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The Path to Peace

(In the Footsteps of the Buddha)

by

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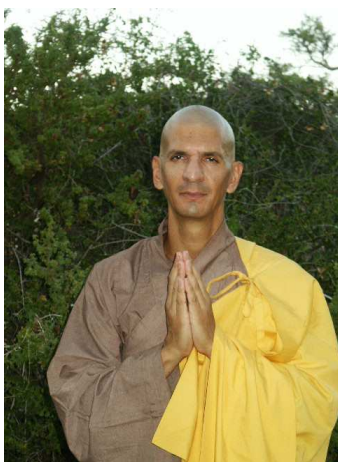
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Synopsis

Directed towards the modern practitioner and expressed in a vivid personal narrative, *The Path to Peace (in the Footsteps of the Buddha)* is an accessible journey chronicling Buddhist practice for the newcomer to meditation, and going on to reveal the profound insights of the Dharma to be a part of our everyday lives as well as detailing how to apply advanced practice techniques. Yes, peace of mind and fulfillment are possible in our fast-paced, high-tech culture. *The Path to Peace* is an enthusiastic celebration of personal discovery, demonstrating the 'aware and caring' practice of the Buddha to be every bit as relevant and 'enlightening' for today's spiritual traveler as it was 2,500 years ago.

About Us

Brother Pho Quan



After seven years of deepening practice and commitment to the Dharma, Brother Pho Quan, 'Universal Contemplation' (Roberto Vicente) was happily ordained in 2002. His spiritual experience has been with local temples and retreat centers in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. He has been influenced by Jack Kornfield, Ven. Narada Maha Thera, Bhikkhu Bodhi and Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Brother Pho Quan has a BA degree (CSUS 1979). His emphasis is the practice and fundamentals as expressed and experienced through the discourses of the Pali Canon (please visit www.accesstoinsight.org).

Martha Aitchison



Martha Aitchison is an artist using traditional media as well as the computer as a painting tool. The illustrations in *The Path to Peace* are hand drawings further processed electronically. Originally from Argentina, Martha lives in England and is a practicing Buddhist, involved with Theravada groups there. She holds degrees in Architecture (1962), Town Planning (1973) and Art and Design (1990). She is now retired and trying to keep her life simple at her home in a London suburb, dedicated to family and friends, cat, art and a garden, which she manages as a mini wild life reserve. Martha has also recently become a grandmother for the first time. For more information about her work, visit her website www.nottwo.org.

“It’s been Martha’s and my goal to bring the Dharma, the Buddha’s insights and teachings to our contemporary Western culture. The message of awareness, compassion and wisdom is the same; we’ve only expressed it for a modern audience. I am very grateful to Martha for her willingness and enthusiasm, generously donating her vision of the Dharma through her artwork. We have spent two years in collaboration to see the *Path to Peace* to completion. We are also grateful to Marvine Williams for her invaluable help in editing and proofing the manuscript and to the late Rick Bolton for his generous dana. We hope our humble offering will allow the reader to continue to investigate the Dharma. Joy, Wisdom and Peace are to be known in this beautiful practice of awakening and understanding.”—Brother Pho Quan.

May you all be happy and may you all be blessed.

**THE PATH TO PEACE
(In the Footsteps of the Buddha)**



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SN: Samyutta Nikaya—The Grouped Collection of Sutras

THERG: Theragatha—Verses of the Elder Monks

THERAG: Therigatha—Verses of the Elder Nuns

UD: Udana—Exclamations

VN: Vinaya Pitaka—The Monastic Code Collection

The Sanskrit usage of words and phrases have been adopted since they are readily used and referred to by the modern audience (i.e. sutra, Dharma, karma, Nirvana, etc.).

PART ONE

THE PATH

Chapter One

THE JOURNEY—

Awakening



“Suppose a man wandering in a forest wilderness found an ancient path, an ancient trail, traveled by men of old, and he followed it up, and by doing so he discovered an ancient city, an ancient royal capital, where men of old had lived, with parks and groves and lakes, walled round and beautiful to see, so too I

found the ancient path, the ancient trail, traveled by the Fully Enlightened Ones of old.” SN 12, 65. “One is the path that leads to worldly gain; and the path that leads to deathlessness—Eternal Bliss, is the other.” DH 75.

Your Journey



WE ARE ALL ON A JOURNEY. Everyday you set off for somewhere, to do something, to see someone, to start one thing or finish another. A car ignition grinds and one person makes his way through snarled morning traffic.

Someone else is off doing an errand while yet another person flies across country on a business trip.

Georgia O’Keefe journeyed with brilliant colors over canvas. Neil Armstrong journeyed into outer space to go on to set foot on the moon. John Coltrane scored musical journeys. Bill Gates has ventured through high-tech, cyber space. But how many of you lead such exciting, headline grabbing lives? What is seen on the evening news or glimpsed on magazines covers while waiting in the checkout line at the grocery store are far removed from our humdrum lives. Meals are to be prepared. The trash needs to be taken out. The laundry has piled up. Children are to be picked up from school. Wanted is a quiet, secure life and to be happy, sighing as we turn the lights out to sleep.

The pieces are picked up after a divorce or death. There are accidents and illnesses, family conflicts and misunderstandings. Problems and upsets have a way of creeping up on us. Depressed, a Valium or Prozac is popped into the mouth. Diet pills are a quick fix for the flab around the waist. Liquor dulls the pain of a soured life.

You look around to see that you have arrived at the same old unhappy, dissatisfied ending.

I remember as a boy, my father crying when he received the wire that his mother had passed away in Spain. Here was this big man weeping into his hands. I didn't understand. What was death? Not understanding, you stare at yourself in the mirror, unable to imagine such an unlikely ending to you. "Is this it?" I thought. "Am I missing something here? Is this as good as it gets?" Who is prepared for the hurricane of relationships, work place politics and backstabbing, and life's ups and downs? My own confusion was great, my worries and doubts paralyzing. I joked how much nicer it would be to return to the womb.

A voice of unhappiness echoes. What's the right way? Where do you turn? What's next? Now is the time to pause and listen to that urgent voice. Your spiritual awakening, this desire for happiness, fulfillment, and understanding usually comes after repeated let-downs, a lesson hard learned, or a desire for a more meaningful life ("Loss through aging, loss through illness, loss of wealth, and loss of relatives..." MN 82). Your awakening isn't the same as rousing to an alarm clock in the morning. That is an awakening of sorts. To be 'awake' then is to try and understand and come to terms with all of the conflicting experiences that have made you the person you are. To be 'awake' is to ask questions, to wonder why, to look deeply at your motives, desires, and actions. To be 'awake' is to stir from an automatic tendency to plunge into situations and relationships and not just wait for the experience to sour or to be impatient for the thousandth time with a family member. To be 'awake' is to take responsibility for your well-being while going on to share in the well-being of others.

Here before you is a journey like none other. Are you ready to start? The way will open and brighten as you begin to move ahead. Others have gone before and have kindly marked the way, struggling with your very same questions and challenges. This is a shared journey of discovery and awakening. Happiness and understanding aren't far away.

| The Awakened One



Traveling the Northern Indian countryside, a tall, barefoot mendicant moves steadily in easy steps. Dressed in a saffron robe, he cradles a bowl in his hands. His eyes are fixed, looking out a few yards ahead.

Struck by his presence, villagers stop to question the composed monk.

“Sir, will you be a god?”

“No.”

“Sir, will you be a heavenly angel?”

“No.”

“Sir, will you be a spirit?”

“No.”

“Sir, will you be a human being?”

“No.”

“Then, sir, what indeed will you be?”

“...I, who was born in the world and grew up in the world, have transcended the world, and I live untouched by the world. Remember me as one who is Awakened.” AN 4, 36.

Siddhartha Gotama became known as ‘The Awakened One,’ the Buddha. His quest and searching fulfilled, he had realized the truth

about life. There were no claims of immortality or divine inspiration, which was a first in the history of spiritual practices and religions. His insights came from practical experience, from understanding himself and the world around him. You, too, can awaken from your doubts to come to terms with life and bring an end to your problems and upset.

Born about 2,500 years ago in a small kingdom of Northern India in what today would be considered Nepal, legends and stories have come out. From what is known, his mother died shortly after his birth. The young Prince lived a life of leisure and luxury (“I lived in refinement, utmost refinement...I had three palaces: one for the cold season, one for the hot season, one for the rainy season.” AN 3, 39).

But the lavish princely life was closer to being in prison rather than a joy. In a palace dominated by an overbearing father, his aunt cared for him. There was the family obligation and pressure on him to be next in line to the throne to rule.

Siddhartha went on to marry Princess Yasodhora and had one son, Rahula (To his credit, when the Buddha returned after his enlightenment, Rahula went to live and remain with his father as a monastic). Gnawing questions and an uneasiness set Siddhartha at the age of 29 on his journey (“Even though I was endowed with such fortune, such total refinement, the thought occurred to me...subject to aging...subject to illness...subject to death...” AN 3, 39).

Leaving the palace, he took on the life of a bodhisattva, someone on the path to spiritual awakening (“...having shaved off my hair and beard—though my parents wished otherwise and were grieving with tears on their faces—I put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness.” MN 36). Over the next six years, Siddhartha studied with meditation masters, soon equaling each until he had learned everything that he could from them. Still he felt that he hadn’t found the answers to his questions, to the dissatisfaction and unhappiness that touches all our lives. He went on to practice severe asceticism, eating only a handful of food each day (“My body became extremely emaciated...My spine stood out...My ribs jutted out...But with this racking practice of austerities I had not attained any superior human state, any distinction in knowledge of vision worthy of noble ones. Could there be another path to Awakening?” MN 36).

Weak and near death, Siddhartha made a dramatic turn around and realized the role of the Middle Way between indulging in sensual pleasures as well as the extremes of deprivation. He recalled a childhood memory of sitting in the shade under a roseapple tree. Here was a moment of calm and ease, free from desires and distractions (“Following on that memory, came the realization: ‘This is the path to enlightenment.’ ” MN 36).

He abandoned all austerities and then having regained his strength, Siddhartha made a vow to sit meditating until he was awakened and fully understood. Under the Bodhi tree, he meditated deeply and saw the ‘Threefold True Knowledge’ (MN 36): how habits and impulses took him from one life to the next and how each life played itself out, the causes leading to each and the effects; he saw how people’s actions led them to fortunate or unfortunate states; and he saw how suffering and problems came into existence and the way out from suffering and problems. “When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated...” MN 36.

In Siddhartha Gotama a profound understanding, a compassion and an awakening to the frail human role in the vast universe arose and came to fruition. Now awakened, seeing through ignorance, desires, hatred and confusion, the causes and effects of all suffering, the Buddha had come to the profound understanding of the true nature of life (or the Dharma): Four Noble Truths penetrate to the cause and origin of your problems, and the Noble Eightfold Path (the Middle Way of wise intention to freedom from selfish attitudes) as the release from your problems. Siddhartha had awakened, he was the Buddha (“My heart...was released, from...sensuality, from...becoming, from...ignorance” MN 36). All of us have the potential to awaken and appreciate the deeper dynamics at work in your life.

For the next 45 years the Buddha traveled Northern India by foot, tirelessly teaching and sharing his insights and compassion with everyone as well as establishing a monastic practice. His Great Passing came outside of the small village of Kusinara at the age of 80. The Buddha referred to his practice as ‘the Dharma’ and ‘the discipline.’ Once realized, your awareness of the Dharma (the Truth), brings you to experiencing insight and wisdom in your life. The

'discipline' are the many useful tools of practice (meditation, virtues, and understanding as well as precepts and the developed monastic order) which help transform habitual, impulsive behavior.

"A Perfect One is simply one that shows the way," the Buddha said of himself (MN 107). He wasn't an oracle spouting answers for the sake of answering questions. His every word tried to evoke understanding and spark realization; awareness for the source of suffering and the fulfillment to be free. Far from an intellectual or conceptual pursuit, the Buddha's wisdom is practical and skillful. Reading the many discourses, you will see for yourself how intuitive he was. He gave a Dharma Guarantee of sorts: "this Dharma is visible here and now, not subject to time, inviting all to come and see, pertinent, to be known by the wise for themselves." SN 1, 20.

Today the same compassionate message resounds. Buddhism (or perhaps more accurately it should be known as the Dharma) has reached around the globe. The tradition of the Buddha has been kept alive through three main lineages (Theravada, 'The Teaching of the Elders,' in Sri Lanka, Ceylon, Burma and Thailand; Mahayana, 'The Great Vehicle,' in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam; and Vajrayana, 'The Diamond Vehicle,' associated with Tibet). Each country has given its own cultural twists to Buddhism, but the original wisdom is closely followed.

Aware and Caring



Traveling from Chicago to San Francisco, you could go in any direction you wanted. Eventually you would get there. You could go east then cross the Atlantic Ocean, travel across Europe and Russia, down through China, take a freighter and finally dock in San Francisco. That is one option. When you are out

of touch and disconnected from the present moment the simple things in life become difficult and a struggle. You see, you have been wandering aimlessly. The present moment is your ready compass, always constant, showing the way like magnetic North.

The snag is that you race along the path ignoring the signs along the way, and suddenly find yourself stumbling and lost. Careless is what you are, allowing desire, anger and confusion to get the better of you. As you will come to know, there is a tug-of-war of forces compelling you to act and react.

But in order to awaken to connect with the present you first have to be aware and you have to care. Tired from a long day at work is an awareness of the present. Caring is a direct experience that you need to relax to get your energy back and settle your mind. Going to bed, you are aware of a present anger or upset you may be holding on to. Caring is a direct experience to be forgiving and to release the frustration or anxiety to go on to sleep peacefully. You are aware in the present that your spouse or friend (or yourself for that matter) isn't having a good day. Caring is the direct experience to have extra patience and understanding on your part. Of course, there are degrees and levels of awareness as you become more in tune with your life and surroundings. But everything on the Path to Peace slowly begins to reveal itself through your being present, aware and caring.

Awareness of your Breath and Breathing



Are you breathing? Of course I am breathing, you answer. I'd be turning blue if I wasn't! This is reassuring, but are you sure you are always breathing? There is an actual awareness and experience in taking a breath—air is drawn in,

filling the lungs as the heart beats to distribute oxygen, and the blood then circulates the oxygen through the body. You feel at ease as the breath is expelled. While you don't have to worry yourself about the intricate physiology, but know that, in fact, you are breathing. Realize, too, when you aren't breathing naturally but are tense and clenching. In today's hectic world people ignore the obvious—how they are feeling and something as simple and revealing as the breath. You may find it boring, but imagine if you suddenly stopped breathing. This is a sobering thought. Your breath is sensitive and measures your current state of well-being—stressed, happy, depressed, at ease or just all right.

Having awareness for your breath does make a difference in your life. You do breathe differently when you are attentive to the present. You can have awareness. There is understanding and personal insight into your life. Knowing your breath, you will have relief from your compelling habits and impulsive actions. Not realizing your breath, you then don't know what you are thinking and doing and, ultimately, where you are headed in life. The simple awareness to appreciating your breath will take you on a detour from the doctor's office and a medicine cabinet filled with prescriptions to settling down to sit quietly and reflect. There is awareness of two breaths passing through and absorbing your life—the Everyday Breath and the Insightful Breath.

Common and driven by habits and restlessness is the Everyday Breath, expressed through self promoted actions of desire, anger and confusion. Wanting, disliking and fantasies actually are a stranglehold, leaving you to finish the day exhausted and overwhelmed. This agitation then translates to nervousness and labored breathing; agitation and anger, a gasping for air. The Everyday Breath is a symptom and a reaction to your busy and stressed life.

In contrast, the Insightful Breath (referred to in the discourses as 'clear knowing') is easy, natural and flowing. Guided by your awareness and connected with your actions as a harmony with the present moment, the Insightful Breath starts in the lungs and diaphragm and in the lower abdomen as you relax and are aware of your breathing. As a gradual familiarity and appreciation, your life becomes clear and manageable when experienced through the

Insightful Breath. In Chapter Two the practice and experience of meditation is detailed.

Asking the Right Questions



One way of understanding the awakening experience and how to apply awareness to your life as well as caring, is for just a moment to take one giant step backwards. I asked myself, how did the Buddha make the great

leap of realization from being Prince Siddhartha, who had his own share of conflict and family problems as we all do, to go on to become Awakened? The details are there in the discourses (the Pali Canon) as the Buddha vividly recounts his personal struggle. Going back to before he took leave from his family and set off in renunciation from the worldly life, a questioning and a reflection began in Siddhartha by simply applying himself and asking the right questions. From the seed of asking the right questions comes the slow-to-germinate and eventually to blossom to awakening or Buddhahood, an understanding of your life.

The Buddha shares with us his own spiritual journey and how it all began—“...I thought: [while] an untaught ordinary man...subject to aging...subject to sickness...subject to death...it cannot befit me to be shocked, humiliated and disgusted on seeing another who is aged...who is sick...who is dead.” AN 3, 38. “Why, being myself subject to birth, aging, ailment, death, sorrow and defilement, do I seek after what is also subject to these things? Suppose, being myself subject to these things, seeing danger in them, I sought after the unborn, unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme surcease of bondage, nirvana [peace]?” MN 26.

Normal questioning has you seeking after impossible to fulfill and unrealistic expectations and desires—What do I have to do to earn more money...get another job...a new car...a better house...fine clothes...the woman or man of my dreams...be more like so and so...have more of this and less of that...get away from him or her? There are no reasonable answers to these questions. In the end you are left exhausted and dissatisfied.

When a wanderer approached the Buddha with useless questions on life and the universe, which had nothing to do with promoting awareness and understanding, the Buddha answered: “The speculative view...is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views. It is beset by suffering, by vexation, by despair, and by fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana. Seeing this danger, I do not take up any of these speculative views...Therefore, I say, relinquishing of all conceivings, all excogitations, all I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit, [the Buddha] is liberated through not clinging.” MN 72.

In my own life, I am taken aback by how ignorant, accident prone and mistaken I have been. But now I find myself smiling. I have direct experience of how right questioning leads to awareness and how caring has brought ease as well as understanding to my life. Fulfillment awaits each one of you as your spiritual journey ever so slowly comes into recognition.

Begin to ask questions about your life and know yourself better.

Life Practice

Your challenge is to slowly get to know your thoughts and actions. You are a better person for being aware. Allow yourself to care and be sensitive. Don't force yourself or feel you have to try to change, but realize and understand how experiences move you one way and another. Every moment is an opportunity of present minded awakening.

For example, driving, you can cut off other cars, using the car horn to sound your impatience, or allow others to pass ahead. Handing over something, you can push the article towards the person or gently hand it over. Answering the telephone you can be curt or sincerely greet the caller. Opening a door, you can burst in and rush by, or calmly enter. You can be selfish or share things with others.

Be aware and caring toward yourself. Often one's inner thought dialogue is often abusive, cruel and negative. If you are edgy or frustrated, take note of this Everyday Breath and tension. A message for awareness is flashing. Take a moment to compose yourself. Appreciate the Insightful Breath as you separate from the stress and your mind and breathing relaxes.

Slow down! For example, you spend a lot of time walking. But do you realize how you are moving and where you are going? Do you care? Feel how your body is actually stiff and tense with the anticipation of what you are planning and how you make yourself dizzy. Feel the Everyday Breath consuming you. Now walking with awareness, note the Insightful Breath recognition settling you down.

How about eating? Food is stuffed into your mouth, eating to hurry off somewhere. This isn't being aware. Gobs of food are difficult for the stomach to digest. Later, you suffer from ulcers and gastritis. Is this eating or being closer to a wild animal? Slow down and enjoy your meal.

Take opening a door, as another example. Keys are fumbled with, jabbed at the keyhole, the doorknob is twisted and turned, then the door is pushed open out of the way, the keys tossed on the counter as you begin to hurry around the house, looking for the next thing to keep you occupied. This is closer to charging like a bull. Care about the moment. Care about yourself. Caring is synonymous with the present moment.

You have started your journey on the Path to Peace. Ahead the trail is marked for you to follow.

Chapter Two

THE JOY OF MEDITATION— A Break From Your Habits



“Wisdom springs from meditation; without meditation wisdom wanes. Having Insight these two paths of progress and decline, let a man so conduct himself that his wisdom may increase.” DH 282. “...Meditate do not delay, or else you will regret it later. This is my message to you.” MN 8.

Your Next Step—Stopping!



There is a joke about the man who goes to the doctor with shoulder pain. “Every time I do this it hurts.” The man rolls his shoulder forward with difficulty. The doctor answers, “Well, stop doing that!” The simple cure for your problems and ailments is stopping. A student was

having problems with his practice and felt as though he had dug himself into a rut. “Stop digging,” his teacher retorted.

As boys and girls first learning to cross the street, we were taught to stop, look both ways, and wait until it was safe to cross. Stopping was all important back then and stopping is all important now. As simple as this may seem, stopping is where your understanding and direct life experience begins to connect and develop, and your awareness to expand. Learning anew how to look at yourself, you see the world as it is rather than what your desires, hatred and confusion distort your life to be.

Meditation



“...[The Buddha] seats himself cross-leg, sets his body erect, and establishes awareness in front of him. He does not occupy his mind with self-affliction, or the affliction of others, or the afflictions of both; he sits with his mind set on his own welfare, on the

welfare of others, and on the welfare of both, even on the welfare of the whole world.” MN 91.

Needing to be busy and occupied, I have friends and know of instances where people couldn't sit to meditate because they felt 'unnatural' or out of sync. It is sad to see how people are consumed and driven by their habit energies. One woman after her first meditation told how she wanted to scream and jump up and down during the sitting because her restlessness was so strong.

But little do you realize—you have been meditating your whole life. There isn't a day that goes by that you haven't meditated. What, me meditate? Go on! I don't meditate. Where would I get the time?

Sitting, stopped in bumper-to-bumper traffic, you stare off into space. You aren't paying attention to the news report from the radio. You have stopped thinking about the deadline at work, whose birthday is coming up next, or browsing the internet for flight deals. It isn't until the person behind you taps his horn that you are stirred back into the commuter grind. A flood of thinking comes back as you sigh and put the car into gear. Where were you? What happened in those moments when you drifted off? Believe it or not, you were meditating!

And what about those times in the shower with the hot water stinging your back as you stand there unwinding? Or the times you flopped down on the couch, spacing out for a moment. Waiting in the doctor's office, you look up surprised when your name is called. Where did the time go? Yes, these are all meditative moments as your self-absorption stopped and nothing demanding happened. It isn't too often in your busy life where nothing happens.

There is a great misconception about meditation. Thoughts of a long, white-haired guru sitting in a contorted position come to mind. There are fears of cult groups and brain washing. But meditation has nothing to do with any of these things and everything to do with just bringing a moment of quiet and stillness to your life. This is the 'work' of a spiritual practice; to be at ease, to heal and to understand. The Buddha was asked what could be gained by meditation. He answered nothing could be gained. The person must have looked

confused. The Buddha went on to explain, “Let me tell you what I lost through meditation: sickness, anger, depression, insecurity, the burden of old age, the fear of death. That is the good of meditation, which leads to Nirvana.”

The practice of meditation has transformed my own life to one of true joy, tranquility and patience. From ancient times, Bhaddiya also exclaimed his happiness during sitting meditation, “Oh, bliss! Oh, bliss!” The next day he was called before the Buddha to explain himself. “[before] I lived fearful, agitated, distrustful, and afraid. But now, revered sir, on going alone into the forest, to the foot of a tree or to an empty place [to meditate], I am fearless, unagitated, confident, and unafraid. I live unconcerned, unruffled, my needs satisfied...”

The Buddha summed it up, “In who exists no inner stirrings, having passed beyond being this or that, and for whom becoming and non-becoming are overcome, he is one—beyond fear, blissful, without grief...” UD 2, 10.

Sitting and Centering



If you have ever closely watched a hen rest, you will see that it makes a few turns in a small circle to find the ‘right spot’ to sit. At the beginning of your meditation you, too, should get comfortable and stretch to get all the kinks, tensions and stiffness out of your body. Stand and do a few stretches

before first sitting down.

There are a number of meditation positions. Find the one that is most comfortable for you—sitting on the floor on a cushion with your legs crossed (the Lotus position of legs wrapped up underneath each other can be too difficult and painful for beginners); sitting Indian style on a cushion with your legs open and crossed over at the ankles; on

a low styled meditation bench; sitting on a chair; or for those people with chronic back problems, they can lay on the floor.

Posture is important. Sitting too erect or rigid only brings added tension to your body and thoughts. Meditation should be comfortable. However, you need to notice if you are sitting slouched or leaning off to one side or the other as well as sitting hunched over. Loose-fitting clothing that doesn't pinch is preferable. Feel free to loosen your belt, undo a few buttons on your shirt or blouse and be relaxed.

Now using the technique of centering (access meditation), ease into meditation. Your daily activities have a way of charging your body and thoughts. Begin by sensing your forehead. Is it wrinkled and tense? Are your eyebrows arched with tension, narrowed and meeting at the middle? Relax and release. Are your lips tightly shut? Gently smile. Notice whether you are grinding your teeth. Relax your jaw, allowing it to drop and open naturally. Finally, lowering your chin slightly will take tension off your neck and make you feel more comfortable. Remember, smile as you breathe, but also smile from within your thoughts, too.

Feeling as though you are carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, you tend to react and unknowingly arch your back muscles. Allow your shoulders to relax and drop down. Let your arms hang freely at your sides. Smile and take a few deep breaths. Be happy and at ease.

Moving on down, feel your chest for any tightness or pressure. Try and relax to open this area. Breathe naturally feeling your lungs fill, the diaphragm expands then the lungs deflate as the chest drops and the breath is expelled.

Notice whether your abdominal muscles are clenched and tight. Think of the abdomen as something soft and flexible, allowing the muscles to drop and relax on their own.

Don't be in a hurry, centering can take anywhere between 10 to 20 minutes. Feel as you open the channels of awareness and sensitivity

to your meditation. Now 'centered,' you can continue with a longer and deeper meditation session.

The Observer



Established in awareness, mindful of your body, feelings, thoughts and the present moment, you are connected with meditation as an observer and witness of your detached and quieting Insightful Breath. Feel how the Centering Meditation has slowed down the Everyday drive of habits to always need

to be doing, thinking and discriminating. Your deepening meditation now takes you from Everyday reactions to an Insightful composure; from uncertainty, habit driven and carelessness to a personal appreciation and connection with your life.

With the gentle guidance of awareness as an observer, feel the flow of the present moment with your Insightful Breath being the only factor for your attention. You are sensitive and attentive rather than reacting and impulsive. Should an Everyday distraction creep in, notice how the corresponding tension and pressure is felt in and around your forehead as well as the back of your eyes. Begin to note these subtle signs of strain in you.

As an observer you view, discern, and are caring. Feel the unattached perspective of being a witness. Like viewing a work of art in a museum, you appreciate the overall picture of breath, body, senses and mind. Note the joy of meditating as you separate from longstanding Everyday habits and impulses. Having awareness and observing, you are sensitive and open to the moment (the breath, feelings or thought) rather than judging, criticizing or repressing.

As a witness and connecting to the Insightful breath, acknowledge the softening of self-promoted thinking and pressured concentration.

Follow the open moment as it is without labeling or identifying. Feel the difference to be a witness and observer, having awareness of the present moment of feelings, sensations and thoughts. Relax and allow yourself to ease into the opening of your open mind as an observer. Watching, seeing, feeling, I am a witness. I see my life from another perspective and am sensitive to what's happening. I'm not reacting automatically. I find myself settling down. Now continue following your breath.

The Breath



As the waves of sensation pass, acknowledge your breath. No two breaths are the same. Sometimes your shoulders will arch up with a full breath, other times the breath comes from deeper in the abdomen. Your nostrils flare slightly as a bellows-like effect on the diaphragm as it takes in the oxygen, the heart

beats, blood pulses and circulates, then the air is expelled. There is a lot going on with one simple breath. You are a witness and aware in the present moment.

Your breath is a sensitive gauge, revealing the extremes of the Everyday Breath and the calm of the Insightful Breath. Note if your attention is distracted and careless as Everyday pressures bring tension to your face, neck, shoulders, and a stressed quality to the breath. You only have to observe and acknowledge the Insightful Breath, aware and disconnecting from your habits.

Observing the breath naturally leads to a calm body, which leads to a quieting mind. Through the presence of the present, you perceive and deepen the awareness of the Insightful Breath. Slowly you separate from your all consuming self-promoted tendencies. The Everyday Breath of habit energies begins to settle down.

I'm aware of the different qualities in my breath. I sense my mood swings from Everyday stress and tension to an experienced ease. I can get caught up in my desires and worries, or relax and release them. Take your time to become familiar with the many manifestations of both the Everyday and the Insightful Breath; absorbed, stressed and conflicted, and the gradual caring approach of awareness.

The Body and Sensations



Now continue as an observer, acknowledging the pressures or tensions within and passing over your body. If your shoulders are hunched over try to relax and release the stress in them. Are your eyes squinting at the corners, forehead wrinkled with pressure, throat tight or torso tense? Recognize the

Everyday annoyance through your body's sensations.

Don't 'think,' but investigate and observe, noting the internal rhythms and feelings. There is a pressure in my leg, my attention has wandered away from the breath, but now I relax to the moment. I have an urge to move but I sit with the impulse without giving in. Slowly I am calming down. Go deeper in the awareness, noting the Everyday charged feelings beginning to soften, at ease and release through the Insightful Breath. Recognizing and exploring each feeling and sensation of passing energy, is an empowering personal discovery. More than what Everyday habits have made you, you are relating to the body through the calm awareness of Insight.

I feel the discomfort. I note my impulse to want to react and be rid of the pain in my leg or back, or move to scratch an itch. With my Insightful Breath, I exhale and release Everyday pressures. Having awareness leads to knowing and understanding; habits lead to annoyance and stress. Take your time to sit with and explore your body's feelings and sensations.

The Insight Mind



Disturbed and challenging thoughts can at times overwhelm your mind and bring pressure and tension to the body, making you feel all the more uncomfortable and restless. Here you are experiencing the Everyday Breath of charged habits. Note as you physically recoil, how your mind actually

shrinks and your concentration narrows and is strained. A thought is a pinpointed experience bearing down to concentrate as a response to an action, moment or experience. Feel how your Everyday attention escalates to judge. Concentration becomes tense as you go on to judge the thought with strain being felt at the forehead as well as behind your eyes.

With the awareness of an observer, relax your attention and allow the grasp of concentration to relax. An image slowly fading, feel as you allow the thought to soften and disappear on its own; the Everyday Breath giving way to the Insightful Breath dispersing over and through your body. There is a weightlessness and effortlessness to your attention, flowing and open rather than strained and narrow. As an observer you recognize and connect to this Insight experience—the breath, body and mind through a calm, open attention. I feel how my mind has relaxed. I see how I get caught up and stress suffocates me. I realize the difference to be an observer and how Everyday pressures have left me tied up in knots. Now I have awareness and an Insight appreciation and relation for myself. Not only quick to respond and impulsive, but you begin to know and cultivate patience for yourself. This meditative timeout is allowing you to know ease, joy and have a clear appreciation for your life.

Survival Meditation...Survival Practice



Listening to and having observed people now at temples or during retreats for a few years, there is a symptom called ‘survival practice.’ This is where someone meditates only when he or she feels the urge because they are hurting, depressed or upset. Meditation serves as a band-

aid to mask deeper problems. It is good that they meditate, but this type of haphazard practice will never allow for true awareness and Insight to be realized.

Weeks will go by before you again see the person. They speak of going through some challenging times (‘busy’ is how they refer to it) and how they have been meditating for years and yet because of not keeping a regular practice they always fall back, victim to weaknesses and overwhelmed by habits. This is like the person who joins a gym, goes for about a month and then gives up. Similarly, if you were going to learn to play the piano, practicing now and again wouldn’t do much. Consistency and motivation are crucial in a happy, successful, meditation practice and for your spiritual well-being. No one can do it for you. It all comes down to your own initiative. (“He keeps his persistence aroused for abandoning unskillful mental qualities [desire, anger and confusion]... He is steadfast, solid in his effort...leading to the right ending of stress.” AN 5, 53). For many, the support of a meditation group or local temple is helpful. You will share in the enthusiasm and support of fellow practitioners as well as learn from sharing personal experiences.

As you will come to know in future chapters, there are deepening insights and realizations to come from meditation. For now you will continue with these basic techniques and awareness. Your

meditation practice is a benefit to other areas of your life and can be expanded to when eating as well as when you walk.

Eating Meditation



“Good Gotama [The Buddha’s family name.] chews the food in the mouth two or three times and does not swallow unbroken particles, does not keep any particles in the mouth, when the next mouthful is taken. Good Gotama partakes food conscious of the taste, yet

not greedy for tastes. Considering eight things good Gotama partakes food not for play, intoxication or adornment. He partakes food to support the body, without greed for tastes, thinking I should make an end of earlier unpleasant feelings, and not arouse new, just the right amount for a pleasant abiding, without faults. After partaking food, accepting water in the bowl does not bend, raise or shake it, accepts the right amount of water. Washing the bowl does not make a sound, does not turn the bowl about, or put it on the ground to wash. With the water in the bowl he washes his fingers and with the fingers washes the bowl and throws the water not too far or too close without sprinkling it everywhere. After partaking food, he places the bowl on the ground, not too far nor too close, thinking may the bowl be of no disturbances, does not protect it too long. After the meal is over he sits silently for some time, not neglectful of a thanksgiving. When he gives the thanksgiving, it is not to debase that food or to desire some other food. It is an all round teaching, with advice, incitement, and to make the hearts light. After the thanksgiving, he gets up and goes away, not too fast, nor too slowly and not as though were relieved.” MN 91.

All too often eating takes place as so much food gobbled down without appreciating, smelling or tasting what is being eaten—all too eager to get back to work, the TV or simply being absentminded. Similar to sitting meditation, eating meditation is best experienced when possible as a moment of silence and a timeout from all your rushing around.

While it may not be possible to eat all of your meals in perfect silence and away from every distraction, while at home you certainly have control of the environment. You don't need the television blaring from the front room, the agitation translating over to your eating as you poke, stab, scoop up and stuff food into your mouth. To be fair and allow for family conversation, begin a meal with one to five minutes of eating in silence and then go into 'crunchy' meditation of talking softly with your spouse and children. Try and direct your conversations to people only in the immediate room.

A good way to begin a meal is to say a few words of grace and appreciation for the food before you.

May this food nourish my body and further my compassion.

May those people without food be nourished.

May those people without clothing be protected.

May those people without a home have shelter.

And may those people who are sick and diseased, may they be cared for and may they be cured.

Look at the food on your plate. What do you see there before you? What are you about to eat for breakfast—oatmeal or fruit? Does the food have a scent? Do you feel warmth from the plate? Go ahead and begin to eat.

Feel as your arm reaches out and then your hand takes hold of the cool utensil. Curving your wrist and fingers, easily take a spoonful of oatmeal or cereal, feeling the weight of the food on the spoon. Slowly bring the spoon up towards your mouth. At this moment as you are about to place the food in your mouth, drawing in a breath (Remember, you do breathe as you eat!). Feel as your lips go on to part and how the mouth opens. The jaw drops and the tongue pulls back slightly, resting at the bottom of the mouth. The spoon slides

into your mouth as the silverware touches your tongue and the warm oatmeal the roof of your mouth. Your mouth then closes around the food as the spoon is slid out through your closing lips. The thick texture of warmly cooked, cinnamon-flavored oatmeal, sprinkled with raisins as well as the sweetness of honey, is absorbed by your taste buds. The tongue moves forward and back as your teeth gently break down the oatmeal and raisins until mashed and fine enough to swallow. Your throat opens fully and the chewed food then passes down through the contracting throat muscles. The food then warmly fills your stomach. This is eating with Insight: having awareness and caring.

You drink water, tea, coffee or juice with a meal. Consciously reach for the glass of water, feel its weight and how you bring it up to your mouth and there the glass gently touches your lips. You tilt the glass up, head back, part your lips slightly and the water flows slowly into your mouth. Feel the coolness of the water and how it washes away the taste of the food. You gulp the water and it passes through the throat and on down into the stomach. You can actually feel your stomach expanding with the addition of water. This is having awareness while drinking water.

Realistically, not all your meals or your snacks can be eaten at a leisurely pace. There are times while working through your lunch hour that you eat a sandwich at your desk while typing at the computer. But you should try taking one bite at a time from the sandwich, instilling bursts of awareness into all your moments. You are what you think and do. With each inattentive bite, you stoke your body with Everyday energies of desire, anger and confusion. With awareness meals become a joyful experience of calmly eating and easy digestion.

Walking Meditation



“[The Buddha] always starts to walk with the right foot, placing the foot not too far nor too close. Does not walk too fast nor too slowly, the knees do not brush each other when walking, nor do the ankles and thighs. When walking his thighs do not writhe, bend or raise, only the

lower body moves without a bodily effort. When looking he turns the whole body. He does not look up or down and does not walk with inquisitive eyes. ...” MN 91.

After breathing and thinking, the most common action of your life is walking. You have to will yourself to walk. If you walk with anger, you are angry. Walking with desire, you are desirous. Marching to a fantasy, you are fantasizing. Often arriving in a flurry, you are closer to the running of the bulls at Pamplona. As you begin walking meditation, you will be amazed to feel the many muscles involved in taking a step and the actual rhythm to walk.

Walking meditation can be done in a backyard, patio area, large front room or hallway, or outdoors in a park or any open setting. Choose a clear, level distance of 20-25 feet. Before starting, stop to center yourself, taking a few deep breaths to connect with the moment then slowly begin to walk at a normal pace. Don't forget to note your breath as you walk and to be aware of Everyday breath distractions.

From the buttocks stretches all the connecting muscles which extend down the legs and allows for movement. Don't be embarrassed or think it strange, but note whether your butt is tight and stiff. Yes, the butt reflects your feelings, sensations and thoughts. There's a laugh, but it is true.

As you walk naturally release the tension carried through your abdomen, extending down into the buttocks and through your legs. You have been clinging and grasping, attached and pressured by Everyday tensions. It feels in part like a melting or an evaporation as the tension and pressure is released out through your steps. This is your Insightful Breath awareness now emerging. You can imagine holes at the bottom of your feet and any frustration or anxiety exiting through them.

Always moving from one place to another, you can incorporate walking meditation as you go back and forth to the photocopy machine, walk to the bathroom, to the break room, walk from your car into the office building, walking up and down a stairway or to take out the garbage. The awareness at the center of meditation is connected to all of your life.

Life Practice

You aren't alone. In every major city meditation groups are meeting, giving guidance and support to one another as friends and practitioners. Check the Yellow Pages Phone Book under 'Churches (Buddhist)' for a location near you.

But there is always some place to be found for a quiet moment of meditation; a bench under a tree at the college campus, in an open patio or courtyard, at a public park or in a quiet room at home. 15 to 30 minutes or longer of sitting meditation will settle and revive you. Whatever time allows, you will be better for sitting.

Try to make some time before you rush off to work in the morning or after an especially difficult day. Feel how the stress from the day lifts. Note all the emotional baggage and stress you tend to carry around all day with you, even to bed (after all, where do you think nightmares come from!). Sense what it is like to let go of all the longstanding desires and worries festering inside of you and to actually rest for a moment. All the stressful energy simply melts away.

An 'enemy' of meditation is sleepiness or drowsiness. As your body relaxes, the temptation to nod off can creep in. You can meditate with

your eyes open, staring down at a spot on the floor (light acts as a stimulus to help keep you awake). Get up and take a short walk to elevate your energy. However, your body may very well be telling you that it needs a short nap or break, but don't give in every time. There are many distractions and temptations trying to pull you away from meditating. Watch out for laziness, too. You can skip a meditation, but realize the carrying of leftover inside of you. Consider everything a part of your spiritual practice, including the down times as you apply awareness.

Try setting up a spiritual room or practice corner in your home or apartment. A small altar with a Buddha statue, flowers and a place to burn incense helps create a comfortable setting. Do whatever it takes to bring enthusiasm and joy to your practice.

Everything about your life can be a meditative joy of awareness. When you are at a mall, you don't have to feel overwhelmed by the crowds. Walk calmly, enjoying yourself. Other people may be in a hurry but you walk effortlessly. Stuck in traffic, put the car in park, take your foot off the brake and drop your hands at your sides. Take a deep breath and exhale all the stress building up in you. You can pleasantly do chores and make them a joyful moment rather than gritting your teeth and fighting with yourself to finish things.

While eating, enjoy your food. Know what you are eating, its taste and texture. Feel how you chew, swallow and how the meal enters your stomach. Watch for your thoughts drifting away. Gently smile and direct yourself back to eating. Don't rush off when you do finish but feel the digestive process.

Be careful of burnout. Each one of us needs to observe him or herself for stress, unhappiness or laziness. Be a friend to yourself in your practice. Don't corner or limit yourself into do's and don'ts. Notice how you knot up whenever anger, frustration, and hurry creep into your life. And notice, too, what it is like to release the tension and frustration. Be patient with yourself and others. Feel what it is like not to have an agenda. Here you are aware and caring.

Meditation is a realized understanding of Insight and peace in your life.

Chapter Three

LOVING-KINDNESS— Compassion for One's Self...Compassion for the World



“I call on you to stop! Can you not hear me, monk? Stop...Stop!”

Angulimala, the known murderer, was running, approaching the Buddha from behind. The Buddha continued walking slowly, looking straight ahead. Again, Angulimala called out. The Buddha walked

on. Breathless, Angulimala caught up to the Buddha. They stopped and looked at each other.

“I ordered you to stop.” Angulimala gasped for air. He had a long knife slung to his belt. Around his neck was a grotesque garland of fingers taken from each of his murder victims. “I ordered you to stop and yet you continued.”

The Buddha looked into Angulimala's eyes then spoke in an even voice. “I have stopped my running, Angulimala, have you stopped yours? Angulimala, I have stopped forever. I abstain from violence towards living beings. But you have no restraint towards things that live. This is why I have stopped running and you have not stopped running...”

They stared at each other. Angulimala shuddered then dropped to his knees and wept at the Buddha's feet. MN 86.

“Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law.” DH 5.

Opening to Loving-Kindness



Things are going well in your life. You are enthusiastic about the journey and your practice. Then all at once you feel cold. You glance over your shoulder. The wind picks up. A storm is approaching, some trouble or difficulty. Now you are

frightened and uncertain. How do you handle the problem?

Do you fight, name call, seek revenge, hate, cry, run away, or ignore the situation or person? This is what you have always done. Loving-kindness is a true potential to help deal with difficult situations and persons, challenges, and overcome hardships, cruelty and hatred.

There are countless long enduring sitters, others who fast, while others who can expound discourses and texts at great length. But where is their compassion? Where are gratitude and generosity? Where are forgiveness and fellowship? Where are patience and caring? The awareness of loving-kindness is a defining experience for all of us.

On the first day of a loving-kindness seminar I attended some years back, no sooner had the facilitator started her introduction, when one apprehensive man interrupted. Unsettled, he spoke of his confusion and hesitance about loving-kindness. He didn't know what he was doing at the workshop. The facilitator was confident and not at all unnerved by the man. Since that day, I have always wondered what I would say to anyone who was as equally dubious and resistant about loving-kindness.

It is normal to react with doubt and even feel the opposite, threatened and revulsion, to anything that is new and different in your life. If someone only knows despair, has been rebuffed, or comes from a history of abuse, how else can they be expected to react to the 'novelty' of loving-kindness? You need a moment to get used to your new surroundings.

Your spiritual journey embraces a threefold awareness. Nourished first by the awareness of meditation, you slow down your over reactive, impulsive nature to be busy. Second, once slowing down, you then have the direct and personal experience of your impulsive nature to understand how you are always driven and busy with thoughts and activities. Finally, your budding awakening through awareness and caring naturally leads to loving-kindness and compassion which help resolve, transform, and bring peace to your life. You now have the sensitivity and appreciation to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion.

Let's look at a true life-experience from the Buddha and how he shared loving-kindness.

Angulimala, the Converted Murderer



Of all the Buddha's encounters, his meeting with Angulimala quoted at the beginning, is the most revealing and perhaps the most 'awakening' or helpful of the Buddha's experiences for you to know and apply to your life. The confrontation is a great compassionate moment. Here in this life-threatening situation, the Buddha has shared his insight, shown unconditional love and compassion, offered healing, acted without prejudice, was without fear and dealt without harming.

What did the Buddha mean by his cryptic remark to Angulimala, "I have stopped my running, have you stopped yours?" What running was the Buddha referring to? The running and domination of your habits and impulses, which have contributed to an idea of self and ego; the never-ending 'running' or 'desire' within one which is the cause for your being unsettled and having problems. The Buddha had finished with his 'running' (his struggles with selfish habits and impulses) and boldly brought out to Angulimala his own wild and murderous actions. Our own histories have made us victims, cornered us into a never-ending cycle of blind and harmful actions. Angulimala's case is but an extreme example. We aren't as free as we think we are.

The Buddha saw through the sheer, psychological veil and understood the anger and bitterness not of Angulimala, 'the murderer,' but of a man made victim from a cruel background. What Angulimala did was wrong, but he was wronged into his desperate acts. This isn't about trying to make excuses for villains and barbarous acts or forgetting the victims, but trying to bring

understanding and compassion to our consciousness. Under different conditions and influences, Angulimala would have turned out to be a gentle and responsible man.

The Buddha exemplified unconditional love and compassion. The selfish view only for ourselves separates us from the world and stops us from connecting and feeling loving-kindness. Filled with longstanding prejudice, passing verdicts and self-serving motives, we strangle our compassion. Angulimala was accepted as he was, not for what he wasn't or for what he was lacking. This is having the compassion to see and understand beyond a narrow scope of judgments and bias.

If you step on a flower, will it grow and blossom? The flower will try but if each day it is stepped on, finally it will wither and die. In a sense, this is what happened to Angulimala. We all start with the potential to be a flower, but somewhere along the way, we are stepped on, abused and neglected. While a flower shrivels up and dies, a human becomes angry, bitter and potentially violent. The Buddha shared non-harming. We don't return violence with violence, seek revenge or wish suffering. From our thoughts and actions, there is only good will.

Here, for the first time in history, a known murderer and criminal was accepted into a spiritual practice or religious setting. However, this didn't happen without repercussions. A search party was formed by King Kosala to track down Angulimala and bring him to justice. Some time later the search party encountered the Buddha and a group of monks on alms round. The Buddha asked what was happening.

"We search for the murderer, Angulimala," the King explained.

"But suppose," the Buddha went on to ask, "you were to see Angulimala with his head shaved, wearing the yellow robes, having left his past life and finished with killing, what then would you do?"

"I would worship him then," said King Kosala.

The Buddha called Angulimala to step forward from the ranks of the other monks. The King and his troops were startled to see the

murderer now a monk. He was left in the Buddha's charge. But things for Angulimala weren't so easily settled as he was beaten and bloodied by villagers still angry for his past violence. The newly ordained monk accepted the consequences without hatred or bitterness. Even the Buddha was impressed with Angulimala's dramatic turn-around and his dedication to practice. If generosity, loving-kindness and compassion could change Angulimala, couldn't understanding and caring transform the world's suffering and hatred?

Mike Tyson, the often-in-trouble boxer, coming from a broken home and a background of poverty, learned to survive by his fists and got by the best he could on the tough streets of Brooklyn and New York. With such a harsh start in life, his opportunities were few. The influences making his persona were hardly a role model for success.

Staying at a friend's ranch in the San Joaquin Valley, I was witness to a remarkable transformation. One day a large dog roamed by the property. Eventually it was welcomed on to the ranch and fed near the house. The dog growled, menaced and lunged to attack.

Over a period of years, Moose (as the dog was named for its size) went from a snarling, biting beast to a gentle, fun-loving puppy. In the beginning whenever the dog was on edge and wanting to bite he was isolated and reprimanded. Then over time, with socializing and hearing kind voices, receiving the basic necessities of food and shelter which every creature needs, Moose went on to become the darling of the ranch. I was amazed.

Loving-kindness can calm savage creatures and transform hardened people. They simply haven't known or had other options available to them. Consider how fortunate you are to now have awareness and caring which allows for understanding and choices in your life. In a civilized society we don't accept bad behavior, we offer compassion.

Gratitude



A first step towards a full embracing, awareness and compassion is gratitude. Begin by showing gratitude for everything that you already have. There is gratitude for your many friends and your family who care and help you, (despite the personal conflicts that do crop up from time-to-time). There is gratitude for the warm meal nourishing your body while

there are so many people without food. Gratitude is realized for the clothing protecting you, and for medicine that heals you. On this basic level we are all truly fulfilled.

Your morning orange juice or the cup of coffee is made available because of farmers and field workers (not to mention nature). The newspaper funnies you glance over have been made available by people working long hours at a printing press. Smelly trash and waste is taken away by refuse collectors. You drive off to work because of the efforts of the assembly line, the mechanic and the people maintaining the roads. The bus driver more often than not, arrives on time and gets you to work. The copy machine technician services the machine on the blink. The school nurse tends to your feverish children. The bag boy helps with your groceries. The postal worker delivers your correspondence. The gardener and the roofer provide their services. Having gratitude makes a difference.

Loving-Kindness Meditation



As with all meditations, you sit and get a feel for the moment: where you are, body sensations, what you are thinking, and a brief body scan, relaxing any physical pressures and releasing mental tensions. Take three or four deep breaths to connect you in the present with your breath and body.

Before you can ever begin to share loving-kindness, goodwill and generosity, you must know peace within yourself. Otherwise you really are offering a less than a complete and honest compassion. There is a need for healing and a rightful closure to the chapters of suffering in your life. Begin by understanding and acknowledging your own pain and torment.

I have been hurt, wounded, lied to and betrayed. Yes, it happens to everyone. I feel my sorrows and all the pain, the many let downs, rejections and shortcomings. There has been confusion and anger over the years. But all along, what I have really been doing is hating myself and being my own worst enemy. I see how I have been holding on to all my upsets and torments.

May I forgive and let go of my anger and bitterness. It has to end sometime, somehow. Otherwise I only bring more suffering to myself. I must forgive in order to live in peace. May there finally be forgiveness and acceptance. I finally understand my sorrow and how it has affected me.

I know my father neglected me. My mother was very severe and showed me little love. My lover or mate went on to betray me. I understand and know my pain. May I stop tormenting myself and let go of my bitterness. I can be a friend to myself. Happiness and well-being can be a part of my life.

May I forgive myself, too. I don't have to suffer. What happened was a long time ago. There is no use whipping myself. What good does picking at old wounds do? May I be happy. May I release my sorrows. Try to feel patience, acceptance and understanding to whatever degree you are capable of and know that caring and compassion are elements within you needing nurturing.

As a final sharing, try to extend loving-kindness, well wishes, concern, and sympathy to those people who are difficult to deal with and with whom you regularly show impatience.

I know that things haven't always been good between us. We have had some friction in the past but right now I hope things are going well for you. I hope that your problems go on to work themselves out. I hope you can forgive me and have patience for me. I have come to better understand my shortcomings and I hope you can, too. I understand you better after knowing my own anger and upset. Sometimes I am not the easiest person to get along with and ask for your understanding and support. Let's meet half way.

One way of establishing a deeper contact with difficult people is to refer to the two of you together in the third person plural—'we.' The thoughts for each person are made more real. Using 'we,' no longer is the other person distant or anonymous, but we have actually joined with them in forgiveness and healing. A shared moment of compassion opens us to other people and their personal situations.

It can be argued that when all has been said and done that the other person may still remain difficult. Of what use is your loving-kindness meditation? In the end, you have changed and grown. How could you go back to being the bitter, angry, vindictive person of yesterday? You have opened yourself to compassion and peace. Not everything is suffering and anger. In the least you offer non-harming to a challenging person or aggressor, offering good intentions and accountability for your actions. If the other person chooses to hold a grudge then they must live with themselves. There is sympathy for everyone's suffering, offering blessings and compassion to their tormented-plagued lives. The decisive question is "where is my compassion?"

As you have witnessed, loving-kindness brings to the forefront your true humanity; all your wrinkles and scars as well as your most noble attributes. A nurturing and open communication with yourself and for others develops. You come to see people as friends rather than the enemy or as a threat. Loving-kindness isn't about being Mary Poppins, but is a positive option rather than dishing out anger and blame. Adding a short loving-kindness moment to your regular meditation practice helps establish your compassionate nature. Some of the rewards of loving-kindness are restful sleep, waking easier, being endeared and closer to others, a sharper mind and dying unconfused and at peace. Hostility and bitterness can be transformed to a generous and caring person.

Inner Child Meditation



Within each of us is an inner child that consists of: all of our memories and experiences; all the joy as well as the many tears shed, fears of dark rooms or spiders and, unfortunately, sometimes deep trauma. Most people have had a happy childhood. The memories of birthday parties, special visits with grandparents, and weekend excursions made for a healthy growing-up. But there are other people who haven't been as fortunate. There may have been abusive or neglectful parents, loud fighting and divorce, a nightmare of sexual abuse, or just not enough love (our parents are a product of their own unfortunate childhoods). You carry these early torments around with you. They are real. You couldn't be someone else. But you can bring understanding, compassion and healing to your inner child.

Try smiling in awareness at your inner child—a gentle, caring smile. Not trying to cover up any cruelty, but a smile which acknowledges and appreciates yourself as a younger person in a friendly and positive way. Aware and caring, you are able to acknowledge that

you have unresolved issues. But how many troubled people are unable to admit their past? They lash out projecting the cruelty and pain of their inner child on to everyone they come in contact with.

Continue smiling gently, understanding your inner child, knowing that you have deep wounds and emotional scars. I have come to visit with you, my friend. I understand that you are hurt. Now together we can understand.

I am truly sorry that you have suffered and that things haven't always been well for you. Yes, you were neglected. Yes, you were abused. The suffering was horrible all those many years. How could it have happened—to me...to me! I see all the cruelty. I see the pain. I embrace you. You aren't alone. There has been a lot of heartache, but can we try to move away from it? Try and feel that not everything is suffering. Look around you. Don't be scared. Not everything is trying to hurt you. I am here with you, my inner child. I have come as a friend. I am older now and though I still have pain, we can get to know each other and see that we aren't alone. I smile with you here, my friend. You aren't alone.

Smile now in forgiveness. I see how my past has brought me pain and suffering here today. I forgive you, my past, my inner child. I know that it wasn't your fault. You are innocent. I see the anger I have been holding onto from vicious parents. They made me the bitter person I now am, but I can't continue living this way. I am only hurting myself. I forgive you, mother and father, for bringing me pain and suffering. You did nothing wrong, my friend. You are a survivor.

Smile now through your tears, should you be crying. It is all right to cry. You have understood the pain and trauma, bringing healing and forgiveness to yourself. Now go on and try to live a happy life. Be patient and forgiving as memories and flashbacks erupt from time-to-time. You have touched sympathy and love for yourself. You can smile and know peace.

What is Love?



Loving-kindness leads us to ask, what is love and what role does affection and caring play in your spiritual awakening? Love is certainly one of the most compelling feelings and motives in being human. From birth, love is craved and reached out for. A mother's and father's love is nourishing. Infants without love suffer emotional damage. In one

respect, everything you do, your relationships and experiences with others, is a call to know love. However, love is often confused with sex, self-fulfillment, or expressed as a control.

Where is the magic sung about in the Oscar-Hammerstein lyric, 'Some Enchanted Evening'—"Some enchanted evening you will see a stranger across a crowded room?" These encounters of dazzling romance have less to do with love and more to do with desire. The next time you see someone who strikes you as attractive, honestly ask yourself why? Is it because he or she fits your idea of beauty (which is part cultural as well as upbringing)? Does he or she remind you of someone or an affair from the past? Do you like his or her smile, perfume or cologne, the clothes they wear? Is their voice soothing? Or on a much deeper level, not having received enough attention or love in your life, do you crave that 'enchanted' person to fill a void for what is lacking in your own life? These are tough questions. Facing them head on leads towards understanding and opens to sincere compassion rather than fulfilling passions. Already, if you are practicing meditation on a regular basis, your habits and impulses have slowed down enough to become clearer as to why you act the way you do. Now love, too, is exposed and understood.

Feel the desire to have or to be needed, and how it escalates to a driving sexual urge. You 'see' someone. Your eye senses come into focus and go from 'seeing' to 'liking', and then just as quickly escalate to 'craving,' and explode to outright 'sexual desire,' needing to possess the other person you see across a crowded room.

Most people aren't honest with themselves, preferring to look the other way, falling into and out of relationships without understanding why. But again, everything is a part of your spiritual awakening, even the lows of a break up, a nasty divorce, or the short-lived affair. Why can't I find love? What is wrong with me? Why do I always seem to attract the wrong kind of problem-filled lovers who turn out to be just like all the other losers before? Why can't I be alone for one night instead of running off with the first person that comes my way? Everyone else is married with children, what is wrong with me? Well, I guess I just better settle down with the next person who comes along. What can I get out of this person? What are they going to do for me?

Love (or the pretending of love!) has many disguised forms. There is Romantic Love, which is a fantasy and delusion of not truly seeing people for who and what they are. This is all about a 'fireworks show' of passion. There is Sexual Love, which satisfies urges and pleasure-seeking but remains only on a physical, gratifying level while the overall relationship suffers or probably never existed except in bed. There is the Wounded Heart Love, which calls and craves for healing from childhood needs or family conflicts; falling in love an attempt at covering up the past. And there is Possessive Love, which is insecure and seeks to control and suffocate rather than communicate.

Where does all this leave us? Can there be love? Does it even exist? Fortunately, there are more rewarding and truthful relationships. You now understand what has compelled you to run after someone. You aren't out to deceive or hurt anyone, least of all yourself.

Once and for all, try and understand that to love and to share compassion, doesn't mean you have to yearn on a sexual level. But on the contrary, love means to see the other person for who they are. You can care for their safety, well being, and good fortune without thinking that you have to bed them and live happily ever after in courtships and domesticity. Is there a greater love than this? No between-the-sheets lover could ever be so generous, noble or caring. No rendezvous could be as fulfilling as someone who wants the best

for you. This is love as understanding and compassion. This is love without judgments or expectations; a love that is unconditional and based on awareness and good will.

We Are the Compassionate Ones



Here, then, is the challenge for greater understanding. Do you sit and reserve your practice only for the meditation cushion? Is your understanding only an intellectual deception? Of course, problems and difficulties will come your way and are a part of life, but awareness and caring have naturally lead you to transcend these moments with loving-kindness and compassion. This is the springboard to a deepening spiritual practice. Here you cross over from being a hotheaded, impatient person to being a 'compassionate one.'

Daily, there are drivers who cut you off on the freeway. Someone speaks rudely. Small mindedness is directed at you from a co-worker. A family member's or friend's words are wounding. You lash out ignorantly without understanding or having awareness and caring. The act of compassion comes from an awakened and caring person, who offers good will and concern. Loving-kindness is the natural next step of development and personal experience in your spiritual journey.

Unfortunately, loving-kindness is at times seen as something frivolous, romantic, and tied to emotions. Even a few senior monastics misunderstand and look down upon the practice as petty and sentimental. On the contrary, loving-kindness sensitively connects you to an awareness and appreciation with long-ignored personal issues, problems and habitual, destructive patterns of living. A dialogue of forgiveness, acceptance and understanding develops rather than hatred, fear or bitterness. The rewards of loving-kindness have a more complete effect as a spiritual tool than years of pain-

staking sacrifice and withdrawn practice. Once I was challenged by a hard-driven monk to do 1,000 prostrations. I turned to him and said I would do them if he would chant the Discourse on Loving-Kindness 1,000 times. There is already too much pain in the world. Compassion is needed.

When you look deeply into your suffering it is done with the awareness and caring of loving-kindness to understand, heal and transform the pain, anger or upset. This is having true awareness. Wisdom and understanding without loving-kindness is still being ignorant and careless to a degree.

Life Practice

Make a vow as you wake each day that you will offer kindness and generosity, share and do favors, and have patience with others. This includes yourself.

Smile more, smile much more. Smile as things get hectic around the office. Have humor and be light hearted instead of tense and edgy. Don't allow pressures to overwhelm you, but offer the situation or the other person a smile. An air of patience and tolerance is infused. Smiling, you radiate confidence, trust, happiness, kindness and generosity.

If you feel the urge to snap back at someone or become angry, step away from the situation. Try having the patience to hear the other person out without taking what is being said as a personal attack ("Knowing that the other person is angry, one who remains mindful and calm acts for his own best interest and for the other's interest, too." SN 1, 162.). Feel how by being patient situations and communication with people actually do improve. Even if nothing changes at least you aren't enraged and out of control. After calmly listening to disparaging remarks from one man, the Buddha responded that he wouldn't accept his 'gift of anger!' (SN 7.2).

Everything you do involves and is compassion linked—how you speak to people during the day and the tone you use; handing something over and how you offer it, driving and taking your time, letting another driver squeeze in, or pushing ahead with road rage;

sharing what you can when you can and not hoarding. Compassion is your method and your reward; the measuring rod of your life; your true gain and salvation.

Should hateful or angry thoughts come up during the day, try offering an immediate mental blessing towards the situation or the person. Say to yourself, have a nice day. I won't be angry. I'll bend. May there be peace. Do anything except yield to your first impulsive reaction to be angry. Try feeling disappointment rather than rage. You are capable of caring, gentleness and loving-kindness. Gradually compassion will become a natural extension of your person.

Volunteer whenever possible (even if only on weekends or holidays) is a way of renewing your ties with compassion and loving-kindness. Other people in turn are touched by your generosity and inspired to help. All of your efforts to share loving-kindness do make a difference. Maybe not immediately or as you would like, but always as an offering of peace.

| Compassion cannot be denied.

Chapter Four

THE MONKEY MIND— Distractions and Concentration



“When a person lives heedlessly, his craving grows like a creeping vine. He runs now here and now there, as if looking for fruit: a monkey in the forest.” DH 334

“Abandoning what's first, they depend on what's next. Following distraction, they don't cross over attachment. They embrace and reject—like a monkey releasing a branch to seize at another—a person undertaking practices on his own, goes high and low, latched onto perception. But having clearly

known...having encountered the Dharma, one of profound discernment doesn't go high and low." SN 4, 4

A Wild Monkey



Like a monkey hopping about, wildly chattering and swinging from one vine to the next, you are easily distracted. Judgment impaired, actions impulsive, you are provoked and respond. This is how you lose your way and find yourself suffering and upset.

Desire/Craving—What do I have to do to find the woman or man of my dreams...Have a red convertible...How about...What I wouldn't do for a ...This would be nice but I first want.

Hatred/Aversion—I don't want to...You're wrong...Get away from me...I hate you...I'm not doing that...You scare me...I don't trust you...I don't like this.

Dullness/Fatigue—I just don't know what to do any more...I've tried everything. Anyway it's always the same...What am I supposed to do...It can all wait until tomorrow...It's not going to matter anyway...I'm tired...I need a break.

Restlessness/Worry—I can't sit and meditate...I don't feel right unless I'm busy...There's always something that needs to be done...I don't know why I did it—I just had to...That's just the way I am...I can't stop.

Doubt/Skepticism—I can't do it...I was never any good...It's better if I don't...It doesn't matter what I do...This is the way it's always been.

Does any of this sound like someone you know? Does it seem a bit like a family member, friend, or co-worker? You might be shaking or dropping your head right now. Could it be? A little too close for

comfort, it sounds a lot like one's own self! Who is in control, you or your Monkey Mind?

No sooner do you get out of bed and your feet touch the floor, thoughts begin clicking away: what needs to be done; what should be done; what you don't want to do; what you would like to do and what needs to get done. The mind flashes as fast as shuffled cards. Awareness and concentration suffer and habit tendencies follow. Unable to keep up with all the stimulation and events, you are stressed and confused. The present moment is an overwhelming experience. Even sleep is disturbed by dreams brought on by your compulsive ways.

Try this short test. Sit alone at your dining table or at your front room sofa and observe what happens. Do your thoughts quiet down? Are you looking around the room for something that interests you or reeling off thoughts and imagined scenarios? Does the slightest sound, movement or shadow lead your thoughts astray? Did you conjure up memories—some family squabble, a former romance or favorite fantasy?

Don't be hard on yourself. There are few people whose attention is calm and concentrated. Ironically, most people have an actual suspicion and fear of being quiet and calm, preferring to be occupied, pushing one's self to the limit and always on the go.

The Boredom Factor and the Past in the Present



When a moment or experience doesn't hold your attention, isn't meaningful, stimulating or satisfying, you fall prey and are victimized by boredom. How many times have you been talking face-to-face with a person when your mind wanders off to think about another person, fantasize shopping, or being someplace else?

Boredom can be looked at as a form of

hate or aversion. In a less menacing way, you are tuning out, ‘hating’ the other person or the moment. Boredom and the reasons behind boredom are such a strong influence all on their own that it needs to be examined. Boredom is sneaky in how quickly it can sidetrack. You can be watching a movie, cutting vegetables, or driving along when boredom draws you away. Our minds and thoughts like a challenge.

Probably the single most boring and distracting moment for all of us is going to the bathroom. It isn’t exactly something that is brought up in polite company, but serves as a good example. Distracting thoughts, humming some long forgotten tune, pondering a problem, thinking about running an errand and even paying taxes overtakes you while you sit in the bathroom.

Once your attention is bored, the Monkey Mind and your habit nature swing into action, the past promoting the future, divorcing you from the present moment. Although boredom is the first instance in the breakdown of your concentration, the specific distractions are more complicated. The original word from the Pali, *nivarana*, means to cover up or obscure our awareness. When your attention and concentration is ‘covered over,’ you aren’t understanding things. Distractions are like having sunglasses on all the time—true reality doesn’t filter through and you react unwisely.

After the Buddha had addressed a group of monks, Ven. Maha Kaccana was asked to further explain the connection between our perceptions and the past, and our experiences and distractions. ***“...What one feels, one perceives (labels in the mind). What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one complicates. Based on what a person complicates, the perceptions and categories of complication assail him or her with regard to past, present, and future forms cognizable...With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives (labels in the mind). What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one complicates. Based on what a person complicates, the perceptions and categories of complication assail him or her with regard to past, present, and future ideas cognizable via the intellect.” MN 18.***

Like a grainy, 8mm film of a family get together, you splice and edit from old footage as you discredit the present moment. Who could ever imagine that there is another side to things other than how you perceive them to be? You find it unbelievable that you have to change, adapt and allow for other people in your lives and are surprised that you aren't believed or understood.

Take for example, a couple (a man and a woman), entering a room. You glance their way and immediately begin sizing them up. I like her but not him. He reminds me of so and so. He is arrogant and can't be trusted. But she seems sweet. She has a kind face like my favorite aunt. I'm going to watch out for him though.

Here you have judged and discriminated, all on what evidence? You have distracted and distorted the moment through your habit nature of limited past memories and experiences. The mind is forever changing gears from past to present, present to past. There can be similarities but the two are separate moments and experiences.

Here is another example. Tired from a demanding and stressful day at work, your mind wanders. The children are playing loudly in their room. There is one piercing scream too many and you explode into a tirade as your exhaustion spills over to take it all out on the kids.

Your conscious awareness is similar to a computer. Everything you have experienced and know is downloaded and collected in your hard drive-like minds. You have quite a collection of stored memory files. These experiences are your very own personal operating system, which manage how you view and deal with the world. At instantaneous speeds, memories are associated with the present moment. Just like your computers at home or work, there are corrupt files, crashes, program problems, or overload. The computer analogy only serves as an example to help you appreciate how you misinterpret things. You are alive and dynamic, a living and breathing phenomenon of experience but, also, you are subject to being distracted and distorting things. This is how the Monkey Mind leads you around.

The Five Distractions



Distractions come in different forms and disguises but the Buddha categorized them into five groups in what he called the Five Hindrances. These Five Hindrances or Distractions cause your concentration and understanding to be confused and unreasonable—desire (sensual desire), hatred (ill-will), mental fatigue (sloth and torpor), worry and guilt (restlessness and remorse), doubt (skeptical doubt).

The Buddha compares each of the five distractions to a particular impurity of water. To see things through a pool of water, the water (your mind) has to be clear and calm.

The Wandering Mind (Sensual Desire and Craving)

Like so many bright colors gleaming and reflecting on a water's surface, you are side tracked by sensual stimulation as well as your desires. Your attention flutters, seeking after something interesting and enticing.

As a distraction, the Wandering Mind is bored. But behind the boredom there is also a deeper impetus of the past. You may think or believe that your wanting and going after something is your own free will, but from having a favorite color to not getting by without a particular article or having an emotional longing, desire and craving are formed by past associations.

The fallout of desire is that it is unending. It is the itch that you can't stop scratching as desire feeds more desire. Your bored and distracted thoughts are a constant temptation, leaving you reeling and out of control. Seemingly harmless, you pretend and deceive yourself that it is all right to desire. The harm is that desire gains momentum until you are out of control. The Wandering Mind is like that of a child in a candy store, who looks around wanting to taste everything. In the end you make yourself sick.

As you proceed with your day, notice how your thoughts are easily distracted. There's a pretty blouse. Look at that new sports car. Closer to a dream, you disregard your family and loved ones. But there is awareness of the present moment. Everything else is a fantasy and a delusion.

Even your meditation and practice can be a focus of desire as you look for and anticipate certain outcomes. You want to be 'enlightened.' You are looking for a special spiritual teacher, guide or group. On the short term, desires are enjoyable like a vacation. But at some point you have to wake up and the vacation ends. No matter how hard you try, tension, problems, stress and conflicts creep back in. Awareness and caring are the common sense bridge, connecting you with your life and reality.

The Whining Mind (Ill-will and Aversion)

Ill-will, hatred, anger—the mind froths like boiling water. Boiling water is unrecognizable, steaming and clouded. It is also painful. You know what it is like to get angry—feeling flushed and hot all over, tense and tight, eyes bugging out, your heart races and head pounds while feeling as though steam is coming out of your ears.

Many times you are comparing, judging and looking down at people or situations. The present moment becomes a battleground as you are lost to warped perceptions. But where did these harsh thoughts come from? Again, the past affecting the present is the key influence.

Practicing as a monastic, I found myself alone for two weeks as the others were away. In the first few days my mind was sharp, aware and caring. But something happened half way into my time alone. Hatred and anger began cropping up. Instances of past arguments, disagreements, unhappiness and conflicts manifested themselves in whatever I was doing or thinking. Yet I had nothing to be angry about since I was alone. Using the technique of Right Questioning, I asked myself how could it be that whatever I was doing in the present that an angry recollection from the past could so dominate my every thought and blur my concentration?

Unaware and sidetracked, my mind was subtly bored and wandered off (boredom the initial catalyst). I had allowed myself to be distracted. Something happened in my practice at this point as an understanding of clarity and awareness had exposed my weakness. Realizing that it was my concentration or awareness which had a momentary lapse, I refocused and applied myself to whatever I was doing in the present moment of cleaning, eating, meditating, working, walking or chanting. I was aware of my situation, understood my distraction and lack of concentration. I was happy to have exposed the Whining Mind. This is what is meant by having direct, personal experience as an insight.

If you were to add up how many times a day you complain about things, criticize someone, pass judgment, discriminate, have false expectations, you would be amazed. Every few seconds we are 'whining' to ourselves about something. As sneaky as desire, the final outcome of the Whining Mind can lead to an outburst of anger.

Aversion is the other extreme of the hatred spectrum. When you don't like something or are unable to cope, you want to flee, are fearful and uncertain. Past fears and doubts bubble up, nothing goes right and once agitated everything goes wrong. If you aren't right then everyone is wrong! But things are rarely as bad or as one sided as we make them out to be.

Ill-will can be an uncomfortable challenge. We need patience to slowly become familiar with the workings of the mind and impulsive thought process.

The Sluggish Mind (Dullness or Sloth and Torpor)

Like water covered over with moss, stagnant and not circulating, the Sluggish Mind is unclear and distorted. Rigid and dull, you are out of touch. Reality seems distant and unreachable. A fog hangs over you.

In the throes of depression or fatigue, a heaviness and resistance overtakes you. We have all seen children who dawdle rather than do something that they are told to do or would prefer not doing. The Sluggish Mind is the adult version of lying down and giving up. Oh, I

can do that later. I'm tired. Now is not the right time. We are all very good at deceiving ourselves and being in denial.

The Black Cloud Mind (Restlessness and Remorse)

Restlessness and worry are like water churned up by strong winds, whipped by waves. When the distractions overwhelm you they disturb your equilibrium, preventing you from being calm and having insight.

Like being under a proverbial black cloud of negativity, the Black Cloud Mind is worried and unsure, nervous and irritable. A mind on edge and confused, the Black Cloud Mind is a symptom of an over reactive mind. You can't connect with reality because you are unsettled and anxious. Life rushes by in a whirl. In the beginning of your spiritual practice there can be a great deal of restlessness, especially during meditation. You aren't used to the quiet and sitting. Habit actions and impulsive reactions have been your norm and creep up to get the better of you. Restless, anxiety is projected onto the present.

How would you treat a nervous guest visiting you? Be a friend to the Black Cloud Mind. Make it feel at ease and welcome. Don't fight or get caught up with the restlessness. What agitation are you feeling—where in your body? Take a couple of deep breaths to exhale and disperse your anxiety. Be calm and allow for awareness to refocus your attention. Allow the negative energy to flow naturally on its own rather than damming it up and holding onto it.

The Quicksand Mind (Skeptical Doubt)

Thick, gooey and sludge-like, skeptical doubt is a muddied perception making a wasteland of your life. This is the Quicksand Mind. Frightened and made insecure by the past, the present is an unwelcome and unsteady experience. You struggle and sink in a mire of distractions. Everything around you seems remote and unfriendly. Insecurity and apprehension drive a wedge between you and the world. Nothing seems right.

The Quicksand Mind is potentially the most difficult and threatening distraction because it is filled with subtle negativity and a deeper defeatist attitude. You become your own worst enemy through doubt, paralyzing decision making. You start something, quickly stop, go to the next, run off and go around and around without ever committing or accomplishing anything. The lack of self-esteem all stems from past experiences. Anxious, fearful and doubting, past insecurities form imagined distractions.

There is a fabled story of a monk, who living in a cave, painted a tiger on a rock wall. When the monk had finished he stood back to take in his effort. He flinched in fear because the tiger appeared menacingly real. When distracted by the Quicksand Mind you imagine or make things out to be far worse than they are.

Regarding your spiritual practice, the Quicksand Mind is the most harmful because it can cause you to give up practice and also because it prevents you from understanding yourself and deeper truths. Everyone else is having a good meditation but me. Why can't I stop all my worrying? Who needs practice and all this silly meditation? The doubter sets him or herself up with unrealistic expectations and then when they fail, stops practicing all together.

Confessing a poignant experience, a woman spoke up at a weekly Dharma gathering and shared her challenging weekend. She was having problems with her car and began looking through the weekend newspapers for better transportation. She then began second-guessing and doubting herself as to what kind of car she would need. She was single but then contemplated whether one day she would be married and perhaps with children and whether a larger sedan verses a smaller car would be appropriate. She went on to bemoan the fact that she was single and all her friends were married, most having children. She cried about her life and what to do. In the end she laughed. She decided to stay with her old car and to be happy as she was.

Overcoming the Distractions— Concentration, Clarity and Understanding



Whenever you think, look at something and simply experience anything, you are using your attention and concentration. However, experiences are taken for granted and what you end up doing is plunging carelessly into the moment and becoming confused through impulsive reactions. Though seemingly technical, the Five Awareness Penetrations (Absorption Factors) to be described take you deeper into meditative awareness

and connect you with the life experience before you. The Penetrations demonstrate in a practical way not only how to slow down and develop concentrated awareness, but also how to harness the Monkey Mind.

The Five Awareness Penetrations (Absorption Factors)

Initial Contact

Sustained Contact

Interest

Joy

One-pointedness

Initial Contact takes place when your awareness is first scratched or 'itched.' An action has made 'contact' and your consciousness focuses in its direction. If an ant were to crawl on you, you wouldn't immediately notice it. There would be a light, quick sensation or contact. Here your awareness is vague and not yet focused. Initial Contact stirs your attention.

Sustained Contact is your awareness having made contact with the subject as you feel a crawling sensation over your skin. At this point you haven't yet looked over nor do you know what the itching is, but your curiosity has been stimulated. Sustained Contact fixes and draws your attention towards the crawling ant.

Interest occurs after the curiosity of sustained contact as you glance over with the awareness of interest to see the ant crawling along on your arm. Here awareness is contacted but has not yet quite absorbed with the present moment.

Joy (though in the case of an ant this may not exactly be joyful) refers to the 'joy' as your attention is fully aware and cognizant of the ant, the experience, or the subject. It is considered a 'joy' to know and be aware in the present moment. At this point you haven't acted or reacted by way of your habitual and impulsive nature. You are abiding in the feeling and knowing (or 'joy') of your attention fully connected with the subject, the ant.

One-pointedness is achieved as you knowingly focus your awareness, connecting with the subject. Before there is any acting or reacting on your part, you are absorbed and focused on the ant crawling along your arm. There is nothing distracting you as you recognize the present moment.

As you can see, awareness is quickly engaged, but through meditation you have learned to slow down. Your feelings, sensations and thoughts aren't haphazard. You are fulfilled and at ease to finally subdue the Monkey Mind. You may now blow the imaginary ant off your arm! Take a deep breath and relax for a moment.

Another example of the Awareness Penetrations is to consider them like trying to open a door in the dark. Initial contact is groping to find the door knob, sustained contact occurs as you pass your hand over and touch the door knob, interest is keeping your hand on the door knob, joy is bringing out the key with the other hand and one-pointedness is the concentration used to insert the key and unlock the door in the dark. Like a mime moving slowly through his act, the break down of the awareness penetrations serves to show how your attention focuses to concentrate.

In traditional practice, the Five Awareness Penetrations and the Five Distractions of the Monkey Mind are connected on a one-to-one level. Each penetration relates to and blocks out a distraction. Initial contact shuts out dullness and drowsiness. Sustained contact puts away doubt. Interest subdues ill-will. Joy overcomes restlessness

and worry. One-pointedness of mind counteracts sensual desire. Developing the Five Awareness Penetrations, the Monkey Mind is quieted.

When the Five Distractions are brought under control, awareness enters into what is known as 'neighborhood' concentration (access concentration), approaching the 'neighborhood' of clear and unobstructed concentration or unwavering one-pointedness. The Five Distractions have been controlled but concentration is not very deep nor has it been held for very long. This is like a child learning to walk. Your concentration may still have moments of wobbliness, but awareness is becoming stronger.

Now try applying the Awareness Penetrations as a concentration exercise to understand as well as harness your impulsive Monkey Mind. Sit as you normally would for meditation but in this instance apply the Penetrations. The subject most often used during meditation is the breath, but you can choose to focus on anything. Some people use the abdomen or lower diaphragm. I am fond of using my chest and the bellows-like effect each breath has. I have also used my heart, feeling its rhythm and beating. As I relax and calm down, my awareness is drawn to the delicate and sensitive rhythms of the heart action. The mind becomes unwavering and is fully concentrated.

As you breathe the **Initial Contact** can either be the lungs drawing in the breath or feeling the air as it enters through the nostrils. **Sustained Contact** is the air filling your lungs or passing through the nostrils. **Interest** is that pause between the in and out breath when for an instance the breath is filled. **Joy** is in the knowing and awareness that you are breathing. **One-pointedness** is your attention receptive and absorbed in the present moment of the breath and the whole breathing cycle.

Try also applying the Awareness Penetrations practice to any thought you might have during meditation. Feel as the thought first comes to mind as an **Initial Contact**. **Sustained Contact** is the thought continuing and becoming stronger or clearer in your mind. **Interest** is the thought being identified. **Joy** is when you know you are fully within the thought preoccupying your mind. **One-pointedness** is the

choice of continuing and developing the thought or to dismiss and release it.

The Awareness Penetrations practice can also be applied to your daily activities. You might be sweeping the kitchen. **Initial Contact** is picking up the broom and holding it in your hands, **Sustained Contact** is positioning yourself to sweep, **Interest** is as you begin to sweep, **Joy** is known as you connect with the sweeping motion, and **One-pointedness** is your carrying out the chore with a clear mind and full awareness for what you are doing. This is knowing and having a simple but clear happiness.

“Wonderful it is to train the mind so swiftly moving, seizing whatever it wants. Good is it to have a well-trained mind, for a well-trained mind brings happiness.” DH 35.

Life Practice

Our personalities have a disposition to certain distractions more than others. This has been our conditioning as we are prone to falling back on past experiences and projecting them onto the present.

Starting with the boredom factor and how we become disconnected, observe yourself and under what conditions your Monkey Mind jumps up. Stressed or anxious, does the Whining Mind get the better of you? Do responsibilities and options confuse you, the Quicksand Mind coming out? Does your Black Cloud Mind make situations more difficult than they truly are? Identifying these mental states is crucial to understanding and overcoming the distractions.

There are positive ways to counter the distractions. Asking the ‘right question’ is helpful. What am I doing right here and now? Am I bothered, fearful, or confused? Why am I acting this way and thinking these thoughts and where are they leading me? What is my motivation? Take responsibility for what you are thinking and doing. Don’t allow habits and impulses to get the better of you.

Observe how you ‘makeover’ a situation or person, discriminating through your limited experiences and understanding. Try from the outset of a situation to clearly be aware of your experience. We have

a choice, between the distraction of the past and having awareness of the present moment.

If you are walking, be with the awareness of walking and the muscle coordinated movements through your legs. You don't have to add more or embellish the moment. At work, driving, doing chores or alone, be in the awareness of those moments. Don't let your mind wander. Realize that you have been bored, and stop the distraction from being taken over by the out of control Monkey Mind.

Our understanding slowly comes from knowing and awareness. You can feel and know the influences of the distraction and wait for a more opportune time to make a decision or before speaking to someone. Cultivate patience. Multi-tasking may be necessary at your job or business, but it is counter productive to spiritual practice.

If you have a long standing problem with a certain distraction, make the extra effort to concentrate and be aware of your body/thought dialogue. Feel the 'real' expression of the distraction in the narrowing of your attention and through your body tension. Feel any resistance you may be having towards certain situations or people. When we are distracted the mind narrows and thoughts become compressed. This is the opposite of awareness and concentration. Remember the Everyday Breath is stress related and disconnected. The Insightful Breath is having awareness and truly knowing what is happening to you in the present moment. The Monkey Mind is an old standby option.

Take note as you go from boredom and distractions to refocusing with awareness. This is like being a diver coming up from a great depth; a vague, murky light shows above. Aware, you surface through the distractions and are experiencing the present moment.

The Monkey Mind has been tamed. Concentration, understanding and awareness now bring you to Wise Action.

Chapter Five

THE ACTION OF OUR LIVES— Virtue, Wise Actions and Karma



The Buddha spoke to his son, Rahula, in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Sanctuary.

“What do you think, Rahula? What is the purpose of a mirror?”

“For the purpose of reflection, sir.”

“In the same way, Rahula, bodily acts, verbal acts, and mental acts should be done with repeated reflection.

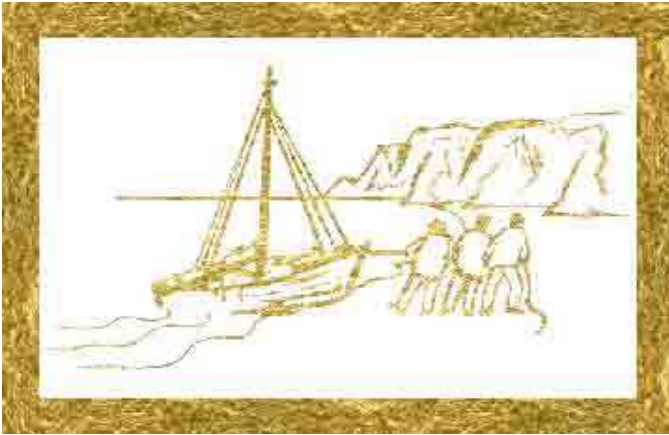
“Whenever you want to do a bodily act...a verbal act...or a mental act...you should reflect upon that same action thus: ‘Would this action that I wish to do lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both?...But when you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I wish to do with the body, speech or mind...is a wholesome action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results,’ then you may do such an action with the body, speech or mind.

“Whenever you are doing a bodily act...a verbal act...or a mental act... you should reflect upon that same action thus: ‘Does this action that I do lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both?...But when you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I do with body, speech or mind...is a wholesome action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results,’ then you may continue in such action with the body, speech, or mind.

“Also, Rahula, after you have done a bodily action...a verbal action...or a mental action... you should reflect upon that same action thus: ‘Does this action that I have done does not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both?...But when you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I have done with body, speech or mind...is a wholesome action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results,’ then you may abide happy and glad, training day and night in wholesome states.

“Therefore, Rahula, you should train yourself: ‘I will purify my bodily acts through repeated reflection. I will purify my verbal acts through repeated reflection. I will purify my mental acts through repeated reflection.’ That is how you should train yourself.” MN 61.

The Action of Our Lives



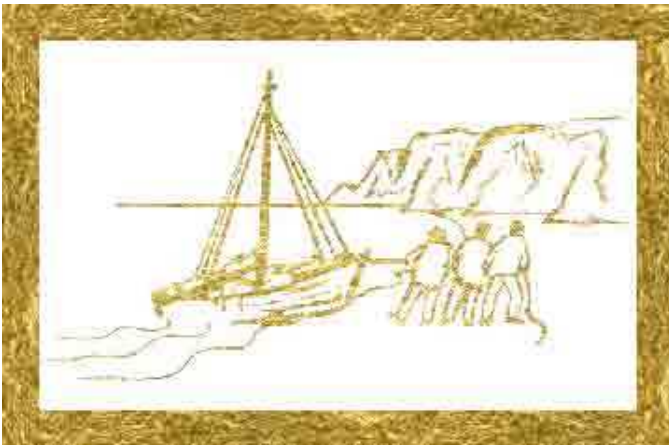
As children, many of us learn to ride a bike using training wheels or have seen other youngsters using them. Until you finally have the balance, the strength and agility to ride on your own, the training wheels serve a purpose. As with anything in life, there are levels and degrees of experience, skill, attainment, and maturity to be learned, honed and applied. If you were to become a plumber, electrician, chef, nurse, doctor, or lawyer, you would spend some time, often years studying and practicing, getting certified and licensed, passing exams, or working your way up from apprentice to journeyman. The same applies with your spiritual practice. There are stages of discovery, intuition and awareness to progress through. As you have slowly come to realize and know first hand for yourself, a spiritual journey is about awareness, leading to the appreciation for all your actions of body, speech and thoughts.

In some respects it is easier just to go ahead with your habitual and impulsive ways. You can shrug, look the other way and go from one problem and upset to the next. But it takes awareness and caring to step out from the overwhelming charge of your habit energies. Wise Action is a commitment to improving and living a less suffering life.

While the Five Wise Actions predate the Buddha and were already in practice in India, through Buddhism they have taken on a unique perspective and application. Life which we live and value, articles which we all possess, sexuality from which we are born, speech through which we communicate, and drugs or alcohol which can be used beneficially, the Five Wise Actions are a continuation of your deepening awareness and appreciation for your life as well as the choices and options you have. As the Buddha emphasized in the opening quote of this chapter, you reflect on the actions of your life—body, speech and thoughts.

The late John Lennon wrote a song called ‘Instant Karma’ and how there is no escaping what you have done. Karma literally means action—action as in motion, movement or acted out—a cause and effect and consequence. When referred to ourselves, karma is the motive behind our action and the direction our decisions take us. The Buddha saw that everything in the universe and our lives is a result of action. Not to go into it too deeply here, because karma is a complex and profound experience (see Chapter Nine), the easiest and best way to be introduced and come to terms with karma is through the everyday experiences of your life and the application of the Five Wise Actions. More than a guideline or way of conduct, the Five Wise Actions have you reflecting on how your choices are played out and how you can better live your life. Yes, as John Lennon sang, “instant karma is going to get you.” You live experiencing the action of your life.

The Five Wise Actions



The Wise Action of Kindness and Understanding (not to harm or injure)

Reverence for all life is the understanding that your personal actions can be an offering of kindness and goodwill in every moment, situation and encounter.

Motivated not to harm or hurt, you share and live through non-violent cooperation and solutions. The Wise Action of kindness is a practical way of realizing the role and importance of karma in your daily life—your action as constructive and helpful or your action as destructive and a problem. There can be disagreements, murder and war or tolerance, communication and friendship.

Prior to becoming a monk while at my last job, there was a misunderstanding with a fellow employee who had expectations about our positions. For two weeks straight my co-worker went out of

her way to pick a fight and harass me. Not once did I give in to her exchanges. I wasn't going to perpetuate a nasty volley of arguments. I chose not to feed the karma or action of animosity. Not countering her attacks there they ended. I smiled, nodded my head and patiently listened to her. As I wasn't troubled or intimidated, my co-worker became more upset and her anger vented back on her as she was even more disturbed, out of control and a victim of her own rage. I saw how she was harming herself. By this time I was a more stable practitioner and able to handle the situation. Some five years earlier in an almost identical situation and only a beginner my spiritual practice, I exploded into a rage with a co-worker of that time. From my more recent encounter, I understood anger as having its beginning in indignation and pride and was able to direct and wisely stop any animosity on my part. The other person is allowed to have their say and to be in disagreement with me.

Even monastics aren't immune to disagreements. One younger monk was very adamant. I pointed out how anger was getting the better of him. He wouldn't listen. Far from being perfect, at least I didn't respond with anger. There is no reason why we have to be angry or abrupt in our exchanges.

When you read the Buddhist discourses, hostile and aggressive people repeatedly confronted the Buddha. "It is wonderful...it is marvelous how when [the Buddha] is spoken to offensively again and again, assailed by discourteous courses of speech, the color of his face clears, as is to be expected by one who is accomplished and fully enlightened." MN 36.

When you don't get your way, the other person becomes the enemy and a threat. With Wise Action, here first you note and catch how harmful reactions enter your consciousness. Most of your disagreements and arguments are misunderstandings blown out of proportion. Sense how you become ruffled. Feel how your body tenses, your pulse and blood pressure increase and hormones race—follow the Everyday Breath. In an instant you are out of control, exchanging words, dagger-like stares, finger pointing, making ultimatums and then turning your back on the other person. If you saw one of your own children acting in this way you would sit them

down and have a long talk with them. But as adults we think we are above reproach.

The Wise Action of not harming extends not only to humans but to all beings and creatures. If there is a trail of ants coming into your house, try cleaning better and not leaving anything out or at least using non-toxic repellents that keep most bugs away (poisoning the environment also affects us). Your every motive needs to be searched and exposed for hatred and cruelty. While working the garden at a temple, my fellow brothers and I collected the snails in a bucket then took them to a back field to enjoy wider pastures. The garden was virtually made snail and slug free. The intent isn't only not to harm, but to live in peace with our neighbors, the four legged and scaly ones, too. The world belongs to everyone.

The Wise Action of Generosity and Sharing (not to steal or take what isn't ours)

Who hasn't had such 'innocent' or 'trivial' lapses such as walking away with paper clips, pens and restaurant packets of sugar or making long distance phone calls at work? But we know better than to take what isn't ours.

There is also a deeper recognition to generously share and offer whatever we can. This is having awareness for the actions of your life. Should you see a homeless person asking for money, do you pass them by without at the very least greeting them and wishing them well? "What the miser fears, that keeps him from giving, is the very danger that comes when he doesn't give." SN 1, 32.

The motives behind your giving and sharing are important, too. Do you give with your reputation in mind and the attention it draws, or with the hope of coming away with a favor? This is hardly being generous. "If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of miserliness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they eat without having given. The stain of miserliness overcomes their minds." IT 26.

Having a broader understanding, there can be exploitation by corporations, corrupt politicians and government officials, or there can be charities, establishing centers for the underprivileged, and serving the public at large. The world isn't only selfish. Each person can be an influence.

The Wise Action of Caring (sexual responsibility, offering compassion)

Rather than indulging or being led astray by sexual urges, there is the awareness that caring rather than passion is available as an expression. You can care deeply while not having the need to possess, control or crave the other person. Sexual misconduct is harmful for its compromising intent, ruins individuals and families as well as destroying the lives and happiness of innocent children. Many people have been hurt by the trauma of irresponsible sex, going on to inflict that same trauma in the name of 'love' onto others. I know of one incident where unknown to the wife, the husband was a pedophile. He was discovered and convicted. Shortly afterwards her teenage son died in an accident and the woman's home life was completely destroyed. This is the repercussion of warped sexuality. In a well-documented case of the mid 1990's, a female schoolteacher went on to have sex with a male student and then have a child from this encounter. The woman was sentenced to prison. She brought catastrophe to herself and to the family of the young man. Impulsive sexual escapades can have far reaching consequences. Visiting one of my old college professors after my graduation, he sadly told me the story of his divorce from his wife of many years after he had a brief affair with a college girl. He was deeply remorseful for having the fling and considered the affair the worst mistake of his life. He had lost his wife and the respect of his older daughters. He looked miserable and alone. Such are the consequences of disturbed sexual desires.

Sex is on TV, in the movies and in scandalous headlines from the highest government offices (Clinton/Lewinsky in 1998 is only one instance of a fall from grace). The suggestiveness and allure of sex and sensuality is everywhere in magazines and advertisement campaigns. Where does all this lead society? The first impulse becomes to lust and desire. Easily excited and enticed, sexual preoccupation limits your true potential. This isn't about being a

prude or censoring things, but assuming responsibility for our actions and where desire can potentially lead us.

The Wise Action of Truthfulness (not to lie but to use honest and kind speech)

Compared to many countries, here in the West we are fortunate to have freedom of speech and believe it is our right to say whatever we think and feel. But words that injure, cause misunderstanding, and escalate tension are a misuse of the right to speech. If you see something that you don't necessarily agree with, to come out and criticize it is like poking someone with a stick. What we take to be right for us isn't necessarily right for someone else. Instead of name calling at the work place, finger pointing at home or blaming a partner or friend, Wise Speech has us examining ourselves rather than running off at the mouth.

Speaking unkindly puts you in a state of aggression. Lying and straying from the truth keeps you restless and filled with doubt as you rush about to cover up and fabricate another lie. Lying or wrong speech splinters your mind into many disordered directions. Even white lies are misleading. We victimize ourselves by not being able to live and deal with the truth and things as they are. "The person who lies...there is no evil he might not do." IT 25.

Even gentle, chiding humor comes under the heading of thoughtless speech. We shouldn't be too serious that we can't have a laugh or share in a light moment, but when humor goes on to chide, exaggerate, maim or single out someone for foibles that we all have, then our speech has taken on a wounding and aggressive nature. Our words should be treasured and measured to fit the situation and be directed to the level of understanding of the other person.

Gossip communicates something we don't have direct experience about. People are hurt by the spreading of exaggerated or false reports. Rumors are always ugly, brings pain and even destroys families and reputations. You can see just how miserable the lives of politicians and movie stars are. Look back at the Watergate scandal of the early 1970's for rumor spread, dishonest tactics used by the

Republican re-election committee (Politics in general, the drive for power and control, has thrived on character assassination.).

Tabloid magazines at the supermarket checkout area are a glaring example of the titillating and morbid ‘thrill’ that gossip is. It is sad that ‘enjoyed’ is the suffering and unfortunate problems of others. The Buddha instructs, “Abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, and from idle chatter: This is called right speech.” SN 150, 8.

Having awareness, you realize how your speech starts and forms as a thought. (“Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they.” DH 1.) But because of careless and self justified natures, we let fly out from our mouths the first thing that comes to mind. Our spoken words mirror our Monkey Mind, scattered concentration, fear based bias, discrimination and confusion. Have the patience to listen to others as Wise Speech also includes ‘noble silence.’ If we don’t have anything worthwhile to share or communicate, there is our calm and peaceful presence to share. Listening is an important part of communication. Or a simple, “I don’t know” is often the best answer.

“A statement endowed with five factors is well-spoken...It is spoken at the right time. It is spoken in truth. It is spoken affectionately. It is spoken beneficially. It is spoken with a mind of goodwill.” AN 5, 198.

The Wise Action of Moderation or Sobriety (to be responsible for our drugs or alcohol use)

The consequences of drugs and alcohol are obvious as our body, speech and thoughts are impaired—unable to drive, stumbling along, slurred speech, body chemistry a wreck, a careless attitude. We have no sense of judgment or excess. The rush of a drug is never worth the effects of being out of control and the time it takes to recover. Drug addiction, wild parties and lost, drunken weekends are one option, but there can also be the joy of living our lives naturally, without needing to repress, escape or live in denial through drugs. This is a sane and sensible ‘high.’ Carelessness through drugs or alcohol harms friends and family.

But what do we do if we are ‘unwise’ or neglectful? Is it the end of the world? Are we condemned? Not at all. You learn from being less than perfect. Something was tried and didn’t workout. In the Conch Trumpet Discourse (SN 152, 8) the Buddha explains how to deal with unwise actions.

“What do you think...If a man is one who steals...indulges in illicit sex...tells lies, then taking into consideration time spent doing and not doing, whether by day or by night, which time is more: the time he spends telling lies or the time he spends not telling lies?... Taking into consideration time spent doing and not doing, whether by day or by night, then the time he spends telling lies is less, and the time he spends not telling lies is certainly more.

“There are living beings that I have killed, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.’ So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then [and there] the taking of life, and in the future refrains from taking life. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

“There are lies that I have told, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.’ So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then [and there] the telling of lies, and in the future refrains from telling lies. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

“Having abandoned the taking of life, he refrains from taking life. Having abandoned stealing, he refrains from stealing. Having abandoned illicit sex, he refrains from illicit sex. Having abandoned lies, he refrains from lies. Having abandoned divisive speech, he refrains from divisive speech. Having abandoned harsh speech, he refrains from harsh speech. Having abandoned idle chatter, he refrains from idle chatter. Having abandoned covetousness, he becomes uncovetous. Having abandoned ill

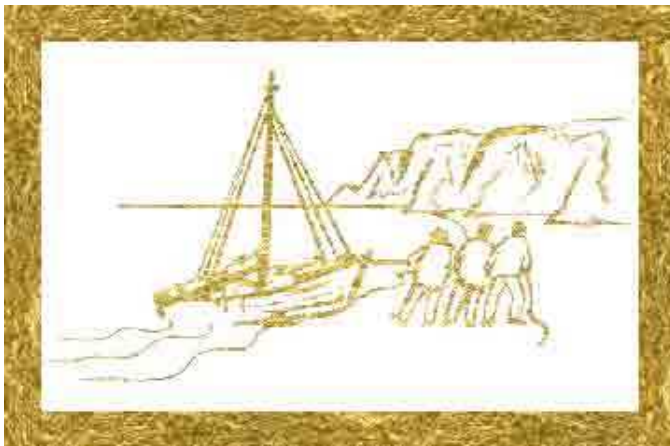
will & anger, he becomes one with a mind of no ill will. Having abandoned wrong views, he becomes one who has right views.

“...Thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unconfused, alert, mindful...in the same way, when the awareness-release...is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there.”

There isn't a one of you who has come this far on the Path to Peace who will ever again return to being the tormented, struggling persons you were before. You have awakened to go against the Everyday habit-filled stream current. There has been a transformation—you are aware. You have had Insight ('clear knowing'). The choices and directions you take are your own doing. Karma is a sobering wake up call; not negative, tragic or a verdict, but how you choose to direct and live your life.

On one level there is only the eternal here and now present moment, but having a deeper understanding there is also action, how it is sparked and where your action leads you. The present comes alive through the past; tomorrow has begun for you today.

Appropriate Attention



“I don't envision any other single factor like appropriate attention as doing so much for a [practitioner] in training...a [practitioner] who attends appropriately abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful.”

IT 16.

Applying right questioning as an appreciation for your life now questioning gives way to expand as 'appropriate attention.' As the

Buddha mentions, having appropriate attention is the ability to know what is skillful and unskillful, to be careful or careless, have awareness or be absentminded, be wise or unwise. The Everyday and the Insightful stand out—stressful, conflicting habits or to continue with appropriate attention as an appraisal of your life, distinguishing the practical and real from the farfetched and a deception (“Through careful attention there took place in me a breakthrough wisdom.” SN 12.66).

While meditation is a connection of quiet concentration during sitting, your awareness extends its mindful presence to regard and compliment all of your life—body, feelings, thoughts and life actions (MN 10). But not everything deserves your attention. If you were gawking rather than showing appropriate attention to driving you might end up in a ditch or worse; from not having appropriate attention for the food you eat, you might develop high blood pressure and heart problems; seeing someone you are attracted to but not having appropriate attention and ignoring their character flaws will likely bring you heartache; being impatient and not having appropriate attention while doing a chore can make the episode take twice as long. Appropriate attention focuses the whirling moments of the present into a clarifying acknowledgment of what you are doing and where you are headed in life.

A profound realization of Four Noble Truths (Chapter Eleven) came together for the Buddha through his right questioning and appropriate attention to see life as it truly is—what is unsatisfactory and stressful (grasping and attachments to a self notion), the origin for what is unsatisfactory and stressful (craving), the ending of stress (craving) as the ending of suffering, and the path of practice leading to the ending of stress (“Your duty is the contemplation, 'This is stress...This is the origination of stress...This is the cessation of stress...This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.'” SN 56.31). The ability to distinguish through appropriate attention marks a shift from Everyday self-related stress to a detached non-self Insight.

This is both a practical and wise approach as you follow the Buddha’s steps to Awakening. “Attending to another thought... scrutinizing the drawbacks of those thoughts...paying no mind and paying no attention to those thoughts... attending to the relaxing of thought-

fabrication with regard to those thoughts... beating down, constraining and crushing his mind with his awareness... steadies his mind right within, settles it, unifies it and concentrates it.” MN 20. This is the recommendation for dealing with distractions and applying appropriate attention. Most times being present to the contacts of body, feelings, thoughts and life actions and relaxing the Everyday stress through your Insightful Breath is enough to bring Wise Action. But on occasion you will have to forcefully center yourself to deal with a difficult moment or the distractions of the Monkey Mind. Allow yourself to feel the shift and clarity through appropriate attention as habits, confusion and stress fade away.

Life Practice

What do I do with bugs entering the house? Is it all right to eat meat and be a Buddhist? What am I supposed to do if I am attacked by someone? If I find something, can I take it home with me or is that considered stealing? It is good to ask questions and explore Wise Action.

Is it necessary to panic if a trail of ants is discovered making their way into the house? There are the options to clean better or try spraying around the perimeter of the house with pepper spray. This isn't toxic and the ants won't cross the sprayed line. For slugs and snails, set out special, non-lethal powders (lemon and orange peels work very well because of their acidity). Visiting Third World countries, I would catch a cockroach in my room in a plastic cup and release it outside. If mice are entering your pantry and eating your foodstuffs, it is a 'wise action' to place the food in plastic containers. Get 'traps with a heart' which capture the mice alive and you can release them later in a field. The mice are only trying to survive. Allow yourself to share in this world occupied with its many creatures and beings. Tight fitting screens and better insulation around doors can keep away unwanted guests. Place some food outside to draw the bugs or ants. You can pick snails out from your garden and transplant them elsewhere. All this requires a little extra effort but the final results all lead to peace rather than stress and conflict.

What if you are attacked? Try talking and reason, running away, and if you are forced to defend yourself, can you disarm the person? It

isn't your intention to harm or kill. If an unfortunate result should come about, it was never your motive to hurt anyone. Sharon Salzberg, the Dharma teacher, managed to free herself from an attacker while in India. She went to her teacher to discuss what should be done in an extreme case. The teacher said to hit the assailant compassionately over the head with an umbrella! I remember watching John Lennon on TV while I was a teenager. He was asked as a man of peace how he would handle someone attacking him. He mentioned that he would run away rather than fight. Unfortunately, Lennon was later murdered by a deranged fan. But Lennon always stood by his peaceful principles.

Regardless if you are a meat eater you can nevertheless practice the awareness revealed through Buddhist insight. There are no conditions or prerequisites for living a life of Wise Actions. But for variety, try substituting non-meat dishes a few times a week in place of fish or meat. Get to know herbs and spices, tofu, beans and legumes. Your palette will find these other offerings every bit as tasty and filling as well as your cholesterol level and blood pressure decreasing. Eating dairy products is fine. The animals aren't harmed in this case and we are grateful to be sharing nutrition with them. But realize the suffering brought to an animal that is slaughtered. This is sobering.

Should you find a lost item make an attempt to find the rightful owner first. There is nothing wrong with keeping something you may find, but also remember to be generous and grateful. There are so many other people with less means. Reflect on how blessed you really are, especially with having good friends, family and your spiritually aware life.

Value your life and respect your physical and mental health. Know where the action of your indulgence is taking you. It might seem that recreational drug use is inconsequential, but how much better would you be without it? Hate, fear, rejection and low self-esteem are covered up by self-destructive tendencies. It is one thing for a terminally ill patient to use medication, but it is another to unnecessarily dull your body, speech and thoughts through drug abuse.

What about our society in general—obese, fast-food consuming, drug indulgent, alcohol consuming, glued to violent and sexual flashing screen images—where are we headed as a people and a planet? Anything we over indulge in and abuse, whether it be food or videos, is harmful.

As you begin to apply the Wise Actions to your life, focus on one at a time as a ‘theme for the week.’ One week stress being kind and not harming. Another week be gracious with your speech and truly listen to others. But you shouldn’t be self righteous with a superior-than-thou attitude that puts others off. Wise Action is a personal realization and happiness, not a criticism of others. We can’t change or expect other people to be anything other than what they are nor should we be upset and at odds with situations that are less than ‘perfect.’

The Five Wise Actions help guide us away from conflict, struggle and stress towards happiness. This is the real-life aspiration of a spiritual practice—to live in awareness and to be happy. As you apply the Wise Actions to your life and relationships, the motive behind your action becomes clear. Trouble sleeping; anxious, nervous and impatient; quick tempered and vengeful; indecisive and on edge; confused and frightened, lustful and wandering attention, unaware actions have a way of haunting and gnawing at you. Wise Action promotes confidence, understanding and caring.

Often we think of people like the Buddha, Jesus, Florence Nightingale, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Theresa, The Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela as ‘super people.’ Their acts of generosity, acceptance and compassion have deeply touched and inspired us all. And yet these ‘super people’ have also known doubt, suffered and cried in their own lives. But despite their uncertainties, they have always transcended their suffering and thought of benefiting others. Each of us has many virtues, strengths and qualities. We help friends and strangers, we do favors, give money, share and are generous. And though you may not believe it, you too, have been a ‘super person’ for someone at some time—caring, generous and compassionate.

Ahead around the bend waiting to greet you, the Buddha sits in the shade under a tree.

Part Two

THE DHARMA

Chapter Six

THE DHARMA AND THE BUDDHA— The Truth and The Wisdom



***“The gift of Dharma triumphs over all other gifts;
The taste of Dharma triumphs over all other tastes;
The happiness of Dharma triumphs over all other pleasures...”
DH 354.***

“So give ear, for the immortal has been discovered and I instruct, I teach the Dharma.” VN 4.9

“Just as a capable physician might instantly cure a patient who is in pain and seriously ill; so also, whatever one hears of the Buddha’s Dharma, be it discourses, mixed prose, explanations or marvelous statements—one’s sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair will vanish...all one’s plight, fatigue and the feverish burning of the heart are allayed.” AN

The Buddha



Coming down from the mountainside on to the plane, the path widens to a reddish-brown, worn smooth surface. Many spiritual travelers have passed this way. There is a sense of safety and certainty now in knowing the way is cleared. The sun shines bright and warm on the flat land.

The path bends to the right. Ahead there is a clearing with a grouping of trees. Looking closer, there is a figure sitting in the shadows. We approach slowly. A man dressed in a saffron robe sits meditating. His back is straight, eyes closed, hands cupped before him, the left hand under the right. We have seen people meditating before but this man is different. There is a deep calm and peace about him. We feel as though we are interrupting a private moment.

Stepping into the circle of shaded trees, we now clearly see the man. A thin cotton robe is wrapped around his body. He has a tan, clean complexion with smooth features, full lips, long thin nose turning downward, long eyelashes and thick-tufted dark eyebrows. With his head shaved, his ears seem large. The shape of his head is smooth. His hands have long, delicate fingers. His legs are crossed over in the full lotus sitting

position. Behind him is a small wooden bowl. He breathes easily, the breath generated in his lower diaphragm.

Slowly his eyes open; large gleaming brown eyes with a polished copper-like tinge around the pupils. He stares at the ground in front of him, seeming to be looking far away. The eyes move up to take us into their gaze then our eyes meet. His stare is deep and penetrating, seeing and knowing everything about us at a glance. Our eyes pull away from his strong stare then meet again. In that moment we missed how his eyes glinted to become welcoming. There is a trace of a gentle smile as his lips have stretched out and turned up at the corners. With a slight nod of his head he invites us to sit down across from him. We give a nervous bow, joining our hands together in respect, then, as we sit down we give another nervous bow. Here we are sitting before the Buddha. He gives a broader, full-welcoming smile. We feel at ease and smile back. His eyes glance down at the ground before looking back up at us. He is helping us to settle down. We sigh a deep breath and let the tension and nervousness pass, relaxing in his presence.

He speaks up breaking the silence. His voice is calm as he talks in a kind, sincere tone.

“Even if one should seize the hem of my robe and walk behind me, if he is covetous in his desires, fierce in his longings, malevolent of heart, with corrupt mind, careless and unrestrained, he is far from me. Because he does not see the Dharma, and not seeing the Dharma, he does not see me (AN 1)...he is near to me and I am near to him because he sees the Dharma, and seeing the Dharma, he sees me...But thoroughly understanding Dharma and freed from longing through insight, the wise one, rid of all desire, is calm as a pool unstirred by the wind. How close is that peaceful one to one at peace, that cool one to one cooled, that content one to one content! (IT 91). Just as the sun and the moon clear all, the doctrine and rules proclaimed by the Perfect Buddha shine before all the world and not in secret...With regard to the Truth, the [Buddha] has nothing like the closed fist of a teacher.” (DN 2, 100).

The Buddha leans forward and picks out some dust with the tip of a fingernail. “What do you think? Which is greater: the little bit of dust I have picked up with the tip of my fingernail, or the great earth?”

“The great earth is far greater,” we answer.

“...That’s how great the benefit is of breaking through to the Dharma. That’s how great the benefit is of obtaining the Dharma eye. (SN 13, 1).

“Seeing misery in philosophical views, without adopting any of them, searching for truth I discovered ‘inward peace.’

“Not by any philosophical opinion, not by tradition, not by knowledge, not by virtue and holy works can anyone say that purity exists...An accomplished person does not by a philosophical view or by thinking become arrogant, for he is not of that sort; not by holy works, nor by tradition is he led, he is not led into any of the resting places of the mind...But those who grasp after views and philosophical opinions, they wander about in the world annoying people. (SN)

“Friend, the essentials of the holy life do not consist in the profits of gain, honor, and good name...but the sure heart’s release, friend—that, friend, is the meaning, that is the essence, that is the goal of living the holy life.” (MN)

Referring to our threefold practice of meditation, virtue and understanding, the Buddha explains, “Such is virtue, such is concentration, such is understanding; concentration fortified with virtue brings great benefits and great fruit; understanding fortified with concentration brings great benefits and great fruits; the heart fortified with understanding becomes completely liberated...(DN 16). How should one make the Dharma one’s own island or refuge? Through the cultivation of mindfulness or awareness of the body, sensations, mind and mind-objects.” (DN 2).

“Others will be cruel...others will kill living beings...others will take what is not given...others will engage in inappropriate sexuality...others will speak falsehoods...others will speak maliciously...others will gossip...others will be envious...others will be avaricious...others will be fraudulent...others will be arrogant...others will be unmindful...others will lack wisdom; we shall cultivate wisdom. Thus, one should incline the mind.” (MN 8)

We watch the Buddha. He looks down at the ground. Though sitting directly before us, he is detached, an easy-breathed presence flowing through him. He is like no other person we have met or known. Our breath and breathing have stilled to be sitting before him. A breeze rustles through the treetops; birds’ chirping echoes; two squirrels run across a limb, but we have lost all sense of time. The world, our bodies and busy minds have vanished. Here is the Buddha. For the first time we have witnessed true fulfillment and absolute peace in the company of this Great Being, and know it as a potential within ourselves.

As I now make my own way along the Path to Peace, I find myself continually amazed at the purity, compassion and wisdom shared by the Buddha. Shown and expressed in many situations, he offered insight to our suffering humanity. His understanding and insight is the most valuable realization offered by anyone. Part psychology, part natural science, and all compassionately oriented, your awakening to the Dharma (the true nature of life) is a personal experience of understanding and liberation.

No easy feat, Siddhartha Gotama’s profound breakthrough came after six years of intense effort and practice which nearly cost him his life. Finally, he penetrated reality and overcame suffering. As the ‘Great Teacher and Guide of the World,’ the Buddha showed the way to awakening, which any dedicated person can realize. Each of us has a potential to awaken; to experience and understand for ourselves the Dharma. Your ‘ignorance’ or carelessness of not knowing or clearly understanding reality, being distracted and caught up by so many habits, keeps you tied to problems and stress. But everyone is capable of wisdom.

A Buddha has three defining qualities: perfect purity, unconditional compassion and profound wisdom.

Siddhartha Gotama as the Buddha-to-be devoted himself to transforming and purifying himself of all corrupt thoughts, condemning speech and harmful actions rooted in desire, hatred and confusion. By living through a pure intention and deeply experiencing the cycles of life that are the Dharma, Siddhartha overcame his passions and weaknesses.

With the noble characteristic of Great Compassion, the Buddha shared his insights on the Dharma for forty-five years. Having passed through similar problems and hardships, the wisdom of the Buddha is motivated by the 'Immeasurables' of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

As the 'Knower of the World,' he profoundly realized the true nature of life (impermanent, the flaws and suffering from impermanence and life's non-self nature). He discerns the minds and motives of others, their abilities and level of understanding, sharing insight in an appropriate and straightforward way. Guiding each person to have personal awareness and direct experience of the Dharma, he skillfully reveals life and the way out from suffering.

"There will be some with less dust on their eyes," the Buddha remarked about the potential of others. Never discouraged, he showed patience and an intuitive skillful means to communicate the Dharma with people. Traveling barefoot over the Northern Indian countryside, the Buddha continued his compassionate mission of helping others 'awaken' to life until his Great Passing at age 80. Surviving him is the oldest practicing order of monks and nuns.

For some years now the Dharma and the Buddha's insights have been making inroads into our high-tech, fast-paced Western culture. While no definite course or tone to Western Buddhism has emerged, given time it will flourish and develop its own character as Buddhism has done throughout the Far East and Asia. Perhaps, the United States being the melting-pot that it is, the best from all the Buddhist traditions will be adopted to form a 'United' or 'One Dharma.' Also, Buddhist temples and monasteries are beginning to spring up and

prosper in cities big and small across the U.S. heartland as well as on both coasts. Meditation retreats and Dharma talks are offered by monks and nuns while lay Dharma teachers share their insight. Monastics dressed in Theravada soft orange robes, brown or gray Mahayana wardrobe, or in the dark red of the Tibetan lineage, have come to stay in the West as well as inspire others to join their ranks on the Path to Peace.

As for myself, I had been meditating for two years before I first met a Buddhist monk. Attending a three-day retreat at a West Coast meditation center, there were two lay Dharma facilitators and a Theravada monk. Here in trend-setting California was this calm monk of English origin, dressed in orange colored robes, his pale complexion standing out against the darker colored cloth. He sat with his eyes closed, left hand cupped under the right hand.

The retreat took place over a hot weekend, but the monk sat cool, calm, and unbothered. Never had I seen such composure, gentleness and grace. For a long while he didn't open his eyes nor speak, as the lay facilitators began the retreat. All the while I couldn't keep my eyes off the monk. I was sweating in the stuffy meditation hall. Flies buzzed around and distracted my attention while my knees ached from sitting cross-leg. Other practitioners coughed, rustled about, and made the typical settling down noises that accompany the start of every retreat. But the monk sat as though sitting on a cool cloud, unmoving and concentrated. At one point the sound system shot up loudly and everyone grimaced or covered their ears, but the monk sat unmoved.

On the second day the monk was introduced. His eyes opened and a smile brightened his face. When he looked across at the audience of some 70 practitioners, he wasn't looking in the way that most people would of judging or sizing things up. His head turned slowly from side-to-side, simply reviewing the scene. He had a calm and soothing presence, sharing and instilling his peace over the group. As he spoke, he came across as warm, genuine and witty. From somewhere deep within him, out came this personality. Now he was communicating in the conventional sense of language and gestures, smiles and light-hearted jokes.

In the presence of this pale looking monk, I was seeing the true Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—alive, real, compassionate and wise. Beyond anything I had yet experienced, whatever basic meditation composure I had managed to instill in my life, here alive before me in the presence of this monk was the Buddha Dharma. Sitting surrounded by other practitioners, I began to weep and tears streamed down my cheeks. They were in part happy tears and in part awakening tears—happy at what I was seeing and being exposed to the Dharma and also awakening tears to truly know and have a glimmer of direct experience and insight.

Later during a break, I managed to slip the monk a scribbled note reading, “I thought through books and readings that I knew the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. But now seeing you, I have truly come to know the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for the first time.”

Here in the West Buddhist insight is fairly new. We practice the best we can with the materials and opportunities available. At this moment the number of Buddhist monks and nuns is growing and their presence will be a strong influence to touch many lives. Such is the power generated and communicated by a well-practiced and compassionate monastic or devoted practitioner. Much later when I became a novice monk, I would come in contact with other generous and well-practiced monks and nuns. On a few other occasions I would be moved by their powerful presence. I only wished that I had known of the Buddha Dharma much earlier in my life.

Now we are invited to join the Buddha as he guides us on the Path to Peace. Rising to his feet, we are surprised how tall the Buddha is as he stands a full head above us. His frame is thin, showing wrapped under the robe. He turns to pick up the bowl, cradling it with his left hand securing the underside, right hand out over the front face. Inside the bowl is a filter to clear away any bugs or insects out from the water. He starts to walk. We are uncertain what to do. The Buddha pauses. We begin to follow behind him. He walks in an easy flowing step-by-step motion. His bare feet gently touch the ground without stirring any dust. We slowly head toward the Western horizon.

The Dharma



With the stilling, quiet and ease from a regular meditation practice; having awareness of the present (your speech, thoughts and actions), asking questions and having appropriate attention, and applying Wise Action as well as caring to your life, you have slowly directed yourself away from being dominated by your habits. From Everyday to Insightful, your true realization of life, experiences and an understanding are beginning to focus. A transformation is taking place. Less rushed and more relaxed, your thoughts and mind activity have settled. You are coming to have patience for yourself as well as for others.

About the Dharma the Buddha said, “Whether [a Buddha] appears or not it remains a fact, an established principle, a natural law that all conditioned things are impermanent, suffering and that everything is non-self. This fact the [Buddha] realizes, understands and when He has realized and understood it, announces, teaches, proclaims, establishes, discloses, analyses, and makes it clear, that all conditioned things are impermanent, suffering and that everything is non-self.” AN 1. “This Dharma is visible here and now, immediately effective, inviting inspection, onward leading, to be experienced by the wise for themselves.” MN 38, and “The Dharma is well-expounded by the [Buddha], to be seen here and now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the wise for themselves...” AN 11, 12.

The Buddha referred to his practice as ‘the Dharma’ and the ‘Discipline.’ Once realized, the Dharma opens and illuminates your journey of ‘awakening’ and wisdom. The ‘Discipline’ is the many useful tools of practice (meditation, virtue, and understanding as well as precepts and the developed monastic order) which help transform you.

Dharma has the literal meaning of to support, to sustain, or to hold up. But in its broader definition, the Dharma is the true nature of all things and reality; how life, experiences and phenomena come to be and play themselves out. The word dharmas in lower case is used to refer to all life and experiences within the greater Dharma. In your human form you are a dharma, part of the changing elements within the greater Dharma, and so are all other dharmas of suns, planets, plants, animals as well as the greater scope of nature being a dharma. The vast complexity of the universe is influenced by the three aspects of the Dharma—impermanence; the flawed, unsettledness and suffering which comes about from impermanence; and the non-self or soulless aspect of life. Underscoring the Dharma is the fundamental makeup of how all life is governed and ruled as a principled form of checks and balances. Everything within the Dharma has its reason, motives or karma, consequences and results, with impermanence as the catalyst jostling everything about. But beyond knowing and appreciating the Dharma is having wisdom for the Dharma: Insight of impermanence—Wisdom of Signless Deliverance; Insight of the flawed, unsettled suffering—Wisdom of Desireless Deliverance; Insight of non-self—Wisdom of Emptiness Deliverance; Insight of Nirvana—Wisdom of Unshakeable Deliverance. This deeper penetration and wisdom is what the Buddha offered to everyone as an end of suffering.

You are a reflection of the Dharma. There isn't a moment that you don't experience change, the suffering or stress from impermanence as well as the non-self nature of life. As the Buddha noted, "Rather, it is in this fathom-long carcass [the body] with its perceptions and its mind that I describe the world [suffering], the origin of the world [suffering], the cessation of the world [suffering], and the way leading to the cessation of the world [suffering]." SN 2, 36.

One of the first things you come to know and experience is that thoughts come and go, feelings appear and disappear, sensations are felt then fade away. This simple awareness is impermanence, change as the driving force in your life and affecting everything in the world and universe. The unsettling of impermanence as a compelling force leads to desiring security. You become angry or disappointed when a moment changes or isn't to your liking. Confused as a conscious being, you take all too seriously your every thought and

fantasy. You have alienated and separated yourself from the present moment reality that is the Dharma. You kid yourself and are in denial that somehow you are exempt and privileged from going through the changes that everything and everyone must experience.

Before beginning your spiritual journey, it would have been impossible as well as untimely to connect with the truth of the Dharma. You were living an unsettled and confused life, unable to recognize, understand or experience for yourself anything but your dominating habit energies and impulsive reactions. It would have been like allowing a child to drive the family car. The Dharma is a truth that isn't shared randomly, but offered at the right moment to the person and practitioner who can understand, appreciate and apply the Dharma's liberating potential. There is always the matter of considering the level of each person through skillful and practical means. The Buddha usually spoke to people about Wise Action, virtue and compassion before revealing the deeper Dharma. Try teaching higher mathematics like trigonometry or calculus to someone who is still having problems with basic arithmetic and see how far you will get. Have a person who has started to learn the violin join the symphony and what kind of results would they achieve? You have now readied yourself through your consistent practice to experience and know the Dharma.

As you continue on your spiritual journey, you will explore the many dimensions of the Dharma, and also how your practice naturally deepens through realization and experience as you go from awareness to insight to wisdom.

Experiencing the Dharma



A progress of recognition and penetration, life isn't about having a passing or fail grade, but about being aware and maturing from suffering, one-sided actions and compromising behavior to having understanding and to stop suffering.

Revealed through your mindfulness, the contrasting experiences of the Everyday Breath and the Insightful Breath help you connect to understanding the truth that is Dharma in your life.

Through great gulps of anxious Everyday Breathing, you are tense and stressed, at odds with the world. Nothing seems to go right. Everywhere you look trouble and conflict crops up while the people you deal with seem to stand out more like strangers or enemies. Confrontations, tempers and hostility make up your day. Not realizing or accepting the Dharma, a defensive attitude of mine and theirs, right and wrong, fight or flee behavior emerges as you struggle to cope. The Everyday is closer to a living nightmare.

Three misperceptions ('taints,' IT 56-57) stand out obscuring your penetrating the insight of the Dharma and the deeper nature of life: the attachment and attraction of Everyday sense gratification; the attachment to Everyday becoming or urges which keep you forever longing, unfulfilled and dissatisfied; and the Everyday carelessness from ignorance keeping you from not knowing the wisdom and truth about life (The Four Noble Truths, Chapter Twelve). Of the three, ignorance is the most harmful because you are confused and deluded assuming the changing to be changeless, the ugly and dangerous to be beautiful and enticing, the painful to be pleasurable, and take the deception of self to be separate, unique or eternal.

But there is also the potential of awareness and appreciation for life to realize the Dharma and not react out of habit to changes and challenges. Without battling and having one-sided expectations, the

Dharma works to your benefit. There are careless and unwise actions, keeping you tied to compromised attachments and selfish tendencies, but there is also the Insightful Breath of mindful and responsible behavior. Rather than being cornered and victimized by difficult and stressful moments, Wise Action is engaged. Knowing the Dharma is knowing that you have options and choices instead of going down the same hopeless dead end street of desires, anger and confusion. Connecting with your Insightful Breath, a simplicity of awareness reveals the truth of the Dharma in your life. From this point on your spiritual journey is distinguished by the experience of Insight appreciation for the Dharma as you release Everyday upset. “He [the practitioner] gains unwavering confidence in the Dharma thus: ‘Well proclaimed by the Blessed One is the Dharma, realizable here and now, possessed of immediate result, bidding you come and see, accessible and knowable individually by the wise.’” MN 7.

The happiness and fulfillment that has come to be my life and that of countless others will also be yours. In compromising situations where my old personality would have raged and fought back, I have Insight and remain confident and composed. I have become soft spoken and patient instead of Everyday aggression lashing out. I never imagined my life being this fulfilled. I am no different than anyone else on the Path to Peace. I have known patients with hypertension, alcoholics, drug addicts, repressed and fearful people as well as easily angered persons—each one of them transformed through the appreciation for the Truth, the Dharma, in their lives and the realization that comes to take place through the awareness first established through the Insightful Breath. You, too, will be pleasantly surprised at where the Dharma takes you. The classic analogy is of a lotus emerging from the muddy depths of a dark pond to slowly inch its way out to the surface sunlight. You go from the Everyday Breath of careless ignorance to a personal experience of wisdom.

Life Practice

People and situations are a challenge. Things happen unexpectedly and you can be caught off guard. But you are deepening your practice and strengthening your awareness. Recognized are the extreme reactions through the Everyday Breath, and the calm and knowing experience of the Insightful Breath; the first is common,

stressful and problem filled, and the former is aware, realized and understood. The challenge is to know when your awareness has become distracted and disconnected through habits and impulses, and to guide yourself away from continuing in the direction of problems and upsets to have Wise Action.

But don't feel you have to be 'perfect.' That would just be returning to Everyday pressures without having any understanding or insight. Take life one moment at a time. Make the present moment your only moment. Everything else is beside the point. Remember, it isn't about having all the answers but about being aware and knowing where you are in life and where your thoughts, speech and actions are taking you. If you loose your temper, are overwhelmed by fear or doubt, this means you simply weren't aware. At least now you have realized how Everyday carelessness compromises your life. Awakening after the fact is nevertheless awakening. The next time you will act differently—wisely. I knew of one Dharma Teacher who was going to write a letter to someone over a comment he didn't feel was appropriate on his part. He had awareness.

If at some point you do explode in anger, while not solving everything, you can apologize to the other person. Awareness takes you towards remorse and the stirring of compassion. In the end, congratulate yourself and be confident. Slowly you will find yourself more in tune and having a deeper understanding for your actions. If you are a person given to road rage you can now wish the person in the other car well, allowing them to move ahead. You have understood where before anger would have carried over to ruin your day, changing to a flexible awareness of patient problem solving.

Watch out for automatic pilot! Just as you can put your car into cruise control and airplanes now travel by computer, don't let your mindfulness lull. Having an Everyday attitude you are absentminded, argue and are easily stressed. Insight awareness is a gentle ride as you know where you are and where you are going. Don't take anything for granted.

Even with difficult people, the idea is to go beyond your habits and having a tit-for-tat attitude. You understand how an aggressive mind-set only worsens a situation and leaves you feeling ill. Notice how all

too quickly you turn into judge and jury. Feel how your mind wanders when bored to tune out the other person. Note the difference when you are involved and do care.

Your awakening and awareness is a personal realization—the truth you experience is the wisdom of the Dharma.

Chapter Seven

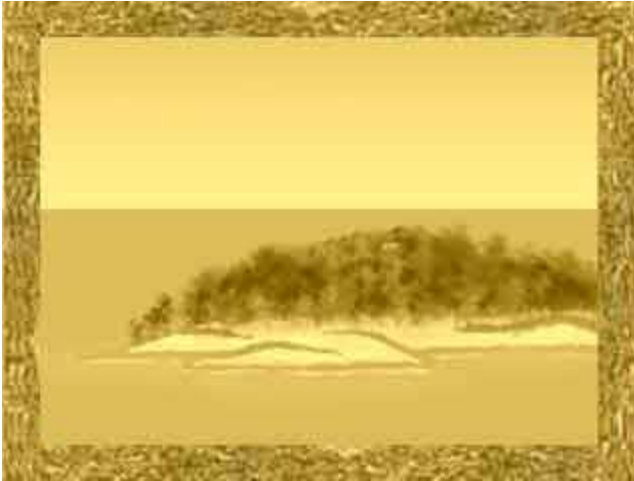
REFUGE AND RENUNCIATION— The Buddha, The Dharma, The Sangha and You



“He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, sees with right knowledge the Four Noble Truths—Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the Transcending of Suffering and the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to the Cessation of Suffering. This, indeed, is the refuge secure. This, indeed, is refuge supreme. By seeking such refuge one is released from all suffering.” DH 190-192. “In the same way, if, due to lack of faith, conscientiousness, fear of blame, energy and wisdom, good things are not practiced by one, then one must be watched

over by me. But when good things are practiced, then I need not look after one, thinking: ‘He can now look after himself; he is done with foolishness.’” AN 3, 6.

Your Practice



We sit now in the evening with the Buddha. A twilight of flame colors light the sky, reflecting in warm tones over the landscape as well as on the Buddha’s face.

“Abandon wrong. It can be done. If it were impossible to do, I would not urge you

to do so. But since it can be done, I say to you: ‘abandon wrong.’ If abandoning wrong brought loss and suffering, I would not encourage you to do so. But since it conduces to benefit and happiness, I urge you to: ‘abandon wrong.’ Cultivate the good. It can be done. If it were impossible to do, I would not urge you to do so. But since it can be done I say to you: ‘cultivate the good.’ If cultivating the good brought loss and suffering, I would not urge you to do so. But since it conduces to benefit and happiness, I urge you to: ‘cultivate good.’” (AN 1, 58).

The Buddha nods his head in affirmation.

“Whoever is wise and full of faith, deeply learned, holding fast to Dharma and living according to it—‘light of the Sangha’ they are called...male and female disciples fully endowed with faith—It is they who illuminate the Sangha ‘Light of the Sangha they are called.’ (AN 2, 8).

“I, too, have the faith, the virtue, the learning, the generosity, and the wisdom...At a time when the noble [practitioner] recollects all these things, his mind is freed from greed, hatred

and delusion. At that time...he expresses the gladness of the Dharma, and the gladness that goes with the Dharma. In one who is glad, joy arises; because of joy, the body is tranquil; with tranquil body one is happy, and the mind of one who is happy is concentrated. About a person like this, it is said: ‘the noble [practitioner] who recollects the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, who recollects virtue, generosity...—that [practitioner] dwells evenly among folk who dwell unevenly.’ ”(AN 5, 332).

“[As monastics], householders are most helpful to [us] since they provide [us] with robe, bowl, lodging and seat, medicines and the necessities for sickness. [As monastics we] also are most helpful to householders, since [we] teach them the Dharma that is lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle and lovely at the end, both in letter and spirit. [We] proclaim to [you] the holy life in all its completeness and purity. Therefore, the holy life is lived in mutual dependency, for crossing the flood, for the overcoming of suffering.” (IT 111).

“...Monks and nuns, the laymen and laywomen live with reverence and heed to the Teacher, the Dharma and the Sangha, live with reverence and heed to the training, to the concentration, to earnestness and to goodwill, then the good Dharma will last long. (AN 4, 83). . .Just call to mind the Buddha and no fear or trembling will arise. If you cannot think of the Buddha, this best, this highest, this finest of man, then call to mind the Dharma, the well taught guide. If you cannot think of the Dharma, the well taught guide then think of the Sangha, that incomparable source of good in the world. (SN 1)...Deep reverence for the Teacher, the Dharma and the Sangha. With earnestness and love a [practitioner] will not fail; he is near Nirvana.” (AN 3, 330).

The Buddha’s eyes shine warmly in the evening twilight.

From carelessness to awareness; from habit energies and impulsive reactions to understanding and insight; from suffering and problems to responsible action and wisdom, this inwardly investigative journey brings you to terms with the most important of all understandings and insights—how you live, your suffering and your release. The Buddha

is a generous guide, having great patience. But it is now up to you to apply the understanding and put it into action.

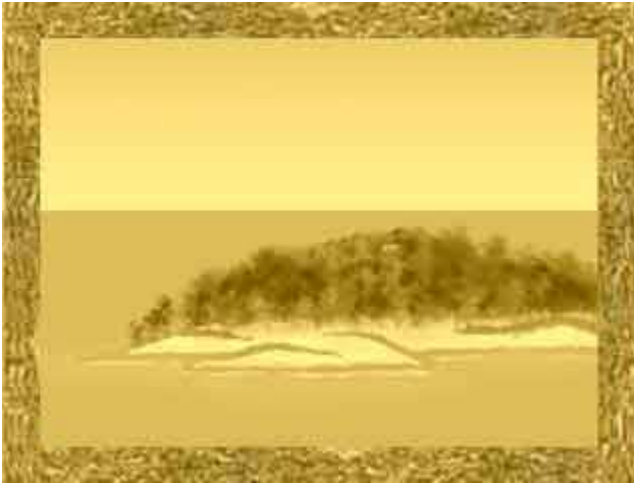
While I have many weaknesses and moments where habits get the better of me, with each passing day my life improves as I have awareness and caring for my motives and actions. Yes, I do falter, but I catch myself, smile, sometimes laugh at my antics and proceed to right myself. These aren't excuses I am offering but rather than being a hard-nosed perfectionist, you should have patience and forgiveness for yourself. Observe and learn from your lapses rather than blaming or finding guilt. This is having wisdom. Once you are unaware, twice you are forgiven, a third time you are foolish.

For example, at an East Coast facility one practitioner snuck out to go to a football playoff game. The man went on to have some beers and hot dogs then later that night crept back in. Feeling remorse, the next day the man confessed his 'great escape' to Dipa Ma, the meditation instructor from India leading the retreat. Normally, he would have been asked to leave the retreat, but Dipa Ma came forward, hugged him and the retreat proceeded.

At a one-month retreat I was attending, one recovering alcoholic came up with an excuse to leave, disappeared for two days and had a drunken relapse. The woman returned to the retreat, apologizing before everyone.

Wanting to know what the Buddha had to say about guilt I came across the Conch Trumpet Discourse (SN 42,8). The Buddha offered a deep consoling insight. Straying from Wise Action or being less than honorable and upstanding, should you then never again commit or fall victim to your careless habits you would be absolved. This is a keen insight and demonstrates the forgiveness and non-judgment which makes Buddhist practice unique. Of course, the Buddha mentioned that only trivial or lesser slip-ups on your part could be overlooked as long as you didn't fall back to committing them again. More serious actions of murder, thefts, chronic abuse, or lies of great consequences still would have far reaching implications and weigh on you. When you are less than perfect there is the understanding that you can right yourself and proceed with your life.

Renunciation



Renunciation is a strong word. One imagines seclusion and penance. These practices help, but they do have their limits. Renunciation is really the stopping of harmful and negative habits that bring you to suffering and problems while cultivating wise actions which are understanding and

responsible. Simply put, “To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one’s mind—this is the teaching of the Buddhas.” DH 183.

I may be a monastic in robe and have my head shaved, but this is only an image. If I still were angry, lied, stole or were dishonest then the monk model would be pointless. I know some monks who aren’t particularly noble or insightful and lay people who I consider to be my Dharma Elder.

The curious thing about Western practitioners is that they want to keep or feel the need for a life of luxury and leisure. Spiritual practice is about simplicity, cutting back or trimming away ‘the fat’ of distracting experiences in your life. Some sacrifice and determination is required in everything you do in life. For example, going to night school requires giving up some social activity and putting time in for studying and writing papers. You can’t have and do everything because you end up hurting yourself and being confused.

Looking back to my early days on weekend retreats and attending Dharma talks, I perceived an attitude of ‘weekend warrior’ or part time spiritualism. This is where practice is reserved for retreats or Dharma talks and then afterwards people fall back into their habit filled ways and comfortable material life style. I have known some practitioners of many years’ experience who say they wouldn’t mind being a monastic but didn’t want to cut their hair or how they still need to have

one thing or another. In the end these are all excuses for not committing oneself to practice.

At one U.S. Zen temple I visited, eating meat as well as drinking alcohol was allowed and the late American Roshi was also a chain smoker who died of heart congestion. They wanted to make practice as 'normal' and 'real' to life as possible. When I declined to eat meat and spoke of compassion it raised eyebrows. I was soon dismissed from the temple after two weeks for being 'pious.' You can't have it both ways, one foot in awareness and the other straddling in careless habits. It is either you are wise or unwise. The foot that rests in the quick sand of habits will always slip and bring down your whole practice. Look at it as dropping your burdensome bag of habits while keeping awareness, compassion and insight.

Often puzzled people ask me how I could give up working, not having health insurance, be a vegetarian and reject the securities of 'Everyday' life. Well, if anything I tell them I am freer, more relaxed, at ease, less worried, unattached as well as being more open and caring. One former co-worker invited me to his home to talk about 'spiritualism.' I gave him the address of the temple, the hours we meditated and the day of our weekly Dharma talk. He never came. Many people bubble with enthusiasm but are uncommitted. They can be found entranced in front of their television sets or too busy in their consumer lives. Some time before taking vows I lost contact with one close friend, saying he didn't have the time for friendship anymore. He was too busy with his two children, job, mortgage payments and family obligations. He communicated with me some years later, but then shortly after wrote me back the same response—he was too busy. You can be overwhelmed and distracted by many unimportant and deceiving desires. Of course, family is first, but to get caught up in the consumer, workaholic run around has people crying for a sane outlet. A spiritual life is about priorities. Meditation and a spiritual practice are just that—a renunciation of habits, desire, anger and confusion. You have more time to care, be generous, listen and relate to other people as you leave behind the frivolous and the unproductive.

It comes down to personal responsibility. I know monastics who eat meat, people who have firearms, others who belly-up to the bar for

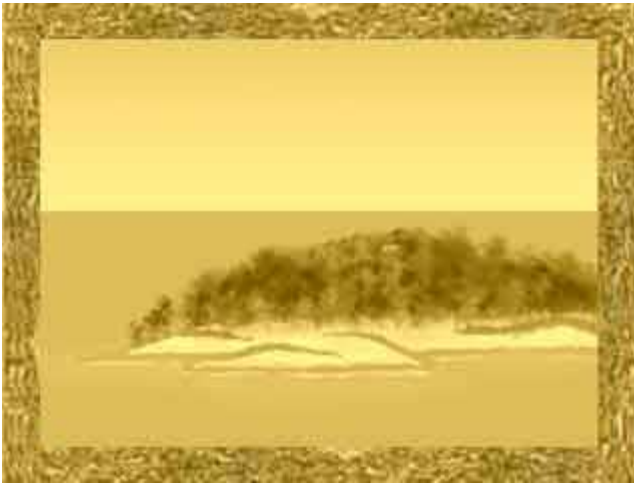
their evening cocktails, and others who are less than reliable and honest. I don't frown on anyone. You don't go around spouting platitudes at every turn. There is a 'right time' when to talk to a person and only if they are willing and capable of listening. Outside of this you have to live life and be at peace with your surroundings. In the end you are responsible for your life and actions.

Next door to my old temple lived a kind and generous 80-year old woman who followed the Catholic religion. I took to cutting her lawn and helping her with odd jobs. The highlight of my week was to visit with her on Sunday evenings. A monastic brother of mine thought that it was wrong and that I shouldn't have casual contact with lay people, least of all a woman. I stressed that she was 80 years old and that I was befriending her. I learned many 'Catholic lessons' from Mrs. Silva. I called her my angel and she would laugh that she was an angel with horns!

Probably the most well known story in all of Buddhism is of two monks who meet a woman at a stream crossing. One monk carries the woman on his back across the flowing water. Later as the monks continued their journey, the other monk criticized and reprimanded his monastic brother for dealings with a woman. "I left her at the stream, you are still carrying her," answered the helpful monk. You have to be flexible. A nun fell down the stairs once and lay dazed on the floor. I spoke gently, asking her to try moving her limbs, had her sit up, then lifted her back up to her feet. She was all right but sore. One thing is to help, have compassion, and another is to lust. As I am fond of saying, it is all about compassion, not passion.

"When he has given up, renounced, let go, abandoned and relinquished [the defilements or habit energies] in part, he knows: 'I am endowed with unwavering confidence in the Buddha... in the Dharma... in the Sangha; and he gains enthusiasm for the goal, gains enthusiasm for the Dharma, gains gladness connected with the Dharma. When he is gladdened, joy is born in him; being joyous in mind, his body becomes tranquil; his body being tranquil, he feels happiness; and the mind of him who is happy becomes concentrated.'" MN 7.

The Triple Gem (The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha)



I had bowed three times before the temple altar and the Buddha statue. One American woman asked me after I had finished prostrating what I was doing. I mentioned that I was bowing in deference to the Buddha, the Dharma and Sangha. Her question was sincerely asked.

Coincidentally, that evening the Dharma discussion was to be on the Triple Gem: The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Bowing isn't something normally done in Western culture. We are a hand shaking, hand waving, backslapping, hugging, broad smiling demonstrative society. But in the East bowing is a display of respect, dedication, confirmation, and loyalty. Bowing takes effort as well as humility to go down to your knees and prostrate. Reading the discourses, the Buddha was greeted by monks bearing the right shoulder, bowing three times then to sit off to one side but not directly in front of him (circumambulating three times around a person is no longer done except on very rare formal occasions). These were the customs of ancient India and have been preserved through most of the Buddhist practicing world. I have been injured in the past where I couldn't fully prostrate and half bowed from a standing position. One's sincere intention is what counts. As a monastic, when visiting another temple or in the presence of a senior monk or any Dharma Elder, one normally bows three times. At times there is a lot of bowing going on in Buddhism.

Later during the Dharma discussion I brought up the earlier question by the woman and taking refuge in the Triple Gem was discussed. I mentioned that for me the Buddha not only meant the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gotama, but also his great wisdom and penetrating insight. I also referred to how bowing was an intimate moment for me as I summoned up wisdom and insight within myself.

I gratefully bowed to the Buddha, to the spiritual ancestors who came before him and acknowledge the many spiritual travelers whose efforts have now reached me. You should bow sincerely and feel a deep respect for all 'awakened' beings.

The Dharma is the Truth, the Way life really is: impermanent, the friction, suffering and problems coming from impermanence as well as the non-self nature of all things. I bow to empty myself of all my habit energies. I end my second bow by thinking, whatever form the earth and the universe make me, may I be at peace.

The Sangha, of course, refers to a group of Dharma practitioners: monks and nuns as well as laymen and laywomen. But for myself, I broadened my practice to include all moments, circumstances, situations, encounters and to see others respectfully, bowing for the third and final time.

The abbot of the temple went on to talk to the group and mentioned how, of course, the Buddha statue was only symbolic. But again, you are showing respect to the Awakened One and the practice that has developed from his insights. The abbot went on to mention the Buddha didn't need or want recognition, but through bowing you show generosity, goodwill, openness as well as respect not only to the Buddha but also have this attitude of respect and value towards everyone and for everything.

Taking Refuge

A refuge is a safe haven or a place to go when you are distressed or need security. A Buddhist temple or any church, synagogue, mosque or temple for that matter, is a place of refuge. No one is turned away at a Buddhist temple.

The abbot where I trained as a novice monk, told me how he befriended one man who came to stay the night at the temple. The man went on to steal the temple checkbook as well as the temple car. The abbot added that he wouldn't have done it any differently. Again refuge was offered, but personal responsibility becomes the issue. The befriended man could have taken good advantage of the help that was being offered to him, but he chose otherwise. In another

situation a man one night called the Temple from jail where he was detained due to visa problems on entering America. The abbot again went to defend the man and within two months had him out of jail. The man stayed with us at the temple for a few weeks before striking it out on his own. Personal responsibility and one's motives stand out as the key issues.

Much is made about the difference between monastics and lay people. But the Dharma touches all our lives in the same way. The difference is in the approach towards practice. The monastic sangha couldn't exist without the generosity and help of the lay sangha and in turn the insights of the Dharma are shared with the lay followers. The Buddha did it intentionally this way so that the two would be interdependent. For monastics understanding and coming to terms with karma and no longer promoting selfish intentions or motives while living a celibate life is part of the practice. For lay people following the Wise Actions of not harming but being kind, not stealing but being generous, not lying but speaking truthfully, being sexually responsible and mindful of alcohol and drug consumption is how they should follow the Dharma.

A general misunderstanding exists as many people assume that they have to dropout and stop their connection with their present faith or religious practice. This isn't the case nor is it expected of Buddhist practitioners. A remarkable encounter occurred when Upali, who followed a different practice and elder, went to challenge the Buddha and in the end found himself taking refuge in the Triple Gem. The Buddha encouraged Upali to continue supporting his teacher and not to give up his former practice.

“Make a proper investigation first,” the Buddha cautioned.

“Now I am even more pleased and satisfied when the Lord says to me: 'Make a proper investigation first.' For if members of another religion had secured me as a disciple they would have paraded a banner all around the town saying: 'Upali has joined our religion.' But the [Buddha] says to me: Make a proper investigation first. Proper investigation is good for a well-known person like yourself.' ” MN 56.

Mahatma Gandhi mentioned that he was part of all faiths, reading and referring to the Bible and the Koran. Buddhism is no different. Where the practice is genuine and serving, we can all learn. I am taken with Christianity and the offerings of Jesus. His insights to compassion, the human situation, and his great faith are a stirring example. The Catholic saints and more recently Mother Theresa, are a true testament of a devoted life. We can all learn from the compassion, the generosity and the insight of all religions. Buddhism offers its own unique point of view. One Theravada monk I know ends his Dharma talks by telling the audience to take and apply what they can use and to leave the rest behind. There is no brain washing or accepting on blind trust. Buddhist practice and awareness is an open invitation as a direct, personal experience.

The villagers of Kalama approached the Buddha to ask who they should put their faith and trust in with so many spiritual masters and gurus passing through. The Buddha responded, "...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 skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to welfare and to happiness'—then you should enter and remain in them." AN 3, 65.

A serious moment comes for each of us when you decide to make a commitment by taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha as well as following the Five Wise Actions or precepts as the guiding principles in your life. Refuge in the Triple Gem as an awareness and true potential then becomes your liberation.

***But to take refuge in the
Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha
and to see with real understanding
the Four Noble Truths.
Suffering, the cause of suffering,
the transcending of suffering and
the Noble Eightfold Path that leads
to the transcending of suffering.
This indeed is a safe refuge,***

***it is the refuge supreme.
It is the refuge whereby one is
freed from all suffering. DH 190-192***

Taking Refuge in the Buddha: confident acceptance of the fact that one can become 'awakened,' having awareness for your actions through body, speech and thought, and to be responsible. Refuge isn't taken in the Buddha as a deity to solve your problems, in spiritual favors or to bring you salvation, but in the example he has given you of insight, virtue, meditation and liberation. The only assurance you have is through your own efforts. Just as the Buddha came to his great understanding and awakening, you empower yourself. You experience the realizations of the Four Noble Truths and the transformation of the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation.

"He thereupon gains unwavering confidence in the Buddha thus: 'Thus indeed is the Blessed One: he is accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with [insightful] vision and [virtuous] conduct, sublime, knower of the worlds, the incomparable guide of men who are tractable, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed.'" MN 7.

You are grateful to the Buddha for clarifying your life and directing you to understanding, compassion and awareness.

Taking Refuge in the Dharma: understanding the Four Noble Truths (Chapter Twelve) and conducting your life in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path (Chapter Thirteen). You are on the Path to Peace towards Nirvana and ultimate peace. You practice the Five Wise Actions to the best of your ability. The understanding and realization of the insights of the Dharma are all around you: impermanence, the unsettling and suffering from impermanence and the non-self nature of all life. Wisdom is known through your own realization by stopping self-promoted actions. The Buddha said, "He honors me best who practices my teaching best...He who sees the Dharma sees me."

Rumors, superstitions, miracles, blind faith and trust, pre-conceived notions and intellectual speculation have no place in the Dharma.

“He gains unwavering confidence in the Dharma thus: 'Well proclaimed by the Blessed One is the Dharma, realizable here and now, possessed of immediate result, bidding you come and see, accessible and knowable individually by the wise.' MN 7.

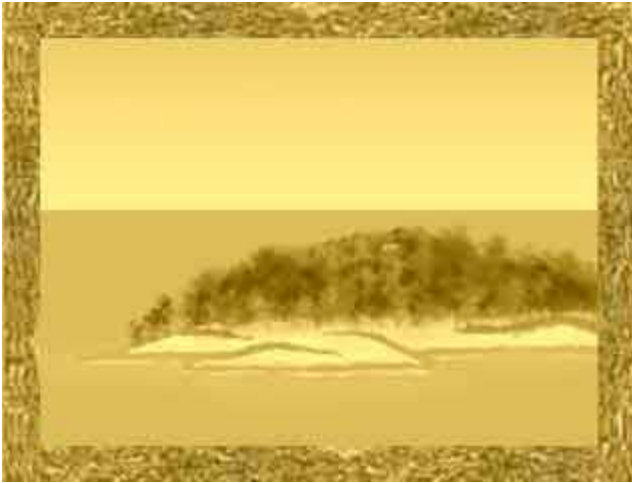
The Dharma as truth is an uncompromising, unflinchingly, honest, realistic view and personal understanding of life revealing how and why you live the way you do. This spiritual practice then is a coming to terms with the true nature of life and your own life actions.

Taking Refuge in the Sangha: is normally considered the formally ordained body of monks and nuns following the monastic code, but now has gone on to include everyone on the Path to Peace. From the beginning, the Buddha reached out and has relied upon the lay community, establishing a mutual cooperation and involvement. The ideal of liberation is shared by committed senior practitioners who provide you with the example and support needed for your own 'awakening.'

“He gains unwavering confidence in the Sangha thus: 'The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples has entered on the good way, has entered on the straight way, has entered on the true way, has entered on the proper way; that is to say, the four pairs of men, the eight types of persons; this Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the incomparable field of merit for the world.' MN 7.

The Sangha is the many adherents of Buddha Dharma practice, but also alludes to the irreproachable disciples of Stream Entry realization (Chapter Fourteen) who eradicate the remaining defilements to achieve wisdom and liberation.

Wise Actions

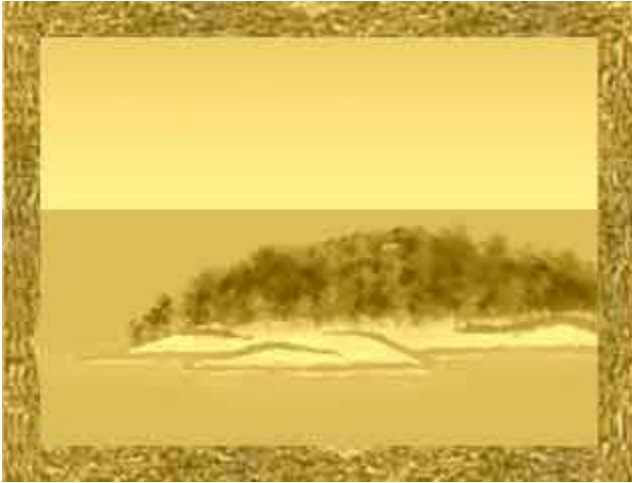


The Five Wise Actions ground you in awareness, responsibility and understanding, generated through your body, speech and thoughts. The Wise Actions are no different than any other faith's 'golden rules.' But Buddhism applies a different perspective; your actions have motives and

ultimately free will is involved as careless karma plays itself out over and over (Chapter Ten). In other words, you should reflect deeply before you think, do or say anything. The Everyday and the Insightful reveal themselves to you. If any of you have seen the entertaining movie, *Groundhog Day*, where the character repeats the same day over and over again until he finally gets it 'right,' karma is very similar to this except it is only habit energy that is transferred and not a specific person or soul.

Assuming responsibility for your actions leads you to wisdom. "If anyone with a pure heart undertakes a commitment to virtue—to refrain from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual immorality, from lying speech, and from taking strong drink and sloth-producing drugs—that constitutes a sacrifice better than giving alms, better than giving shelter, and better than going for refuge." DN.

The Ten Perfections of the Bodhisattva



You should be happy in your life and practice but happiness by itself is a practice without understanding. Before his enlightenment, the Buddha practiced and 'perfected' ten ennobling qualities.

A Buddha of penetrating wisdom such as Siddhartha

Gotama comes along only once in many, many eons. Having the good fortune to follow in his footsteps, you are a 'Bodhisattva' someone headed for awakening and liberation. All moments, situations, circumstances, and encounters reflect your budding understanding. You don't see enemies but friends. You don't insult or hate but are caring and generous. This isn't about being a do-gooder but having deeper insight into the energies that make your life. You also see the underlying conditions and influences leading others to their suffering and problems. As a friend, brother and sister of everyone, you have compassion because you have emerged from the blinding anger and desires which consume so many others. "Being reviled, he reviles not; being beaten, he beats not; being annoyed, he annoys not. His forgiveness is unfailing even as the mother earth suffers in silence all that may be done to her."

I have heard senior monks tell how during adversity they put all their focus and effort to keeping the Dharma in mind. They would prefer to die and have their last thoughts clear and on the true nature of life than be distracted and lost. Below are the Ten Perfections with real life quotes from practitioners as they experienced their own insight into the Dharma.

Generosity

Consumed with desire and only doing for yourself is a vain and empty pursuit. Generosity naturally transforms selfishness, greed, and arrogance. You share on whatever level you can.

Don't judge the moment or the person, but share without having expectations. It can be a small favor, communicating with a friend you haven't heard from in a while, or checking up on someone who might be sick. At times you may be busy or preoccupied, but during the course of the day little acts of kindness such as listening to the other person and 'feeling' for their situation is what you can offer. There is an actual joy and happiness when you are involved and care for others. You share your deeper values.

Generosity becomes a natural way and expression. You are open, giving, good natured, natural and at ease. When the other person is helped and bettered, you feel their strength. What you have belongs to everyone through the great circle of generosity and goodwill. What starts as an individual act carries over. Your own needs are few that you rarely find yourself asking for help. You don't have to be Mother Theresa or the Dalai Lama accomplishing some headline humanitarian effort, but are naturally generous and kind. People rely on you for being trustworthy.

The perfection of generosity actually reveals deeper insights.

Virtue

"Virtue is the foundation, the forerunner, the origin of all that is good and beautiful, and therefore one should purify one's virtue...Virtue is the control, the restraint and the delighting of the mind, and thus the place where all Buddhas cross over. Therefore, one should purify one's virtue...Virtue is the food for the journey, virtue is the best vehicle for going in any direction."
Thag 608-616.

Every aspect of your spiritual practice, your awareness and understanding, is expressed through your mind and motives of virtue and by way of your wise action. Your conduct relates to who you are as a parent, how you behave as a friend and as a society.

A Bodhisattva perfects the Five Wise Actions of not harming, not stealing, nor lying, being chaste and doesn't indulge in alcohol or drugs. When you act carelessly you are actually harming others and abusive to yourself. While you may not live in a perfect world this doesn't mean that you shouldn't be responsible. If everyone were

reasonable and realized the consequences of their actions from government officials to entertainers and all the way through society, the world would be a much different place. Whatever your place in society, you have an important role to fill—doing your best. It is only when you are self consumed with desires that you become estranged from the world. It is easier to have virtue or Wise Action because the suffering you put yourself through when you are careless and unaware is painful and exhausting.

Virtue transforms hatred to kindness, jealousy to sympathy, craving to fulfillment, fear to patience.

Renunciation

“Rightly grasping the [Groups of Self Attachment] arising-disbanding -- will return to the hillside, intent on seclusion.” Therag. 1, 23

“Rouse yourselves.

Go forth.

Apply yourselves

to the Awakened One's bidding...

He who, in this doctrine and discipline, remains heedful...,

will put an end to suffering and stress.” Therag 3, 13

Renunciation is often misunderstood. You don't renounce friends and family; you don't renounce caring or your good nature—you do renounce everything that is unwise (desires, anger, doubt, fear and confusion). Having awareness and wise action, carelessness and habits weaken. Wanting and needing the latest consumer goods, fashions, stylish car and a demanding lifestyle only keep you tied to craving and desires. The attachment to sensual pleasure, to the notion of a self, or to the misunderstanding of no-self are renounced. Through the insights of the Dharma, you open to personal awareness.

Wisdom

“There's no tying down one who knows.” Therag 1, 14

Insight and wisdom are cultivated in three ways. First there is insight shared through your contact with teachers and Dharma friends helping deepen your realization. There is also the insight from studying and penetrating the discourses and Dharma offerings through books (a certain amount of reflection is required). But understanding isn't fulfilled until you have realized personal, direct experience and intuition in your life as wisdom then cuts through the illusion of self and habit energies to insight.

Wisdom is when you come to realize the deeper meaning of suffering in the Four Noble Truths and the deliverance from self through the Middle Way of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Effort

Effort is a quality of action or behavior—your character. Effort first begins with an attitude and as a clear and positive mental energy. Like a camera lens focusing, effort is the action that sharpens awareness. A blurred mind is warped and distorted by habit energies. Having right effort focuses your whole practice and understanding to a clear and positive mental energy. Effort uplifts laziness, worry and fear.

When you are weak or selfish you become negative and the skeptic in you comes out. With proper effort you settle to meditate and have the realization needed to continue your practice. Mahatma Gandhi commented that the only difference between himself and any other person realizing the same spiritual goals was perseverance. Right or wrong effort can be a boon or a handicap to your spiritual journey. Wise Effort mentioned in the Noble Eightfold Path (Chapter Thirteen) prevents and transforms unwholesome thoughts and attitude while promoting and maintaining wholesome, skillful thoughts and attitude.

Patience

***“Formerly this wandering mind, a wanderer,
went where it wished, wherever whim or pleasure led,
today I shall thoroughly restrain it
as a trainer's hook the elephant in rut.” Therag. 14, 40.***

Your whole spiritual practice thrives on patience. Some moments and experiences are difficult and tiring, but having patience will see you through. Patience goes on to allow your mind to clear for the understanding of the Middle Way and Dharma insight. By first having patience your breakthrough to equanimity and wisdom are known. Patience is the brake applied to a runaway, reckless life. Goodwill and loving-kindness are seeds that begin to sprout from having patience. Without having to fight or struggle, through patience you begin to realize how Everyday impulsiveness worsens a situation. You have the patience to let events and situations run their course. When challenged you have the confidence established through your mindful practice.

Truthfulness

***“One should speak as one would act,
and not as one wouldn't.***

***When one speaks without acting,
the wise, they can tell.” Therag 3, 15.***

Truthfulness and honesty are at the center of a spiritual life. To know the Dharma you must be truthful. Trivial conversations, frivolous actions, and silly thoughts weaken and fade with your commitment to the Bodhisattva ideal.

People naturally perceive you with confidence and are reassured by your good company. Your inner values reflect your thoughtfulness. Rather than fight or blame, you offer realistic solutions. If necessary, you don't hesitate to apologize or make amends for any misunderstanding.

Determination and Resolution

***What needs to be done with firm persistence,
what needs to be done***

***by someone who hopes for Awakening,
that I will do.***

I will not fail.

See: persistence and striving! Therag 2, 24

Everything you do requires determination—noble and wise determination. Spiritual practice requires time being alone to meditate, to settle down and for personal reflection. Being resolute and consistent in your practice sees you through the distractions of self and ego.

Every moment offers its lessons to be learned, as ‘grist for the mill’ for your greater awareness. Patience actually gives way to determination and being resolute in times of hardship. The Bodhisattva stays firm on his or her course, the Path to Peace.

Good Will

***“Since I went forth from home into homelessness,
I haven't known an ignoble, aversive resolve
'may these beings be destroyed,
be slaughtered, fall into pain' --
I've not known this resolve in this long, long time.
But I have known good will, unlimited,
fully developed, nurtured step after step,
as taught by the One Awake:
to all, a friend;
to all, a comrade;
for all beings, sympathetic.
And I develop a mind of good will,
delighting in non-malevolence -- always.
Unvanquished, unshaken,
I gladden the mind.
I develop the sublime abiding,
not frequented by the lowly.” Therag 14, 1.***

The early stages of practice are actually spent healing and coming to terms with aggression, bitterness and anger. Goodwill is first acknowledged for yourself. Forgiveness and kindness are necessary to bringing closure with past sorrows. Otherwise what you end up doing is bringing your personal baggage of suffering with you and projecting it. This isn't a masked or a faked sympathy, but a penetrating compassion for your sorrows and unhappiness. Until you can acknowledge your suffering, you won't be able to connect with the greater suffering in the world.

If someone approaches you with anger, it isn't likely against you, but that the person has in some other way felt fear or feels inconvenienced. Caring, you listen with true appreciation to the other person and their problems. Within you is the genuine wish that everyone resolve their suffering. From your secure practice comes boundless goodwill.

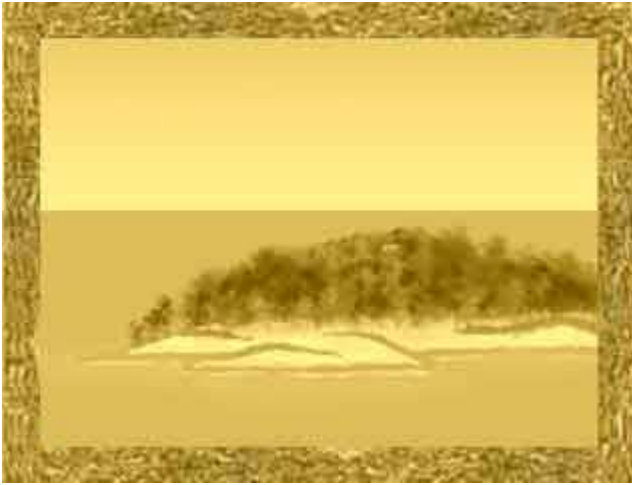
Goodwill and loving kindness open to understand the world. Situations that may have been difficult and people who have been a challenge, now are patiently dealt with. No longer is there an I, me, mine aggression but your perception is a sensitive acknowledgement for everyone.

Equanimity

***“Calmed, restrained,
giving counsel unruffled,
he lifts off evil states of mind --
as the breeze, a leaf from a tree.” Therag 1, 2***

Your awareness unifies in an expression of fulfillment and equanimity. Having confidence as well as being accepting, tolerant and forgiving are the qualities of equanimity. The Middle Way brings a clear mind to the understanding of self-promoted suffering. Equanimity emerges as a solidarity of compassion and wisdom. Nothing is a threat, a worry or a danger. The Bodhisattva reflects compassion and wisdom. Outside of full awakening and being a Buddha, equanimity is your closest awareness to enlightenment. Whatever the moment, the Bodhisattva is understanding, patient and calm. You go from Everyday conflicts and upset to an insightful, generous, patient and wise nature. Whatever the situation or encounter, you are resilient.

Eight Worldly Conditions (vicissitudes)



“These eight worldly conditions spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions...Now, gain arises for a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones. He reflects, ‘Gain has arisen for me. It is inconstant, stressful, and subject to change.’ He

discerns it as it actually is.

“Loss arises...Status arises...Disgrace arises...Censure arises...Praise arises...Pleasure arises...Pain arises. He reflects, ‘Pain has arisen for me. It is inconstant, stressful, and subject to change.’ He discerns it as it actually is. His mind does not remain consumed with the gain. His mind does not remain consumed with the loss...with the status...the disgrace...the censure...the praise...the pleasure. His mind does not remain consumed with the pain. He does not welcome the arisen gain, or rebel against the arisen loss. He does not welcome the arisen status, or rebel against the arisen disgrace. He does not welcome the arisen praise, or rebel against the arisen censure. He does not welcome the arisen pleasure, or rebel against the arisen pain. As he thus abandons welcoming and rebelling, he is released from birth, aging, and death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is released, I tell you, from suffering and stress.

“This is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor between the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person.” AN 8, 6.

Pinning for a glamorous life is a Hollywood deception. Events, moments and people move in cycles—this is the Dharma of impermanence. One minute you are on top of the world and then next you are climbing out of a hole. The lives of celebrities prove this

best. A more irresponsible, unrealistic and insecure group of people you will never meet—face lifts, drug and alcohol addiction, indulging until they are over indulged. When the money runs out and the party is over, they find themselves sober and alone. Actually, they should be commended for the real life examples and lessons they provide us. You might get what you want, but at what price and remember it won't last!

Wisdom comes down to being happy and secure with what you have and who you are. This is why the simple life creed of monastics rings true: food, clothing, shelter, medicine—I have everything I need, let the riches come from my good intentions. Most people have basic security and comfortable lives, an education and good job; home, food and the means as well as being loved by friends and family. But you need to always remind yourself of the unsettled nature of life. The classic beauty of a rose is a real-life lesson and mirrors your own situation. The rose emerges from a bud as you do from a womb. The flower slowly unfolds and is exposed to the changes of climate and the seasons. You experience changes in your life. The rose blooms then begins to wilt. You mature and age. There is one difference between the rose and the human condition—you have wisdom. You can take responsibility for the direction of your life.

Gain and Loss

Not only is there gain and loss of material possessions, but there are also much harder hitting, emotional and personal gains and losses. The biggest illusion you suffer is your own notion of self-identification. Normally it isn't until you are old and have slowed down that you are jolted to the fact that you aren't going to live forever. I can't do half the things I could in my youth. My body doesn't respond. This is impermanence. I make up for this with being aware, caring and understanding.

Gain is marked with selfish and egotistical pride, conceit and arrogance. You feel in control, all-powerful and a know-it-all. But this is short lived. Money, status, position, and power are deceptions you struggle to hold on to and control. On the flip side when things don't go your way you are annoyed, fearful and insecure. Again, self and ego are the source of your suffering and problems as you do things with a motive of gain and control.

The Perfections of the Bodhisattva help you deal with loss and gain. One well known, senior monk tells the story of his mother passing away and how he wept at the loss of this all-important person in his life. You have feelings and honestly relate to them. There is no covering up, deception or being callous. But putting things into perspective, the Dharma has you understanding that life presents challenges. You meet the adversities with patience, equanimity and a clear mind of wisdom.

Fame and Infamy

Who wouldn't like to be the toast of the town, complimented by friends, recognized and sought after? But again fame feeds the ego and inevitably there comes a downfall. You can't make everyone happy and be all things to all people. Someone is always going to feel left out and bitter. The backlash is guaranteed. The President, the Governor or a parent know all about making unpopular decisions. When you are generous, and share in the Perfections, kind actions are usually returned to you, but you don't have any expectations or illusions of needing any such recognition. A truly practiced and wise person isn't swayed by praise or off handed remarks. If in the end you are the only one to know what has honestly happened then you can be content in having lived faithfully.

When you read the discourses, you will be surprised at how the Buddha was challenged and criticized. He was also paid great homage. Whatever the situation, moment or encounter, he was unwavering and fearless. He realized all too well how notoriety is a burden rather than an asset. His speech, actions and thoughts reflected wisdom. He remained steadfast to awareness, understanding and having compassion as his guidelines.

Praise and Blame

If politicians weren't in general so corrupt you would do well to follow their example of great resiliency for praise or blame. As long as they are in power you can say anything you want about them, and they will smile. But more realistically praise is ego inflating while blame crushes your personal image. Praise is soothing and gentle while blame is hostile and unwelcome. You like people and situations where you feel comfortable, are well received, admired and avoid any

negative feedback. The antics of self and ego are devious and subtle.

But how do you handle criticism and blame without feeling the need to fight back and avenge an insult? It is self that needs to be comforted. Praise and blame are as changing as the weather. One moment it can be warm and pleasant and the next moment cold and rainy. Sometimes all you can do is endure and accept the situation as it is. No amount of justification will help. These are challenging lessons for all of us. The other person is entitled to their opinions even if they run counter to your own. View yourself as a peacemaker. After all, you are on the Path to Peace.

Happiness and Pain

There is Everyday happiness and Insightful happiness. Everyday happiness soothes and comforts your ego illusion, always leading to disappointments. Everyday happiness relates to the three different forms of desire: your senses and sensual desire; self and ego desire attachment to the idea that you are a unique person or individual; and the desire of no-self that is an extreme reaction to life.

In your daily exchanges the pendulum swings from sensual and self-happiness to difficulty and disarming. Remaining calm, steady, and secure is a measure of your understanding and practice. Happiness and pain are both short lived. When I severely sprained my ankle while at the temple, I immediately knew the impermanence of the situation and that change would come. I hobbled for two months before the ankle improved. During my convalescence I meditated on what it would be like to be permanently handicapped and the equanimity needed for such a life. The late film star, Christopher Reeve, who once played the action hero Superman, was confined to a wheelchair after a serious horse riding accident. He was no less a person, showed great courage and received support from friends and family. Imagine what it must be like to live a handicapped life. The marathon runner and Olympic champion, Abebe Bikila, became paralyzed from the waist down after a car accident.

This isn't a fatalistic or pessimistic point of view, but realizing the impermanent nature of life. The Dharma is reflected and evidenced in everything around you. Can you be 'happy' regardless of the

situation, circumstance or encounter? At the end of each e-mail I have the signature piece “Whatever form the earth and the universe make me, may I be at peace.” This is a reminder to myself and sharing with others a deeper realization of life.

Like riding a cresting wave which peaks then crashes, you are picked up, carried for a while then tossed. How you handle and cope with the ups and downs of life is the true measure of your spiritual journey. There are Everyday reactions of indignation, disappointment, anger, fear, and confusion as you cling to self-driven needs and expectations, or realizing your true fearless potential and release from self through your experienced Dharma wisdom. Be confident, you are now aware.

Life Practice

The Big Picture begins with glimpses of understanding. Only your own self imagined weakness creating misunderstandings and obstacles limits you. Take the time to notice the Dharma and change around you, how things arise and how they move on. Wrinkles now line your face, but they can be smiling lines of awareness. Awareness, understanding and wisdom more than make up for your lack of strength or speed. Attached to a self-nature, you realize how silly and caught up you have been about things.

The next time you are outside look around. You are a part of the elements. Leaves fall. The wind gusts and carries things. Water moves swiftly. You come across the remains of an animal. Notice all the elements from sun, earth, water, and air that were in this creature. See how, in its passing it returns to the elements to share its life energy. You have awareness, understanding and wisdom. Now be mindful and responsible for your actions. With his last breath the Buddha uttered: “It is the nature of all compounded things to decay. Attain perfection through diligence.” DN 16.

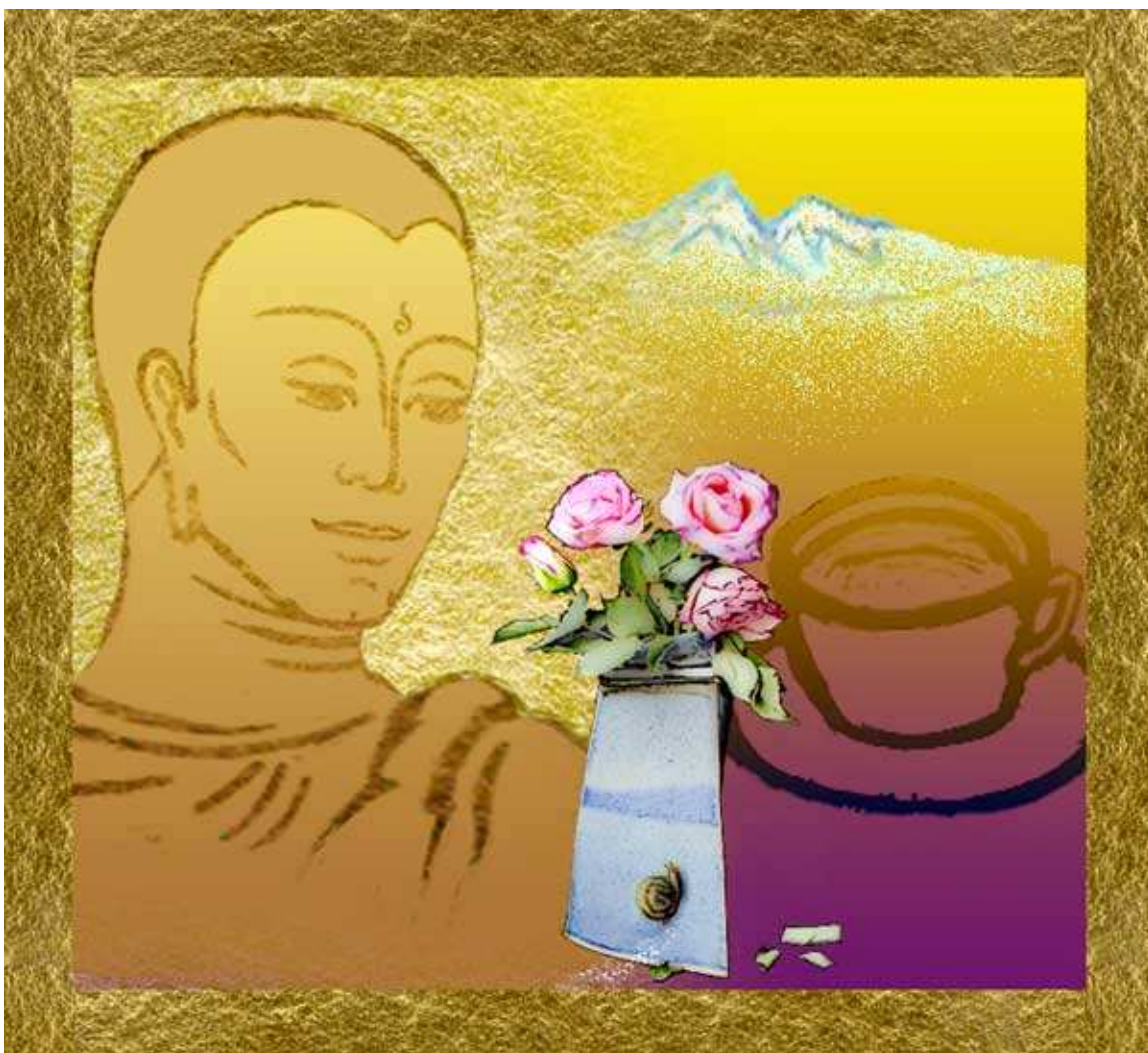
At times you find yourself sick, but have your actions and carelessness actually made you sick? Reached for are tranquilizers and painkillers; covered up are unresolved issues. Simplicity is the key to refuge and renunciation as you loosen the bag of material and emotional attachments. Presented with options and choices, a

deepening awareness and understanding begins to lift the veil of self and ego.

The Path to Peace brings you to wisdom.

Chapter Eight

IMPERMANENCE AND THE SUFFERING FROM IMPERMANENCE— Energy, Karma, Self



“That impermanence, that suffering, that changeability in the world—that is the misery in the world.” AN 258.

***“Above, across or back again,
wherever he goes in the world
let him carefully scrutinize
the rise and fall of compounded things.” IT 120***

Your 'Wandering' Through Impermanence



The Buddha looks directly into our eyes. His copper tinged brown eyes are honest and serious. A long moment passes in silence. Once we are settled, he begins to speak.

“Life in the world is unpredictable and uncertain. Life is difficult, short and fraught with suffering. Being born, one has to die; this is the nature of the world. With old age there is death; this is the way things are.” He nods his head slightly. “When fruit is ripe, it may drop early in the morning. In the same way, one who is born may die at any moment. Just as all the pots made by all the potters end in being broken, so it is with the life of all who are born. Neither young nor old, foolish nor wise will escape the trap of death. All move towards death. They are overcome by death. They pass on to another world. A father cannot save his son or a family its members. Look! With relatives watching, with tears and crying, men are carried off one by one, like cattle to the slaughter. So, death and aging are a natural part of the world. Thus, the wise grieve not, seeing the nature of the world.” (SN 574-581).

His eyes are open wide. A great truth is being conveyed. “There are these five facts that one should reflect on often, whether one is a woman or a man, lay or ordained. Which five?

I am subject to aging, have not gone beyond aging...

I am subject to illness, have not gone beyond illness...

I am subject to death, have not gone beyond death...

I will grow different, separate from all that is dear and appealing to me...

I am the owner of my [motivates] actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir.” (AN 5, 57).

His eyes are piercing as he continues talking. “All conditioned things are impermanent. All conditioned things are suffering. All conditioned or unconditioned things are soulless or selfless (DH 277-279)...there is this established condition of the Dharma, this fixed law of Dharma: all conditioned phenomena are impermanent...all conditioned phenomena are suffering...all dharmas are non-self...(AN 3, 134). For one who remains focused on the impermanence of all fabrications, ignorance is abandoned, clear knowing [insight] arises.” (IT 3, 50-99).

Living in La Paz, Baja California, Mexico prior to making my monastic commitment, I would go in the evenings to the edge of town and watch the sunset over the bay. Usually, I would sit for two hours watching the colorful scene unfold across the Western sky. No two sunsets were ever alike. Some evenings were clear; others were streaked with a strata of clouds. One evening the sun would be a large, orange flamed ball and the next evening it would be a soft ruby color. I sat there with the blending elements of earth, sea and sky.

A Mexican friend who knew of my interests asked me, “What is Buddhism? What is it all about?”

Motioning to the blue-green bay, I answered, “We are like that—the earth, the sea and sky. But we have lost contact with all the elements. We are like nature. If you sit and meditate, you’ll find a quiet place inside yourself and then see how everything really is.”

I only half imagined or had an inkling of what life was about. I was closer to ignorant, but at least I was meditating and being mindful. The settling of meditation then allowed me to know my many habits and impulses and to slowly see into the true nature of life, the Dharma. No, I wasn’t in the least bit wise.

Later, I spent some months at a fishing village which was truly getting back to basics, having no telephone, electricity or running water. The highlight of each month was the full moon appearing over the Eastern horizon. We sat quietly and watched as the moon loomed larger in the sky and streaked a shimmering reflection on the water. Here were conditions and nature at their most elemental.

All around you, marking and influencing every aspect of your life, is impermanence—an arising, transformation and dissolving. Too busy in your frantically paced life, consumed with your self-important doing, you are oblivious to the obvious. Impermanence and the action from impermanence dominates your life and the universe.

What then is impermanence? We all know that it means not lasting or enduring. As fleeting and fickle as your thoughts, your own body in the course of just one or two seconds isn't the same as it was the moment before. For the best evidence, look at your family history in your many photo albums—newborns; toddlers; high school senior prom bright smiles; young men and women; middle age spread and balding; gray, wrinkled old people. Many of the people in the photographs have passed on. You go from a nursing baby all the way to a hunched-back senior citizen. Nothing or no one escapes the defining way of the Dharma—impermanence.

The continental plates, the tallest mountains, the sturdiest ant hill, waves pounding a shore, a 2,000 year old redwood tree—all crumble, evaporate, change or erode. The universe itself is expanding (expansion is change as things move and shift about, 'cosmic contraction and expansion' MN 36) but perhaps one day to collapse upon itself or continue expanding, but there will always be change. The Buddha didn't invent this. He started simply with his breath, became very still and concentrated, observed himself then looked around at the world. Everything is impermanent—arising, transforming and dissolving.

Insurance companies know all about impermanence. They prey and use impermanence to their advantage. They know all too well that people will die. There will be fire loss; hurricane, earthquake and storm damage; airplane, car and workplace accidents. They profit on the deception of permanence and pander to people wanting to have a

steady, secure life. The symbol of one insurance company is the Rock of Gibraltar. Even the rock will one day be reduced to dust. Most of us accept change as a part of our lives, but there is something you haven't understood or acknowledged—your uneasiness and wrestling with change creates the suffering, stress, unhappiness and dissatisfaction of your life. This was a keen observation and experience noted by the Buddha—impermanence hurts! Unhappy and unsettled, you are in a Catch-22—the very things you desire and crave slip through your fingers like trying to hold water. The more you go on to try to keep your possessions, are attached to loved ones or a certain way of life, the more you suffer. Ironically, your very desires are your dilemma. All of life seeks to survive, come out ahead and be satisfied.

Naturally, you ask, why is there impermanence—why are things changing and coming apart? Simply put, we don't live in a perfect world or paradise. Fruit ripens, falls and then goes bad. There is evolution, change, and transformation. Nothing is absolute or guaranteed. Ask the insurance companies. The present moment is alive and dynamic, a moment or two passes before changing and dissolving into the next continuously changing present moment experience, going on to then influence and promote other moments. Sharing the Way of the Dharma, the Buddha pointed to the 'wandering' (*samsara*) through impermanence, a victim of your own desires, anger and confusion and not knowing the true nature of life. As a result of impermanence you are continually rubbed the wrong way.

On the night of his full awakening and wisdom, Siddhartha Gotama had three profound insights into impermanent life and how motivated actions affect your life. In the first understanding he saw deeply into the role of his own motives or karma and how his past actions went on to affect his life. He was never the same person but a transferring of similar, motivated energy. He realized how the charge of willed actions played and lent themselves to certain consequences and results for suffering or a life less inclined to suffer. ***“When the mind was thus concentrated...I directed it to the knowledge of recollecting my past lives...many eons of cosmic contraction and expansion...Thus I remembered my manifold past lives in their modes and details.” MN 36.***

Once fully penetrating the role of 'self' promoted action and how it carried over, the Buddha had a second penetrating understanding, seeing into the lives of all beings and creatures throughout the universe. They all suffered because of the actions brought about by their motives or intentions. ***“When the mind was thus concentrated...I directed it to the knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings. I saw—by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human—beings passing away and re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their [motives] karma.” MN 36.***

In his third penetration of wisdom bringing him to full Buddhahood came the realization of the Four Noble Truths of 'self' promoted action and the way to liberation. ***“When the mind was thus concentrated...I directed it to the knowledge of the ending of the mental fermentations [habit energies of 'self' promoted actions]. I discerned, as it was actually present, that ‘This is suffering...This is the origination of suffering...This is the cessation of suffering... This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering...These are fermentations...This is the origination of fermentations...This is the cessation of fermentations....This is the way leading to the cessation of fermentations.’ My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the fermentation of sensuality, released from the fermentation of becoming, released from the fermentation of ignorance [about the Dharma and true nature of life as non-self]. With release, there was the knowledge, ‘Released.’ I discerned that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’” MN 36.***

Life appears to be stable and defined because your awareness isn't sharp. Slipping by you is the in between moment of 'transformation' within impermanence. You notice the big events of birth and death, beginning and ending, but as change slows in the present moment you are deceived and think of things as solid, fixed, enduring and permanent. As a magician uses tricks and illusions, you are deceived by your slow to recognize senses and think of time, events, and places, as well as the biggest delusion of people and yourself, as

being individual and separate. But the wrinkles, receding hairline, and expanding waist prove otherwise.

This isn't to dismiss or dehumanize the experiences of your life, but to clarify impermanence. You proceed with caution, awareness and caring on your spiritual journey ("Impermanent are all compounded things. When one perceives this with true insight, then one becomes detached from suffering; this is the path of purification." DH 277). Sitting to meditate, you slow down to have insight for the elemental nature and the impermanent truth that is the Dharma.

The Dharma and impermanence aren't haphazard or random, but have the deeper implication of your motives or karma, as having a compelling willed energy behind them. You can chart the obvious orbits of the planets, but less certain and defined are the many influences and conditions that make up your own life because they have the element of free will behind them. To be detailed in later chapters, not only is there change and transformation or willed action in the present, there is also action of the 'past' that goes on to influence the 'future' (Chapter Eleven, Conditions Arising). This energy is karma (Chapter Ten). Karma isn't fate or a celestial passing of judgment, but how the energy of your strong-willed motives directs events, then goes on to promote similar, but not exactly the same, actions. There is a principled and reasoned consequence underlying the actions of the universe.

Already you have discovered the relationship between Everyday, careless actions which are summed up in the three broad categories of greed, aversion and delusion (they are the root causes for all the afflictions in your life with delusion or ignorance being the defining false impression), but also for Insightful Wise Action which is generous, of good will and wise. On subtle and not so subtle levels, the Everyday and Insightful actions and motives play themselves out over and over again. Impermanence from beginningless time (without a defined place of origin), generating a cause and effect, marks life as suffering, unsatisfactory, of non-self influences and conditions, is clung to and grasped, craved after, and a struggle of survival and comfort. Behind impermanent action are the compelling-willed motives driving the universe—careful or careless, skillful or unskillful, wise or unwise—karma as motivated action a guiding

checks and balances for how life is lived. There is no fate but, rather, how each person has free choice empowering their lives.

The Makings of Impermanence



The Four Dynamic Forces— Extension, Cohesion, Temperature and Motion

Science has come very far in explaining the forces of nature, but misses the subtleties behind the transformation within impermanence and the link to direct personal experience for insight. Researchers overlook that they are also a part of their findings and connected to the ‘big picture.’ Investigating ever deeper, elusive elementary particles have been reduced to such names as ‘strange, charm, and neutrinos.’ Requiring concrete, without-a-doubt proof of so many precise equations, science has run into a wall where their investigation can’t penetrate further. The straightforward wisdom of the East can now fill in the gaps where research, calculations, equipment and experiments no longer can measure or define. While science divides and separates through its analysis, the Dharma is an intuitive dynamic, leading to awareness and wisdom.

There are Four Dynamic Forces of extension, cohesion, temperature, and motion underlying the action of impermanence and make for the variety of conditions coming together. The Four Forces are the very verbs of change; all material phenomena having in its makeup their energy. The dominating element makes for either a body (earth, physical body or material form), fluid (moisture, liquid or gas), temperature (heat and combustion or cold), or space (air and motion).

Extension (solid)—the earth, your bodies and anything ‘solid’ in form are molded by the force of extension. The characteristics of hard and soft, which are relative, allow for a material body to occupy space, resist pressures as well as prevent other forms from occupying the

same space. Your skeletal bones, bodies and organs come about as part of the extension dynamic.

Cohesion (liquid)—this dynamic allows for scattered particles to join as ‘bodies’ or ‘forms.’ The elements of extension and cohesion are closely interrelated; when cohesion weakens and stops, extension also breaks down.

Water and all liquids reflect cohesion. Cohesion is the element that ‘greases’ the wheel of impermanence. When some bodies melt, cohesion dominates as fluid. Your intake of liquids accounts for the body being 70% cohesion, keeping everything lubed and working.

Temperature (heat)—heat or cold (cold is also a temperature but of a lower degree) have the power to nourish as a vitalizing energy. Every material body possesses some degree of temperature. Unlike the other three forces, the temperature dynamic has the power to regenerate matter by itself. The friction of impermanence as things arise then dissolve makes for temperatures of heat and cold. You are born warm with active energy then go cold when your physical energy ebbs and comes to an end.

Motion (space/air)—movement is produced from this dynamic. Motion is regarded as the force or the generator for temperature. The air element is produced by motion and the reason that all material particles are in a state of vibration, flux, change and action. Motion and heat together account for the energy that stimulates your life.

But where is the earth element or the water element? Where is the air element and the heat element? Penetrating into the Dharma, the Buddha saw the Four Dynamic Forces and how all life are a combination of many influences and conditions joining together. **The paradox of impermanence is that for there to be ‘one’ there must always be two or more conditions and influences.** For there to be any ‘one’ person, animal or plant, other conditions, influences and pressures exist, and in turn these conditions, influences and pressures have their own conditions. You can’t point to a particle of solid, liquid, motion or temperature because they are all products of conditions and a changing universe. The Buddha used the word ‘compounded’ referring to how conditions touch and join everything.

With his last breath he uttered, “all compounded things are of the nature to decay [are impermanent]” DN 16. “Put aside the extreme of past and the extreme of future [a beginning or an ending]. I will teach you Dharma. When there is not this, there is not that. Ceasing this ceases that,” he added in MN 2.

As when I lived in Baja California, looking out at the earth, sea and sky, we are all part of the elements. Your problems and upset come from your inability to deal with and accept change. But now having awareness, you step out from uncertainty to experience for yourself the Dharma, how life truly is—impermanent, the friction and the unsettling from impermanence, and non-self.

The Five Conditioning Processes (Seasonal, Genetic, Natural, Karmic, and Conscious Conditioning Processes)



The present moment (the perspective of time, place and history) has five conditioning forces coming together at the ‘right time.’ In MN 38 the Buddha mentions the ‘three conditions’ for human birth, but the notion of ‘right time’ applies to all life. If the right conditions aren’t present or don’t exist then the energies creating that experience are unable to come together.

For example, there are four types of birth, relating to all living things, each birth having the right condition and influence but also needing to have the ‘right time.’ There is egg born (birds and reptiles); womb born (humans and mammals); moisture born (bacteria and some insects) and finally, there is spontaneous birth, which doesn’t go through embryonic development (MN 12).

Seasonal Conditions—the physical inorganic order of temperature (hot and cold), climate (rain, drought, wind, etc.), and the seasons (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter).

Genetic Conditions—cells, genes, germs, seeds, elements, minerals, vitamins, proteins, heredity (sex and reproduction), as well as evolution.

Karmic Conditions—the energy of action, and its resulting consequences and effects. On a deeper level, karma is an action carried over from previous acts. Motives and behavior go on to play themselves out and continue as a present and future scenario. This isn't fate but how many influences combine to play an important role in each and every life moment and circumstance. Karma relates to your problem of 'suffering,' the reason for so-called 'fate or destiny,' and to the inequalities and injustices occurring within humanity.

Natural Conditions—the physical, gravitational as well as all the natural forces of the universe, also covering the 'supernatural' phenomena accompanying the birth and activities of a Buddha in the world.

Conscious Conditions—encompassed here is the dimension of thought energy, mind, imagination and psychic ability. Consciousness includes the present moment understanding, awareness, insight, and wisdom through direct experience of the Dharma or there can be careless, Everyday habit-driven ignorance.

Many Lives, Many Worlds (The World Systems)



Using the language of his present day India to communicate as a skillful means, the Buddha describes a cosmos of vast proportions and complexities, taking in many life forms and conditions as well as the cause and effect of all action.

Great patches of time mark the progress of impermanence through the cosmos ("Inconceivable indeed is the beginning of this faring on." SN 2, 118). Our short lived human lives are nothing more than a blink in the epochs of longer enduring spans, going on to generate and influence energy,

life, action and change. Time is better understood as a moment-to-moment arising, transforming and dissolving through the action of impermanence. There is no fate or defined life, but each life-energy generates action, the action to survive and seek comfort, conditioned by many influences. There are light worlds which are millions of years long (as realized, for example, by Einstein). There are severe lives of brutality witnessed in the animal kingdom. As a human, you are somewhere in the middle, having enough awareness to go beyond your habit energies and impulsive reactions.

The Three Planes of Life Action

Since impermanence implies action and life is action, three world potentials exist for the playing out of conditioned, willed-life action and your 'wandering' through the stress and conflicts of change. While some planes have longer lasting lives, they all succumb to the arising, transforming and dissolving that is life, and life can very well move within the Three Planes—the Sense Contact Plane (dominated by the senses and physical contact), the Fine Material Plane (weakening of the senses and maturing mental insight), the Immaterial Plane (higher mind/psycho conscious potential).

These are all conditioned experiences and worlds dominated by the undoing of impermanence and the energy of karma. The Buddha went on to realize a fourth 'unconditioned' or 'unfabricated' domain which is free of the Everyday forces, conflicts and stresses (greed, aversion and delusion). Nirvana (Chapter Fourteen) is a liberation known through the end of craving and the eradication of habit energies or the defilements of self attachment.

The Sense Contact Plane

The Sense Contact Plane is the most haunted, tormented and suffering of the three conditioned realms, having the base senses and dominated by desire and conflict for physical satisfaction and gratification. Many beings and creatures wander helplessly, searching in vain for fulfillment. There are battles for survival through fight/flight instinct which dominate as the Ten Unwholesome actions are acted out.

Ironically, birth as a human being in the Sense Plane is favorable, a combination of pleasure and pain with the potential to realize the truth

of the Dharma and better ourselves. The possibility of virtue and wisdom exist. It is as humans that 'stream-entry' to liberation, understanding the Dharma and your commitment to the Path to Peace take place. There is some enjoyment and delight of a less suffering life, where bodhisattvas perfect themselves to return to the human realm to become Buddhas. The announced Buddha in the far off future, Maitreya, will take place in the Sense Contact Plane. Fortunately, there is no 'eternal' hell as nothing is permanent and all beings and creatures are able to better their lives.

The Fine Material Plane

The beings in this plane enjoy varying degrees of meditative concentration and the beginning detachment from sense pleasure domination. They range according to the level of meditative absorption developed. In the highest state recognition, the body exists as a material flux while mental distractions are temporarily calmed and brought to a stand still through the deepening of cultivated meditative absorption.

The Immaterial Formless Plane

The inhabitants here are possessed entirely of mind and deep concentration as complete separation from the physical and sense world is known. An existence of pure concentrated-mind bliss is achieved. Having no physical body, they are unable to hear Dharma teachings and offerings. The higher meditation absorptions are distinguished.

The Buddha didn't emphasize a universal theory, but expressed the dominant action or karma of each being and creature, the cause and effects of their actions, and the consequences and results. Motives and responsibility determine how life is to be lived and experienced. You don't have to be overwhelmed by your habit energies and impulsive reactions. As the Buddha points out, there is also compassion and wisdom to help you step out from the struggle with impermanence. Wise action brings an end to suffering. The Path to Peace is leading you to insight and freedom.

The Dharma expresses the threefold nature of the universe: impermanent; a friction, suffering, dissatisfaction and unsettled

quality; and non-self nature. For each aspect of the Dharma there is an understanding and insight revealing its deeper, true meaning.

Life being impermanent you begin to penetrate the Wisdom of **Signless Deliverance**. To see and experience without seeing a solid, separate subject or object (a 'sign' or label of identification or naming that you project onto things) before you, but rather deeply knowing that everything and everyone is only so much 'compounded' energy, and just as quickly the subject/object transforms and goes on to dissolve or change. Fooled by appearances, you may see a chair, an animal, a river or someone but, in fact, what you see and experience is short lived and changes (the chair will break, the animal pass away, the river dry up and the person age and pass on). You fail to take into account the penetrating understanding of **Signlessness**.

Insight for the flawed, unsettled and suffering is recognized as change is a part of and affects everything, the limits and imperfection behind life. Realizing this 'flaw' in life, then there is the Wisdom of **Desireless Deliverance**. There is nothing worth 'desiring' or longing after because try as much as you will, you won't be able to hold on to the moment and will suffer when things end. People get sick, age and die and you will be separated from everything in your life. This doesn't mean that you don't care or love nor that life is hopeless, but to know the moment and experience as short term and to see how 'desire' keeps you off balance and neglectful. Desireless Deliverance is to not have the longing and the pursuit to grasp and crave.

Insight of non-self (Chapter Nine) is to see how energies combine to influence and join the 'one' without there really being any separate individual or entity. A giant redwood tree, for example, is formed by rain water, sunlight and earth nutrients all mixing to live as a tree—short term, too, as fire, disease or age will affect the tree's growth. Wisdom of **Emptiness Deliverance** is to know the 'emptiness' of non-self and to be free from the burden of the compelling willed action of motives inciting you to be a self that suffers.

Unshakeable Deliverance is the fourth dimension or liberating wisdom that the whole of the Buddhist practice is directed towards. Without definition, substance, becoming, or conditioning, Nirvana is a

peace and freedom from the three worldly conditions and their suffering.

Impermanence as a Salvation



By now you are wondering and seriously asking, what do all these far out notions and world systems have to do with me? This is fine but I have a job, a family of three, and mortgage payments to make. I'm sorry but all this sounds like a lot of mumbo-jumbo. I just try to fit in some meditation time and get a little peace and quiet in my life. But don't jump to conclusions. Take a moment and look deeper. There are many things going on

in the background behind your 'innocently' lived life.

Take a look around you. Conflicts and military actions are raging somewhere in the world. This is closer to the Hell Realm. Monte Carlo, Las Vegas and Atlantic City cater to the temptation of money and vice. Washington DC, Beijing, Moscow, Berlin, Tokyo and other capitals are the corridors for power and corruption. Pornography is connected to Hollywood and other locales as an attachment to the Sense Realm. Some Third World countries biggest produced crops are drug related because they are kept out of the fringes of economic development by the industrial nations. Look at the animal world, plant life, and physical universe. Each speaks for itself and the type of energy spawned and how lives are lived and expressed. You don't have to invent tall tales but have an honest look at life around you.

Take a look at your own conscious awareness prior to starting your spiritual practice and to now journeying on the Path to Peace. You began in ignorance with deep seeded desires. Each of us in his or her own way has known hell and suffering, and now each of us can lead a life of wisdom. There is no 'big bang' to awakening and spiritual fulfillment, but rather a series of little bangs and connections made along the way. Change works to your benefit, too, if you know where to look and how to apply it. The Buddha steered completely

away from hypothetical issues. His whole focus was to direct an understanding for and liberation from suffering. But you shouldn't reject anything because of your limited insight.

Life Practice

A lot of your life is spent in counter productive and harmful action. I look back and see how I was at odds with myself and the world. We are distracted, consumed, fearful or down right stubborn. Not everything merits your attention or a reaction. You can pick and choose your way. You learn intelligent, skillful and compassionate action. Unless sirens are screeching, smoke is pouring out a window, or someone is screaming for help, then you really don't have to live the demanding, high-stressed lives that have become characteristic of our times.

Relax and bring an aware and caring attention to your life. Witness and observe the moment arising, transforming and dissolving. Detachment, patience, acceptance and understanding are cultivated as equanimity is developed.

Note how you cling and remain attached to the action and the stress brought on from your motives as you fight, argue and wrestle with the experience or moment. The event can be long over with, and yet you are punishing yourself. This is how you suffer in life. You become fist-like hard and inflexible as you react. Feel, experience and know impermanence, opening one digit at a time of your compulsive, driven nature.

Demanded by one monk to know the origin of the universe, the Buddha refused to answer. Instead he pointed to the practical and not to the theoretical. (“This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’—I have declared...Because it is beneficial, it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life...it leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana [peace].” MN 63). All you need concern yourself with is the changes affecting you. You do have control over your motives and intentions and where you are headed.

Truly realizing impermanence in your life is the beginning of freedom.

Chapter Nine

THE GREATEST ACTOR— The Makings of Self and Your Non-self Freedom



“I will show you grasping and worry and I will show you the letting go of and freedom from grasping and worry. And what is grasping and worry? Concerning this, ordinary folk have this view: ‘This body is mine, I am this, this is my self.’ For one like this, the body alters and changes, and owing to this alteration and change, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair arise in him. And it is the same with his feelings, perception, mental constructs and consciousness. And what is letting go of and freedom from worry? Concerning this, the well taught noble

disciple has this view: 'This body is not mine. I am not this, this is not my self.' For one like this, the body alters and changes, but in spite of alteration and change, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair do not arise in him. And it is the same with feelings, perception, mental constructs and consciousness. Thus, there is letting go of and freedom from grasping and worry." SN 3, 19.

Who Are You?



We stop to sit and rest with the Buddha, looking out over the countryside. A river curls through the landscape. The different tones of dark and soft yellows, browns and greens show in squared patterns on the land.

"When a person perceives impermanence, perception of non-self becomes established in him; and when a person perceives non-self, he arrives at the elimination of the conceit 'I am,' and that is Nirvana here and now."(UD 4, 1). The Buddha gestures with a slight wave of his right hand.

"Mean thoughts, trivial thoughts come tempting the mind and fly away; not understanding these thoughts in the mind, the heart strays chasing them back and forth. A man understanding these thoughts in his mind expels them with vigorous awareness, and one enlightened has done with them all; for no more temptation then stirs his mind." (AN 9, 3).

"In the world I see this generation racked by craving for being." The Buddha pauses, looking directly at us. "Wretched men gibbering in the face of Death, still craving, hoping, for some kind of being. See how they tremble over what they claim as 'mine,' like fishes in the puddles of a failing stream." (SN 4, 2). His voice drops off. We look at the Buddha. He shakes his head then turns back to look at the countryside.

Most everything you do in life is done in the pursuit of personal happiness as you try to fulfill the person you believe yourself to be, struggling to have meaning, order and a sense of well being.

Again, the Buddha questioned his own life. But he was more specific and narrowed his investigation and inquiry to why he suffered and why there is suffering in the world. Your approach to life, how you live, and the questions you have asked have left you unsettled and unfulfilled. If you ask for more money, a new car or a larger home, a better job, season tickets to football games, a graduate degree, the perfect mate, your life will certainly take you in these directions. Do the questions you ask lead you to having insight and being free from suffering and your problems? Are you made better from your search? And, ultimately, are you happy with the answers you get?

The Buddha's father, King Suddhodanna, tried to influence Prince Siddhartha through the pursuit of riches and reputation, but Siddhartha was unfulfilled. He saw that all possessions, relationships and worldly comforts eventually lead to suffering, disenchantment and dissatisfaction. Siddhartha ended up renouncing everyday life. He asked the most important questions of all—why do we suffer and why is there suffering? The insights that the Buddha came to know and experience were remarkable and not the typical understanding.

You already have half the answer—impermanence. You live in an imperfect setting and world. Everything you have, know, possess, and love will change and at some time come to an end, leaving you dissatisfied. What then does impermanence imply about you as a person?

Non-self is the third insight of the Dharma and the most challenging because of your Everyday notions for life. You experience life as if you were the center of the universe with everything else revolving around you. This is an Everyday view. The Dharma connects you to the Insightful truth about life. Driven to survive through the breakdown of impermanence, life, moments, people (including yourself) and all experiences are made up and linked through many energies, influences and conditions. Going for a hike around a lake, I shuddered at one point. I saw the body of water not as a lake but as

a source of billions of individual drops of water forming the ‘one’ lake; many energies and external forces (climate, geography, the right time, etc.) giving the impression of the ‘one.’

Now take a look at yourself. How special and individual do you think you are? There are parents, schooling, friends, culture and society as well as personal histories all coming together to form an identity of self. Looking at life through the awareness of the Dharma (impermanence, the friction and the unsettledness, and the non-self nature), all that you are, imagine yourself to be, comes from outside yourself. Material energy comes together to make your body. The body energy bonds for a time then weakens. Your character is so many imprints of personality. There is nothing that stands out that can be identified as a self or a person. Self is a nourishing of conditions and influences, a non-self collection.

Mistaken with the insight of non-self is ‘no self.’ No self is an extreme view related to ‘nothing’ or annihilation and borders on chaos. Negating self while segregating the phenomena of the Dharma, no self has things as individual, without taking into account the role of Conditions Arising and the greater implications of impermanence. No self relates life as coming from nothing and ending in nothing. On the other hand, non-self reflects the truth of the Dharma, pointing to the changing conditions that contribute to life as well as the recognition that there is no individual or separate being, but a blending of body, feelings, perception, motives/mental reactions (autobiography), and consciousness. Misunderstanding the insight of non-self, a group of monks committed suicide. The Buddha had to reemphasize non-self as not having ‘loathing’ for the body but rather not to identify with it. Your awareness takes you to not being attached to the body or mind as a self and to the deeper realization of the non-self nature of all life (SN 54, 9).

As a way of communicating and a convenience tool of language, we refer to ‘he/she, his/hers—I, me, and mine.’ The pronouns are words of reference, a shorthand way to distinguish moments and serve as a description. But, unfortunately, you take I, me, and mine all too seriously. You aren’t acknowledging or understanding the short-lived nature or the changes ongoing within your life. Non-self doesn’t deny the experience of the mind/body interaction but simply that the

'person' you see yourself as is empty of soul or a unique, separate personal identity. The notion of I, me, mine and your reaction to impermanence distances you from the truth of the Dharma.

Visualize for a moment an old fashioned coffee filter, the type that looks like a sock around a wire frame holder placed in a large cup. Your mind and how it operates isn't much different. The cup is clean, clear, empty and void—a vessel. You are born innocent—clean, clear, empty and void. The filter is your mind conscious awareness sifting and collecting, filling with life experiences. Once, you were uncluttered and simple of mind. What happened along the way? How did you go from an open-minded, awe struck child to being a desiring, angry, prejudice, fearful and doubting adult?

As a baby you cry out for care and feeding and the cup-like vessel of 'self' experiences begins to fill. Encounter after encounter, drop by drop, emotions, conditions and thoughts hit you from every direction. Soon, the overflow of experiences, trials and errors, do's and don'ts, triumphs and failures, pleasure and pain starts to collect and leads you to behaving with a certain disposition for self. Your once clear and empty cup-like vessel have gone on to fill with feelings, culture and family pressures. Judgments form and a character jells from these life experiences. A smiling, bubbling child slowly turns into a doubting, short-tempered adult. So many habits and impulses, the mind is flooded to the point of confusion, nearing a nervous breakdown.

The Monkey Mind distractions of desire, anger, dullness, restlessness and worry, and doubt and confusion thicken to a clogged up filter of self identification. No wonder you are unable to clearly understand and connect with the truth of the Dharma. Usually one of the habit energies of desire, anger or confusion is more dominant and becomes a discriminating way of looking at the world. An ego, a self and a personality attachment is the result—an addiction and obsession to self habits and impulses. Tommy becomes a Tom who is worried and hard driven; Susie becomes a Susan who is secure and a leader; Debbie becomes a Deborah who is nervous and flees; Charlie becomes a Charles who is dominating and needs to control.

A lopsided personality has formed. Now there is right and wrong, ugly and beautiful, love and hate. Desires and craving emerge. Opinions and views mesh and an individual voice demands to be heard. There is hurt, resentment and anger. A character or personal connection to the world takes hold. Insecurity and barriers of doubt are erected as battle lines are drawn. There is attachment and a search for happiness, security and meaning in the unending surge of upsetting impermanence. The illusion to identify with the image of I, me, and mine forms into a view of self and ego delusion. The persona of a girl and boy, a woman and man is clung to.

Who then are you? You have been cast as an actor given a part to play; the many influences and conditions of parents, friends, school and society are the pages of a drama. The person you think you are is nothing more than a masquerade.

Sensations Pressing and Impressing



The Buddha gave the Fire Sermon (SN 35, 28), stating how your senses are on fire—stimulated and agitated, sensitive and on edge. All day long your eyes see: billboards, lights, other people, action continuously flashing by. Sounds come up from all directions: car alarms, telephones ringing, a dog barking, babies crying, the scratch of chalk on a blackboard, voices loud or whispered. Smells drift by: Chinese cooking, a flower's scent, jasmine tea, or body odor. Foods are tasted: the fresh morning cup of hot coffee, an Indian curry meal, peppermint gum, the sweetness of a butterscotch candy. Tactile contact occurs: bumping into the edge of a desk, soap slipping through fingers, sanding a cabinet, typing at the computer. Thoughts race by: a memory of an elementary school teacher, your first time at the wheel of a car, a favorite fantasy, a vacation to plan.

But are you what you see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think? Are you really who you think you are? On one level, yes. I've cut my finger

while preparing a meal. I've seen a stunning sunset. The garbage wasn't taken out and now there's a rancid smell in the house. A catfight wakes you up in the middle of the night. The memory of the time you were grounded because your grades were low. It is one thing to hear something and another to personalize the situation by judging it through habit energies. Oh, I can't stand opera. Opera is only a sound and a sound only, a vibration within the ears. Self and ego behavior and impulsiveness have judged the sound to be good or bad, right or wrong, ugly or beautiful. A piece of silk suddenly becomes something seductive and cool but, in fact, it is only material. Your judging and projecting isn't part of the material.

While on a morning alms round the Buddha was stopped and not allowed to pass. Bahiya, who had made a long journey, stood blocking the way, wanting to know the Dharma. Finally, the Buddha answered the insistent man.

“When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bahiya, there is no you in terms of that. When there is no you in terms of that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering.” UD 1,10.

What the Buddha so concisely impressed on the long traveled man 2,500 years ago and still applies to your own experiences here in the 21st century, is that you aren't the sound, the seen, the smelt, the tasted, the touched, or the thought. There have been sense contacts and sense contacts only stirred by a present moment experience.

The person you so highly regard yourself to be, and make elaborate efforts to perpetuate and please, is nothing more than sense moments agitated into action and a reflex of personal attachments. You take things to be solid and secure, but this is the illusion of self and ego, which separates you from the truth of the Dharma.

Another way of understanding the Buddha's words is:

To see without there being someone who sees.

To smell without there being someone who smells.

To hear without there being someone who hears.
 To taste without there being someone who tastes.
 To touch without there being someone who touches.
 To know without there being someone who knows.

By now you must be seriously wondering and asking, well, if there's no self or no one here then what do you call this person, this body, this me that I am? I'm here after all. Knock, knock, who's here?

The body and the senses are part of the Everyday understanding and a common experience—the body aches and ages while the senses take in the action. Insight is having awareness of the impermanent nature of all physical and mental experiences and how they are influenced and conditioned by many elements none of which is self. Yes, here, for the moment, we have names, birthplaces, countries of origin, and social security numbers. These are tools to help us communicate on the Everyday level. There is much more going on.

Stepping outside to look at the clear blue sky, I smiled broadly. While still a layperson I was reading Ven. Walpola Rahula's **What The Buddha Taught**. Finishing the chapter on non-self, it felt as though a great weight had lifted off my shoulders. For a moment, all my problems dispersed and the phantom of 'self' disappeared. Never could I have imagined there not being a self or a me. But here I had just finished reading these very words—non-self. Had I needlessly suffered? Could it be that I was searching in the wrong direction? I didn't have to be who I was told to be—the obligation of family expectations, the day-to-day desires and responsibilities, finding a perfect soul mate, and then angry or disappointed when I didn't fulfill life's goals. All my confusion had come from a self illusion. Your intellectual capacity as a human being is, ironically, a trap ensnaring you to Everyday desires and gratification. While I wasn't free of my habits and impulses, I was never again to be the same. I saw how the years had marked me to deal with life through certain behaviors and reactions. I was an actor in a second rate, B-movie drama. But here, my sense of self began to lose its grip.

Non-self is like peeling an onion. There is nothing inside to be found as fulfilling, linked to a self or to worry over. To know non-self is to 'awaken.' To know non-self is to have insight into the experience of

the Dharma, the true nature of life. To know non-self is to have wisdom.

The Five Groups of Self-Attachment



“Suppose a man...beheld the many bubbles on the Ganges as they drifted along, and he watched them and carefully examined them, then after he had carefully examined them they would appear to him empty, unreal and insubstantial. In exactly the same way does [one] behold all physical phenomena, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and states of consciousness—whether they be of the past, or the present, or the future, far or near. And he watches them, and examines them carefully; and, after carefully examining them, they appear to him empty, void and without a self.”

Experience is synthesized through a connection to five groups, which go on to make up your view of self and ego: body (form), feelings, perceptions, motives/mental reactions (autobiography), and consciousness. The five groups demonstrate that there is no individual or separate self, nor should they be taken to be a replacement for self since that would only be another version of self! It is only through your clinging and attachment that the five groups are revealed. When you aren't attached and grasping the five groups don't surface (“If one stays obsessed with form...feeling...perception...[mental] fabrications...consciousness, that's what one is measured by.” SN 22, 36). Originally, skandhas meant ‘heaps’ but the Buddha used the word as five insubstantial or ‘empty’ groups of consciousness brought about by craving and clinging to an illusion of self. The five groups unite into the role you play out as an actor or actress. The mind and mental awareness are referred to in different terms such as perception, mentality, consciousness, stream of consciousness, mental formations, thinking or the brain, but they are to be taken as the same and the names

used are a reference according to the situation. Whatever the term, the resources of the mind are a dynamic reflection of the impermanent Dharma. Thoughts, ideas, fantasies or imagination have their conditions and influences, arise and then fade away.

Using a simple, illustrative analogy, your human experience is not unlike a four-cylinder car. There is a body (your physical form), a transmission-like nervous system, while the four areas of mind (feelings, perceptions, motives/mental reactions and consciousness) are the four pistons of the engine that powers the consciousness of self. Each piston driving your conscious is unique, but all four have to work together to understand and experience reality. The engine, the transmission, the body and all the other parts, none of the pieces makes the car (or the person) but combined together join to make for your experience of the vehicle of self. If there were a self then self could be controlled and directed.

In one conscious moment all five groups are alive together like the pistons of an engine firing, but you take them to be one and a self. This is the carelessness of ignorance. The whole of your spiritual practice is to undo or clear ignorance to non-self wisdom to know the release from grasping self habits—not I, me or mine. The Dharma reveals impermanence, change and non-self as a true understanding for life as it is and the ultimate, unconditioned reality of Nirvana. Not addicted and obsessed with self but a renunciation to non-self liberation or freedom, you go from driven habit passions and reactions of desire, anger and confusion to generosity, goodwill and understanding, and finally to wisdom. Wise Action works to change your impulsive nature.

Body (material form)

“Form is like a glob of foam...” SN 22, 95. The body is like a shell, an empty chamber. You identify with your body image but the truth is that the body changes, weakens, sickens and, ultimately, breaks down. Everything nourishing the body comes from outside it. The body isn't self.

The body is alive and vibrant, formed by the four elements of extension (solid), cohesion (liquid), temperature (heat), and motion (space/air). You see the body and how it changes in children as they

grow up, and you see the changes in your own body (losing hair, skin wrinkling and sagging, putting on weight). Impermanence is always here. Everything in the sense material realm has a body or shape housing and protecting it.

The Buddha remarks on the illusion of the body: ***“Just as a dog, tied by a leash to a post or stake, keeps running around and circling around that very post or stake; in the same way, an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person...is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dharma—assumes form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.” SN 22, 99.***

The pleasures of the senses through visual stimulation, enjoying sounds, smells, tastes and sexual gratification keeps you pampering, clinging and attached to the body as a source of identity. You aren't aware nor have you understood the Dharma. The pleasure ends and the body changes, always leading to suffering.

The body is your first connection with the present moment. The basic breath awareness and appreciation reveals the body experience as not self. The threefold insights of the Dharma stand out (impermanent, unsettled, and non-self), conditions and influences charged into an effect. Note the stress and attachment, the gravity and pressure as you grasp and cling to the body as self.

“Any [material] form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’” MN 109.

Feelings (sensations)

“Feeling is a bubble...” SN 22, 95. Like bubbles rising to the surface, feelings are evidence and a byproduct of the changing nature of life giving way to other feelings. Feeling is the experience of the present moment as either a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral moment. Where is the person in the array of sensations?

From the appreciation of the body comes the contact of feelings and with feeling begins the first of the four conscious connections of mental experiences. There is no 'one' perception of the present but, rather, rapidly absorbed conscious contacted moments (as experienced if you tried the Awareness Penetrations meditation exercise of Chapter Four). The body stirred, the moment is sensed and a sustained contact is made with an outside subject or stimulation. Like someone knocking at the door, you feel the body-experience taking place. Feelings emerge as pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. As this point you aren't feeling as a self or a person. In the next level of consciousness comes perception where you identify and label the experience. But here there is only a sensed moment of responded to feeling. You yearn, cling and desire pleasant sensations; fear, hate, and are in aversion to painful, difficult and unpleasant sensations; or are bored and neglectful of neutral moments. Feeling is a reaction and reflex to sensations.

Having awareness you open to the moment as it is without becoming attached, overreacting, noting how the feeling began and goes on to change. You aren't pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral as a person, but have awareness for the brevity of the moment.

The threefold insights of the Dharma stand out (impermanent, flawed and unsettled, and non-self), conditions and influences charged into an effect. Note the stress and attachment, the gravity and pressure as you grasp and cling to feelings as self.

"Any feeling whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'" MN 109.

Identifying and Labeling (Perceptions)

“Perception a mirage...” SN 22, 95. Like a shimmering mirage image, perception is an illusion. As you near the mirage it disappears. The notion of self is a deception. Perception is a mental function to identify, label, categorize, and perceive through the six senses.

Through feelings and sensations, you distinguish, connect and name a situation. An all too quick perception or reality check is made to identify and label the moment. Being honest, you are regularly off base in your observations. Put two people together and they are unable to agree on a color. Eyewitnesses to a crime are unable to corroborate the event. In one sad case, a man was convicted of a series of rapes. The women came forward to identify the perpetrator. But the rapes continued until later a remarkable look-alike was caught. The two men could have passed for brothers. However, an innocent man was convicted, divorced by his wife and his life ruined all because of wrong perceptions.

A well-known example of misperception is to see a stick or rope in the road and confuse it for a snake. We have all done that. You aren't seeing or understanding the Dharma clearly. An automatic tendency comes out as a reaction from longstanding instinctive habits and a defensive nature. Pent up energy of desires, fear, anxiousness, worry and hatred cause you to over react. But knowing the true nature of the Dharma, you can come to accept moments as changing and non-self and have caution for your judgments.

Perception should be an awareness and a connection with the present moment rather than a deception. Don't rush to judgment. Self focuses to project and inject all kinds of one-sided distracted and fragmented views. In a museum you take your time and look at the beautiful artwork or exhibition. You should equally appreciate all your experiences.

The threefold insights of the Dharma stand out (impermanent, unsettled, and non-self), conditions and influences charged into an effect. Note the stress and attachment, the gravity and pressure as you grasp and cling to identify and label as self.

“Any perception whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’” MN 109.

Motives/Mental Reactions (autobiography)

“*Mental Formations are a banana tree...*” SN 22, 95. The trunk of a banana tree is so many rolled layers, having no hard wood. Underneath the personality of self there isn’t to be found any self-nature, but only so many conditioned habit and impulses. Choices, imagination, convictions, greed, craving, desire, ill will as well as generosity, kindness, compassion are all experiences of an ‘autobiography’ and self identification.

Charged with a mixed bag of memories, deceived notions, and one-sided tendencies, there is no self or ego, but a reflex, grab bag reaction of personal history. The ‘actor’ or ‘actress’ of self steps out on stage as autobiographical patterns become so many lived out habits and impulsive reactions. No one is born liking and disliking, anxious and worried, desiring and needing. All your views—for voting for a political party affiliation, for disliking beets, or not getting along with certain people—have been conditioned. Clinging and attachment hardens (is grasped) to obsession and addiction. Your ‘mental formations’ or habits and impulses are nothing more than the sum of all your personal experiences filling up and clouding a once clear and pure mind attention. Habits give way to an illusion of self and ego seeking domination and fulfillment. Your life story is like an ongoing movie. The individual frames of feelings and sensation experiences are spliced together by the mind capacity into one long motion picture of self and ego. All at once, you are the main attraction, star, director and audience of your movie.

Before you go on to act, say or think there is actually a will or motive of conditioned habit compelling you to act, say or think. This is karma (Chapter Ten), the thought before the thought. Putting it simply, you are here now on your spiritual journey because of your motives. You could have the intention to be slumped in front of the TV or at the local bar, but you have chosen to investigate and understand the

Dharma. Your Wise Action and awareness turns you away from careless, impulsive actions.

The threefold insights of the Dharma stand out (impermanent, flawed and unsettled, and non-self), conditions and influences charged into an effect. Note the stress and attachment, the gravity and pressure as you grasp and cling to motives/mental reactions (autobiography) as self.

“Any [mental] fabrication whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’” MN 109.

The Charming Illusion (consciousness)

“Consciousness [is] a magical trick...” SN 22, 95. Like a magician creating an illusion, where is self? Consciousness is a charming trick; the deception alluring and beguiling, but unreal. Consciousness functions through the contact of an outside subject with one of the senses then becoming a sense contacted consciousness experience of the subject.

There is eyes-sight consciousness, ears-sound consciousness, nose-smell consciousness, mouth-taste consciousness, tactile sensation-touch consciousness, mind-thought consciousness. However, a carelessness through ignorance for not understanding the Dharma, the true nature of reality, a simple conscious moment is exaggerated and seen as self. Descartes’ ‘I think therefore I am’ is the misguided downfall of self. By virtue of sheer intellect and imagination, you bestow on yourself the pseudo-honor of self and ego—I, me and mine. This is living closer to fiction and a fairytale. From a disjointed misunderstanding, you experience and live an Everyday carelessness of self-inclined desire, hatred or delusion.

The Five Groups function together as a life experience. In one present moment there is a body contact through one of the senses, a feeling of pleasant, unpleasant or neutrality for the moment arises, perception acknowledges and identifies the moment, motive/mind reaction injects a judgment, and a consciousness appreciation is

stirred and formed. However, it is only when you carelessly try to grasp and hold on to the present moment that there is sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, distress, and despair.

The Groups are conditions of generated life action and conditions only not a self or ego experience! Not I, not me, not mine. Self attachment is flawed and incapable of long lasting happiness, satisfaction or fulfillment. Insubstantial are body, feelings, perception, motives/mental reactions (autobiography) and consciousness. To overcome the carelessness through ignorance, non-self wisdom (the Four Noble Truths, Chapter Twelve) opens the way from Everyday conditioned worldly torment to Insightful unconditioned liberation and peace.

All life being impermanent, you now begin to investigate and appreciate the Dharma Truth. The stages and effort of practice take you along the Path to Peace to personal discovery and intuition. There is right questioning, appropriate attention, awareness, insight and understanding. Carelessness, selfishness, being impulsive, arrogance, anger and desire give way to generosity, patience, humility, good will, and wisdom. Non-self is the renunciation of all self habits and attachments of desire, hatred and ignorance for selfless freedom and fulfillment.

“Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'” MN 109.

The Defilements



Greed/Desire Aversion/Hatred Delusion/Confusion

Something doesn't go your way and you rage while uncertainty leads to nervousness and desire keeps you unsettled. Everyday conflicts and extremes wreck havoc on your life, but even deeper lurk the defilements of self driven habits and impulsiveness as the perpetrator.

While the distractions of the Monkey Mind (Chapter Four) affect your attention and concentration, the defilements of greed/desire, aversion/hatred, and delusion/confusion are the haunting and one-sided expression of self illusion habits. Their toxicity corrupts, brings instability and ruins your life. In a way, the defilements are a projection of how you would like the world to be but, absurdly, separate and distance you from reality. These conditioned self habits all have the tendency to become stuck and attached, are stressful, compromising, problematic, suffering, painful and tormenting.

The Buddha referred to the ebb and flow of the defilements as 'effluents' or currents-like overtaking you—when situations seem out of control you feel closer to drowning; not knowing how to proceed the many decisions are like a branching delta waterway of confusion; when you experience upset in your life this is like going over turbulent rapids. The ongoing outpour of defilements has you adrift and unsettled by Everyday commotions.

Desire/greed—a passion for sensual pleasure and the excitement of the six sense-contacts, the drive to be endlessly satisfied never ends. Desire is an exhausting pursuit that you can never completely fulfill as the sense moments ends and you are left unfulfilled to seek out more. But your awareness and wise action bring responsibility into your life as well as insight for the Dharma. No longer a victim of desire, patience and understanding bring you to experience and appreciate

life differently. As you settle down a perspective of insight develops and expands to a deeper recognition.

Aversion/hatred—Self-preservation, the need to dominate and control, you are at odds with anything that is an inconvenience, are short tempered, feel indignation and compelled to have things your way. Unfortunately, simple challenges leave you reeling and upset. Ironically, your strong identification with a self is closer to a ball and chain, shackled by your own narrow view of things. You have expectations about yourself, of others and the world and when things fail or don't match up you sulk, rage or are depressed. This is closer to the carrying on of a child. But through caring and goodwill the overwhelming rage of aversion and hatred is toned down. You pleasantly notice that you feel 'disappointment' rather than the higher degree of anger, and this is a sign that self is no longer getting the better of you. A whole new appreciation and perspective for life comes about through meditation, Wise Action and the relevance of the Dharma. There is a wise way to life and not only habit reaction.

Delusion/confusion—muddled, misunderstanding, only seeing through a pigeon hole of illusion, self is akin to an overdose of hallucinogenic drugs, having you out of touch with the world and reality and is closer to insanity. Nervous, doubting, uncertain, you are bewildered and feel cornered by the ongoing pressures and demands around you. Some people are trapped in neurosis and can't penetrate beyond self confused limitations. Voices and fear engulf the person. Of the three defilements the confusion or carelessness through ignorance distorts the truth of the Dharma to seeing the impermanent as permanent, the unsettled and flawed as satisfying, and non-self conditions as self. But healing and stability are experienced through the settling of your spiritual practice and the true nature of life is recognized.

The defilements affect your life on three levels of dormant, conscious and active habit energies. Deep in the conditioned self persona are dormant desires, anger and confusion which surface under the right conditions. This is the subconscious, but as meditation and your awareness experience reveal, the subconscious no longer is unknown or hidden as ulterior motives are exposed. You see how deep seeded willed-action comes to be played out, but Wise Action

takes you from impulsiveness and reactive to being responsible and controlled. Conscious habit energies are those defilements that come to mind, but no longer do you give into these 'self' defining choices but have the option of awareness and discrimination to not go with your first impulse head long into trouble, conflict or stress. Active habits are actions and behavior presently taking place, but there is Wise Action and not only self limiting choices to rely on. Wise action and awareness direct you from Everyday impulsiveness to Insightful responsibility and understanding to be more than a victim of habit.

Life Practice

Take a break from being yourself. Most times you are in a non-stop frenzy of doing, becoming, judging, discriminating and projecting, all too wound up in the fulfillment or the escape of self. Having to be your self is no easy job. Meditation allows for the separation, timeout and the down time to cultivate the appreciation of awareness and insight. On one side is the Everyday carelessness of grasping self habits and on the other is the Insightful recognition of the present moment and how to release the tie to self. The Five Wise Actions allow for control, detachment and responsible stability in your life. Slowly, non-self awareness is known.

Appreciate each of your six senses and how they connect you to the present moment. Each sense contact is experienced separately, but occurs so rapidly that they jumble together as an illusion of self. The afternoon is bright, a loud noise sounds, there is a fresh scent in the air, the taste of an orange, cold is felt, something you have to do comes to mind. Cultivate the awareness and the patience to relax, release and detachment from strong habit energies and impulsive reactions.

Non-self doesn't mean that you should just go out and live it up. No, that would be an Everyday fulfillment. As soon as the good times run out you would be feeling unhappy, craving after and in the exhaustive search for good times. Misunderstood in spiritual practice is the freedom from selfish attachments and desires. You don't become another person, but rather are wise and liberated from your Everyday

character. You are more than a creature of habit. Arguments, jealousy, fighting and wars all come about from a self attachment.

The Jewel of the Buddha's awakening is that you don't have to be the person you take yourself to be. You don't have to be a someone for anyone—not even for yourself! When you do get overwhelmed, let go, right yourself and carry on. This is awakening. This is Insight. You understand, have patience and caring for your life. Why fight with a self that doesn't exist? You have been deceived by your clinging and attachment. When you stop struggling, demanding, desiring and having unrealistic expectations, the burden and stress of self lifts to a 'weightlessness' of direct personal insight. A clarity of understanding and wisdom opens; a true life practice of awareness and meditation brings you to freedom.

When you act out of self you suffer. When you know non-self you are wise.

Chapter Ten

THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF KARMA— The Compelling Motives Leading to the Action of Your Life



“It is hard to find beings who can admit to freedom from mental sickness for even a moment, except those who have destroyed the defilements [habit energies].” AN 2, 143.

“...intention [motivation] is karma. When one intends, one acts by deed, word or thought.” AN 2, 82.

“I recollected my manifold past lives...many eons of cosmic contraction and expansion...directed it [my mind] to the

knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings. I saw beings passing away and re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their karma...I directed it [my mind] to the knowledge of the ending of the mental fermentations...My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the fermentation of sensuality, released from the fermentation of becoming, released from the fermentation of ignorance.” MN 36.

“When the mind is unguarded, bodily action is unguarded, speech and mental actions are also unguarded. In him whose bodily action, speech and mental action are unguarded they are saturated with [habit energies]. When they are thus saturated with [habit energies] they are rotten.

“When the mind is guarded, bodily action also is guarded, speech and mental action are also guarded. In whom they are not saturated with [habit energies] so they are not rotten.” A 1.

The Karma Connection



The Buddha has been doing walking meditation on an open patch of land between two trees. We sit watching him. He moves slowly, hands cupped together at waist level, eyes cast down. His every step is an awareness for what he is doing: raising his leg, stretching forward to take a step, planting his foot to touch the ground gently, then simultaneously the trailing back foot leaving the ground in a lifting heel-toe movement. He walks twenty-five paces, turns around in a smooth shift of body, pauses for a moment then walks back in the other direction. The walking meditation goes on for a half hour. He comes back over towards us and sits down. He waits until we are both settled before speaking.

“What is the cause and condition why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior? For people are seen to be short-lived and long-lived, sickly and healthy, ugly and beautiful, uninfluential and influential, poor and wealthy, low-born and high-born, stupid and wise. What is the cause and condition why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior?” He is looking directly at us but doesn’t wait for an answer. “Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior. (MN 135).

“Thus karma is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving is established in (tuned to) a lower element. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming [transferring karma energy] in the future. (AN 3, 76)

“We are the result of what we were and will be the result of what we are. Past, present and future lives are linked through wholesome and unwholesome mental processes (SN)... As rust, arisen out of iron eats itself away, even so his own deeds lead the transgressor to states of woe (DH 240)...Bad karma takes effect at the opportune moment. An evil deed committed does not immediately bear fruit, just as milk curdles not at once; smoldering, it follows the fool like fire covered with ashes (AN 1, 21)...The fool may be known by his deeds. The wise one may be known by his deeds. Wisdom is illuminated by one’s deeds.” (AN 1, 101).

The Dharma of impermanence points to action. Karma literally means action and when you look at the action of your life it all begins, has a first expression, and is channeled through your motives or willed action. The wisdom of the Buddha is vast and profound, but the focus and concern is through understanding (as well as taking responsibility) how actions have led you to self-promoted suffering and how to stop your self-promoted suffering actions.

Karma is misunderstood as a far out Eastern foolishness. Here in the West we are a practical culture of instant results and quick gains. We

tend to dismiss things that aren't immediately useful or understood. What we see, hear, taste, smell, touch, and think is all that we imagine and care to know, the Everyday. But our eyes can't see infra-red light or x-rays and yet they exist, our ears can't hear the higher frequency that most other animals do, our smell, taste and touch are also weak, while our mental insight and realization is limited by Monkey Mind distractions and dominating habits. Behind all your doubts is the imposing influence of karma or motivated action.

At first glance, karma is straightforward, but to understand and penetrate its full significance is something very profound. The Buddha mentioned that all its complicated implications could drive a person crazy (AN 4, 77). Confusing the issue is that karma has been completely misunderstood by the general public. There are two versions of karma. One is the Hindu interpretation and the other is Dharma insight. Hindu karma gives a cause and effect; a results and consequences to karma. You do something and the retribution of your actions brings about a certain karma or outcome (also the Hindu religion has a rebirth of a definite, immortal soul or person unlike the Dharma's non-self). In this version of karma, destiny and fate play a role that makes events unchangeable and set in their ways. You are who you are and there is nothing to be done about it.

The karma of the Dharma, the true nature of life, is completely different. Here karma is strictly the motivation, will or intention driving and compelling you to act; the thought before the thought or the thought before the action. Karma then is the thought, which leads you to do. What the exact consequences and results to your actions will be or their outcome can't be anticipated. There is no destiny or fate, but personal responsibility and free choice are involved. We will look at how the transferring of karma energy takes place later in the chapter, but it is a transfer of energy which comes about from many conditions and influences and isn't an immortal soul or unique person.

But where does karma come from? On the greater universal scale, karma is in the background as the architect generated by impermanence, compelling and moving the cosmos to contract and expand. This isn't a haphazard change of events and circumstances, but karma as a natural checks and balances of forces and energies

characterizing the causes and effects that everything must go through. Whether it is a human, animal, plant, or mineral, each in its own way (even the elemental forces of extension, cohesion, temperature and motion are dominated and influenced by karmic design) is compelled by change to struggle, survive, serve and better fulfill its needs and position. In regards to your own personal life experiences, karma appears as longstanding habit energies and impulsive reactions which motivate you to act and react (the thought before the thought). From a self centered view of I, me, mine and attachments, your habit energies are very much alive, dominate and carry over.

Six basic qualities mark your motives to shape and develop your character-to-be: the three Wise (or Wholesome) Actions of generosity, good will and wisdom, and the three Unwise (or Unwholesome) Actions of desire, hatred and confusion.

Actions done physically are considered 'body karma.' When expressed through speech, this is 'verbal karma.' Thought and planned action is 'mental karma.' Within the Wise and Unwise Actions of body, speech and mind are ten beneficial and ten harmful behaviors. This isn't a morality play but how knowledge and insight of the Dharma is reflected through your intention—ignorant and carelessness or having awareness and understanding.

The Ten Beneficial Actions are: not taking life and being considerate you have a compassionate mind; not stealing you are generous and have an honest mind; being sexually responsible your mind is pure and settled (these three actions are performed through the body); speaking truthfully, gently, without harming and respectfully, your speech is kind (four areas of speech); not being envious or desirous you are satisfied; not hating there is friendship and generosity; having no doubts and being clear minded you have knowledge of the Dharma (three mind related actions).

The Ten Harmful Actions of body, speech and mind are: three harmful bodily actions—killing, stealing and sexual misconduct; four unwise actions of speech—lying, slandering or divisive speech, speaking harshly, and engaging in idle chatter or frivolous speech

and gossip; three Unwise mental actions—coveting, ill will, and having wrong views or misunderstanding.

Knowing and understanding the role that your motives play is important because deep seated habit energies are at the root of your suffering, influencing the present moment but also go on to manifest themselves and affect the future. Karma is dynamic and real, not just a point of debate or philosophical curiosity. Just as a fire has embers that spark and continue the flame, karma smolders in the background of your life. What direction your motives will take you in comes down to your own choice and responsible Wise Action.

The karma connection becomes clear during your meditations as you try to calm down and concentrate. Racing thoughts, surrealistic fantasies, sexual desires, out of control anger and regrets, your habits cloud the mind. Behind the chattering of internal voices, what you are experiencing is the impulse of habits jabbering away as karma rumbles, promoting action. But as you settle down you begin to clearly note all your impulsive reactions; how the many interactions form into misperceptions to bolster a self and ego. “In the same way, it is impossible for one with a turbid mind to understand either his own benefit or the benefit of others, or to realize higher states. And why? Because of the turbid state of the mind...In the same way, it is possible for one with a tranquil mind to understand his own benefit and the benefit of others, and to realize higher states. And why? Because of the untroubled state of his mind.” AN 1, 9.

A woman I know is driven by desires for good times and to be continually entertained in her life. As a teenager she was very ill while also coming from a broken home. The habit energies and impulsive reactions motivating her are to crave for ‘good times.’ She is forever on the run to please herself, leading a dizzying life. A psychologist I know seeks to always dominate and control the situation. His longstanding problems are a result of insecurity and the sibling rivalry he experienced as a boy. A drug addict or alcoholic have the overwhelming habit energy and impulsive reaction to drown and blot out their miserable lives and insecurity. Everyone has been a victim at one time or another and has suffered. Within the Dharma words like ‘good or bad,’ or ‘right or wrong’ aren’t generally used. There is intelligent, skillful action and careless, unskillful action. The

distinction is important because there is no blame but points to influences and circumstances having an effect on you, as well as your own free will to choose.

But karma is always even handed. When events go your way and you are happy it is from your understanding and having done things 'wisely;' when you suffer and are upset it is because you have been unaware and 'careless,' taking things for granted. Even the hardened criminal, abused or angry person is capable of having awareness and insight. "By yourself alone it was done. It is just you that will experience the fruit thereof." AN 1, 138.

The past in the present, unfolding complex and interwoven life moments; a kaleidoscope of turning and spinning karmic patterns comes to persist in your life. In the next chapter on Conditions Arising you will see how the Five Groups of Self Attachment connect to the past, present and future of your life, but for now let's continue examining how motives affect you. It can be difficult and painful to face up to this Everyday image of yourself, but with practice and patience, you begin to see that there is spaciousness within you as awareness and understanding emerge. Connecting with and realizing karma deepens your experience of the Dharma to know your life to be more than habits and to have control.

Karma in Action



The classic example of karma is that of a corralled herd of cattle. Weighty Karma is the bull or the strongest motive to come forward from the herd; Proximate Karma happens to be that cow which is closest to the gate to come out as a reaction; Habitual Karma is the lead cow heading the group and the most common reaction; and Random Karma can be any one of a number of motives coming forward.

Weighty Karma

A great deal of your life has to do with 'weighty' or dominating karma as desire, anger and confusion make up an ongoing theme in your life. Some people are moved by fear and insecurity that goes on to paralyze and consume their lives; other persons have a strong anger that seems to always get the better of them; another person can be selfish; someone else can be desiring and unsettled. The same can be true of the Wise Actions of kindness, truthfulness, generosity, sexual responsibility, and sobriety as being the focus of your life.

Weighty karma is also important at the time of your passing away as a 'final thought.' The strong willed habit energy of your life usually shows itself at this time. If you have murdered or been caring, abusive or kind, desiring or sharing, cheated or generous, hateful or forgiving, this can lead you to a future of hellish suffering or a pleasant life.

Proximate Karma

Proximate karma is going with your first instinct. When caught in deadlines, stuck in commuter traffic, multi-tasking at work, juggling the many responsibilities of having a family, job, and going to night school, all tend to lead one into proximate karma.

Life is happening so fast that you can't think clearly. On edge, you are only able to cope with so much. Tides of emotions are overwhelming as you give way to whatever it takes to get by. This shows the unpredictable and unclear outcome that is karma.

Habitual Karma

Coming from longstanding impulses, you act out of conditioning. Unaware and absent minded, you live in an instinctive tendency of compromising actions and conditioned life suffering. When dislike, boredom, anger or fear show themselves you feel uncomfortable, confused, fantasize and are tormented.

Once seeing someone eating, my hand automatically came up to my mouth and touched my lips. This just goes to show how sneaky habitual karma is. You think you are doing the right thing, but really are guided by habits. Lack of mindfulness is the contributing factor. Your bodies give off tell tale karmic signs: a nervous twitch or forced

smile; stuttering when unnerved or angry; shoulders hunched over when you are depressed; a rolling of the eyes or wrinkling of the forehead when threatened or in doubt. Be aware as your habitual karma is revealed.

Habitual karma is like a magnet which 'pulls in' similar responses. A patient and generous person draws in friends. An angry person absorbs suffering and bitterness. A selfish person will usually come up needy. A lustful person gives in to desires. Habitual karma plays a deciding dynamic in the transferring of karma energy.

Random Karma

How is it that you can be humming some long forgotten tune or a person you haven't thought of in decades comes to mind? This is an example of random karma. Confused in your thinking, random karma shows how motives can pop up at any time. It is kind of like the weeds that immediately appear after cleaning the yard—under the right conditions the karma and habit energies reveal themselves. The distractions of the Monkey Mind have the impulsive tendency of whatever-the-dice-rolls-will-be. You know of people who like to do things on a whim. This is random karma motivating them. The person can also have bouts of kindness and affection while being mischievous, annoying and joyful.

Bordering on the irresponsible, random karma appears silly as a wild flash of associations and memories are triggered. People who are impulsive, blurt things out and who don't plan well are all victims of random karma. Horoscopes, astrology, buying a lottery ticket, are all putting credence into the 'random' side of life. Artistic imagination is linked with random karma, allowing for the creative juices to flow.

Karma acts out like a volcano ready to explode and vent at any time as your habits of desire, hatred and confusion are expressed on three levels—dormant, conscious and active.

Dormant Habit Energies

Habit energies can be deceptive like a quiet volcano. You know what it is like not to be angry, but can you actually stop yourself from getting angry? Just because your practice is tidy and regular doesn't mean that habit energies can't spring to life and produce suffering.

Volcanoes erupt under the right circumstances and pressures and so can habits.

Conscious Habit Energies

Conscious habit energies are the volcano which has started to steam and show signs of erupting. This is where your dormant energy springs to life and flares up in your consciousness as an active thought.

Who hasn't thought of 'killing' an annoying person ('I wish they were dead,' you think to yourself.), had a sexual fantasy or just let the Monkey Mind run wild? The pressure of the habit energy bubbles. This shows the power of the mind and your thoughts. All your actions are premeditated, the thought before the thought. Here the habit energy is a distracting hindrance preventing you from having Wise Action. Be careful or you just might get what you wish for. Thoughts become an inclination. The mind is far from controlled.

Active Habit Energies

At the third level, the habit energy passes from conscious to action. The volcano erupts and out spill unwise thoughts, speech, and actions.

I have known people who have gone off and had flings, costing them their marriages; others who have lost their jobs because of stealing; others who have overdosed on drugs just for a good time and people who have been crippled at the cost of being drunk. Awareness isn't about being right or wrong but going deeper to the wisdom of the Dharma and non-self—carelessness generates selfish suffering and awareness wisely approaches a situation as self free and without any ego ambition.

While carelessness may get the better of you, it is through the mind that wisdom is experienced. The Insightful mind looks beyond distractions and is aware of the subtleties and the role of the Dharma.

Presented here has been karma as a tendency and mind potential to act and react. Harming or killing leads you to a short-lived life and being prone to disease, sickness, anger and fear. Physical deformity and disabilities come from vicious actions.

Stealing or taking what isn't your own creates the effect of poverty, misery, and having unfulfilled desires and being dependent.

Sexual misconduct creates enemies, unstable relationships as well as being prone to disease.

Lying and careless speech can lead to abuse, being vilified, distrusted, nervousness and having chronic disease.

The Buddha straightforwardly explained karma to a student: ***“There is the case where a woman or man is a killer of living beings, brutal, bloody-handed, given to killing and slaying, showing no mercy to living beings...This is the way leading to a short life...But then there is the case where a woman or man, having abandoned the killing of living beings...This is the way leading to a long life.***

“There is the case where a woman or man is one who harms beings with his or her fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives...This is the way leading to sickness...But then there is the case where a woman or man is not one who harms...This is the way leading to health.

“There is the case, where a woman or man is ill-tempered and easily upset; even when lightly criticized, he/she grows offended, provoked, malicious, and resentful; shows annoyance, aversion, and bitterness...This is the way leading to ugliness...But then there is the case where a woman or man is not ill-tempered or easily upset...This is the way leading to beauty.

“There is the case where a woman or man is envious. He/she envies, begrudges, and broods about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, and veneration...This is the way leading to no prominence...But then there is the case where a woman or man is not envious...This is the way leading to prominence.

“There is the case where a woman or man is not a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to priests or contemplatives...This is the way leading to poverty...But then there is the case where a woman or man is a giver of food, drink, cloths...This is the way leading to great wealth.

“There is the case where a woman or man is obstinate and arrogant...This is the way leading to a low birth...But then there is the case where a woman or man is not obstinate or arrogant...This is the way leading to a high birth.

“There is the case where a woman or man when visiting a priest or contemplative, does not ask: 'What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm and suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare and happiness?'....This is the way leading to stupidity...But then there is the case where a woman or man when visiting a priest or contemplative, asks: 'What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated?...This is the way leading to discernment.

“So, student, the way leading to short life makes people short-lived, the way leading to long life makes people long-lived; the way leading to sickness makes people sickly, the way leading to health makes people healthy; the way leading to ugliness makes people ugly, the way leading to beauty makes people beautiful; the way leading to lack of influence makes people uninfluential, the way leading to influence makes people influential; the way leading to poverty makes people poor, the way leading to wealth makes people wealthy; the way leading to low birth makes people low-born, the way leading to high birth makes people highborn; the way leading to stupidity makes people stupid, the way leading to discernment makes people discerning.

“Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Action is what differentiates beings in terms of baseness and excellence.” MN 135.

Karma does get complex and involved, but karma isn't fate or destiny. You do have personal responsibility, awareness and wisdom to redirect your strong habits.

The Transferring of Karma Energy



Prompted by your motives, karma is the energy of the mind. You don't see, touch or hold this energy, but nevertheless it is real and has repercussions. Like the wind, karma is stirred up and put into motion through conditioning forces, and like the wind, which you can't see, karma goes on to affect everything. From the arising, transforming, and dissolving of impermanence comes the instinct of survival; through these habit energies

you crave after then go on to become attached. There is a clear trail of transferred karmic dynamics.

At this moment there is a puzzled look on your face. Something isn't making sense to you. There is a leap in logic and a grand assumption going on. On the one hand there is non-self and no immortal soul or unique person, is what is being implied through motives and karma is past lives? Having a forethought or motive then something surely had to come before it, but what exactly is happening? If consequences and results follow, doesn't this mean that there are future lives? What then in your actions is promoted and passed on and how does the transferring of karma energy occur?

In the same way that a film has frames of action connecting it, similarly the memories and dominating energy of your life are also spliced together, move on to the next life scene and the transfer of habits continues. Earlier (Chapter Four on the Monkey Mind) the

association of the 'past in the present' was mentioned where past action and memory associations come to charge your present experience as a distraction. The mind/body contact through the Five Groups of Self Attachment gives the illusion of the person you take yourself to be as you act and react to the changing and charged moments throughout the busy day. With each contacted moment your whole life story of memories, perceptions and experiences (motives) are passed on to your next experience as the habit energies are projected and continuously play themselves out. All those flashes of memories and rapid fire associations that you have, the little voice gnawing inside your head, the urge to act and react (the desire, anger and confusion), are a gallery of connected but individual film-like scenes of motives collected as karmic energy.

You are an actor in an Everyday life story. The dominant flashes of experience go on to become the recurrent themes of your life (motives or karma). Meditating and deepening your awareness is like using the remote control for a DVD player to pause and stop, understanding your life story.

This is how karma is experienced as a present moment action, but what about the past and future experience? Your physical body is a gross energy, weakening and breaking down to dissolve at death (impermanence touching all of us) going from physical matter and returning to the pure energy of the Four Dynamic elemental forces. Mind energy, though subject to impermanence, is longer lasting and thrives in a different way, continuing as a motive (the thought before the thought or the thought before our action) of energy intent, using the body as a vehicle for communication. The all important 'final thought' is carried over as an energy of influence and not as the same person (there only being non-self components and nothing remaining the same).

The closest connection you have to death and a 'final thought' is during your sleep. As your body energy relaxes, mind energy stands out and comes to the forefront. Who hasn't been consumed while trying to sleep with thoughts of anger, foreboding, sexual fantasies, trips down memory lane, regrets, or wild dreams? While sleeping you sink into the depths of karmic-habit potential. At first your dreams seem unintelligible but looking deeper into them you can see desire,

fear, hatred, lust and confusion. Now understanding how karma affects your life, the bigger picture of the Dharma begins to reveal itself and become clearer: impermanence, craving after, lead to an attached self and problems. With some concentrated effort and practice you can make sleep a mindful extension of your spiritual practice.

Three things are required in the making of a baby—the right time of the month for the mother, the union of male sperm and female egg, and also the conscious connection that is established through the transferring karma (MN 38). Once all three factors are in place, the mind energy joins to complete the embryonic process and the fetus begins to crave with the characteristics of motivated karmic energy potential. The ‘final thought’ at the moment of death is very much alive and immediately makes the psychic jump from the ‘old’ body and is transferred into an impregnated embryo.

The ‘final thought’ karma isn’t a destiny or fate. There is always free will and responsibility in the matter. A murderer can genuinely repent at his deathbed and his mental energy then send him into a state of good intention (However, that past action of murder will come to play itself out at some point.). Another person may have led a good life, but if his or her last thought dwells on greed, lust or hatred then it is that energy which is transferred as a karmic connection. A person who has refined his or her habits from jealousy, anger and contempt to joy, friendship and responsibility will lead a less suffering and problematic life. This is why having awareness and being mindful of your actions, speech and thoughts is stressed in spiritual practice. Your motives lead you to Wise Action or to continued troubles and stress through Unwise Action.

“And what is the result of karma? The result of karma is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here and now [in the present], that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that [in the future]...” AN 6, 63. Karma is like seeds, which come alive under the right conditions, including the conditions for your spiritual journey on the Path to Peace.

Having lived in Baja California for a stint, its geography of desert life was new to me. I saw how harsh conditions and influences made for

the thorny cactus and created the venomous snakes. Under different karmic conditions, the desert would be a forest and its life would take on an entirely different shape, consciousness and karma. Looking back at the example of Angulimala, the one time murderer, if he could be transformed into a peaceful monk then there is potential for all of us. But it is hard to break free from the domination of your habit energies, the impulse of karma.

This lag or time warp of karma accounts for why a seemingly good person can suffer and meet up with tragedy and why also troubled people seem to be fortunate. The more profound questions as to why there is poverty, innocent children victimized, physically and mentally disabled people, karma (motives) is the determining factor. You are only seeing the results, but episodes and events have transpired over long instances of time. Only your wisdom and understanding your relationship to the Dharma can stop unwise and careless action from coming to fruition.

You can better understand karma through analogies and examples rather than intellectual explanations. Think of karma as a blood transfusion; all the biological make up or 'karma' drawn is then transferred. The 'old self' of the donor isn't the same, but like a blood transfusion, the habitual and impulsive characteristics of the donor go on to thrive in the 'new' body. Or try imagining karma as a kidney or heart transplant, the energy of the 'old' organ continues thriving in the 'new' body. Karma can also be seen as a radio wave, which is invisible and carries a message, traveling over distances and time. Karma is most often expressed in terms of a fire spreading. The fire changes as it spreads and yet the basic flame is the same. Elements and willful forces come together, unite, mix, and separate. Are they the same? Not exactly. Is the person the same today as he or she was yesterday? Not exactly. Is life destined? Not exactly. Karma allows for the complex directions of life.

“But there are unskillful things not yet given up, things tainted, leading to rebirth, fearful, of painful result in the future, things associated with birth, decay and death. And it is for the giving up of these things that I teach Dharma. However, if you practice correctly, these tainted things will be given up, and the things that lead to purification will grow and develop. In this very life you will attain the fullness of

perfect wisdom by your own knowledge and vision, and abide in it.”
DN 3, 55.

Everyday Karma and Insightful Karma



Visiting San Francisco to see a Buddhist themed movie after being some time in a temple in the quieter East Bay, I saw how people displayed and projected their karma through the simple ways they dressed and behaved. Dark glasses in unusual colors of orange and purple, excessive jewelry of chains and rings, the latest trend setting clothes, hair styles to match, and exotic tattoos to top it all off. Sports cars and oversized vehicles sped by and loud music boomed. There is nothing wrong with any of this, but the fashions and life style as intention were taking the people in a certain direction and announced something about themselves. As I walked to the movie theater I could literally see the weight and burden of each person (the karmic intent) being dragged around like a ball and chain. Of course, being in a monastic robe I was conveying my karma and intention. There was a difference in Everyday and Insightful actions of life.

A group of ascetics imitating dogs during the time of the Buddha approached him to ask about the outcome of their practice. The Buddha went on to explain four types of karma (dark, bright, dark and bright, and neither-dark-nor-bright, leading to the ending of action) and concluded, “A being’s reappearance is due to a being [there being a self]; one reappears through the karmas [motivated actions] one has performed...Thus, I say beings are the heirs of their actions.” (MN 57).

As regularly practicing meditator and having awareness, you have an advantage in knowing what is happening to you. You sit with your anger, desire, anxiety and unsettled mind, watching the play of karmic intent come forward then disappear. You breathe in

recognition, coming to know that it has been karma knocking and intruding on your consciousness, compelling you to act and react.

If you still find yourself doubting karma, think about the following analogy. Picture yourself on a hilltop with a boulder in front of you. You push the boulder over the edge and it crashes down the hillside. This is the equivalent of karmic intent. The rock careening down the hill and smashing into things is the result and consequence of your actions. As you then try to go down the hillside, the broken trail following the boulder's path becomes your own life experience—careless, unskillful and foolish or aware, skillful and wise.

Life Practice

To help put you at ease about karma, the Buddha didn't just snap his fingers and become enlightened. Over the course of many karmic lifetimes of practicing, learning, realizing, taking some backward steps along the way, bringing his habit energies under control and transforming them, only then did Siddhartha Gotama penetrate the Dharma and become the Buddha. The good news is that you have the Path to Peace to follow. The Buddha noted, "Do not think lightly of goodness saying, 'Nothing will help me improve.' A pitcher is filled with water by a steady stream of drops. Likewise, the wise person improves and achieves well-being a little at a time." DH 122.

Careless motives give off a spark, igniting the flame of karma. But what happens when there is no self-promoted flame, if there were no ego sparks? Could it be? Peace can be known and lived.

Your spiritual journey is an investigation and journey of deepening awareness. You get distracted and sidetracked by desires, anger, restlessness, worry and doubt. One moment you are centered and the next you stumble. Karma is your own personal guide book. The will and intent live itself out on some level in you unless you understand and transform it. Karma is a generator—whatever action you do will likely spark a similar reaction.

Karma can be challenging so you are better off focusing on the present moment and your immediate motives. Follow your breath, feelings and the many distractions and motives whirling inside your

head. Listen, feel and know what you are doing. What's my intention here? What was I trying to get at? What did I mean by saying that? Why did I do that? Can I do something differently the next time around? Like a boat's rudder, karma and awareness give your life direction and control.

Careless moments are a learning experience. I knew of one woman who was fond of saying after a lapse in judgment, "Not yet a Buddha! Not yet!" She would always smile, showing forgiveness and acceptance for herself. Please, be patient.

If you are hungry, how often do you just scarf the food down in great gulps? This is closer to being an animal. If you are hurried notice how close to panicked and out of control or fearful you are. The habit energy carries over to keep you worried and stressed. If you are angry, notice how you are threatened and inconvenienced. Familiarize yourself with the signs and clues from your habit energies. Become skillful.

One way of coming to terms with your anxieties and karma energy is to meditate for 5 to 15 minutes or longer before going to sleep. Quietly sit at the edge of the bed. Feel what energies or questions you are still carrying with you from the day. Breathe deeply. Relax your body and clear your mind of stress and conflicts. Note how at this late hour thoughts and feelings are more subtle and disguised in the form of a 'whisper' echoing through your mind and stress pulsing through the body. Simply pulling over the covers doesn't end the upset nor does the stimulation of some late night sex put an end to it either, while sleeping pills only blur a conflict. Feel the energy and frustration trapped within you and how you can release it and find peace with your stirring karma. One way or another, the habit energy will find expression. It is better to mindfully and compassionately deal with it rather than doing something that later you will regret. What do you think nightmares are? What are sleepless, tossing and turning nights all about? They are karmic intent and habits. Make your bed time a moment of peace.

The Buddha mentioned if you were only to commit a foolish act once and never do it again, your karma would be corrected through your wise intention. "If a man is one who steals...indulges in illicit

sex...tells lies, then taking into consideration time spent doing and not doing, whether by day or by night, which time is more: the time he spends telling lies or the time he spends not telling lies?... So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the taking of life [or stealing, illicit sex, lies, etc.] and in the future refrains...This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.” SN 42, 8. In another discourse the Buddha adds, “But because you see your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dharma...For it is a cause of growth in the Dharma and discipline of the noble ones when, seeing a transgression as such, one makes amends in accordance with the Dharma and exercises restraint in the future.” DN 2.

A turn around doesn't come overnight, but you are much further along now than when you began your spiritual journey. You are wisely experiencing truth in your life.

Knowing karma, you take full responsibility for your actions.

Chapter Eleven

CONDITIONS ARISING— The Becoming of Everything



“Deep is this Conditions Arising, and deep its appearance. It is because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dharma that this generation is like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, and bad destinations.” DN 15.

Conditions Arising



“I will teach you the origination of the world and the ending of the world. Listen and pay close attention.”

We sit together under the shade of a tree. The afternoon is warm and without a breeze. The Buddha’s voice carries softly. Having shared with us the truth of the Dharma (impermanence and non-self as well as karma)

he brings the complete understanding of life experience together for us.

“And what is the origination of the world? Dependent on the eye and forms there arises eye-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact...dependent on the ear and sounds there arises ear-consciousness...dependent on the nose and aromas there arises nose-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact...dependent on the tongue and flavors there arises tongue-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact...dependent on the body and tactile sensations there arises body-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact...dependent on the intellect and mental qualities there arises intellect-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. This is the origination of the world.

“Now, from the remainderless cessation and fading away of that very craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of

becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress and suffering. This is the ending of the world.” SN 12, 44.

We have a doubtful look, not understanding all of the complicated sequence or the implications. The Buddha breathes an encouraging smile and we faintly smile back.

“I will describe and analyze Conditions Arising for you.” His voice drops in tone.

“And what is ignorance? Not knowing suffering, not knowing the origination of suffering, not knowing the cessation of suffering, not knowing the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering: This is called ignorance.

“And what are fabrications [our motives or karma]? These three are fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications.

“And what is consciousness? These six are classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, intellect-consciousness. This is called consciousness.

“And what is name-and-form [‘self’]? Feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention: This is called name. The four great elements, and the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name and this form are called name-and-form [‘self’].

“And what are the six sense media? These six are sense media: the eye-medium, the ear-medium, the nose-medium, the tongue-medium, the body-medium, the intellect-medium. These are called the six sense media.

“And what is contact? These six are classes of contact: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, intellect-contact. This is called contact.

“And what is feeling? These six are classes of feeling: feeling born from eye-contact, feeling born from ear-contact, feeling born from nose-contact, feeling born from tongue-contact, feeling born from body-contact, feeling born from intellect-contact. This is called feeling.

“And what is craving? These six are classes of craving: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for smells, craving for tastes, craving for tactile sensations, craving for ideas. This is called craving.

“And what is clinging/sustenance? These four are clingings: sensuality clinging, view clinging, precept and practice clinging, and doctrine of ‘self’ clinging. This is called clinging.

“And what is becoming? These three are becomings: sensual becoming, form becoming, and formless becoming. This is called becoming.

“And what is birth? Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates, and acquisition of [sense] media of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth.

“Now what is aging and death? Whatever aging, decrepitude, brokenness, graying, wrinkling, decline of life-force, weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called aging. Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, break up of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption in the life faculty of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called death.

“Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering.” SN 12, 2.

Here now we smile with the Buddha.

Penetrating the Dharma brings you to a personal experience in understanding your habit driven ‘wandering.’ Conditions Arising is your realization of how self and ego nature is played out, demonstrating the intimate connection of many influences carrying over from the past to make the present and then goes on to affect your future. Prior to his enlightenment as well as afterwards, the Buddha deeply contemplated the interaction confirming Conditions Arising. “From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Consciousness doesn’t exist when name-and-form [‘self’] doesn’t exist. From the cessation of name-and-form [‘self’] comes the cessation of consciousness.’ (SN 12, 65)...As phenomena grows clear to the [the practitioner]—ardent, absorbed—his doubts all vanish when he discerns what has a cause.” (UD 1, 1).

Also known as Dependent Co-Arising, Dependent Origination or Conditioned Genesis, the name Conditions Arising is used here. The plural ‘conditions’ expresses the connection of the many dharmas (life elements and the characteristics of nature) and influences which go into the making of a moment of experience and how everything is conditioned by the many. Not an intellectual wrangling or philosophy, Conditions Arising is the truth of the Dharma. To know the truth is to understand how and why you live the way you do as well as your ‘awakened’ and liberating potential. Conditions Arising is the natural science or universal ‘blueprint,’ chronicling the forming aspects of impermanence (the arising, the transforming and the dissolving). Though the sequence may be difficult to understand at times, there is no chance or chaos to life, nor are things set as a fate or destiny, but a real-life relationship through purposeful action. The dynamic sequence can be applied both to the psychological and physical worlds.

Summed up as a simple wisdom (“This being that exists; through the arising of this that arises. This not being, that does not exist; through the ceasing of this that ceases.” MN 79 also UD 1, 2 and UD 1, 3 and “When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.” SN 12, 62, 2), don’t dismiss, trivialize or be misled by the straightforward expression of Conditions Arising.

The Buddha chided his personal attendant, Ananda, for taking for granted and assuming Conditions Arising to “seem as clear as clear can be” DN 15. “He who sees Conditions Arising sees the Dharma; he who sees the Dharma sees Conditions Arising.” MN 28.

Being a child of Old World European traditions, the dominant influence was the strict energy compelling me to be ‘Spanish.’ This became my habit energy turned to motives (karma) which came through as the Conditions Arising in my life. Over the years I was exposed to the easier going American-mainstream influences and slowly these alternate conditions began to influence my life, smooth out my rough edges and have an impact on me. When I came in contact with the Dharma in my late 30’s, I was influenced by the peaceful and penetrating approach. The practice of virtue, meditation and understanding has brought me to where I am today. Knowing and applying the Dharma to my life, I can now see the difference between unskillful or unwise action (Everyday/careless) and skillful and wise action (Insightful/wise). But how you interact and in what direction Conditions Arising takes you is a matter of free will and choice.

A weed, for example, comes about from rain, sun, earth, grass elements and thrives in the right season; the action energy of many influences mixes to make a continuing expression of life. Take away any one element or influence and that experience and potential as a weed ceases. The weed has no awareness to take control of its life but, fortunately, you have understanding.

In one of the most illustrative and penetrating similes in the entire discourses of the Pali Canon (SN 12, 23), the many-sided potential of Conditions Arising as well as the release from suffering is compared to rain runoff. This isn’t to be mistaken with the idea of ‘cause and effect,’ which is like a series of individual dominos falling over in sequential steps, where each condition and moment is a unique potential unto itself. Conditions Arising is like drops of rain water (which have their own conditions of air pressure, clouds, climate etc.) falling from the sky then running down a mountainside. Individual drops become rivulets, become streams, become brooks, become rivers, become lakes, and become oceans as many sources thrive and interact together. Cut off the conditions for the flow of water and

there is drought and a new set of conditions emerges which could lead to an arid desert atmosphere. It is important to understand that there is no beginning or ending, implying a specific source with an exact cause leading to a one of a kind affect but rather multiple conditions. Everything is non-self.

Everyday Arising and the Greater Arising



Everyday Arising

On the personal level, the law of conditions arising represents the cycle of self promoted action coming from a longstanding carelessness through ignorance for not realizing the true nature of non-self Dharma. The compelling willed action of your careless motives (karma) to think, talk and do then carries over as habit energies of self promoted action. Reality is perceived through a 'self' image and everything you do is an attempt to fulfill and justify your self portrait, conveniently labeling a situation to fit your limited experiences. Connecting to the world through the six senses, you become attached, crave and act out of self-interest, giving way to pain, torment, conflict, stress, frustration, misgivings and unhappiness. Your 'wandering' and suffering in life is the consequence of this ignorance running deeply through all your life and affecting your future.

You go out to buy a new car. What was the motivation leading you to the choice—prestige for how it will make you feel and look to others, caught up by the lure and promises of some advertisement campaign? The suffering is the monthly car and insurance payments you get to look forward to. There is the worry too as you go out of your way to pick a parking spot at the far end of the lot not wanting your precious possession dinged or scratched.

The degree you spent years getting at night school, was it to help you earn more money for a better house (but what was wrong with the old

home that made you unhappy?), allow you to live a higher consumer life style, get you promoted at work so that you could then give the orders and be at the top of the power chain? You finally get the job, but need a better wardrobe, feel the need to climb the social ladder and impress others. All the money you earn goes to living a higher, self-imposed life style.

No matter how innocent, your 'self' centered actions have results and consequences, ending in unhappiness, problems or stress. Even wanting a good time can be a suffering if it doesn't turn out the way you anticipated. Having awareness, patience and caring for the present is how you begin to have wise action.

The Greater Arising—Three Karmas (Past, Present and Future)

As if one karma wasn't enough, imagine three. Would you be three times as lucky or three times as cursed? I'll take one you say and forget the other two! But penetrating into Conditions Arising you now find other dimensions existing. This is quite a knotted scenario of karma; the past is in the present and the present is in the future and the future then goes on to quickly become the past. By now you are probably shaking or scratching your head, maybe wiping your brow, or doing all three. The Dharma is profound.

Conditions Arising Past—Carelessness and Motives

Carelessness (Ignorance)

“And what is ignorance [carelessness]? Not knowing stress, not knowing the origination of stress, not knowing the cessation of stress, not knowing the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance.”

Everyday Arising: Life moves in quick spurts as you are unaware or don't appreciate impermanence. This is living without awareness or understanding. Behind all your compulsions, desire, anger and confusion dominate. Living on automatic pilot, you are compelled to live, do and become.

Multi-tasking at work is an example of how unnerved you can be. You take shortcuts, which end up costing you in the long run and have to go back and fill in the gaps. You get angry and grumpy. Driving down the street you daydream about a billboard you just passed. You slam on the brakes in time to avoid rear-ending a line of cars. This is carelessness. Exhausted, you arrive at home short-tempered. You live unaware and are reactive.

Greater Arising: Charged and kept off balance by the struggle with life, your present experience is dominated by past upheavals. A driving energy of longstanding habits and impulsive reactions is already part of the mix of life. There is a fight for survival, dominance, power and to be pleased at this instinctive level. You have a basic life consciousness.

Ignorant of impermanence and the greater Dharma (the other two insights are the friction and suffering from impermanence and the non-self nature to all life), desire, hatred and confusion are the basic characteristic of the human condition. Ignorance is not knowing and misinterpreting the true nature of life and reality as well as not knowing the Four Noble Truths (Chapter Twelve)—impermanent, flawed and suffering, and non-self (taking things to be permanent or long lasting, pleasurable and attractive, and as self). From this basic ignorance come all the other habits of greed, aversion, delusion, jealousy, anger, etc. Before you ever think, say or do, your past is marked by this misperception for not truly knowing life. This basic, careless habit driven, scheming consciousness which interpret through self distinguishing keeps you attached as an aimless drifting of becoming and suffering that marks all life. The consciousness awareness isn't separate or marks an individual but is part of the conditions and influences that are part of the mind and body make-up (the Five Groups of Self Attachment). Together they make for the image of the person you take yourself to be. Already as an embryo and then at birth, the five factors of self are alive and interacting and continue to feed this view as a 'person.' Struggling to cope with life, your habit energies are motives going on to condition your actions and influence your future. Not a destiny or fate, the potential habits surface only under the 'right' conditions. Through awareness and appreciation of your life you come to have wise options and choices to move away from the suffering direction life has been taking you.

The Buddha went on to break through and have an insight of Four Noble Truths that clarify life to the way of liberation and peace (Chapter Twelve). It is from not knowing these truths and the true nature of life that follow a cascade of conflicts and sorrows.

Carelessness (Ignorance) conditions and leads to Motives (Karma) arising

“And what are fabrications [your motives]? These three are fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications.”

Everyday Arising: You know what it is like to have a mind that won't quiet down. The little voice inside your head then becomes the motives for what you think, speak and do.

Like a magnet pulling you along, habits and impulses make you behave in certain ways and to having a particular disposition. Each person has his or her annoying and more challenging characteristics. Again this is ignorance or living on automatic pilot.

I have worked with people who have chained-smoke cigarette after cigarette or talked all day long. Within them were compelling motives. For the most part you react unaware of this subtle defining karma (the thought before the thought) which goes on to influence your actions. You experience life through the distractions of your habits (the past in the present).

The Greater Arising: Your consciousness is an energy and an action having long range consequences and effects. From not knowing the true nature of life and seeing things as self, you go on to promote and participate in self willed actions. Always in a frenzy of careless preoccupied thoughts, you engage in unsettling conscious scheming to becoming, create and participate in self defining scenarios.

As a conscious dynamic, habits formed in the past, go on to transfer (the dominating energy) by way of the 'final' thought of a dying person and to connect with an embryo of a child-to-be. It isn't the identical mind energy that is transferred but the basic habits of desire, anger and confusion (comfort, pleasure, survival, dislike and misunderstanding) are carried over. This habit energy goes on to specifically make a human to be born as a human or more careless actions to link with an animal or less conscious form. Specifically, wise action brings about an agreeable transferred karma experience while unwise action takes one to greater suffering, problems and conflicts.

However, both wise and unwise motives stem from a reaction of ignorance and confusion to impermanence. Wise action seeks comfort and good standing and unwise action tries to escape the

difficulties and hardship. The Path to Peace shares a non-self, liberating option.

**Conditions Arising Present—
Present Moment, ‘Self,’ Media Contact, Sense Impressions,
Feelings, Craving, Attachment, and Commitment**

Motive (Fabrications) conditions and leads to the Present Moment (Consciousness) arising

“And what is consciousness [of the present moment]? These six are classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, intellect-consciousness. This is called consciousness.”

Everyday Arising: A constant flow of action knocks on one of the sense faculties and your awareness turns towards the action—something drifts by your eye, a sound echoes, a scent wafts by, a strong taste, feelings of hot or cold, a thought imagined. Yet you are too engrossed or busy to take notice of what is really happening to you.

When crossing the street, you look both ways for the right or ‘wise’ moment to step off the curb. You should always be aware, but habit energies have you hurried or just not looking. This is how accidents happen, how you misunderstand, fight and argue, take things for granted, and manage to get hurt or involved in compromising situations. The present moment is a dream and you live in a daze.

Greater Arising: While karma is different than physical energy, motives express themselves through the body as a vehicle of communication. All the past habit energies and impulsive reactions carry over and are transferred as a potential in the baby-to-be. Formed in the infant are the Five Groups of Self Attachment (body, feelings, perception, motives/mental reactions and consciousness) which go on to develop and mature. How the habit energy

characteristics go on to be played out is determined by many situations and also by free will.

Consciousness joins with the experience in the present (this is a reaction of habit and not a soul or an individual person) as the stream of conscious mind energy of the dying person is now transferred and continues to be active, uniting with the embryo of an impregnated fetus. Usually it is Weighty or Habitual Karma that is transferred.

The Present Moment (Consciousness) conditions and leads to ‘Self’ components (Mind/Body or name/form) arising

“And what is name-and-form [self]? Feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention: This is called name [this ‘self’ consciousness]. The four great elements, and the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name and this form are called name-and-form.”

Everyday Arising: The recipe of ‘self’ is contacted through your senses and stirs in the mind as consciousness in the present. Without either of the two ingredients (mind/body) there would be no ‘self experience.’ Decartes said, “I think therefore I am,” but Buddhist insight acknowledges you first make contact as a consciousness through your senses, which stir a thought reaction and a deeper habit impulse. Self is only a reaction.

Looking back how an older neighbor girl first showed me how to tie my shoes as a boy, the body and mind worked together. This was my first triumphant moment of realized self. We can all remember learning to ride a bike—the mind works in unison with the body. Mind and body join as a self illusion (as defined through the Five Groups of Self attachment—body, feelings, perception, motives/mental reactions and consciousness.)

Greater Arising: The right time of the mother being fertile, the union of the father’s sperm and mother’s egg, and the newly transferred conscious energy allow for the pregnancy to be completed. In the microscopic cell of an embryo are all the dynamics of self attachment—body, feeling, perceptions, motives/mental reactions

and consciousness. The many give the illusion of the one. A 'name and form' identity is established and as a consciousness is a multifaceted generation of influences.

'Self' (Mind/body) conditions and leads to the Media Contact (Sense Base) arising

"And what are the six sense base [media]? These six are sense base: the eye-base, the ear-base, the nose-base, the tongue-base, the body-base, the intellect-base. These are called the six sense [media] base."

Everyday Arising: Taking for granted your surroundings, dominated by habit energies and an impulsive nature, compelled by motives, a one-sided self expression comes out. Judging, labeling and discrimination occur as you try to cope with reality. The present moment is twisted and blurs to a 'self' awareness as attachments and expectations are projected from your increasing collecting of personal experiences.

Everyday life is a challenge. Your conscious awareness is narrowed by habits and misunderstandings. Consumed by the fairytale of 'self,' problems and disappointments are the natural outcome of ego. Possessiveness comes to the forefront. Anger is felt while fear and unhappiness are present.

The Greater Arising: From the beginning, as an embryo the six sense contacts as well as the mind experience a limited awareness through the Five Groups of Self Attachment. Once born, they continue developing and maturing, stimulating karmic potential, separating experience into 'self' and 'other' (subject).

Media (Bases) Contact conditions and leads to Sense Impressions (Sense Contacts) arising

"And what is contact [impressions]? These six are classes of contact: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, intellect-contact. This is called contact."

Everyday Arising: The senses come alive in the present (though acting independently from one another), absorbing a different facet of reality: eye image, ear vibration, nose scent, tongue flavor, body sensations or mind reflection.

A 'subject' is experienced in the present moment as the 'self' reacts to it. The six senses are different here as they go from turning towards the action to actually identifying and labeling through a 'self' reaction.

I have a headache—you feel after rushing around. Look, there's someone I know—you see. Someone's cooking up something good—you acknowledge a scent. A voice calls out—you look back to see who it is. A feeling of cold—you have a tactile sensation. A thought of something to do—the mind reacts. The senses become entangled through a confused personal projection.

Greater Arising: Each sense is engaged as it absorbs an action. It is the sense's function to recognize and interpret. The energy of a nuclear sun brightens your day, sounds reverberate all around, a smell tingles your nostrils, taste bursts over your tongue, sensations pass over your body, thoughts and thinking play on the mind. Each sense contact works separately. Conditioned by the eye and forms, eye consciousness arises; conditioned by the ear and sounds, hearing consciousness arises; conditioned by tongue and delicacy, taste consciousness arises; conditioned by feelings and sensations, feeling consciousness arises; conditioned by mind and thoughts, mental consciousness arises. The particular impression routes the experience while the consciousness collects to form an understanding. This is how you experience life and the world around you.

Six contacts for the six senses equals thirty-six conscious potentials in the present moment (There are a total of 108 consciousness potentials for the past, present and the future.).

Sense Impressions (Contact) conditions and leads to Feeling arising

“And what is feeling? These six are classes of feeling: feeling born from eye-contact, feeling born from ear-contact, feeling born from nose-contact, feeling born from tongue-contact, feeling born from body-contact, feeling born from intellect-contact. This is called feeling.”

Everyday Arising: Here the present moment is absorbed by your senses and channeled to ‘self’ conscious tendencies and potentials. Your habit energies are aroused to label and identify the sense impression as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

Here you have put in order (or are trying to put in order) the fast lived experiences around you. The sight of a billboard, a siren approaching from behind, an odor you don’t recognize, a taste that is refreshing, something touches you and you are startled, a memory flashes to mind.

Greater Arising: Feelings are generated through the senses having received and experiencing a contact or stimulation in the present (there are causes and leading to the effect of experience). There are three qualities of feelings—pleasant, unpleasant and neutral—arising as a reaction in connection with the six contacts.

While ‘self’ or the notion of a ‘self’ have been with you throughout the whole experience as a part of the mind/body union, it is here at the moment of feeling that ‘self’ emerges to ‘react’ with the experience. The feeling moment is named and interpreted by the ‘self’ consciousness as either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. It is this feeling which goes on to ignite your past habit energies and impulsive reactions as a conditioned self motivation.

Feeling conditions and leads to Craving arising

“And what is craving? These six are classes of craving: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for smells, craving for tastes, craving for tactile sensations, craving for ideas. This is called craving.”

Everyday Arising: The moment goes from being recognized to discriminated by ‘self.’ A visual image becomes ugly or beautiful;

sounds are liked or disliked; taste is bitter or sweet; smell is liked or not liked; touch is painful or soothing; your thoughts are agreeable or a nightmare. Judgments and prejudice are projected from your grab bag of personal habits.

That's the ugliest color for a house I've ever seen (sight). It's sure hot today. I feel like taking a nap (feeling). Umm, whatever you're cooking sure smells good (scent). Coffee is bitter today (taste). The neighbor's dog kept me up all night barking (sound). I'd never vote for him (thoughts).

Greater Arising: Like a Pandora's Box of evils and plagues, 'self' is virtually uncontrollable. An instance before as a feeling, 'self' was a whisper, now it has intensified to a deafening roar as motives erupt to dominate and distract you. The Five Groups of Self Attachment are the embodiment of past willed action alive and reacting under the right conditions and influences. You clash with your surroundings from not understanding the Dharma. You crave after life and fulfillment. Here is the actual moment when your motives and karma put you on course to suffering, setting in motion the potential for future habit actions.

But within the crucial moment of feeling there exists the possibility of wise action and understanding, free will and responsibility. Your spiritual practice has slowed you down to have awareness and wise action. Acknowledging the feeling you catch yourself on automatic pilot. Here you can actually close the lid to the Pandora's Box of troubles. The past is literally dropped or disengaged, allowing for the karma of unwise energies to stop. This is the penetrating experience of Dharma insight.

Craving conditions and leads to Attachment (Clinging) arising

“And what is clinging [attachment]? These four are clingings: sensuality clinging, view clinging, precept and practice clinging, and doctrine of self clinging. This is called clinging.”

Everyday Arising: The delusion of self is a masked denial. Reality can't be right. You know what's best. All or nothing, you are at odds with the moment, stressed and suffering.

We all know the person who has to have the last word while someone else brings everything to a stop to better suit themselves; another person walks into a room and begins to arrange and move things about; and there is the person who has to take charge and order people around. You try to manage and cope with life in your own way.

Greater Arising: Attachment is similar to craving but is more an intensification and result from it. The frustration of not getting your way leaves you dissatisfied and unhappy.

There are four types of attachment. Attachment to sense pleasures of enjoyable feelings which arise for the object of the experience; attachment to views as you cling to opinions and philosophy; attachment to rules and observances through rituals and practices to blindly follow them; and the attachment to a separate self as a unique person or immortal soul.

Craving puts your hands in the Pandora's Box. Attachment is your coming away with suffering or a problem. You can trace the careless role of motives and karma through your entire life experience.

Attachment (Clinging) conditions and leads to Commitment (Becoming) arising

“And what is becoming [commitment]? These three are becomings [commitments]: sensual becoming, form [body or material form as ‘self’] becoming, and formless [mental] becoming. This is called becoming”

Everyday Arising: Caught up and attached to the sensual side of pleasure and short lived satisfaction; attached to something agreeable or comfortable; righteous and viewing a situation as wrong or right; and not understanding the non-self nature of life developing from the many Conditions Arising, it is easy to be attached to one-sided, self serving views and notions. Attachment then becomes a nagging problem and leads to suffering. Thinking you are right (even if you are!) you are stubbornly at odds with other people around you. When the moment inevitably changes, you become annoyed. You

could just as easily let go, knowing that everything is impermanent, but habits and impulses dominate you, backing you into a corner and the worst part is how you have turned your back on reality. Most people get caught up in sensual attachment, but attachments to political views, philosophy and controversial issues are a clinging, too. Humility is difficult for 'self' to acknowledge.

Greater Arising: Finally the moment of commitment takes place. Motives and intention stirred by feelings have come alive under the right conditions. Here you react and follow your first impulse of dominating habit energies. Commitment is when you decide to take and follow a course of action.

Commitment is like having the right to vote. You can vote and have a legitimate say in your life and live intelligently or choose not to vote and live a careless, after-the-fact troubled life. Usually you decide not to vote (your automatic pilot tendency) and are a victim of unfavorable reactions.

Conditions Arising Future— Action, Suffering and Problems

Commitment (Becoming) conditions and leads to Action (Birth) arising

“And what is birth [action]? Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates, and acquisition of [sense] media of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth.”

Everyday Arising: Caught up in a flurry of dizzying potential you react to the moment selfishly. You want to get ahead, hold on to what you have or try for more. If you have ever played a board game with adults you will see uncensored self will. A quiet, good-natured person suddenly becomes Napoleon. The current dilemma of road rage during commutes shows peoples' darker side. Attracted to being a certain someone, a person loses control. A good-natured friend of mine went out of control waving a pistol he had just recently bought. Fears, jealousy, authority, power and outright craziness get

the best of you if you aren't aware. By the time action is set in motion it is too late—you have become self.

You react unwisely through sensual attachments; or you assume your body to be a 'self' and cling to the mistakenly 'solid' nature of things not seeing impermanence; intellectual types act out of thought definitions and project a reasoned 'self.' This is the height of 'self' delusion and conceit ("I think therefore I am"). All three actions narrow the present moment to unwise options and careless choices.

Greater Arising: From a simple motivation and casual commitment you now take action ('birth'). Mind energy comes before the act ('mind is chief' DH 1). The tendency to repeat a past action becomes a steady habit as you live unaware of the deeper karmic energies driving you. Transferred over are your dominant intentions.

Your anger surfaces, desire manifests itself along with fear, doubt and confusion. Ambition is alive. While it may seem easier to give in rather than face a situation, the consequence is your unwise commitment is compounded to appear again in the future.

Action (Birth) conditions and leads to Suffering and Problems (Aging and Death) arising

“Now what is aging and death [suffering and problems]? Whatever...weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called aging. Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, break up of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption in the life faculty of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called death.”

Everyday Arising: There is literal aging and death, which challenges everyone, but there are also your personal habits as an Everyday reaction, intensifying your general suffering and problems. Conditions Arising moves by so quickly that only by first meditating can you see the scenario of twisted karmic complications.

'Self' is expressed or born out every moment of the day as you interact and communicate with others. People are filled with worry,

anger, and desire. When opposed you butt heads with the other person. Neither is right or wrong. You have only approached the situation from different experiences of I, me and mine. It is your attachment to 'self' which lives and ages while it is your imagined 'self' which dies.

Citta, a lay person, speaking to some monks explained: "...the eye is not the fetter of objects, nor is the object the fetter of the eye. Rather, the desire and craving that arises...that is the fetter. The ear and sounds, the nose and smell, the tongue and tastes, the mind and thoughts are not the fetters, but rather the desire and craving that arises...that is the fetter." SN 4, 280. In other words, the moment isn't the problem but your own motives and self centered point of view are the problem ('the life, the aging, the death'). The moment itself is innocent. You go on to inject self and experience events as a 'life, aging and death' misinterpretation of self.

Greater Arising: Driven by longstanding habit energies, the phantom of self torments you. You go from one careless mishap to another and wonder why your life is troubled. A white lie spoken, sexual irresponsibility, an 'innocent' taking of something that isn't yours, over indulging in food and alcohol—all your actions are first generated by your motives. Imagine your motives and actions like striking matches and setting them under people, situations and encounters. The flame starts up and continues on its own to start other flames. It is never the exact same energy that is transferred but is always ignorant and careless, based on desire, hatred or confusion. The Dharma has been ignored. Rather than life and death, Dharma awareness is realizing the constant changing nature of conditions arising, without having to inject and be burdened by a self.

What you do, say and think affects the future. If you had to take a test and neglected studying, in all likelihood you wouldn't pass. If you studied then the chances are that you would pass the test. If you drink and drive there is the chance of killing yourself or harming others on the road. There is no set scenario, but individual responsibility plays a determining role in the direction of your life. "When things become manifest to the ardent meditating [practitioner], all his doubts then vanish since he understands each thing along with its cause." UD 1, 1. "Blissful is passionlessness in the world, the

overcoming of sensual desires; but the abolition of the conceit ‘I am’—that is truly the supreme bliss.” UD 2, 1. You have more control and say in your life than you believe.

A mindful practitioner has three moments to catch and stop their carelessness, all occurring in the present moment. The first insight comes just after the habit energy becomes a motive. This is when the urge to act bubbles up to become a ‘feeling.’ You now have the wise awareness to turn away from your Everyday habits.

Your second opportunity to deal with the karma of Conditions Arising is at the split second before your impulse turns into an action at the decision-making instance of ‘commitment.’ Rather than falling victim again, you catch yourself before you slip on the proverbial banana peel of carelessness. Notice your tendency to react to the script of self.

The third, last-ditch effort comes ‘after the fact.’ But this awareness is still a minor awakening. You can put on the brakes and say ‘no more.’ There may be embarrassment and some apologies needed to be offered, but you acknowledge that if you do continue with your unwise action, the situation will worsen as well as the karma carry over into the future hurting yourself and innocent people. Mickey Mantle, the late baseball great, came forward as he was dying from liver failure to announce to the public and especially young people the shortcomings of drinking and alcohol. This doesn’t wipe the slate clean, but puts you in a position of honesty and doing something positive for the future. “Once all ignorance [past] and clinging [present] are extinguished, neither karmically meritorious, nor imperturbable karma formations are produced, and thus no consciousness will spring up again...[the future]” DN 15.

It is the carelessness of ignorance that keeps you locked into the illusion of self promoting actions and thoughts. Only the undoing and complete eradication of ignorance will stop the cycle of suffering. Your spiritual journey is one of going from not knowing to wisdom. The mind needs to be purified and cleansed and so your practice is three fold: meditation to quiet and bring clarity to the mind, virtue to correct impulsive and selfish one-sided habits and, finally, to penetrate the Dharma as a true understanding of life (impermanent,

flawed and unsettled, and non-self) through wisdom to the liberation from self. Like washing a dirty, hard caked plate, it can take longer and some elbow grease to get the job done. So too, are you cleaning and polishing the mind as you turn away from self impressions, narrow views, attachments and craving to awareness, understanding, insight and wisdom. With a regular practice and taking responsibility for your actions, thoughts and speech, the carelessness of ignorance is polished to a bright and lucid penetration of life.

The twelve stages of Conditions Arising play out the cycle of attachments to the Five Groups of Self Attachment—body, feeling, perception, motives/mental reactions and consciousness—that feed the illusion of the role you play as a person. It should be noted that Conditions Arising doesn't only cover the 'big picture,' but the cause and effect of conditions is played out at every instance and in every moment of your life. Each encounter, situation and experience generates carelessness, motives, consciousness, craving, attachment and becoming, ending in suffering. Guide your awareness to the rapid start-up and passing of conditions arising affecting you and how you can mindfully turn around the course of habits.

Life Practice

Slow down. Feel each sense contact as it is touched and tickled to respond. Identifying what you are doing and how you are doing it, glimpses of intuition begin to come together.

Why bother understanding Conditions Arising and karma? Your happiness and peace are at stake. There are other options. You don't have to suffer. Knowing the contributing factors and how suffering comes about means you can do something about it. If understanding weren't possible then there would be no reason to follow this spiritual path. Before you were dubious, wandered aimlessly, but now you have come in contact with the Dharma, the true nature of life. Your problems have a solution. In Chapter Twelve, the Four Noble Truths clarify that solution.

Take any event in your life: an argument today at work or a childhood memory suddenly flashing to mind. Running the experience backwards, you will see how the episodes reveal the sequence of conditions. Everything points to carelessness (ignorance) and your motives (habits as karma) influencing your decision making and emotions in the present which then carry over to the future.

Of course, karma has carried over from many events and episodes as well as many life times, but all that you need to understand and focus on is how your habit energies affect you in the present moment. You can't change the past, you can only learn from it. The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path to be detailed next, offer how to approach and deal with your suffering and problems. The Buddha penetrated deeply into the implications of karma. You, too, are slowly penetrating the Dharma and bringing understanding to your life. "I do not say that the attainment of profound knowledge comes straight away; on the contrary, it comes by a gradual training, a gradual doing, a gradual practice." MN 70.

But because it is hard to discern when you are being careless, redirect your motives to the instance of 'commitment' (becoming). Before committing yourself to think, say or do something, acknowledge where your motives are taking you. Feel how you are driven by the compelling conditions of karma. You are wise now. Say 'no' to habit energies.

Apply the same mindful attention used during your meditation sitting to your actions—awareness, observing and insight. It takes a bit of time to reformat the 'hard drive' of a mind which has been used to seeing and doing things only out of self serving craving. Go slowly. Realize the Everyday Breath and the Insight Breath characteristics and qualities. Begin to distinguish how motives drive you to act.

Through Conditions Arising, the compelling dynamics and influences of the Dharma are revealed.

Chapter Twelve

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS— The Middle Way to Penetrating Self and Suffering



“Friends, just as the footprint of any living being that walks can be placed within an elephant’s footprint, and so the elephant’s footprint is declared the chief of them because of its great size; so too, all wholesome states can be included in the Four Noble Truths. In what four? In the noble truth of suffering, in the noble truth of the origin of suffering, in the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and in the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.” MN 28.

“The Middle Way...avoids both these extremes: giving vision, giving knowledge, it leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana....It is just this Noble Eightfold Path...It is a state without suffering...and it is the right way. Therefore this is a state without conflict.” MN 139.

What is Suffering and Why Do We Have Problems?



We sit with the Buddha. A circling breeze runs through the trees. The branches and limbs creak and the leaves rustle as a dry chime. Patterns of white and gold defused sunlight reflect on the Buddha's face and shine in his eyes.

“It is through not discovering, not penetrating, four truths that both you and I have had to travel and trudged through this long round. What four? They are the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. But when these four truths are discovered and penetrated, craving for being is cut off, craving that leads to being is abolished, and there is no renewal of being.” (DN 16).

“And what have I taught? ‘This is suffering...This is the origination of suffering...This is the cessation of suffering...This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering.’ This is what I have taught. And why have I taught these things? Because they are connected with the goal, relate to the rudiments of the [spiritual] life, and lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to [Peace]. This is why I have taught them.” The Buddha looks at us seriously. “Therefore your duty is the contemplation, ‘This is suffering...This is the origination of

suffering...This is the cessation of suffering...This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering.’” (SN 56,31).

From the very start of this spiritual journey, you have experienced awareness for the Everyday and the Insightful Breaths. Here now the Four Noble Truths are the ultimate awareness—it is the mind that makes and indulges in self and it is the mind that must be made to see beyond the limits of self. Rather than searching outside of yourself for something fulfilling, asking questions like what will make me happy? What do I want? What do I need? Your reflecting is directed inward. With all the distractions of the world, with the intimidating immensity of the universe before him, the Buddha zeroed in on the one significant theme of suffering—why is there suffering and the ending of suffering? The ‘right questions’ and ‘appropriate attention’ led the Buddha in the direction to awakening and insight (see Chapter Two for more on the ‘right questions’) and the same holds true for you. Everything else is pointless, futile, a waste of time and without answer. The Buddha chided and set a monk straight for making demands and asking meaningless questions (“And what is declared by me? ‘This is suffering,’ is declared by me. ‘This is the origination of suffering,’ is declared by me. ‘This is the cessation of suffering,’ is declared by me. ‘This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering,’ is declared by me. And why are they declared by me? Because they are connected with the goal, are fundamental to the holy life. They lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, Nirvana. That's why they are declared by me.” MN 63).

Throughout much of the modern, industrialized nations, luxury and convenience are at one’s fingertips. Having more, you are encouraged to indulge and satisfy your desires. But underneath your indulgences is an out of control, endless craving that approaches panic, keeps you unsettled and endlessly wanting. Distracted while feeling unfulfilled, you are kept busy and off balance. There is an ‘incompleteness,’ an aching, empty misery to your life.

“I teach suffering and the end of suffering,” the Buddha repeated with a clear mind, over and over again that a misunderstood, pessimistic view of his insights has developed. The Sanskrit word ‘*dukkha*’ is the most referred to word and subject in all of Buddhism. ‘*Dukkha*’ has the

connotation of unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and disappointment. You can best understand suffering as having a problem, being stressed, bothered, dissatisfied, inconvenienced and in conflict. Focusing on suffering, the Buddha looked at the true nature of life. A friend of mine teases me that I am a pessimist and I always counter that I am a realist, seeing things for what they are.

Suffering is part of the Threefold Truths of the Dharma: everything being impermanent, the potential for suffering already exists in all moments, encounters and as a part of your life; the inherent friction-flaw, dissatisfaction and problems which do come about from impermanence as everything changes; and the non-self nature to all life. Emphasizing suffering, the Buddha is referring to both the innate suffering that affects all life but also to how your ego and selfish attachments go on to complicate matters.

If the world and life were perfect and never changed there would be no sad endings. But things break, accidents do happen, the unexpected occurs, and people you love and hold dear pass on. But the biggest shock of all is that you are mortal. Most people don't accept this until they are aged and fall victim to a terminal illness or disease. One well attended lay person at the temple was in a panic when he became sick for short while. He hadn't realized the true meaning of the Dharma.

Behind the impact of impermanence is your acting and reacting through the Five Groups of Self Attachment (body, feelings, perceptions, motives/mental reactions and consciousness). You have the physical body of six senses while the other four groups relate to your mental experiences. The natural instinct to crave for comes about as a defense mechanism as you cling and are attached to certain expectations about life. As your self/ego illusion acts out, you are either attracted to the enjoyment of pleasure, which keeps you looking for more, or you are on guard and feel threatened. What stands out is your suffering.

The Buddha summed it all up nicely: ***“Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are suffering; association with what is not loved is suffering, separation from what is loved is suffering, not getting***

what is wanted is suffering. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are suffering.

“And what is the cause by which suffering comes into play? Craving is the cause by which suffering comes into play.

“And what is the result of suffering? There are some cases in which a person overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, and becomes bewildered. Or one overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, comes to search outside, ‘Who knows a way or two to stop this pain?’ I tell you that suffering results either in bewilderment or in search. This is called the result of suffering.

“And what is the cessation of suffering? From the cessation of craving is the cessation of suffering; and just this noble eightfold path—wise understanding, wise intention, wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, wise effort, wise mindfulness, wise concentration—the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering.

“Now when a [practitioner] of the noble ones discerns suffering in this way, the cause by which suffering comes into play in this way, the diversity of suffering in this way, the result of suffering in this way, the cessation of suffering in this way, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of suffering.” AN 6, 63.

Suffering and problems come on three levels: first, the Everyday problems and difficulties everyone experiences, feels and shares in common such as the aches and pains of the body, the inconvenience of the commuter grind, the pressure at work, and all the day-to-day travails you go through and put up with as well as the Murphy’s Law annoyance of things just not going right.

Second, there exists the suffering and problems brought about by change or the short-term realization that moments, experience and life, no matter how gratifying, are impermanent. The good time you had on a vacation coming to an end, relationships changing or

ending; possessions broken, lost or stolen; friends or loved ones no longer with you; the characteristic of change is part of everything giving way to suffering or problems.

And third, is the conditioned suffering highlighted in your own personal life through the Five Groups of Self Attachment. As everything else is, you, too, as a person are a combination of conditions and influences, undergoing constant transformation and are impermanent. While careless in the present moment, 'conditions arising' relates to a past karmic inclination which goes on to affect the future. You distance yourself from the true nature of life and the world through a one-sided nature brought about by your craving. These three areas of suffering and problems are connected and reflect your conflict with impermanence.

“There are these three forms of stressfulness, my friend: the stressfulness of [everyday] pain, the stressfulness of [mental] fabrication, the stressfulness of [impermanence] change. These are the three forms of stressfulness.” SN 38, 14.

Four Noble Truths



Characterized by simplicity and candor, the Buddha not only conveys the Truth of suffering and problems but also their liberation. Normally, you take the Truth to be a statement of fact or to be a precise and definite answer as in a math problem. The Truth here has nothing to do with intellectual wrangling and off-based perceptions, but expresses the

clarity of the Middle Way and is a dynamic, experienced awareness understood in the present moment through your mindful and wise actions of body, speech and mind. Already you have distinguished between Everyday and Insightful experiences, now you will plunge deeper to bring wisdom to your life.

Noble signifies the awareness and wisdom brought about by the Truths as they take you from ignorance and carelessness to awareness, insight and to liberation from suffering. In this respect, the Truths are 'ennobling' when they are applied, experienced and put into action. Your once suffering and problematic life is turned towards understanding and peace. You are transformed and made better by the Truths—ennobled. Whether there is a Buddha or not, the Four Noble Truths are real and exist, standing out as universal, all encompassing, and beyond the conventions of time, culture or history. But it takes a Buddha to recognize the Truths and to then go on to communicate their profound experience. In most temples and centers the Four Noble Truths are taught first. After all, the Truths were the Buddha's first discourse after his enlightenment (SN 56, 11) and the central theme of his wisdom. But as the Buddha himself realized and understood the many aspects and dimensions of the Dharma, you have first become familiar with all the background details.

The Four Noble Truths carry such importance and are so all encompassing that the Buddha thought of them as elephant prints, containing all other features of the Dharma. The Truths are the Dharma in microcosm: impermanence; the suffering, dissatisfaction and problems from impermanence; the non-self nature of life, the Middle Way between self and ego extremes and the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation from suffering; as well as reflecting karma, Conditions Arising and on to Nirvana (peace).

Many people assume that the Four Truths are an introduction to the Dharma with the higher teachings coming later, but this isn't the case. The entire experience of the Dharma and awakening is defined in the Four Noble Truths. Without the Four Noble Truths you would find yourself overwhelmed by suffering and problems. The Four Noble Truths direct you to make a clean break from Everyday pursuits and self obsession. Each Truth has a triple insight relevance of penetration and recognition of awareness, understanding and wisdom.

It wasn't until the Buddha knew for himself the profound meaning and implications of the Truths that he was awakened. For a short time his own spiritual practice had taken him in the wrong direction of severe

asceticism and had become a punishment and not a practice of insight and understanding. But a childhood memory at a festival where he sat alone on a sunny day under a roseapple tree, sparked an intuition that he had strayed from a meaningful practice (“But by this racking practice of austerities I have not attained any super human states, any distinction in knowledge and vision...Then, following on that memory, came the realization: ‘That is the path to enlightenment.’” MN 36). Here he had glimpsed the Middle Way. Some time later, the Buddha bridged the final understanding to wisdom and enlightenment, answering the question on suffering he had set out six years earlier to realize.

Declaring the Four Noble Truths to five fellow practicing ascetics in Varanasi (near present day Benares), India some 2,500 years ago, the Buddha put the ‘wheel of the Dharma’ (SN 56, 11) into motion and the Truth has continued ‘turning’ to this present day. The insight of the Four Noble Truths is an invitation of personal discovery, understanding and, ultimately, liberation.

But what keeps you from knowing the Truths and freeing yourself? Desires, anger and confusion—in other words your habits turned to motives or karma are the stumbling block. Like viewing the emperor without any clothes on, there can be some initial discomfort in facing your weaknesses, but it is with the intention of transforming your less than wise actions.

Therapists I have known mention spending weeks, months and even years in getting their patients to the personal experience of facing their suffering and problems to where the person can honestly admit and look at themselves without fear or resentment. Even I have flinched to view this exposed picture of myself, but I also felt that I was ready and that the Path to Peace following in the footsteps of the Buddha had prepared me for these Four Noble Truths. You are brought to an awareness of penetrating insight—self and ego are your suffering and problem—and the Middle Way leads to wisdom and peace.

“The Noble Truth of Suffering (dukha) is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, association with the unpleasant is suffering, dissociation from

the pleasant is suffering, not to receive what one desires is suffering -- in brief the five aggregates subject to grasping are suffering.

“The Noble Truth of the Origin [cause] of Suffering is this: It is this craving which produces re-becoming [rebirth] accompanied by passionate greed, and finding fresh delight now here, and now there, namely craving for sense pleasure, craving for existence and craving for non-existence [self-annihilation].

“The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering is this: It is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, relinquishing it, liberating oneself from it, and detaching oneself from it.

“The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering is this: It is the Noble Eightfold Path, and nothing else, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.” SN 56, 11.

The First Noble Truth (The awareness that self is suffering)



“The Noble Truth of Suffering is this: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, association with the unpleasant is suffering, dissociation from the pleasant is suffering, not to receive what one desires is suffering—in brief the five aggregates [self] subject to grasping are suffering.

“[Self as] Suffering, as an noble truth, is this:’ Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the illumination, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before. ‘This suffering, as an noble truth, can be diagnosed:

'such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the illumination, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before. 'This suffering, as an noble truth, has been diagnosed: 'such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the illumination, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before.' SN 56, 11.

The Buddha looked at our troubled humanity and wondered why things rarely got any better. Despite the modern wealth of technology, support and access making things easier for more people than at any other time in history, there is suffering. Ultimately, are you any happier? How do you cope and bring understanding and compassion to your suffering and problems? Believe it or not, as strange as it might seem, suffering is a salvation. How good to learn from your mistakes. There is hope, joy and, finally, understanding yourself. You are awakening.

During a Dharma talk, one Nun mentioned how we each carry and are overwhelmed by our own 'personal bag' of suffering and problems. I envisioned each of us like an overworked Santa Clause. You need to learn and understand how you contribute and add to that burdensome bag of problems you lug around. What you think of as on the surface as happiness, may in fact be bringing you greater pain and sadness through your attachments. First you must honestly try and understand your suffering and problems. This may not be the glamour you had in mind for a spiritual practice. But a deeper fulfillment, steadiness and ease, and awakening to life is known—your problems as answers.

Here the Buddha is a 'Great Physician,' his ability to clinically diagnose a problem and prescribe an adequate treatment for suffering and problems through the Four Noble Truths: you have awareness that you do have suffering or there is a problem present; understanding the cause and reason of the suffering or problem; know that the suffering and problem are treatable and, finally, wisdom to transform the suffering or problem. This is your prescription to keep in mind; a practical insight applying to everything you experience.

Through the First Truth, the Buddha traces suffering to the mind and the illusion of self that is so all consuming. The Five Groups of Self Attachment cling to life, an act of desperation on your part to try and bring control and security to a constantly changing world. Demonstrated is how suffering arises from your own mind as you are at odds with life. Your liberation then must be experienced through the mind as you transform your habit energies and the compelling karma motivating you. You began your spiritual journey in a state of ignorance and confusion, but now you go from Everyday habits to the realization of awareness, understanding and to having wisdom.

I know that before the start of my spiritual practice and journey, I thought it was normal to suffer and have problems, and that all my experiences should end in suffering. From there I would get angry, bitter or depressed. But now with the Noble Truth as awareness that suffering and problems are taking place, rather than shrink back at the first hint of stress, a 'friendly' communication with my upset has emerged. You begin to ask the right questions. Why am I suffering or unhappy? What is going on here? What can I do about it?

Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of suffering [from a self attitude]'... 'This noble truth of [self] suffering is to be comprehended'... 'This noble truth of [self] suffering has been comprehended.' SN 56, 11.

Awareness:

Your direct experience of the First Noble Truth is a turning point in your spiritual practice as you realize the suffering brought about by your personality, thoughts and actions ("the five aggregates subject to grasping are suffering"), empowers you with insight as well as greater compassion. The Dharma becomes a lens of awareness and is practically applied—life then which is impermanent and flawed is underscored by suffering and is found to be unsatisfactory.

With deep insight, the First Truth directs you to examine and approach your suffering and problems—what is happening, what you are feeling, thinking, saying and doing, and why are you stressed. If before you were bothered by the slightest inconvenience, now you

show patience and understanding in dealing with the moment. Frustration over being late and becoming testy; anger at the way the boss came down on you at work then your taking it out on someone else; a childhood fear getting the better of you; confusion about a decision to make; the unhappiness of not getting your way; desire leading to more desire—awareness of a self centered suffering is the recognition of Everyday pursuits and tendencies to having insight and redirecting your relationship and attitude with your upset.

Understanding:

Your awareness is keen to pick up on the subtle signals of self—the Five Groups of Self Attachment (body, feelings, perceptions, motives/mental reactions and consciousness). I'm not getting my way. There's a lot of pressure going on at this moment. The connection between wise action (Insight or 'clear knowing') and unwise action (the Everyday) is realized. The I, me, mine attitude and identity keeps you at odds ("birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, association with the unpleasant is suffering, dissociation from the pleasant is suffering, not to receive what one desires is suffering")—everything related to self and ego is suffering. The Four Noble Truths are a profound realization in your life, exposing self and ego grasping as the making of suffering. The Crown of Self is one with many thorns.

Wisdom:

The final piece of the puzzle in place, self then is at the center of your suffering. The energy required to live out this self deception is exhausting. You stop at this moment of self-filled stress and have a good look around—at the situation and your suffering. As the Buddha went on to point out to Bahiya, "there is no you in terms of that [the body, but also feelings, perception, motives/mind reactions and consciousness]. When there is no you in terms of that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress." UD 1, 10. If you happen to be suffering from a memory or any motive/mind reaction you identify this. Misunderstanding, you are attached to the memory as self. The same applies to the body, feelings, perception, and consciousness. Here you have identified the situation as 'self' and have non-self realization.

Self only knows anger, hostility, greed, deception, is careless and irresponsible. But having awareness has made you patient and insightful as well as responsible for what you think, say, and do (“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me...suffering had been comprehended.”). The all-consuming, self attitude and a shallow, naive perception are exposed. The image reflected is only an illusion. Non-self now makes sense as a revealing experience of personal insight.

The Second Noble Truth (Understanding Why you suffer—craving)



“The Noble Truth of the Origin [cause] of Suffering is this: It is this craving which produces re-becoming [rebirth or transferring of karma energy] accompanied by passionate greed, and finding fresh delight now here, and now there, namely craving for sense pleasure, craving for existence and craving for non-existence [self-annihilation].

“This is the Noble Truth of the Origin [cause] of Suffering': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Origin of Suffering [self craving] as an noble truth should be eradicated': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Origin of suffering [self craving] as an noble truth has been eradicated': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before.” SN 56, 11.

The Second Noble Truth reveals that while a self image and attitude are at the center of suffering, specifically problems have a beginning through craving.

The Sanskrit word 'tanha' means to thirst for, but 'craving' is the word that has come to be used. On the Everyday level of experience, craving comes out in a triangle of self promoted desires: the enjoyment and attachment to 'self' through sense pleasures; the desire for a 'self' image to be immortal and perceiving life as unchanging; and the desire or desperation of taking things from the extreme point of view of no self as an attack on self (this is a disguised view and grappling with self!). They aren't separate forms of desire but different aspects brought about by the craving after self.

Sensual desire is an appetite without end as you seek out gratification and are attached to thrills and enjoyment of the senses or forms, making pleasure a fulfillment of self. Whenever the sense desire ends or changes you find yourself lacking, throwing a tantrum or sulking. "If one, longing for sensual pleasure, achieves it, yes, he's enraptured at heart...But if for that person—longing, desiring—the pleasures diminish, he's shattered..." SN 4, 1.

With a 'self' to fulfill, craving for existence is the desire for survival or a 'lust for life.' You identify with the body as the begin-all-and-end-all of your life—wrinkle creams, face lifts, liposuction and diet pills only mask an insecurity about death. You turn away and are in denial about sickness and disease as well as the homeless and poor people because they make you feel uncomfortable. Even wars and conflicts are waged to exert control of self grandeur; a national flag (symbolic of self identification) is enough to send missiles over borders.

Subtle and disguised, you bring the desire of self to your practice, too. I want to get away from it all and feel good. I see how that other person is sitting there. I'm going to out do him. I know what I'm doing. "If this sticky, uncouth craving overcomes you in the world, your sorrows grow like wild grass after rain. If, in the world, you overcome this uncouth craving, hard to escape, sorrows roll off you, like water beads off a lotus." DH 335-336.

The cynic who sees nothing good in the world echoes the final drawback of self attachment. They fight and deny self so intensely that they are clinging to a self of hatred, chaos and doom. This is expressed through anti-social behavior and goes as far as suicidal tendencies. There is a perverse glee to their name-calling and

philosophical wrangling. The attitude is one of confusion, discomfort, and rejection as they desperately seek to wipe out all life and anything to do with a self.

When you have true awareness and understanding of the threefold insights of the Dharma the cravings from self-desire evaporate as insubstantial. Everything is impermanent and made up of non-self energies and influences joining together. Craving is an ignorant and careless reaction from not understanding the Four Noble Truths and selfish conflict.

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of the origination of suffering [self craving]'... 'This noble truth of the origination of suffering [self craving] is to be abandoned'... 'This noble truth of the origination of suffering [self craving] has been abandoned.'”
SN 56, 11.

Awareness:

Life is unsettling and underneath your unsettledness is an unhappiness or dissatisfaction (“the origin of suffering is this: it is this craving”). What you take to be as the ‘spice’ of life, craving keeps you unsettled and looking for more. Your spiritual practice has now brought you to the penetrating awareness of the Second Noble Truth and contact with your habits: sensual desire, craving after life, and the delusion of no-self. Craving becomes the catalyst for all the demands life places on you.

Understanding:

Wanting things your way, you crave clinging to your life experiences. This then is your unsettling. But not everything you want is good for you. Understanding the Second Noble Truth, you move from Everyday carelessness to the track of awareness, understanding your experience (“This origin of suffering [self craving] as a noble truth should be eradicated.”).

Now you realize that you do have options and choices. While it is craving which conditions and leads you to future problems and the transferring of karma, there is your present moment awareness

distinguishing the Everyday and the Insightful at the crucial instance between 'feeling' and 'craving.' It is here that patience takes affect, allowing for realization and leading you to Wise Action. Not everything is desire and craving. Now you must let go of the demands and urges of the Five Groups of Self Attachment keeping you craving. Craving must be eliminated.

Wisdom:

Feeling as though you were being pushed off the edge of a gang plank, your habit energy impulses of temptation, doubt and fear prod you on. Your breath, the tension revealed in your body language and your chattering mind are signals you can choose to ignore or with the Second Noble Truth, realize the desire and the powerful karma leading you astray. You assume responsibility ("This origin of suffering [self craving] as a noble truth has been eradicated.") Was the answer so simple? Craving has been leading you astray to problems and upset. Only when craving is fully eliminated does suffering end. This is your addiction and obsession with self, tormented by an illusion.

At times you may be lured back in by desire and craving, but you know there is a way out. A realization has taken place. Listen to your motives, that little voice echoing inside your head, and where it wants to take you. This is craving talking. Don't be a push over to habit energies and carelessness, but firmly say 'no.'

The Third Noble Truth

(An end to your suffering is the end of craving)



“The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering [selfish craving] is this: It is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, relinquishing it, liberating oneself from it, and detaching oneself from it.

“This is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering’: such

was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Cessation of suffering, as an noble truth, should be realized': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Cessation of suffering, as an noble truth has been realized': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before." SN 56, 11.

The Third Noble Truth leaves no doubt that the Buddha Dharma is a personal, realized experience of fulfillment, shattering any misconception that the Dharma is nothing more than a practice of denial and turning away from the world's woes. You do, however, turn away from ignorant and careless actions to awareness and realization stopping your craving. Only you alone are responsible for your suffering as well as being your own savior.

In Buddhism this is considered a 'lion's roar' of personal insight. You aren't a hopeless victim to always suffer, but appreciating the Dharma (that life and all moments are impermanent, unsatisfactory and have non-self qualities), you don't get hung up in wanting or needing, expectations about people or situations because you know they all will change.

If there weren't a deliverance, the Buddha Dharma would be a useless practice of empty words. Paradoxically, your problems are your salvation. This spiritual practice has helped slow you down, pointed you in the right direction and brought meaning and understanding to your life. The long trail of habit energies turned to motives points to the illusion of self and how you crave as a reaction. Stop your self delusion and craving, and you will be happy.

Cessation is about renouncing and what you renounce is your addiction and obsession to self. You don't hold onto to something which harms you. You get rid of it. Craving keeps you obsessed. There is the more obvious craving that coincides with the six senses, but behind it is the craving and addiction to self attachments which is the strongest. But once you see how you cling and are obsessed

through craving you see things as they really are in light of the Dharma and the Four Noble Truths—as not I, me or my self.

The ending of suffering brings you to Nirvana or peace. This is a 'deathless' or condition free revelation compared to the conditions arising in which you now find yourself struggling. Detaching from Everyday distractions, your practice is a matter of awareness and release from self to experience wisdom. This is awakening—your problems as answers.

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering' [selfish craving]... 'This noble truth of the cessation of suffering is to be directly experienced'... 'This noble truth of the cessation of suffering has been directly experienced.'” SN 56, 11.

Awareness:

Whatever your problem or upset there is a connection to craving as you are attached to expectations and an ego attitude. When things don't go your way you feel ruined. “This Cessation of suffering [selfish craving], as a noble truth, should be realized.”

Self realized, craving known, only the cessation and ending of craving can bring an end to your obsession with self. The Middle Way insight is not to fight, deny and bury your head in the sand like an ostrich to escape from self and craving, but for you to actually stop feeding and nourishing craving. Previously, your impulses had been to seek out constant sensual gratification or to indulge your every fantasy and whim. Now you move from short-term, Everyday pleasures to Insightful simplicity and renunciation. Less is more, cessation leading you to less suffering and finally to wisdom.

The focus of your life is your practice and your practice is your life. Craving and selfish tendencies are understood, softening as they are exposed and as you gain experience. Through a commitment of wise choices, habits are controlled and a patience emerges for yourself as well as for others and for life in general. There is no blind faith here

but your actually lived awareness. Something you have to continually remind yourself is the possibility of not suffering.

Understanding:

Stop craving and you stop self-attachment, stop self-attachment and you are free. It sounds simple and it is, but you are consumed and blinded by your strong habits. You can't accept anything other than your own selfish point of view or allow for anything or anyone to get in your way.

“It is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, relinquishing it, liberating oneself from it, and detaching oneself from it.” The burden of self is like a suit of armor weighing you down. The suffering comes out through your anger, jealousy, frustration, or paranoia—all of these are side effects of a selfish, craved for life.

Wisdom:

When nothing seems to work it is because self indulgence keeps you attached and craving gets in the way. You lash out and get hopping mad. But letting go of your selfish attitude, releasing your attachments, problems immediately start to clear up. Required on your part is the commonsense, the will power, the renunciation to be free from self and craving. You clearly see the pitfalls, the lost time, and the suffering involved; a sobering, break through wisdom to the short comings of self and Everyday distractions.

“The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering is this: It is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, relinquishing it, liberating oneself from it, and detaching oneself from it.”

**The Fourth Noble Truth
(the Middle Way experience brings cessation and allows for
Insight to suffering)**



“The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering is this: It is the Noble Eightfold Path, and nothing else, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration

“This is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Path leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, should be developed': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Path leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth has been developed': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before.” SN 56, 11.

Through all his intense striving, the Buddha had overlooked and discounted the obvious—the Middle Way. Now he turned back to see what he had missed. As an extreme there is the sensuous pleasure of attachment to self and on the other side there is the negating and denial of self and to try to physically subdue and be done with it. Both views are a struggling and mistaken attachment to a self view. Missed is the true significance of non-self and the Dharma; a middle point of detachment and emptiness, of non-self, that releases all the ties to your self promoted motives and actions.

Perversely, there is an attitude that suffering proves just how strong you are. But this accomplishes nothing and reveals no understanding of your dilemma. There would always be more suffering to come around the corner. That isn't much of a future. When the Buddha

began his own spiritual journey there was a sense of breaking through the threshold and tolerance of suffering, but he realized he was wrong to be punishing himself. This turned him around to look deeper, and here now you go deeper into your own problems.

“Two extremes ought not to be practiced...there is addiction to indulgence of sense-pleasures, which is low, coarse, the way of ordinary people, unworthy, and unprofitable; and there is addiction to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy, and unprofitable...Avoiding both these extremes, the [Buddha] has realized the Middle Path; it gives vision, gives knowledge, and leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment and to Nirvana [Peace].” SN 56, 11.

In 1969 humans first stepped on the moon and a flag was placed there in commemoration. Well, you are no different in your own life as you argue, fuss and fight with others and events around you, always trying to wave your own ego flag. But it is this ongoing attachment to self that keeps you from completely penetrating the Dharma. The Middle Way then is to be fully settled and clear minded to penetrate through your attachments to self. The medication and cure is prescribed in the Fourth Noble Truth. No easy task, like a Jack-in-the-box old habits pop up, but the Noble Eightfold Path of the Middle Way guides you to wisdom and liberation. The Buddha went on to say, “the Middle Way...avoids both these extremes: giving vision, giving knowledge, it leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana...It is just this Noble Eightfold Path...It is a state without suffering...and it is the right way. Therefore this is a state without conflict.” MN 139.

The Noble Eightfold Path is—

Right Insight:

Wise Understanding

Wise Intention

Right Virtue:

Wise Speech

Wise Action

Wise Livelihood

Right Concentration:

Wise Effort

Wise Awareness

Wise Concentration

‘The Discipline’ as Buddhist practice is known, has three areas of insight to cultivate—understanding/wisdom; virtue/compassion; and meditation/concentration. Notice that the Noble Eightfold Path (detailed in the next chapter) covers every aspect of life: the intellectual, the ethical, and the psychological, directing you to insight and wisdom. The Middle Way is the Buddha’s prescribed course of treatment for dealing with suffering and problems.

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering’... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed’... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering has been developed.’” SN 56, 11.

Awareness:

You notice that you are off balance by your selfish attitude (“Two extremes ought not to be practiced...addiction to indulgence of sense-pleasures...and there is addiction to self-mortification.”). You can fight, cry, have a fit, and be unhappy (Everyday habits), or you can have awareness through Middle Way discernment (Insightful mindfulness). The picture of self-promoted suffering and your release are now clear.

Having understanding and insight, you direct yourself to the cessation and complete end of suffered craving through the bearing and equanimity of the Middle Way. It is not enough to know that you are suffering but now to deal with it in a constructive way. All along it has been your awareness, your understanding, your knowing, your insight—the Buddha has only been a guide. Your awareness is wisdom.

Understanding:

With your awareness of the Middle Way, you come to the insight that in order to stop your suffering you have to abandon all your self-promoted desires. This isn't Nirvana or complete peace from all selfish craving and desiring, but at least you are headed in the right direction. Here you note how you go from carelessness, distractions and ignorance to having awareness and understanding. The practice and effort must be applied and further developed in order to know the end of suffering.

“Avoiding both these extremes, the [Buddha] has realized the Middle Path; it gives vision, gives knowledge, and leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment and to Nirvana.” Now having understanding, your recognition balances the scales to the center and control, the Middle Way.

Wisdom:

As you go from Everyday carelessness to Insightful understanding, the Middle Way is a natural progression of your practice and maturity. Fulfillment of all four aspects of the Four Noble Truths—awareness of suffering and problems through the Five Groups of Self Attachment; craving the catalyst driving your selfish attitude leading to your suffering and problems; bringing an end to your self craving; and the Middle Way clearing away all the confusion, doubt and impulsiveness you have as ‘self’—the end of suffering is your true fulfillment.

“When my knowledge of seeing things as they really are was quite clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, concerning the Four Noble Truths, then I claimed to have realized the matchless, supreme Enlightenment in this world...”

While cessation of craving stands out, this deep understanding also goes on to affect every aspect of your life as a practical wisdom; self promoted actions and motives are wisely viewed with insight and responsibility. All of the Dharma is reflected in the Four Truths. So profound was his insight that the Buddha wondered whether others would understand, but he chose to share the wisdom, knowing that there would be others ‘with little dust in their eyes.’ From careless habits to wisdom, the Dharma lens of penetrating awareness brings clarity to your life.

Life Practice

First you must honestly try and know where your habits are taking you and how you contribute and add to the burdensome 'bag' of problems you haul around.

Try and ask yourself during the day as you become busy at work or at home, "what am I doing...what did I mean by saying that...what is it that I want?" This serves as a reminder to help keep you in touch with your actions, acknowledge your desires and motives. All-too easily you get distracted and see things only from a 'self' point of view. Acknowledge the symptoms of self. Feel how you are charged with craving. Your chest is tight, blood pressure up, shoulders hunched, head throbbing. If you feel anger, it is because there is self-disappointment. If you feel lust, it is because there is self-desire. If you feel sad or depressed, it is because there have been self-expectations.

Your mood changes from one moment to the next—feel how craving leads you around all day long. You try to please one person, argue with another personality, or are accepting of some people. Most of life's situations are imagined and colored by your narrow views and expectations. Craving is in the background and you are led about like a puppet on a string.

The Buddha regularly advised people on the virtues of the Middle Way ("Overstriving leads to agitations, and understriving leads to slackness. Therefore resolve upon evenness of energy, acquire evenness of the spiritual faculties, and take that as your sign." AN 6, 55.). The Four Noble Truths are the essence of a balanced, unhurried, clearly known life. They transform suffering into a personal realization.

The defining moment of your spiritual practice is when you embrace the Four Noble Truths as a meditative and personal experience to come to terms with your suffering and problems: the Truth of universal suffering and the grasping of the Five Groups of Self Attachment; not knowing or seeing the cause of suffering as craving; the cessation of suffering when your craving is stopped; and the freedom from craving known through the Middle Way path, leading to

peace or Nirvana. The sum of your long journey has brought you to this moment of understanding—to be free from the illusion of self.

Experiencing the Four Noble Truths is an insight into non-self happiness.

Chapter Thirteen

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH— The Middle Way From Carelessness to Wisdom



“...I saw an ancient path, an ancient road, traveled by the Wisely Self-awakened Ones of former times. And what is that ancient path, that ancient road, traveled by the Wisely Self-awakened Ones of former times? Just this Noble Eightfold Path: Wise Understanding, Wise Intention, Wise Speech, Wise Action, Wise Livelihood, Wise Effort, Wise Awareness, Wise Concentration...I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of birth...becoming...clinging...craving...feeling...contact...the six sense media...name-and-form... [self] consciousness, direct

knowledge of the origination of consciousness, direct knowledge of the cessation of consciousness, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of consciousness. I followed that path.” SN 12, 65.

Towards Wisdom and Liberation



We have followed the Buddha over trails, across fields, around rivers and down slopes. Resting in the shade of trees, he has spoken to us. Now before us is an expanse of green and gold wild grass. The grass is blown by the

wind, sections swaying then falling motionless as the breeze moves across. What had been a narrow path now opens to a wide, red-earth lane. The remainder of the way is straight to the far Western horizon. Looking at the countryside, the Buddha begins to speak.

“Before my Awakening, when I was just an unawakened Bodhisattva, the realization came to me: How this world has fallen on difficulty! It is born, it ages, it dies, it falls away and re-arises, but it does not discern the escape from this suffering, from this aging and death. When will it discern the escape from this suffering, from this aging and death?” SN 12, 65.

The Buddha pauses, staring straight ahead. We look at him and see that he is deep in thought. He surveys the landscape.

“Ignorance is the leader in the attainment of unskillful qualities, followed by lack of conscience and lack of concern. In an unknowledgeable person, immersed in ignorance, wrong understanding arises. In one of wrong understanding, wrong intention arises. In one of wrong intention, wrong speech...In

one of wrong speech, wrong action...In one of wrong action, wrong livelihood...In one of wrong livelihood, wrong effort...In one of wrong effort, wrong awareness...In one of wrong awareness, wrong concentration arises.

“Clear knowing is the leader in the attainment of skillful qualities, followed by conscience and concern. In a knowledgeable person, immersed in clear knowing, Wise Understanding arises. In one of Wise Understanding, Wise Intention arises. In one of Wise Intention, Wise Speech...In one of Wise Speech, Wise Action...In one of Wise Action, Wise Livelihood...In one of Wise Livelihood, Wise Effort...In one of Wise Effort, Wise Awareness...In one of Wise Awareness, Wise Concentration arises. SN 154, 1.

“Knowing that directly, I have revealed it to monks, nuns, male lay followers and female lay followers, so that this holy life has become powerful, rich, detailed, well-populated, wide-spread, proclaimed among celestial and human beings.” SN 12, 65.

He takes one step forward onto the widening path. He waits for us to follow. Now we stand side-by-side with the Buddha. He turns his head to us and smiles. Together we begin walking the Middle Way, the Noble Eightfold Path to Peace.

Each step along the way on the Path to Peace has brought you closer to fulfillment and peace. Looking over your insightful practice, a regime of virtue in the form of wise actions, concentration in the form of meditation, and understanding in the form of insight of the Dharma (the true nature of reality) and the Four Noble Truths has been shared. Now all three fronts join to focus as an appreciation and knowing through the Middle Way. The Eightfold Path transcends and transforms self absorbed suffering to wisdom. Bound toward liberation, there is no returning to your old ‘self.’ Peace isn’t far away now.

As a ‘middle way,’ the Noble Eightfold Path steers clear of the two common extremes of sensual gratification (“low, common, worldly, ignoble, not leading to the goal.” SN 56, 11) and the opposite as punishment, denying the body, and self mortification (“painful,

ignoble, not leading to the goal.” SN 56, 11). The deceptively, clear-minded option of the Middle Way even eluded the Buddha, an insight that “Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought.” DH 1.

As an appreciation of mind, the Middle Way follows and penetrates how conscious action is expressed, giving rise to actions of body, speech and thoughts. The mind is exercised and directed not in the Everyday pursuit of habits, desire, anger and confusion, but as a Dharma intuition to the true nature of life without self discrimination and self promotion. As a ‘noble path,’ you are brought to Stream Entry insight and the Unshakeable Deliverance or wisdom (“gives rise to vision, gives rise to knowledge, and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana.” SN 56, 11), the Middle Way leading to liberation.

“Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch, in the same way this Doctrine and Discipline has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual progression, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch. The fact that this Doctrine and Discipline has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual progression, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch: This is the first amazing and astounding fact about this Doctrine and Discipline that, as they see it again and again, has the [practitioner] greatly pleased with the Doctrine and Discipline.” UD 5, 5.

Right Insight (Wise Understanding and Wise Intention)



Establishing a connection with the true nature of life and reality, the Buddha first emphasizes Wise Understanding, revealing the Dharma (impermanence, unsatisfactory and suffering, and non-self) and the

attachment to self brought out in the Four Noble Truths.

Having the Truths and self in proper perspective help define the successive steps of insight that allow you to reach final understanding. Without this Right Insightful clarification, you would veer back to Everyday self-dominated habits and distractions. From the beginning, your spiritual journey has had an established direction—the ending of suffering, knowing wisdom and having peace.

Wise Intention is your acknowledged and conscious intent to move beyond Everyday problems and stress to a reasonable and responsible awareness. Your journey began with questions and appropriate attention, and now is headed towards an undeniable experience to penetrate the illusion of self.

Wise Understanding

“And what is Wise Understanding? It is the knowledge [of the Four Noble Truths] of suffering, the knowledge of the origin of suffering, the knowledge of the cessation of suffering, and the knowledge of the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering. This is called Wise Understanding.” SN 155, 8.

Dominated by Everyday habits, you have taken an unreal self to be real, perpetuating conscious actions (karma) of desire, anger and confusion. Like a dog chasing after its own tail, the carelessness from ignorance, consumed by automatic habits and impulsiveness, leads to unwise action and suffering. You can't expect years of conditioning and habits to disappear overnight. There has been a lot of Wrong Understanding, but through your meditation and awareness knowing and insight take place. Your gradual realization is like a camera ever so slowly coming into focus as more and more of the 'big picture' reveals non-self insight.

Like the fish which was once hooked, you are wiser, see how self is perpetuated, how patience and equanimity bring a quiet, clear non-self attention. A disconnection or 'cessation' on your part for desire, anger and confusion brings realization.

Wise Understanding is an insight to live honestly and intelligently. The Path to Peace is a real life guidance bringing sanity and reason to your life. The Middle Way doesn't lead to one-sided 'right and wrong' answers, but is the knowing of suffering and how not to suffer. "When a [practitioner] understands what is karmically unwholesome, and the root of unwholesome karma, what is karmically wholesome, and the root of wholesome karma, then he has Wise Understanding." (MN 9).

Wise Intention

"And what is Wise Intention? The thought of renunciation, the thought of non ill-will, the thought of harmlessness. This is called Wise Intention..." SN 155, 8.

Previously having a self-limited understanding of narrow and careless recognition, Wise Intention is an about face and turns you in the right direction. It is as though for so long you were in an egg or cocoon walled in by self. Now you break through the shell of desire, anger and confusion to know and understand ("In this generation given over to ignorance enclosed in an egg of ignorance, sealed in by ignorance, I alone in the world have discovered the supreme full enlightenment by piercing the shell of ignorance." AN 8, 11).

Intention or how you want to proceed and live is the vital link that connects the mind and your life to the greater world around you. For the most part, the world is driven by the compelling willed action of self promoted behavior. This action carries over and makes the world a conflicted and suffering place.

The Buddha realized how intention is the mind's first step and from this snowballs Everyday actions of desire, anger or confusion or through awareness and caring there are wise actions. As you think, want and do, so are there consequences and results. Understanding the Four Noble Truths in relation to your life leads to the responsible intention of renunciation for desire, which keeps your mind

dissatisfied and always searching. Understanding the Truths in relation to other people gives rise to the intention and responsibility of good will and non-harming.

The Intention of Renunciation

Renunciation is a strong word, but here you only renounce those thoughts, motives and actions which aren't useful and don't promote understanding. Specifically, it is the renunciation for sensual pleasure and restraint for sensual gratification. Wise Intention establishes a responsible commitment to actively participate in directing your understanding. The Middle Way, reflecting the Four Noble Truths, is the most important recognition for changing the course of your habits ('cessation').

People assume that renunciation is giving up everything and living in a tortoise shell, but this isn't accurate. You only give up suffering—self promoted desire. You live wisely. You renounce craving that takes you on a downhill slide of self destruction. You don't give up kindness and generosity. Thus renunciation, turning away from craving and the unending drive for gratification, is the Middle Way to happiness, to freedom from the hold of the Five Groups of Self Attachment.

Penetrating the suffering tied up with the quest for worldly enjoyment is like releasing a hot iron, the suffering through self immediately cools down—awareness gives way to insight, insight gives way to renunciation, renunciation gives way to equanimity, equanimity gives way to non-self wisdom.

The Intention of Goodwill

Since no two thoughts can exist in the mind at the same instance, the intention of goodwill pushes aside cruel and hostile intentions. Rather than seeing the world as confusing and a threat, goodwill is the awareness of kindness and generosity. If you have ever turned on a garden hose before taking hold of it, the nozzle sprays water in every direction. Having anger and ill will is the same as a nozzle spraying about out of control. But the Middle Way takes you from

blind anger, softening the Everyday mindset to have recognition and the intention of goodwill.

Goodwill is cultivated through loving-kindness and the Immeasurables (Chapter Fourteen). Rather than an 'eye for an eye'—shouting matches, tearful scenes, and harsh words—you express yourself through insight ('clear knowing') and not careless habits.

On the deeper level of karma, any hostility you generate only keeps you bound to conflict. Rather than leap into an argument, you patiently listen to the other person. Even your body language becomes reassuring and relaxed. Acknowledge the suffering and confusion in other people, you are sympathetic and caring. Further weakening the three defilements and the one-sided effects of self, the intention of good will considers how all beings are searching for happiness.

The Intention of Non-harming

Goodwill naturally brings you to the intention of non-harming. Previously, you separated things into 'me' and 'them,' but now all beings and creatures are appreciated and respected as equals. Dealing with suffering and problems, the Four Noble Truths bursts the bubble of ego that keeps you at a distance judging.

You regard everyone in the context of the Dharma. Some people are overwhelmed, not having the skill or insight to handle their problems. Other people are less suffered because they wisely approach the situation. In the end each person is responsible for his or her actions and how they come to live their life. You can't solve or take on the problems of others, but you can have sympathy, patience and compassion, sharing whatever insight and wisdom you have.

Here is how the Buddha approached Wise Intention: ***“Before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened Bodhisattva, the thought occurred to me: 'Why don't I keep dividing my thinking into two sorts?' So I made thinking imbued with sensuality, thinking imbued with ill will, and thinking***

imbued with harmfulness one sort, and thinking imbued with renunciation, thinking imbued with non-ill will, and thinking imbued with harmlessness another sort...I discerned that 'Thinking imbued with sensuality has arisen in me; and that leads to my own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both. It obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, and does not lead to nirvana.'...And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, and resolute, thinking imbued with renunciation arose. I discerned that 'Thinking imbued with renunciation has arisen in me; and that leads neither to my own affliction, nor to the affliction of others, nor to the affliction of both. It fosters discernment, promotes lack of vexation, and leads to nirvana...Whatever a [practitioner] keeps pursuing with his thinking and pondering, that becomes the inclination of his awareness.' MN 19.

The starting place is always the same—as an attention of awareness and understanding in the present moment. Your intentions make the moment an insightful connection or a careless dilemma. The Middle Way is a path of resolution; the Everyday is an aggression of self struggle. Now realizing Truth, this centering practice and experience, the intention of harmlessness considers how people wish to be free from their suffering. Through an intelligent action of peace, you undo the karmic knots of mal-intent.

Right Virtue (Wise Speech, Wise Action, Wise Livelihood)



The mind is where insight takes place and where your intention is scripted, but it is through your actions that your awakening is lived and exercised. More than an ethical practice, Right Virtue is a knowledge of

communication and action. Yes, the proverbial foot gets stuck in your mouth as you find yourself cornered by your careless ways, but with Right Virtue you begin to understand how Wise Action takes you from stress and conflicts to a realized fulfillment and Dharma insight.

Wise Speech

“And what is Wise Speech? Refraining from lying, refraining from slander, refraining from harsh speech, refraining from frivolous speech. This is called Wise Speech.” SN 155, 8

“Words that have four qualities are well-spoken, not ill-spoken, faultless, not blamed by the wise...Concerning this, one speaks words that are beautiful, not ugly; one speaks words that are Wise, not wrong; one speaks words that are kind, not cruel; one speaks words that are truthful, not false.” AN 1, 249.

Speech is your verbal contract, commitment and appraisal, reflecting your values. What you say is how you in turn are judged and are dealt with. Careless speech hurts others, creates enemies, is the cause for many families not speaking for years, and even the start of wars. But speech can be wise, heal divisions, and create goodwill and offer insight. The Buddha brought countless persons to the personal experience of ‘awakening’ through speech.

While your speech is all important for the four obvious reasons of not to lie, not to slander, not to insult, nor to engage in trivial speech, your speech is used as a wise understanding and intention to not contribute or take part in suffering acts. Everyday speech keeps you tied to judgments, is spiteful, and abusive. How can you have deeper understanding and commitment when you are lying or saying something that compromises your life?

When desiring, lies are spoken to get your way. When you hate, you speak with the intention to hurt others and cruelty. When you are confused, you exaggerate, are impulsive, tell white lies and invent things as an amusement. The Buddha spoke seriously to his own son, “Do you see how this bowl has been turned upside down? In the same way one who tells a deliberate lie turns his spiritual achievements upside down and becomes incapable of progress.” MN 61.

Behind your speech are your motives; the mind's inner dialogue sounding off. Unfortunately, words and conversations all too often jump out of your mouth without thinking of the implications of speech. Words cause more pain and harm than actual physical action. Note how your habits taint and blur reality. Reflecting your whole misguided thinking, a thought forms, an opinion is passed and, finally, out comes speech. It is important to truly understand where your speech is taking you.

Your every word should be treasured. This is how important the Buddha saw speech. There is a fine line between being honest and cruel. If you see someone, you don't have to say how awful they look, tell how a hair cut doesn't suit them, or how you didn't like the dinner served and insult your host. This is an Everyday thoughtless speech and the voice of ego.

Humor is something necessary in life. A smile, being lighthearted or playful is useful in our stress-filled, hectic times. But without realizing it, humor can actually be vindictive and insulting. This type of humor is actually an attack. Humor that is sarcastic is counter productive and an escape from responsibility.

Your mind is quick to react and lash out at situations and people. You assume it is your 'right' to express yourself. Using Wise Speech directs a situation away from hostility. Rather than engaging in nasty name-calling you allow the other person to speak and then stick to the issues. This is having wisdom.

There are even misunderstandings at temples and monasteries. A well-known incident, the Quarrel at Kosambi (VN 10, 1) occurred during the time of the Buddha between two parties of monks over a minor infraction of the monastic rules. Sides were taken, words exchanged and tempers vented. It all came down to an attachment and an inflexibility of egos. The Buddha tried to settle the dispute but even he was told not to meddle. At this point the Buddha had enough and went to practice and live on his own for some months in the forest. The lay people were taken back by the attitude of the quarreling monks and cut back in their generosity to them. Finally,

elder monks brought a truce to the whole matter and the Buddha was asked to return. Everyone apologized and wisdom prevailed.

You need to apply the brakes to your impulsive reactions and use, as the Buddha did, 'Noble Silence.' The Buddha's 'Noble Silence' was directed more to questions that had nothing to do with spiritual practice. But you can use 'Noble Silence' should you feel the urge to gossip, tell a white lie (a half truth is all lie!) or tell someone off. You develop complimentary, positive and right speech. Consider it like watering seeds. Wherever you go and whomever you deal with, you are nurturing and generating friendship, cultivating seeds of goodwill in others. After a tense conversation, end by wishing the other person well. Should gossiping at the work place be going on, use 'Noble Silence' or point out positive qualities. Should someone confront you or insult you, don't say anything to escalate the situation, but defend yourself politely. Look at it only as a difference of opinion or a misunderstanding, the other person entitled to their views. How silly to always charge into battle. In the end, don't hold any hard feelings. You don't harm or betray, talk down to, ridicule, show any animosity or speak badly about or towards anyone else. Speech which heals and generates goodwill is practiced.

Wise Action

“And what is Wise Action? Refraining from taking life, refraining from taking what is not given, refraining from sexual misconduct. This is called Wise Action.” SN 155, 8.

Non-harming

The Five Wise Actions (Chapter Five) began with your awareness and are a wake up call to assume responsibility for your life. I know that before my spiritual journey I never imagined that my actions had any real significance or far reaching consequences. The emphasis of the Noble Eightfold Path is about going from ignorance and carelessness to applying understanding and wise choices to your life. Your motives or karma set your life in motion—desire, anger or delusion as Everyday habits or generous, good willed and responsible Insightful understanding. The Four Noble Truths lead to the cessation of suffering and careless actions.

All life is sacred and worthy, from the tiny ant and mosquito to fish, cattle, chickens and every animal and life form in between. You wouldn't eat your neighbor would you? Well, you don't eat the other creatures you share the planet with. Realized is the suffering behind slaughtering an animal, and that you do have other choices. Just think of how you would like to be treated. You are no less savage than a wild tiger because you eat your meat with a fork and knife.

Seeing ants in the kitchen try cleaning up better. A spider in a dusty corner is welcome to stay. As vegetarians plant life is consumed. Vegetables have no consciousness. Your intent is not to harm. You accept rather than see others as a threat or take advantage of their weaknesses.

Non-harming includes not fighting with others. While I may be a monastic doesn't mean that people treat me specially. I have been hit, called names, insulted, debased and ridiculed as a monk. Not once have I fought back to injure or insult the other person. I am not a martyr, but an awareness and veneration for all life has stirred in me as well as a peaceful way of communicating ("To be a disciple of the Buddha you must utter no unkind words. You must always be compassionate." MN 21). I always ask myself how I would like to be treated and base my actions accordingly.

The Buddha had assassination attempts made on his life and didn't flinch. He was often jeered, insulted and mocked. He calmly and patiently dealt with everyone. You refrain from taking life, but also from harming and ill-will, understanding how your thoughts and speech translate into action. Goodwill is a part of your nature, too. It is only that your nobility has been dormant or asleep.

Shariputra, one of the Buddha's senior disciples, was struck from behind and knocked to the ground to see if he could be provoked. He picked himself up and without looking back continued on his way. The people turned against the perpetrator for his action and Shariputra had to intervene to stop the mob from lynching the man.

Not to Stealing

Most people are honest. Stealing or taking something that isn't yours is understood as wrong. You don't trust people who steal and their

actions make them outcasts. Yet at the work place making long distance phone calls, photo copies for personal use, walking away with pens, pencils, paper clips or postage stamps goes on. Because the company has no 'face' or identity it is presumed as 'all right' to take. But what you end up doing is cheating yourself by lying, making believe and living a delusion. How can you honestly come to have understanding and wisdom when you bend the rules?

For many people, giving doesn't come easy. Possessiveness and attachment get the better of them. One woman I know spent more money on airfare to collect a jacket from her estranged husband because it was 'mine' than the actual value of the garment. That is how attached many people are to their possessions. Others talk about giving closets full of items to the local thrift store but can't bring themselves to part with their junk. In this consumer culture it is easy to be attached to the material side of life—self and ego creep in to dominate and corrupt your consciousness.

One hard-edged man wondered why I was generous and compassionate. I asked if he knew why. He didn't. I told him he should think about it. Of course, he went on with his resentful ways, keeping the world at a distance. On another occasion I was walking with a friend. A man with a cane and serious limp asked us for money and I gave him all the change I had in my pocket. My friend said why did I give to the man when I didn't know him. He asked me and needed it, I answered. Outside from the temple where I ordained a homeless family stopped their loaded-with-possessions car each morning to drop off their daughter at school. I gave them food and money. Later they saved enough money to get an old recreational vehicle to live in.

“If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of selfishness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they eat without having given. The stain of selfishness overcomes their minds.” IT 26.

Feel how your self-attachment smothers you and how you actually are made miserable when you hold back and are selfish. Stress and tension infect your generous side and embitter your life. You can't hide from your miserly intention. When you are stingy, you make yourself depressed, ill and lonely. Sharing and giving naturally open wide your understanding and takes you out of suffering cycles.

Sexual Responsibility

As humans we thrive as a society. There is friendship, caring, goodwill and generosity. But more harm and victimization is committed by the confused intention that lust is love, that passion is compassion than any other aspect of human nature.

Sex is a physical passion, a carnal falling together. Compassion is an acceptance and befriending. For many it is all right to cheat on a mate just as long as the other person doesn't know, or to go from one bed and romance to the next, in denial of your insecurities and the role of responsibility. Recognize the urges and desires for what they are.

I know people who go from one abusive relationship to the next craving love, others who go to little known parks or public restrooms for anonymous encounters. Sexual scandals destroy church congregations. Politicians resign from office over extra marital affairs. Child molestation continues by adults who abuse their 'authority' and coerce youths, traumatizing the victims with life-long psychological nightmares. Teen pregnancies are on the rise. Pornography is only the disguised torment of unloved and confused people.

Without an honest or genuine dialogue, the already weak relationship will in all likelihood come to a sad ending as the habit energies of both parties involved destroy the affair. Jealousy, petty power struggles, lusting for other people, cruelty carrying over from childhood, all of these reflect your Everyday carelessness. While it is always the hope that the love will be stronger and smooth out the rough edges, the truth is that this rarely happens and most people continue without truly knowing why, suffering through painful episodes.

Here now the Four Noble Truths stand out as to why you suffer. Craving covers up and masks family abuse, insecurity and immaturity. How do you solve or help improve your situation? Slowing down, taking the time to wisely reflect where your actions are leading you. A charming smile doesn't mean that the person is sincere. Know that you are infatuated about some aspect of the other person's personality but what about the whole person—are they honest, faithful, and responsible?

Wise Action makes you accountable as you look for honest, fulfilling friendships and mature relationships.

Wise Livelihood

"And what is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood: This is called right livelihood." SN 155, 8

Wise Livelihood is working and earning your living in a fair, servicing and responsible way, but also living a humble life of simple food, clothing, shelter and adequate medicine. Less is more as you actually are free from all the entrapments of the consumer lifestyle which tempt the ego.

Most people have a strong identification with their jobs as pride usually shows when someone speaks about their employment and what their work entails. The work place is almost like an extended family as you have some of your most meaningful relationships on the job. Work provides security and balance to people's lives.

Every job extends itself beyond its isolated duties and description. A school teacher is the backbone of society as they literally educate the nation and have a lasting influence on many lives. Who hasn't been inspired by a special teacher and guided in a meaningful direction? Doctors, nurses, firemen and paramedics literally save lives. The farmer feeds the world. A musician or any other artist brings joy through their creativity. A secretary in a large corporation is as important as the final product. A street cleaner helps shape and clean the environment and is as important as a Nobel Laureate.

We are all indebted to the work of others. But what about jobs and careers which actually hurt society?

It is one thing to work in a union for worker's rights, it is something else to accept payoffs or get kickbacks. It is one thing to be a pharmacist, it is another to sell the drugs illegally. It is one thing to be a politician and serve your constituency well and another to get 'favors' for passing convenient laws. It is one thing to work for a clothing manufacturer and another to steal and sell items on the side.

Drug dealing not only harms the person using the drugs, who may then have to go on to steal and rob innocent people for drug money, but how does it affect that person's loved ones and family? Taking drugs as a recreational user may seem innocent, but this displays a cover-up of personal problems and emotional issues. Weekly tabloid journals deal in gossip, innuendo, and lies. What are television action series saying about our society, which shoots and kills? Where do all the scandal and talk shows lead us, and what base emotions do they stimulate and glorify?

Pornography makes victims of young people in the skin trade (also victims of those who promote and make profits for continuing and perpetuating the sex scene) and goes on to affect marriages and personal relationships. The minds of youngsters are polluted by X-rated material in magazines, videos, and now readily available on the internet. Prostitution and strip clubs degrade women. Guns and weapons kill children, from the accidentally picked-up pistol found in the home to the murders taking place in public schools. Tobacco pollutes your body. What about military arms deals which contribute to revolutions and military coups being commonplace, and terrorist acts exploding internationally? Whatever happened to communication, diplomacy and peace-making efforts? The innocent men, women and children of each country caught up in the ideological struggle between dictators and revolutionaries are the one's who suffer.

For most people a job well done brings satisfaction but for others profits, outdoing the competition and generating higher numbers than the last quarter leads to a mentality of crushing and outdoing the competition. What you can do is first be responsible for yourself, then

to go on as a society to examine your motives and the direction your country is headed.

The proof of your spiritual practice is bringing Wise Speech, Action and Livelihood together as an honest realization to every aspect of your life. With a common sense approach, you curb the impulsiveness and habit reaction of self and ego. Living a cleaner, clearer and simpler life, your greater fulfillment and peace is a sane approach and direction of a wisely based life.

Right Concentration (Wise Effort, Wise Awareness, Wise Concentration)



Now the Noble Eightfold Path unifies as a climax of experience in the form of mind transforming insight—wisdom of the Dharma, wisdom for your life and liberation from self. All along self has been the thorn in your side. Advancing from moral

restraint to direct mental training, a final clarification comes into focus as you apply Wise Concentration, opening the door to the realization of Wisdom. Wisdom is the insight tool for deliverance, but the penetrating vision it yields can only come about when your mind is composed and clear of all self misdirection. Right Effort provides the energy demanded for the task, right mindfulness the steadying of awareness as an appropriate attention while concentration directs the mind away from Everyday distractions to Insight.

Wise Effort

“And what is Wise Effort? Here [one] arouses his will, makes an effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind and strives to prevent the arising of unarisen even unwholesome mental states. He rouses his will...and strives to overcome evil unwholesome mental states that have arisen. He rouses his will...and strives to

produce unarisen wholesome mental states. He rouses his will, makes an effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind and strives to maintain wholesome mental states that have arisen, not to let them fade away, to bring them to greater growth, to the full perfection of development. This is called Wise Effort.” SN 155, 8.

The Path to Peace requires effort. Intention and effort seem very much alike and there are areas where they overlap, but while intention directs the mind, effort is the actual energy and action of a wisely directed mind. The right Effort is needed to bring you to wisdom and liberation. Everyday effort is self connected and habit driven while the Insightful effort is aware, controlled, responsible and knows non-self. Now your Wise Effort distinguishes between self attached suffering (the First Noble Truth) which is perpetuated over and over again, and the wisdom of cessation (the Fourth Noble Truth) to stop unwholesome action and the dedicated effort needed.

Wise Effort is applied in four helpful ways: to **prevent** and **abandon** habit driven, counter productive careless thoughts, and to **arouse** and **maintain** wise, wholesome, responsible thoughts. Dormant habits are stopped and active defilements are all together suspended. Insightful awareness requires that penetrating and responsible mind action be nourished and brought out, then developed as a personally experienced understanding.

To prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts which haven't come to mind.

“Herein the [practitioner] rouses his will to avoid the arising of evil, unwholesome states that have not yet arisen; and he makes effort, stirs up his energy, exerts his mind and strives.” AN 4, 13.

You can't very well think clearly and be wise if negative and defeating thoughts run through your head. The Monkey Mind appears at any time to distract and draw you away from the present. Here now you 'prevent' these Everyday tendencies, applying a clear and decisive awareness. You can see how effort leads to concentration and a clear mind, or how just as easily when you aren't mindful, habits and self fulfilling motives bring about stress and suffering.

This is seen as the effort to bring the mind under control and to actively deal with your habits. If you are excited by desire or lust, have angry and bitter thoughts, or feel overwhelmed and insecure or nervous, the Everyday Breath is the hostile expression of self. The mind thinks and the body behaves. You need to restrain these careless impulses. The Middle Way reveals that sensual desire on the one hand and physical denial and punishment on the other are extreme reactions but, rather, the Middle Way unites understanding, virtue and attention to a personal experience of freeing insight.

To abandon unwholesome states which have already come to mind.

“Herein the [practitioner] rouses his will to overcome the evil, unwholesome states that have already arisen and he makes effort, stirs up his energy, exerts his mind and strives.” AN 4, 13.

Even at your best self and ego are a distraction wanting to have their way. But what really is happening is that you aren't seeing things clearly as your concentration breaks down. You have to take immediate action to deal with the situation before it leads you to full-fledged suffering or a crisis. The Wise Effort to abandon unwise thoughts is called upon. The Buddha offers ways of dealing with a troubled mind and thoughts.

“When a [practitioner] is intent on the heightened mind, there are five themes he should attend to at the appropriate times...he should attend to another theme [subject], apart from that one, connected with what is skillful...he should scrutinize the drawbacks of those thoughts...scrutinizing the drawbacks of those thoughts, he should pay no mind and pay no attention to those thoughts...he should attend to the relaxing of thought-fabrication with regard to those thoughts...beating down, constraining, and crushing his mind with his awareness, those evil, unskillful thoughts are abandoned and subside...He has cut down craving, removed the fetter, rightly mastered pride, and made an end of suffering.” MN 20.

While every moment may not turn out the way you want, you can still do a lot through improving your effort. What happens is that you are caught in a momentary frustration as you get out the door late for work, then the tension is compounded stuck in rush hour traffic, and

on to an extra-demanding morning on the job. You are drained, edgy and ready to crack. Though challenging, knowing that each event is isolated and different (non-self influences) puts things into their true perspective. Most times you can't change people or situations, but you can make an effort not to be overwhelmed and see things clearly without letting self dominating habit energies get the better of you. Don't go with your first impulse and if you do, catch yourself and reestablish Wise Effort.

To arouse wholesome thoughts which haven't yet come to mind

“Herein the [practitioner] rouses his will to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen; and he makes effort, stirs up his energy, exerts his mind and strives.” AN 4, 13.

Wise Effort takes you from carelessness and being a victim of your habits to consciously cultivating awareness (unattached or empty of self) non-self wisdom and, ultimately, a freed nature. Consider it planting seeds of goodwill and good intention. If you still get bothered, you at least have realized the moment as it is and can do something about the situation. That in itself is an accomplishment.

Wise Intention now overlaps with Wise Effort as you leave behind Everyday experiences tied to desire, anger and confusion to connect with Insightful appreciation for understanding and realizing wise action. It isn't enough just to feel good and quiet down the Monkey Mind, but now to move deeper within your effort to go beyond a self limiting attitude. No longer that puppet on a string manipulated by Everyday habits, you defuse self by way of your experienced wisdom.

To maintain and perfect wholesome states which have already come to mind.

“Herein the [practitioner] rouses his will to maintain the wholesome things that have already arisen, and not to allow them to disappear, but to bring them to growth, to maturity, and to the full perfection of development; and he makes effort, stirs up his energy, exerts his mind and strives.” AN 4, 13.

As an effort to 'maintain' and 'perfect' wholesome thoughts and intentions, this final application of effort clears the mind of Everyday distractions in order to penetrate the Truth of the Dharma.

You first have to understand the impulsiveness that makes you frustrated, impatient or desiring, and what you can do to nurture patience and caring. This is the Middle Way—insight for the shortcomings of self-craving and realizing the implications of the greater Dharma in your life. You have to regularly remind yourself to let go of self. Give up your attached tendencies and you give up your problems. The Four Noble Truths stand out as the insight to liberation—there is the appreciation for careless self attachment as well as the influence of many conditions as a Signless Deliverance; craving the origin of suffering, there is insight to turn away from the Everyday as unworthy as a Desireless Deliverance; the cessation of craving as an insight to how motivated action leads to suffering as an Emptiness Deliverance; and the Middle Way as the Path to Peace to the complete cessation of craving as the insight of wisdom to non-self liberation as an Unshakeable Deliverance—Nirvana.

Wise Awareness

“And what is Wise Awareness. Here [the practitioner] abides contemplating body as body, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the world; he abides contemplating feelings as feelings...; he abides contemplating mind as mind...; he abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the world. This is called Wise Awareness.” SN 155, 8.

There is Everyday self awareness which is grasped through the Five Groups of Self Attachment, and there is the Middle Way Insight to release from the illusion of self. A fine line of experience, here you step through the mirror of self reflected absorption to turn back around to know non-self intuition and Dharma insight.

Awareness is a practical consideration. If you are driving and become distracted or take your eyes off the road, what is likely to happen? You will crash, swerve, or cause an accident. You need to be awake and aware of all your experiences. There are four key areas to help you stay in touch with the present—body, feelings, mind qualities and life action. Identifying the moment helps put you in a

'wise' frame of mind. This understanding is an awareness without self!

Body—the body and the senses are your first contact with the present as you see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think in connection with an experience. You start off by touching base with where you are, what you are doing and what is happening. There is the Everyday self identified body and there is the Insightful realization of non-self. The Middle Way appreciation is unattached to the body form.

Having Wise Awareness, you are an observer. The body is a form or a shell of protection and not self. Insight of the Dharma comes when you know the moment as impermanent and non-self.

Feelings—the body feels as the senses are impressed and contacted, and how in turn you react to these sense impressions. There is an immediate rush to judge an experience as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. The Middle Way experiences without labeling or judging.

Applying Wise Awareness, you relate to the presence of feelings without self identification. Insight of the Dharma is when you know the moment as impermanent and non-self.

Mind Qualities—note the qualities of your mind and what moods are passing through it at any particular moment (a dislike for someone, the sudden thought of an errand you have to do has you worried; you daydream). Self is expressed in terms of desire, anger and confusion while the Middle Way penetrates the Monkey Mind distractions through awareness, effort and concentration.

Applying Wise Awareness, you acknowledge how you react to the moment as either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. View the thought as an impersonal conscious experience without injecting a self scenario. Insight of the Dharma is when you know the moment as impermanent and non-self.

Life Actions—the present is made up of your sense media consciousness of eye, ear, taste, nose, touch or mind and a subject

outside from you and then the contact of a subject and the sense media making for that particular conscious moment of eye, ear, taste, nose, touch or mind is stirred—a life conscious action. Your awareness reveals how self is stimulated, given voice to and suffers through attachment. This grasping is closer to a self inflicted wound. But the Middle Way isn't side tracked by desire and the sense charged world nor is it a denial and punishment, but opening to, experiencing and understanding the conscious energy as non-self.

Applying Wise Awareness, you realize how motives or karma dominate you in your reactions, are given life to and carry on to the next conscious life action as past quickly becomes present and present quickly becomes future—all tied together in perpetual self stressed promotion. Consciousness doesn't imply that you are the thinker or that there is a self behind the thinker. Phenomena or life action happens, is dominated by both a physical as well as conscious contact energy (mind and body mentioned in Conditions Arising) which carries over. This consciousness contact is a life energy but not a self. Through Wise Awareness your attention now has the quality of what is referred to as 'bare attention' or insight ('clear knowing'), understanding the depth of the Dharma, a Middle Way appreciation and penetration to non-self.

The Buddha clarifies, "And what is Wise Awareness? Herein, a [practitioner] 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...the only way that leads to the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering upon the Wise path and the realization of Nirvana." DN 22.

Wise Concentration

“And what is Wise Concentration? Here [one] detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome mental states...thinking and pondering, born of detachment, filled with delight and joy. And with the subsiding of thinking and

pondering, by gaining inner tranquility and oneness of mind...is without thinking and pondering, born of concentration, filled with delight and joy. And with the fading away of delight, remaining imperturbable, mindful and clearly aware, he experiences in himself the joy of which Noble Ones say: 'Happy is he who dwells with equanimity and mindfulness'...and having given up pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness. This is called Wise Concentration. And that is called the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering." SN 155, 8.

The Monkey Mind distractions are Everyday disturbances tempting you. Insightful concentration and Dharma awareness are a gradual understanding and release from habits and impulsiveness directing you to the true nature of reality (impermanent, flawed and non-self). The mind divides and wrestles with self expectations and personal prejudices through a bewildered consciousness of desire, anger or confusion. Meditating as well as living responsibly through the renunciation and restraint of Wise Action, have allowed you to be composed and patient. The Everyday self fades (actually you haven't been feeding the habits, but nourishing Wise Action and understanding). A 'disenchantment' as the Buddha puts it, Wise Concentration isn't forced or obliged but comes naturally through the 'cessation' of self attachments and grasping.

With the Monkey Mind chatter now quiet, the experience of the Middle Way unifies as an appreciation of the Ultimate Truth. Like a cloud coverage suddenly lifting and rays of hot-bright sunshine beaming down, a flash of recognition stirs as you see self and suffering on the one hand and the open clarity of release and cessation on the other.

The Middle Way is a rejoiced cessation as you drop the burden of self. The Buddha mentions throughout the discourses 'joy,' 'happiness,' 'rapture,' 'bliss' and 'awakening.' Not everything is suffering when you are consciously aware of your thoughts, actions and speech. Looking back, upset and distractions came from your careless ignorant grasping (Five Groups of Self Attachment) along with craving as the culprit. Your spiritual journey has been a present moment experience in simple recognition with your body, feelings,

mind and life actions. You breathe a heavy sigh of relief, seeing how through a false impression of self you were led astray.

As a further clarification of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path is a personal penetration into the three levels of dormant, conscious and active self habit energies. In the chapter on karma motives were alluded to as a volcano but it might help you to see your habits as a layered cake. The frosting on the outside is the obvious active first layer of karma habits, biting into the cake is the conscious underneath layer, and deeper inside the cake is a filling of dormant habit energies. The cake itself is an illusion you have mixed and baked coming from your attachments and craving. Your experience is incomplete until you have "...cut them [habit energies] off at the root...done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising." MN 36.

Wisdom to non-self liberation is the cure the Buddha has guided you to. Insight comes together as an experience of the Eightfold Path and resounds as an intensified awakening of insight of non-self awareness. Ignorance is squelched and fades away. Oh, now I see. My habit energies and self affinity are a carelessness. I suffer because I haven't seen the true nature of life. Self has me looking in the wrong direction. When craving gets the better of me I suffer. Realizing the Dharma, there is no suffering because there is no self that suffers. I just didn't know better. But here now I understand. Yes, I can be wise.

The Middle Way is a realization to 'stream entry' liberation (the four rites of passage to full awakening and Nirvana are detailed in Chapter Fourteen). The Eightfold path is the stream leading you to a greater liberation. With your karma energy now refined you will never again be transferred to a lower state of suffering. You are bound for complete liberation in seven or fewer lifetimes. As an 'ancient path' that the Buddha rediscovered (SN 12, 65), the understanding and insight has always been here but has been obscured by self obsession. The experience of the Four Noble Truths is an insight which towers above all other recognitions and discernments. It is up to each person to apply themselves and realize the cessation of self promoted habits, and to know the wisdom leading to the ultimate peace of Nirvana—the Unshakeable Deliverance.

Life Practice

If you took a tablet with only one mineral or having only one nutrient in it you might eventually become malnourished, weak or sick and the tablet would have little or no affect. You need the complete company of minerals and vitamins to be ‘awakened.’ All eight insights of the Noble Eightfold Path contribute simultaneously as a Middle Way harmony to understanding and release.

Your self and ego attitudes are an extreme reaction, distancing you from the truth of the Dharma. Everyday associations of desire, hatred and confusion tug at you, but the Eightfold Path is a transforming realization—from habits to wisdom. The Four Noble Truths are penetrated—how your attached and grasping self nature led to suffering, how your craving intensifies and perpetuates suffering, but also the release and end of your craving and the insight and wisdom needed to be realized to be free from suffering. You have broken through the illusion of self to non-self freedom.

With Wise Intention, you direct yourself to renounce desiring, hateful and harmful intentions, and with Wise Effort you actually take on your negative and careless habits, actively developing and promoting skillful action. You assume responsibility for what you think, say and do. A constructive way to deal with negative and unwelcome thoughts is to offer a blessing or well wishes to yourself, to the difficult situation or person you hold in contempt. May I be patient. May I feel and have goodwill. I hope you go on and have a nice day. I’ll listen calmly and be a friend. I’ll carefully choose my words. You discover how much easier life is if you let go without feeling you need to react out of self habits.

Be responsible for your speech. Don’t go with your first impulse. Take the extra moment to sense the implications and reaction of what it is you are about to say. Make each of your words valuable, memorable and honest. Feel what it is like not to argue and fight. Apply ‘Noble Silence.’ Be patient. Don’t feel you always have to have an opinion or the last word!

The final proof of your practice is in your actions. Wise Action is about simplicity—extending courtesies, being available and caring while also leading a humble life of few needs and possessions. Be accountable for your actions.

Wise Livelihood should be enjoyable work, but you can get tied into jobs you don't like in order to pay bills. If possible, your job should reflect your ability and character. Some people are good with their hands and make a wonderful seamstress, handy man, construction worker or mechanic. Other people like words and make good writers, lawyers, or office workers. Know your strength and talents and take advantage of them. But whatever you do is important. Society couldn't get along without a single one of us.

When you do something give it your best effort, your Wise Effort. Even the little things count. Doing a chore (don't be angry or short tempered), eating a meal (don't be desirous or absent minded, but be in the present with what you are eating), going through doors from one room to the next (be mindful and present without rushing ahead to the next task)—are you on automatic pilot or are you aware and in tune with what you are doing? It's the little actions that reveal so much about you, reflecting patience, calm and understanding. Habit energies are careless and irresponsible while Wise Effort is thought management!

No longer sidetracked by Monkey Mind habits, your Wise Awareness is present, caring and responsible, knowing what you are experiencing in the body, through feelings, in your thoughts as well as life actions. Feel how the grasping and the craving of self actually cripple you. The Everyday Breath is a self strangulation. The Insightful Breath understands and is aware of self stressed desire, anger and confusion. Letting go of your attached and grasping behavior, the understanding experience of freedom from self through the Middle Way clarifies life.

From ignorance and carelessness to awareness and understanding—you have come to know Wisdom.

Chapter Fourteen

INSIGHT MEDITATION— The Realization of Wisdom and Liberation



“The carpenter or his apprentice sees on his tool handle the wearing away caused by his fingers and thumb, but he does not necessarily know that so much has been worn away today, so much yesterday and so much at another time. In the same way, one living devoted to the practice of meditation does not know that so much of the defilements [habit energies] has been worn away today, so much yesterday and so much at another time. He merely has the knowledge that they are being worn away.”
SN 3, 154.

Opening to Insight



There is a slight rise ahead on the path as we follow behind the Buddha. For a moment the sun is in our eyes and we squint. At the top of the rise we look down over the brightness of the countryside. Holding a hand up to shield our eyes, we can see in all directions. Far behind us now is the mountainside where we began our journey, looking more like a shadowy mound. We glance at the Buddha. He

stares out at the hazy horizon.

Many conditions and influences have brought us to this place of spiritual awareness. We are no longer the same person as at the start of our journey. We have come to understand and experience life in its true dimensions—impermanent and of non-self influences. We are aware. Now we continue on down the other side of the rise and stop to rest.

The Buddha smooths out his robe, takes a few settling breaths then allows for a moment of silence. “Suppose that an archer or archer’s apprentice were to practice on a...mound of clay, so that after a while he would become able to shoot long distances, to fire accurate shots in rapid succession, and to pierce great masses. In the same way, there is the case where a [meditator]... enters and remains in the first jhana: rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness, as inconstant, stressful...painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, non-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena...‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the resolution of all [mental] formations; the relinquishment of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Nirvana.’ ” AN 9, 36.

“I have taught the way to cross over the flood by going from one support to the next, the noble liberation. Whatever a teacher should do—seeking the welfare of his disciples, out of sympathy for them—that have I done for you...Practice meditation. Don't be heedless. Don't later fall into regret. This is my message to you all.” MN 106.

The Buddha's eyes look down. We sit together meditating.

Meditation has been around for thousands of years and was well established in India before the Buddha's time. However, the meditations only took the practitioner as far as being settled. This was serenity meditation or a calming, survival practice. The ultimate question of suffering and fulfillment wasn't addressed or answered. Unique to Buddhism is Insight Meditation or vipassana. Insight is knowing the true nature of life or the Dharma as non-self through your own experience, surroundings and penetrating to the breakthrough insight of realizing not only the causes and complexity of your suffering but their 'cessation,' release and liberation.

There are a series of valuable meditation experiences that help bring insight and wisdom to your life. The meditations are separated into two groups as a calming and concentration foundation of 'pleasant abidings' and Liberating Meditations of wisdom and enlightenment breakthrough.

Helping as a clarifying concentration are the Centering Penetrations (related to subduing form/sense/material attachments), the Immeasurables of loving-kindness, and the Eminent Penetrations (related to defusing formless/psychic/immaterial associations through keen mental release) allow for calm, steadiness, joy, focus and healing of the mind. Although considered as 'pleasant abidings' (MN 8) these meditations serve to weaken habits or defilements and help to establish insight for the Four Noble Truths.

Then there are the Liberating Meditations which bring you to the realization of wisdom and the end of suffering—The Four Frames of Awareness (MN 10), the Awareness of Breathing Meditation (MN 118), Meditation on Emptiness (MN 121-122), and Meditating on the Buddha Dharma.

All along you have been practicing these meditation techniques to a certain degree or level, but now you will develop, expand and cultivate them as useful means to a deeper insight—the end of suffering, wisdom and non-self liberation. You can think of the meditation offerings as consciousness expanding exercises. Some people jog while others swim, bicycle, take aerobics classes, lift weights or do yoga. There is the ‘right’ meditation to fit everyone, allowing for enjoyment and enriching your direct experience of the Dharma to bring you to the release from suffering, Nirvana.

Actually, there are many other meditations but these few have come to be the mainstay, sharing a non-self insight of the present moment as their underlying experience of Dharma appreciation and wisdom. You don’t have to become an expert on all the meditations, but choose the two or three that best suit you. Over the years, I have practiced all of them. Each of them has helped me to detach from self driven habits as insight has slowly emerged.

The Centering Penetrations of Dhyana Practice (Related to the Everyday experience of forms and sense contacts)



The Joy of Meditation
The Joy of Concentration
The Joy of Equanimity
The Joy of Detachment

In the most beautiful and poetic language of the entire discourses from the Pali Canon, the Buddha eloquently describes and details the Centering Penetrations. From his tone and the words used there is no doubt that the Penetrations have a special place in meditation practice as a useful, present-minded focus. In the West, awareness of the present moment, where you are, what you are doing and feeling has been the emphasis, but concentration is important in your going on to develop insight in your life. You can be sitting and aware of the Monkey Mind, but that

doesn't calm or focus the mind. Simple concentration is elusive. Fortunately, there is a direct, hands-on-approach to the Centering Penetrations.

The word dhyana (in Pali jhana) refers to your having penetration or absorption in clear, one-pointed concentration, but the dhyanas are also mentioned as 'ecstasies' because of the joy brought about from having a calm and undistracted mind. The happiness is a direct experience as you go from Everyday habits, impulses and being unsettled to being aware, knowing and responsible. Practice, concentration, joy and insight go hand-in-hand.

The Centering Penetrations are connected to the 'body' or 'form' ('rupa'), relating to the six senses and the sense realm world of conditioned impermanence. Here, what you do is quiet down and detach from the sensory overload charging your life—eyes and sight, ears and hearing, nose and scent, tongue and taste, touch and feelings, thoughts and consciousness. Practicing the Centering Penetrations is like disconnecting one breaker switch at a time in your home fuse box. The senses and the Everyday feelings of habit energies driving you are an electric connection. Here you will begin to weaken your sense contact associations and identification with the body as self. Compelling you to act and react, sensory overload is a dangling temptation, but every time you go after the enticement, grasp and become attached, your suffering is magnified. Follow as you also disconnect from the defilements of attachment and desire.

If you tried the Awareness Penetrations mentioned earlier in Chapter Four then the Centering Penetrations won't be all together new for you. Initial Contact, Sustained Contact, Interest, Joy and One-Pointedness direct your attention from impulsiveness to the calm awareness of non-self.

The Joy of Meditation (Dhyana of Seclusion)

"...quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, [the meditator] enters upon and abides in the first jhana absorption, which is accompanied by initial and sustained thought, with interest and pleasure born of seclusion." MN 26.

“Just as a skilled bath man...heaps bath powder in a metal basin and, sprinkling it gradually with water... [the meditator] makes the joy and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unprevaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.” MN 39.

“Friend, in the first jhana absorption five distractions [the Monkey Mind] are abandoned and five factors are possessed. Here, when [the meditator] has entered upon the first absorption, sensual desire is abandoned, ill will is abandoned, sloth and torpor are abandoned, restlessness and remorse are abandoned, and doubt is abandoned; and there occur [initial contact, sustained contact, interest, joy, and one-pointedness].” MN 43.

The Joy of Meditation begins with your actually sitting to meditate (the Buddha referred to it as ‘seclusion’ or coming to sit at a quiet place). This meditative time out and rest from life’s ups and downs and demands is a beneficial doing ‘nothing’ (nothing disturbing or self promoting). You find joy with the stilling and releasing of your habit energies as your whole being is soothed and calm.

Identify with the present moment of feelings, sensations and your surroundings. Do a body scan to help you settle down. Take a few deep breaths to relax. Note and appreciate yourself as you sit: check your posture, feel the different pressures and sensations, how you are feeling in this moment as well as taking in your surroundings of the quiet room or meditation hall.

The Joy of Meditation is a quiet moment. Your senses, which are normally alive and impressed, begin to calm down. Allow joy to come naturally on its own and to flow over you. There is a weightlessness and a release rather than looking for or trying to achieve something.

The Monkey Mind is weakening but still manages to flare up in occasional chattering instances. Let whatever thoughts spring up to mind but don’t actively follow after them. Don’t squeeze or bear down with your awareness to collapse around the thoughts. Thoughts slowly become wispy and soft. If longstanding difficulties with anger,

insecurity or confusion arise, feel how you are clenching and clinging to these issues. Below the level of Everyday stress is joy.

The Joy of Meditation has the Five Awareness Penetrations of Initial Contact, Sustained Contact, Interest, Joy and One-pointedness as part of its awareness. Initial Contact can begin with your breath or any other subject you are attentive to. Sustained Contact is continuing deepening your attention on the subject; Interest is knowing and acknowledging the subject of your attention; Joy is your full awareness of the subject; and One-pointedness is your undistracted concentration.

Feel the subtle qualities of the Joy of Meditation. Initial and Sustained Contact stand out as you simply connect with your sitting and ease in this meditative time out. The Penetrations deepen into a joyful, quiet mind as you slowly begin to also experience concentration. The joy experienced is an Everyday pleasure of settling down and not an insight. But note how the urge to do and be busy has softened. As your senses quiet down so, too, does your self identification.

The Joy of Concentration (Dhyana of Concentration)

“Again, with the stilling of initial and sustained thought, [the meditator] enters upon and abides in the second absorption jhana, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without initial and sustained thought, with interest and pleasure born of concentration.” MN 26.

“Just as though there were a lake whose waters welled up from below ...[the meditator] makes the rapture and pleasure born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of concentration.” MN 39.

Now settled, there is a shift from the general pleasantness of the body being relaxed and the breath calming which gives way to the Joy of Concentration and mind ease. An observer rather than occupied, you feel as though you are standing on the outside looking in at yourself.

Follow how the mind squeezes around a thought consciousness and forms to understand and judge the moment. There is Everyday pressure and tension of attachment and craving with the thought. You realize this tug-of-war and extremes, allowing the mind to relax and release its hard focus. Feel the softening and passing of thought action.

Feel what a restful mind is as your thinking settles and awareness expands. Thoughts may arise but pass by without attachment. The depth and expanse of the mind is realized—stilled, open and unburdened compared to when you are preoccupied and pressured. With the breath as a focus of your meditation, note how the hollowness of breath translates to your undisturbed mind and clear concentration of non-self realization.

You just don't snap your fingers and become concentrated, but ease into it through Interest, Joy and One-pointedness of the moment. Sounds can echo around you, sensations may tingle, the Monkey Mind may screech, but your attention doesn't rush off to inspect the action. The moment is one of quieting down and detaching from sensory perception to a distilled mind without self calling or self boundaries. The mind is like a muscle and when it normally focuses to think there is a degree of straining and stress as it judges the moment or experience. Now relax your mind so that it isn't bearing down to scrutinize, but settles as the surface of a lake on a quiet, warm summer day. Acknowledge your attention expanding and being weightless not having any preoccupation or absorption.

The Joy of Equanimity (Dhyana of Equanimity)

“Again, with the fading away as well as rapture, [the meditator] abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third absorption jhana, on account of which noble ones announce: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.’” MN 26.

“Just as, in a pond ...some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and cool water drenches, steepes, fills, and pervades them to their

tips and their roots...[the meditator] makes the pleasure divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of rapture.” MN 39.

Open, calm, and at ease, it feels as though you are drifting on a warm sea. Buoyant and effortless, the body and mind are pacified. Interest gives way to Joy and One-pointedness. The breath flows seeming not to have any starting place and passes effortlessly. The mind is at rest, further separating from all sense activity. Equanimity is the direct experience brought about by emphasizing concentration in meditation. You are stepping away from being a self actor.

Adrift in Equanimity the Interest Penetration gives way to Joy ('rapture') and One-pointedness. The breath, body and mind soften and relax in ways unrealized before. The present moment is centered and quiet. Your breath moves effortlessly and the mind follows undisturbed. There is a sense of 'wishlessness' as all your needing to be, acting and reacting drop away. As though taking a warm soothing bath, all your sensations and mind activity are relaxed.

The Joy of deep, concentrated equanimity gives way to the Joy of Detachment or separation from self. Disturbances and Everyday self reactions vanish as the clarity and calm of the Insightful Breath emerges. Deeply feel how all the sense connections with self are tranquilized. Without any demands, habits and impulses fade away. Note the absence of self pressure and expectations. Without the contributing conditions, self quiets down. Here you are abiding in the deep and passive calm of non-self. Feel how in gradual steps you have relaxed and released the grasp of self.

The Joy of Detachment (Dhyana of neither pleasure nor pain)

“Again, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, [the meditator] enters upon and abides in the fourth absorption jhana, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.” MN 26.

“He sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind...just as though a man were sitting covered from the head down with a

white cloth...and sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind.” MN 39.

Allow yourself to feel and know the depths of your clear and open mind as detachment flows over and through you. Self has been an obstacle and an intrusion, a pursuing pleasure and an avoidance of pain. But stepping back from the stimulation and charge of the senses, quieting the mind, the demands and the production of self have stopped. The moment is as it is—non-self qualities. Feel how the habits of self making have turned off. Wise action extends itself to meditation as you nourish insight rather than the senses and self addiction.

Feeling as though you have opened a door and entered a room without walls, floor or ceiling, your detachment from the Everyday run around of distractions and demands is quelled. The craving and grasping mind are dormant. Your awareness is larger than your own imagination and the connection to self. A quiet awareness shines fully realized. Joy gives way to the One-pointedness of an undistracted mind attention. Now you realize the full scope of the Everyday and the Insightful: stressful, exhausting, painful and pursuing when not fleeing and the watchful, caring, responsible, calm and clear mind. There is only your consciousness and the experience of this quiet attention. Note how the acting out of self to be and become, to need or keep away, to judge and label—the quest for pleasure and the aversion for pain—self is subdued.

The Centering Penetrations are a training tool of experience to help you see through the commotion of your sense activities and self attachments. You are directed to the insight of non-self realization.

The Immeasurables

(Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, Equanimity):



“Develop the meditation that is love, for by so doing, hatred will be got rid of. Develop the meditation that is compassion, for by so doing, harming will be got rid of. Develop the meditation that is sympathetic joy, for by so doing, dislike will be got rid of. Develop the meditation that is equanimity, for by so doing, sensory reaction will be got rid of. Develop the meditation on the impure, for by so doing, attachment will be got rid of. Develop the meditation that is the perception of impermanence, for by so doing, the conceit ‘I am’ will be got rid of.” MN 1, 424.

“If one were to give a gift of a hundred coins in the morning, again at noon and again in the evening or instead, if one were to develop the mind of love in the morning, noon and evening...this would be by far the more beneficial of the two. Therefore, you should train yourself, thinking: “We will develop the liberation of the mind through love. We will practice it often. We will make it our vehicle and foundation. We will take our stand upon it, store it up and promote it.” SN 2, 264.

An uplifting way to begin the day is with a meditation session on the Immeasurables (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity) also known as Metta (Loving-kindness), bringing caring to oneself and good will to the world at large. Later in the evening you can focus and settle down with a concentration meditation.

The Buddha encountered many troubled people during his life as well as accepting many challenging persons into monastic practice. The most notable was Angulimala, the murderer. Everyone deserves a second chance in life, if not then we are all doomed by our mistakes and our imperfections. It isn't enough to talk platitudes but to genuinely extend your kindness and your understanding. Try being 'accepting' of someone in your family or at work to see them with an

attitude of compassion. Stop thinking of the other person as a threat or the enemy and try offering patience and goodwill. Your spiritual practice is also all about loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity—an ‘immeasurable’ and unconditional goodwill.

I begin my days by going outside in the morning, bowing to the four cardinal directions then sincerely desiring that all beings and creatures the world over and throughout the universe be well. I go on to think about my immediate neighbors, friends and loved ones, the people in the city I am living in, wishing everyone goodwill. While practice does begin with one’s self, your awareness and awakening extend to everyone. Leaving a job after years of service to pursue my spiritual calling, I went to every person in the building and said the following words, “May you be healthy, may you be happy, may you know peace and may you be loved.” I also made sure to share these feelings with co-workers I had problems with. I could see they were surprised by the sentiment.

Loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity are ‘immeasurable.’ Their unconditional qualities have no limits or definition, and extend themselves to everything and everyone. Also known as the Brahmaviharas or Sublime Abiding, the Immeasurables are an awakening to the non-self qualities of the Dharma and help provide a meaningful perspective to something other than one-sided, self charged habits and impulses. As a formal meditation practice, the Immeasurables have a way of softening and opening the mind and your consciousness to a deeper understanding of wisdom and peace. The Immeasurables also heal the trauma in your life. Applying skillful means, the Buddha spoke to a Brahman who asked what were the most noble of qualities and characteristics that would take one to the Brahma realm of attainment. The Buddha responded that the ‘Sublime Abiding’ or Immeasurables bring you to this realization (DN 13).

As was mentioned about loving-kindness meditation in Chapter Three, there can be an initial resistance to the practice as well as feelings of awkwardness and uncertainty. Many people would prefer not to show or aren’t accustomed to expressing their sensitive side or being overtly kind. Without good reason, it is considered a sign of weakness and vulnerability to be generous and compassionately

engaged. About the power of loving-kindness the Buddha said, “None of the means employed to acquire religious merit has a sixteenth part of the value of loving-kindness. Loving-kindness, which is freedom of heart, absorbs them all; it glows, it shines, it blazes forth.”

Loving-kindness (Metta)

***“Just as water cools both good and bad,
And washes away all impurity and dust,
In the same way you should develop thoughts of love
To friend and foe alike,
And having reached perfection in love,
You will attain enlightenment.” JN 168-169***

Sit as you normally would for meditation. After doing a brief body scan, draw your attention and awareness toward yourself. Smile here in the moment. Smile mentally within yourself as you take a moment to be aware and caring. Follow your in and out breath, feel the ease and calm of the moment. Joy and happiness are also a part of your life and spiritual practice.

Feel and acknowledge the gentleness relaxing and moving through you, down from your head, neck, shoulders, warming through your torso and on down into your arms and legs. As though bathed in warm soothing water, you are calm and at peace. Note how the gentleness within you softens and opens areas that are tense and difficult. Loving-kindness is done in a sequence of visualizations, reflections and offerings.

Should any anger or negativity arise in you, try repeating an affirmation. Here in this moment may I be relaxed. May I feel simple happiness. Let me know kindness, friendship and caring for myself. I smile at who I am. My goodwill reaches deep within me and I open to kindness and caring. May I be a friend to myself.

Now that the energy of loving-kindness has been brought up, try now to offer and extend the same concern to a friend or family member. I am thinking of you now, my good friend. We have seen each other through many trials. I appreciate you always being there for me and being helpful. Thank you. You have made a difference in my life. I

wish you well and your family, too. May you be blessed. As you meditate, take your time to feel the bonds of friendship and caring between you and the other person.

If possible think of a person at work or family member that you are having some differences or difficulties with. Don't think of an outright enemy. Again, begin by extending an offering of good will to this person. I know that at work things can be very hectic. We are pressured and sometimes we do and say things that we don't mean. I am not the easiest of persons to get along with. I'm sorry for any upset or angry episodes. We have always managed to laugh it off later. I just got a little out of control. I will try to be more patient and I hope you can be patient with me. We have always talked things out. We can be direct without feeling badly. I will try to listen better. Take care of yourself. Thank you for your patience.

Loving-kindness is a powerful realization, at once healing, transforming and accepting. Your motives or karma are redirected as you go from a selfish and one dimensional person to being receptive, flexible, generous and willing. But you should proceed slowly. I spent over two years in intensive loving-kindness practice, coming to terms with past bitterness. I know how slow going the transformation can be. But with each session the wounds do begin to heal and close. You don't forget the hurt or injustice, but you forgive and accept to move on.

Some of the benefits of having an awareness of loving-kindness are "one sleeps happily and wakes happily, one has no bad dreams, one is dear to both human and non-human, one is guarded by gods; fire, poison and swords do not affect one, the mind concentrates quickly, the complexion is clean, one dies without bewilderment, and if one develops no further, one will reach at least to the Brahma world." AN 5, 342.

Compassion (Karuna)

"To be a disciple of the Buddha your heart must bear no hatred, you must utter no unkind words, you must always be compassionate." MN 21.

Compassion was at the heart of the Buddha's intention and aspiration as he left his palace home life to understand the nature of suffering. However, compassion shouldn't be confused with pity, sorrow or looking down upon someone's misery by placing a value judgment on them. When you have compassion you sympathize and understand the other person's hardship and are linked through caring. Often you tend to think of compassion as a special quality that only persons like Jesus, Gandhi or Mother Theresa have. But compassion is for everyone and shared by everyone.

Sitting to meditate and a continuation of your loving-kindness practice, turn your appreciation towards compassion. May I have compassion for myself. May the qualities of sympathy and caring be a part of my life. May I have tenderness and know mercy. Feel how you naturally soften and open with compassion. There are areas within all of us which are reserved. Smile as you extend compassion to yourself. Yes, I forgive myself. I can't change my wrongdoing, but I can have compassion here and now. This much I can do.

Feel how your breath is a gentle wisp of air as you have brought out the awareness of compassion. The body feels calm while the mind opens in empathy. Here the moment can feel as though you are releasing a dam of pent-up sorrows. To forgive and accept yourself is to have compassion. Feel as you move away from your old selfish ways. But don't be angry or disappointed. Know mercy. I understand my rage and torment. I just didn't know better, but now I can change. I know my suffering and have compassion for myself.

To have compassion is to understand and come to terms with the past. Yes, mother, you did the best you could. We had many hard times but that was the past. Here now I wish to say I'm sorry. I forgive the past. There must be a compassionate resolution. Father, you weren't always there for me and I could have used your help and guidance. It was just the way things worked out. But now I wish to move on. I have accepted and forgiven myself and I accept and forgive you. I hope you are happy. Please, have a good life. We can be happy.

Bringing closure to the past frees you. Know the depths of compassion. Feel release and feel peace in your life. You draw

strength and concentration from compassion. Realize the far reaching transformation that compassion can make in you. Sense how light and buoyant you feel as though you could touch the highest cloud or the most remote corner of the universe. This is why the practice is known as ‘immeasurable.’ Compassion reaches everyone and embraces all suffering beings, including yourself.

Sympathetic Joy (Mudita)

“Wishing: In gladness and in safety,

May all beings be at ease.

Whatever living beings there may be,

Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,

The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,

The seen and the unseen,

Those living near and far away,

Those born and to-be-born—

May all beings be at ease!” SN I, 8

Sympathetic joy opens to the simplest of virtues—to be happy for others. Most times your day is filled with only what you can do for yourself, how you can get ahead, with little regard for people around you. Yet there is no escaping that you do share with and rely on others.

Wouldn't it be nice to hear congratulations when others succeed or during sporting events one competitor applauding the other for a good shot? But all too often habit energies of jealousy, pettiness, competitiveness and misunderstanding come out. Sympathetic joy or gladness is a genuinely felt happiness for another person's good fortune, success and their well being. You see the other person not as a threat but as part of your life.

Sit and experience the many pleasures, joys and the good fortune in your life to have ‘awakened,’ to have awareness and understanding. Breathe joy and gladness, knowing it in your body and your mind. Feel how light-hearted, content and at ease you are. Yes, there is happiness when I am aware. I open myself to joy.

Now turn your thoughts to a friend and be happy for them. My friend, you have gone on to have a strong marriage and beautiful family.

You have achieved many good things. You have been a good friend and I am truly happy for you.

If other people haven't succeeded as they had hoped for you can also console them. You did the best you could. Unfortunately, you weren't chosen. Later, you will be recognized. It just wasn't the right time. There is no need to be discouraged. You have a lot to be proud about. Another door will open and you will be rewarded.

Notice how you have come out from a petty shell of selfishness to be caring, accepting and open minded.

Equanimity (Upekkha)

“When his mind is concentrated he looks (upon all things) with thorough equanimity. This is called equanimity as a part of enlightenment.”

At a Dharma gathering I mentioned in conversation that equanimity was the deepest and most all encompassing form of love and understanding that we could share. One woman didn't understand. I went on to explain that equanimity or the even-tempered, clear-minded person doesn't discriminate or judge, has no expectations and is accepting of everyone. Of course, this is something I am working on within myself, needing much more patience and understanding. Equanimity is a natural conclusion to Metta practice and generously rounds out the 'Immeasurables.' Everything and everyone is held in esteem.

Allow yourself to feel equanimity through your breath, body and mind. A warm ease flows over you. Self and ego dominance and judgments have vanished. There is only peacefulness. Here now I feel the well being and centering of my practice. I am fortunate to know another way of dealing with life. The Dharma has brought me understanding and compassion. I have nothing to prove. I can also be patient, accepting and forgiving. Yes, I can live in peace.

Direct your thoughts and feelings of equanimity to the world at large. I hope that my co-workers are happy in their lives and family situations. I know some of them are having problems with their teenage children or spouses. I hope they can come to an

understanding. May my neighbors be happy, well and secure. May my friends be happy and safe in their lives. May my family be safe, untroubled, and blessed.

Though international troubles are far from me, I hope that any waging battles are settled quickly through peaceful political options rather than bloodshed. I do what I can in my own small way. I notice that I now listen to others. This is quite a change. I am less critical and argumentative. May all beings and creatures live in harmony and come to know peace in their lives. May they be fulfilled and contented. Equanimity is a settling awareness.

To live the Immeasurables is to be fulfilled, at peace and a deeply understanding person. Many people as they get older embrace loving-kindness, finally settling down as they are finished fighting, arguing and hating. But you don't have to wait to be old to be wise. Start right now. The Immeasurables cross over from self and suffering to caring and wisdom.

“Train yourself in doing good that lasts and brings happiness. Cultivate generosity, the life of peace, and a mind of boundless love.” IT 16

“Wise and mindful, you should develop immeasurable concentration [concentration based on immeasurable good will, compassion, appreciation, and equanimity]. When, wise and mindful, one has developed immeasurable concentration, five realizations arise right within oneself. Which five?

“The realization arises right within oneself that 'This concentration is blissful in the present and will result in bliss in the future.'

“The realization arises right within oneself that 'This concentration is noble and not connected with the baits of the flesh.'

“The realization arises right within oneself that 'This concentration is not obtained by base people.'

“The realization arises right within oneself that 'This concentration is peaceful, exquisite, the acquiring of serenity, the attainment of unity, not kept in place by the formations of forceful restraint.'

“The realization arises right within oneself that 'I enter into this concentration mindfully, and mindfully I emerge from it.'

“Wise and mindful, you should develop immeasurable concentration. When, wise and mindful, one has developed immeasurable concentration, these five realizations arise right within oneself.” AN 5, 27.

Self is an imposed barrier of not knowing any better which boxes you into limitations of desire, anger and confusion. Through metta you realize other options and a direction other than suffering as Insightful and wise choices of patience, generosity, and caring come forward to replace old habits. Life isn't only about taking, needing, gaining and control. This has been a painful pursuit headlong into careless conflicts. Metta softens the hard edges of self as you open to compassion and sympathetic joy. An ease, quiet fulfillment and equanimity enrich your life. Distancing self and ego, the experience and understanding of the Four Noble Truths as a non-self liberation slowly becomes clear.

The Eminent Penetrations
(Related to the formless realm of mental experiences and mind energy):



Infinite Space
Infinite Consciousness
Nothingness
Neither-Perception-or-Non-Perception

While the Centering Penetrations are related to the concentration and detachment from the body and your senses ('form' or the material realm), the Eminent Penetrations are the continuation for developing awareness and concentration into mind consciousness. They are considered 'formless,' relating to mental experiences and perception. Before proceeding with the Eminent Penetrations, you should be well practiced in the Centering (sense released) Penetrations and have control of your Monkey Mind, along with insight into the impermanent and non-self aspects of the Dharma.

The Eminent Penetrations help open and expand your consciousness beyond the craving grasp of self limitations to a mind of vast non-self appreciation. You proceed slowly, doing only as much as you can without forcing yourself to be a 'super guru.' Each one of us is different, having his or her own pace as well as unique abilities. You practice to understand, have insight and, ultimately, the wisdom of liberation—non-self peace. Here you are about to travel through the space-time of the mind. Things and life function differently in the formless realm. As a complete separation from the physical and sense world is known, an existence of pure concentrated-mind bliss is achieved and the higher formless meditation absorptions are distinguished. The complex craving and grasping of motives and mental attachments are unfastened. Pulling back from your normal sense focus of breathing action through the nostrils, lungs and diaphragm, now your breath becomes refined as it is drawn in from lower in the abdomen.

Infinite Space (Beyond the Body and Senses):

“Again with the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, aware that 'space is infinite,' [the practitioner] enters upon and abides in the realm of infinite space.” MN 26

“With the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, aware that 'space is infinite,' [the practitioner] enters upon and abides in the realm of infinite space.” MN 26.

Detached from the body and removed from the stimulation of the senses, follow how your awareness naturally moves to the vacuum and spaciousness of pure mind attention and mental capacity. The Eminent Penetrations are realized by the undistracted and unattached practitioner. The coinciding of Wise Action as a virtuous renunciation along with the taming of the Monkey Mind, have made you a settled and insightful person who is no longer sided tracked.

Here, slowly you have made your way through the Everyday self sense notion to the revealing meditation depths of non-self capacity and potential. There is a change in awareness as you go from concentrating on the breath and physical sensations to the detached finer plane of formless mental states (“Phenomena are preceded by the mind, ruled by the mind” DH 1 as here you experience the role of the mind as a ‘formless’ compelling willed action to project motives and habits, but also the freedom from the karma of self attachment). Like stepping into a darkened room, there is an adjustment to the surroundings as your awareness clears and brightens to the spacious atmosphere. Self habit and impulsive reactions flash by as streaking colored light episodes.

Experience is no longer an incident that happens so much as the exposure of attention and concentration occupying a place in mind conscious space. Follow as mind energy warps, ascends, twists and folds with each thought moment. Feel how a thought instance peeks and pokes around in the space of the mind. Everyday craving and grasped attachment of the mind are more illusive than the more obvious hard hitting, sense contacts and is revealed as a fleeting

pressure of mind space. Thoughts flash like a meteor shower streaking into the atmosphere.

When the light of a self thought energy is grasped then the thought reveals itself and craving simultaneously appears to add weight and pressure to the moment. Closer to a dream, a whole thought episode of light image unfolds and the brightness of the thought energy absorbs you in attachment and craving. There is pressure, stress and the anxiety from the thought as your concentration bears down to investigate, then judge as the self thought energy light brightens to consume and distract you. But now with Insightful awareness experience, you relax, pull back and release allowing the thought light to recede and disappear. As other self absorbed thoughts flash, you aren't drawn to their light attraction, but allow them to pass on.

Settling deeper into your meditation, the flashes and upheaval become fewer. The spaciousness of mind consciousness slowly begins to expand to a boundless capacity revealing an infinite, non-self formless space. A settling darkness returns and the mind expands to a dimensionless haze. Feel how your mental concentration is weightless as you drift in the 'formless' atmosphere of infinite non-self space. Without a thought moment to occupy and burden you, note the freedom from self as your consciousness broadens to a greater infinite space potential. Note how self has shrunk and disappeared. The moment is formless, without dimension and self restrictions. Without the dazzling kaleidoscope of mind-light energy of motives and habits, you turn away and relax deeper into the broader expanse of conscious atmosphere.

A thought or mind moment is a pin prick of spiked agitation compared to the greater formlessness of mind space. With nothing conceived, only deep, mindful non-self awareness exists. Everyday perception is a gravity of compelling concepts and conditions, intellectualizing and limited by personal views and habits. When self erupts then infinite space collapses and narrows through the occupation of self, and when self vanishes, awareness capacity expands to open to infinite space. Now begin to appreciate the immensity of the non-self mind. A revelation is coming into focus.

Infinite space gives way to infinite consciousness.

Infinite Consciousness (Beyond Infinite Spaciousness):

“Again, by completely surmounting the realm of infinite space, aware that 'consciousness is infinite,' [the meditator] enters upon and abides in the realm of infinite consciousness.” MN 26.

“Surmounting the realm of infinite space, aware that 'consciousness is infinite,' [the meditator] enters upon and abides in the realm of infinite consciousness.” MN 26.

The guidance provided by the Buddha is intentionally less specific. You are considered a mature meditator capable of guiding yourself to discovery. Your attention is distinguished by the underlying selfless consciousness which recognizes and is alert. Infinite consciousness is the mind as a clear, vast vessel; the mind knowing no history, preference or personality—selfless.

Again, a self thought moment is a pin point of contact in the vastness of mind conscious space as you draw in quickly to the thought. Like a telephoto lens narrowing, your attention focuses and there is stress and pressure in the moment. Now soften and pull back your attention and allow the thought speck to fade until there is nothing to concentrate on. Consciousness opens to a broader infinite potential. There is no sense of self, time, place or feelings, but only the becoming pressure of the thought. Devoid of emotions and sentiment, feel how clarity, lightness, space and a dimensionless realization opens. Feel and know the wide expanse of mind potential. Rest within in the freedom of infinite consciousness.

Beyond the blur of sense action and stimulation, beyond the I, me, mine attitude of intellect and limited personal perception is an immaculate, far reaching realization. Muted is the calling of karma, the compelling voice of habits and motives urging you to act. Clarity as consciousness, consciousness as mind space, mind space as infinite—the mind begins to clear and direct itself towards wisdom.

Infinite consciousness gives way to emptiness.

Emptiness (Beyond Infinite Consciousness):

“Again, by completely surmounting the realm of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing,’ [the meditator] enters upon and abides in the realm of nothingness [emptiness].” MN 26.

“Surmounting the realm of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing,’ [the meditator] upon and abides in the realm of nothingness.” MN 26.

“Here, with the complete surmounting of the realm of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing,’ [the meditator] enters upon and abides in the realm of nothingness. This is called the deliverance of mind through nothingness.” MN 43.

Your experience of the Dharma has shown that everything changes and is of non-self influences. Known through a calm and penetrating awareness, you experience ‘emptiness’ or the stopping of self promoted habits and reactions. Note the quiet and ‘formless’ concentration that comes from the absence of distracting personality distractions as well as to attach and crave. Note in this deep stillness how the urge to crave and desire are mute—the emptiness of self.

Acknowledge the freedom from self limiting consciousness to the emptiness of ‘nothingness.’ The Dharma is known through your personal, insightful experience—impermanent, unsettled and non-self. The true nature of life and phenomena, reflected are the Four Noble Truths for self-filled suffered attachments as well as the cessation from the cycle of craving and becoming. Not a nothingness of chaos and doom, but a nothingness of non-self freedom. With nothing defining you, feel how the actor of self is quiet and absent. Without motivated karmic thought energy promoting self, then consciousness opens boundlessly to an emptiness realization beyond even the immaterial world.

Feel how you have gone beyond the intellectual grasping and imagination of the self narrowed mind. Sense how beyond infinite conscious awareness there is no definition of place or time. Note the observance of clear, conscious awareness. Here is a true gleaning into the freedom of non-self.

Emptiness gives way to neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception (Beyond Emptiness):

“Again, by completely surmounting the realm of nothingness [emptiness], [the meditator] enters upon and abides in the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.” MN 26.

Now with a penetrating conscious awareness your deepened concentration and meditation are a realized insight of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; an observance without the guise or intellect to react out of self definition and self obsession. Note how the absence of karma to be or becoming has faded in this penetrating awareness. Feel how all the makings of self judgment and reactions have abated and only a fine alert concentrated consciousness remains. In the beginning you saw life through a narrow viewpoint of self which separated and categorized subjects and objects as individual and foreign to you. Now your maturity as a meditator has moved beyond Everyday definition to a non-self detachment and expanded attention. Note how your self-perception has slipped away and only a lucid awareness remains.

Rest in the open awareness of unshaped and undetermined consciousness. The alert mind is without definition, texture or compelling focus. Infinite and boundless, self recognition and identity are nowhere to be found. The identification with the body is non-existent and the stream of consciousness process is absent. Here is the thought before the thought, before the compelling willed habit action of karma, a moment undisturbed by the gravity of impermanence or the recognition of self. Awareness without self awareness, knowing without self knowledge, a perception unperceived, undefined, unconditioned and desireless, the moment without self cognition or the shaping forces of the conditioned world having effect. Here is a consciousness without being.

Everyone is capable of penetrating non-self. This is an inherent and natural conscious realization; an uncorrupted state of insight and awareness. The unabsorbed mind potential is without obstacles and is limitless. The Buddha recalling a youthful episode while sitting serenely under the roseapple tree saw how the moment reflected a mind that was open and led to the settling experience of the Middle Way and to the liberation of the Noble Eightfold Path (MN 36).

Don't be in a hurry to cultivate or have a breakthrough in the Eminent Penetrations. Explore the qualities of an expanding consciousness. Feel how you achieve concentration and have awareness. The root for all defilements obscuring the true nature of life is the carelessness of ignorance; to overcome your habit energy is to overcome the craving and clinging of grasping self. There are many beguiling layers of self to make your way through. The awakening experience of Insight Meditation is the realization of the Dharma: impermanence, the dissatisfaction and the suffering, and the non-self nature of life to an Unshakeable Deliverance beyond the cycle of conditions generating Everyday life.

Liberation Meditations



More than an exercise, the Liberation Meditations are the final breakthrough experience to the peace of Nirvana, the Ultimate Truth and Reality of life penetrated only through your personally recognized wisdom. From the start of your spiritual journey, meditation has served as a transcending experience taking you from the Everyday to the Insightful; the careless ignorance which has led to grasping and craving and kept you tied to rebirth and suffering, to self serving habits and the contributing defilements of desire, hatred and confusion. The Liberation Meditations help to see and know the insight and wisdom of the three aspects of the Dharma—impermanence, the dissatisfaction and unsettling, and the non-self nature to an Unshakeable Deliverance from self. This can only truly be known when desire, hatred and confusion (ignorance)

are completely done away with. Four penetrating meditation experiences are offered here as wisdom enlightenment (Satipatthana MN 10, Anapanasati MN 118, Emptiness MN 121-122, and the Buddha Dharma).

The Four Frames of Awareness (*Satipatthana Sutta* MN 10)

The Discourse on the Four Frames of Awareness (MN 10) is a practical appreciation of your body, feelings, mind and life actions; an awareness leading to deep understanding and non-self realization. Through the recognition of your breath—the Everyday Breath and the Insightful Breath qualities (Chapter Two), you go beyond your habits and outstrip the craving which leads to future suffering. Through your keen meditative awareness you now have the effort and concentration to breakthrough to non-self realization.

The Awareness of the Body

“Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out...he trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the entire body and to breathe out sensitive to the entire body...He trains himself to breathe in calming bodily formations, and to breathe out calming bodily formations...Breathing in long, he discerns that he is breathing in long; or breathing out long, he discerns that he is breathing out long. Or breathing in short, he discerns that he is breathing in short; or breathing out short, he discerns that he is breathing out short. He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the entire body and to breathe out sensitive to the entire body...He remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to the body...And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world.” MN 10.

Your identification with the body is an Everyday misconception created through the grasping illusion of self. The body’s health should be maintained through good nutrition and commonsense care, but the adornment, build up, cosmetic surgeries and shrine-like attitude to a form which will eventually age and give way is

completely unrealistic. Here you come to know the Signless Deliverance of the body—an organism that thrives and passes on.

The Buddha goes on to speak uncompromisingly about the true nature of the body. Despite its marvelous biology, the body suffers and undergoes the same breakdown that all form and matter does. This sobering portrait brings you to seeing the true nature of the Dharma (the impermanent and non-self dynamics)—arising, transforming and dissolving. Conditions Arising, the body is young then old and suffers. But you aren't the body, the body isn't self. Described in the sobering simile of a family lost in the desert and reduced to eating their only child to stay alive (SN 12, 63), i.e. eat only for the sustenance of the body and not for pleasure, not for self gratification.

The practice of the Centering Penetrations helps you separate from the action and stimulation of bodily sensations. Poise, detachment, and equanimity are experienced. The draw, appeal and the short term enjoyment of the sense moment is realized—arising, transforming and dissolving. The clinging of the Five Groups of Self Attachment and the craving leading to future suffering stands out. The Four Noble Truths and the end of suffering are realized through your 'cessation' and withdrawal from Everyday habit energies. Before you nourished your suffering, but now you know better. There is nothing worth clinging to or ennobling in your physiology. The body is as it is—impermanent and non-self. You aren't bound by biology but now come to have the deeper awareness and the penetrating wisdom to see how desire, hatred and confusion ensnare you to the illusion that the body is self.

Meditation on the Body

Feel the quality of your breath as it traces your physiology, sending impulses through nerve endings, cells, muscles and skeleton. Notice whether the breath is short or long as it moves along. Watch and observe as the breath begins to settle and the body calms down. The diaphragm rises, a spaciousness-like bellows affect is felt as the breath is inhaled and then exhaled. The abdomen also lifts and drops with the breath.

Now sense the other areas of the body—facial muscles stretching with the breath, throat tickled with air, shoulders and back muscles dropped and relaxed, chest expanding, heart beating, internal organs moving with the abdomen as well as your lower back having a faint pressure, a feeling of dampness or perhaps dryness to the skin. Your attention goes from being preoccupied and reacting to one of awareness and understanding—the body is not self.

Impermanence is change, change is action, and life is so many influences of changing action. Realize the Four Dynamic Forces (Chapter Eight) of extension (solid), cohesion (liquid), temperature (heat) and motion (space/air). There are solid organs, muscles and a skeleton; liquid in the form of blood, water, urine, moisture and the like; temperature of body warmth as well as cold; and space/air of oxygen as well as space between the body anatomy allowing movement and functioning. Realizing the components and influences, the many make up the one body. No one element stands out above the others. This is non-self realization. Now meditating, relax your identification and pressure of self connecting to the Four Dynamic Forces—relax the body solid, relax the liquid, relax the temperature, and relax the space air movement. Note how your attention is drawn to self identified exaggeration arising with these basic pressures and feelings. Feel how craving escalates and the stress weighs you down. Name and form identification ignite the jump to self consciousness. This clenching, rigidity, tightness, suffocating and stress are a struggle of carelessness through ignorance for not appreciating the Dharma and the true reality of non-self.

The Middle Way of understanding reveals a clarity of Signless Deliverance (not to see the world as subject/object but wisely considering all formations to be impermanent and no longer keeping to a one-sided perspective of distracted and fragmented views). Detachment takes place. The grasping of the Five Groups of Attachment weakens. Craving dissolves. The body as a body, the breath as a breath—a meditation of concentrated awareness, impermanence and non-self are realized.

The Buddha goes on to practically detail how to bring awareness to all aspects of our life. **“When walking, the [practitioner] discerns**

that he is walking. When standing, he discerns that he is standing. When sitting, he discerns that he is sitting. When lying down, he discerns that he is lying down. Or however his body is disposed, that is how he discerns it...Furthermore, when going forward and returning, he makes himself fully alert; when looking toward and looking away... when bending and extending his limbs... when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe and his bowl... when eating, drinking, chewing, and savoring... when urinating and defecating... when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and remaining silent, he makes himself fully alert.” MN 10.

Awareness of Feelings

“When feeling a painful feeling, discerns that he is feeling a painful feeling. When feeling a pleasant feeling, he discerns that he is feeling a pleasant feeling. When feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he discerns that he is feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling...In this way he remains focused internally on feelings in and of themselves, or externally on feelings in and of themselves, or both internally and externally on feelings in and of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to feelings, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to feelings, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to feelings...And he remains [unattached] independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world.” MN 10.

Feelings through the sense contacts are how you connect and experience life. The moment is lived as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral as the feeling and sense experience is identified and labeled. You become an endless seeker of pleasure through attachment and gratification, while denying unpleasant moments and tuning out neutral experiences. Sensations and feelings reflect the changing and short-lived nature of life. Trapped by your reactions, the downfall is your attachment when dealing with the moment and the craving that arises to propel you to subsequent future actions.

Acknowledge the unsettling nature that feelings are and how they consume you. Even a pleasant experience is marked with a deeper

anxiety of self suffering to grasp onto the moment and make it last. Now you have realized the freedom and release for non-self. Contact is made but not engaged. Like a one sided tennis game, you don't have to respond to the volley of feelings. There is a non-self undoing. Cessation works to your benefit as you realize what is wise, selfless action. This is the Desireless Deliverance as you turn away from the gratification of common feelings.

As challenging feelings and demands do crop up your practice of Metta brings you ease and a positive way of relating to events, moments and experiences. You don't have to view the world as hostile but can experience the moment with goodwill, generosity, composure and patience. No longer are you a victim to Everyday, one-sided emotions—feelings arise, transform and fade. It is self that responds and needs reassuring. You realize cessation. Feelings reflect the impermanence of life as well as the Conditions Arising influencing them. Sense contacted feelings lead to craving and craving then brings about future suffering, upset and let downs. Alluded to as a flayed cow whose senses and nerves are raw and exposed (SN 12, 63), i.e. don't get caught up by sense impressions and feelings as a pleasure, not for self enjoyment.

Meditation on feelings and sensations

As you sit meditating, direct your awareness to any body feelings you are having. The most obvious feelings during meditation are in the lower back, stomach or abdomen, chest area, and most notably, in the knees and lower legs as well as the buttocks stiffening. Open your awareness to the sensation without bearing down with your attention to judge. You have an open, flowing and relaxed concentration. Note the moment and whether the sensation is dull, sharp or passing. Follow the sensation as an observer, not allowing the ego as critic to emerge and dominate.

There are pleasant feelings as when you have energy for your meditation or other times you can be tired and listless. But when you are distracted, every itch, or tingling makes the meditation seem long suffering like sitting on a cushion of nails. Don't get sidetracked by habit energies to oppose your feelings. Relax and allow the sensation to pass. Recognize the Dharma—sensations are

impermanent. There is no self within or behind the sensations. Relax your grasping to appreciate non-self freedom.

When the misconceived consciousness of ego habits arises follow how your attention narrows and stresses to deal with the experience. Note the tension and pressure behind self thoughts and impulses. Relax your reactive behavior. Follow the arising of sensations without making it an I, me, mine issue. Feel where you are grasping and begin to relax your attachment. Acknowledge the cessation of craving and the shift from Everyday self promotion to a non-self peace.

The Middle Way of understanding, ease and clarity reveals a Desireless Deliverance. Detachment takes place as self is dropped. The grasping of the Five Groups of Attachment is weakened. Craving dissolves. The feeling as a feeling without self, feeling as only a feeling—a meditation of concentrated awareness, impermanence and non-self are realized.

The Awareness of the Mind

“When the mind has passion, he discerns that the mind has passion. When the mind is without passion, he discerns that the mind is without passion. When the mind has aversion, he discerns that the mind has aversion. When the mind is without aversion, he discerns that the mind is without aversion. When the mind has delusion, he discerns that the mind has delusion. When the mind is without delusion, he discerns that the mind is without delusion...he remains focused internally on the mind in and of itself, or externally on the mind in and of itself, or both internally and externally on the mind in and of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the mind, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the mind, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to the mind...And he remains [unattached] independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world.” MN 10.

Moments flash by in dizzying sequences. Your understanding is regularly fooled and betrayed, blinded by anger, swept up in desire or scared and in denial as careless habits come out to stamp their

approval. But all you have to do is observe and understand. Be aware of how consciousness arises through contact with the senses of eye, ear, nose, taste, touch or thoughts and then the attachments and craving that follow. A conscious moment of contact provokes an out pouring of self identification, projection, and a judge and jury-like attitude of one-sided verdicts. This is how the Everyday self operates.

Simply note the qualities and presence of the aware and open mind. Meditation practice has helped cultivate patience as well as having good will and how to constructively deal with challenges. The Middle Way experience distinguishes between the careless, the attached and craved for, and the aware, the passionless and wisdom. Here the Eminent Penetrations practice and realization help as you have learned and experienced the infinite mind potential as well as the infinite consciousness to a non-self perception. Karma (the thought before the thought which leads to action) has been a distraction of impulsive habits. Now your insight and wisdom see through the looking glass reflection of self that keeps you off balance. You experience the true non-self reality of the Dharma and the profound freedom therein. The Emptiness Deliverance is a release of attachments and the grasping reflex of Everyday self, doing away with the becoming of compelling willed action. Referred to as a man to be dragged and tossed into a pit of hot coals (SN 12, 63), i.e. the intellect and thoughts are a painful labyrinth of deluded concepts and self justification, not for self aggrandizement.

Meditation on the Mind:

Through a centering warm up, you check in with yourself. How are you today? What are you feeling? Listen to yourself. I'm not happy. I don't like this. I'm confused, angry or scared. No one is ease dropping so you can feel free to have an open dialogue. You will still have your secrets, just not from yourself!

There is a connection going on within you: breath, body and mind overlapping and communicating in subtle ways. In this instance, direct your awareness to your mind attention. Does your mind feel open and receptive? Is your attention drifting or steady? With every self promoted thought (desire, anger and confusion) of Everyday distractions there is a narrowing of consciousness as the mind bears

down to inspect and give a verdict. Your attention is used to being busy and preoccupied—grasping and attached. Feel the actual stress of this mind action in your forehead as well as pressure behind the eyes. Closer to a muscle clenching, the focusing and concentration of the self induced and provoked consciousness is an actual pain and exhaustion—Everyday carelessness and the playing out of Conditions Arising. This has been an endless neglect of non-stop experiences leading to repeated birth and death. Only the complete cessation of your habits energies and having wisdom will take you out of this painful cycle.

As you calmed the body, you now gently relate to the mind. Feel the strain and contraction around a thought. Slowly relax your concentration and the grip of the mind (your attachment). If the thought persists and remains difficult, take 5-7 deep breaths of air through the nose and with this fresh air, the thought should relax and vanish. Note the change as the mind opens and releases this self straining. Feel the emptiness and vacancy of non-self. Again, the Eminent Penetrations (infinite space, infinite consciousness, emptiness and neither perception or non-perception) are a useful exercise for non-self clarity. Within you are the many layers of karmic self addiction and obsession to deal with. You honestly get to know yourself.

The basic theme of Everyday and Insightful Breath meditation is developed and deepened. Acknowledge the difference of mind when a habit thought of desire, anger and confusion arise. Feel the stress, narrowing and pressures in these habit reactions and judgments, how they consume, entangle and make your life difficult. Begin to note how and when they arise, play out and affect you, then fade away. Here Right Effort of the Middle Way is crucial to helping you deal with difficult thoughts. You stop and prevent unwholesome habits from getting the better of you while maintaining and developing right thoughts, directing the mind and your realization to wisdom—the end of self promoted suffering from craving and the undoing of habit actions. Self is an extreme, careless habit reaction. The Middle Way and awareness are an equilibrium of patience, clarity and sanity to your life.

The Emptiness Deliverance of non-self appreciation is the release from a grasping and attached mind. Self is dropped and a fresh understanding sharply refocuses the present moment for what it is. The mind as a mind without self, the mind as consciousness—a meditation of concentrated awareness, impermanence and non-self are realized.

The Awareness of Life Actions

“He remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the five hindrances. And how does a [practitioner] remain focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the five hindrances? There is the case where, there being sensual desire present within, a [practitioner] discerns that ‘There is sensual desire present within me.’ Or, there being no sensual desire present within, he discerns that ‘There is no sensual desire present within me.’ He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen sensual desire. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of sensual desire once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no further appearance in the future of sensual desire that has been abandoned. [The same formula is repeated for the remaining hindrances: ill will, sloth and drowsiness, restlessness and anxiety, and uncertainty.]...He remains focused internally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or both internally and externally on mental qualities in and of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to mental qualities...And he remains [undetached] independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world.” MN 10.

Habit energies and impulsive reactions lure you in as your motives lead to the transferring of karma (the thought before the thought) habit energy. You simply have to be present to the incoming swells of feelings and emotions as short lived experiences and encounters. The Middle Way of not giving into extremes of self indulgence or conflict clears and settles the stream of conscious confusion. You can look at your mind experiences without playing the role of acted

self (learned and conditioned desire, hatred or delusion). Without a self to inflate, there is only emptiness and freedom. The Middle Way is a gradual succession to wisdom. Alluded to as a criminal punished by being speared (SN 12, 63), i.e. to be wary of consciousness as something with a potential for pain and not a true enjoyment, not a self delight or gratification.

Conditions spawned by their own conditions, cause and effect, the disturbing pattern is penetrated. The Four Dynamic Forces of solid, water, temperature and air are themselves generated by the upheaval that is impermanence to cling together, grasp, bond and crave. Conditions react, join, and come apart in an endless flux. Only the complete cessation of craving can stop the urge to become. Transforming the habits of desire, anger and confusion along with the cessation of craving, the Middle Way experience brings you to the ultimate truth as a personal experience of non-self freedom and the peace of Nirvana—unconditioned, unfabricated, and deathless—the Unshakeable Deliverance.

Meditation on Life Actions:

What thoughts or distractions are absorbing you? What mind experiences are echoing in your head? Feel how the Monkey Mind shapes your attitude, keeping you off balance and unsettled. The mind narrows and presses, rattled with by Everyday grasping of self promoted suffering and problems.

Guide your attention away from the distraction and focus on your breath. Feel the change in quality from busy and active to open and relaxing, from self to non-self. When your sense contacts are calm so are your thoughts. The mind rests in a larger experience of restfulness and peace. Acknowledge the insight in these refined moments, opening to non-self appreciation.

Where is the personality and voice that make you? The Five Groups of Self Attachment (body, feelings, perceptions, motives/mental reactions, and consciousness) are no longer grasping. You have separated from carelessness to experience the liberation of non-self. Without the craving to have and need, the motivation or karma for self dies away. There is only a deep calm abiding. Here now you

experience everything through awareness and wisdom. Time has stopped. Dharma insight is boundless. The mind is in quiet rapture.

These are the Four Frames of Awareness. If you are a person easily taken in by desires and craving for sensual experience, try focusing your meditation on the awareness of body. A logically minded person might try the awareness of Elements. Slowly expand your attention to include the deeper understandings of Dharma insight and selfless reality.

“If anyone would develop these four frames of reference in this way for seven years...six years...five...four...three....two years...one year...seven months...six months...five...four...three...two months...one month...half a month...If anyone would develop these four frames of reference in this way for seven days, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here and now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging—non-return.” MN 10.

Awareness of Breathing Meditation (Anapanasati Sutta MN 118)



In guided, step-by-step detail the Awareness of Breathing Meditation is a revealing mindfulness bringing deeper understanding, realization, and non-self penetration to your life. The Buddha practiced Awareness of Breathing during the night of his own enlightenment. The title refers to having full awareness of both the inhaling as well as the exhaling of the breath. The background to this discourse is during the end of a three month rains retreat, the Buddha expressed how pleased he was with the efforts of the large gathering of monks that he decided to stay on an extra month in practicing, sharing and instructing (It is interesting to read as the Buddha comments on the many different levels of spiritual and meditative experience as well as the camaraderie shared by

everyone.). He goes on to mention that awareness of the breath is the common factor shared by all meditations. Below the sixteen penetrations are divided into tetrads. The Awareness of the Breath Meditation is the most comprehensive, overall appealing and instructive for your practice.

Awareness of the breath and the body:

1. ***“Breathing in long...or breathing out long, he discerns that he is breathing out long.***
2. ***“Or breathing in short...or breathing out short, he discerns that he is breathing out short.***
3. ***“He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the entire body, and to breathe out sensitive to the entire body.***
4. ***“He trains himself to breathe in calming bodily formations, and to breathe out calming bodily formations.” MN 118***

Connect with the present moment through your breath. Nothing could be simpler or less demanding, but as you already know it is a challenge to concentrate. Sit comfortably and relaxed. Catch yourself if you are squinting or have facial tension, relax your lower jaw and allow it to drop, chin down slightly to take pressure off your neck, relax your back muscles and drop your shoulders, allow the chest to breathe and move freely and also for your abdominal muscles to relax and soften. Waves of sensations pass through you—your nostrils flare while a bellows-like effect of the diaphragm moves and oxygen circulates, the heart beats and blood pulses. No two breaths are the same. Sometimes your shoulders will arch up with a deep breath, other times the breath comes from deeper in the abdomen. There is a lot going on with one simple breath.

As you first sit the breaths are heavy, deep and long. This is the body settling down and shifting from Everyday habit energies and being driven all the time. Muscles may even twitch and jump as your body begins to unwind. Try relaxing the body in sections of facial muscles, throat and neck, chest and diaphragm, stomach and abdomen, and the arms and legs. Feel how your breath travels through and affects

these areas. Meditation is an awareness and an experience to begin to acknowledge two conflicting breaths and attitudes in your life—the Everyday and the Insightful.

Usually after some minutes your breathing begins to change to a short and easy respiration—the Insightful Breath emerging. This is the natural calming and ease from sitting to meditate. You only have to be a witness of the present moment. As an observer you don't judge or have expectations but become familiar to any deeper stress or tension you may be experiencing. Meditation is a timeout from the demands of your hectic life. If you feel particularly restless try taking 5-7 deep breaths through your nose to clear both your mind of any anxieties as well as relieve the stress in your body. Feel how the Everyday Breath is a coiled gripping of self pressure while the Insightful Breath is undemanding, relaxing and opens both the mind and the body to deeper awareness.

Breathe naturally without telling yourself to breathe. Try focusing on your lungs and the simple movement of breath action. Begin to acknowledge the Everyday Breath of grasping, desire, aversion and confusing demands. The breath is a sensitive gauge. Quietly sitting with the breath, a joy and a simple realization follows—yes, your habit energies are quieting down. The breath naturally leads to a calm body which leads to a quiet mind. Awareness, understanding and insight are connected to how you breathe. Slowly you separate from the Everyday grasping of self reactions to the revealing detachment and the offering of the Middle Way—non-self insight.

Here meditation allows you to experience a separation from the barrage of sense stimulation and careless reactions you go through all day long while being a positive and caring offering that doesn't deny, punish or lead to upset. The Middle Way is a calm appreciation for your life revealing how the world and life around you actually are—impermanent, flawed, and having non-self influences.

Feel how change affects your life. As you first sat you may have been distracted and stressed with habit energies from earlier in the day. Meditation is a beneficial timeout allowing you to step away from these Everyday demands, to see and experience with awareness and a calm perspective, and to realize impermanence in

your life and how it can work in your favor. An awareness and appreciation for other options and choices, the Middle Way is the peaceful offering of insight to the uproar of the world. Insight is slowly leading you to wisdom.

Awareness of joy in calming the body and the mind:

5. ***“He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to rapture, and to breathe out sensitive to rapture.***
6. ***“He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to pleasure, and to breathe out sensitive to pleasure.***
7. ***“He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to mental formations (feeling and perception), and to breathe out sensitive to mental formations.***
8. ***“He trains himself to breathe in calming mental formations, and to breathe out calming mental formations.” MN 118.***

Not only is there suffering and challenges in life but the awareness of joy as you separate and pull back from self. This is the clarity of the Middle Way having effect on your life as you open to discernment. Through the settling of the mind, carelessness gives way to awareness, ignorance is exposed and an insight of selfless peace is known.

Your awareness and attention are like a stirred up river bottom, unclear and cluttered, but now slowly settling down. The mind is a vessel through which the present moment is experienced. The Monkey Mind has you off balance but meditation settles your over activity. As a guideline of appropriate attention, the Middle Way deepens as an insightful offering of understanding, conduct-virtue and concentration. Self and ego label, attach, have expectations and are prejudice; a carelessness through ignorance. You wildly react to the stresses of change and are off balance.

Feel how the Everyday Breath is closer to a strangulation, is painful and exhausting, but having awareness the Insightful Breath is a breath of fresh air releasing, unattached and revealing. Feel how the

weight and pressure of self is a gravity weighing you down and blurs the true reality of life. The mind becomes dull and disordered with fear, anger, doubt and confusion. You act and react out of self misunderstanding.

Now breathe deeply, focus on the breath and exhale the all-consuming self attitude. The mind begins to slowly clear and settle. With each realized breath ego attachment weakens. Whatever the thoughts (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral), you realize how you are consumed but now have an easy focus. Self clenches and latches on to an experience and this in turn causes stress, conflict and pain. Feel how the self mind narrows to judge and critique. Everyday suffering is confused and in denial of the Dharma. But having awareness you now consciously loosen the grip of careless habits and impulsiveness. Feel the ease and equanimity of your settled mind bring you to insight. A recognition and revelation is beginning to open up.

Awareness of opening and emptying of the mind:

9. ***“He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the mind, and to breathe out sensitive to the mind.***
10. ***“He trains himself to breathe in satisfying the mind, and to breathe out satisfying the mind.***
11. ***“He trains himself to breathe in steadying the mind, and to breathe out steadying the mind.***
12. ***“He trains himself to breathe in releasing the mind, and to breathe out releasing the mind.” MN 118.***

Your meditation began with the breath as a way of helping you center in the present moment as an appreciation for the body and physical sensations. Now guide your attention towards your mental consciousness. Observing thoughts, note whether you are desiring, angry, confused or calm, at ease and aware. Feel how your mind spins over on itself when desiring, narrowing when angry or conflicted, and unsettled when confused. Each habit energy has its own characteristic. Witness and observe your mental experience.

With every thought there is also a corresponding physical sensation. Try to sense where in your body you have also reacted—nervous stomach, breath restricted and chest heavy, throat tight, forehead aching, eyes pressured, mouth dry, ears ringing. These are the Everyday warning signs of self stress. Observe your thoughts without reacting to them. Note how charged you were when you first started to sit with thoughts about work, errands or flash backs, but also the settling as you go from a collapsing, stressed charged mind connected to Everyday life and the Insightful Breath realizing a non-self composure and detachment. As an appreciation of awareness, the Middle Way is an experience of non-self discovery and insight.

Feel as you have calmed your body how the mind follows along to quiet down as well as expand to the moment of awareness. An overworked muscle, a tense mind is stressed, painful, and confused through self pressure. As you release the grasp of self, the mind becomes clear, spacious and understanding. Acknowledge your awareness—the happy, bright mind at ease. Practice letting go and not getting tied up and cornered by self and ego. If you are struggling or forcing an issue then stop and allow yourself to breathe naturally. The frustration will pass away. The more you struggle, the more you exhaust yourself. Middle Way appreciation is open, unattached and formless. It is your connection to the gravity of the sense world that weighs you down.

Awareness of impermanence and releasing:

- 13. *“He trains himself to breathe in focusing on impermanence, and to breathe out focusing on impermanence.***
- 14. *“He trains himself to breathe in focusing on dispassion, and to breathe out focusing on dispassion.***
- 15. *“He trains himself to breathe in focusing on cessation, and to breathe out focusing on cessation.***

16. “He trains himself to breathe in focusing on relinquishment, and to breathe out focusing on relinquishment.” MN 118.

The breath changes, sensations arise and fade, thoughts flash and disappear, the Everyday Breath reveals an attached and grasping self promotion of desire, anger and confused impulses and reactions. Grasping onto the impermanent, you are taken for a ride of ‘sorrow, pain, lamentation, grief and despair.’ Impermanence is an unsettling and a dissatisfaction which hurts. The Insightful Breath reveals impermanence and non-self to be akin—with change there can only be non-self. Not caught up by sense impressions for the material-sense world or mental energy of the formless-immaterial realm, there is a deeper realization to non-self. This is a Desireless Deliverance where the passion and allure for self is seen to be without merit and reward. Note how through your dedicated practice there was first patience and now equanimity to the present, clear-minded realization of non-self. Also, feel the cessation of the Five Groups of Self Attachment disengage. Here now you experience the penetrating wisdom of the Four Noble Truths as they were intended to be—“...to be seen here and now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the wise for themselves...” AN 11, 12.

The whole of the Dharma and the true nature of life is experienced. The Four Noble Truths reveal the Five Groups of Self Attachment as a careless relationship to an illusion. Paradoxically, self compounds suffering as a thorn pushed in deeper through craving for sense contact, craving for existence and a lust for life, and craving for non-becoming as a denial and turning away from the true nature of life. Only the cessation of craving will set you free. The Noble Eightfold Path with its emphasis on understanding, virtue and meditative concentration is the way to a non-self ending of the Five Groups of Self Attachment and to craving.

Like a candle’s flame blown out, the carelessness through ignorance to self vanishes. Through the balance of the Middle Way you are no longer seduced and ensnared by self. Renunciation has allowed self to weaken. You let go to watch self disappear into the abyss of nothingness. Without the conditions of the Five Groups of Self Attachment (body, feelings, perception, motives/mental reactions and

consciousness) there is no link to cause and effect generating self. "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world."

In one surprising deep breath, the whole of the Dharma stands out before you as wisdom. Feel how the physical and mental absorption of impermanence build up, passes then are released and exit out from you. Feel how you have clung and suffered from not knowing the Dharma. Feel how you have gone from careless habits and impulsiveness to awareness, knowing, understanding and wisdom. Meditation has been an insight experience and penetration. Yes, there are feelings. Yes, there are thoughts. Yes, things change. But where are you, where is self, in this change? You are free of self.

'Relinquishment' is the abandoning of the self acted out role you have been playing. Tossed aside is the personal script you have followed. Relinquishment is the cessation as you stop the craving for future becoming leading to suffering. Self is no longer an obstacle but is understood. Here you have penetrated to know the great wisdom of the Buddha. You have awakened to life without the burden and gravity of self. This is the direction of the unconditioned, Nirvana; the end of conditioned craving and self promoted habit energies.

Emptiness



Emptiness relates to the non-self insight experience of Dharma realization. Life is compounded and thrives upon conditions and influences. The building blocks are the Four Dynamic Forces of solid, moisture, temperature and air/space motion (but they in turn have their own conditions and influences, impermanence touching everything). From this mix and match grab bag of attracting forces, quick to form dominating energy arises, transforms and dissolves. In this respect there is non-self or emptiness as the many contribute to

make the one and as nothing lasts for more than a moment before change affects and weighs on everything and everyone.

“He discerns that 'Whatever is fabricated and mentally fashioned is impermanent and subject to cessation.' For him — thus knowing, thus seeing—the mind is released from the effluent of sensuality, the effluent of becoming, the effluent of ignorance. With release, there is the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

“He discerns that 'Whatever disturbances that would exist based on the effluent of sensuality...the effluent of becoming...the effluent of ignorance, are not present. And there is only this modicum of disturbance: that connected with the six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body with life as its condition.' He discerns that 'This mode of perception is empty of the effluent of sensuality...becoming...ignorance. And there is just this non-emptiness: that connected with the six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body with life as its condition.' Thus he regards it as empty of whatever is not there. Whatever remains, he discerns as present: 'There is this.' And so this, his entry into emptiness, accords with actuality, is undistorted in meaning, pure—superior and unsurpassed...Whatever contemplatives and priests who at present enter and remain in an emptiness that is pure, superior, and unsurpassed, they all enter and remain in this very same emptiness that is pure, superior, and unsurpassed.

“Therefore you should train yourselves: 'We will enter and remain in the emptiness that is pure, superior, and unsurpassed.'” MN 121.

“But there is this (mental) dwelling discovered by the [Buddha] where, not attending to any themes [subjects], he enters and remains in internal emptiness...He attends to internal emptiness. While he is attending to internal emptiness, his mind does not take pleasure, find satisfaction, grow steady, or indulge in internal emptiness...He attends to external emptiness...He attends to internal and external emptiness...He attends to the

imperturbable. While he is attending to the imperturbable, his mind does not take pleasure, find satisfaction, grow steady, or indulge in the imperturbable. When this is the case, he discerns, 'While I am attending to the imperturbable, my mind does not take pleasure, find satisfaction, grow steady, or indulge in the imperturbable.' In this way he is alert there.

“There are these five clinging-aggregates where a [practitioner] should stay, keeping track of arising and passing away (thus): 'Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling... Such is perception... Such are fabrications... Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.' As he stays keeping track of arising and passing away with regard to these five clinging-aggregates, he abandons any conceit that 'I am' with regard to these five clinging-aggregates. This being the case, he discerns, 'I have abandoned any conceit that 'I am' with regard to these five clinging-aggregates.' In this way he is alert there.” MN 122.

As you sit to meditate, imagine yourself as an hourglass filled with habits (desire, anger and confusion), and filled with your entire personal history of family, friends, schooling, politics, workplace and intimate experiences. While similar to everyone else's, you have your own unique experiences which have contributed and conditioned you to being the person attached to self that you are. More accurately, your self hourglass is filled with the Five Groups of Self Attachment (body, feelings, perception, motives/mental reactions and consciousness).

Yet here now at this moment of meditation as you sit in your home or at a meditation hall, there is emptiness. Having centered yourself through a body scan, relaxed the body and mind settling down, you realize that you are 'empty.' Yes, 'empty' because here in the present moment you are 'empty' or undisturbed by Everyday distractions and demands. You are 'empty' because the body doesn't endure, feelings come and go, perception fades, mental formations disappear and consciousness vanishes.

Acknowledge the clinging and grasping on your part as you try to hold on to the security of self. Through awareness as an observer of the

Everyday and the Insightful Breaths, the truth of the Dharma is revealed—impermanent and non-self. Without reacting and giving into feelings, realize their coming and going. This quiet moment of meditative insight also reveals perception as judgment and labeling tied to experience, how your motives/mental reactions (autobiography) are dominated by habits, and consciousness is narrowed by self. Following your breath, you realize when stress, pressure, and actual discomfort surfaces as well as craving arising to compound the moment as self. Struggling with impermanence, self is a feeble reaction to change. As you sit, realize how your habits are in check without the compelling conditions of attachment and craving. The body is empty and not self as everything contributing to it comes from outside it. Also, feelings, perception, motives and consciousness are empty and not self but conditions. Each time self arises as an expectation, desire or a judgment, you allow the experience to empty.

Here through your awareness you come to know the Noble Truth of Cessation—by relaxing your attachments and stopping craving, there is non-self emptiness. Acknowledge how the hourglass of self drains out, your release and liberation. The Middle Way is an insight into the struggle and pursuit of self. Your consistent practice has been an emptying of self to now know the Ultimate Truth of Unshakeable Deliverance, Nirvana.

The Emptiness Deliverance is known—all formations are non-self and insubstantial without an illusion of self promotion, and realizing non-self as unconditioned and unfabricated. Here you glimpse the unburdening for Nirvana. The clarity of Insight Meditation helps bring you to the proximity of non-self liberation. Having slowly emptied yourself (cessation), you begin to slowly realize the peace of Nirvana and move away from the world of conditions arising (cause and effect) to the unconditioned. As your habits and craving empty, self no longer generates karma and self promoted action comes to a halt. Feel the release to grasp, cling and crave. The pause and the 'do nothing' of meditation, your spiritual journey has been one of emptying self.

Meditation on the Buddha-Dharma



The Buddha Dharma, the Buddha, any liberated practitioner (the Arahant detailed later in this chapter), the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path are all one and the same—they are and reflect the supreme wisdom and liberation of the ultimate reality of Nirvana—unconditioned, unfabricated, deathless and the Unshakeable Deliverance.

“One who sees the Dharma sees me [the Buddha]; one who sees me sees the Dharma. For in seeing the Dharma, one sees me; and in seeing me one sees the Dharma.” SN 3, 87 (5).

Keeping you from wisdom and liberation has been a carelessness of ignorance for a self notion of habits and attachments. To reach the point of unbinding experience has taken your awareness, the refinement of meditation, Wise Acted responsibility, controlling the Monkey Mind, penetrating karma and Conditions Arising, then the revelation of the Four Noble Truths (the cessation of craving) and on through the Middle Way deliverance and applying the Noble Eightfold Path—here now you come to know and realize the Dharma and are headed towards the liberation of Nirvana. You stand at the threshold of complete cessation and fulfillment.

Sit now to meditate with deep insight, understanding and clarity. You are totally aware. Recognized is the Everyday Breath of self stress and problems, but also the Insightful Breath of Dharma appreciation and revelation. Loving-kindness, patience and equanimity have transformed difficult habits and issues into understanding how carelessness led you to the challenges and conflicts of your life, but also now to the habits' cessation and the liberation from self promoted desire, hatred and confusion. The Buddha has been your example and guide as you have followed in his footsteps along the Path to Peace. But from the outset it has been your Right Effort and awareness making this spiritual journey one of personal discovery and reward. Not a philosophy or dogma but an experienced

understanding and sobering wakeup of desireless discharge, the Four Noble Truths wisdom are known through your experience of the Dharma. “In this very one-fathom long body along with perceptions and thoughts, do I proclaim the world [suffering], the origin of the world [suffering], the end of the world [suffering] and the path leading to the end of the world [suffering].”

Acknowledge the fading of the conditions which urged you to self promoted habits (desire, hatred and confusion) and the defilements given way to an uncharged, cravingless approach to Nirvana. This isn't the ultimate and final penetration to liberation but a glimpse into selflessness. Penetrating the grasping of self arousal, subjects both tangible in form as well as formless consciousness are no longer a catalyst for reacting and becoming. Feel the cessation of craving and how self promoted action drops away and vanishes. Note emptiness as an unburdening and release from the compelling willed action of karma.

There just on the other side of the reflection of self identification and obsession, the Insightful Breath reveals a dimensionless non-self without conditions. Acknowledge the clarity of wisdom that is non-self. Beyond the molding of form, beyond the formation of immaterial consciousness, beyond haphazard imagination, logic and convention, beyond the limits of space and time fabric; unburdened and released, there is no connection to being and becoming. Beyond the gravity and limitations of self and the volume of the world, there is non-self emptiness. Feel how through the Insightful realization of the breath the true nature of life has been revealed to you—the cessation of self to an unconditional peace.

Feel the release of karmic willed habit actions to be, survive, grasp and crave. Through the subsiding of attachment, the last gasp of Everyday self action is exhausted. The body no longer a source of identification, the mind no longer narrowed and compressed by one-sided thoughts, self gravity is released. The conditioned world and effects rush by. Acknowledge the undisturbed silence and liberation as you no longer grasp or crave. A dimension that doesn't reside in place or time, beyond the confines of generated conditions, Signless Deliverance, Desireless Deliverance, Emptiness Deliverance, the Unshakeable Deliverance—Nirvana, the supreme peace and ultimate

reality is known. Only the illusion and grasping to self and the defilements has kept you from this liberating wisdom experience.

“At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the [Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha], his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the [Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha]. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dharma, gains joy connected with the Dharma...You should develop [these] recollections...while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.” AN 11, 13.

The Seven Enlightenment Aids—Focusing the lens of Wisdom



Awareness
Investigation
Effort
Rapture
Tranquility
Meditative Concentration
Equanimity

Everyday attention is distracted and defused through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, tactile sensations and consciousness. This is the equivalent to an out-of-control jabber whacky. With so much sensual stimulation, what else could be expected but a carelessness through ignorance, mistakenly identifying the experience as self—I, me and mine.

With the Four Noble Truths as the bold distinguishing of self obsession and offering the Middle Way of the Noble Eightfold Path to cessation and liberation, the Seven Enlightenment Aids unify your Dharma insight to a concentrated point of clarifying wisdom. While components of the Aids are similar to your earlier practice, your

understanding and experience is of a person of Stream Entry maturity who has separated him/herself from the runaround of Everyday conditions and now has the appreciation of cessation and the unconditioned. With the weakening of self identification, the insight to wisdom and liberation is accelerated. “[The Aids] conduce to perfect understanding, to full realization and to Nirvana.” SN 46, 16.

The Seven Aids reflect two qualities in the cultivation and insight of wisdom—active and deepening as well as settling and restraining. The Aids of Investigation, Effort and Rapture have the qualities of application, effort, and practice to be used when the mind is sluggish, weak and unclear, pointing you in the direction of wisdom. Tranquility, Concentration and Equanimity are applied when the mind is excited, anxious or fast thinking. Awareness is used throughout to note and identify the present moment mind mood and whether to apply the active or settling discernment Aids.

The Awareness Aid—Everyday attention is a mix-up of Monkey Mind (Chapter Four) distractions of desire, hatred, mental fatigue, worry and guilt, and doubt. A disastrous pursuit of self and false fulfillment leaves you exhausted and stressed. But through the detachment of Insight awareness the Dharma is realized—short lived, stressful and non-self.

The penetrating wisdom door of the Four Noble Truths opens. Your experience of reality is no longer from the deluded point of view of Everyday pursuits, but a revealing insight that doesn't settle to grasp or cling. The personal baggage of stress, habits and behavior you have been carrying is dropped and the Noble Truth of cessation from craving is realized. Previously this was an intellectual or conceptual effort as you wrestled with the idea of non-self, but now the Enlightenment Aid of Awareness penetrates the greater Dharma to the Ultimate Truth.

Repeated by the Buddha is the admonition to be 'heedful' as an awareness of conduct, thought and speech while appreciating the four areas of body, feelings, mind and life actions (MN 10). Having stepped through the mirror of self deception to the flow of Stream Entry wisdom headed towards full awakening, your virtue is beyond reproach and 'blameless.' On the Everyday level the Aids serve to

‘denourish’ (SN 5: 46, 51) the Monkey Mind distractions or hindrances (desire/dispassion, ill-will/loving-kindness, laziness/effort, restlessness/patience, confusion/understanding). As a break through to wisdom and Stream Entry, the Seven Aids are the very intelligence and understanding, giving voice to wisdom and helping in the eradication of the final ten defilements. A commonsense clarity stands out—carelessness vs. awareness. Habits on the one hand lead you to unskillful, stress-filled problems and suffering while awareness and responsibility guide you to intelligence, knowing, insight and to wisdom (SN 5: 46, 51).

“When a person's attention is inappropriate, unarisen factors for Awakening do not arise, and arisen factors for Awakening do not go to the culmination of their development...When a person's attention is appropriate, unarisen factors for Awakening arise, and arisen factors for Awakening go to the culmination of their development.” AN 1, 75-76.

The Investigation Aid—As a sequence of awareness and appropriate attention, you followed how desire, anger and delusion, spring up from impulsiveness and lack of attention.

Through your investigative quality the true nature of life is discerned—the arising of experiences, their transforming and dissolving as conditions seek to survive, dominate and control through aggression or out of fear as well as how they are played out. There is also insight into the role of karma as a driving force behind Conditions Arising. Though having a free will potential, Everyday habits, carelessness and, ultimately, ignorance blur the realization of non-self (“When [investigation] is developed, what purpose does it serve? Ignorance is abandoned.” AN 2, 30). As a direct experience, investigation opens the way to realization, “this doctrine is for the wise and not for the unwise.” AN 8, 30.

The shift from self to non-self gives way to full discernment. With an observance that is calm and defining, insight investigation penetrates the Five Groups of Self Attachment, the conditioned role of the actor you have been playing out. But compelling the actor of self is the catalyst of craving—craving of sensual desire, craving for existence and to survive, and craving for non-becoming as an escape—the

Noble Truth to craving as the origin of suffering. The cessation of craving leads to Nirvana.

You have come to know the insight offering of the Buddha Dharma. “The Dharma is well-expounded by the [Buddha], to be seen here and now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the wise for themselves.” AN 11, 12.

There is no blind trust or unqualified acceptance, but a confidence in your own experience. Your wisdom and penetrative insight take you from grasping and attachment to knowing non-self. Closer to an addiction, your fondness for sense contact gratification ends like a child who has out grown his toys. You turn away from self obsession, which is stressful and problematic, and now perceive the unconditioned, the unfabricated, the deathless—Nirvana.

“Whenever he reflects on the rise and fall of the aggregates, he experiences unalloyed joy and happiness. To the discerning one that [reflection] is deathless, Nirvana.” DH 374.

“Remaining mindful in this way, he examines, analyzes, and comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment. When he remains mindful in this way, examining, analyzing, and coming to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then analysis of qualities as a factor for Awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.” SN 46, 6.

The Effort Aid—The Buddha referred to himself as only a guide (MN 107). Each person is obliged to ask the right questions, make the effort and have the patience to nourish and bring wise action to his or her life.

As part of the Middle Way of the Noble Eightfold Path, the effort now required is to leave behind the temptations of the conditioned world and the reactions of habit and desires to recognize complete cessation. Just as an athlete spends hours, weeks, months and years in training for a performance of excellence, the Path to Peace requires a strong, committed and regular effort to crossover from the carelessness of ignorance and the small mindedness of the Everyday to realize the deeper penetration to liberation and wisdom. “He keeps

his energy aroused for abandoning unskillful mental qualities and taking on skillful mental qualities. He is steadfast, solid in his effort, not shirking his duties with regard to skillful mental qualities.” AN 5, 53.

From the beginning Wise Action has helped to distinguish between unskillful and unwholesome actions, but also to develop and promote positive and beneficial thoughts and actions. At the start of your practice effort was closer to an enthusiasm, but now effort requires you to once and for all stop the exhausting run around of Everyday desire, anger and delusion. This is achieved through renunciation or strict, no nonsense excuses and determination. “The function of energy is four-fold: the effort to eradicate evils that have arisen in the mind; the effort to prevent the arising of unarisen evil; the effort to develop unarisen good; the effort to promote the further growth of good already arisen.” AN 4, 13. Entering the stream to wisdom requires uncompromising conduct-virtue as well as concentration to the final clarification of liberating wisdom. There is the Everyday effort to grasp, need and become, and there is the effort of Insight as the end of self dominated craving (the Third Noble Truth of cessation).

“In one who examines, analyzes and comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, unflagging persistence [effort] is aroused. When unflagging persistence [effort] is aroused in one who examines, analyzes, and comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then persistence as a factor for Awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.” SN 46, 6. Giving up self isn’t a spiritual suicide nor is there anything to fear but is, in fact, an undoing of the strangle hold of habits and self addiction.

“The idler who does not strive, who, though young and strong, is full of sloth, who is weak in resolution, that lazy and idle man will not find the way to wisdom, the way to enlightenment.” DH 280.

The Rapture Aid—Pulling your hand away from a fire you feel relief. All long your experience of insight has brought you degrees of fulfillment. Suffering has lessened as the self connection has

weakened. Cessation is an everlasting happiness as you sever the attachment to defilements and self association.

On the surface, Everyday happiness seems to be the answer, but chasing after more, different or new experiences is an exhausting pursuit and a struggle closer to hopeless. Behind the Everyday pleasure is the illusion of self and the defilements of desire, anger and delusion. Caught up in the need for craving, there is disappointment as self can never be satisfied. Being lost (samsara or 'wandering') and disconnected from the truth is the result.

But having awareness, bringing loving-kindness to your life, being responsible through the Five Wise Actions, having patience, moving from external pursuits to inner investigation, Dharma understanding is all about the greatest happiness—the ending of suffering. Renunciation is a simple, humble happiness for the basics in life of food, clothing, shelter and medicine, as anything more is a blessing. Less is best while more leads to attachment and to the craving of the defilements and distractions. The Five Remembrances are also a sobering wake up call (sickness, aging, death, loss of possessions and relationships, and responsibility for your actions). The Four Noble Truths stand out—there is no greater joy or bliss than the rapture of cessation and the insight of wisdom to selfless. Wisdom is the fulfillment of not having to be, need nor is fear based. Rapture comes from the actual stopping and doing away with careless, self expressed defilements and ignorance to know the truth of the Dharma.

“Before, when I was a householder...,” Ven. Bhaddiya shared, “I dwelled in fear—agitated, distrustful, and afraid. But now...I dwell without fear, unagitated, confident, and unafraid—unconcerned, unruffled, my wants satisfied...This is the meaning I have in mind that I repeatedly exclaim, ‘What bliss! What bliss!’”

To which the Buddha responded, “In whom there exists no provocation, and for whom becoming and non-becoming are overcome, he is one—beyond fear, blissful, without grief...” UD 2, 10.

The Five Groups of Self Attachment are disowned. “In one whose persistence is aroused, a rapture not-of-the-flesh arises. When a

rapture not-of-the-flesh arises in one whose persistence is aroused, then rapture as a factor for Awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.” SN 46, 6.

“When a disciple of the noble ones enters and remains in seclusion and rapture, there are five possibilities that do not exist at that time: The pain and distress dependent on sensuality do not exist at that time. The pleasure and joy dependent on sensuality do not exist at that time. The pain and distress dependent on what is unskillful do not exist at that time. The pleasure and joy dependent on what is unskillful do not exist at that time. The pain and distress dependent on what is skillful do not exist at that time. When a disciple of the noble ones enters and remains in seclusion and rapture, these five possibilities do not exist at that time.” AN 5, 176.

The Tranquility Aid—More than being calm and still, this is the tranquility that goes deeper to the true fulfillment of self habits being done away with. Patient, at ease and fulfilled, the Five Groups of Self Attachment are disconnected. Everyday behavior and personality give way to insight and wisdom appreciation of non-self realization. Your composure radiates peace and goodwill to others, communicating a confidence and intelligence of trust. Insight practice reflects the Middle Way equanimity and the higher recognition of the Four Noble Truths to the liberation of self. You are no longer challenged by the Eight Worldly Conditions or vicissitudes (Chapter Seven). Everyday restlessness fades to security, ease and fulfillment. “When tranquility is developed, what purpose does it serve? The mind is developed. And when the mind is developed, what purpose does it serve? Passion is abandoned.” AN 2, 30.

“For one who is enraptured, the body grows calm and the mind grows calm. When the body and mind of an enraptured [practitioner] grows calm, then tranquility as a factor for Awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.” SN 46, 6. Rapture as an underlying component of wisdom remains present while tranquility allows you to penetrate a deeper concentration.

The Concentration Aid—The ramblings of an unconcentrated mind are like opening a Pandora’s box-like of defilements. Having Wise Actions and virtue along with the Centering and Eminent Penetration meditations, settle your attention to reveal a concentration that penetrates Everyday life.

Supported by Dharma insight, the concentrated mind knows craving, how it keeps you off balance, and the cessation of craving. It is this keener concentration which brings you to the culmination of wisdom and helps end the attachment to self. The Noble Eightfold Path is grouped into understanding, virtue and concentration. Unmoved by the conditioned world, your concentration sees how the fetters cling, how they are to be eradicated. The peace of Nirvana is possible.

Concentration is applied like a telescope to penetrate through the conditioned world to see the light of freedom beyond self. If you are concentrating too hard then you are stressed and not applying the Middle Way correctly which avoids extremes and conflicts. Recognize the Everyday Breath and the tension emerging in you. Take some deep breaths to relax both the body and the mind, allowing your attention to soften and pull back. Defilements and craving keep you stressed and anxious, narrowing your concentration.

“And what sort of [concentration] did he not praise? There is the case where a certain person dwells with his awareness overcome by sensual passion, seized with sensual passion. He does not discern the escape, as it actually is present, from sensual passion once it has arisen.” MN 108. Your awareness to cultivating Insight brings you to clear one-pointedness. This isn’t complete liberation but puts you at its door step.

“When the mind of one who is at ease—his body calmed—becomes concentrated, then concentration as a factor for Awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.” SN 46, 6.

The Equanimity Aid—A deepening through virtue and concentration, equanimity comes about as the result of renunciation and leading a responsible life. You are really renouncing the desire, aversion and

delusion of the Five Groups of Self Attachment and, ultimately, stopping the suffering of self craving. Now your settled mind inclines toward the full perspective of wisdom—liberation through the Emptiness Deliverance or non-self. “Truly the good give up longing for everything. The good prattle not with thoughts of craving. Touched by happiness or by pain, the wise show neither elation nor depression.” DH 83.

Resignation or blind acceptance isn't to be confused with equanimity. Equanimity is an ease as well as security that realizes cessation through the Middle Way. Without self there is nothing to prove, nothing to gain, nor anything to pursue—you are equanimous. There is the peace of living an uncomplicated and undistracted life that comes with the letting go of self. Like a trap door opening, self falls through and disappears. “When one's awareness is dedicated to renunciation, seclusion, non-afflictiveness, the ending of clinging, the ending of craving, and non-deludedness, seeing the arising of the sense media, the mind is rightly released. For that [practitioner], rightly released, his heart at peace, there's nothing to be done, nothing to add to what's done. As a single mass of rock isn't moved by the wind, even so all forms, flavors, sounds, aromas, contacts, ideas desirable and not, have no effect on one who is Such. The mind—still, totally released—focuses on their passing away.” AN 6, 55.

Cultivating equanimity, the carelessness of ignorance as a reflex of the defilements is undone without further karmic repercussions. “Effluents ended, independent of nutriment, their pasture—emptiness and freedom without sign: their trail, like that of birds through space, can't be traced.” DH 93.

“When he oversees the mind thus concentrated with equanimity, equanimity as a factor for Awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.” SN 46, 6.

There is no passion for the worldly life. “What is worldly equanimity? There are these five cords of sensual desire...And what is the still greater unworldly equanimity? When a taint-free [practitioner] looks upon his mind that is freed of greed, freed of hatred and freed of

delusion, then there arises equanimity. This is called a 'still greater unworldly equanimity.'" SN 36, 31.

Together the Seven Enlightenment Aids make for the very eye of wisdom focusing on the unconditioned, the unfabricated, the deathless—Nirvana. “And how are the Seven Factors for Awakening developed and pursued so as to lead to the culmination of clear knowing and release? There is the case where a [practitioner] develops **awareness** as a factor for Awakening dependent on seclusion...dispassion...cessation, resulting in letting go. He develops **investigation** as a factor for Awakening...**effort** as a factor for Awakening...**rapture** as a factor for Awakening...**tranquility** as a factor for Awakening...**concentration** as a factor for Awakening...**equanimity** as a factor for Awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion...cessation, resulting in letting go. This is how the Seven Factors for Awakening, when developed and pursued, lead to the culmination of clear knowing and release.” SN 46, 6.

The Stream Entry to Liberating Wisdom



“This Noble Eightfold Path—Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration—is the stream.” SN 55, 5.

The Middle Way insight is the right flowing direction leading to the ending of craving and the corresponding habits or defilements. All eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path merge into one current as a watershed Wisdom. Your renunciation of the Everyday (mundane) now gives way to the Greater Dharma (the supramundane); from conditioned and desiring to the ‘unconditioned’ and ‘deathless’ of Nirvana. There are ten final ‘fetters’ (as in being shackled, tied down or limiting) of self binding habit energies to eradicate before liberation.

The three areas of Middle Way practice of understanding, virtue and concentration of the Eightfold Path deal directly with the three habit areas (desire, hatred and confusion).

Through Right Understanding you realize the three aspects of the Dharma, are aware of the Four Noble Truths (attachments and the cessation of craving), the cycle of Conditions Arising (sense contacts, craving and continued becoming) as well as the realization of non-self weakening self addiction.

Right Virtue is a road sign alerting you to take responsibility for your speech, livelihood and actions. A patient Middle Way composure emerges. The three defilements are realized as so much fool's gold.

Finally, with Right Concentration you have the awareness, effort, composure of mind and wisdom to cease all unwholesome karma, know unconditioned realization of Nirvana and the complete freedom from self. As though stirring from a deep sleep, some people wake up easily while others want to sleep a bit longer, and there are others whose habits are so engrained that they don't wake up at all. Everything comes down to how long you want to be addicted to your self attachments and to suffering.

“The [practitioner] dwells in contemplation of phenomena, namely, of the [Five Groups of Self Attachment]. 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.” DN 22.

You have wisdom—the Dharma insight that there is nothing worth grasping or clinging to. Oh, now I see. My habits are my careless misunderstanding. When desires get the better of me I suffer. When I understand I let go of ego. When I don't crave I don't suffer. Yes, I can be wise. If I don't grasp and cling to self—I can be free.

The Middle Way experience allows you to cross from Everyday stress and conflict to the stream entry of insight and liberation. The Buddha likened this to using a raft to crossover from carelessness to wisdom.

“I have taught the Dharma compared to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Understanding the Dharma as taught compared to a raft, you should abandon even good states, to say nothing of bad states.” MN 22.

The Buddha distinguished between two types of people—the Everyday ‘worldling’ and the ‘Noble One.’ The first is dominated by the temptations of the senses and the runaround of the conditioned world while the Noble One has understanding of the Dharma and is ‘passionless’ towards the Everyday to know unconditional freedom.

Here now you enter the stream to liberation. The breakthrough experience of wisdom clears away the ‘fetter’ habits binding you to self experience and with each corresponding wisdom realization there is a two sided experience of recognition and for the eradication of the defilement to non-self.

Stream Enterer—Entering the stream of insight headed towards liberation, the fetters of a self-identity view, having any doubts about the practice and way, and clinging to rituals and ceremonies are eradicated. This initial breakthrough allows for no more than seven more rebirths before final liberation. The Stream Enterer has the attribute of virtuous conduct.

Once-Returner—Weakening desire and hatred, the Once-Returner is reborn no more than once more and has the attribute of developing concentration.

Non-Returner—Doing away with the fetters of desire and hatred, the insight ensures that you will be reborn in a higher state never to return to the human realm. Here concentration is further deepened.

The Noble and Perfect One, the Arahant—Eradicates the fetters of desire and attachments for the form realm and to being reborn there; eradicates desire and attachments for the formless realm and to being reborn there; eradicates conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. Completely freed from craving and the cycles of conditioned rebirth, the Arahant is the supreme embodiment of the Middle Way experience of nobility and purification to liberating wisdom.

Through these four levels of wisdom recognition, the mind as catalyst for craving and becoming is turned from ignorance to wisdom as all self promoted karma comes to a halt. Your dedicated practice and mature insight penetrates to awakening and complete liberation.

The Stream Enterer Wisdom: Like a flower bud beginning to show on a stem, your experience and insight of the Four Noble Truths is revealed. “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: self-identity view, doubt, and grasping at precepts and practices.” MN 2.

Non-self is realized as well as the game playing of attachments and grasping that come along with self (the Five Groups of Self Attachment of body, feelings, perception, motives/mental reactions and consciousness). With this insight you can never go back to being the person of old you once were. The Emperor without clothes, exposed is the self-acted role you have been playing out. Once and for all you turn away from the habits and karma of self illusion. A revealing personal experience, discovery and insight, you have first hand understanding of the Dharma and the release and fulfillment of the Middle Way.

The Understanding and Fetter released: You are committed to the conduct and virtue of the Triple Gem (the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha) and step away from Everyday carelessness.

Confidence or Faith: “The Dharma is well-expounded by the Blessed One, to be seen here and now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the wise for themselves...” AN 11, 12. Not a blind trust or acceptance out of faith, you experience the insight and transformation of the Dharma to know first hand the depths and the clarity, the revelation and insight offered by the Buddha. Understanding is a personal experience. “There is nothing with regard to the teachings that the [Buddha] holds to the last with the closed fist of a teacher who keeps some things back.” DN 16. Your change and awakening empower your dedication.

Non-self: Nothing in the Everyday world is enduring, worthy or whole. The Five Remembrances underscore Dharma insight: aging, sickness, death, no possession or relationship enduring, and actions guided by your intention. The truth of the Dharma is sobering, but also an inspired awakening as the Four Noble Truths bring you to reflect beyond Everyday attachments. The notion and actor of self is only a trance of desire, hatred and a confused obsession. Self is suffering and problematic while the Middle Way reveals a balance from Everyday extremes and leads to the unbinding fulfillment of Nirvana.

Rites and rituals: More symbolic than substance, the ceremonial side of religion and the respect brought out aren't wrong, but have limits because they don't take you to full awakening and wisdom. The triple Gem of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is a recognition of personal experience for the true nature of life.

“But when, having gone to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for refuge, you see with right discernment the Four Noble Truths—stress, the cause of stress, the transcending of stress, and the Noble Eightfold Path, the way to the stilling of stress: that's the secure refuge, that, the supreme refuge, that is the refuge, having gone to which, you gain release from all suffering and stress.” DH 188-192.

Your first breakthrough understanding as Stream Enterer is an undeniable passage of renunciation for the Everyday on its most basic level of carelessness and ignorance while directing you towards wisdom. Here you have entered the Stream and the Middle Way is your course. The distinguishing of a Stream Enterer confirms the Path to Peace and the experience leading to your Great Awakening. With each succeeding defilement eradicated and dropped, the appreciation of wisdom is clearer. The Everyday weakens and insight to emptiness and non-self is known. As a stream enterer you are accomplished in conduct and virtue.

The Once-Returner Wisdom: Now the bud of insight grows but isn't yet ready to open. The weakening of the habits of desire and hatred begin to take place.

Referred to as a 'Once-Returner,' the insight here allows for a return as a human in the sense realm before breaking through to complete enlightenment. Though there is no complete undoing of a fetter there is the maturing realization of cessation.

The Once Returned is marked with concentration as he/she begins to turn away from the Everyday stimulation of the senses as well as the temptation, need and reaction of desire and aversion. The commotion and trials of self-promoted action give way to a distinguishing clarity and a strengthening of attention and awareness to undo impulsiveness and habit actions. Self feels more like the trappings of someone in a Halloween outfit. You know the self actor and the masquerade all too well as you begin to release the burden of self. The Five Groups of Self Attachment are no longer the force they were as the First Noble Truth is confirmed as well as seeing into the Second Truth and how craving affects you. The Factors of Enlightenment help settle you and provide a deepening of the Middle Way.

The Undetstanding and Fetter released:

Desire: Excited and like a wide-eyed child in a candy store, desire leaves you dissatisfied and searching for something better or after more. But patience and concentration come together as a settling and refined intuition. No longer careless and impulsive, you distinguish self reaction and wise action.

Aversion: Kind of like stepping on hot coals, you distinguish how a one-sided self attitude leads to stress, pain and suffering. The trappings and clinging of self are further realized. Your dedicated practice allows you to realize that you don't have to snap back by way of hostility or aggression. The Path to Peace provides wise options and choices. Renunciation and applying the five Wise Actions stand out. There is honest expression without self dominating the moment as aversion dims. The Middle Way of Wise Effort replaces a negative attitude.

The Non-Returner Wisdom: The bud of insight now opens to blossom and reveal the liberating flower of wisdom. Over time you have weakened the suffocating grasp of self to now let go of the two

dominant expressions of desire and hatred. Desire comes in the form of lust and excitement for life or situations while hatred is an anger and wishing to escape from disagreeable moments and life's demands. The final attachments to these strong cravings are let go.

Like a balloon released, your obsession with self drifts away and disappears. Suddenly practice seems so simple. The relief is great, the insight profound, and the wisdom clear. The Middle Way of understanding and concentration is the knowing of non-self freedom. Action, stimulation, sense contacts, Conditions Arising, play themselves out as waves lapping over a sand castle and not as an attachment of self. The ending of desire and hatred sets you outside Everyday conditioned gravity and approaches unconditioned fulfillment.

The Understanding and Fetter Released:

Desire: the Buddha says, "Abandon one quality and I guarantee you non-return. Which one quality? Abandon greed [desire] as the one quality, and I guarantee you non-return." IT 1-8. Cessation is about abandoning or completely letting go of all the self baggage you hold onto—body, feelings, perceptions, motives/mental reactions (autobiography) and consciousness. Through desire, craving goes on to compound and generate continued suffering, keeping you addicted to a sense identity and gratification. Ironically, desire has been making you sick and tormented. You release it like a child would a candy that makes him sick. The infatuation is over.

Hatred: The hatred remaining is subtle and without overt signs. But your inner mind dialogue reveals the tension of craving as disliking, anxiety and dissatisfaction played out in the form of impatience and indignation. Self wants things perfect, recoiling when inconvenienced. The clinging obsession to existence and for becoming is really a fear of death and has elements of hatred.

Looking back, you can see the self baggage you have been carrying and burdened down with. Dropping the heavy luggage of self, there is the joyful recognition and experience of the end of suffering. The Everyday renews suffering, the Insightful is a full appreciation and awakening to the end of suffering.

With the eradication of desire and hatred you are to abide in the Pure Abodes, but with enlightenment so near you push ahead in your discernment to the final release of the noble and perfected Arahats.

The Arahats Wisdom: Awareness and insight flourish to a mature understanding into the undoing of the final fetters of self. Wisdom flowers to be bright, strong and radiant. No magic wand or shortcuts taken, your understanding has nothing to do with book knowledge or the logical mind, but an Insightful penetration realized through the cultivation of virtue, concentration and wisdom. A practitioner noble and perfected, you have reached the liberation and understanding of the Arahats.

Transcending the three realms of the conditioned worlds, self is purged to know the unconditioned, Nirvana. Without a thought or inclination clung to as self or I, nor generating careless karmic consequences, self is dissolved. Fully realizing the Dharma, the final five fetters of bondage to the Everyday world are eradicated: desire for the fine-material world and existence there, desire for the immaterial world and existence there, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. This body is the last 'residue' of previous conditioned karma and at his/her passing away the Arahats is 'without residue' (conditioned form or mannerism) to abide in Nirvana. Whatever discomfort is known through the body, the Five Groups of Self Attachment are 'cooled down' and no longer experienced as self. No longer a practitioner of the path but its living embodiment through personal experience penetrating the profound cessation of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, as an Arahats you come to know the supreme wisdom and liberation of the Unshakeable Deliverance. Here cessation is the blowing out of the last ember of self craving to know the unconditioned and the deathless, Nirvana.

Established in liberating wisdom, you can never be unsettled by Everyday experiences or encounters. Without fear or uncertainty it is impossible to have a confused view of phenomena. Doing away with the defilements, your wisdom transcends and pulls off the veil of illusion to know non-self.

The Arahat is “Dedicated to six things: renunciation, seclusion, non-afflictiveness, the ending of craving, the ending of clinging, and non-deludedness.” AN 6, 55.

The Understanding and Fetter Release:

Fine Material World: Whether these states exist or are creations of the mind, the underlying factor is how you cling, grasp, and are addicted and obsessed to the tranquility therein. Ultimately, no matter how sublime the moment, it is conditioned and impermanent. Like an ostrich with its head buried in the sand, you are in denial of the world around you and have neglected the Dharma. Yes, the Fine Material world is better off and less suffering than the present sense realm, but no matter how long endured and blissful this life may seem, there will always be change along with the corresponding attachment and expectations to bring you to suffering. Living humbly you are content with the basics of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. This simplicity helps ground and settle you to know the Dharma of impermanence, dissatisfaction and non-self. Desire for the fine-material world is undone through the ending of attachment and craving further penetrating the wisdom to non-self.

Feel how self craving for the world slips away as a final sensation, a last gasp of Everyday breath attachment. You look amused at this world and how through conditions its hectic energy carries on. There is no passion or desire for this Everyday life. The final undoing of the fetter feels like a weight slipped off as you move away from conditioned becoming.

Immaterial World: Even the resources and bliss of higher conscious attainment are unsatisfactory. While suffering is remote and less obvious, dissatisfaction arises. Without realizing the Dharma and the Four Noble Truths you are doomed to suffering and to being reborn into the shuffle of higher or lower states—the carelessness of ignorance, the domination of karmic intention, the cycle of Conditions Arising, attachment, craving, becoming, past-present-future unsettling, the aimless wandering (samsara) of life upheaval. Only Wise Action, the stopping of craving, and the understanding of the Dharma will lead you to freedom from conditioned peril. Desire for

the immaterial world and existence are undone and a further penetration to wisdom is realized.

Conceit: The preoccupation, the unsettledness, the looking over your shoulder, the worry, the need, the compelling willed action of becoming, all swirl around the subtle conceit generated by self, keeping you from knowing the Ultimate Reality. This isn't the same conceit of an arrogant and egotistical person, but of one who still separates the world by self inclined tendencies and divisive thought folly. As long as the conceit of self remains, then there is agitation, doubt, and true liberation and fulfillment can never be known.

But with equanimity as an enlightenment factor, you are now beyond the careless distractions of the grosser self. Beyond all craving for the sense world, for becoming and existence, and for the non-becoming as a denial, as an Arahat you don't succumb to the illusion of self and corresponding mind games.

In Conditions Arising, the Buddha refers to 'name and form,' no longer referring to self but rather the conditioned influences leading to the illusion of self. There is a physical body and a conscious moment aroused when contacted. Any self identity is pure fiction and delusion. This is the conceit that delights in the notion that a sensation of contact or thought experience is a self proclaimed expression. This conceit is the last bastion of self attachment. The Buddha alludes to this aroused conceit: "Eye...or form;...ear...or sounds;...nose...or aromas;...tongue...or flavors;...body...or tactile sensations;...intellect...or ideas,...then in him—relishing them, welcoming them, and remaining fastened to them—there arises delight. From the origination of delight, I tell you, comes the origination of suffering and stress."

The Eminent Penetrations of mind expansion as well as the Emptiness meditation along with the Concentration Enlightenment Aid, snap conceit like a dried twig. Non-self 'passionless' release is known (a not having 'passion' for self on any level). As an Arahat you aren't fascinated by feelings whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral and have full realization of the Dharma. The simple awareness started with the Insightful Breath culminates in your unburdening.

Restlessness: The friction and unsettling of Everyday conditioned life shocked you into compelling willed charged action and, specifically, to act out of self promoted behavior. Like a light bulb become weak and dimmer, now the connection and impulse of self dies out.

With the realization of Dharma insight that nothing endures, feel how your mind turns away from the unsettling that is impermanence. While the world around you scurries about, you are tranquil and know equanimity, having renounced Everyday obligations and connections. This is the peace of non-self realization bringing you to Nirvana. The actor of self now takes his/her final curtain call before leaving the stage. There are only conditions generating action and impulsiveness, carrying over to habits, and the stronger or dominating motives become the direction of that life. With the Enlightenment factors of Tranquility and Rapture realized, the fetter to restlessness subsides. As an Arahant, the Enlightenment Aid of Equanimity is stronger than any self indulgence and excitement.

Ignorance: “How does a [practitioner] know and see, so that ignorance is abandoned and clear knowing arises?”

“All things are unworthy of attachment....Comprehending every thing, he sees all themes [subjects] as something separate...He sees the eye as something separate...He sees the ear as something separate...He sees the nose as something separate...He sees the tongue as something separate...He sees the body as something separate...He sees the intellect as something separate...And whatever arises—experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain— that too he sees as something separate [not self]...This is how a [practitioner] knows, this is how a [practitioner] sees, so that ignorance is abandoned and clear knowing arises.”

As the last of the ten fetters eradicated and the self bond released, the carelessness of ignorance (delusion as one of three obstacles along with desire and hatred) or not knowing affected all your life—believing the conditioned to be real and enduring, trying to find reward in the unsatisfactory, and deluded to seeing a self in the non-

self. Fortunately, the Buddha realized the truth of the Dharma and shared his insight experience with the world. In direct contrast, the Four Noble Truths guide you to discerning the Dharma wisdom to the end of suffering and the break through to Nirvana. With consummate virtue, concentration and now wisdom, your nobility and perfection as an Arahāt shatters the hold of the conditioned world to realize the unconditioned and deathless liberation.

Starting as an awareness to a deeper understanding and concentration, there is now the clarity of wisdom. Wisdom is the final undoing of craving as experienced through the Noble Eightfold Path. The Path isn't wisdom but directs you to the liberating experience. Wisdom is the 'unshakeable' freeing of all ties and connections to the illusion of self attachment. The unconditioned and the unfabricated appear when all self promoted actions and tendencies cease. The realization of the Four Noble Truths catapults you once and for all beyond this conditioned world. The Everyday fairytale has finished and the Ultimate Truth and Reality of Nirvana is known. The Path to Peace culminates in the 'cooling' of the Five Groups of Self Attachment and the clear recognition turns away from the suffering of conditioned pursuits. A climax and harmony of practice and experience, the addiction and obsession to self are ended, there is the quiet but profound peace of Nirvana.

“With taints [misconceptions for desire, for becoming and of ignorance] destroyed, who has lived the holy life [an Arahāt], done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and is completely liberated through final knowledge...” MN 1.

Nirvana the Ultimate Reality and Peace—

The Cessation of Craving and Liberating Wisdom



Acted on, becoming, motives turned to action, your spiritual journey began in the Everyday world of unrest, but now you have settled to see through self actions. Carelessness from the past, attachment and craving in the present ignite future suffering, problems and rebirth. Here the Supreme Noble Wisdom to the end of all suffering is known. The fetters or bound by so many impulsive habits have been eradicated. With the Five Groups of Self Attachment 'cooled,' the fuel for combustion or self promoted action is exhausted, and the Ultimate Reality is known.

The Seven Enlightenment Aids focus together as a lens of deep penetration: Awareness of cessation and the defilements eradicated; Investigation to penetrate and clearly know the Dharma and life phenomena; Effort given in the release and cessation of the fetters; Rapture as a profound bliss and happiness in the undoing and ending of the cycle of birth and death to penetrate the unconditioned, deathless state; Tranquility as ease experienced in the attainment of the supreme knowledge and liberating wisdom; Meditation to see through Everyday habits and know the depths of self unburdening; Concentration as a clear-minded, undisturbed consciousness, turning away from the distractions of the conditioned world; Equanimity as the sublime fulfillment and freedom in the release of self without future becoming.

Incomprehensible by the limits of self and ego, Nirvana is without location, timeless, can't be theorized, measured, or defined. Nirvana neither creates nor is created, being the cessation of all creating. A peace beyond description, the freedom that is beyond craving, a bliss surpassing the unsettling of the Everyday, the end of suffering brought on by careless actions and becoming, Nirvana is realized as the flame of ignorance, attachment, craving and becoming for the

conditional world dies out (the flame of self promotion, identification and compelling willed action), giving way to an immaculate experience. The Arahant of noble and perfect conduct-virtue, concentration and wisdom breaks through to Nirvana.

Here the words of the Buddha best communicate the supreme wisdom and freedom of Nirvana.

“The religious practice...is conducted for utter nirvana without attachment. So it is that this religious practices...is not for advantage or gains, honors, fame; it is not for advantage in knowledge and vision. That which is unshakeable freedom of mind, this is the goal, of this practice, this the pith, this the culmination.” MN 29.

“Hunger is the greatest disease. The aggregates of being are the greatest suffering. If a man thoroughly understands this, he has attained Nirvana, supreme bliss.” DH 203.

“No concentration is there for the unwise, no wisdom in one who lacks concentration; in whom there is concentration and wisdom, he truly is in Nirvana’s neighborhood.” DH 372.

“Reality is a name for Nirvana.” SN 4, 195.

“There is the unborn, unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned. Were there not the unborn, unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned, there would be no escape for the born, originated, made and conditioned. Since there is the unborn, unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned, so there is escape for the born, originated, made and conditioned.” UD 8, 3.

“There is that dimension where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor stasis; neither passing away nor arising: without stance, without foundation, without support [mental object]. This, just this, is the end of stress.” UD 8, 1.

“It occurred to me that this Dharma I have realized is deep, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, beyond mere reasoning, subtle and intelligible to the wise. But this generation delights, revels and rejoices in sensual pleasures. For a generation delighting, revealing and rejoicing in sensual pleasures, it is hard to see this conditionality, this dependent arising. Hard, too, is it to see this calming of all conditioned things, the giving up of all substance of becoming, the extinction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nirvana.” SN 6, 1.

“I attained the unborn supreme security...the unaging supreme security...the unailing supreme security...the deathless supreme security...the undefiled supreme security...the sorrowless supreme security...I attained the undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nirvana. The knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘My deliverance is unshakeable; this is my last birth; now there is no renewal of being.’” MN 26,18.

[Nirvana is] “profound, hard to see and hard to understand, ...unattainable by mere reasoning” MN 26, 19.

“What is the noble liberation?...There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones considers this: ‘Sensuality here and now; sensuality in lives to come; sensual perceptions here and now; sensual perceptions in lives to come; forms here and now; forms in lives to come; form-perceptions here and now; form-perceptions in lives to come; perceptions of the imperturbable; perceptions of the dimension of nothingness; perceptions of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception: that is an identity, to the extent that there is an identity. This is deathless: the liberation of the mind through lack of clinging.’” MN 106.

“And it would occur to you, ‘My gosh, how long have I been fooled, cheated, and deceived by this mind! For in clinging, it was just form that I was clinging to...it was just feeling...just perception...just mental processes...just consciousness that I was clinging to. With my clinging as condition, there is becoming... birth... aging and death... sorrow, lamentation, pains, distresses, and despairs all come into play. And thus is the origination of this entire mass of stress.’” MN 75.

“Whatever feeling he experiences, be it pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, he experiences it without being attached to it, without being bound to it. He knows that with the dissolution of the body (after the life principle has come to an end) all feelings, all experiences will become cool, will be tranquillized just as an oil lamp burns dependent upon oil and wick and through the coming to an end of its oil and wick it goes out for lack of fuel. Even so when a monk experiences a feeling that the body has come to an end, he knows, ‘I experience a feeling that the body has come to an end’, and when he experiences a feeling that life has come to an end he knows, ‘I experience a feeling that life has come to an end’, and he knows, ‘with the breaking up of the body and the coming to an end of life, all feeling, not being delighted in here and now, will become cool.’” MN 140.

“This deliverance of his, founded on Truth, is unshakable. False is that which is unreality; that which is reality (not false), Nirvana, is Truth. Therefore a person thus endowed is endowed with this supreme Truth, because the Supreme Noble Truth is Nirvana, which is reality (not false).”

“Their past is dead, the new no more arises, mind to future becoming is unattached, the germ has died, they have no more desire for growth those wise (and steadfast ones) go out as did this lamp.” Sn 2.1

“Here there is neither the element of solidity (expansion), fluidity (cohesion), heat (temperature) and motion (air), nor the sphere of infinite space, nor the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor the sphere of nothingness, nor the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, neither this world nor the other, nor sun and moon. Here there is none coming, none going, none existing, neither death nor birth. Without support, non-existing, without sense objects is this. This indeed is the end of suffering.” UD 8, 1.

“If a [practitioner] abandons passion for the property of form...feeling... perception...fabrications...consciousness, then owing to the abandonment of passion, the support is cut off, and there is no base for consciousness. Consciousness, thus unestablished, not proliferating, not performing any function, is released. Owing to its release, it is steady. Owing to its steadiness, it is contented. Owing to

its contentment, it is not agitated. Not agitated, he is totally unbound right within. He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'" SN 22, 53.

"What one intends, what one arranges, and what one obsesses about: This is a support for the stationing of consciousness. There being a support, there is a landing of consciousness. When that consciousness lands and grows, there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. When there is the production of renewed becoming in the future, there is future birth, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering and stress." SN 12, 38.

"If one doesn't intend and doesn't arrange, but one still obsesses [about something], this is a support for the stationing of consciousness. There being a support, there is a landing of consciousness. When that consciousness lands and grows, there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. When there is the production of renewed becoming in the future, there is future birth, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. Such [too] is the origination of this entire mass of suffering and stress.

"But when one doesn't intend, arrange, or obsess [about anything], there is no support for the stationing of consciousness. There being no support, there is no landing of consciousness. When that consciousness doesn't land and grow, there is no production of renewed becoming in the future. When there is no production of renewed becoming in the future, there is no future birth, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, or despair. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering and stress." SN 12, 38.

"In the same way, where there is no passion for the nutriment of physical food... contact... intellectual intention... consciousness, where there is no delight, no craving, then consciousness does not land there or grow. Where consciousness does not land or grow, name-and-form does not alight. Where name-and-form does not alight, there is no growth of fabrications. Where there is no growth of fabrications, there is no production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is no production of renewed becoming in the

future, there is no future birth, aging, and death. That, I tell you, has no sorrow, affliction, or despair.” SN 12, 64.

“Consciousness without surface, without end, luminous all around: Here water, earth, fire, and wind have no footing. Here long and short, coarse and fine, fair and foul, name and form are all brought to an end. With the cessation of [the aggregate of] consciousness each is here brought to an end.” DN 11.

“View the world as empty—always mindful to have removed any view about self...This way one is above and beyond death. This is how one views the world so as not to be seen by Death's king.” Sn 5,15

“I will teach you peace—in the here and now, not quoted words—knowing which, living mindfully, you'll go beyond entanglement in the world...Whatever you're alert to, above, below, across, in between: knowing it as a bond in the world, don't create craving for becoming or non-.” Sn 5, 5

“This is peace, this is exquisite—the resolution of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Nirvana.” AN 3, 32.

“There's no fire like passion, no loss like anger, no pain like the aggregates, no ease other than peace.

“Hunger: the foremost illness. Fabrications: the foremost pain. For one knowing this truth as it actually is, Nirvana is the foremost peace.

“Freedom from illness: the foremost good fortune. Contentment: the foremost wealth. Trust: the foremost kinship. Nirvana is the supreme peace.” DH 202-204.

Life Practice

The insight meditations presented here take some time of committed practice to mature within you. Just as a fruit tree grows slowly from a sapling and bears fruit some seasons later, your practice develops through regular attention and care.

A concert pianist spends thousands of hours practicing to make a performance effortless. An Olympic athlete trains for years prior to the event. The Buddha spent six years in intense training and investigation then devoted his remaining forty five years to sharing the insights of the Dharma. Make things simple for yourself—you only have to be aware of the present moment and how carelessness, attachment and craving are affecting you.

Don't be overwhelmed by the different meditations and their jargon. The Buddha helpfully documented all the aspects of practice leading to awakening. In the end the many offerings are only the proverbial finger pointing the way. What counts is your making the effort to meditate with awareness and concentration.

Slowly build your confidence. Trying to do too much will only make you lose interest in your practice. A good way of learning and applying the Concentration Penetrations is to practice one, become familiar with each stage of recognition and experience then to confidently go on to the next. Meditation is also practical as you can apply the Four Frames of Awareness while doing any activity. Feel how stress, tension, or doing a job with an intense attitude carries over and charges your body and mind. This is an Everyday 'self' reaction. Let go of your attachments and expectations. Open your awareness.

“When you are established in these four [wisdoms] of stream-entry, you should further develop six qualities conducive to clear knowing. Remain focused on impermanence in all fabrications, percipient of stress in what is inconstant, percipient of not-self in what is stressful, percipient of abandoning, percipient of dispassion, percipient of cessation. That's how you should train yourself.” SN 55, 3.

If you are a good meditator while on the cushion and then go on to be angry, confused or fearful in your life, then your practice is one sided. Feel and know equanimity. You don't have to react out of habit. Feel and know the Immeasurables of loving-kindness rather than desire, anger and confusion.

Become familiar with your body and mind states as practiced in the Four Frames of Awareness. Also, feel and know how you go from

awareness of the moment to total release from 'self' and freedom from suffering as practiced in the Awareness of the Breath meditation. Your spiritual recognition and understanding touches every aspect of your life. The Dharma is an experience and not an intellectual effort. Apply the meditations as a life practice.

Ensnared in a trap of self binding, only wisdom can cut the ties of ignorance, attachment and craving to final liberation. Consider it like getting a divorce from yourself and the final judgment is passed and achieved from Everyday self promotion to the noble and perfect wisdom of the Arahant. You, too, can have the highest conduct-virtue, meditation-concentration and insight-understanding. This isn't another disguise of self but its unburdening, the insight and the wisdom release from self illusion.

The attraction for the Everyday world is like an electric shock and now wisdom cuts through the old conditioned wiring—the senses weaken; desire, hatred and confusion fade; ignorance dies off. Fulfillment and peace happen as self is released. Nirvana is the supreme joy, the ultimate truth and reality; the unconditioned, the unfabricated and the deathless.

The looking-glass mirror no longer casts a reflection as the enticement of self is transparent. Can it be that all along who and what you took to be meaningful and real was, in fact, a hindrance, a suffering dream, a delusion? Now to live in peace and never again be a victim or give in to desire, anger or confusion.

You are free from the illusion of self and have penetrated the experience of Dharma Wisdom.
