidetrack for a little while here and talk somewhat about 'meditation'. There's a lot of differing opinions of what meditation should consist of, and it's time to partially clear the air on this much maligned and misused word.

We'll talk about it here, because we'll need it much more in the next few chapters.

Meditation is a lot of things to a lot of people. It's one of the most misused (or mis-defined) words in the English language.

To many it's just sitting down, closing their eyes and enjoying the silence and relaxation. It calms them down, and allows them to 'center' themselves and they enjoy just being quiet for a while.

To others, it's a ritual designed to suppress the mind with an overwhelming batch of dogma and ceremony, thus displacing whatever was running with an overlay of defined terms and conditions which give structure to thinking and the mind.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary says that meditation is:

- the act or process of spending time in quiet thought
- the act or process of meditating
- an expression of a person's thoughts on something
- a discourse intended to express its author's reflections or to guide others in contemplation
- the act or process of meditating
-

This doesn't help much, other than to formalize the word. It still doesn't address the objective of meditating. OK, you say ... what is the object of meditating?

Normally, we filter and modify all the sense inputs that we encounter every minute of every day with all the dreck that we collect over our lifetimes.

Meditation is a mind exercise. The objective (in Buddhist philosophy) is to train the mind to give you analysis, opinion and insight only on demand. It is to concentrate the focus on what is really there, rather than what you think it should be.

The end result is that you see things (literally) as they really are, instead of what your mind tells you they are or thinks they are. But getting from point 'A' to point 'B' is a little bit trickier than just putting it on the printed page. Some of the exercises we've done so far should have proven this beyond any doubt.

Let's be clear on something here. What we've done so far in terms of the exercises is to improve concentration and focus on a particular thing or idea. That's not really meditation - it's a concentration exercise. That's all.

Meditation is an ongoing experience. But there is an inherent trap to meditation, in that we have a natural tendency to try to control it. That's what the exercises we've been talking about are designed to do - control the mind and concentrate. But that's not really meditation. It may appear to be, but in reality it's just forcing the mind to focus without distraction. It doesn't serve any real purpose other than that up until now. If all you do when you meditate is to calm the mind and achieve inner peace, you're missing the point.

Unless we use meditation to change the way the mind works, we've not accomplished anything. Without that change in what the mind does with the inputs it gets, the information will still be mangled and you'll operate on incorrect data.

To affect that change, we can cause the mind to concentrate on something that happened that day; or something that you saw in yourself that bothered you; or any number of specific things that you can identify and work on. This is what I call 'prescriptive meditation.' It works on specific stuff that you want to change or understand, and involves

your looking deeply into ALL aspects of the thing(s) or experiences you're looking at.

There's a second way that meditation also works, but it requires that you master the prescriptive type first.

This second type of meditation allows the mind to wander off and do something untoward. It is the only way that we can actually see what it's doing when it's unleashed. If we try to tightly control its activity, we limit its scope of action, and miss out on some of the other things it's doing that we need to look at. This (I am told) is what Zen is all about. Zero structure, just meditate and see where your mind takes you - and hopefully learn to throttle the junk that it comes up with.

Throttling the junk is where the prescriptive type of meditation comes in. Once you see where your mind went, then you can backtrack and find out what started that line of thought in the first place - and it's usually pretty well hidden (or you've jumped six topics since then). But half of fixing any problem is defining it to begin with.

This idea of letting the mind wander at will may appear to run counter to all the exercises that we've discussed so far. But appearances can be deceiving. In reality, the previous exercises have honed the mind into concentrating on what WE want it to work with - not what IT wants to work with. Now, we take off from that point and let it run, with the supervisory part of the mind watching carefully and focusing on what the other part is doing, and working back to the origination point that started the thought. I know, I know - it's counter-intuitive and doesn't make much sense right now.

In a way, you might say that the concentration exercises are much like dog obedience training, in that once you get the dog under control, you can then let it run free without fear of it taking off and losing you (or visa versa). 'Come here, mind. Heel. Sit. Stay.'

As you've noticed, we're working with two levels of the mind here - the supervisor part is doing analysis of the reactive/cognizant part. And the concentration that we have gained up to this point works wonders. Both parts are used to

track back the nasty stuff that is still resident and causing havoc with evaluating what things really are like out there in the real world. And it is these filters/interpretations/assumptions that have to be stopped from running automatically.

Meditation of this type is more dealing with the mind in real time and what it does to our thought process. And it can be dangerous if you're not prepared to do the inward-looking introspection that is required. After all, if you see what you're REALLY like in the noggin, it may send you screaming into the night - where you'll find that you're right there to greet you.

Now, it may seem that we're playing with psychobabble here. After all, what does this have to do with Buddhist thought? The answer may surprise you - or it may not. The answer is that it has everything to do with it. OK, so you probably know that I wouldn't have put it in here if it weren't germane to the discussion. Ya' got me.

Buddhist thought requires a degree of insight and introspection that would make most therapists blush. (Extraneous thought - Is there such a thing as a Buddhist therapist? Or do Buddhists require therapy? I'm just curious.) It requires delving into what the mind is doing and altering the processes so as to more closely conform to the Moral Disciplines of the EightFold Path. Now why would we want to do this?

If you are a student of sociology at all, you will immediately see that the Moral Disciplines are nothing more than a way to make a society or social structure run more harmoniously. Are they universal truths? Maybe. Surprisingly enough, old-time philosophers from Aristotle to Plato to Spinoza to Voltaire found many of the same truths and ideas that Buddhism presents. They may not relate them in the same exact way, but the basic ideas are there nonetheless. The question now arises, did the ideas come through from Buddhism into these thought streams, or were they derived independently? Or just maybe, are these philosophers actually reincarnated Buddhas - as Buddha himself proclaims (at least

for the sages that preceded the historical incarnation of Buddha.) If it happened prior to the Buddha's historical incarnation, then it is logical to assume that it could happen after his exit from this world. Inquiring minds want to know.

At the very minimum, though, what these concepts are, are ways that an individual can minimize the stress in their individual lives. Almost anyone can visualize that. In fact, I've seen the Four Noble Truths stated while replacing 'desire' and 'ignorance' with the word 'stress', and it works as well if not better than using desire and ignorance.

So why codify this stuff into part of the EightFold Path? Because, in reality, many people can't (or won't) visualize these rules as being in their own best interests. Perhaps (as a single example), the difference between need and want isn't obvious to them. So in order to make the social order work, you have to lay down some rules for the ignorant (Buddhist usage). That enforcement takes place at the group level. Being part of the 'religion' or having laws for the society helps to do this. However, **true** enforcement in the Buddhist tradition doesn't exist except within the individual. Granted, the community will register their disapproval and sanction the individual, but the individual is still free to ignore the rules or comply. The pressure just helps the decision along somewhat.

If you consider the Buddhist versions of 'desire' and 'ignorance' as things to be avoided, then you minimize the number of intrusions into your personal space (physical, mental, and moral, remember?) But if you happen to be one who ignores these ideas and lets greed or lust take over your personality, you're not going to be EightFold Path material ... at least not right now. Nor will you be fully accepted into polite Buddhist society.

The objective of Right Mindfulness is reached when we can use the mind for our own good, rather than allowing it to harm us. Meditation is one way that we can find out what it's doing to us, and work to alter its patterns so as to have it

support our better natures, rather than encouraging our worst aspects.

In the coming chapters, meditation in its Buddhist form takes a major role in the remainder of the EightFold Path discussion.

We've spent five chapters looking at Right Mindfulness from a number of angles. We talked about the Four contemplations. We found a few concentration exercises that sharpen the mind. And we talked about meditation and its ramifications.

What have we accomplished here? The objective was to quiet the mind, and cause it to give us only raw sensory data without interpretation, augmentation or extraneous prior similars. With lots of work, it's doable - and necessary.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

RIGHT CONCENTRATION (PART 1)

In this, and subsequent chapters on Right Concentration and Wisdom, things get a little disjointed and esoteric. These last parts of the EightFold Path and its application require that a lot of definitions be made, and connections be established before we put these last few high level constructs in place. So bear with me if you don't see the relevance of what we're talking about immediately. It will become much clearer in a little while.

Let's see what the Buddha himself said about Right Concentration:

“And what, monks, is right concentration? Herein, secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters and dwells in the first jhana¹, which is accompanied by initial and sustained application of mind and filled with rapture and happiness born of seclusion.

Then, with the subsiding of initial and sustained application of mind, by gaining inner confidence and mental unification, he enters and dwells in the second jhana, which is free from initial and sustained application but is filled with rapture and happiness born of concentration.

With the fading out of rapture, he dwells in equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending; and he experiences in his own person that bliss of which the noble ones say: "Happily lives he who is equanimous and mindful" — thus he enters and dwells in the third jhana.

With the abandoning of pleasure and pain and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters and dwells in the fourth jhana, which has neither-pleasure-nor-pain and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.

This, monks, is right concentration.²”

Let's visit this in another light from the Anguttara Nikaya:

¹ Jhana: a state/level of concentration/contemplation.

² Digha Nikaya 22.

“These are the four developments of concentration. Which four? There is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to a pleasant abiding in the here & now. There is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to the attainment of knowledge & vision. There is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to mindfulness & alertness. There is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to the ending of the effluents.

“And what is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to a pleasant abiding in the here & now? There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful qualities — enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation.”³

This initial step to the jhanas (which are levels of concentration) requires that the meditator find a quiet place, get comfortable, and have few things that may distract and require any action. It is primarily the seclusion and quiet which are the prerequisites. Once these are attained, then we can begin work.

The first jhana is also actually marked by five factors, called ‘Absorption Factors’. They are:

- **Initial application.** This directs the mind to the object. It forces the mind to focus on the object and hang onto it.
- **Sustained application.** This anchors the mind on the object, not allowing it to vary from its focus.
- **Rapture.** This is the joy that accompanies a favorable interest in the object (i.e. ‘It really works!’.)
- **Happiness.** This factor is the joy that accompanies the successful concentration on the object.
- **One-pointedness.** This is the pivotal function that unifies the mind on the object to the exclusion of all other objects that may attempt to intrude.

Of the five, only the first two are unique to this first level. Initial and sustained application is the effort that the

³ Anguttara Nikaya 4.41.

meditator puts into the attainment of any jhana. Rapture, happiness and singularity are a byproduct of the work that the meditator does at this point.

It's a really good state to be in, but it is only the beginning. It's enjoyable, but you probably will get bogged down in the results for a while until they become familiar and you find that it's not enough.

The 'directed thought and evaluation' means that you're looking at what the mind is doing, and evaluating it. There's no action yet, just watching and being able to see it for what it is, not what you think it should be.

We have to master this level until we can attain it, stick with it, let go of it, and look back at it without getting into emotional trouble. This also means being able to get into and out of it without much effort. And we have to be able to do this repeatedly until it's easy. In other words, get with it, stay with it, and get it. When we can do this, we also gain an inner confidence and a mental unity from the process.

While the first jhana is very pleasurable, it is still pretty close to the starting point. It is with the lessening of the effort required (both initial and sustained) to get there that we arrive at the second jhana.

"With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance."⁴

The second jhana represents the point when the lack of external distractions and the focused, non-flitting mind puts you into a state of rapture for the quietness and peace that you experience. You are just 'aware' of things and thoughts, but no effort is made to channel these inputs. You just see them for what they are without much effort.

Remember that this also requires the idea of the 'sixth sense' of the mind itself, where the concepts and ideas that are generated in the mind are on a par with the five sensory inputs. All of this represents the second level of concentration (the Second Jhana).

⁴ Ibid.

But the rapture component of this level also contains the seeds of excitement, since it's something new and wonderful. Experiencing rapture is a wonderful thing, but it distracts from our watching of the senses and the mind. Eventually, as we become more used to experiencing this level, the rapture becomes commonplace, and with familiarity we can go back to working with the six inputs.

“With the fading of rapture, he remains in equanimity, is mindful & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasurable abiding.'”⁵

As you become used to being in this state, you will experience an evenness of temperament (this is what equanimity really is) as well as being singularly aware. It is a pleasurable state, this third jhana.

The word 'equanimity' threw me for a loop the first time I encountered it. Wikipedia describes the Buddhist definition:

Neither a thought nor an emotion, it is rather the steady conscious realization of reality's transience. It is the ground for [wisdom](#) and [freedom](#) and the protector of [compassion](#) and [love](#). While some may think of equanimity as dry neutrality or cool aloofness, mature equanimity produces a radiance and warmth of being. The [Buddha](#) described a mind filled with equanimity as "abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill-will."

And on to the fourth jhana ...

“With the abandoning of pleasure & pain — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — he enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is the development of concentration that... leads to a pleasant abiding in the here & now.”⁶

The fourth jhana brings us to the elevated state of concentration where you are 'pleasant(ly) abiding in the here and now.'

The issue of being divorced from both pleasure and pain refers to mental qualities, rather than physical. It means that

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

you should not be reacting to either stimuli or thoughts which generate pleasurable or painful feelings - just watching them as they go by. These things don't simply disappear, but they are put out of the picture until such time as you want to deal with them.

What is left for you in this level is a great calm, a neutral position, not feeling much (if any) emotional reaction, yet observing with a great degree of concentration and seeing much of what is going on within the mind and how it reacts to the sensory stuff.

Such is the power of concentration at this level.

While this may appear at first to be four distinct levels, it is actually a spectrum with an infinite number of levels and no accurate distinction between them. How can this be?

In Buddha's time and audience, the ideas of infinite gradation and spectra were not even glimmers in the minds of the greatest scholars, let alone the common man to which he was speaking much of the time. Even the rulers and kings didn't possess that idea. As an example, the Buddha speaks of many thousands of kalpas indicating a long time and 'as many grains of sand as exist in the Ganges (river).' These are over-the-top descriptions intended to convey quantities that would boggle the mind of the listener, bordering on the infinite (another quantity that his hearers would have trouble with - I even have trouble working with that one myself.)

Therefore the principle of expedient means comes into play, taking whatever concept is being taught to a level that the populace could understand and deal with - hence four distinct levels rather than a sliding scale. And for my next act, after reading the Buddha's mind two-and-a-half millennia ago ... ummmmm ... but I digress.

The four jhanas merely get us to the 'jumping-off' spot for distinctive meditations on any number of things designed to focus the mind even more closely on individual objects or ideas to the point of singularity, ignoring all external sensory inputs until we are ready for them. Right now, our focus is on getting through the jhanas in one piece.

It may seem that we're jumping around a lot here, doing some stuff that we've done before, and reverting to past exercises. In some respects that's true, but we're approaching it from a different angle, and starting to incorporate a lot more of the EightFold Path into the practice.

In the next chapter, we'll discuss these meditation objects and how to use them to get there.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

RIGHT CONCENTRATION (PART 2)

Right Concentration isn't what it seems at first blush. Now wait just a minute here! We just spent six chapters concentrating and focusing the mind. What the hell are we doing with this again? Well, grasshopper, we just jumped onto another leaf on the same plant - or to be more precise, a different section of the concentration path.

Right Concentration is also known as Right Meditation, but we'll stick with the first title. Right Concentration isn't how we look at things, but rather **what** we look at, and **why**. It involves the other seven factors of the Path and begins to bring them to a unified whole. Kindof. Sorta. Maybe. Actually, it does, in a very skillful way.

Right View pulls us into a more narrow scope, with energy funded by Right Effort, and our determination to see this through focused by Right Resolve. We narrow our transgressions against the outside world (and of the outside world to us) through the Moral Disciplines (Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood) and watch what we're thinking and doing through Right Mindfulness. And now we're up to the eighth part of the EightFold Path - that of Right Concentration. 'Ahhhhhhh', you say. 'We're finally there.'

Ummmm - no. Actually, we're just beginning, in terms of getting it all together, that is. All the previous stuff is a prelude to the main event.

But don't despair. We've come a long way, and the work ahead, while difficult, has light and happiness coming along for the ride. Right Concentration, at its core, involves honing the skills that we've learned so far into a singularity of focus - one that brings all the facets of the mind to bear on just one individual object of attention so as to REALLY see it as it is, not anything else.

At this point, we actually get to a fork in the road, where we may choose one of two paths to walk. We may go down the path of **serenity meditation** or that of **insight meditation**. Oops, I lied. Actually, we don't get to take the insight road just yet. We have to do both in sequence. No real fork here. While it is possible to make the quantum leap from this point directly into insight meditation, it will probably elude most people, since the mind isn't sufficiently concentrated yet to deal with the concepts of insight that require this kind of singularity of focus.

What are these two types of meditation?

Serenity meditation involves a series of some forty items of concentration, selectively increasing the complexity of the object of meditation until a singularity of focus is achieved. In the last chapter, we talked about the four jhanas, which are the first steps in the serenity meditation.

Insight meditation takes this singularity of focus and begins to apply it to what are called the 'Five Aggregates of Clinging' and the six sense experiences so as to begin to define and pre-empt the idea of 'self' and the whole idea of how we define our being (See, I told you it would get esoteric and disjointed). Don't go off screaming into the night just yet - it DOES get easier to understand.

Let's start with the Serenity Meditation. After finding a suitable place to practice concentration, removing as many of the physical distractions as possible, and becoming comfortable, we may start almost anywhere in the forty objects of concentration.

The forty objects are:

- ten *kasinas*
- ten unattractive objects (*dasa asubha*)
- ten recollections (*dasa anussatiyo*)
- four sublime states (*cattaro brahmavihara*)
- four immaterial states (*cattaro aruppa*)
- one perception (*eka sañña*)
- one analysis (*eka vavatthana*).

Let's take a look at them in no particular order of usefulness.

Kasinas. (No, not casinos.) These are rudimentary concepts involving physical objects within your sphere of reality. The ten are:

- Earth
- Fire
- Water
- Air
- Red
- Blue
- Yellow
- White
- Light
- Space

Each of these objects can be easily identified and concentrated upon. The objective is to focus **all** the parts of the mind on the object, while observing and correcting the streams of thought that don't apply. Make the object the sole focus of attention to the exclusion of all other things. Using these *kasinas* makes it easier to identify the object to the mind - until you get into such things as 'Light' or 'Space', although these can be interesting concentration objects.

Next ...

"The ten "unattractive objects" are corpses in different stages of decomposition. This subject appears similar to the contemplation of bodily decay in the mindfulness of the body, and in fact in olden times the cremation ground was recommended as the most appropriate place for both. But the two meditations differ in emphasis. In the mindfulness exercise stress falls on the application of reflective thought, the sight of the decaying corpse serving as a stimulus for consideration of one's own eventual death and disintegration.

In this exercise the use of reflective thought is discouraged. The stress instead falls on one-pointed mental fixation on the object, the less thought the better."¹

OK, so we don't have decaying corpses around to look at for this exercise. But almost any flower will do just as well. Watch it in its various states - bud, opening, fully open, wilting, dead. The objective is to note and concentrate on the

¹ 'The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering' by Bhikkhu Bodhi; The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS.

fact that it is **impermanent**, and that it has a **cycle of birth and death**, just as you do. But focusing on that cycle and its progressive parts is the reason for doing this exercise. We go from full flower to dead stem ourselves - we have to accept that and be able to concentrate on it at times.

I quoted here from Bikkhu Bodhi, because he states it far better than I can for this area. He then takes up the next set of concentration objects ...

“The ten recollections form a miscellaneous collection. The first three are devotional meditations on the qualities of the Triple Gem — the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha; they use as their basis standard formulas that have come down in the Suttas. The next three recollections also rely on ancient formulas: the meditations on morality, generosity, and the potential for divine-like qualities in oneself. Then come mindfulness of death, the contemplation of the unattractive nature of the body, mindfulness of breathing (sound familiar? Ed.), and lastly, the recollection of peace, a discursive meditation on Nibbana.”²

These techniques are explained fully in the ‘meditation manuals’ elsewhere in the suttas/sutras. To go into them at this point would be a digression that would take years to get out of, and I’m sure if you’re really interested you’ll find them for yourself. If you Google ‘Buddhist meditation techniques’, you’ll eventually find what you’re looking for.

Once the four jhanas are achieved and serenity meditation is applied, more subtle versions of advanced concentration now come to the fore.

“The four sublime states or “divine abodes” are the outwardly directed social attitudes — loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity — developed into universal radiations which are gradually extended in range until they encompass all living beings. The four immaterial states are the objective bases for certain deep levels of absorption: the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of nothingness, and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. These become accessible as objects only to those who are already adept in concentration. The “one perception” is the perception of the repulsiveness of food, a discursive topic intended to reduce attachment to the pleasures of the palate. The “one analysis” is the contemplation of the body in terms of the four primary elements.”³

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The next level of concentrations are the four sublime states:

- loving-kindness,
- compassion,
- sympathetic joy,
- equanimity.

These we've talked about before briefly, but here they become things that we will eventually extend to all living beings. This expansion to all living beings is difficult at first. I remember trying to concentrate on compassion (something I have had great difficulty with) and winding up with my mind totally revolting and running away. The mind does that, by the way. But that's the reason for the exercise - to let it do that, and gently bring it back and try again. Eventually the mind gets used to the idea and will stick with it, but it takes work.

Loving-kindness is as it sounds. Being loving and kind to all sentient beings is what it's about.

Compassion is being able to generate sympathy and empathy for a being that is in sorrow or has suffered misfortune. Understand the position and emotions that the other is going through.

Sympathetic Joy is taking part in the happiness of others and being able to share that happiness with them and others.

Equanimity is serenity, peace, calmness, or whatever synonym you can find for being calm, collected and joyous.

This is still the fourth jhana and we go from there to the next four, the four immaterial states:

- the base of infinite space
- the base of infinite consciousness,
- the base of nothingness
- the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

And the ninth: Cessation.

I quote here from a book by David N. Snyder, Ph.D., called 'The Complete Book of Buddha's Lists – Explained.' He does a much better job than I can of explaining the next five Jhanas ...

The Fifth Jhana: Infinity of Space

The fifth through the eighth jhanas are the “absorptions without form.” This is because they refer to states of consciousness where there is no perception of a form or body. They correspond to heavenly realms which also have no form or body. That is, beings re-born to the formless realms, which are some of the heavenly planes, do not have a body, but do have pleasant existences.

You enter the fifth jhana by remaining in the utter peacefulness state and then shift your attention to the boundaries of your being. You focus your attention outward as if you are watching yourself from above. You may feel like you are floating above your body at first. You put your attention on your body so that it feels like you are filling the room. This is expanded further and further so that you fill your whole neighborhood, city, country, continent, and then to space itself. You find yourself in this huge expanse of empty space.

The Sixth Jhana: Infinity of Consciousness

You enter the sixth jhana by realizing that the infinite space you occupy includes your consciousness. So you shift your attention to infinite consciousness instead of infinite space. You may feel “at one” with all nature and existence, but do not be fooled, this is not full enlightenment. Concentration is further increased and there is still one-pointedness of mind.

The Seventh Jhana: No-thingness

The seventh jhana is entered by realizing that the content of the infinite consciousness is basically empty of any permanent nature. We also realize that there is no “thing” either. There is nothing in the universe that has any permanent essence to it. We realize that everything is in constant flux.

The Eighth Jhana: Neither perception nor non-perception

The eight and ninth jhanas are difficult to discuss because they are so hard to describe in much the same way nibbana is hard to describe. This is because they are such heightened levels of concentration and of the Path itself, that they must be experienced. There is also very little to discuss with the eighth and ninth jhanas, since the perception levels have become so fine and so subtle. You enter the eighth jhana by letting go of the sense of no-thingness and enter a very natural, calm place. In the eighth jhana there is very little recognition of what is happening, but you are also not totally unaware of what is happening. There is such a peaceful state and you have gone beyond the duality of perception nor non-perception that it is easy to be fooled that you have experienced full enlightenment. But there is still more to do.

The Ninth Jhana: Cessation

When you reach the limits of perception, you realize that lesser mental activity is better for your calm and peaceful state. You enter a state of “cessation” of consciousness where there is only a very subtle form of perception. The meditator may appear to be unconscious. There have been reports of meditators having heart beats as low as 20 to 40 beats per minute at this jhanic level. The nearest way to describe this state is something like a very deep sleep. The eight and ninth jhanas are not full enlightenment, but very close stepping stones to full awakening. Only those who are

very close to being fully enlightened can enter the eighth and especially, the ninth jhana.⁴

To me this may seem almost a distraction from meditation, but it really isn't. It's just a different way of describing the same thing that we've been talking about all along. It's pretty high level stuff, and takes a while to not only absorb, but utilize in your meditative practice.

The four immaterial states constitute the 'absorption meditations.' These work on rethinking objects so as to provide a subtler one. Looking at these for the first time, it's psychobabble. But they really do start to make sense when you start really thinking about them.

For instance, when you look at an object, it occupies space. When you remove the object, there is only a space where the object was. Contemplating this gives us the idea of space, and the emptiness of that space. Expanding that contemplation to the idea that any time you have space, you have emptiness. This can be carried out to infinity.

Next, we contemplate that space cannot have existence, since it does not possess anything within it to coexist with and be part of. Therefore it is infinitely empty. You are only conscious of the space and its non-existence.

But if there is nothing within space for it to exist, there is nothing for you to be conscious of, therefore your consciousness of space cannot exist. PLEASE don't get technical with me and start talking about the fact that even in remotest outer space there's still a few molecules of whatever floating around in the vacuum. That's not what we're about here. Just use the concept and go with it.

But when you meditate on the *base of infinite space*, for example, you can work with not just the concept of space that an object occupies, but work with the idea of that space itself. At least for me, my mind first wants to put up an image here looking out the front viewport of the Starship Enterprise, with

⁴ The Complete Book of Buddha's Lists – Explained, David N. Snyder, Ph.D., <http://www.thedhamma.com/buddhaslists.pdf>

Captain Picard saying 'Make it so.' But alas, that is a far cry from the concept that we're talking about here. This is just the concept of empty space itself, wherever it is.

One of the exercises recommends that you start by concentrating on a physical object, and then remove the object and concentrate on the space where the object was. By successively eliminating objects, you expand the idea of the space where the objects were until it becomes infinite.

Esoteric, no?

Infinite consciousness works on the shoulders of infinite space, in that you become conscious of that infinite space and therefore your consciousness has to expand to deal with it. These concepts are nebulous (no pun intended), and are not for the faint of heart. Expanding your consciousness to deal with infinite space requires lots of practice.

Nothingness turns infinite consciousness on its head. The exercise requires us to negate the concept of infinite consciousness and infinite space so as to provide the reduction of these to an infinitesimal value, and then to nothing.

While these object and formless meditations get us focused and singularly occupied, they are not by any means the be-all and end-all of the process. They merely serve to improve the singular concentration so as to further hone the abilities of stopping, looking and listening.

Here it becomes the time to bring in a second mode of meditation/concentration. It is called 'momentary (or insight) concentration.' Now wait - don't get ahead of me here. This isn't quite going back and letting the mind flit from idea to concept to sensory input without form - to the contrary, while it does do exactly that, we're preventing the reaction part of the equation. We observe rather than participate in what the mind is doing. Once we see this dreck, we can proceed to work with it. The seeing of the origin of the dreck is what the 'momentary concentration' is all about, and what the Zen folks use as their primary tool, so I understand.

The attainment of this concentration results from not concentrating solely on a single object or idea. It instead

allows you (while maintaining the concentration state) to note anything that happens as merely an event, while latching onto and working with **none of them** as they go by. As we go through this method, gaining strength in concentration, we maintain a continuous awareness of ANYTHING that enters our perception. Eventually we get to a state of singular concentration on the constantly changing stream of ideas, events, and thoughts - noting all, and evaluating none.

This creates a fluid concentration capable of rapidly gathering the mind's state(s) and determining what action to take in regards to those that we eventually find harmful.

Next chapter, please ...

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE FOUR SUBLIME STATES

This is a different kind of chapter, in that I'm going to speak from some personal experiences about these four sublime states, rather than relying on all the work from other writers.

Back in Chapter 25, we learned about the four sublime states - compassion, sympathetic joy, loving-kindness and equanimity - these were associated with the first four Jhanas. When I first wrote about these states, I was just coming to the realizations of what they encompassed - not so much in the technical sense, but in a personal, up-front, in-your-face kind of way. What I realized was that in reality, I possessed almost none of these qualities and had no idea about how to do anything about it on a personal level. So now is the time to tangle with these four states from perhaps a more personal - a more subjective perspective.

The four sublime states aren't totally separable from each other - and, as in most things Buddhist, the definitions aren't as clear-cut as they would sound in the dictionary.

Even without these sublime states, things had progressed for me to the point where I could accept the bad/inappropriate things that I had done earlier in my existence and see what it was that had caused me so much pain (many 2:00 AM's later).

1.) COMPASSION

I found this out a while back when the realization hit (as is customary in my 2:00 AM awakenings) that I really didn't understand those who did altruistic work and devoted their lives to helping others. As an early advocate of Ayn Rand and objectivism, I viewed the world from the viewpoint of everyone being responsible for themselves and 'tough luck' if you screwed up your life. The idea of trying to get someone else up and running after a stumble was as foreign as the Mongol culture in Outer Mongolia. It wasn't my problem. Until now ... until I studied Buddhist teachings.

Then the realization hit that I truly didn't understand those who had an altruistic bent. No comprehension. Nada. Zip. None. In

addition, I knew that I wasn't a particularly altruistic person to begin with. 'Selfish' was the word that my mother used.

So here I was trying to deal with compassion without really understanding it.

Needless to say, if I truly believed in what I was now reading and trying to understand, then I was going to have to do some serious soul-searching to figure out this paradox of my thinking. This led to a roundabout process where I was foundering with my non-compassionate attitudes about others against the bedrock principles of what I had found to be the Buddhist path to a much better life.

In the process of this examination, more stuff came up than the mental cesspool could handle in a non-toxic manner. I have found that biting off individual experiences and allowing them to be whatever they were without all the emotional baggage hanging all over them was a major key to getting this far. Dealing with these experiences was an eye-opener, since it required the un-suppressing of all the things that I didn't want to remember and re-living some pretty rocky times. Eventually, though, the baggage falls away or becomes less offensive and you're left with just the experience. It is only then that you can look at it objectively and see what made it so difficult/bad/ugly. Usually, it was either something that I had done without thinking about the consequences, or I was just plain oblivious to them. Or it was something that I hadn't done because I hadn't considered the full impact of the situation.

So here I was, looking at all this stuff and finding this common symptom of lacking compassion. I didn't give a crap about anyone else. Not really.

Now the problem was trying to figure out what to do to generate the compassion that I lacked.

All the writings tell you that you can concentrate on this or that and that'll help. Unfortunately, writing is just writing unless you put it into practice - and "Aye, there's the rub." All the writing in the world is just words unless you accept what it says and use it

to your own advantage (including this verbiage). I've found this out the hard way.

So how do I develop compassion? First, what is it, really?

Wikipedia explains thusly:

"The Dalai Lama has said, "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

The American monk Bhikkhu Bodhi states that compassion "supplies the complement to loving-kindness: whereas loving-kindness has the characteristic of wishing for the happiness and welfare of others, compassion has the characteristic of wishing that others be free from suffering, a wish to be extended without limits to all living beings. Like metta, compassion arises by entering into the subjectivity of others, by sharing their interiority in a deep and total way. It springs up by considering that all beings, like ourselves, wish to be free from suffering, yet despite their wishes continue to be harassed by pain, fear, sorrow, and other forms of dukkha." [Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Buddhist Publication Society, 1994, page 23.]

OK, I think I get it. Compassion is getting inside the other person's head and seeing what makes them suffer, and realizing that they want to be happy just as much as you do - and realize that they may lack the means to figure out how to do it.

At this point, I have to ask myself, is this external manifestation of compassion (roughly equivalent to altruism) necessary or required? Most religions would say yes - that you have to prove your compassion to God or to others. But proving to others isn't what Buddhist practice is all about, is it? It's working with your own mind to bring about change, so as to eliminate your own suffering. After all, if you're suffering, you aren't going to do much of a job of helping others get out of their mental cesspools, are you?

So maybe the external display of compassion doesn't seem to be necessary in Buddhist practice - but the internal one sure as hell is. Actually, compassion is the understanding and acceptance of people, things and situations **as they are** - whereas altruism has the **changing** of the people, things, and situations as its ultimate

goal. I always got these confused, and it really had me running in circles. I could be compassionate and yet not altruistic. Does this mean I'm still selfish? Probably, but at least I now admit it.

Compassion is trying to put yourself in someone else's shoes and attempting to see how they feel, and maybe trying to help them in some way accept reality. Yes, it's difficult, because you don't have their experiences and mindset. But you have to try and maybe you'll eventually succeed.

OK, now wait a minute - aren't we talking about sympathy and empathy as well? Most people would say yes. Most people would be wrong.

Sympathy means that you feel the same way that the other person does, and you are both probably miserable. That's not something you can afford if you're trying to help. Amplifying the other person's bad feelings means that you both are in a downward spiral that can't wind up well.

Empathy is just being able to understand the other person's viewpoint and/or feelings. Not that you agree with them, accept them or validate them - just that you understand where they're coming from.

I have a friend who recently suffered a massive stroke. His entire left side was paralyzed and he had/has all kinds of problems. I've had a minor stroke myself and I can empathize with him about the frustration and anger and hostility that you feel about your body betraying you. I was lucky - I got back to about 98% of my operational being.

Most of his friends aren't coming by any more, and he's getting frustrated, I'm sure. I feel really bad about not stopping by. (I have since stopped by for a visit).

Do I have compassion for him? Yes. But that doesn't make it any easier to go and see him. When we do, it's a non-stop talk session (usually a monologue), because he's starved for company ... and a totally emotionally draining process for those of us that do stop by. To make things worse, he's got a major speech impairment which knocks down my understanding of what he's saying to less than 50%. I would guess that it's the reflection of our own mortality that really gives us pause - and makes us not want to look or visit.

Do I have compassion? I think so. But the price for expressing that compassion in this case for me is extremely high.

Any altruist will show external compassion (if it's really that). Whether through their religion, or a desire to give back to the community, or just genuine altruism in the soul, many times they express their altruism openly and without reservation. They claim that they get back as much as they give, and that their rewards are seeing the suffering of others at least temporarily abated. But what is it that they get back? I would have to assume that they get back some gratitude from the recipient - or they get to feel better about themselves - or they get a boost in the eyes of their peers, or they're making points with God. Any or all of these factors may be true for them.

I just know for me, being the hermit and introvert that I am, the definition of compassion minus altruism seems to be what works for me.

Such is compassion. It's a relief to know that I may just have some - I've just been using the wrong definition.

2.) **SYMPATHETIC JOY**

When I first looked at the heading of this sublime state, I must have misread it as "synthetic joy." I thought to myself - 'what the hell is this?'. Who in the world would want joy to be artificial and not mean much in reality?

Of course it was a misreading at first glance. It's not 'synthetic', but 'sympathetic'. But the questions still remained as to just what kind of state of mind this could be.

Sympathy is, naturally, an alignment of your emotions with someone else's - usually negatively when they're in a great deal of pain or emotional stress. Too much of this and you both wind up in a downward spiral that leaves the two of you drained and depressed. However, joy is the absolute antithesis of this negative state - i.e. the elevation of the emotions to a happy level. So at first, it would almost seem that using the term 'sympathetic joy' would be a paradox.

As in all things Buddhist, the first and most obvious answer is both the correct one, and the one requiring much more thought to really understand the meaning of.

Sympathetic joy is (in its simplest and most basic form) sharing in the joy of others as if it were your own. At first this sounds a little parasitic, doesn't it. After all, you're sucking in someone else's good emotional state and vicariously enjoying it as if it were your own. Another version of the definition also includes yourself in the mix - in other words, sharing in your own joy for your accomplishments. However, the distance between hubris (pride) and sympathetic joy is very small, and we have to make sure that pride doth not get in the way and cause a fall.

But is this REALLY what we're doing here? Maybe, if you're coming from a space where it allows you to escape your own troubles and problems and enjoy what others have done. This could also be a major distraction if you focus too much on it. But sympathetic joy is, by definition, one of the four sublime states - therefore you have to be in a pretty good space to begin with. This means that this sycophantic, parasitic state of feeding on someone else's joy isn't where we're at with this at all. In addition, this sublime state cannot allow for the inclusion of any envy or resentment for the other's accomplishment.

Ok. Time to get real.

"Sympathetic joy means a sublime nobility of heart and intellect which knows, understands and is ready to help.

Sympathetic joy that is strength and gives strength: this is the highest joy."

The Four Sublime States ...
Contemplations on Love, Compassion,
Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity
by Nyanaponika Thera © 1994,2013.

Wow. Quite a place to be coming from. But this vaguely smacks of altruism and compassion as well.

But this is where the person enjoying these sublime states can, through strength, radiate joy to help others achieve a betterment in their own emotional position.

All of these are difficult to explain without having been there yourself. I can only profess to having been in this position momentarily on occasion, before submerging once again into the morass of my own mind. But I truly remember those moments. It was where I was able to understand where the other person was coming from and share their joy and in the process, amplify it for both of us.

This state of sympathetic joy (along with the others) can be tough to attain, let alone maintain. I know that for me, it is an acquired taste - much like appreciating Limburger cheese or running marathons.

It eventually requires you to extend your sympathetic joy to everyone - not just those that are your friends or daily contacts. This can be one of the toughest things to do that there is.

Let me cite an example:

Some of us who live in rural America live on agricultural land. Many times, this land is irrigated through a legal process known as a 'water right' (and a lot of physical labor to shift the water around from a water source.) These legal processes were established over years as to who has the right to take water from a stream or reservoir, and how much they have the right to take. It's both written and unwritten law - both the legal and traditional aspects keep the whole thing going. Water wars in the American West have been (and continue to be) both contentious and, on some occasions, deadly.

We had the misfortune of being on 'the end of the ditch' - i.e. the last user on a multiple shared flood irrigation ditch system. This meant that we were subject to the whims of any water-right holder upstream of us as to when they chose to take out water from the ditch, or to even let the water into the ditch to begin with. Sure, we had the legal right to enforce our getting our share of the water -

but that doesn't always mean that you can get the job done when you need it.

Well, to make a long story short, an upstream neighbor sold their property, and the new landowner didn't want to be bothered with the maintenance of the ditch or any of the required work to allow us to get our share of the water. In addition, when we offered to maintain their share of the ditch so that we could get our water, we were rudely rebuffed and refused access to their property.

Technically, we could have forced the issue and made a big deal of it with the state water-master - but it would have been a yearly hassle that we just didn't feel like mucking with.

Our solution was to change the takeout point for our share of the water to a point on our property, which entailed much paperwork with the state, not to mention the installation of pumps and piping and going from flood irrigation to sprinklers for our allotted number of acres under irrigation.

This (as you might expect) caused us a large number of headaches and expense both for the system itself as well as the paperwork and regulatory submissions and hoops that we had to go through.

And all of this because someone else was just either too lazy or too private to allow us to do the work to maintain what was rightfully ours.

Now we no longer have to muck with them, but it was expensive in both monetary, physical and mental energy to resolve the problem.

I bring this up to point out that if there was ever a situation that tested my ability to extend sympathetic joy to someone, this had to be it. There were times that I used language that wouldn't be printable in a family setting and wished ill things upon our neighbor that probably generated a lot of negative karma for me. But that was then, and this is now. Granted, it still takes a gritting of the teeth and a muscling of courage to not extend the negative side of my wishes towards some people, but it gets easier with time. Most of the time I have great compassion for them, since they must be filled with such negativity as to manifest that kind of behavior.

So how do you get to the point of extending sympathetic joy to people you hate?

By coming to grips with yourself. By meditating on your own actions until you are completely comfortable in your own skin. It is only then that you can radiate your own sympathetic joy not only to yourself, but to the entire set of sentient beings on the planet. I know, I know, - it's a tall order - but it can be done. Not that I've completely gotten there, but it's possible.

3.) **LOVING KINDNESS**

Most people will look at the title and go 'ho-hum'. They'll yawn and start thinking about something else. It's really easy with this title to dismiss it as just another platitude from almost every religion in every generation since time immemorial. It's against that backdrop that we have to swim against the 'I've heard this before' tidal bore in order to try to explain this from the Buddhist perspective.

When we do so, we are immediately drawn to the idea of its universality - which is a mind-boggler to most folks. In our western, Judeo-Christian based world, love is immediately portrayed as beginning from the physical attraction to the mental bonding to the overall social responsibility of our particular religion. Universal love isn't something that comes naturally to most of us - even in contradiction to our embedded religion from childhood. In most religions, God isn't above throwing thunderbolts or condemning people to eternal damnation or purgatory for their sins against the heavenly horde. So much for universal love.

This is in stark contrast to such platitudes as 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' It almost seems to follow the adage of 'Do as I say, not do as I do.'

Most people say 'I'm trying to do this, but the other guy makes it almost impossible to love them.' From a standpoint showcasing human nature, they're right. Conflict and disagreement seem to be genetically bred into us - as well as almost any other life form on the planet. It goes to our basic survival instincts to try to make our

lives (and that of our progeny) not only possible, but easier for my family unit than it was for me to begin with.

So it would seem that loving kindness is a chimera for most of us. It hangs out there somewhere, promising to make our lives better, but magically disappears when we come too close. An oasis mirage, promising shade and water, only to disappear when approached.

As part of the sublime states, loving kindness is but a part of the whole for Buddhist philosophy. As part of the quartet of aspirational states for Buddhists, it occupies part of that panoply, and is tightly interwoven with the other three - compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

Loving kindness means that you can't qualify your kindness to any other being, regardless of what you think they're doing to you or anyone/anything else. At this point, most people will qualify you for a soap box on a street corner with the rest of the ranters and loonies. 'You want me to do what?'

What Buddhist philosophy wants you to do, in spite of your own innate human nature, is to extend love and kindness to everything and everyone else - including yourself. Easier said than done, to be sure.

So how do we go about cultivating this universal love?

We can start by giving that love to those we hold dear. Hey, that's easy. Well, most of the time, anyway. But the trick is to make that love happen ALL the time, even when we're provoked and our buttons are being pushed like an elevator in a skyscraper at quitting time.

When we feel provoked, it's time to "Stop, look, and listen." There's a good chance that we're not the actual target of whatever vehemence is being directed at us. For the 'stay at home mom', the kids have been a pain all day, the mother-in-law is meddling, and the checking account for groceries is short a hundred bucks. And you, as the breadwinner, walk into the middle of this. Stop, look and listen.

OK, so you forgot to enter that ATM withdrawal - so take the kids into the family room and let them raise hell with you for a while. Later, call the mother-in-law and tell her to butt out - in a nice way. Then offer to help with dinner. And ignore the blast you got when you came in from the garage.

If you're in a reasonably good space, loving kindness can be generated from understanding what the situation is, wherever you are. You can even extend it to your boss, who you find out is really under pressure to put out that report, and nobody is cooperating with providing data. Understand where they're coming from and send 'em some universal loving-kindness.

But you have to start with loving yourself. That means accepting what you are and who you are, warts and all. Being brutally honest in your self-evaluation is a big part of it. Once you've done that self-acceptance, and made sure that there aren't too many delusions about yourself that you harbor, then you can start liking what you see that's good, and working to change the parts that aren't going so well. Eventually you can even love even the parts of your personality that used to be toxic, because you've eliminated or changed them radically.

4.) **EQUANIMITY**

I must admit that I didn't have a clue as to what equanimity meant until I started doing some research into the Four Sublime States. As far as I was concerned, it could have been something to do with finance or money in the stock market or some such. I just didn't know what they were talking about.

This is equanimity, inward poise and balance free from the two defects of excitement and inertia. When inertia prevails, energy must be aroused; when excitement prevails, it is necessary to exercise restraint. But when both defects have been vanquished the practice can unfold evenly without need for concern.

[Bhikkhu Bodhi, The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering.
Buddhist Publication Society, 1994, page 39.]_

The Buddha recommended the 'middle way' in all things. Equanimity is no exception.

There are actually two versions of equanimity. One is as Bikkhu Bodhi describes, with neither inertia nor excitement guiding your actions.

The second definition is being able to disregard all outside influences and sensory input, and guide your actions without any emotional bias or previous experience overwhelming your thought process.

Both definitions are true, but I prefer to look at it as a meld of both. If you apply neither inertia nor excitement to your decision-making process, then you are pretty much excluding the outside influences from your senses that could affect your actions. Likewise, the inertia side of the equation prevents action - again by not allowing negative inputs to prevent your acting as necessary. Excitement is an emotional state that can lead to rash action - by excluding it, you mitigate the negative effects of what that excitement-based action would have caused. But caution is required if you eliminate the sensory input and outside influences, since there will be perhaps no external driving force to goad you into making a decision or taking action. The flip side, of course, is that you're ignoring facts and ideas that could make your decision better.

At this point, it's waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay easy to get confused. Many people would look at this state as apathy, or 'I don't give a damn', or too self-absorbed to deal with the world. Others would view it as unconcerned, uncaring, or worse. Still others would view it as an insulated state - one where the individual is removed from a lot of the cares and concerns of the world through wealth or status. Nothing could be further from the truth. Do not make this mistake. Equanimity is none of these things.

In actuality, it's a state of total, unemotional awareness - where the person involved is closely connected to all the surroundings and events that are going on around them - yet not emotionally influenced by them. They are focused totally on the 'here and now', and not actively involved (at this point) with the 'was and did' or the 'will be and action.' It means absorbing the

situation and surroundings without combining them with any of your prior similars or memories. This allows a 'correct' (read realistic) evaluation of the situation based totally on the current frame of reference, thus allowing a more accurate look at what to do and where to do it (if that's necessary.) Of course doing nothing based on this current situation is also an option. It's doing the reactive stuff based on either your instinctive 'flight or fight' instincts or your own prior similars that gets you into trouble.

Don't get me wrong here. Disregarding your senses entirely is almost impossible unless you're in a completely catatonic state and are unresponsive to any outside stimuli. Given that you're reading this, I sincerely doubt that you're in this classification. However, having the capability of pulling in the sensory inputs along with all your memories and previous experiences without the emotional baggage that would ordinarily accompany the information is a big plus. It allows you to make rational decisions and avoid rash actions that would cause you bad karma and ill feelings from others.

So how do we get to this equanimity thingie?

One of the best ways that I have found is to bring up unpleasant memories and just let the emotional side of it go for broke. If you do this enough times, eventually the emotional impact of the memory will fade, and you'll be able to look at that 'prior similar' and just treat it as an experience to learn from. Examine it from a factual viewpoint, and you'll see what you did wrong eventually, and be able not to do it again (hopefully).

Meditation, of course, is another way to deal with them. The concentrated focus on just looking at the memory and forcefully excluding the emotional sidebars can achieve the same result.

Of course, one of the unintended side effects is that you'll drive other people nuts when you don't panic or go down the tubes in the midst of some crisis or other. The positive part is that you'll be in a much better position to make the correct decision without the terror, fear, and doubt that comes with the panic.

So this is what the four sublime states are. When mastered, they comprise a level of calm, peaceful existence that wipes out much of the daily emotional trauma that we seem to be so fond of - or at least have running in our thoughts.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

RIGHT CONCENTRATION (PART 3)

We have spent a lot of time on concentration exercises and meditation itself. But concentration by itself merely allows us to see what's going on and identify it. We haven't gotten all the way down to the roots of the problem and figured out how to deal with it. Stuff still comes up, colors the perception and exits stage left (or right or center or wherever).

Why won't concentration alone get us to where we're going? Figuring out that the tire is flat and knowing what to do about it is worthless without a lug wrench. You need a tool or two to get it changed. Try as we may, just getting phenomenally good at concentration to the exclusion of everything else but the object of that focus, just doesn't seem to quite get the job done. So why won't it work? No tools yet.

Concentrate as we may, we can't get to the roots of the wrong-form, wrong-feeling, wrong-perception, wrong-fabrications, and wrong-consciousness¹. Nor can we get to the basis for those fleeting chunks of 'not-reality' which the mind throws up for your consideration. For most people that's just the way it is - they just act on what their mind throws up for them.

We CAN ultimately stop reacting to these altered perceptions, and we CAN halt our consideration of them after they surface. But until we prevent them from surfacing for good, we haven't fully quieted our minds. We'll get back to the Five Aggregates in a more detailed fashion in a couple of chapters.

Back to basics, however (again).

There are three main categories of emotions and reactions. We've seen one in action throughout this whole series up to now, but only the most obvious one - the last one in the following list:

¹ The Five Aggregates of Clinging.

- Latent emotions and reactions. This is where the reaction is dormant, and only erupts under duress (usually at the worst possible time).
- Manifested emotions and reactions. The emotional reaction is generated, but just flaps in the wind.
- Transgression emotions and reactions. The emotional reaction is acted upon, causing karmic problems not only for you but usually someone or something else as well.

These can be broadly summarized as latent, active internally, and active externally (different words, same thing). All three types generate action (and its associated karma) - it's just the levels of subtlety that they operate on that are different.

It seems simple enough, doesn't it. But, as in all things Buddhist, the devil is in the details.

Transgression emotions and reactions are the ones that we deal with in the real world. This is the realm of the direct confrontation or the reactive part of our existence. "Yer mother wears combat boots." "You don't know my mother, you SOB". The conversation usually goes downhill from there.

When these emotions and reactions happen, they're pretty easy to spot with the old 'Stop, Look, and Listen' procedure from the railroad crossing. 'Hold up a minute, look at what I'm doing, and listen to what my mind is throwing up at me.'

We have the moral discipline parts of the path to work with to counter us getting into trouble with the transgression thingies - Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.

Once you've got those pesky transgression emotions and reactions under control (or at least visible), you find that the emotion is still there, being generated, but it maybe just hangs out there - flapping in the emotional wind. But hopefully you see them and don't outwardly react. This is the category of 'manifested emotions and reactions'. Two out of three isn't bad, and it's a hell of a lot better than where we started.

It's the third and final category that now requires our attention - that of the latent stuff that's still under the surface and only comes out when you're least expecting it. They never really come to light except by what they generate, which is a fully formed concept. That concept is not only incorrect, but it's immediately there without any real obvious work on your part. But nonetheless, the work was subliminally going on down there deep in the cesspool.

We now have to deal with those fleeting thoughts, concepts and ideas that surface for a mere instant and then vanish. But in that instant, they alter the perception of what you're looking at (either momentarily or longer). These aren't those full-blown concepts that you've seen up to now - these are subtle ones, coloring the perception just enough to alter it from its native state - sometimes in a major way. Many of these latent burbles of the mind are instantaneous and vanish quickly, leaving only the resultant altered perception. The latent emotion/reaction leaves no trace of where it came from or what kicked it up. The altering concept flits in and out on quick gossamer wings, and leaves only its residue.

The overworked Parable of the Red-Haired Man is a perfect example. In the second encounter of the hiring interview, you probably aren't even aware of what is coloring your perception of this person. All the inputs say 'GO', but your mind has kicked up some fleeting objections - and probably not even at the conscious level. Your logic says 'hire this guy', while emotionally you're leaning the other way without knowing why. You probably don't even remember the original situation. This is an erroneous 'gut feel.' Figuring out which of these reactions is a correct one (there's something about this person) and not an incorrect one (whoa - just get this guy out of my office) is the challenge here.

It is this root level of digging out these gas bubbles from the swamp that Right Concentration is really concerned with. It's in many ways esoteric, eclectic and maddening, because we have such a hard time getting to these swamp crawlers and the methods almost always have to be indirect and obtuse. Most of the time your mind hides these muck denizens from

you very well and we have to trick the mind into giving them up. Right now it seems impossible, but with a little practice, it's can be done.

It's time to get into the specifics of what we need to root out these subtle concepts rather than just concentrating on seeing them, so as to elevate this to a higher level. We need to begin forcing specific emotions or conclusions that normally lie dormant to arise so we can bring them to the surface and make them visible.

Kicking up these reactions and emotions in a specific way so we can see and deal with them is the next step, and it's somewhat technical in how it works. Buddhist philosophy, if nothing else, is logical at its core.

Think of it as doing an experiment that tests a chemical compound with various reagents to see what it does. It might do nothing; it might explode; it might change color; it might smell terrible; or it might do all of these things at once - or any number of others.

Using concentration/meditation to concentrate on certain types of memories or perceptions to generate a reaction from the mind is very much like the chemistry experiment. This reaction used to happen automatically, didn't it? Previously, the reaction from the mind was involuntary, and before you even knew what it was doing, it had altered your perception of the situation as it was at that particular point.

Now, it's time to purposely generate these reactions from the mind, in order to figure out what and where they are, and just maybe where they came from.

So far in this series of chapters on Right Concentration, we've dealt only with quieting the mind (in a number of ways). The quieting of the mind and the concentration required may have seemed familiar - because we've encountered at least one of them (the breathing exercise) earlier on in Right Mindfulness when we started the whole concentration section.

Going back to the three major divisions of the EightFold Path, we can now see that the Moral Discipline section (Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood) keeps us from getting into the transgression portions of emotional reactions and subsequent actions. The Concentration section (Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration, Right Effort) keeps us out of the swamp of manifesting these emotions and reactions by seeing what the mind is doing.

It is the third level of the mind's actions (the latent stuff) that remains. This is the nasty subliminal stuff that comes up from the swamp and colors your perceptions and ideas without you ever being aware of it happening. It's insidious and really tough to get to. Again, concentration by itself won't do the job - it is going to require the combined efforts of the entire EightFold Path to take care of these mental piranhas.

But wait, there's more ...

"And what is the development of concentration that... leads to the attainment of knowledge & vision? There is the case where a monk attends to the perception of light and is resolved on the perception of daytime [at any hour of the day]. Day [for him] is the same as night, night is the same as day. By means of an awareness open & unhampered, he develops a brightened mind. This is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to the attainment of knowledge & vision."²

This quote is a little difficult to wrap your brain around without some effort. It may seem that it has little to do with these latent reactions and emotions. But consider this: We're trying to break habits of thinking that have been decades in the making and practice. Becoming aware of how we think of things and changing that type of thinking to be more reality-oriented is the goal of these digressions. That autonomous/automatic generation of perceptions is what we're getting at here.

The second section of the development of concentration is a little harder to fathom than the jhanas were. Concentration isn't quite the right word here. It's more of a combined effort of both logic and concentration.

² Anguttara Nikaya 4.41..

At first glance, we might say 'Day and night are two different things. Day is light, and Night is not. Stars and moon are out at night, but not in the daytime.'

Now, when we think about it, we find that day and night are the flip sides of the same coin. To put it another way, they are the ends of a continually variable spectrum of brilliance. This seems so basic and mundane as to not warrant much further thought. But at its essence, that little, minor process of looking at day and night as the same is a very advanced concept.

When we say that day is the presence of light, and that night is the absence of light, we have to see that the object we're looking at (whatever) is separate and different from the light. The light and the object are two distinct and separate phenomena. The object hasn't changed between day and night. It is still there. It is only the presence and absence of the light and our perception of the object that is different. The only difference in our perception of the object is whether you can see it clearly in the light or cannot see it in the absence of illumination. The only thing that changed was your perception of the object. The object hasn't changed, nor have any of the circumstances surrounding it. Only your ability to clearly see the object and your perception of it is different between the two.

To take this concept to its metaphysical extreme, Nichiren once said that 'Suffering is nirvana. Ignorance is enlightenment.' It was a long time before I gained any insight into this quotation. It seemed at first glance (and many more glances after that) that it was a paradox - these two things were at total opposites and couldn't be equated. It wasn't until I ran into this third part of Right Concentration that this finally made sense.

Suffering and Nirvana are the flip sides of the same coin. Ignorance and enlightenment are the opposite ends of the spectrum of 'wisdom'. So therefore, the concepts are very equatable through their connection of wisdom and 'not-wisdom' as being the same but different. (I know, it's a contradiction you're not used to yet.) Think of 'this' and 'not-this' as variations on the same exact theme.

A little explanation is in order here. We in the west many times make much of the fact that either something is or it isn't. I constantly catch myself making this black-and-white distinction. In Buddhaland, this doesn't hold water - or at the very least the bucket leaks badly.

Not-something isn't the negation/elimination of the 'something' - that would be 'No-something.' Saying 'Not-truth' doesn't mean necessarily that you are lying, but merely that what you possess is different or shaded from my definition - not that what you have said is false (although many times it is). Not-something means that the object still exists, just not in the form that you thought it was. The object being totally gone would be 'No-something', not 'Not-something'. (Bleagh!)

You may think that this is a difference in search of a distinction. It is not. It is essential that we think in shades of gray here, and not just in black-and-white. And we must differentiate the entire concept of 'not-something' from 'no-something'. 'Not-something' is where the 'something' is still there, just not what you thought it to be. 'No-Something' means that the 'something' isn't present at all. Once you can make that distinction, things get a little easier.

Whew! Again, we come down to perception and the role it plays in analyzing this stuff. "Perception is reality!" at least for many folks even though it's not.

We might note here that the various developments of concentration are actually facets of the same jewel. They all provide us with a different window into the same place - that of getting to the innermost depths of the mind.

(3) "And what is the development of concentration that... leads to mindfulness & alertness? There is the case where feelings are known to the monk as they arise, known as they persist, known as they subside. Perceptions are known to him as they arise, known as they persist, known as they subside. Thoughts are known to him as they arise, known as they

persist, known as they subside. This is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to mindfulness & alertness.³

This third development of concentration is involved in watching the mind do its thing. All the products of the mind (and the senses, for that matter) arise, persist for some period of time, then subside and go away. This all has to do with what the mind adds to the original perceptions before it presents the unified observation to you. The objective of this phase is to consciously maintain a state of concentration and be able to watch and identify these latent emotions/reactions as they subliminally flit through; and watch where they come from. To put it another way, we're constantly monitoring the mind as to what it's doing and we're working to prevent it from doing those things that will harm us.

We'll work with the fourth Development of Concentration in the next chapter ... Hang in there.

³ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

RIGHT CONCENTRATION

(Part 4)

Here's the fourth Development of Concentration:

(4) "And what is the development of concentration that ... leads to the ending of the effluents? There is the case where a monk remains focused on arising & falling away with reference to the five clinging-aggregates: 'Such is form, such its origination, such its passing away. Such is feeling... Such is perception... Such are fabrications... Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.' This is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to the ending of the effluents."¹

First, what are effluents? These are things that drain away reality from your perceptions (my own personal definition). We saw the 'The Five Aggregates' briefly at the beginning of the last chapter. Here we see them in detail for the first time. These are all advanced concepts, which don't make sense if you just are starting this process. But having done the exercises and slogged this far, you now have some insight on what we're talking about when we speak of '**form**', '**feeling**', '**perception**', '**fabrications**', and '**consciousness**'. These are all parts of what the mind provides in response to the five senses. We integrate the sense data and all the other stuff to provide a unified whole. Of the five, only the first one of 'form' pertains to the legitimate input from the senses.

Think on what happens when we see someone we recognize.

- 'There's a person.' (Unified identification/form)
- 'That's Bill.' (Further analysis/form)
- 'I can't stand Bill.' (Feeling)
- 'He's arrogant and condescending.' (Perception)
- 'I bet he's a pain to work with.' (Fabrication)
- 'I'll need to avoid him.' (Consciousness)

Of these five examples, only the first two (which are actually one) may be valid - identify the object, and further refine the definition - but experience may prove correct.

¹ Anguttara Nikaya 4.41..

We further have to break each of these aggregates down into three further components:

- Identify it (which aggregate)
- Origination (when and where did it come from)
- Leaving (when and where did it go)

Identification has to do with figuring out what part of the Aggregates we're dealing with for each incoming thought or idea or perception.

Origination is backtracking to see where it came from and what started it.

Leaving is watching it disappear back into the muck from whence it came.

Now you're asking what does this have to do with effluents? It's because when you can grab the Aggregates and differentiate them, you can begin to see what they are taking away from your ability to see things clearly.

Form is the only one of the five that is sensory-based. Form is the body, functions, senses and raw cognition. And it is only that. Any overlay by the mind is something else subsequent to this.

Feeling is the emotional side. It's how we instinctively react to the raw cognition. No thinking, no anything else - just raw emotional reaction. (Remember the feeling reaction to the sense input? The three levels - good, bad and indifferent?)

Perception is the identifying the input and qualifying/quantifying it. This involves going back into the mind's memory banks and drawing out any 'prior similars' or models that may exist back in the dusty vaults.

Fabrications are the combination of all of the above woven into a coherent (?) concept - the projections and feats of mental engineering that the mind puts on the sense object, the feeling associated with it and the retrieved data from those past experiences which leads to the generation of possible scenarios, based on perception, feeling and form (aggregates 1, 2, & 3).

Consciousness is the awareness that allows us this kind of analysis that we're doing now. This involves taking an action (or not) based on what we've determined through the other four Aggregates. The trick that we're trying to accomplish is to jump from level 1 (form) to level 5 (consciousness) without picking up the incorrect stuff from the other three levels in between.

(Note: As I said earlier, what follows here and in the next chapter or two may seem disjointed and jumping around a lot, but I have to lay the groundwork for integrating all this stuff so you can pull it all together later. Bear with me.)

This fourth level of the Development of Concentration (recognizing those Five Aggregates) requires also that all the facets of the EightFold Path come into play.

Right View now becomes once again a major player. We use Right View to focus our direction where it needs to go, and Right Effort provides the energy and drive to get there. Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood collectively work to keep us from creating more karma than we already have. Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration (even at these low levels) work to focus the mind on what it needs to work on - not what it WANTS to play with.

At our current level of Right Concentration, it very much requires us to be in the 'here and now'. After all, we are working on canceling much of what our mind provides us. If we can avoid most of the mind-junk surrounding what we encounter in the real world in real time, it leaves us without much more than what is 'here' and 'now.'

It is also necessary to reiterate here that we are not abandoning what the mind does, nor am I suggesting that we ignore its inputs totally. However, we are controlling it in such a way as to make it work in our best interests - without generating all the extra overlays of mind-junk that it does (or did, by this point). We are trying to not allow this stuff to present itself unless we ask for it.

“OK,” you ask, ‘where’s the beef here? We’re traveling in circles.”

True to a point - but we’ve come back on an upward spiral to where we started laterally, but at a different (much higher) level vertically. We may seem to be at the same place on the horizontal circle, but we’re much elevated from whence we came.

Again, here, we have to emphasize that concentration alone will not bring us to our eventual goal - 'enlightenment'. Why? Because concentration by itself cannot and will not allow us to deal with this stuff at this fundamental level - the concepts and ideas that surface so briefly that they only color the mind’s concepts and do nothing more obvious. The overt stuff that the mind generates is far more visible and obvious, but the aggregates give us such a brief glimpse (if any) of the underlying workings of the mind that we can only imply what they're doing, but not yet directly deal with.

Yes, these are esoteric concepts. Yes, they’re advanced stuff. Yes, it is possible for you to do this. It’s not impossible, and it **is** possible to do so within THIS lifetime.

Now another gear shift.

As the next step, we have to start looking at the whole of our thought process, not just various stages of concentration and levels of thought. As we’ve seen, it consists of multiple levels of sensory input, as well as the processes of analysis, projection, and development that occur following the sensory input. Many layers of overburden have to be stripped out to get to the valuable ore.

Let's do a little work here. Let's take an example and wobble it around a little to show you how this works.

I had one bad experience a number of years ago that haunted me for a long time (over twenty years).

I had almost run someone off the road on a rural Texas highway by turning in front of them - I never saw 'em coming. I was by my nature very paranoid at that particular time, and I remember looking down the road, and seeing nothing but a

dust cloud. I was so freaked out that I just kept on going - not knowing what really had happened. I later came back the same way, and found no evidence of an accident or an actual crash.

That stayed with me for years. I would hit on this late at night and it would keep me up for hours until I was so exhausted that I'd fall asleep in spite of myself.

When I started meditating, this incident came up almost immediately and forced me to look at it. My first reaction was emotional - all the paranoia and fear came roaring back. After many reiterations, I became used to the memory, and became able to ask the questions:

- What is the feeling associated with the memory?
- What other stuff accompanies the memory?
- Is the other stuff valid?
- Is it still necessary?
- What are you doing to keep it from happening again?

Eventually, I was then able to see the incident without that emotional reaction and find that while I may have caused some havoc momentarily, there was no ultimate harm done and I never had any reason to generate all the trauma that I had done to myself over the years. After a while the guilt went away, and what was left was the resolve to be more careful and make sure of what I was doing.

I bring this up to show that while we talk about the Aggregates as distinct ideas, in actuality they are intrinsically tied together and separating them out in practice is difficult. The reality of working with these experiences is to grab what you can and work with it one piece at a time. In my case, it was to prove to myself that I didn't need to feel guilty any more. Yes, I was guilty of causing the incident, but that was then, this is now, and I can't go back and undo it, as much as I'd like to. I can try to make sure that I don't do it again.

Now going through this isn't a rationalization to make you feel better. It's bare-bones realism in taking the actual facts, and seeing if the resultant feelings and projections were worth the effort. In almost every instance, they aren't. It took any number of nights working with just this one incident to

get it to a good space - and then others took much less time and effort. Get over the first one, and the subsequent ones get progressively easier, until you are able to deal with them in real time.

From a theoretical standpoint, just knowing what the Aggregates are, and how they work is important. Both consciously and subconsciously applying them to your mind takes work also - but the definitions are essential.

In the following chapters, we will get to the very essence of what Buddha taught - the wisdom to attain serenity – peace - Nirvana. In it, the objective is to get rid of our ‘self’, or at least get out of our own way - you’ll see.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE RECOGNITION OF SELF OR WISDOM, UNPLUGGED

As we said earlier, concentration can only take us so far. While it brings us great peace, tranquility, and joy, it cannot and will not bring us to the end of suffering, nor to Nirvana or enlightenment.

We also see that the mere recognition of the Aggregates in our thoughts isn't enough to get us there either.

Why? Because the root causes of suffering, the underlying concepts, thoughts and ideas that color our perceptions (i.e. the Five Aggregates), cannot be seen and worked with by concentration or definition alone.

As we noted earlier, there are three levels of those groups - transgression, manifestation and latent.

The transgression and manifestation levels can be handled by concentration alone – allowing them to be seen for what they are. But the third level, that of the latent and dormant stuff that lurks below the level of any kind of consciousness, is accessible only by the attainment of wisdom.

The antidotes for these three levels are all parts of the EightFold Path.

The transgression level is countered by the Moral Discipline division of the Path (Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Livelihood). It for the most part keeps us out of external troubles.

The manifestation level is handled by Right Concentration and Right Mindfulness. Concentration and seeing what we're doing keeps us from manifesting bad karma for the most part to the external world.

That leaves the third level, the latent level which is countered by 'Wisdom'. This wisdom is achieved through a reinvigorated use of the first two parts of the EightFold Path - Right View, and Right Effort.

Right View, once our concentration allows us to dig deeply into our mental cesspool, will allow us to look at our basic perception of reality versus what our mind wants us to accept as that reality, and how it differs from our intended direction. It also refocuses our attention on the clarity of the Four Noble Truths. Yes, there is suffering; it's caused by my ignorance and excessive desires; I can get rid of it by getting rid of my ignorance and desires; and what I'm doing with the EightFold Path actually works.

Right View allows to narrow our focus to start seeing the mind actually being altered by the instantaneous stuff at the latent level.

Right Effort will give us a renewed energy to do this in an ongoing manner.

“OK”, you say. “Where the hell do we get this damn wisdom stuff? We’ve spent all this time working our minds off, and there’s more?” Yep. There’s more.

Again I quote from Bikkhu Bodhi:

“Wisdom alone can cut off the latent tendencies at their root because the most fundamental member of the set, the one which nurtures the others and holds them in place, is ignorance (avijja), and wisdom is the remedy for ignorance. Though verbally a negative, “unknowing,” ignorance is not a factual negative, a mere privation of right knowledge. It is, rather, an insidious and volatile mental factor incessantly at work inserting itself into every compartment of our inner life. It distorts cognition, dominates volition, and determines the entire tone of our existence.”¹

What is this ‘ignorance’, anyway? I thought that we'd already taken care of that!

Ignorance is, first and foremost, not an absence of knowledge. What it consists of what we think of as facts and recollections that are probably not applicable to the present situation, but the mind throws them out anyway. It is all the overlays and dreck that our minds put into play without our even being aware of it. It is the things we learn and accept as fact along the way that shape almost every facet of our

¹ ‘The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering’ by Bhikkhu Bodhi; The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS.

existence. Much of it is wrong. Lots of it is buried deep in the mental cesspool and only surfaces when something prods it to action. It almost always comes and goes before we even realize that it has acted.

Actually, this definition of ignorance isn't quite on the mark. What ignorance does is subconsciously alter the memories of our experiences (from the ultra-short to the ultra-long) so as to make it appear to be something that it wasn't. Yes, the experience is still there in its pure state, but the ignorance gently (or sometimes radically) alters the associated feelings, concepts, and perceptions long before they rise to the level of consciousness. How many times has your version of events that you witnessed been crosswise with the recollection of someone else seeing the same event? This is the same exact principle that makes eyewitness testimony in court so suspect.

According to Buddhist thought, ignorance works in three broad categories:

- The idea that things or people are permanent.
- The idea that unsatisfactory things or ideas are considered satisfactory (or visa versa).
- The idea that there is a 'self' in things that that are 'selfless'.

Obviously, there needs to be extensive explanation in regards to this. We are dealing with ideas that are esoteric. These are advanced concepts of Buddhism that most people never approach.

Going from the Five Aggregates and the Defilements to this definition is a leap. How does permanence, unsatisfactoriness, and the 'self' (whatever that is) relate to ignorance or anything else?

The Aggregates and concentration have taught us to examine how the mind works and to be able to quiet it to the point of seeing how it works. Until you see how it works, these concepts of ignorance won't make much sense. Let's try to make a little headway in understanding what that relationship is.

Let's take first, the idea of seeing permanence in the impermanent.

Atoms change. Molecules get modified. Plants live and die. Humans live and die. Mountain ranges are elevated and erode. Planets and solar systems evolve. The entire known universe is in constant flux. Everything constantly changes. The only difference between all of these is that of their time scale. Some things change in the trillionth of a second, while other things change on a scale of billions of years - but change they do and it is inevitable. This evolution is not restricted to the physical/matter part of the world we live in, however.

That idea of change applies internally to everything we know, do, think, and act on. **All of it** is subject to change. It is totally and absolutely impermanent. **There is no permanence**, period.

OK, you say, what about the Law of the Conservation of Energy? Alright, you got me. There is a quantifiable amount of energy that gets changed into matter, and visa-versa. The total amount of that matter/energy pair is fixed (somewhere). But the state of that pair - whether it is energy or matter or what kind it is is constantly changing on some time scale. What we think of as permanent appears that way only because we cannot comprehend that time scale.

What we know or feel or think right now may change in the next instant or the next decade. It may become obsolete, or it may be enhanced or indeed be totally negated. But **it will change**.

If you look around anywhere you are, just think on this - nothing within your field of vision will be the same in a hundred years (or maybe tomorrow or even five seconds from now) as it is right now. You might say that some distant mountain range or other landscape feature would be the same, but even they will be subtly different. That mountain range could be uplifting at a rate of an inch a year, or is being eroded by the same amount by wind and water. But changing it is. The only difference is time.

And what's even worse, your recollections of the reality that you're currently seeing will change and be modified by all the other stuff that your mind has buried down in the muck

once you try to remember it. And that muck itself is constantly being updated and changed, so that what you remember or perceive right now might be subtly altered (or radically changed) from a minute ago because the muck monster has evolved. Your recollection has changed because of something you read, saw, or sensed and the muck monster ingested it and will modify the underlying memory the next time it is retrieved..

THE ONLY THING CONSTANT IS CHANGE. This may seem as a single sentence paradox, but it is one of the basic truths of the universe.

Thinking that anything is permanent in our own existence cannot be substantiated (including our own memory banks). While it may seem so within our time scale, in reality everything changes both within and around us every microsecond. It may seem that things are static, but the bird that was singing a second ago is now silent, and the water in the creek has moved a few feet down the channel and been replaced with a similar but different cubic amount. The car passing by on the road has vanished, and the silence is now broken by an airplane overhead. **Nothing is ever totally static. Nothing is ever permanent.** We ourselves in a physical sense are obviously not permanent. The list is endless. And what we remember of it is never what it was in actuality because we're remembering it as a snapshot in time. It may be close to being accurate, but it's never totally right.

In a slight digression, I have to laugh when I hear of politicians telling us that a tax cut or a law is 'permanent'. It's permanent until they decide to change it next week, next year or next election. See - I told you I was digressing ...

The second category of ignorance is that of seeing satisfaction in the unsatisfactory. Huh? This sounds like another paradox or at least a contradiction.

Bikkhu Bodhi sayeth thus about this:

“We assume we have an innate right to pleasure, and direct our efforts to increasing and intensifying our enjoyment with an anticipatory fervor undaunted by repeated encounters with pain, disappointment, and frustration.”²

In other words, we look for pleasure and enjoyment and direct all our efforts towards that end, regardless of the ‘pain, disappointment, and frustration’ that we endure in the process. Surely this must be unsatisfactory, yet we keep on keeping on. It reminds me somewhat of the old definition of insanity - of keeping on doing the same thing over and over with disastrous consequences, expecting a different result.

Looking at this is to remember that we are constantly looking to increase our pleasure in the face of pain, non-accomplishment and obstacles. Yet in spite of these impediments, we continue to search for and think that we find pleasure in spite of them.

And we also think that we find pleasure in unsatisfactory results. If they were truly satisfactory, we’d quit looking, because we’d found it. But is the pleasure truly worth the pain and obstacles?

This sounds like the old chicken gag from Hee-Haw: Patient says 'Doc, it hurts when I do this. Doc says ' Well, don't do that', and whacks the patient with a rubber chicken.

A better way (to my way of thinking) of looking at this level is to consider that if we base any expectations on anything that we consider permanent (of which there are none) then we must consider that the results will be unsatisfactory, since they will change sooner or later. Expectations based on objects that we consider permanent will always be unsatisfactory.

The delusion that an object will always be there, always ends up being transient in some time frame, and we’ll be unsatisfied with that outcome. This is because we’ve built an entire expectation platform on them being unchanging in the future. This is the danger of seeing satisfaction in unsatisfactory objects.

² Ibid.

The third part of ignorance, and the most major one by far, is the idea of 'self'. This one is going to require a lot of explanation.

What is 'self'?

First, we have to remember that our experiences in life is all we have, other than the innate instinctive things that we possess from birth.

A lot of what we've surrounded ourselves with (outside of the necessities) in terms of material 'stuff' doesn't mean much to anyone but us. That's based on the experience and memory that made us accumulate it to begin with. Every single piece of stuff has a memory and feeling attached to it. Otherwise it wouldn't be important - and you wouldn't have it to begin with. Who but you knows the emotional experience of the family photo album? Who but you will recognize the participants in any photo in it or know why it was taken? Or why you collected thirteen-dozen different potato mashers?

Our friends and family usually share some of the ideas and common values, but each of us is still unique. Your own experience that shaped you and your ideas is paramount and singularly yours. What you see through your own personal lens is totally yours and yours alone. Even identical twins are individuals and have unique personalities (although they may have many of the same interests and abilities.)

Second, that unique experience is the filter, lens and distorted view through which we see this current, instantaneous, ever-changing, unsatisfactory world around us. It is that experience that shapes our perceptions, reactions, and thoughts for the most part going forward.

Your unique experience is present at all three levels of the defilements. We've worked on the first two levels, but the most insidious one (latent stuff) is still out there, tweaking our perceptions and ideas in ways we can only imagine. Yes, it's minor, but in a major way.

What has this got to do with 'self'? And what the hell is 'self' anyway? Jumping into unknown territory without scouting and understanding it, grasshopper, is a jump from the frying pan into the fire. Just cool your jets, youngster, and hang in there. We'll get to it. Remember that patience is a virtue (I'm ducking to avoid your physical response to all these mixed metaphors.)

'Self' is the façade that we present to the outside world, and many times even to ourselves.

Almost never is that facade what (or who) we really are, what we believe or what we really think of ourselves. To eliminate the 'self' is to become incredibly vulnerable. Our 'self', then, is our shield and armor to the real world outside our minds. By the way, discard any direct comparison to Freudian concepts of id, ego and super-ego. They don't apply here.

This 'self' is not to be discarded lightly. 'Self' has corollaries of 'I', 'me', 'mine', and 'not-mine'. It sets up boundaries of external space and appearance that cannot be sustained on close examination. It sets up the concepts of object possession that are transient at best and are unsustainable even at the onset in the worst case.

Just one minor example - I can say I 'own a cat'. Nothing could be further from the truth. You can't ever say that a cat is 'mine'. I may be responsible for its well-being and providing it the space to become symbiotic with me, but as for owning it? Ask any cat 'owner' if that's true.

'I' (the 'self' in Buddhist thought) represents me to the outside world. It is my avatar that could be just as easily used in an on-line fantasy game. It can be anything I want it to be. It can be active, passive, flamboyant, or a shrinking violet. It can be aggressive, pacifistic, irritable or smooth. But it is almost never my actual internal 'self' - at least not for most people.

The most obvious example of this is the acting profession, where the fantasy world portrayed by the actors

almost never reflects their own personalities or inner beings. The best actor is the one that can portray another person accurately and believably. And their public persona as 'an actor' also very seldom reflects their true being in private - but that last part goes for all of us in that we're actually 'actors' to everything outside of ourselves.

The most insecure person is many times the one that is the most aggressive and outgoing or charismatic and social, so as to try to convince themselves that they're actually secure. The quiet one in the corner may be the one that is the most at peace with themselves and doesn't require the reinforcement of others telling them of their accomplishments or likability.

We are beginning to see what 'self' really is, in the sense that what we usually consider as 'self' is almost never what underlies the avatar.

We have to dispel this idea of 'self' since the whole concept also works both ways. We not only have the world seeing us through the image of our worldly avatar 'self', but that same 'self' screens, alters, and modifies what the real world looks like to us. This is where the mind comes in - it generates and maintains that avatar 'self', and filters all the stuff for us. For instance, if we have an inflated sense of 'self', the inputs reflect what the 'self' wants to have coming in. Accepting this fact is the last part of using the EightFold Path, and is the first part of the development of Wisdom.

Are we clear yet? No? OK, here's another shot ...
(pressing Reset button.)

One of the hardest concepts of Buddhist philosophy is that of the 'self'.

We tend to think of ourselves as being something that lives in this universe, eats, sleeps, dreams, and interacts with that same universe. That's what most people tend to think of when we talk about 'self'. We use terms like 'myself', 'ourselves', 'themselves' - or refer to ourselves as 'selfish' and 'self-centered'. In any case, the 'self' we are referring to is a

construct that we put together consisting of our physical bodies and our minds. Somewhere in there is also our conscience (otherwise known as our 'Buddha Nature').

When we talk about 'ourselves' to others, it is almost always a construct of what we want other people to see - not what we are at our core beings. I've referred to this as our eggshell. When we think about 'ourselves' internally, it is many times self-delusional and self-serving, coming from remembered facts(?) and experiences (both being subject to error).

The 'self', then, is a figment of our imaginations - a generated image of what we think we are and what we want to appear to be. This 'self' is almost never what we truly are either through our external presentation, or (much more importantly) our internal representation of what we are to ourselves.

One of the core goals of Buddhist thought is the elimination of 'self'. Most people right off the bat will recoil in horror, saying something like "I can't destroy myself. What would I be if I wasn't me? "

Well, the answer is actually that you'd be a whole lot better off than you probably are now. And you'd be honest with yourself.

Up to now, we've done meditation, concentration, and tried to get the mind to start doing what **we** want it to, instead of what it has been doing since forever. All this mind-training has had one thing as its ultimate goal, that of seeing truly (and many times for the first time) who we really are and how we react to our external world.

When we say that we are going to destroy the 'self', we aren't talking about physical suicide, or becoming something else - we're talking about becoming the person we truly are, and acting accordingly. It is about stripping off those layers of the onion to get to the essential core of our being that is buried beneath the multi-layered eggshell.

All this work so far has been to identify what the mind is doing to us, and getting it to either modify what it does or quit doing it entirely.

If, after watching the mind at work, we find that we have a tendency to go after money in an obsessive way, then we now have the capacity to change that and modify our behavior to have a more benign interface with our world.

If we find that we anger quickly and react while still in that mode, we can change it so that we wait until the anger has passed before we react to the perceptions that created it.

This eggshell, then, is the self-generated 'self' that we are destroying - not our core being. Our 'self' is a usually false perception of what and who we are that is generated by the mind, either to feed our own egos or to provide a buffer to the outside world (probably both) that insulates us from true reality. It is seeing the true reality of both ourselves and the outside world in this particular instant that is the ultimate goal of Buddhist training.

The 'self' that is destroyed through this process is nothing more than a figment of our imagination, created by our experiences, concepts, perceptions, and even our imagination. It is not who we are, but who we think we are and what we want the outside world to think we are. It is not what we are, but what we think we are. This is the 'self'.

When we talk about the 'self' in Buddhist terminology, we cannot ignore the term 'emptiness'.

This term is misused most times to mean a lack of anything.

We talk about the 'emptiness' of space - when in reality it isn't truly 'empty'. It has a few molecules of gas and maybe a particle of matter out there anywhere we look. It isn't a total vacuum.

When we talk about 'emptiness' in Buddhist terms, we are referring to the idea of seeing things as they truly are – totally empty of our prejudices, ideas, concepts and pre-conceived notions that we carry with us. It is seeing

things 'empty' of everything but what they truly are at that particular instant.

As with the 'self', the thrust of 'emptiness' is to strip away any false perceptions of the actual thing that we are seeing, hearing or whatever sense input that we're getting - and see the thing for what it is, and not as what we think it to be. We are emptying our view of the object of everything that the object fires up in our minds and we are seeing it in a true light.

Seeing the absolute reality of both our world and ourselves is the true goal - it is the nirvana of what the Buddha taught. When we do achieve this, it is with the calmness and peace of knowing that what we are doing is best for ourselves and our own individual world. And by doing so, we change the world for others in order to allow them the freedom to change their worlds as well.

A word about Wisdom here. **WISDOM IS NOT KNOWLEDGE.** Make this association at your peril. Knowledge is the retention of facts and perceptions, while Wisdom is the ability to use them in a positive manner. Knowing how to make a weapon of mass destruction does not mean that I **should** make it - the difference is wisdom. The bureaucrat/technocrat who relies only on their knowledge or the written law will always err on the side of being unwise.

In the next chapter, we'll take a look at how to approach the destruction of 'I' and what it means in a deeper sense.

CHAPTER THIRTY

MORE ABOUT WISDOM AND THE 'SELF'

Let's start with a quote from myself about ten chapters back or so.

Lets take an example. I hear a gunshot. I see a man running. I smell gunpowder residue. I see another man lying down. Now most of us would take these sensory inputs and immediately conjecture that there has been a shooting, and that the man running has shot the man lying down. But is that really the case?

Hearing the gunshot, you identify it as such. Feelings about gunshots are usually bad, unless you're in the Middle East and it's festival time. You add the things you know about gunshots, and start making assumptions.

Seeing the man running is another identification. Now by itself, it could be that he forgot to feed the parking meter, or is just in a hurry to get to work because the bus is late. It results in an indeterminate feeling ... doesn't move me one way or the other.

Smelling the gunpowder residue could just be a coincidence, but probably not.

Seeing the other man lying down could be that he's drunk, sleeping on the street or needs medical attention.

The perception that is generated by the combined senses is a general one that something bad just happened. While each input is possible on its own, the mind has combined them all to provide a basis for determining action (or not). In this case, most of us would assume that a shooting just occurred and the running man did it. In fact, it may have just been a car backfire, the guy is in a hurry, your nose mis-identified the smell, and there's a drunk in the gutter.

Perception in this case is based on a whole series of assumptions, grounded in identifying what the sensory input means. Some of the time it's right. Sometimes it's wrong. The more complex the set of inputs, and the more connections the mind has to make, the more likely it is that you'll make the wrong end assumption and make an incorrect decision on action.

Now if you see the running man point the gun and fire before he starts running, you've got a better handle on things. But he still could have missed, your nose could have erred on the gunpowder, and the guy in the gutter is still drunk.

If the running man fired the gun, and the guy in the gutter fell as a result, then you've got much more evidence that you were correct in your

original assessment. The smell aspect becomes minor. Since you have overwhelming visual evidence as to what went on.

But you still don't know if the guy in the gutter got shot, do you? He might just have been taking a dive for cover and the running man missed or wasn't aiming for him at all. If the gutter guy was a Vietnam vet, the dive for cover is a good possibility. ¹

You now see (again) that it is a complex set of equations and assumptions that the mind is dealing with. In many cases it may be drawing on experience at the perception level, without even going back to make sure that the feelings or even the sensory input is correct. Other times, it may be relying on concepts and perceptions that made sense at the time but may be no longer valid.

When we saw this excerpt back when, we were just looking at what we could see of the entire perception process AT THAT TIME. From the viewpoint of wisdom and the third level emotion/reaction, we now can see that it isn't just the fact that we jumped to conclusions that we couldn't actually substantiate; it is much more than that which shaped our conclusion. What caused us to get there without even thinking about it? How did our minds jump to this conclusion without going through a logical process?

Now we start to get into the realm of wisdom. This is where we can discard what our minds bring up if it isn't necessarily true. We can also start to eliminate the things that subliminally allowed us to jump to an incorrect end result. In addition, we can begin to dissect the actual process that got us from A to X in a heartbeat.

In the example cited above, it may have been from watching too many cop shows on TV, or reading too many mystery novels. But it did affect your conclusion, and it was past experience(s) that did it, although which one(s) is probably a mystery at this point.

(I skip disjointedly here again, for which I apologize ...)

¹ Me. From before somewhere.

To call someone 'delusional' in our society is to invoke the specter of mental illness, and yet in truth, we all do it. We're all deluded in one way or another; every one of us. **Our experiences and ideas are all subject to delusions based on prior similars or other experiences.** And each one that is accumulated tends to reinforce the others to the point that our current instantaneous world of experience can be totally colored and clouded. We never even realize that our mind is manipulating the inputs so effectively that it masks its own activity. **We're immersed in our mind's version of the real world, not the real thing.** It's somewhat like the Matrix, substituting the virtual reality of the 'programs' for an unreal version of what the outside world is like. Unfortunately, most of it is delusional.

But isn't this off the track in the search for 'self'? Not really. It may seem like it, but it's not.

We read in the last chapter that there were three forms of delusion at the bottom level of the mind - permanence, satisfaction, and self. We had the delusion that there was permanence in the universe at all levels, when there isn't. We had the delusion that it is satisfactory to accept unsatisfactory outcomes in our existence and satisfaction in impermanent things. But the largest delusion to which most of us are subject in the worst way, is this whole delusion of the idea of 'self'.

'Self' carries with it a whole slew of other stuff that can wreck even the most concentrated mind and the most disciplined life. 'Self' allows us to claim objects (both things AND people) as 'mine'; self allows us to claim both to ourselves and others that life itself (as we scientifically know it at this instant) is immortal in another plane of existence once we die; self allows us to present a facade to the world that may be totally false. All of these are delusions.

It provides a measure of accomplishment to us, and allows us to keep score in life by what we have accomplished. Who among us will actually be remembered as something other than lines in a history book or an unimportant obituary somewhere when more than two generations have passed

since our deaths. You say the Buddha is one of those remembered - *<sound of a klaxon horn> incorrect - you may inhale a penalty beer.* We remember him through the teachings - not because we knew his 'self' - whatever that was. We have no idea of the 'self' of the Buddha (if there was one), just what was left for us and **even that** is only through the recollections of others. We no more know the Buddha than we probably know our own great-grandparents, other than anecdotal evidence.

Thus our 'selves' are not only impermanent and unsatisfactory, they manifest a manufactured image of our own making to the outside world and visa-versa. It is in countering these three things that the remaining practice of wisdom is devoted.

As to the issue of the 'self' being immortal and existing on a different plane after physical death, this is a contradiction in terms, no matter how you slice it. How can the universe and everything in it be impermanent and subject to constant change, and yet have something eternal and unchanging in it? Different plane and different rules, you say?

This basic contradiction flies in the face of all logic that we know of at the present time. I realize that the fiction of 'self' is necessary to people that haven't progressed to examining their lives and the world with no filters whatsoever, and have to have an idea of property, belonging, possessing and all that stuff. They require an 'I'. If you believe in the 'I' as soul or 'Atman', then you probably believe in a higher kind of being that controls your life in the ways that you cannot. Both of these ideas, however, require permanence and immortality. You can't have one without the other. And you thus live a contradiction - and create suffering for yourself.

Now we have to begin with a different concept of 'self'.

We start with an analysis of experience itself. When you start to break down experience into its components, it begins to unravel as being a part of your 'self'. You start to see that the experience is bits and pieces of both things and timings that were entirely dependent on other things and timings - nothing really to do with you, except for your reactions to

them. It's possible that they would have happened even had you not been there.

The old adage, "if a tree falls in the woods, and there's nobody there to hear it, does it still make a noise?" is totally appropriate here. The implication is that I (my 'self') has to hear it to have it happen or at the very least, be relevant. Nothing could be further from the truth. The noise would be there whether we were present to hear it or not. The noise may have been relevant to us, but we didn't cause nor enhance it with our presence. We can't take credit for the noise, no matter how egotistical we may be.

A waterfall on a river doesn't shut off until you're ready to experience it and it will still be there when you're gone (making noise, by the way). Proving this to your own satisfaction may prove somewhat difficult, since you're not there, you don't know what it does - and when you're there, you can only speak to what you experienced. Conundrum #4165.2. Here again we can return to the concept of the 'Fair Witness' that Robert Heinlein created in 'Stranger in a Strange Land.' Report only what you yourself sense and do not conjecture about things that you could not sense.

No experience that you can recall is independent of other factors and events that were totally out of your control. The tree falls because of age, wind and/or lack of rain. The waterfall goes on regardless of you or anything else concerning you (unless you built a dam and shut off the river). Even so, it has nothing to do with your inner self/Buddha nature (not the outer self we're talking about) even if your ego is integrated with the ability to build the dam and shut off the water.

To avoid confusion from now on, let's call this outer self our 'eggshell' (Star Trek fans will recognize a personal 'shield' here), which protects us from things we don't want to experience, as well as preventing others from seeing the real yoke/embryo (Buddha nature) within. Again from Heinlein's 'Stranger in a Strange Land': "I am but an egg".

Each and every experience, therefore, is a set of interconnected events, perceptions, and reactions that in actuality have nothing to do with who you are at the core of

your being - your Buddha Nature. You may have shaped your eggshell by what you think you experienced and you may even believe that you really are that eggshell after a while (carrying delusion to a brand new level). But it just ain't so, Guenivere. This mental fabrication (eggshell) that interfaces between you and the outside world is just that, a fabrication. There is probably not much of your inner being in that eggshell. And in many cases, the eggshell takes over who you really are - which is that of being a Buddha-in-waiting.

If you're still doubting the eggshell theory, let me point you to a vivid example in your own living room.

Take a look at your television set. Unless the only thing you watch is educational television, you are bombarded with advertising for virtually everything under the sun. Now if you analyze who they're talking to, you'll find that all of that advertising is directed at your eggshell - particularly in how you look to the outside world through weight-loss and cosmetology, making life easier with gadgets that you really don't need, or making you feel better about yourself. If you're older, hair-replacement, Viagra, prostate health, and walk-in tubs fill your screen.

How you look to the outside world (fitness machines, hair restoration, makeup, weight control, etc.) fits right into the eggshell theory. It doesn't have anything to do with you (the internal you), and everything to do with what you want people to think you are. Being accepted in your group/family is a powerful force.

Making life easier with the gadgets caters to the laziness of our lives. Almost none of these things are 'have-to-have' items. We can do well without almost all of them, and we probably should, seeing as how almost none of them work as well as is shown to you in the ad. But they appeal to your eggshell's innate laziness.

Feeling better about yourself tries to deal with how you look to you. This category somewhat overlaps with how you look to the outside world. This deals with such things as erectile dysfunction meds, pharmaceuticals of every description for diseases that I never knew existed five years

ago, hair-restoration products, addiction cures, and a host of other things designed to make you either feel better physically or feel better about yourself (in regards to your eggshell, anyway).

What seems amazing to me is that many of these eggshell-related ads are aimed at men, particularly erectile-dysfunction and physical fitness ads. And the idea that 'you aren't a man unless you have abs of steel', or can perform in bed at seventy like you were twenty, I find to be somewhat amusing. The sad thing about the ads is that they work (maybe not the products, but in getting you to buy the product through creating the desire). People buy the products. The ads wouldn't still be running if nobody bought the stuff.

Why do we need this stuff? Have we placed so much emphasis on this stuff that we're required to live up to expectations that have no relevance to our real lives and our Buddha natures?

If you have any doubt as to the existence of the eggshell, start analyzing the ads you see for various things, and figure out what niche in **your** eggshell it's aimed at. You'll be as amazed as I was, I'm sure. And NONE of it will help you on your road to enlightenment, except to show you that the eggshell theory is alive and well.

In actuality, television almost exclusively is involved in the creation of desire, the promotion of ignorance, or the state of denial and escape that many of us want to get into from our normal everyday lives.

In the next chapter, we start to look at how to attack getting rid of the eggshell and be a real being.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

CRACKING THE EGGSHELL

So now we've defined the inner core of our being as our Buddha Nature, and the apparent 'self' that insulates us from the real world as our eggshell. We can watch the mind create the 'self' and concentrate on watching the roots of the perceptions that we get every minute from the mind. We now have to break our eggshell and emerge in order to progress to enlightenment. That's what this next section is all about.

The starting point, as we saw in the last chapter is to analyze our experiences and see that they are actually a series of interconnected and interrelated perceptions (memories) which form our eggshell. These have very little (if anything) to do with our Buddha Nature. But each memory isn't an integrated entity all by itself. Each one also consists of isolated bits and pieces of other memories and experiences. They interact with a lot of other experiences and memories, only some of which are relevant to current experience.

You can experience the use of a car or a spaceship, but only as a complete unit, unless you're a qualified mechanic. You are at arm's length from them. You certainly can't **be** a car or a spaceship to experience what the object does (if it does). And you can only experience it as relates to your use or value to you in conjunction with your experience with it at the time. If the car is a lemon, you'll be skeptical of all cars for a long time.

Not only that, you can only experience **what your eggshell permits you to experience** about it. It's an important distinction.

I can't overstate the importance of recognizing what is eggshell and what is you. What parts of what I think I am are eggshell and what parts are really me? It is essential that we figure out this distinction for ourselves in order to progress. While your eggshell may incorporate some perceptions of and experiences with the world, **they aren't you.**

“Me and my eggshell, all alone and feeling blue” - good lyrics for a song - but I digress - I know - I do that a lot - oh well ...

There are two ways of approaching this seemingly impenetrable object. The first is to examine it by way of the ‘Five Aggregates of Clinging’. We ran into them a few chapters ago. The other is to examine the eggshell in terms of the ‘Six Internal and External Sense Factors’. Don't let the label give you indigestion, we'll see more on this one later.

Returning to the Five Aggregates - you remember them, right? OK, just as a reminder, they are **‘form’**, **‘feeling’**, **‘perception’**, **‘fabrications’**, and **‘consciousness’**. In the Buddha's own words:

“The disciple dwells in contemplation of phenomena, namely, of the five aggregates of clinging. He knows what material form is, how it arises, how it passes away; knows what feeling is, how it arises, how it passes away; knows what perception is, how it arises, how it passes away; knows what mental formations are, how they arise, how they pass away; knows what consciousness is, how it arises, how it passes away.”¹

Form, of course, is the material body, the mind, and all of the senses that go along with it - including the cognitive areas.

Feeling is the raw emotions that are generated by an experience and are attached to that experience.

Perception is the identification of the experience and the objects within it.

Mental Formations are just that - what your mind comes up with when confronted with these feelings and perceptions.

Consciousness is the basic level of sentience in order to be able to identify and work with the other four.

These factors are called the ‘Five Aggregates of Clinging’ for a reason. We like to hang onto them because they allow us to rationalize things and experiences through the bidirectional lens/filter/blinders of the eggshell. If we didn't have them,

¹ Digha Nikaya 22.

then we'd have irrational experiences and do irrational things - and of course we wouldn't want to consider either our surroundings or ourselves irrational, would we? Of course, that might even imply that we were (gasp) delusional. Nahh - not us.

Each and every experience is made up of these five factors. We've approached this from several different directions now as to the various parts of either experience, or how the mind works (or doesn't).

The exercise that comes with this part of getting to enlightenment consists of breaking down experiences into these factors and making sure that we understand the factors in terms of the three parts of wisdom:

- That no part of the experience was permanent, and that each part was also affected by other factors over which we have no control or influence. That experience, even if very similar, is not and will never be the same as the one you are experiencing right now.
- That any part of projections based on experience outside the eggshell was unsatisfactory, because the underlying parts of the experience weren't permanent.
- That these factors were applicable to our 'selves', and not a part of us (that being our inner being/Buddha Nature) and were only part of our eggshell, and only that.

We have to try not to make the experience (or any of its factors) part of our eggshell. If we already have, we need to root it out and expose it to the light of enlightenment. In other words, we have to avoid trying to integrate the experience into our eggshell.

While the Five Aggregates are the result of conditions that existed at the time of the experience, they are not self-sufficient on their own. The eggshell may bring them into play if it deems them helpful in rationalizing whatever premise it's trying to make up, even if they are not applicable to the present situation.

The alternative method of dealing with the mind/self at this level is that of working with the six internal and external factors that are part of any experience (i.e. the six sense faculties and their corresponding objects). As usual, the Buddha states it best:

“The disciple dwells in contemplation of phenomena, namely, of the six internal and external sense bases. He knows the eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tangibles, the mind and mental objects; and he knows as well the fetter that arises in dependence on them. He understands how the unarisen fetter arises, how the arisen fetter is abandoned, and how the abandoned fetter does not arise again in the future.”²

This alternative approach deals not with the analytical methodology of the previous one, but instead in terms of the relationships between the various sense bases and the objects associated with them. As opposed to the Five Aggregates and their factors, the six sense bases operate only in the relationships that each has with its particular form.

Let’s take these one at a time.

The eye deals in visible forms for identification and classification.

The ear identifies sound patterns.

The nose finds familiar odors.

The tongue works with tastes.

The body deals with tactile sensations of touch and physical sensations.

The mind and its mental objects are those constructs built on the other five, operating primarily on a subliminal level before you ever acknowledge the construct as being a built-up one.

The fetters that the Buddha speaks of are the restraints and incorrect conclusions built on the secondary sense buildups as well as the mental constructs. Once you see what’s going on, you realize that they are totally intertwined with one another. This is also known as ‘dependent origination.’ This relates to the sense bases only, not to the

² Ibid.

Five Aggregates, which are ALL independent (kindof, except for the cause-effect thingie).

But not only does this realization allow you to see the buildups while they're happening, but you can see them arise and depart. Once you see this, you can keep them from recurring by recognizing them and squelching them before they get going.

We see now that all the external inputs to our sensory system are almost totally independent of each other, and the buildups from those senses are almost totally dependent on each other for an integrated, rational output. The eggshell provides the interface point for that coordinated whole.

In both cases, we begin to see that the 'self' is both gatekeeper and holographic projector, depending on which direction we're using it for. In neither case is our Buddha Nature really related. We rip away the curtain to find the Wizard manipulating the controls of the shrine, now visible to Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Woodsman and Scarecrow (all of which are parts of the allegory relating to our inner selves - our Buddha Nature).

Thus we begin the destruction of the eggshell (self) that prevents our Buddha nature from being the real person.

We'll continue with our eggshell demolition derby in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE EGGSHELL DEMOLITION DERBY

I start this chapter with a recounting of what we've been playing with in these last few episodes from Bikkhu Bodhi:

“To uproot this subtle form of ego-clinging requires a counteractive perception: direct insight into the empty, coreless nature of phenomena. Such an insight is generated by contemplating the factors of existence in terms of their three universal marks — impermanence (*aniccata*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkhata*), and selflessness (*anattata*). Generally, the first of the three marks to be discerned is impermanence, which at the level of insight does not mean merely that everything eventually comes to an end. At this level it means something deeper and more pervasive, namely, that conditioned phenomena are in constant process, happenings which break up and perish almost as soon as they arise. The stable objects appearing to the senses reveal themselves to be strings of momentary formations (*sankhara*); the person posited by common sense dissolves into a current made up of two intertwining streams — a stream of material events, the aggregate of material form, and a stream of mental events, the other four aggregates.

“When impermanence is seen, insight into the other two marks closely follows. Since the aggregates are constantly breaking up, we cannot pin our hopes on them for any lasting satisfaction. Whatever expectations we lay on them are bound to be dashed to pieces by their inevitable change. Thus when seen with insight they are *dukkha*, suffering, in the deepest sense. Then, as the aggregates are impermanent and unsatisfactory, they cannot be taken as self. If they were self, or the belongings of a self, we would be able to control them and bend them to our will, to make them everlasting sources of bliss. But far from being able to exercise such mastery, we find them to be grounds of pain and disappointment. Since they cannot be subjected to control, these very factors of our being are *anatta*: not a self, not the belongings of a self, just empty, ownerless phenomena occurring in dependence on conditions.”¹

Wow. Two paragraphs and he sums three of my chapters in that excerpt. But I felt it was necessary to lead up to this with some ‘expedient means’, so that when we arrived here we’d be ready for his distilled version. Nothing is as it seems at first, and nothing is as simple as it may initially appear.

¹ ‘The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering’ by Bhikkhu Bodhi; The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS

There are a few things here that merit some further discussion, however. We can simplify things just a little up front. The five aggregates ('form', 'feeling', 'perception', 'fabrications', and 'consciousness') can be divided into two main flows, that of the material (form) and the immaterial (feeling, perception, fabrication, consciousness.) In other words, sensory stuff and mind stuff.

The perception of any object that initially appears to be permanent breaks down into these two flows, much like anything that appears to be long-lasting and non-changing can be broken down into various components when you look at it close enough. I'm looking at a computer screen right now, and I see my manuscript staring back at me.

If I examine it closely enough, I find that it is composed of a myriad of tiny dots that are constantly changing - it isn't my manuscript at all, but an electronic representation of it. Look at it even closer, and you can lose sight of what the overall screen is doing, seeing only the dots in seemingly random patterns. 'Can't see the forest for the trees' comes to mind as a simile.

And if I look from another angle, the screen is impermanent. The screen changes as I write, shifts as I zoom in and out, and completely shifts appearance if I go to a different program or document. What could be more impermanent than this? The minute I shut off the power, it all goes away, even my manuscript (although it is temporarily stored in some electronic marvel somewhere.)

Likewise, my immaterial stream of thought is impermanent. What I know today may change tomorrow or next year. I may forget or learn things. I may change my viewpoint on things. Even my memory is impermanent.

The impermanence of things is total and real. Nothing survives in its current form forever, no matter how hard we try to preserve it. Even the universe as we know it with its imponderable time frame has a beginning and an end (theoretically). Yes, this is the theory that matter and/energy can never be eliminated or destroyed - merely converted. But our perceptions of what our universe's form was, is, and ever shall be may and must change. And indeed, the fundamental

energy/matter relationship may be eternal - but our perceptions of how it forms itself in this particular nanosecond will change. And it is only our perceptions that allow us to even marvel at the sight.

Since nothing is permanent, or even temporarily permanent (yes, I know it's an paradox), we can **NEVER** make assumptions that what is here this instant will be here in the next. I may keel over and never finish this chapter, or I may live to be a hundred and twenty - but I can assume neither one because of the impermanence factor. **"The only thing constant is change."**

This has to do with self, also. If I can't count on anything being permanent, then I can't build an eggshell that can withstand the change, either. There will always be chinks and holes, no matter how hard I try to plug them. I get really grumpy when I don't succeed. This always brings me back to suffering. But now, it hits me at a level that I can understand, because I'm seeing the root causes for it, rather than the buildups and misrepresentations that my mind has substituted for it. This advanced suffering is totally dependent on the conditioned responses of my mind/eggshell, which I now have the tools to see.

"Now what, monks, is noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions? Any singleness of mind equipped with these seven factors — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, & right mindfulness — is called noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions."²

Ah, the interlinked nature of the EightFold Path. You now see the incredible linkages between the elements of it. Each one amplifies and helps the other seven.

So where are we? I know it may seem that we've been jumping around a lot on this stuff, and I assure you that there's method to my shotgunning here. It's because the whole

² Majjhima Nikaya I 17

idea of destroying the self has to do with wisdom, and wisdom has to do with the entire EightFold Path and all its corollaries.

“To free ourselves from all defilements and suffering, the illusion of selfhood that sustains them has to be dispelled, exploded by the realization of selflessness. Precisely this is the task set for the development of wisdom.”

“Wisdom alone can cut off the latent tendencies at their root because the most fundamental member of the set, the one which nurtures the others and holds them in place, is ignorance (avijja), and wisdom is the remedy for ignorance.”³

We haven’t talked much about ignorance yet, because it is the most latent and insidious part of dealing with the destruction of the ‘self’. It permeates everything that we do and think and react to. As we alluded to earlier, ignorance is not the lack of smarts or knowledge. It is the possession of views and thinking that impairs the generation of good karma, and increases the bad stuff without you truly recognizing it. For instance, it is knowledge to know how to make an atomic weapon - it is ignorance to use it just because you can. It is wisdom to know not to use it at all. Ignorance lies at the heart of all the stuff that we haven’t conquered yet. But if we stop at that railroad crossing of the mind, and ‘stop, look, and listen’, we will see the signs of our own ignorance everywhere.

We have looked at impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness as goals to be attained. We now have to integrate these in combination with the EightFold Path to totally get rid of those pesky latent defilements/ignorances. Shedding ignorance is the key to doing this. Once ignorance is eliminated, we can actually see a vision of Nirvana. We’re not quite there yet, but we’re close.

We’ve used the Moral Disciplines part of the Path to mostly keep us out of trouble on an external basis, karmically speaking. We’ve used the Concentration parts of the Path to hone our abilities to actually see what is coming up from the basement of our minds. And we’ve used the Right View and Right Effort parts to keep us on the track for the goal, as well as funding the effort necessary to do it.

³ Ibid.

All of the insights that we have learned now come into play for eliminating the last bastion of the “self”. We see that the eggshell is what it really is, and we can look out through it at will to see the real world without bias. And we can also project through the eggshell without modification what our true inner self (read Buddha Nature) really is. And now we use all of this that we have gained to work towards really cleaning out the basement. Yeah, I know, I hate cleaning out the basement myself - but sometimes ya’ gotta do it.

We’ve seen that the Five Attributes of Clinging (material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness) are inherent in the ‘self’ (eggshell). We’ve also noted that they are untenable because they are based on the Three Universal Marks (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness). Thus we must work on deleting these from the mind’s inventory of crafty things to muck us up. When we do this, we enter the ‘supra-mundane’ path. Supra-mundane is exactly what it says it means - it is above the ordinary trudging work that we’ve come to understand on the EightFold Path as we’ve walked it so far. And it’s not clear from here on unless you have traveled at least part of the way on that path.

This is the final step on the road to wisdom. It consists of four levels, which we will examine in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE FINAL FOUR

No, this isn't about the NCAA invitational basketball tournament, although it sometimes has similarities.

First, however, a little review.

Remember the ten defilements/factors of what the mind uses to alter its perceptions? No? OK! Here they are for you as a refresher.

- personality view,
- doubt, .
- clinging to rules and rituals,
- sensual desire,
- aversion,
- desire for fine-material existence,
- desire for immaterial existence,
- conceit,
- restlessness,
- and ignorance.

These are also known as the ten 'fetters', and they bind us to our 'self', which is what we're trying to eliminate. All of the work done so far has been to identify and suppress these ten factors. I say suppress, because we probably haven't handled much of the latent stuff yet at this lowest level.

Forgive me for a quick change of subject for just a second. There are called the 'supra-mundane' levels of the last part of the path to enlightenment. Huh? What is this? Well, the key here is in 'supra-mundane'. Buddha says that there are four levels of existence after you conquer all the stuff in the normal realm of the mind. In other words, as you conquer all the latent stuff in steps, you advance up the Buddha-ladder.

These are the four:

- The Stream Enterer.
- The Once Returner.

- The Non-Returner.
- Arahatsip. (Bodhisattva)

The explanation following is taken directly from Bikkhu Bodhi to explain the four levels. He says it so much better than I can - however, we'll talk a little bit in between each section for clarity in modern times. Remember that the terminology here is that of the original Theravedan tradition, not the ones that followed.

"The first, the path of stream-entry (sotapatti-magga), cuts off the first three fetters, the coarsest of the set, eliminates them so they can never arise again. "Personality view" (sakkaya-ditthi), the view of a truly existent self in the five aggregates, is cut off since one sees the selfless nature of all phenomena. Doubt is eliminated because one has grasped the truth proclaimed by the Buddha, seen it for oneself, and so can never again hang back due to uncertainty. And clinging to rules and rites is removed since one knows that deliverance can be won only through the practice of the Eightfold Path, not through rigid moralism or ceremonial observances."¹

Theoretically, at this point, we've done away with the first three fetters of 'self', 'doubt', and 'clinging to rules and rites.'

We can no longer use 'self' (our eggshell) as an excuse for our behavior because the selfless nature of everything can now be seen. Nothing that we experience can be defined in terms of our eggshell any more, and what we project outward is equally 'not-self' (non-eggshell). While we may appear quite vulnerable at this stage, we are actually much more grounded and safe than at any time ever before in our lives.

Doubt has gone by the wayside, because we see that what we're doing is working, and that reality is beginning to shine through without the filters of the mind. If we possess doubt here, then we need to go back and work on more stuff before proceeding forward. After this point, there is only progress forward. We cannot go back to the old ways of thinking - uhhh, that should be the old ways of being.

Clinging to rules and rites is equally ruled out at this stage. No more mentor; no more rules other than the EightFold Path, and no rites and ceremonies. You're on your

¹ "The Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the End of Suffering" by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Source: The Wheel Publication No. 308/311 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), second edition (revised) 1994. Transcribed from a file provided by the BPS

own. You know it and you practice it. And in all probability, at this stage you truly know that you have to find your own path without any outside assistance whatsoever from this point forward. It's all up to you.

“The path is followed immediately by another state of supramundane consciousness known as the fruit (phala), which results from the path's work of cutting off defilements. Each path is followed by its own fruit, wherein for a few moments the mind enjoys the blissful peace of Nibbana before descending again to the level of mundane consciousness. The first fruit is the fruit of stream-entry, and a person who has gone through the experience of this fruit becomes a "stream-enterer" (sotapanna). He has entered the stream of the Dhamma carrying him to final deliverance. He is bound for liberation and can no longer fall back into the ways of an unenlightened worldling. He still has certain defilements remaining in his mental makeup, and it may take him as long as seven more lives to arrive at the final goal, but he has acquired the essential realization needed to reach it, and there is no way he can fall away.”²

Pretty heady stuff, eh? But at this level (of the stream-enterer) the euphoria won't last too long before it's 'back to work'. The practitioner is in the stream of Dhamma (the Teachings of the Buddha) and that will help them to navigate the remaining territory - but they WILL achieve it. While there are seven remaining defilements/factors to deal with, they will all come tumbling down as we progress - I guarantee it. By the way, accept the seven-lifetime requirement if you wish, but it can be done in one.

“An enthusiastic practitioner with sharp faculties, after reaching stream-entry, does not relax his striving but puts forth energy to complete the entire path as swiftly as possible. He resumes his practice of insight contemplation, passes through the ascending stages of insight-knowledge, and in time reaches the second path, the path of the once-returner (sakadagami-magga). This supramundane path does not totally eradicate any of the fetters, but it attenuates the roots of greed, aversion, and delusion. Following the path the meditator experiences its fruit, then emerges as a "once-returner" who will return to this world at most only one more time before attaining full liberation.”³

Second verse, same song.

Here insight meditation takes the forefront, and brings us to the stage of 'Once-returner'. Here we are guaranteed that

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

we'll only return on the cycle of life and death once more (or less), as opposed to the many returns of the lower stages. This description is from the Theravada tradition, which involves reincarnation. This can be ignored if you wish.

This stage doesn't necessarily eliminate all the fetters, but it will attenuate the basis for delusion, greed and aversion. Remember that these are latents, and have to be rooted out with a lot of effort, by posing situations to the mind, and watching what it comes up with.

Once more, upon achieving this level, there's a period of elation, but it once more subsides to concentrate on the third level.

“But our practitioner again takes up the task of contemplation. At the next stage of supramundane realization he attains the third path, the path of the non-returner (anagami-magga), with which he cuts off the two fetters of sensual desire and ill will. From that point on he can never again fall into the grip of any desire for sense pleasure, and can never be aroused to anger, aversion, or discontent. As a non-returner he will not return to the human state of existence in any future life. If he does not reach the last path in this very life, then after death he will be reborn in a higher sphere in the fine-material world (rupaloka) and there reach deliverance.”⁴

The ‘non-returner’ is one that is one step away from true enlightenment. They cut off totally the fetters of sensual desire and ill will. There will be no occasion for them to return.

“Return” has a specific meaning in Buddhism, of course. It means that you come back as some kind of creature and go through the whole routine again. This is reincarnation, of course. In other teachings, we are told that only our karma rolls over into another life, not our personality or being. This conflicts with the statement that the being itself (psychically, not physically) is indeed going to return - which is the Tibetan Buddhist viewpoint. While I maybe agree (or not) with the idea of rollover karma (much like rollover cell minutes), the jury is still out with regards to whether the whole being does this. The Tibetans of course believe that the Dalai Lama is a reincarnated Lama that remembers things that only the previous Dalai Lama could have known. If that's what they want to believe, that's fine.

⁴ Ibid.

The Bikkhu states in a prior passage that “The four paths can be achieved in close proximity to one another — for those with extraordinarily sharp faculties even in the same sitting — or (as is more typically the case) they can be spread out over time, even over several lifetimes.”⁵ I personally believe that the first alternative of ‘within this lifetime’ mostly applies, but this is my own opinion. Your mileage may vary. You can judge what the Bikkhu says for yourself, and figure out your own timeline.

“But our meditator again puts forth effort, develops insight, and at its climax enters the fourth path, the path of arahatship (arahatta-magga). With this path he cuts off the five remaining fetters — desire for fine-material existence and desire for immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. The first is the desire for rebirth into the celestial planes made accessible by the four jhanas, the planes commonly subsumed under the name “the Brahma-world.” The second is the desire for rebirth into the four immaterial planes made accessible by the achievement of the four immaterial attainments. Conceit (mana) is not the coarse type of pride to which we become disposed through an over-estimation of our virtues and talents, but the subtle residue of the notion of an ego which subsists even after conceptually explicit views of self have been eradicated. The texts refer to this type of conceit as the conceit “I am” (asmimāna). Restlessness (uddhacca) is the subtle excitement which persists in any mind not yet completely enlightened, and ignorance (avijja) is the fundamental cognitive obscuration which prevents full understanding of the Four Noble Truths. Although the grosser grades of ignorance have been scoured from the mind by the wisdom faculty in the first three paths, a thin veil of ignorance overlays the truths even in the non-returner.”⁶

This the arhat or bodhisattva status. Actually status is the wrong word, because status implies a higher regard by other people, but in this area, status has no meaning. The level and its attainment are totally internal, and the outside world has no bearing on how the person considers it nor do they care.

The desire for fine material things has departed. We don’t need or desire them.

We now eliminate the desire for a higher plane of existence. We’ve gotten there.

Conceit and its subtle variations are gone. The idea of ‘I’ has flown away.

We are not restless any more. There’s nothing to create that restlessness within us.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

And, most important of all, ignorance has left us. Ignorance, of course, is what impedes our path to true wisdom and the true understanding of reality..

“The path of arahatship strips away this last veil of ignorance and, with it, all the residual mental defilements. This path issues in perfect comprehension of the Four Noble Truths. It fully fathoms the truth of suffering; eradicates the craving from which suffering springs; realizes with complete clarity the unconditioned element, Nibbana, as the cessation of suffering; and consummates the development of the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path.”⁷

At this point, we intuitively understand the Four Noble Truths at a truly basic level. ‘Nuff said.

“With the attainment of the fourth path and fruit the disciple emerges as an arahant, one who in this very life has been liberated from all bonds. The arahant has walked the Noble Eightfold Path to its end and lives in the assurance stated so often in the formula from the Pali canon: "Destroyed is birth; the holy life has been lived; what had to be done has been done; there is no coming back to any state of being." The arahant is no longer a practitioner of the path but its living embodiment. Having developed the eight factors of the path to their consummation, the Liberated One lives in the enjoyment of their fruits, enlightenment and final deliverance.”⁸

Thus endeth the lesson (and beginneth the enlightenment.)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

ARE WE THERE YET?

I know, thirty-four chapters in, and I'm still throwing stuff at 'ya. Congratulations if you've made it this far without just closing this up and either feeding the fire with it, filling your wastebasket, or the lining the bottom of the birdcage or litter box.

But there's some interesting stuff that I think you'd appreciate knowing at this point. It has to do with an angry e-mail that I got from a Tibetan monk who got a very early version of OhNo (my first volume).

He complained vigorously that I didn't know what I was talking about when I spoke of the Buddhist Monastic tradition. You know what? He was right. I didn't.

But I've done some superficial research into this, and it's interesting to see how it's worked out over the ages.

There is a rich monastic tradition in Buddhism. It is honorable and makes every attempt to keep the traditions and precepts that the Buddha laid down alive and well. The monastic orders have traditionally provided this function. To them I attribute the survival of the philosophy and (for those so inclined) the religion. And to the monk that I antagonized so badly, I offer a sincere apology. (And Ohno has been modified to reflect this recent research.)

In truth, for many, if not most, lay practitioners of Buddhism, the Buddhist monk or nun is a necessity - or at the very least someone to keep them on the right track. Many (if not most) of them need the interpretation of the teachings of whichever branch of Buddhism they belong to in simpler terms and in their own language. In short, they require mentoring.

In fact, one of the tenets that the Buddha laid down is that the teachings **MUST** be in the language of the people to whom it is directed, and must be explained in terms that they can understand. They must be taught with the concept of

‘expedient means’ in order for those receiving it to improve their comprehension of the teachings.

It must be noted in this day and age of the Internet and instant communication, however, that the information (sutras, discussions, definitions) that would have required a blessed teacher twenty years ago, is now available to the seeker with a few keystrokes and the wonder of Google. Does this negate the necessity of having a teacher or the monastic orders? The answer to this question is obviously not. After all, who initially provided the Internet material? The monastic orders are still very much required for many practitioners. But is up to the individual as to whether they need that type of training or not, and whether to seek out a mentor. It is something to consider and has to be totally up to the individual.

OK, so what does this have to do with anything? Well, as to how the knowledge gets passed on, it means a whole lot, as you will shortly see.

In the Lotus Sutra (one of the last that the Buddha taught), he makes the remarkable statement that says:

“The Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, simply teach and convert the Bodhisattvas.”¹

The glossary definition of Bodhisattva is as follows:

- (Sanskrit) "one whose essence is wisdom".
- This corresponds with the Theravedan definition of ‘arhat’.
- In Mahayana Buddhism, a person who has achieved enlightenment, but has who has chosen to remain in this world to help those who are suffering, instead of going on to nirvana. This is the highest ideal.
- Those who aspire to Supreme Enlightenment and Buddhahood for themselves and all beings. The word Bodhisattva can therefore stand for a realized being such as Avalokitesvara or Samantabhadra but also for anyone who has developed the Bodhi Mind, the aspiration to save oneself and others.

Now, in my experience, I have to disagree with the last part of this definition about the Bodhi mind. It makes no sense to me to merely aspire to save all human beings without having achieved some experience with the fundamentals of what the Buddha taught. I can aspire to be a great physicist,

¹ Lotus Sutra, Chapter 2, Burton Watson translation.

but unless I learn the underlying disciplines of math, calculus, applied physics, celestial mechanics, and a host of other knowledge bases, I will never achieve that aspiration. So I am unfortunately bound to stick with the first part of the definition, of the person who has achieved enlightenment, but chooses to stay and teach, instead of going forward and entering nirvana. And in the spirit of challenging anything we don't understand or don't think is quite right, I exercise my right to disagree on the aspirational part of the definition.

The previous quote (not the definition) about the Bodhisattvas is remarkable in that the Buddhas restrict their teachings to only those already knowledgeable in the basics and advanced concepts of Buddhist culture (i.e. the Bodhisattvas)². I assume, therefore, that the Bodhisattvas then go forth into the world and preach the more basic teachings until their students gain Bodhisattva status for themselves.

Again, the Buddha from the Lotus Sutra:

“Shariputra, when the Buddhas of the future make their appearance in the world, they too will use countless numbers of expedient means, various causes and conditions, and words of simile and parable in order to expound the doctrines for the sake of living beings. These doctrines will all be for the sake of the one Buddha vehicle. And these living beings, by listening to the doctrines of the Buddhas, will all eventually be able to attain wisdom embracing all species.”³ ...

There is a bit of confusion here, in that the Buddha is saying that the future Buddhas will use expedient means to teach the dharma to living beings. Does this mean that the Bodhisattva requirement is no longer relevant? Or that there may not be any readily available Bodhisattvas? I don't know.

But this is a minor point when we consider the use of expedient means on the part of the Buddhas (or the Bodhisattvas) to teach the living beings through the ‘One Vehicle’, as opposed to the ‘Three Vehicles’⁴. This implies that

² Paraphrased from Chapter 2 of the Lotus sutra.

³ Ibid

⁴ The Three vehicles are as follows:

1. Sravaka or voice-hearers (Shomon): in which one understands Buddhism by listening to others' talking.
2. Pratyekabuddha or private Buddhas (Engaku): in which one understands Buddhism by oneself in daily life.
3. Bodhisattva (Bosatsu): in which one has achieved Enlightenment and also tries to lead others attain Buddhahood.

there must be the teaching of the 'lesser doctrines', in order to build up to the understanding necessary.

There will be those that will disagree with this, taking the stance that the definition from the glossary, defining aspirants without training to be Bodhisattvas already. Therefore the learning of the 'lesser doctrines' is unnecessary, and the teachings of the 'One Vehicle' can be accepted on faith alone, without any foundational experience. I still disagree with this part.

OK, to bolster my viewpoint, let me quote further from the Lotus Sutra:

"... I know that living beings have various desires; attachments that are deeply implanted in their minds. Taking cognizance of this basic nature of theirs, I will therefore use various causes and conditions, words of simile and parable, and the power of expedient means, and expound the Law for them. Shariputra, I do this so that all of them may attain the one Buddha vehicle and wisdom embracing all species."⁵

This is, to me, basic educational psychology 101. Bring them along at their speed and capability, not yours. A confusing term may be the use of the 'one Buddha vehicle' in this context. What I think the Buddha is saying is that the 'three vehicles' lead to the single point of becoming a Bodhisattva. The 'wisdom embracing all species' will be explained shortly.

A 'vehicle' in this sense is a 'vessel' to carry a sentient being across to enlightenment - the vessel being the teachings that the being has learned to this point. The lower two (or inferior) sets of teachings serve to get the being to a level so they understand the law of the third vehicle (the One Buddha vehicle or arahat/bodhisattva). This will become clearer as we move along.

"Shariputra, when the age is impure and the times are chaotic, then the defilements of living beings are grave, they are greedy and jealous and put down roots that are not good. Because of this, the Buddhas, utilizing the power of expedient means, apply distinctions to the one Buddha vehicle and preach as though it were three."⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Here we have the Buddha predicting that future Buddhas will again teach the fundamentals through the Three Vehicles, leading up to the One Buddha Vehicle.

Wait a minute. OK, so we've got this progression through the three vehicles - so what is this 'One Buddha Vehicle' that seems to be so overridingly important? Haven't we already gone through the steps necessary to achieve enlightenment? Have I been lied to?

Maybe kinda-sorta-perhaps ... but for a reason. Let me quote again from the Lotus Sutra:

"In the Buddha lands of the ten directions there is only the Law of the one vehicle, there are not two, there are not three, except when the Buddha preaches so as an expedient means, merely employing provisional names and terms in order to conduct and guide living beings and preach to them the Buddha wisdom.

The Buddhas appear in the world solely for this one reason, which is true; the other two are not the truth.

Never do they use a lesser vehicle to save living beings and ferry them across.

The Buddha himself dwells in this Great Vehicle, and adorned with the power of meditation and wisdom that go with the Law he has attained, he uses it to save living beings.

He himself testifies to the unsurpassed way, the Great Vehicle, the Law in which all things are equal.

If I used a lesser vehicle to convert even one person, I would be guilty of stinginess and greed, but such a thing would be impossible.

If a person will believe and take refuge in the Buddha, the Thus Come One will never deceive him, nor will he ever show greed or jealousy, for he has rooted out evil from among the phenomena.⁷

This is where we've been heading all along. This is the great law of the Bodhisattvas. It is the ultimate reason for going through all the other stuff that we've done.

It is so simple in its written form (only four words), yet very few people will understand it in its full application and scope unless they have studied a lot of Buddhist theory. It applies to everything and everyone. The entire universe is within its reach.

⁷ Ibid.

That law is this:

ALL THINGS ARE EQUAL!

From the tiniest speck of dirt, to the biggest galaxy - all are equal. Every animal, every plant, every ocean, every atom - all are equal, even living beings.

Now I know how some are thinking, how am I equal to an eggplant? There's an easy answer, and none stated it better than the late Carl Sagan. "We are all star stuff."

We share, at an atomic level, the same atoms that make up the most distant galaxy as well as the atoms of the simplest bacteria or even dust grain. We are equal - to everything else in the universe. It is what we have in common; because we're all 'star stuff'.

Granted, some things are put together in a more complex fashion, but this does not negate that the building blocks are the same - just a different building.

Another way of seeing this is the cryptic phrase that I came up with:

Everything is everything, and nothing is nothing.

'Grokking'⁸ this to the fullest requires a humbling bit of insight and humility. But you've had a lot of practice by now in 'grokking'. So go forth and 'grok' this new concept.

"The Buddhas, most honored of two-legged beings, know that phenomena have no constantly fixed nature; that the seed of Buddhahood sprouts through causation, and for this reason they preach the single vehicle."⁹

Buddhas have learned that phenomena (as you have learned) have no permanence - they are constantly changing, emerging, and going away. They also know that they have to generate in others, the cause that leads to the eradication of

⁸ To 'grok' something, is to totally understand it. It basically involves using the EightFold Path to its fullest and taking a concentrated look at something. It was originally used by Robert Heinlein, in his classic novel "Stranger in a Strange Land."

⁹ Ibid.

suffering, and the effect, which is eventual Buddhahood. At this level, they can teach the Law of the Single Vehicle.

“But that these phenomena are part of an abiding Law, that the characteristics of the world are constantly abiding-- this they have come to know in the place of practice and as leaders and teachers they preach expedient means.”¹⁰

The Buddhas realize that others not so enlightened do not believe yet that phenomena are transient, and permanence is still part of their thinking. Therefore ‘expedient means’ have to be used so as to bring others along to the level of being able to understand the Law of the Single Vehicle.

Ah ... the Buddha was right when he said:

"The wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. Not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas is able to comprehend it." ¹¹

OK, ok. So far the definitions of the Single Vehicle haven't done much for us, have they? Let's try one more.

The wisdom of the Buddhas : The wisdom to realize the three truths of all phenomena; equality, difference, and totality. For example:

1. All living beings are equal because they have Buddha nature and are able to become Buddhas;
2. All people are different in race, sex, education, background, age, etc.;
3. Therefore, we must see all phenomena in their totality.¹²

AHA!!! Maybe we've got something to go on now. Forget the atomic structure - that's a rough kind of an analogy. Here we see it spoken that all living beings have Buddha nature and can become Buddhas. Therefore they are all equal. But also, every one of them is also different in innumerable ways.

Therefore, given that they are all the same in one sense, and different in another, we have to look at the totality of our external world see them as equals - not just their externals as

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Rev. Shokai Kanai's Lectures on the Lotus Sutra, Los Angeles Buddhist Temple © 1996 - 2002 NBSA & Associates

they appear to us, but as to the extent of their Buddha Nature as well.

This is a real mouthful in both theory and practice. For most people, granting equality to a cougar that is about to attack and eat you is virtually impossible. And yet, that is just what we must do.

Another example comes to mind. Battling the crowds at WalMart or Costco on the fifteenth of the month and granting that equality to all the human beings present is a definite challenge.

Each and every living being has a right and their own reason to be here - whether harmful to us or visa-versa. This is the law of equality.

It is hard for many who have been brought up in the Christian tradition of human superiority over all the earth to come to grips with this concept. And yet it is this very principle that causes much of the environmental and resource destruction which we see every day.

As the Buddha said, "... when the age is impure and the times are chaotic, then the defilements of living beings are grave, they are greedy and jealous and put down roots that are not good."

Throughout all the history that I have heard and read, this quote could have applied at any point in the development of so-called 'civilization.' There is much work to be done.

Let's take a longer look at this 'Law of Equality' in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

HOW TO EXPLAIN THE UNEXPLAINABLE

When the Buddha said it was impossible for anyone but a Buddha to understand the Law of the Single Vehicle, he was right. While it sounds simple enough to say, “Everything is equal”, how do you give an example or describe how it works?

The simple answer, of course, is that you don’t. Which is exactly what the Buddha did. He didn’t. While trying to get some basis for this ‘One Vehicle’ law, I wound up in the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra. I floundered around for weeks, looking for even a hint of what the Law of this Single Vehicle was. I was about to give up in utter frustration when the first inkling of what it was came through. Even then, there is no description and no significant path to it. It is as the Buddha says,

“The wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. Not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas is able to comprehend it.”¹

A few years back, waaaaaaaay before I started studying and practicing Buddhism, I had an experience that gave me a small insight into the Law of the Single Vehicle.

I was driving down the Coast Highway south of San Francisco, and I came upon a stretch of road that had trees bordering both sides of the highway. For some reason, there was little traffic on the road, and I slowed down without realizing it. At that point, time almost seemed to stand still, and I clearly felt the presence of the trees in a way I had never experienced before. It was as if we had a cosmic understanding for that brief period.

I still have trouble describing the incident, other than to say that it was as if the essence of the trees was interacting with me, and I with them. There was a majesty of feeling that I

¹ Lotus Sutra, chapter 2, Burton Watson translation.

felt for them, and they reciprocated in some manner which I cannot put words to. In that brief instant, we were 'one'.

It was as if we were both equals in the universe, and that each of us recognized the right of the other to be here - and there was an implicit understanding of why we were both there. It was at once an improbable yet incredibly enlightened feeling - one that defies a coherent rationale or even a reasonable explanation - let alone one that can have a description that makes any kind of sense to anyone else but me.

Thirty seconds later, the road broke out of the grove and the real world set back in, with somebody riding my bumper wanting me to go faster.

A little while later, I found a place to pull over and think about what had happened. Remember that this was long before I had any experience with Buddhism or even the rough edges of the enlightenment movement. I was awestruck at what I had experienced. I had no explanation then, and I have none today, except to know that at some esoteric level, I bonded with everything around me for an instant, and that it probably corresponds now with what I understand as the Law of the One Vehicle.

I have been through that grove several times since, and no matter how hard I have tried, I have to this day never reconnected to that original moment. That was then, this is now.

There have been a few other times that I've experienced this, but they are few and far between, and never as intense. The only other time that even approached this was in a remote corner of Muir Woods north of San Francisco one day. Those are truly mind-blowing experiences.

I figure that usually my mind is so busy doing whatever it's doing, that it never allows me to actually experience the experience, and so I miss the whole damn thing.

There are those who claim that experiences like this can be recreated through chemical means or extreme emotional stress. There can be a similar physical/mental process, I

guess, but what you come away with later cannot usually in any way equal that of the 'Oneness Experience.'

The Buddha said that for the people of the lower vehicles he taught the EightFold Path and Nirvana. I think that he taught Nirvana in that manner as a physical place so that people could more easily understand, visualize and aspire to. It is the 'Oneness Experience', that I believe is the actual Nirvana that we can achieve. It more than fills the bill for the descriptions that the Buddha gives for ultimate enlightenment.

So here I am, trying to describe something that's indescribable. I have no choice but to try, but I'm sure that it will never get across unless someone has already achieved that level and can understand what I'm trying to say. Try as we may, without being there, you can't have understood it. And staying there is a totally different matter altogether.

I'm sorry, but that's just the way it is. I'm not there yet either, but I've had a taste of it, and I want more.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

SOME OTHER THOUGHTS

The 'Oneness Experience' can only be obtained in that extremely rare state where the mind is totally quiet, and is prepared to expand its sensory inputs to the max. This is why the process of the Four Noble Truths and the EightFold Path are necessary to prepare the mind for this condition.

This is one of those situations in which shortcuts cannot be taken, nor steps skipped, unless you're one of those lucky few born with the ability to quiet the mind on command without a lot of training. If you're one of these, then you're probably already a Buddha anyway, or you've become a Lex Luthor (of Superman and Smallville fame as the genius, no-good, no-morals, bad guy).

Yes, you were lied to along the way, but only for the sake of getting you to this point. It was a necessary thing. And I don't apologize for it.

There is a parable in the third chapter of the Lotus Sutra about a wise man who had three sons. He owned a large house that was pretty dilapidated and had only one entrance. The sons were playing in the house when it caught fire. He entreated them to get out of the house, but they were too busy playing and having fun. They weren't coming out.

The man then offered them three small decorated ox carts in order to get them out of the house before they perished. They came rushing outside and began demanding their carts, but the wise man provided them with a huge cart with all kinds of servants and jewels and decorations instead of the three smaller carts. The kids were ecstatic, and the father had gotten them out of the burning house.

The Buddha then explains that the wise man was himself, and the three sons were actually the people of the three vehicles. He bribed the people of the three vehicles to come out of the house (the samsara real world) via the EightFold Path. Then he gave them a much more valuable and greater ox cart with all the decorations (the one vehicle). You

would be valid in calling that a 'bait and switch.' Had he not done that as an 'expedient means', the people would never have come out of the samsara world and partaken of the One Vehicle.

For those that choose to believe the half-truths buried within the EightFold Path, the reward of this one vehicle can be infinitely greater than if they stay within the real world. But in reality, the EightFold Path isn't really half-truths at all. It does work. It produces results. People do feel better for following it. And you can find enlightenment by following its precepts.

So if you're resentful that the EightFold Path hasn't yet gotten you directly to Nirvana, you feel that you can't pass GO, and you can't collect your two-hundred dollars - get over it. No matter what else happens, if you travel even the least part of the EightFold Path, you have improved your life in a major way. Even if you just find how your mind works, you'll come away with something that will enable you to have a calmer life.

However, if you really take all this to heart, and start looking for those 'One Vehicle Moments', you'll blossom like you would have never believed before. And your friends will look at you and shake their heads, asking "Have you changed your hair or lost weight?"

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

A WRAPUP, KINDOF

It's difficult to summarize what has been covered in the last thirty-sox chapters. What more can be said? (Metaphorically speaking, of course.)

From a personal standpoint, I started this journey with the Nichiren folks. But when I started out writing 'Ohno, Not Another Buddhist Primer', my goal was not so much to write a book as to gather my own thoughts together into some kind of order, and see if I could figure out from the Buddhist teachings how to make my life better.

Internally, I've succeeded beyond my wildest expectations. In an essay I wrote a while back, the title was 'Things I've Always Known and Recently Discovered.' This is probably the most important and profound statement of what I've written to date. The key is in that title. Anecdotally, I'm told it's a pretty good read, but that's not what it's all about for me. If I happen to make sense to someone else, that's great.

In doing the research for this discovery process, I indeed felt like I was philosophically coming home - that I'd always pretty much believed a lot of this, and just never put it all together into a concise set of teachings.

That explains why Mr. Spock was always a hero of mine; until I remembered that Vulcans only learn to suppress their emotions, not eradicate these inputs from their thinking.

This philosophy (I refuse to call it a religion in its purest form) is indeed a way to make your life better. It is tough to fathom, but incredible in its rewards. Even those that only dabble in the lower reaches of its concepts report major gains in serenity and calmness, as well as handling the real world a whole lot better.

We also have to remember the context in which the Buddha taught. There wasn't television, radio, books, or even running water for the most part. It was the Indian caste system, which you tried to alter at your peril during this period. Much of what was taught was in small increments that

were defined as an expedient way to get a single point across to an individual or small group (remember expedient means). The general education was so lacking that many of the more advanced concepts could not even be comprehended by most of the populace. It was only through the creation of both the 'religious' nature and the monks and nuns of Buddhist 'religion' that the studies were learned and preserved. The majority of the society was far too busy trying to survive to expend much energy on learning more than a basic principle or two. Thus we have a myriad of sutras (84,000+), some taught by the Buddha and recorded later, and most taught by disciples.

They almost always start with the phrase 'This I have heard.' This is interesting, because with that phrase we introduce the possibility of variations within the many versions of the same Sutra/Sutta, although they are accepted for the most part as gospel. As with Christianity and other major religions, translations vary as to meaning, depending on the context of the translator and the audience that the translator was aiming for. Many words have contextual meanings within the society for which they were written (for which we have no equivalence today). That contextual meaning may be lost in the translation for a society that has different social contexts.

Just a brief example - the Aleutian native language has thirty-some-odd words for snow, depending on the context of what kind, how cold, wet or dry, and other contextual variations - and that's just one language. Now try to translate that into Bantu or native Mayan, for whom snow isn't even a word, let alone the contextual meaning. An extreme example, but a valid one nevertheless.

This just illustrates the difficulty of taking something that was originally taught/written in Sanskrit; translating that to various dialects of Chinese; and then taking that and translating into Japanese; from which we make an English translation. I shudder to think of the transliteration problems that we might encounter in such a chain of linguistic gyrations.

In fact, I've found translations of the Nirvana Sutra from early Chinese texts, as well as later Chinese or Japanese ones. Upon examination, we might as well be looking at two different Sutras. While the basics were still there, the verbiage surrounding them was vastly different. Much of this I attribute to making the Sutras more palatable to various rulers and patrons of the translators/teachers, depending on each of their patron's whims and idiosyncrasies (not to mention funding and livelihood).

Almost all of what we have covered in this volume is from the Theravedan tradition. I'm not at all saying that there aren't others that are just as valid in their interpretations of the teachings. This collection of information is intended to give you a basis for looking further into the various schools of Buddhist thought and making up your mind as to which one fits your lifestyle and predilections. These are indeed the basics. Some schools don't even bother with them, but it is my belief that in order to understand where they're coming from, it's like high school geometry fundamentals - you have to understand and derive the proofs before you can use the theorems for some really neat stuff.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

WINDING UP (NOT REALLY)

When I started this volume on the basics of Buddhism, my intent was not so much to do so for the benefit of anyone else, but for a very selfish reason. By doing this, I find that I can double-check my own assumptions, thoughts, concepts and ideas about this by putting it on paper, and during the following week, month or whatever, verify that it still made sense or was total trash. There was quite a bit of the trash part, believe me. When that happened, that's where it wound up, and I started over.

It wasn't primarily for public consumption in the beginning. I was not (nor am) by any means on an evangelical bent - I'm too much of an anti-social hermit for that. It was just for me - little old selfish me.

What we've done here is attempt to explain what Buddhist practice is all about at a very fundamental level. I've not wasted your time by trying to explain the technical differences between Pure Land, Zen, Theravedan and Nichiren types of Buddhism. That's too much down in the weeds for me. Just give me the facts, ma'am, just the facts (with apologies to Jack Webb and Dragnet).

The other thing that I've found is that most treatises on Buddhism wind up being so stiff and scholarly that they substitute well for almost any insomnia medication on the market. Not that there isn't a reason for technical documents to be technical, but I'm looking for practical ways to accomplish this enlightenment thingie, not dig into the cultural context of what the reasons for how they defined ignorance within a particular sect were. If that's your bag, more power to you, but you many times lose sight of the forest because you've got too many trees in the way.

So I've tried to keep a very deep subject somewhat light, without getting into those toxic weeds that lose so many of us

when we try to wrap our brains around this most important philosophy.

In the process, I've probably alienated most of the devout and fanatical of each and every Buddhist sect, but there are fundamentals here that I needed to understand, and the overlay of dogma and hierarchy within those sects and their focus isn't part of that. All of them began with these fundamentals and without them there is much lacking.

But, enough of this drivel.

But wait, there's more. Just a little.

I think by this time, you may have gotten a broad overview of what Buddhist thought at its roots is all about. Where possible, I went back to the earliest texts from Theravedan sources that I could find, since the closer you get to the original stuff, the less interpretation and overlay you get (hopefully). After all, the Buddha never wrote down any of this stuff, only his disciples did, and it was their recollections that the First Council relied on to produce the first oral collection of the teachings. I'm not sure when it was officially written down, but it was many decades later. At least the First Council had recollections of some of his direct disciples without the subsequent mangling of the ideas.

A brief diversion - just to show the diversity of the sutras and how much they can vary.

In the Lotus Sutra as an example, four critical, pivotal points are brought up.

First, the Buddha declares that this one sutra, and no other, is superior to all the other sutras that he preached prior to preaching this one.

Second, that the Buddha lied about going out of existence.

Third, that believers in the Lotus Sutra could achieve Nirvana in this lifetime.

Fourth, he taught that all sentient beings could achieve Nirvana, even women and non-believers.

All these concepts are an anathema to most of the Buddhist Schools to this day.

Buddha, in this sutra, declares that it is the supreme sutra and no other may supersede it. This leads to the idea that every one of the sutras other than the Lotus are preliminary and cannot lead the reader to Nirvana by itself, nor in combination. Other sutras also said this, of course, but the Lotus Sutra being the last and being the only one taught by the Buddha for eight years prior to his physical demise leads to some credibility on this claim. If this is true, it throws wrenches into the well-oiled machinery of the other schools that depend on the earlier sutras as a basis for building their teachings and hierarchy.

The idea that the Buddha has never actually gone out of existence flies in the face of other sutras wherein the Buddha apparently dies and goes to Nirvana. This happens numerous times throughout the preliminary teachings. But in the Lotus Sutra, he declares that he never does this, and gives the reason for it to the assembled crowd.

He explains that if the Buddha were always present, that the practitioners would always have him to teach them, and that the teachings would lose value in the best case scenario, and be totally ignored at worst. Modern psychology bears this out in that it has been proven time and time again that 'familiarity breeds contempt.' Therefore, the teachings become more valuable if the teacher isn't always around to rely on. Actually the teachings are always present, it's the Buddha that wasn't apparently around. But in a society based on mostly oral traditions, it's always much better to have the original source tell it to you, rather than surrogates.

In addition, he repeatedly says that the dhamma (the teachings and principles) is actually the Buddha - the person themselves really doesn't matter. So the triple jewel (the Dhamma, the Buddha, and the Sangha) are actually just one - eerily reminiscent of the Trinity of Christianity.

Another point to ponder is that the teachings are all we have of the Buddha. We don't know his 'self', nor can we infer

anything about him as a person, save what is written in the sutras.

The third point in the Lotus Sutra again flies directly in the face of almost all the existing Buddhist schools, in that you can achieve Buddhahood (Nirvana) in this present lifetime. But then, if they instituted this, then their long-term existence might be in jeopardy because of fewer members. It is my opinion that religious politics within each and every sect is present - even within Buddhist sects.

Thus, as is true in all religions, the contradictions and reverses are present - leading us to extract only the fundamentals and use them to build our lives and Buddha-natures. Leave the dogma and ritual behind and just stick with the essentials.

So why this Path of the Pratyekabuddha? Because some of us have to find out things for ourselves. We're not team players (so to speak). We look for things individually, we examine them, and take what works for us - ignoring the pomp and circumstance. After all, the Theraveda tradition says:

"Buddhism" means "the Teaching of the Enlightened One." A Buddha is an enlightened individual, one who knows the truth about all things, one who knows just what is what, and so is capable of behaving appropriately with respect to all things. Buddhism is a religion based on intelligence, science and knowledge, whose purpose is the destruction of suffering and the source of suffering. All paying of homage to sacred objects by means of performing rites and rituals, making offerings or praying is not Buddhism. The Buddha rejected all this as foolish, ridiculous and unsound. He also rejected the celestial beings, then considered by certain groups to be the creator of things, and the deities supposed to dwell, one in each star in the sky. Thus we find that the Buddha made such statements as these:

"Knowledge, skill and ability are conducive to success and benefit and are auspicious omens, good in their own right regardless of the movements of the heavenly bodies. With the benefits gained from these qualities, one will completely outstrip those foolish people who just sit making their astrological calculations." And: "If the water in rivers (such as the Ganges) could really wash away sins and suffering, then the turtles, crabs, fish and shellfish living in those sacred rivers ought by now to be freed of their sins and sufferings too." And: "If a man could eliminate suffering by making offerings, paying homage and praying, there would be no one subject to suffering left in the world, because any-

one at all can pay homage and pray. But since people are still subject to suffering while in the very act of making obeisances, paying homage and performing rites, this is clearly not the way to gain liberation."

To attain liberation, we first have to examine things closely in order to come to know and understand their true nature. Then we have to behave in a way appropriate to that true nature. This is the Buddhist teaching; this we must know and bear in mind. Buddhism has nothing to do with prostrating oneself and deferring to awesome things. It sets no store by rites and ceremonies such as making libations of holy water, or any externals whatsoever, spirits and celestial being included. On the contrary, it depends on reason and insight. Buddhism does not demand conjecture or supposition; it demands that we act in accordance with what our own insight reveals and not take anyone else's word for anything. If someone comes and tells us something, we must not believe him without question. We must listen to his statement and examine it. Then if we find it reasonable, we may accept it provisionally and set about trying to verify it for ourselves. This is a key feature of Buddhism, which distinguishes it sharply from other world religions.¹

Thus we as solitary Pratyekabuddhas look for ourselves and find what we need via the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy.

Buddhism at its core is an amazing journey into the mind, and how to tame it (and us) for our own betterment. Does it really lead to Nirvana? I don't know. Does it make my life better in this existence? Yewbetcha. It does so in innumerable ways that I cannot begin to describe.

The Four Noble Truths and the EightFold Path, if you follow them, can provide a serenity of mind unequalled by any other practice. This is because it requires you to question each and every concept presented until you KNOW for yourself that you understand and accept it. It forces you to take NOTHING on faith and even makes you disregard faith (faith being blind obedience to a deity or concept) as a construct. It builds on what you know and can integrate into your life and furthers your overall understanding of what your mind does to you. It works at your speed, requires no theological acceptance in the normal sense of the term, and you understand at the core of your being how your mind works (or doesn't).

¹ Handbook for Mankind; Buddhadasa, Bikkhhu; Looking at Buddhism; 1956; found on the web at <http://www.buddhanet.net/budasa2.htm>

Ultimately, you are the Buddha incarnate. It is the little 'g' god inside that is your true Buddha nature, and it is your opportunity through Buddhist practice to find, nurture, and produce the Buddha that you really are.

Go forth and do it.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE...

Whatever you have taken from this manuscript is yours. The words, after all, are just ink and paper or characters on a screen. It is what you get from it that is important.

I have perhaps gotten more from the writing of this than you, the reader, have gotten from reading it. I hope that I am wrong in this respect. Because if you get something from this, it means that you are on the road to improving your life and becoming a better person.

Granted, much of Buddhist philosophy is esoteric and speaks in vernacular that is difficult for those of us in the Western world to comprehend. Add to that a couple of millenia of familiarity with the teachings and their Hindu predecessors, and we suffer a major understanding gap. I have, in some small way, tried to bridge that gap.

But this book is only the starting point. I encourage you to read the major sutras. Investigate other forms of Buddhist thought. See what others have to say about Buddhist philosophy. Use the Internet to find all the multitude of sites and writings about it. And use all this to form your own opinions and determine the path that you wish to follow.

What I have written is not gospel and not even close to the final word on Buddhist philosophy. It is only a rehash (as most of the 84,000 sutras are) of what the Buddha taught. I've merely tried to transmute some of it into language that we can understand in our own time and western world vernacular.

It is now up to you to implement what you have read. It is your own path that you are on, and only you can navigate it. I may be on a similar path a few feet away, but my path is mine and yours is yours. I cannot navigate your path for you ... I can only point out some signposts and general directions. It is up to you to get there on your own.

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