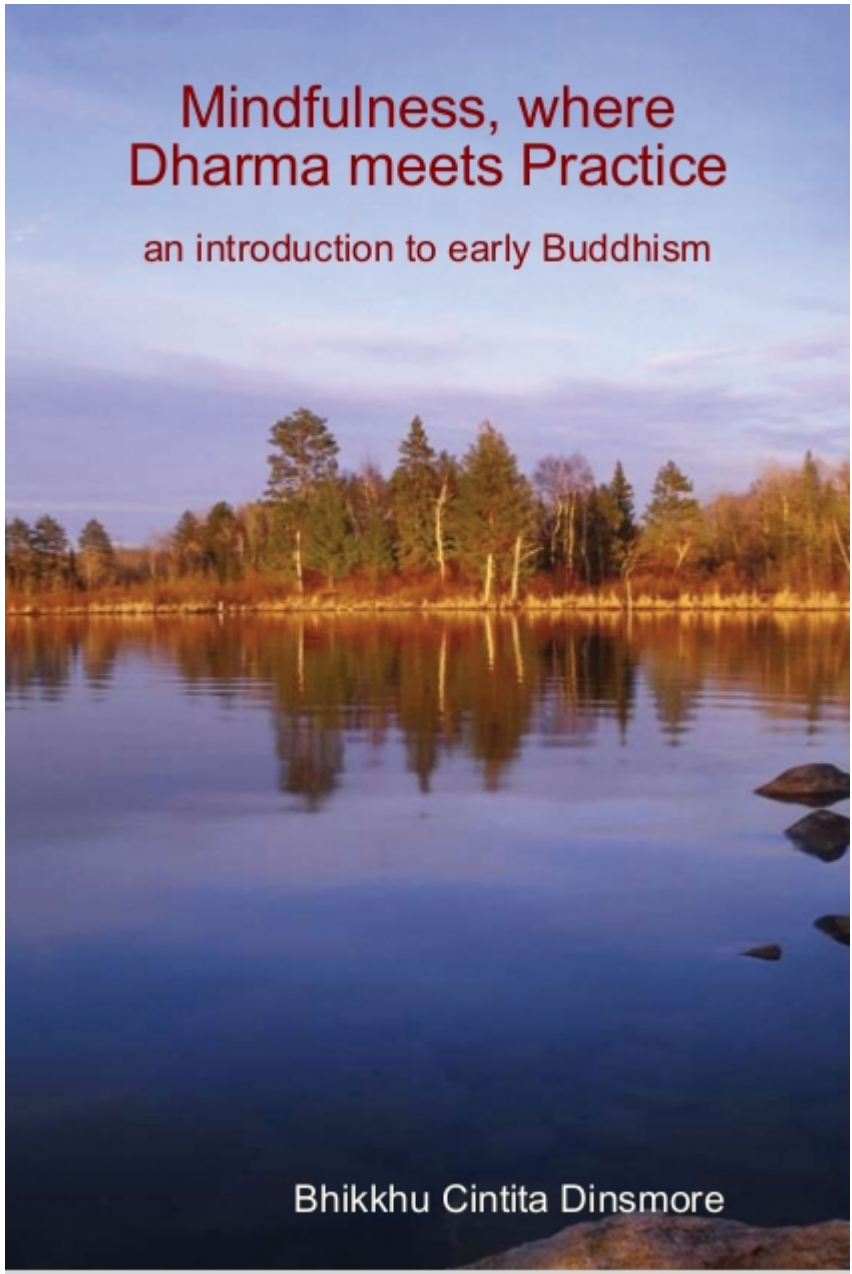
Mindfulness, where
Dharma meets Practice
an introduction to early Buddhism
Bhikkhu Cintita Dinsmore

# Mindfulness, where Dharma meets practice

## an introduction to Early Buddhism

**Bhikkhu Cintita**

*2020*

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# Preface

**M**indfulness is where Dharma hits the road of practice. Dharma is the teachings of the Buddha and their later interpretations: values, standards, guidelines and a conceptual framework that conduce to the wisdom and virtue that alleviate suffering. Buddhist practice is what we do in our lives moment by moment in accord with Dharma. Mindfulness is what connects the two: The word *sati*, the Pali[1] word which we conventionally translate as "mindfulness" in English, actually means memory or recollection, and we will often translate it as "recollection" in the present book, particularly in the first chapter. Mindfulness keeps the Dharma in mind in the way necessary to attend to the present moment or situation as we navigate our lives of practice. This book is therefore about Dharma, about practice, and about how they intersect through mindfulness. It serves at the same time as a general introduction to Buddhism that provides an overview of the range of Buddhist practice and understanding.

This text focuses on the Dharma as the Buddha taught it, as best as we can determine. It is, in other words, based almost exclusively on earliest Buddhist sources, the "Early Buddhist Texts" (EBT),[2] which are the historical basis for all of the diverse later interpretations of Buddhism, such as those found in the Zen, Tibetan and Theravada schools. The EBT are for the most part records of Dharma talks or sermons of the Buddha, commonly called "discourses" or, in the Pali language, "suttas."

Going back to earliest sources will carry with it some surprises for readers who already have some background in modern Buddhism. For instance, the definition of mindfulness presented above may not sound familiar. This book will take virtue and right view as far more foundational than might be anticipated. What is generally called “meditation” is much more fluid and encompassing than normally assumed. This book advances a decidedly holistic view of Buddhist practice with many interrelated aspects, which must work together for the fully engaged practitioner, all in accordance with the Buddha.

By highlighting the central role of mindfulness, this book serves as a corrective to many of the modern understandings of “mindfulness,” often taught in modern Buddhism as the core of the Dharma, or even as the entirety of the Dharma, but in fact often dislodged from the Dharma as an entirely secular practice.[3] The point here is not that these modern understandings are wrong or useless, or even that they are not worthy entry points into Dharma, but that they in themselves are woefully limiting for those of us who would fully engage the richness of the Dharma and of practice on the path to awakening. We hope here to reclaim mindfulness for the Buddha.

Underlying this central role accorded mindfulness is my own conviction that the Dharma serves solely as a support for practice and development. Even the most philosophically sophisticated and astute points of Dharma are no more than parts of the scaffold to which practice adheres. Accordingly, we can ask of any Dharmic teaching, “How do we put this into practice?” or equivalently, “Where and when do we need to be mindful of this to the benefit of our practice?” In exploring this ever practical dimension of Dharma, we will examine the options for making Dharma foundational in a modern life, including the difficulties of wrapping our minds around teachings rooted in a fifth-century BCE, South Asian world view.

My hope is to provide a concise and accessible book for the beginning student and for the casual reader alike, notwithstanding the challenging nature of the material. This book contains five chapters, each of twenty pages, and is suitable as a supplement to an introductory course of five two-hour lectures with discussion. I have significantly avoided the use of foreign words, except for those, like “Dharma,” that are already well-known in the English language, though I will usually have to clarify the technical meaning that even these these take on in Buddhism. I am separately preparing a practice workbook for students who would like to bring this material more fully into their lives, as well as an on-line video course. These resources will be found at *sitagu.org/shortlinks/mindful/* .

This five-chapter book is in large part abstracted from my longer and more technical twelve-chapter introduction to Buddhism, *Buddhist Life/Buddhist Path*, which may consequently serve as a sequel to the present book for those seeking more detailed discussion. However, the present book also presents some new material. I have also provided some advanced content in the endnotes, for those wanting to learn the Pali language terminology, to follow up with more detailed discussion of various points, or to consult outside sources. I've tried to make the endnotes comprehensible in themselves to save the reader from having to do a lot of flipping back and forth between them and the main text.

The five chapters are as follows:

**Living in mindfulness** serves as a general introduction to the Dharma and practice with particular attention to the role of mindfulness.

**Living in virtue** explains the fundamental ethical practices that belong to a Buddhist life: precepts, giving, and purity of mind developed through mindful observation of emotional factors.

**Living in devotion** discusses the wider motivational context of Buddhist practice, how we develop it and how we remain mindful of it, in order to uplift and incentivize our practice.

**Living in wisdom** takes us from right understanding of Dharma to the intense examination and internalization facilitated through mindful observation of cognition. Finally,

**Living in the midst** offers practical advice on integrating Buddhist practice into a modern life already busy with responsibilities and pursuits, and to nonetheless make it foundational in a meaningful and satisfying way.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution to this and the video project to students in classes in Chisago City (MN), Minneapolis and Austin, to whom early versions of this project were presented; to Joe Graef, Jan Naidu and Scott Conn, Lyn Eade and Happy Heilman.

Bhikkhu Cintita
Austin, Texas
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# Living in mindfulness

Buddhism begins with the problematic nature of the human condition, which we call "suffering."[4] Our suffering is there in not finding life to be what we want it to be. Why do we have to die? Why do we have to get sick? Why do we have to get old and feeble? Why me? Why do we have to endure pain, both physical and emotional? Why do we have to lose, one by one, everything and everybody who is dear to us? Why is satisfaction so illusive even when we achieve our goals? Why do we enjoy pleasure of the senses, but then find that they lack meaning? Why does life seem like a long series of broken promises? Why do we end up causing so much harm to others around us? Why do we find it so difficult to ease the suffering of others? In short, why is everything such a darn problem?

Religion in general, it seems to me, tries to come to terms with suffering and the problematic nature of the human condition in one way or another. However, Buddhism has a rather unique take on what is going on: It is *we* who entangle and entrap *ourselves* in suffering through our *own* unskillful behavior and misperceptions, and it is therefore *we* who can do something to disentangle and liberate ourselves from this mess through more skillful behavior and through proper understanding. Let me introduce a couple of technical terms used to describe all this:

**Samsara** is this entanglement that entraps us in suffering.

The Buddha viewed samsara as enduring life after life until we do something about it. We will see two chapters hence the benefits of framing our entrapment such that death does not give us an easy way out of samsara. Briefly this makes of our task an epic battle against beginningless eons of conditioning and entanglement, the victory over which leads to a permanent resolution. I hope that even the "Rebirth, humbug and twaddle!" kind of skeptic will find some resonance with the epic perspective on this endeavor.

**Awakening** (aka "enlightenment"), **liberation** or **nirvana**[5] is the complete release from our entanglement.

Awakening, though difficult, is very much in the range of human capability. Through virtue, understanding and strength of character we can learn, step by step, to think, to behave and to see things otherwise. The Buddha discovered that there is a skill to life, and that awakening is the mastery of that skill. Awakening is, roughly, the perfection of character in terms of virtue, wisdom and serenity. Nonetheless, even if we do not reach this perfection, our skill in life improves steadily with practice, and life becomes less and less problematic through progressive stages.

### *The skill of life*

We develop skills as we learn to ride a bike, throw pottery, take care of a toddler, birdwatch, play poker, cook French cuisine or fashion an arrowhead. In learning a skill we develop behavioral qualities, mental qualities and knowledge to try to produce better results of some kind, and we recognize thereby that there are, broadly speaking, right ways to reach these results, and wrong ways that fail to reach envisioned results. We depend significantly on teachers and on the wisdom of the ages to tell the difference. Without proper training in the right and wrong ways of doing things we might still be able to cook a meal, but not an appetizing one, we might be able to produce a teapot out of clay,

but neither a beautiful nor a functional one, we might be able to accomplish life's tasks, and to experience some of what life offers, but not with fulfillment and delight, nor without harm.

What we do in Buddhism is the same as what the potter does, except we are shaping our characters and our lives, rather than clay. To do this, we need to distinguish the right or skillful way from the wrong or unskillful. But unlike mundane practices, Buddhism deals with the ultimate concerns of life, and might be considered the skill of life itself.[6] Buddhism offers a gradual course of training to the improvement and eventual mastery of living this life. It defines the practices, principles, values, attitudes and ways of framing things that lead to the mastery of the skill of life.

Let's continue to lay down our technical vocabulary to capture the basic components of Buddhist practice. These terms could just as well apply to almost any kind of non-Buddhist skill:

**Karma** is intentional action, action that involves choices or decisions. Karma applies not just to **bodily actions** or **verbal actions**, but also, very importantly, to **mental actions**.

Examples of mental actions are thoughts, perceptions, conceptualizations and plans, for we also make choices in realizing these. Anything we undertake intentionally is, therefore, karma. Since practice is something we do intentionally, our practice is karma. Sitting on a cushion and reading Dharma books are thus within the scope of karma. But so is picking someone's pocket or giving a sandwich to a hungry hobo. Generally, I will use the word "action" interchangeably with "karma," unless otherwise indicated.

It is important to note that we are often unaware, or barely aware, of our karmic choices even as we make them. We often describe ourselves as being on "autopilot" even while we make a complex series of decisions, for instance while we drive to work, often with distracted minds either already in spirit at our destination or

else in the clouds. It is still karma.

**Skillful** or **wholesome**[7] action is karma that supports our development of beneficial qualities and moves us toward awakening.

Wholesome action is good practice. It is generally identified through the quality of the "intention"[8] behind the action, like kindness or renunciation. An example of a wholesome action is giving a sandwich to a hungry hobo or meditating on kindness.

**Unskillful** or **unwholesome**[9] action is karma that undermines our development of beneficial qualities and moves us away from awakening.

Unwholesome karma is bad practice. An example is picking someone's pocket or plotting revenge. Broadly speaking, what is unskillful is motivated by greed, aversion or delusion. What is skillful lacks these roots. More about this in the next chapter.

**Dharma**, aka **doctrine** or **teachings**, serves solely as guide to skillful practice. It sets the parameters of skillful practice.

This is much as a cook book supports successful cooking. As we engage in practice, we repeatedly make choices as to what tasks we perform in evolving circumstances. Our practice is successful to the extent that we choose and perform skillful actions and avoid unskillful actions. The Dharma is a guide to skillful karma. The following two aspects of such actions are clearly distinguished: recollection and effort.

**Recollection** or **mindfulness** (I'll use both translations interchangeably) is having learned something in the past, bringing it to mind, and keeping it in mind.[10]

With respect to the Dharma, we will see that recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, recalling the precept not to kill, remembering that craving is the origin of suffering, and simply remembering to keep the mind on the breath are all instances of

skillful recollection. Typically, we bring a teaching to mind that the current situation calls for, for instance, as we are about to make an ethical choice to squish or not to squish. This aspect of practice is described as follows:

> Just as the gatekeeper in the king's frontier fortress is wise, competent, and intelligent, one who keeps out strangers and admits acquaintances, for protecting its inhabitants and for warding off outsiders, so too a noble disciple is recollective, possessing supreme recollection and discrimination, one who remembers and recollects what was done and said long ago. With recollection as his gate-keeper, the noble disciple abandons the unwholesome and develops the wholesome, abandons what is blameworthy and develops what is blameless, and maintains himself in purity.[11]

Notice that this passage presents mindfulness as remembering "what was done and said long ago," but it also pairs recollection with discrimination of the current situation: the present situation is discriminated on the basis of the recollection of what is or is not wholesome. In this way, recollection "attends to" to the current situation.

> Recollection is **attentive**, or **attends to** the present situation when what it brings to mind is used to discern some particular aspect of the present situation.[12]

Mindfulness is generally attentive in Buddhism, simply because Buddhism is fundamentally about exercising skill in real practice situations. In one discourse, the Buddha describes an occasion in which a large crowd of people assembles to witness the most beautiful girl of the land dance and sing. A man shows up who is given, to his chagrin, the instruction:

> "You must carry around this bowl of oil filled to the brim between the crowd and the most beautiful girl of the land.

> A man with a drawn sword will be following right behind you, and wherever you spill even a little of it, right there he will fell your head."[13]

The Buddha then estimates that that man is not likely to stop attending to that bowl of oil, that he will not, out of negligence, turn his attention to other matters. The Buddha then admonishes his monks to practice mindfulness directed to the body in just this way. This illustrates the critical role of "non-distraction" in attentive recollection. In this case what is borne in mind is what was just recently said: the single task at hand, its parameters and its motivation. The distraction would be the dance and song of the most beautiful girl of the land.

If the Dharma is a cookbook, then recollection, as a factor in Buddhist practice, must at any point be turned to the right page, for instance, to "How to flambé." Recollection must be attentive in order to bring to mind what is specifically relevant in the present context. Mindfulness in Buddhism is, simply put, where Dharma hits the road of practice! For example, mindfulness might act as the gatekeeper when the impulse arises – "Yikes! A twiddle bug!" [WHAP] – to assault a living being, such that the first of the "five precepts" is called to mind to provide guidance in the current situation: WHAP is unskillful. We will see that, as we develop in our skill, much of what we are mindful of may be implications of Dharma that we discover for ourselves in our experience.

> **Effort** is endeavoring to achieve or develop what is skillful and to avoiding or get rid of what is not skillful, according to the standards that one brings to mind.[14]

For instance, if the angry impulse arises to thrash someone severely with one's umbrella, mindfulness arises with the recognition that this would violate the first precept, as it would constitute an unwholesome assault on a living being. Effort

accordingly resists this impulse, perhaps by replacing the anger with a kind thought, or simply by loosening one's grip from the umbrella until a cooler head manifests.

We can think of recollection as a thermostat and effort as the electric heater that the thermostat controls. Recollection monitors (attends to) the room temperature to notice when the temperature drops below or rises above a certain threshold, a standard that it bears in mind. Effort kicks in accordingly, either to start heating, or to stop heating. Likewise, mindfulness monitors the miso soup on the stove, bringing to mind the wisdom that miso soup should not be allowed to come to a boil. Effort turns off the stove at the critical moment identified by mindfulness, and lifts the lid off the pot. We can say that, if recollection and effort work well together, we have diligence:

> **Diligence** is the quality of appropriate effort in response to appropriate recollection.[15]

These are important concepts for the Buddha, for …

> … all skillful qualities are rooted in diligence and converge upon diligence, and diligence is declared foremost among them.[16]

Notice that we might fulfill recollection but fail to fulfill effort. The thermostat might work fine, but the heater has blown a fuse. We can be mindful of the Dharma even while failing to make the effort to behave consistently with the Dharma, for instance by drinking wine gleefully with friends in full awareness that we are violating a precept concerning alcohol. Much of our practice will be like this. Recollection and effort are quite distinct factors of mind with quite distinct functions. But given recollection, effort's subsequent choice, whether to uphold or shirk, is deliberate. In practice, steadfast recollection tends to wear away persistent resistance to a particular kind of effort. In this sense, we can live in mindfulness even while falling short of its demands.

### *Fruits of practice*

Why do we practice the Dharma at all, or any other skill for that matter? In short, because we expect to get something out of it.

> The **result** or **fruit** of an action is the short- or long-term benefit or detriment to ourselves that plays out as a consequence of that action.

But do we seek something for ourselves or for others? We can identify, for various secular practices or habitual behaviors, four possibilities in this respect:

(1) A practice might produce no benefit. We often call this a "bad habit" when it actually brings harm, like smoking, like drinking oneself under the table or like getting into street fights. That people engage in these activities anyway speaks to the depth of human confusion.

(2) It might provide some benefit to the practitioner, but not to other beings, like hunting, or like picking someone's pocket.

(3) It might provide some benefit to others, but little to us, like breaking rocks in a chain gang, or like working overtime under duress so our boss can go golfing over the weekend.

(4) Finally, the benefit of a practice to others might be indistinguishable from its benefit to us. Feeding outdoor birds or pets, or taking care of our own children fit into this win-win category. Many amateur chefs, likewise, experience personal satisfaction from their skill and effort in the bright faces, delighted smiles, smacking of lips and positive comments of the satiated.

Buddhist practice fits squarely into this last win-win category, for what is skillful is of benefit to ourselves and to others as well,

and what is unskillful is of harm to ourselves and to others as well. Buddhist practice is *most fundamentally* about ethics, and therefore about being harmless and of service to others in the world. A fundamental principle of Buddhism is that benefit to ourselves and to others are intimately linked, and, when developed together, produce the kind of character that is outwardly kind and compassionate, ultimately saintly, and inwardly has an abiding sense of satisfaction and delight, alongside wisdom and compassion. Ultimately Buddhist practice can lead to the perfection of the human character, to awakening.

What is skillful tends at the same time to benefit both self and others, while what is unskillful is to the detriment of both. The fruit of our actions is described by the Buddha as follows:

> I am the owner of my 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.[17]

Notice that this makes clear that our development is a product of our actions, *all* of our actions, of body, speech and mind. In what sense are we heir? We gain some understanding of this through the idea of old karma:

**Old karma** is the cumulation of long-term results or fruits that remain with us from past actions, to our future well-being or detriment.

I find it helpful to think of (new) karma as shaping a landscape by driving an ox cart hither and thither. The karmic wheels create ruts depending on our choices, and these tracks are old karma. Even while we make choices, the wheels are disposed to falling into old karmic ruts, particularly into the deepest ruts. When the wheels follow established ruts, those ruts become ever deeper. Unfortunately, these ruts are most typically the products of an unskillful fruitless search for personal advantage, and likely to

perpetuate themselves into the future until proper practice does something about them. If we let the ox decide which way to go, we are negligent, led by old karma. However, we can, at any time and with diligence, steer toward open ground, to begin a new rut, or to choose the rut least traveled on. Old karma tends to nudge us into ruts that allow us to go heedlessly into autopilot, and make it ever more difficult to do otherwise. It is through our actions that we shape our karmic landscape, that we shape our character, and through our deliberate actions that we remake our landscape and character. It is through Buddhist practice that we reshape our karmic landscape to liberate us from the most problematic of our habituated ruts.

It is important to develop mindfulness on a continual basis, for potentially *all* of our actions help shape our karmic landscape. Our path of development does not differentiate what we are doing at work or in bed from what we are doing at the local Buddhist center. We are producing karma all the time, not just during the 8%, say, of the time that we are "practicing Buddhism." In fact, the 92% of the time we are doing something other than "practicing Buddhism" is bound to dominate our progress. This is why it is important to develop persistent mindfulness. This is why it is important to learn to live in mindfulness throughout the day.

Suppose we are knitting a sweater. We have maybe an hour every evening to work on it, so it takes a number of weeks to complete. Normally we might put it aside when we have other things to do, and then pick it up again when we return to, and resume from, where we had left off. In this way we make steady progress and never backslide. We might think our spiritual practice is like this. But suppose that we are never allowed to put the sweater aside, but have to *wear* it, or that part of it that is completed, throughout the day: while washing dishes, while making a presentation at a board meeting, while changing a flat tire, while walking through underbrush or while playing with a pride of kittens. Our practice

is actually like this. It is easily soiled or unraveled by what we do during the rest of our day. We don't get to put the sweater aside. This is why persistent mindfulness is important. All of our karma counts.

### *The scope of Buddhist practice*

What is it we should continually recollect? The Dharma, for it guides us as to what is skillful and unskillful. Its central teaching is the four noble truths, which start, like this chapter, with suffering.

> The **four noble truths** are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering and the truth of the way to the cessation of suffering.

Although “truth” suggests propositions we are invited to accept, the Buddha in fact turns these immediately into practice tasks:

> For **the truth of suffering**, our task is to **understand** our suffering.

Understanding, or insight, is in fact the main engine of skill acquisition for Buddhists.

> For **the truth of the cause of suffering**, which we are told is **craving**, our task is to **abolish** its cause.

Recognizing causal relations is how we disentangle the tangle of samsara, attributing the difficulty of one snarl to another knot that is hopefully easier to tease apart. Part of understanding suffering is to understand the conditions under which it arises.

> For **the truth of the cessation of suffering**, our task is to **realize** that cessation.

This is one way of stating the ultimate point of Buddhist practice.

> For **the truth of the way to the cessation of suffering**, which

we are told is **the noble eightfold path**, our task is to **develop** (that is, practice and master) that path.

The framework of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path illustrates how Dharma is a scaffold for practice, how each teaching is a pointer to a specific aspect of practice. The eight path practices are as follows:

**Right understanding** is a correct understanding of the Dharma, acquired through reading/listening, study, reflection and deep examination.

Right understanding is how we understand the cook book of practice in our progressive degrees of internalization. Since the book before you is intended to get you started in right understanding, you are, with a modicum of diligence, already practicing right understanding. Although based in Dharma, right understanding is not the Dharma itself, but our evolving living understanding of the Dharma. It is, properly speaking, right understanding and not Dharma that recollection keeps in mind, though for simplicity I will continue to speak of mindfulness of Dharma. There is a skill to acquiring right understanding just as there is a skill to the study, research and reflection needed, say, to complete a college class.

**Right intention** is the adherence to a triplet of key Buddhist values that we observe in our actions, namely: (1) renunciation, (2) kindness and (3) harmlessness.

Whereas right understanding provides the map, right intention provides the compass to ensure we stay on course in our practice. We've all gotten lost, either without a map or unable to locate ourselves on our map, but knowing that if we keep heading "west," say, we will get closer to our destination. Confused about our exact Dharmic location, if we bear these three skillful qualities in mind, we know we can still make progress.

**Right speech** is practice so that our verbal actions become

beneficial, harmless, and conducive to the purity of mind that we seek to develop on the path.

We often fail to properly acknowledge the power of wrong speech to cause harm, for instance, when we say, “Actions speak louder than words.” But the Buddha highlights right speech because a misspoken word or two can indeed cause great harm.

**Right action** is to practice so that our bodily actions become beneficial, harmless and conducive to the purity of mind that we seek to develop on the path.

In this case “action” refers specifically to bodily karma, like giving a monk alms or chopping firewood for our grandparents, in contrast to verbal or mental action.

**Right livelihood** is to choose one's career path carefully so that we do not obligate ourselves to conditions that require wrong speech or wrong action, or that undermine the various other aspects of practice.

The choice of livelihood is not an everyday activity but once made it is a major determinant of our success on the path.

**Right effort** is to be vigilant in making proper choices, to choose what is wholesome and to avoid what is unwholesome.

Right effort is a part of right everything else. It is the well-directed energy of our practice and is tasked with overcoming obstacles to practice. We began this discussion with recollection and effort. We now see that these are reflected in two of the eight steps of the noble eightfold path. They are themselves skills that must be carefully trained and cultivated.

**Right recollection** or **right mindfulness** is bringing to mind and bearing in mind the Dharma. It most commonly **attends to** the practice situation and brings to mind the full body of teachings relevant to that situation.

Right recollection ensures no conflict with any of the other steps of the path. Finally, the proper integrated functioning of the first seven steps on the noble eightfold path result periodically in the arising of the final step:

> **Right mental composure**, aka "concentration" or "absorption,"[18] is a rarefied meditative state that is serene, clear and undistracted, while collecting and balancing an array of skillful mental factors, among which are those developed in all of the previous seven path factors.

Mental composure has various functions, but is ultimately an extremely refined instrument of insight, that is, the fine-tuned intuitive understanding of the world based on Dharma. Right mental composure takes full possession of, and perfects, the previous path factors, making them second-nature.

The word "right" here in each of these eight steps on the path is normative, roughly synonymous with "skillful."[19] We saw above that we keep our actions skillful through understanding what is skillful and unskillful, through being attentively mindful of that understanding, and through exerting effort to move away from the unskillful and toward the skillful in our actions. Similarly,

> Right understanding is the forerunner. And how is right understanding the forerunner? One discerns wrong action as wrong action, and right action as right action. … One tries to abandon wrong action and to enter into right action: This is one's right effort. One remembers to abandon wrong action and to enter and remain in right action: This is one's right recollection. Thus these three qualities – right understanding, right effort, and right recollection – run and circle around right action.[20]

This passage circles around "right action" but it is stated verbatim for each of "right understanding," "right intention," "right speech," "right action" and "right livelihood." This is simply the

process we've been looking at, whereby right recollection monitors the present situation, like a thermostat, with the relevant aspect of right understanding in mind, and then right effort kicks in to produce a skillful result.[21]

Significantly, right mindfulness is also specifically defined in some places as a refined practice of "mindful observation":

> **Mindful observation**, literally "attending by recollection"[22] and often translated as "foundations of mindfulness" or as "establishment of mindfulness," is a practice whose core instruction is as follows:
>
> > And what, monks, is right recollection? Here, monks, a monk dwells observing the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, recollective, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. He dwells observing feelings in feelings, … mind in mind … phenomena in phenomena … This is right recollection.[23]

It is important to note that here, in one of the best known passages of the entire early Buddhist texts, right mindfulness is defined as a task of observation that involves recollection as only one of a cluster of factors. Observation thereby adds a new layer to recollection, asking us to back up one step from our world of experience or activity with full awareness. This is a powerful practice and the seat of introspection in Buddhism. Rather than just breathe we observe that we are breathing, rather than just walk we observe that we are walking, rather than just think we observe that we are thinking. In principle, if we can perform a task, we can keep in mind to observe the performance of that task. There is an open-ended list of topics of observation, divided into four categories: (1) body, (2) feeling, (3) mind and (4) phenomena. We will see later that mindful observation plays an important role in the development of both virtue and wisdom.

The added layer of observation entails a bit of a semantic sidestep

on the Buddha's part in this definition of right recollection which linguists call metonymy: much as we call a king “the crown,” we call a certain type of observation “right mindfulness” after its most promient factor. In English, when we are “mindful of” washing the dishes we are “recollectively observing” the washing of the dishes. Both washing and observing are done mindfully. Some authors prefer “awareness” for mindful observation.

### *Cultivating general mindfulness*

Recollection is itself a skill to be learned and cultivated. It shows up in Buddhism in relationship to keeping the Dharma in mind, but an analogous version of recollection practice exists in virtually every craft, such as cooking, sniping or archery, shuffleboard, bird watching, beekeeping, ceramics and deactivating bombs. I imagine that certain kinds of provocative women's clothing demand a well developed faculty of recollection, in fact, sustained recollection, in order to attend to the kinesthetic state of the clothing in the present situation, and also to keep in mind norms of social propriety and even law. Wearing monks' robes also requires recollection, and it takes months to master the skill, but the point is different. The Buddha often described monks of good practice who on alms round passed from house to house in utmost mindfulness.[24]

**Optimizing mindfulness.** The discussion so far recommends recollection in which we can:

(1) Stay on a well-defined task.[25]

We do well to avoid multitasking, such as listening to music or practicing our two-step while cutting carrots, or such as driving, drinking coffee, smoking, talking on the cell phone, listening to music and wishing we were already home, all at the same time. Without avoiding multitasking, it is hard to pinpoint just what task we are supposed to be keeping in mind in any case. In the

Zen tradition it is said, “When chopping wood, just chop wood. When carrying water, just carry water.”

(2) Avoid distractions from that task.

When chopping carrots, we should eliminate from the thought steam anything that is not helping to chop carrots, including striving or hurrying. However, we are mindful of our knowledge of knife, cutting board and root vegetable. In this way we settle into the “how” of the activity.

(3) Bring ardency to that task.

Ardency can encouraged by being competent in our task. If the task is not challenging enough we can impose particularly high standards on our tasks by introducing constraints, such as cutting carrots in uniform slices, or dividing routine tasks into well-defined subtasks and doing them in a fixed order.[26] Zen has been very creative in ritualizing everyday tasks as a way to develop mindfulness.

(4) Observe the task.

You can optionally make observation your primary task. One way is to pick a particular object of examination and observe it, remembering to keep the single task in mind and to let go of distractions. This is the basis of many common meditation techniques, such as sitting on the cushion and following the breath. Alternatively, you can mindfully watch whatever comes up in experience: sounds, thoughts, emotions. Ardency comes with a sense of curiosity, but be careful not to proliferate conceptually. Let the world do the talking and attend to every word.

Practice while sitting on a cushion often begins with exercising the general faculty of mindfulness in this way, as when we endeavor to remember to observe the breath for sustained

periods. Many everyday situations likewise provide a similar opportunity for training the mind to stay on task. You can also take on the observer's stance as you are engaged in a primary task, like chopping carrots. It will feel like you are perched on your own shoulder watching someone else chopping carrots.

It is easy to appreciate how these four aspects of the skill in mindfulness produce stability of mind: the mind settles on a single theme, does not thrash from one thing to another, acquires a certain delight in the present, and steps back from our direct engagement in affairs. We will see that mindfulness, with little encouragement, tends to result in serenity and mental composure.

**Being present.** Modern literature often describes mindfulness as being “in the present moment,” even though mindfulness recollects the past. In fact, avoiding distractions in mindfulness induces an important shift in our relationship to the present moment. The present is suspended between past and future and any task we perform there is potentially conditioned by either past or future concerns, or both. The past concerns, communicated through mindfulness, are typically the learned values, standards and techniques that define the “how” of the present task. The future concerns, on the other hand, generally take the form of self-concerned “striving” in response to the fears and desires that define the “why” of the task.

**The present task shares concerns of past and future.**

Ideally, mindfulness attends to the needs of the task at hand, while striving attends to the neediness of “me.” Significantly,

striving counts as an unskillful distraction, for while mindfulness upholds, striving contrives. As we practice mindfulness, the "why" tends to drop out of mind, nudging the motivational structure of the task: We "inhabit" the task as something satisfying in pursuing well, rather than "utilizing" the task for some purpose outside of the task itself.[27] This is why this chapter is called "living *in* mindfulnesss." As we live in mindfulness, "me" tends to get lost in the task at hand.

For instance, if our action is washing dishes, mindfulness brings to mind an array of knowledge and experience about which implement to scrub with, about how much detergent to use, about how much force to exert, about how hot the water should be, and so on. Without mindfulness, our future concerns might induce us to hurry through the job so that we can have some "real fun," or to look forward to the praise we will receive for having washed the dishes. Thich Nhat Hanh tells us that it is best if we wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes, rather than in order to have clean dishes.[28] This makes washing the dishes more an act of devotion rather than a utilitarian act. In washing in order to wash, mindfulness rather than striving becomes the guide.

Similarly, a sales employee named Bob in a clothing store can be mindful of the inventory, color schemes, current fashions, etc., but also be intent on getting a commission for a successful sale and worried about doing something that will get him fired. When Bob is worried about being fired or anxious for a bonus, he has, in his striving, been known to cut corners and lie a little to the customer, sometimes to overcharge. But with mindfulness training, Bob is more likely to be diligent, upright and honest in his approach to his job. He might still get fired, but it is actually more likely for his boss, admiring his greater competence and the acclaim of customers, to give him a raise.

### *Two stands of practice*

In understanding the logic of the noble eightfold path is is helpful to identify two intertwined strands, those of **virtue** and **wisdom**.[29] The values and standards of virtue (aka ethics or morality) are naturally found in the path factors of right speech, right action and right livelihood. Moreover, right intention sets the limits of skillful action across the board, within the ethical parameters of renunciation, kindness and harmlessness. Further, right understanding, right effort and right mindfulness have broad auxiliary functions in implementing the foregoing.

The strand of wisdom begins in right understanding of how we otherwise misinterpret our circumstances – the world, our own minds, our selves – and then behave on the basis of those misinterpretations. Since delusion underlies our impulse toward what is unskillful, and since virtue attenuates the perceptual distortion associated with self-centeredness, virtue and wisdom develop together – virtue largely through reconditioning our behaviors according to Dharma, and wisdom through investigation in the light of Dharma. Investigation, aided by mental composure, internalizes right understanding to refine wisdom and make it second-nature, and to help us to see through the eyes of the Buddha.

Right mental composure folds in the previous seven factors, and therefore represents the consummation of ethics as well as of wisdom.[30] Mental composure is also based in serenity, a natural corollary of the virtuous and wise tasks performed with right mindfulness. Serenity might be seen to represent a third strand running through the noble eightfold path, and also culminating in mental composure. We will see in what follows that mental composure arises quite readily as we engage in skillful practices of all sorts in which we are able to optimize mindfulness.

# Living in virtue

The *Dhammapada*[31] tells us:

> Refraining from every evil,
> Accomplishing good,
> Purifying the mind,
> This is teaching of buddhas.[32]

Virtue is the beginning and the central concern of the Dharma. If mindfulness is established in virtue, then wisdom, serenity and eventually awakening develop. Without a foundation in virtue all aspects of our practice will be anemic, a mere shadow of what they can be. There are three interlocked systems of virtue in Buddhism, and each of these is reflected in a respective line of the verse above. Traditionally Buddhists learn the first two from childhood, and the third becomes increasingly dominant within practice as we mature into wisdom. These are:

**Precepts** are rules of thumb that, when borne in mind and followed, help us to be harmless or to "refrain from every evil." Precepts typically make our behavior harmless, but sometimes regulate behavior for other ends.

**Giving** is an open-ended practice of responding to, and even seeking out, opportunities to be of benefit, particularly to others, in order to "accomplish good."

**Purity** results from training the mind toward virtue, whereby

> we “purify the mind,” so that it cannot be other than harmless and of benefit. Purity is found in the mind of kindness and compassion, that eventually loses all attachments and ends the self-centeredness that is perpetually seeking personal advantage.

Many people who begin Buddhist practice think, “I am already a nice guy. I've got virtue covered.” Accordingly, they place their primary focus on a more seductive practice like sitting cross-legged on a cushion or like altar maintenance. However, if we diligently engage with the practice of virtue, we discover vast dark and murky areas in our behavior and thought. This discovery should not cause despair, for we humans are intrinsically faulty beings. Were we otherwise the world would be a saner, kinder place and we might not have to practice Buddhism. To become otherwise is a monumental undertaking that requires discipline and persistence. Although practicing mental composure on a cushion will quickly produce satisfying experiences, the impression of progress will be largely illusory until purity of mind is firmly established through direct mindful engagement in human affairs. Living in virtue places our practice in the problematic world from the beginning, where wisdom and mental cultivation then sharpen the skill of life.[33]

### *Precepts*

Precepts are rules of thumb that typically demarcate the limits of harmlessness. When we violate a precept, generally someone suffers as a result. There are many formulations and long lists of precepts, but the standard short list contains these five:

- To refrain from assaulting living beings.
- To refrain from taking what is not freely given.
- To refrain from abusing sensuality.

- To refrain from telling what is not true.
- To refrain from becoming negligent through alcohol.

The first two are often stated as “don't kill” and “don't steal,” and the fourth as “don't lie.” The third generally has to do with adultery and sex with minors, where harm almost always results. The fifth is a matter of promoting mindfulness and diligence by keeping the mind clear.

Living by precepts is, as for any aspect of practice, a matter of personal vow, for these are not commandments from on high. In fact, you should feel free to formulate precepts specialized to your own circumstances, for instance, to refrain from texting while skateboarding and from skateboarding where the elderly congregate. Most Buddhists vow to maintain this short list of five precepts, while others observe the eight lifetime precepts, which additionally include the following:

- To refrain from speaking divisively.
- To refrain from speaking harshly.
- To refrain from speaking idly.

We generally do not realize, for instance, how speaking ill of others easily creates division and discord, and may result in spreading ill-founded rumors, or in creating unfairly biased initial impressions about whom we are speaking, even when what we are reporting happens to have an element of truth.

Many people observe further enhanced sets of precepts on special occasions, such as, traditionally, on new-, full- and quarter-moon days. Monastics, in their enthusiasm, observe hundreds of precepts. When we attend meditation retreats we may be expected to be mindful of a more rigorous set of precepts: to observe almost absolute silence, to forgo all sexual or flirtatious activity and to give up entertainments and self-beautification for the duration.

This as an opportunity to push the precept envelope a bit.

Precepts are concise and wise pointers to where people have gotten themselves into trouble repeatedly for untold ages. Because these nuggets of wisdom are easy to remember, precepts are a natural entry point into the practice of attentive mindfulness as we bring the appropriate precepts comparatively easily to mind when the present situation calls for them.

Mindfulness of precepts lays bare any natural impulses that may have arisen that run counter to the spirit of these precepts, which it is the role of right effort to resolve with diligence. For instance, if an ugly twiddle bug annoys us, instead of squishing it we put it outside. If we find our neighbor's spouse attractive, instead of trying to seduce him or her, we take a cold shower. In this way, mindfulness and effort work together. If someone expresses an opinion we disagree with in an on-line discussion, instead of flaming harshly or maliciously we give ourselves a chance to cool down before responding appropriately. The attentively mindful encounter between precept and practice situation encourages intimacy with our own contrary impulses as effort learns how to tame them. Without this practice of “refraining from evil,” we are likely to take more from the world than we give, and we are likely to harm others in our attempt to accrue some personal advantage.

Effort very often fails to catch up to mindfulness. Even as we are mindful of precepts, right effort is likely to struggle with needy and aversive impulses rooted in the central importance given to a misperceived self that must navigate a harsh, competitive and often abusive world.

> Bad deeds, and deeds hurtful to ourselves, are easy to do; what is beneficial and good, that is very difficult to do.[34]

Even the mindful person might have the precept clearly in mind

as she is about to violate it, as she is violating it, and after she has violated it. Nonetheless, mindfulness brings diligence, and bearing the precept in mind will allow her to fully acknowledge the transgression and determine to do better in the future. Or if she is not convinced of the need for the precept – a surprising number of people actually feel malicious backbiting benefits the world by shining the light of truth in other people's dark places – constantly revisiting the precept through mindfulness may eventually convince her to engage it with more diligence. Alternatively, she may be dealing with contrary social influences in her life and need to work out the dissonance – or not: it is up to her.

Mindfulness alone will tend to wear away the reluctance that right effort suffers with regard to the precept. It is largely in closing this gap between mindfulness and effort that we progress in our practice. Often mindfulness itself fails, for instance, if we act before mindfulness brings the appropriate precept to mind. In this case we fully acknowledge our failure, reflect on the conditions in which it occurred and resolve to do better in the future. In this way we develop greater mindfulness.

When we first begin precept practice, or even take up ritual practices, this kind of regulation of our behavior may feel restrictive, as if we've fit ourself uncomfortably into a box that affords little freedom of movement. There are aspects of western religious and cultural history which bring out in many of us a deep aversion to conventions and institutions, particularly in the religious sphere, and that actually reinforce this kind of conclusion.[35] However, remarkably, within a short while, if we have been practicing diligently, these practices can feel inexplicably liberating! Certainly, many monastics report discovering this sense of liberation in following hundreds of precepts. How can this be?

Recall that most of us are already trapped not quite hopelessly in the ruts of our karmic landscape. We were already oppressed and

restricted before coming to Buddhism by the ever deepening habit patterns that have kept us locked mindlessly and relentlessly in unfortunate patterns of painful behavior and thought, many of which are unskillfully motivated by the fruitless search for personal advantage. These are also what make effort difficult. Precept practice might give us our first taste of liberation by lifting us out of our confining karmic ruts to follow alternative guidelines by our own volition. Our mindfulness shows us that there is no inevitability in our entrapment, that there is a different way of being in the world, a more deliberate way, a more beneficial way.[36]

### *Giving*

Giving[37] is the first factor mentioned in many Dharmic lists of qualities and practices, such as the six or ten "perfections" and the "gradual instruction." Giving is something anyone can practice; children have an inborn, if simple, understanding of giving and experience quite readily the delight that can come with giving. We seek to develop the practice of giving as a substantial part of our everyday Buddhist life, and in fact giving is traditionally the life-blood of the Buddhist community, and it makes temples and monasteries uplifting places to visit, exhibiting economies of gifts where people come to give to others and to enjoy the gifts of others.

In contrast to precept practice, the practice of giving is quite open-ended. We might volunteer as a candy-striper at a local hospital, engage in hospice work, rescue abandoned puppies, pick up trash along the highway, mentor troubled youth, teach meditation in prison, offer sandwiches to the homeless, or organize a strike for a living wage. We might also donate financially to charitable or educational organizations, donate blood or beautify our neighborhood. Regular volunteering and support as an alternative to material donations are highly recommended as a means of fulfill-

ing the practice of giving. Such volunteer efforts can even scale up to the enterprise level, like founding hospitals in third-world countries, or advocacy for peace, social justice or environmental protection. Or we can simply be on constant look-out for opportunities as they arise to help others, like helping to change a tire or jumping in to rescue a toddler from an angry goose.

**Merit-making.** Precept practice brings to mind a relatively small set of very simple and definitive rules of thumb, even as it attends to complex practice situations. Giving is different, because it is open-ended. Mindfulness of the general advisability of giving may have little immediate effect on our actual behavior, much as recollecting that exercise is good for us will be unlikely to manifest results until we can commit ourselves to a structured regimen. Mindfulness requires guidance and structure to hang on to. "Merit-making" provides a kind of metric to quantify our practice of giving over a given period of time, much as people track calories consumed, steps walked or miles jogged. Mindfulness of any of these metrics obliquely encourages the respective practice. Merit refers to the cumulative fruits of our skillful Buddhist practice, of benefit to ourselves and to others as well.[38]

> **Merit** conceptually quantifies the benefit of giving as an approximate composite measure. It is closely related to skillfulness and the fruits of karma.[39]
>
> **Merit-making** is to act in a way that accumulates merit.

Mindful of how we are doing according to this metric, we are encouraged to seek out new opportunities for merit making, or to establish a regimen of giving. We differentiate degrees of merit to earn according to categories of recipient, gift, manner of giving and intention, roughly as follows:[40]

- To whom is it given?

Worthy recipients of giving are ascetics and priests (who live on

alms), destitutes, wayfarers, wanderers, the sick and beggars, as well as family members and guests. These are generally those in need or to whom we bear a social responsibility. Monastics are often called a "field of merit," in which our gifts are like seeds that grow to benefit the practice of many.

- What is given?

The gift of Dharma exceeds all other gifts.[41] In addition to material gifts, the gift of service is particularly meritorious. It is important to note that merit gained tends to correlate inversely with one's resources: a meager offering from a pauper might easily gain more merit than a sumptuous gift from a tycoon. This is because it is, in the end, the intention and level of personal sacrifice that gain merit, as we will see shortly.

- How is it given?

The Buddha recommends that offerings never be given in a callous manner, but rather respectfully, not in a way that humiliates the recipient, and ideally with one's own hands rather than through an intermediary. Notice that these recommendations encourage direct engagement in, and full experience of, the act of giving. In this way, these measures also encourage feelings of affection, appreciation and interpersonal harmony, and thereby of uplift, in association with the act of giving.

- Why is it given?

Giving out of annoyance, out of fear and in exchange are fairly neutral with regard to merit, since in each case one's intention is at least partially self-serving. Intention is critical, for merit in the end is about purity of mind. In general, it is best to give with no expectation of personal advantage. Giving out of kindness or to "beautify and adorn the mind"[42] gains great merit. If we feel happy before, during and after giving, and if the mind becomes serene, these are symptoms of truly wholesome intentions.[43]

**The generous community.** The practice of giving gains more structure through the specialization of Buddhist community life. If giving is the life-blood of the Buddhist community, then the lay-monastic relationship is its beating heart. In fact, the Buddha did something quite clever to achieve this result: He imposed on the monastic community, through monastic regulations, an enhanced level of dependence on the laity, removing them entirely from the exchange economy and making their dependence a matter of daily contact with the laity. This level was then enhanced, in that a monk or nun was not allowed to do her own cooking, nor to save offered food until the next day, nor to have any kind of employment, nor to trade with laypeople, nor to ask for anything except under critical circumstances, nor even to endear herself in hope of better alms. He thereby made the monks and nuns as helpless as house pets or as young children with regard to their own needs.

Although the Buddha restricted what monastics can do for themselves, he did not substantially restrict what monastics can do for others. Monastics teach and provide pastoral care, but also commonly organize a variety of social services. The result is that monastics live entirely in what has been called an "economy of gifts,"[44] in which goods and services flow solely through acts of giving, and the laity live at least part-time in that economy. Although the practice of giving in Buddhism tends to be centered around the mutual support of monastic and lay, its spirit easily flows over the entire Buddhist community, and beyond.

**Watching the mind.** As we practice giving, we also mindfully observe the effects of giving on our own mind. To begin with, we watch out for signs resentment and burnout, which, as we are about to see, are unskillful qualities of mind that undermine rather than enhance merit. We should take care not to push any practice too hard. To begin a jogging practice, it is best to run down to the corner and back, and then only gradually work our

way up to five miles every morning. To take on more may harm rather than improve our health. Take it easy; this applies to all aspects of Buddhist practice. In this regard, the Buddha offered the simile of the lute which makes the most beautiful sounds if the strings are tuned neither too loose nor too tight.[45] In the end we may become hungry for new opportunities for giving, and finally discover that doing things on behalf of others is the most meaningful part of our lives.

As we settle into the practice of giving, we will begin to observe delight in giving. We experience many sensual pleasures in our life – food, music, sex, jewels and zombie movies – but we should become aware as well of the great delight, a supramundane pleasure beyond the sensual, that comes with giving. Become aware that this delight is greatest when our intentions are purest, when the recipients of our giving are worthy and when the manner of giving is proper. If this delight is the direct experience of the merit we have earned, consider how much joy there must be in a lifetime dedicated to giving. If this is not enough incentive, it is helpful to keep in mind how much benefit we are thereby bringing to others. Simply ensuring that one person gets proper medical care, or teaching inmates to meditate is easy relative to the huge benefits that accrue for others.[46]

### *Purity*

The mind is the basis of all of our practice. All of our actions begin in the mind. Whether we adhere to precepts or choose to earn merit, they come from the mind, and they then reshape our karmic landscape. In the end we want to develop the kind of mind that cannot be other than virtuous. This is purity. To develop purity, we take up the introspective practice of mindful observation of mind. The full implementation of this task relies on bringing to mind a wide swath of psychologically oriented teachings, that will further expand as we develop wisdom.

**Precepts and giving produce purity.** If we have entered into the practices of precepts and giving, we have inevitably already stepped into the practice of purifying the mind. This is because we are forced to confront contrary impulses wherever they tend toward harm or away from benefit, every time effort struggles to keep up with mindfulness of a precept. Every time we override a contrary mental factor, we jump out of a rut and begin to decondition an existing unskillful habit pattern. Every time kindness or generosity inspires our good deeds, we are shaping our karmic landscape into a more skillful topology. Even mixed motives, such as response to peer or authority pressure, or such as obligation without kindness, have a way of eventually giving way to purer motives. Pure motives feel good.

For instance, recall the precept not to assault living beings. Maybe we do not initially understand why the life of an ugly twiddle bug matters one snippet, but a twiddle bug is a living being, and we want to be good Buddhists, so we don't kill twiddle bugs. After a few months we will discover something that was not there before: a warm heart with regard to twiddle bugs; they will have become our little friends. And we will find that this result generalizes to other ugly beings as well, and even to certain people whom we had once put into the same category with twiddle bugs. Our mind has become purer.

We have seen above that a number of precepts actually have little directly to do with refraining from evil, except insofar as they produce, through purification, the kind of mind that will want to avoid evil. Breaking a precept against idle chatter, for instance, is relatively victimless. Nonetheless, if we refrain from idle chatter over many months, we will discover a quieter mind, less prone to the distractions that disrupt mindfulness. We will have, simply through observing this precept, made the mind purer. These non-harmlessness-based precepts develop purity of mind in much the way as harmlessness-based precepts but avert eventual rather

than immediate harm for others.

**Refrain from depurifying the mind.** Just as precepts and other physical practices define habit patterns that over time purify the mind, existing habit patterns that characterize our lifestyle may inadvertently *depurify* the mind as the unskillful ruts in our karmic landscape deepen. We do well to refrain from these. A rather complex precept, commonly observed by laypeople every quarter moon, and by monastics always, is the following:

- To refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, smartening with perfumes and beautifying with cosmetics.

These are activities that, although quite normal and maybe of concern for only the most dedicated practitioners, would tend to be motivated by, and therefore to reinforce, unskillful lust and pride. Even more so, the modern pursuits of playing violent video games and watching violent television programs, or listening to hateful speech on the radio will turn the mind toward recurring thoughts of anger and fear. Entertainments that excite lust will tend similarly to depurify the mind, even while doing no outward harm. We turn on the TV and pretty soon it has us dancing to a tune of lust, envy, fear, hatred, anger, fantasy and buying, provoking our entire repertoire of unwholesome mental urges that our practice otherwise tries to moderate. We do well to dehabituate such activities.

**Greed, aversion and delusion.** Our next practice task will be mindfully to observe our own intentions. What follows are some of the Dharma teachings to bear in mind as we attend to our intentions. The Buddha divides the innumerable kinds of unskillful, unwholesome intentions into three broad categories:

> There are these three roots of what is unskillful. Which three? *Greed* as a root of what is unskillful, *aversion* as a

> root of what is unskillful, *delusion* as a root of what is unskillful. These are the three roots of what is unskillful.[47]

The roots of the skillful are the opposites of the unskillful: non-greed, non-aversion and non-delusion, also known as renunciation, kindness and wisdom.

> **Greed** is neediness, the desire, longing, attachment or lust for sensual pleasures, for reputation or fame, for wealth, for power, for comfort, for security and so on.

Greed includes simple lust for food or sexual gratification; pride; the need to be liked, popular or famous, or to be secure, rich or beautiful. Greed generally looks outward for satisfaction or personal advantage.

> **Aversion**, aka "hatred," is the dislike, dread or fear of pain, of discomfort, of enemies, and so on.

Aversion includes thoughts of anger, revenge, envy or jealousy, resentment, guilt, self-hate, disdain, negative judgments, and quickly manifests as anxiety and restlessness. Both greed and aversion are tied to the craving highlighted in the second noble truth.

> **Delusion** is found in erroneous views or justifications, conceptualizations, misperceptions, ignorance and denial.

The greatest delusion for the early Buddhist is that there is an abiding self, a "me," that in some way remains fixed in spite of all the changes that happen all around it, that is also the owner and controller of this body and this mind, a self that is fearful of, but is always looking for personal advantage in, the world "out there." Greed and aversion have their basis in the sense of self, which tends to take things personally, in a self-centered way.

The Buddha observed that unskillful intentions have five

qualities[48] in common, absent in skillful intentions:

(1) They have *roots* either in greed, in aversion or in delusion.

(2) When they give rise to bodily or verbal actions, those actions generally cause *harm* to self or others.

(3) They give rise to *misperception*.

(4) They cause personal *suffering*.

(5) They are an *obstruction* on the path to awakening.

Let's take anger as an example. Anger is a particularly volatile form of aversion (*roots*), that arises quickly and generally disperses just as quickly. It easily leads to verbal or physical assault otherwise protected by the first precept or the precepts around malicious or harsh speech (*harm*). Through angry eyes, the object of our anger, even a close friend or family member, easily manifests as a jerk or as a schmuck if not as a demon (*misperception*), that, when the anger subsides, will re-morph back into its normal more amiable form. The level of tension associated with the arising of even slight anger is astonishing, and great anger plunges us into a hell-like state right here and now (*suffering*). We are all aware that habitual or sustained anger can even affect our physical health (high blood pressure, heart disease, etc.) in a profound way. Moreover, should anger become more ingrained through habituation, it will become increasingly difficult to bring the mind into states of calm and insight necessary for liberation (*obstruction*).

**Mindful observation of impurity.** Mindful observation or investigation is the greatest engine of mental development. With every action we undertake we consistently attend to the intention, mindful to discern, to begin with, whether it is skillful or unskillful. We can trace these intentions as they arise in making ethical choices, or as they contribute to our personal suffering, for

they effect both. Unwholesome intentions are those wearing some degree of suffering – stress, anxiety, dis-ease or dissatisfaction – like a shadow. They will also fall under at least one of the categories of greed, aversion and delusion, and, when acted out, will almost certainly cause someone harm.

We might thereby be embarrassed at how much unwholesomeness we discover, as factors such as anger, lust, deluded views, fear, stress, envy, jealousy, spite, restlessness, anxiety, arrogance and pride make their appearance in turn. We will discover how ubiquitous these factors are, when the stress and anxiety are right there even when we thought we were having fun. It is important to accept this stream as a natural part of the untrained human condition, lest one begin to feel guilty, for guilt is just another unskillful thought, one rooted in aversion.

Nonetheless, mindful observation provides immediate, albeit temporary, relief from the effects of unskillful factors. For instance, when mindfulness attends to the anger itself (which is different from the content of the anger), it moves us one step away from engagement in the anger, such that the anger tends to dissipate. This technique should be part of every Buddhist's right effort toolbox.[49] Moreover, repeated mindful observation confronts our delusions about the role of the impure mind in causing suffering, and thereby suffices to undercut the most stubborn unskillful habit patterns. Miraculously, the unskillful roots begin slowly to loosen their grip. With persistence and time, the mind shifts remarkably. In this way, purity of mind develops.

Mindful observation also reveals the conditions that give rise to what is unskillful. For instance, if we see that stress gives rise to anger, then we begin to avoid stressful activities, just as the recovering alcoholic sees that he must avoid the company of people who drink to avoid his own impulse to do so himself. We can similarly avoid circumstances that tend to lead us into undesirable but accustomed ruts.

Turning from mindfulness to effort, it should be possible to practice restraint, where, for instance, we stop before thought turns to speech when we realize that the thought is unwholesome. Particularly challenging is restraint when faced with angry thoughts, which can overwhelm our discernment very quickly, but even these will come under the control of right effort as we reach advanced stages of practice. There are a variety of techniques for stopping at this critical juncture between thought and bodily or verbal action, and we will discover some on our own. For instance, we learn never ever to write an email in an angry frame of mind; if some anger-trigger needs to be addressed, we wait until the mind is calm, then address it with gentle words, at the right time. Face-to-face encounters that turn to anger might require that we quietly and abruptly leave the room to go simmer down, lest we utter something demeritorious. Recall that mindfulness discerns when Dharmic parameters are about to be breached and effort does something about it. Gradually, we learn to improve the quality of our intentions, to weed out the unwholesome and to cultivate the wholesome. Meanwhile, mindful investigation improves right understanding, refining the parameters we bear in mind.

### *Virtue is its own reward*

We have discussed the win-win claim about the fruition of karmic results in our lives, how we are heirs to our own deeds, how we benefit ourselves while benefiting others. Often people imagine this entails some kind of cosmic payback system, much like Santa's naughty-and-nice list. However, we are now in a position to understand the psychology that suffices to establish this claim.

**Suffering in the unwholesome.** A few pages ago we discussed the five qualities of unskillful intentions. Two of these are worth repeating here, (4) They cause personal *suffering*, and (5) they are an *obstruction* on the path to awakening. . Whereas *obstruction* speaks of long-term effects, *suffering* is felt, at least in part,

immediately. Intentions rooted in greed, aversion and delusion are simply stressful or even painful, as we noted with regard to anger. Moreover, as we continue to behave in unskillful ways, these same intentions are likely to recur over and over, scoring deeper and deeper ruts in our karmic landscape, and becoming more definitive of our character and future behavior. Each time we fall into these ruts we experience the suffering of the unwholesome all over again. Whereas at one point we had been a person who experienced anger, now we suffer as an angry person. In this sense we are heir to our own deeds. We even begin to experience the health problems of an angry person.[50]

**Delight in the wholesome.** Buddhist practice across the board finds its natural home in inhabiting our activities for their own sake, in contrast to the dominant instrumental or utilitarian thinking of modern society. This is much as children play for no other reason than because they love to play, and as we watch birds or solve puzzles simply out of delight in doing so. We noted in chapter one that the general practice of mindfulness by itself nudges the motivational structure of our activities in this direction, encouraging us to inhabit our tasks by focusing on the "how" aspect, rather than to utilize them by striving toward the "why," for striving is an unskillful, self-concerned distraction from the task at hand and disrupts recollection of what is relevant to the task.

The practice and understanding of virtue add depth to this motivational structure. In this chapter we have gained a far better understanding of skillfulness from the perspective of virtue, of how striving – based in greed and/or aversion – leads to immediate suffering – anxiety, stress and so on – and to other problems. Although its nudge gives general mindfulness a somewhat upright quality, the mindful practice of virtue provides a broader context for practice that points to the difference between "mindfulness" and "right mindfulness." A sniper or a

jewel thief can engage his skill mindfully by holding striving momentarily at bay, but at the same time be engaged in a plan fraught with wickedness, conceived in past karma, without regard to the standards of virtue. *Right* mindfulness, on the other hand, recollects the entire Dharma as needed, and so will never neglect the standards of virtue.

To the extent we can lay striving aside, we learn to inhabit our acts of virtue, finding satisfaction and delight in living according to the standards of harmlessness, giving and kindness. This is why this chapter is called "living *in* virtue." As we live in virtue, we lose "me" in concern for the well-being of all, and we enjoy a far greater sense of personal well-being.[51] This underscores that we are heirs to our own deeds, and that virtue is its own reward. Pursuing tasks of all kinds in this way for their own sake is found also in psychological research to lead to a far greater sense of well-being.[52]

We noted earlier also that the skill of general mindfulness naturally produces stability of mind: the mind settles on a single theme, does not thrash from one thing to another, acquires a certain delight in the present, and steps back from our direct engagement in affairs. With purity of mind the mind is further calmed through the larger context of non-regret, particularly in association with whatever plans might stand behind our current tasks. The Buddha speaks of a natural progression that arises effortlessly in the virtuous person pointing to another dimension of living in virtue:

> Monks, for a virtuous person, one whose behavior is virtuous, no volition need be exerted, "Let non-regret arise in me." It is natural that non-regret arises in one who is virtuous, one whose behavior is virtuous.
>
> For one without regret … It is natural that joy

> arises in one without regret.
>
> … It is natural that delight arises in one who is joyful
>
> … It is natural that the body of one with a delighted mind is tranquil.
>
> … It is natural that one who is tranquil in body feels pleasure.
>
> … It is natural that the mind of one feeling pleasure is composed.[53]

Variations of the progression "delight →tranquility → mental composure" are oft repeated in the context of various Buddhist practices. Here this progression is said to be a natural, effortless consequence of the practice of virtue. This touches on the supramundane or even mystical aspect of practice, whose experience far exceeds, and is put into sharp contrast with, normal mundane experiences.[54]

**An example.** Through mindful ethical conduct, even the new practitioner can observe this dimension at least beginning to play out. For example, one day you are doing laundry and you find your house mate has left a lot of clothes in the drier. At first you think,

> "I've got places to go and things to do. I'll just pull everything out and dump it on the table."

But then you are mindful to see this as a prime opportunity for merit-making, a fundamental aspect of devout Buddhist practice, and decide,

> "Oh, boy! I will neatly fold my house mate's clothes!"

Accordingly, you engage and stay on the task of folding clothes

mindfully, putting aside whatever thoughts are not relevant to folding clothes, and you bear appropriate standards in mind, for instance, folding precisely and symmetrically along seams. At one point an errant twiddle bug pokes its head out from a pocket,

> “Blorp, blorp!”

… and you recall the first precept, catch him with a pair of tongs from the kitchen and place him carefully outside,

> “There you go, little guy.”

Then you precede with the task at hand, practicing for the sake of practice itself with no striving and no hurry. The mind feels upright, steady, exalted, and pure, and proceeds from non-regret to joy to delight and so on, possibly (especially as such practice becomes habituated) as far as right mental composure. While any sense of striving for self-advantage recedes for the duration of this episode, you realize that this is the proper and joyful way to live your life, that is, in virtue.

# Living in devotion

A popular adage states,

> "You can lead a horse to water,
> But you cannot make him drink it."

I can lead the reader to the noble eightfold path (and even offer oats in the next chapter), but will the reader drink of it? The issue is one of motivation. Earlier, we looked at the structure of motivation with regard to general mindfulness and with regard to virtue. We want at this time to look at the deeper motivation behind the practice of Dharma as a whole. Buddhism is challenging, so it is critically important that deep, steadfast and wholesome motivation stands behind our practice.

### *Devotion, the motivator*

Think about truly life-altering decisions. Consider the courage of the great explorers, of the hippies of yore on a quest in India with nothing but a back-pack, of procurers of accordions, and more commonly of the betrothed or of the career bound, stirred by deep longing, or by desperation. Do they ever *ever* know what they are getting themselves into? Yet they boldly resolve,

> "*This* will be the shape of my life!"

… and then live accordingly. What motivates such foolhardiness? The currents of motivation are deep, but we can tease out at least

two key factors: trust and devotion. These must be present if we are to fully embrace Buddhist life. When these are present we can expect that our practice and understanding will provide the primary meaning, direction and outlook for our lives. Then into this, all other aspects of our lives will find their place. The Buddhist path is long, arduous and only gradually of discernible result. Those who aspire to great attainments need to be on fire, much as scientists or artists can be on fire. Catching fire begins with "trust" and develops into "devotion."

**Trust**,[55] aka "faith," fills the gap between the little we know and what we need to know to act with certitude.

Trust is a necessary part of choice in all spheres of life. We are karmic beings, repeatedly called upon to act, but in an uncertain world, i.e., with rare certitude as to results. Trust can depend on the probability of desirable outcomes, as when we trust a friend's recommendation of a movie or of a dentist. It can instead depend on the absence of other viable alternatives, as when we have no idea where we are, so choose a direction to drive randomly, and then stick with it. It can similarly be driven by desperation with scant odds of success. Erratic factors can play a role, such as a slick commercial or salesperson, the bedside manner of a doctor or the charisma of a preacher. Nonetheless, we will see below that trust in Buddhism serves as an encouragement for self-discovery that has nothing to do with "blind faith."

Trust, among all its aspects, critically includes motivational force, a commitment to run with our choice based on trust. This is much as a scientist relentlessly pursues an initially unlikely path of investigation. Without motivation beyond the odds, trust serves little purpose. Motivation may grow to wholeheartedness, the origin of the Pali word we translate as trust.[56] Big wholehearted choices with dubious certitude define the realm of greatest human foolhardiness but also of greatest human achievement.

**Devotion** is a sense of wholehearted commitment that motivates practice as meaningful and satisfying in itself.[57]

We have discussed motivation in two previous chapters. Through mindfulness, we tend to "inhabit" the task as something satisfying in pursuing well, rather than "utilizing" the task for some purpose outside of the task itself. Similarly, through virtue we find satisfaction and delight in living within the standards of harmlessness, giving and kindness, rather than striving toward personal advantage. Devotion has a similar motivational structure, but at the higher level of overall life-commitment. The meaning of the Pali word for devotion ranges over "clear," "bright" and "glad" as well as "pious." It is through devotion that we completely inhabit Buddhist practice and understanding. This is why this chapter is called "living in devotion."[58] As we live in devotion, we tend to lose "me" in the Dharma itself.

Of course, our practice and understanding *do* lead karmically to personal advantage; we just don't continue to bear this in mind as motivator once devotion develops. Before that, we may have been told as an incentive, that Dharmic practice is a means to self-improvement, to less stress and anxiety, to "rewiring the brain for happiness," to better relations, to better sex, to mystical experiences, to better creativity or productivity, or even to business success.[59] Although these points may be valid initiators of practice, it is important to develop *devotion* as our primary motivator, since striving for personal advantage gives our practice an unwholesome edge.

### *The communal context of practice*

Although individual practice plays a key role in Buddhism, the Buddha also recognized that humans are social beings and that our trust and devotion will take root primarily through the influence of others. It is important that we associate with the right people.

An **admirable friend** is a wise person who is well informed in the Dharma, lives according to Dharma, and whose words and conduct are a source of inspiration for others.[60]

In effect, in early Buddhism admirable friends were the teachers, for those of higher attainment or spiritual progress are those from whom we are likely to learn the most. The importance of the admirable friend is expressed in this curious but well-known passage:

> As he was seated to one side, Ven. Ānanda said to the fortunate one, "This is half of the holy life, lord: having admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues."
>
> "Don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Having admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues is actually the *whole* of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues, he can be expected to develop and pursue the noble eightfold path."[61]

Admirable friends have themselves already entered deeply into virtue and wisdom. It is through these admirable friends that the meaning of the Buddha's life and awakening is revealed and through these admirable friends that the Dharma is clarified step by step to lead the instructling toward and along the path. We should seek out and befriend those in Buddhist communities whose practice we would do well to emulate. Moreover, the Buddha created the "Sangha," as the monastic community where such adepts are trained, but also supplemented by lay Buddhist adepts of great attainment.

The Sangha serves to uplift the wider community by fulfilling three social functions: First, as an community of adept practitioners the Sangha is a source of admirable friends. Just as it benefits us to have artists and good plumbers among us, or

good citizens, it ennobles us to have saints and sages, adepts and awakened people in our midst, an effective civilizing force. Second, the monastic Sangha provides an ideal context for Buddhist practice for those who want to pursue the holy life as far as possible. It does this by defining the life most conducive to upholding Buddhist principles, a life so barren of any opportunity for personal advantage that a "me" can scarcely find a footing. Third, the monastic Sangha is charged with the continuity of the Buddha's teachings. It plays a role much like the faculty of a university, full-time staff without which scholarship would become anemic if it were to survive at all.[62]

The flourishing of the monastic Sangha ensures that there will be admirable friends of great attainment. The Buddha stated, in fact, that,

> … if the monks should live the life to perfection, the world should not lack for awakened ones.[63]

Keeping the flame of the Dharma burning bright is critical for the perpetuation of the teachings in their full integrity for future generations. Because those teachings are so subtle and sophisticated, they are easily misinterpreted and corrupted if they are not sustained by practitioners of attainment.

In short, admirable friends tend to invoke trust and inspire wholeheartedness and devotion.The root definition of "Sangha" is the monastic community, of both monks and nuns, but the Buddha extended the word "Sangha" also to refer to "noble" monastics and lay people who have entered into at least the initial stage of awakening called "stream entry."[64] In short, it is a concentration of highly qualified admirable friends, who tend to evoke trust and to inspire us to wholehearted devotion.

### *Refuge*

The devout Buddhist develops trust in three sources of wisdom, which we trust to guide us in our spiritual development and in how we conduct our lives. These three sources of wisdom are:

**The Buddha** is the awakened one, the historical founder of Buddhism.

**The Dharma** is what the Buddha taught or a functionally faithful re-presentation of what the Buddha taught.

**The Sangha** is either the community of monastics or the noble Buddhist adepts.

**The triple gem** refers to the three sources of Buddhist wisdom: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

**Refuge** is wholehearted devotion to the wisdom of the triple gem.

Refuge is based not only on trust in the triple gem, but also on trust in our own capacity for practice and awakening. Trust in the triple gem is what first turns our heads resolutely toward virtue, wisdom and serenity and will grow progressively more discerning and acquire more depth, as we repeatedly have the opportunity to check things out in our own experience. The *Dhammapada* says:

> He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and his Sangha, penetrates with transcendental wisdom the four noble truths: suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the noble eightfold path leading to the cessation of suffering.[65]

On the basis of refuge in the triple gem we open our hearts and minds to their influence of the teachings of the Buddha, and then we begin wholeheartedly to study, practice, develop and gain insight into them.[66] Refuge is the center of our devotion, a home

we inhabit in lieu of unwholesome striving, a safe and nurturing context in which our practice unfolds, rather than a place we would rather be. “Refuge”means a place of safety. “Triple gem” carries the same implications, for gems in ancient India were regarded as having protective powers.

### *Devotional practices*

The practice of devotion gives mindfulness a key role, as we bring our values, and particularly the triple gem, repeatedly to mind, so that they become an ever-present support for our path practices, an influence on the ardency and direction of our practice.[67] Such practices are verbal, mental and even bodily and give Buddhism much of its appearance of “religiosity.”

I should acknowledge that many modern Buddhists and would-be Buddhists dismiss whatever smells of “religiosity,” Buddhism as a religion is certainly an outlier, and many would like to leave it that way. For these I note that every element of “religiosity” has its equivalent in common secular contexts as well, for instance, in sports, in the military and even at birthday and dinner parties. Such elements are rather thin in early Buddhism, and, as with path practices, they have well-established functions for the benefit of practice. No further justification should be necessary.

**Verbal refuge.** Refuge is meant to be borne constantly in mind as the backdrop of the rest of our practice. One way to develop mindfulness of refuge is through daily recitation, explicitly to reflect on the qualities of the Buddha, of the Dharma and of the Sangha, traditionally by bringing formulaic texts to mind and by reciting them aloud.[68] Repetition helps us bear our devotion to the triple gem more readily in mind.

Some **qualities of the Buddha** are that he is rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge and conduct, well-faring, an expert regarding the world, unexcelled as a trainer for

> those to be trained, the teacher of all, awakened, fortunate.[69]

This refers, in short, to his attainments of virtue and wisdom and awakening, to his skills as a teacher, and to the benefits he acquired in having discovered the path.

> Some **qualities of the Dharma** are that it is well-taught by the Buddha, visible, timeless, inviting verification, leading to progress, to be realized by the wise for themselves.

This refers to the empirical nature of the Dharma, its provenance and its function. We will explore some surprising and rather inspiring qualities of the Dharma in more detail below.

> Some **qualities of the Sangha** are that it practices well, uprightly, systematically and skillfully, is worthy of support and of respect, is a field of merit. *It is also critical for the propagation and perpetuation of Buddhist teachings.*

This refers to the quality of monastic practice and how the laity properly relates to monastics. The *italicized* portion is not part of the original text, but clearly reflects the historical role of the Sangha since the time of the Buddha, without which the Buddhist teaching we now enjoy would scarcely have survived.[70]

In addition to the mindfulness of the triple gem, the early discourses recommend that we reflect similarly on our own practice of the precepts, on our own giving and on the "heavenly realms." The heavenly realms are typically used in reference to the long-term karmic fruits of our actions and are therefore associated with purity. Each of these six mindfulness practices produces similar results leading to mental composure:

> When a noble disciple recollects the Buddha, on that occasion his mind is not obsessed by lust, aversion, or delusion; on that occasion his mind is simply straight, based on the Buddha. A noble disciple whose mind is straight gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration

> in the Dharma, gains joy connected with the Dharma. When he is joyful, delight arises. For one with a delighted mind, the body becomes tranquil. One tranquil in body feels pleasure. For one feeling pleasure, the mind becomes composed. … You should develop this recollection of the Buddha while walking, standing, sitting and lying down. You should develop it while engaged in work and while living at home in a house full of children.[71]

What is here said with reference to the Buddha is then repeated for each of Dharma, Sangha, precepts, giving and heavens. As for the practice of virtue, we note that mindfulness of the triple gem gives rise to the same familiar progression "delight →tranquility → mental composure."

Although we are looking at refuge primarily as a motivator for path practices, this passage tells us that refuge in itself produces roughly the same immediate fruits as path practices. We should understand that benefits accrue from devotional practices across the board, and across religious traditions, that we do well to respect. It has been shown empirically that the devoutly religious enjoy significantly improved mental and physical health, happiness, calm and a sense of well-being and strong social bonds.[72]

**Bodily refuge.** We enhance mindfulness through verbal recitation, but perhaps even more so through putting our bodies into it. Buddhists take a page out of the play book of puppies, who train for the abstract possibility of future fierce battles by putting their whole bodies and minds into play. This is a function of ritual,[73] in which actions have a meaning beyond mere physical postures, just as gentle nips *mean* violent chomps for the puppy, meanings that are embodied in the action.

Refuge is similarly embodied through gesture. The Buddha was venerated in his lifetime through prostrations, circumambulation,

covering one's otherwise bare shoulder, sitting in a lower seat, standing upon the Buddha's arrival, not turning one's back on him nor walking ahead of him, formalities based in early Indian etiquette and well documented in the earliest texts.[74] To bow to the Buddha (even now to a statue) is to enact reverence for the Buddha with both body and mind. To enact reverence for the Buddha is to re-experience refuge, i.e. to open the heart and mind to the influence of the Buddha. Other practices venerate the Dharma. Many of the same physical expressions of veneration that applied to the Buddha have also always been applied to the monastic Sangha, and continue to be applied in the present day. Veneration toward the Sangha is, in a sense, most natural today, because it applies to the only *living* gem and therefore assumes a particularly personal quality.

Although we are often dismissive of such devotional practices as bowing in modern culture, it is important that this, with time, be overcome for the benefit of our path practice, for it hinders a time-tested way we can better align with the Buddha's path. You will be as surprised as I once was to discover how much bowing, for instance, brings to practice.[75] Devotional ritual practices also dovetail with the cultivation of general mindfulness discussed in chapter one. Because of the often elaborate and normative nature of rituals, they demand that we keep in mind what we are doing. At the same time, our karmic actions take on a kind of “sacred” quality, as if every action has an exclamation point after it.[76]

**A word on historically later devotional practices.** Devotional practices in early Buddhism seem to have been simple, minimal and functionally motivated as a support for the noble eightfold path. In most later traditions devotional practices seem to have generally continued to center around refuge, but to have blossomed into something much more elaborate and freely mixed with elements of folk culture, such as ancestor worship and blessings for good fortune.[77] For instance, after the Buddha's

demise, veneration the Buddha continued in ways that involve stupas, bodhi trees, fabricated footprints of the Buddha and eventually Buddha statues,[78] commonly augmented through ritual offerings of food, incense and water. Some schools, like Pure Land Buddhism and modern Soka Gakkai, are fundamentally devotional, much like possibly the preponderance of world religions. My own sense is that these devotional elaborations are for the most part innocuous, for they strengthen refuge and rarely contradict Buddhist principles. It behooves us to respect the many exotic flavors of Buddhist devotional practice, but it is not necessarily to practice them. Nonetheless, they may may satisfy a common human need for devotional expression that is not fully supported in the early Buddhist texts, and that many of us may well resonate with.

### *Taking Dharma seriously while holding it loosely*[79]

Most people are rightly wary, particularly in this scientific age, of placing trust in an ancient system of beliefs. It is appropriate at this juncture to come to a better understanding of the nature of the Dharma, particularly to recognize that it is *not* a system of beliefs, but represents a middle way between conviction and skepticism that promotes our own process of experiential discovery. The Dharma is something we gradually make our own until eventually trust is no longer necessary. We don't need to be so wary in the case of Dharma.

The main emphasis of the Dharma is on the mind. It deals with the human dilemma, existential crisis, anguish, suffering and dissatisfaction, delusion, misperception, selfishness, harmfulness, meaninglessness and the rest, as *human* problems with *human* causes that arise in *human* minds, and as problems that require *human* solutions. The Dharma provides a program whereby the mind is tuned, honed, sharpened, tempered, straightened, turned and distilled into an instrument of virtue, serenity and wisdom.

The Dharma itself is among the greatest products of the human mind, skillfully articulated by the Buddha.

The Dharma stands out in its parsimony. The Buddha characteristically took care not to teach more than was necessary. As a result, he carefully avoided useless speculation about topics irrelevant to the understanding or practice of the Dharma. This method is made clear in the “handful of leaves” simile.

> “What do you think, monks? Which are the more numerous, the few leaves I have here in my hand, or those up in the trees of the grove?”
>
> “Lord, the fortunate one is holding only a few leaves: those up in the trees are far more numerous.”
>
> “In the same way, monks, there are many more things that I have found out, but not revealed to you. What I have revealed to you is only a little. And why, monks, have I not revealed it? Because, monks, it is not related to the goal, it is not fundamental to the holy life, it does not conduce to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, tranquility, higher knowledge, awakening or nirvana. That is why I have not revealed it.”[80]

Recall that the doctrine of the Buddha is only useful insofar as it promotes skillful practice. The resulting agnosticism with regard to many religious views and folk beliefs gives Buddhism its characteristic tolerance that allows it to blend easily with the presuppositions of various cultures insofar as these do not contradict the purpose of Dharma. For instance, whether one believes in tree spirits or in the flying spaghetti monster doesn't really matter, as long as these beliefs are compatible with virtue and practical wisdom and do not obstruct serenity. On the other hand, the Buddha did not hesitate to criticize views that detract from spiritual development, such as “annihilationism,” the widely held

view that nothing remains, including our karmic results, after the death of the body, for this view limits our willingness to take responsibility for the future, or "eternalism," the opposing view that some essence (our soul) survives death, for this view promotes obsession. The middle way that he advocated led between these views.[81]

The Dharma also stands out in its empirical quality, pointing almost entirely to what can be verified in our direct experience. Many cautious people in the West are inspired to trust the Dharma in the first place upon learning of this refreshing see-for-yourself quality of the Dharma. Some caution is, however, in order, lest one think this entails that we should trust our own experience above all else. In fact, for the Buddha, the typical "uninstructed worldling" (most of us) is actually astonishingly deluded. Most of us get hopelessly confused in trying to see, much less interpret, our own experience, and trying to verify the Dharma against those experiences is that much more difficult. The *Kalama Sutta* warns us not to see certainty in one's own thinking, nor in much of anything else:

> Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon repetition, nor upon what is in a scripture, nor as a result of thought, nor upon an axiom, nor upon careful reasoning, nor out of delight in speculation, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the thought, "The monk is our venerable teacher." Kalamas, when you yourselves know: "These things are good, these things are not blamable, these things are praised by the wise, undertaken as a whole these things lead to benefit and happiness," then enter on and abide in them.[82]

Elsewhere it is suggested that effort is required to verify the Dharma against experience, since the Dharma is "personally experienced by the *wise*." The Buddha invites us "to come and

see,"[83] but when he says "come," he is shouting down to us flatlanders from the mountaintop. To arrive at his vantage point we need to scramble up hills, struggle through brambles and ford creeks. When the Buddha says "see," we need to focus our eyes intently in the right direction to barely make out what the Buddha sees with great clarity of vision.

In order to be willing to do all of this we have to establish from the beginning trust that the Buddha knew what he was talking about. This is refuge. What else would induce us to make the difficult climb up the mountain? Investigation and personal verification are necessary parts of following the Dharmic path but they take time and effort before we can say, "I have come and now I see." Until then trust is essential. "Come" is based on trust, and "see" is the eventual verification in our own experience.

For instance, the Buddha taught that craving is the origin of suffering (the second noble truth). At first this may seem, at least to some, an theoretical proposition which we must ponder and try our darnedest to match up with observation. The most likely hasty outcome is to dismiss this proposition as simply mistaken. It seems pretty clear to us, for instance, that buying titanium cufflinks would make us exceedingly dashing and that that would lead to prospects for romance and other forms of social and perhaps even business success. Therefore, we conclude, "Craving clearly leads not to suffering but to happiness!" We are looking in the wrong place. This is where taking seriously comes in:

> "Taking Dharma seriously" is refuge in the Dharma, trust that that the Buddha saw things rightly.

Refuge entails that we decide to trust the Dharma before we draw naive or premature conclusions from our own experiences, or from what we naively think the Dharma says. This may require that we put aside our pre-Buddhist preconceptions or presuppositions, our tacit assumptions, often instilled at a young age

before our faculty of discrimination had fully developed, and not questioned since. Eventually, perhaps after years of investigation, on and off the cushion, we might discover that the second noble truth is not complex at all; it is something that bites us on the nose over and over all day every day. We begin to notice that as soon as craving comes up the suffering is right behind it, as immediate as a shadow. In fact, as soon as we need to have titanium cuff links there is stress and anxiety, unmistakably. We might discover we have been living in a world of incessant suffering, a world aflame, all along without noticing it.

In brief, what we trust the Buddha to have seen rightly, bears an causal relationship to what we see for ourselves, such that practice turns trust into wisdom. Now, trust here is not about belief.

> "Holding Dharma loosely" is a quality of mindfulness whereby we do not think, "only this is true, anything else is worthless," that is, we don't *believe* the Dharma, rather we *accept* it as a malleable working assumption.

What we hold loosely has as much the quality of a question as of an answer. In fact, notice that in the passage from the *Kalama Sutta* above, the ultimate criterion for evaluating the worth of a teaching is ethical or practical, that is, whether practice on the basis of the teaching is of benefit, not whether "only this is true, anything else is worthless." In the *Canki Sutta* we learn that anything accepted through trust, approval, oral tradition, reasoning or pondering may or may not turn out to be true. At this the young brahmin Canki asks how, then, truth is to be "preserved":

> If a person has trust, his statement, "This is my trust," preserves the truth. But he doesn't yet come to the definite conclusion that "Only this is true; anything else is worthless." To this extent … there is the preservation of the truth. To this extent one preserves the truth. I describe

> this as the preservation of the truth. But it is not yet a discovery of the truth.[84]

The Buddha then repeats this formula about "trust" with regard to "approval," "oral tradition," "reasoning," "analogy" or "pondering out." The only thing that is certain is that things are uncertain. Nothing is to be believed unconditionally, and so blind faith cannot arise under the Buddha's instructions. The Buddha then shows how truth is "discovered" and then finally "realized," the implication being that if a proper teaching is accepted as a working assumption, it will eventually give rise to something seen directly, that is, be known for oneself with wisdom, as one's practice progresses.

What mindfulness bears in mind is not frozen truths, but malleable or workable working assumptions that the practitioner will further shape to match experience as they are better understood through practice, eventually to become fully internalized as a matter of direct perception. At this point, trust serves no further purpose. The last passage is a remarkable illustration of the care with which the Buddha clarifies the subtle roles of trust and other ways of acceptance that fall short of realization in direct experience.[85]

### *A sense of legacy*

We humans seek meaning in that which is bigger than us. For instance, seeing oneself as one member in a long family history with its own legacy gives us a sense of purpose, and is a source of energy, responsibility and devotion that shape one's attitudes and behaviors in significant ways. Higher meaning for the scientist is found in contributing to the forward march of human knowledge. Higher meaning in religion often comes with seeing oneself in the service of God. The meanings we find are not necessarily wholesome: presumably ruthless emperors find

meaning in expanding and perpetuating their empires through conquest. The eminent psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, a holocaust survivor, observed that an important predictor of the survival of inmates in death camps was not youth or physical health, but what kind of future lay beyond the barbed wire that one might live for, be it surviving family members, God or, in Frankl's case, the desire to complete his disrupted research.[86]

Meaning is a great selfless motivator and an essential aspect of devotion. It carries our practice along like a log in a great river. Have you known artists who cannot *not* do art, or musicians who cannot *not* do music? There are also scientists and scholars who cannot *not* do science or scholarship.

One way Buddhists find meaning is in promoting Buddhist teaching. Another way Buddhists find meaning is through an understanding of the epic nature of practice, expressed in this verse from a later Buddhist tradition:

> All my ancient twisted karma,
> From beginningless greed, hate and delusion,
> Born through body speech and mind,
> I now fully avow.

I first encountered this verse in an early Zen meditation retreat in the Spring of 1998. My first suspicious thought on hearing this was,

> "Oh, someone is trying to push the rebirth thing."

Now, at this time I viewed practice as a matter of how I meet the present, having little to do with past and future. Practice was for me like a new office job in which my task is to take documents, let's say insurance claims, mindfully one by one from the "in" box, process them and place the results in the "out" box, thereby remaining totally in the present, as I was told I was supposed to, but with the prospect of a future paycheck, as I was told was

forthcoming.

However, the next morning while we were once again intoning this verse, I discovered that my eyes had unaccountably teared up and that I had such a lump in my throat that it was difficult for me to croak along with the words, and every morning thereafter I had the same response. Somehow the meaning of this verse had struck me to the core. It felt as if my whole bungled karmic past, the mistakes I had made, the people I had hurt, the opportunities and energy I had squandered, were suddenly laid bare, and could be extended far back beyond memory into ancient times, as a cumulation of karmic results that now loomed menacingly and inescapably behind me, around me, and *in* me.

The outlook that emerged with my developing sense of karmic continuity was like learning from an office colleague that the person who had had my job processing insurance claims previously, had become so lazy and so woefully behind in his work that he had routinely taken handfuls of documents from the "in" box and stored them in the adjacent room for *eventual* processing. Looking in the adjacent room, I discovered an alarming backlog of boxes of unprocessed documents, along with bundles of still more documents tied together with twine, stacked up high, bundle on bundle, box on box and bundle on box. I recognized that there was suffering in the form of an unpaid claim in *each* of those pending documents. Dismay toward a bungled past brings with it an urgent sense of responsibility toward a still untainted future. I would have to put in many overtime hours on my shift to make sure these valid claims were paid.

Indeed, the quality of my Buddhist practice changed quickly and markedly after avowing my ancient twisted karma. Suddenly, rather than trying to sustain purity of mind moment by moment, I was engaged in a cosmic battle with terrible ancient twisted karmic forces that threatened the future, and, standing at the

gateway between past and present, I found myself boldly proclaiming, staff in hand,

> "You shall not pass!"

Did I now "believe" in rebirth? I could see that I was onto *something* very real, but did not feel compelled to analyze into any more specific terms.[87] This is the brilliance of taking seriously, but holding loosely. Perhaps practice will lead to further analysis, perhaps not. But, what the hell, it sure supercharged my practice. It endowed it with enormous meaning. It is in these terms that the Buddha addressed skeptics of rebirth, that is, in terms of human benefit, not in terms of "Only this is true; anything else is worthless." The Buddha gives us an example of an unskillful viewpoint:

> There are some contemplatives and brahmins who hold this doctrine, hold this view: "There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no brahmins or contemplatives who, faring rightly and practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next, after having directly known and realized it for themselves."[88]

This viewpoint denies karma and its fruits, the roles of giving and responsibility, refuge in the higher realization of others, and rebirth into another, hopefully more felicitous, world. The Buddha points out not that this viewpoint, whether true or false, is likely to condition the behavior of such contemplatives and brahmins in an unskillful way:

> It can be expected that … they will adopt and practice these three unskillful activities: bad bodily conduct, bad verbal conduct, bad mental conduct. Why is that? Because

> those venerable contemplatives and brahmins do not see, in unskillful activities, the drawbacks, the degradation, and the defilement; nor in skillful activities the benefit of renunciation, as cleansing.[89]

Here is the kicker: a person of this view cannot win, whether their view turns out to be true or false, in the end:

> Assume there is no other world, … This good person is still criticized in the here and now by the observant as a person of bad habits and wrong understanding: one who holds to a doctrine of non-existence. [On the other hand,] if there really is a next world, then this venerable person has made a bad throw twice: in that he is criticized by the observant here and now, and in that with the breakup of the body, after death he will be reborn in a plane of deprivation … Thus this incontrovertable teaching, when poorly grasped and poorly adopted by him, covers one side. He gives up the skillful option.[90]

Fundamentally, this describes a purely pragmatic condition for accepting one of two alternative viewpoints on the basis of a kind of cost-benefit analysis, or a means of covering one's bets, that by itself justifies its acceptance as a kind of working assumption. The Buddha makes a similar argument in the *Kalama Sutta*[91] with regard to realizing the fruits of karma in the next life. It is clear that he recommends that karma and rebirth be accepted as working assumptions by the skeptical, but is at the same time confident that their truth, which he endorses, will eventually be discovered and finally realized in the diligent practitioner's own experience. The practitioner may find the discovery is of something other than what she expected.

# Living in wisdom

The Buddha once said,

> The wise one established in virtue,
> Developing mental composure and wisdom,
> That ardent and prudent monk,
> It is he who disentangles his tangle.[92]

The practice of virtue straightens our emotional life, tames the greed and aversion that so poorly serve the well-being of ourselves and others. Yet the impulse for greed and aversion is held in place by delusion, our conceptual misunderstanding of the world in which we live. The practice of wisdom straightens our understanding of the world, removing the delusion that restricts our negotiation with the world. The passage above sees practice as a process of disentangling ourselves from the knotted mesh of our problematic, samsaric lives. Virtue loosens the grosser tangles and gives us space to deal with the tighter, thornier knots of delusion.

The practice of wisdom begins with right understanding and is perfected in mental composure. It starts with developing a conceptual grasp of the human condition, proceeds through the discovery of this condition in our own lived experience, and concludes with a full internalization of the Dharma. This is a matter of achieving “knowledge and vision of things as the really are,” the precursor to complete awakening.

### *Developing right understanding*

The process of development of right understanding is described as follows:

> The **stages of liberation**:
>
> (1) The Teacher or a fellow monk in the position of a teacher teaches the Dharma to a monk …
>
> (2) He himself teaches the Dharma to others in detail as he has heard it and learned it …
>
> (3) He recites the Dharma in detail as he has heard it and learned it …
>
> (4) He ponders, examines, and mentally inspects the Dharma as he has heard it and learned it …
>
> (5) He has grasped well a certain object of mental composure,[93] attended to it well, sustained it well, and penetrated it well with wisdom …[94]

This passage is quaint in that it emphasizes the rote memorization necessary in pre-literate India to access and preserve the Dharma. With modern access to written texts, we generally proceed more quickly to step four and then five, but then must jump repeatedly back as needed to the discourses and later works, as we mindfully observe and penetrate the manifestations of Dharma in our experience: our conceptualizations and attachments, the unending alighting and flight of phenomena around body and mind, the mesh of causality that entangles us in how we fabricate a sense of self and take it as real. Thereby, Dharma develops from scripture to something integrated into a wide fabric of experience, to something internalized beyond the conceptual to the point that we effectively perceive through the eyes of the Buddha.[95]

A birdwatcher goes through a similar process, as does the student of many a multifaceted craft: She begins with reading or

consulting *the Peterson Field Guide* with its invaluable sketches, descriptions and seasonal distribution maps, tries to remember colors, markings, behavioral patterns and calls, then she brings her understanding attentively to mind as she observes alightings and flights around feeder and bush. The more she engages in her hobby, the more her understanding is refined, and integrated with her knowledge of local landscape and flora. With time much of her understanding becomes internalized as a matter of direct perception of the feathery realm such that she need but catch the slightest motion and glimpse of a tail in order to identify in an instant, without thought, "Oh, a Carolina chickadee!" Effectively, she has learned to see through the eyes of Roger Tory Peterson.

Mindfulness is instrumental at each stage of liberation as we repeatedly bring the Dharma to mind through these various stages. Where mindfulness and ardency are applied to a wholesome practice task and distractions are put aside, we expect mental composure to arise, given that that is the case for virtue, refuge and general mindfulness. Indeed, this generalizes to developing right understanding as well. The full passage for each of the five stages cited above concludes identically with the now familiar causal chain "delight → tranquility → mental composure":

> In whatever way …, he experiences inspiration in the meaning and inspiration in the Dharma. As he does so, joy arises in him. When he is joyful, delight arises. For one with a delighted mind, the body becomes tranquil. One tranquil in body feels pleasure. For one feeling pleasure, the mind becomes composed. This is the first [second, etc.] stage of liberation, … [96]

It often goes unacknowledged in modern circles that recitation can be an integral part of mental composure practice. The special and most contemplative last stage of liberation, in which mental composure is mentioned up front as with respect to an "object of

mental composure," will be considered in more detail below.[97]

In this chapter we take up Dharma, how Dharma relates to lived experience and how we internalize Dharma. This is a huge topic and the primary concern of the Buddha's most profound teachings. We will provide only an overview of this topic in this short chapter, but hopefully reveal the general logic of the Buddha's approach.

### *Understanding experience*

> *The first rays of sunlight against my eyelids. A cold sensation against my cheek and I know my dog is there trying to wake me up. Clinking sounds and I know family members are already in the kitchen making breakfast. I open my eyes and it comes back to me: I was arrested last night for drunken and disorderly conduct. The cold sensation is a metal bar I rolled into in my bed and the clinking sound is the sheriff opening my cell.*

I had fabricated a false reality and taken it to be true. We've talked about greed and aversion and how they inspire unskillful actions, but delusion is a bit more illusive because, as a rule, we do not see our delusions; that's what makes them delusions. Delusions are a quality of experience, in which what we are experiencing fails to reach how things really are. The problem for us is that we then behave on the basis of our delusions, often in very unskillful and harmful ways. So, how do we recognize our delusions? (1) We can observe ourselves fabricating them cognitively. (2) We can notice inconsistencies between different things we think we know. (3) We can notice that there are alternative ways of interpreting what we think we know.

What we *cannot* do is to directly compare what we experience as true with reality itself, that is with the objective world "out there" as it exists before we experience it, for we do not have any access

to the world "out there" independently of what we fabricate in our own experience, with all of its delusions. This might not be obvious, because it sure *seems* that we have direct access to the world "out there" – chair, keyboard, window, dog – but that is part of the delusion. Here is a modern argument that this is so: Let's assume the brain is implicated in the arising of experience. Consider that the brain sits in the skull in total darkness and total silence, communicating with the world "out there" through neural impulses originating the retina, the ear-drum, etc. This raw data must be interpreted to reproduce the complete experience of the world "out there." Therefore, everything we experience as real is in fact fabricated, and potentially delusive.[98] For the Buddha,

> Mind precedes all phenomena. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-made.[99]

We can understand "phenomena" as follows, lest we deny that there actually is a world out there beyond experience:

> A **phenomenon** is an event, object or other factor as it occurs in experience.[100]

Examples of phenomena are urges, feelings, ideas, plans, attention, imaginings, but also those things that we tend to privilege in our experience with separate existence "out there," like tables, chairs, our bodies, our loved ones, our cars, our selves.

Our delusions are also phenomena, and they arise in cognitive dependence on other phenomena. When we think there is an objective world "out there," that is just another phenomenon. Phenomena form a kind of close system, and, in fact, the Buddha uses the word "world" in this specific sense:

> **The world** is the totality of phenomena, all that we experience.[101]

It is important, lest we become confused in our study of the Dharma, to recognize this strongly subjective orientation of the

early Dharma. For the Buddha,

> In this fathom-long living body, along with its perceptions and thoughts, lies the world, the arising of the world, and the cessation of the world.[102]

At the same time, this orientation grounds the Dharma and our practice empirically in what we can directly experience.[103]

In our delusion we fabricate the world as we experience it, then convince ourselves that this world is real and then behave according to what we think is real, thereby keeping us entangled in the samsaric condition. With right understanding we question our fabrications and thereby learn how we can disentangle ourselves from our fabrications. It is in the phenomenal world that we suffer, it is here that we practice and it is here that we awaken.

### *All things are contingent*

The phenomenal world – and we might presume the world "out there" as well – is for the Buddha strictly subject to cause and effect. Phenomena arise from causes and conditions and, in turn, constitute causes and conditions for the arising of other phenomena:

> **Conditionality**,[*104*] or cause and effect, is the relation between two phenomena when the arising or cessation of one is contingent on the arising or cessation of the other.

In the early texts, this is standardly expressed as follows:

> When this is, that is,
> From the arising of this comes the arising of that.
> When this isn't, that isn't.
> From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.[105]

It is this simple insight that allowed the Buddha to crack open our

deluded and persistent misperception of the world to reveal clearly how we entangle ourselves in samsara. It should be appreciated that conditionality makes all elements of experience contingent on other elements, since a given element is both effect of other elements and conditions for other elements. Conditionality, for the Buddha, is taken as a universal principle, rippling through chains of causality keeping the world in constant flux. Nothing happens of itself, but only through conditions, and there is no first condition to anything. Everything, arising in this way, is unsubstantial and contingent. This is "nature" without artifice.

The most prominent example of conditionality in all of the Dharma is the second noble truth, which is stated here a bit differently than before:

> And this, monks is the noble truth of the origination of suffering: the craving that makes for further becoming – accompanied by passion and delight, relishing now here and now there, i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for becoming other.[106]

This can be abbreviated as "craving → suffering."

Here is where the appeal to conditionality gets clever: If we understand *what* things arise from *what* conditions, this gives us the opportunity to engineer more desirable outcomes by tracing back chains of conditionality to factors we are better able to steer. To take a concrete example of this principle, we cannot extinguish a fire directly nor make it burn more brightly, but we can achieve the desired outcome if we understand the conditions that give rise to fire: heat, oxygen and fuel, for each of these *can* be directly manipulated. Dousing the fire with water deprives it of oxygen and reduces its temperature. Throwing another log on gives it more fuel. Blowing on the fire may give it more oxygen but also reduces its temperature. All of our experience is subject to similar considerations.

The recourse to conditionality allows us, through Buddhist practice, to bring the fires of suffering under control by controlling their conditions, such as craving. If we cannot will craving to end we look for the conditions of craving in turn, and then try to control *those*, and so on. Origination of undesirable factors is thereby matched with their desirable cessation, as in the third noble truth:

> And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: the remainderless fading and cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, and letting go of that very craving.[107]

If we don't know how to manipulate craving directly, we can inquire as to *its* conditions, and so on.

Although every factor of experience – or of the world "out there" – is highly contingent and in flux, we often experience the world "out there" unreliably as more permanent, more pleasurable, more personalized and more beautiful than things really are. We fabricate this, in our delusion, as a world of rather fixed things, then become attached to them, and then suffer as a consequence. Our own self is the primary example. As we come to live in wisdom, striving for personal advantage does not even make sense, and "me" disappears into nature, that is, into the flux.

With this in mind, the Buddha asks us always to keep in mind the three qualities characteristic of all conditioned phenomena:

**Impermanence** is the quality of being in flux, born from conditions and also dying with conditions.

Impermanence applies, of course, to thoughts, to feelings, and so on, but also to what is "out there": to the food we buy, to our furniture, to our car, to our own bodies, even to mountains. Impermanence entails that everything and everyone we cherish will be lost to us one by one … until the ones that remain lose us. The world is slipping by like sand through our fingers. There is

no “happy ever after” with regard to the things or people of the world.

**Suffering** is conditioned by craving, the craving that causes us to attach to the things of the world. But because these are in flux, we cannot find lasting satisfaction in them.

Our conceptual experiences simply do not keep pace with the unfolding of the world “out there.” Because things are impermanent, when we seek gratification in something fixed, we forget that samsaric life has been a continual series of broken promises. That which is craved causes us suffering because we cannot rely on it. If we've lost what we cherish, we suffer. If we still have it, we are anxious that we will lose it.

**Non-self** questions the view that there is something substantial and lasting that we call “me.” We will never find such a thing.

If we fully integrate this teaching, we never have to take anything personally, but rather simply as the unfolding of nature. In the meantime, we fabricate a sense of self from the attachments that we appropriate as “me” and “mine,” such as body, fortune, family and bowling championship. But what we think is more-or-less fixed will really turn out to be impermanent, and if we attach to it anyway, it will just be a source of suffering. If it is impermanent and a source of suffering we wouldn't want it to be our self anyway. Yuck.

Contemplating impermanence, suffering and non-self reveals the false premises that underlie much of the world as we have grown to know it. As an empirical matter, these three qualities win all debates, yet we find it perplexingly easy to overlook them. The three qualities remind us that all objects, even if we are convinced they exist “out there,” are by nature unreliable, and explain why they cause us distress when we have a stake in them or try to identify with them.

> In whatever way they imagine, thereby it turns otherwise.[108]

These reflections aim at the fading of passion:[109] Our infatuations are over things that are too hot too handle, things that are not what they promise. It is important to recognize that a meaningful life lies elsewhere.

### *Unsubstantiality*

The three qualities of impermanence, suffering and non-self remind us of the primary human absurdity, that we fabricate the world "out there" in our own minds in a certain way, then we take it seriously as something real and substantial, then we become infatuated with its objects, and then we crave them, much like Pygmalion of Greek legend. We generally don't see this, for we are convinced that we have immediate and effortless access to the world "out there," which is there even if no one is experiencing it at the moment, that we need do nothing to experience it except to show up. But thinking this is just another experience, one that the mind fabricates.

To better see the unreliability of our experience of the world "out there" we can develop our awareness of the process of fabrication as we engage in it, instead of simply taking the world "out there" seriously. To do this the Buddha suggests that we segment our experiences into five categories:

> The **five aggregates** serve to classify phenomena according to epistemic or cognitive faculties of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.[110]

Keeping the five aggregates in mind reminds us that we are, at each step, observing experiences that are mentally conditioned – as in "mind precedes all phenomena" – not some independent world "out there."

A **form** is raw sense data, such as shapes and colors, noise, odors, something that impinges on experience, as if from the outside.

A **feeling** is an affective tone of experience, particularly where it falls on the like-dislike scale.

A **perception** is a recognition of familiarity as an exemplar of something recollected. It typically gives something a name.

A **formation** is a conditioned composite of phenomena, such as gadgets, impulses, patterns, analyses, plans. It entails choice and so includes karmic activities.

An instance of **consciousness** is a movement of mind, including qualities like focus and attention, with consistent reference to things outside of itself (we are conscious *of* something).

The aggregates thereby break experience into five categories of ascending cognitive complexity. In fact, these categories are not discrete, but often highlight different facets of the same phenomena. For instance, nothing we experience can be totally independent of consciousness. Moreover, everything we perceive is a formation, which is to say, fabricated; an instance of consciousness is also a formation. Incidentally, an instance of consciousness, like most phenomena, simply arises in one moment and is gone in the next. This is by way of correcting the tendency to view consciousness as something fixed, or even to view consciousness as "me," the experiencer.

When we take the world "out there" seriously, we take it as real and begin to "attach" to the things we find there as "me" and "mine," which further entangles us in samsara, as we will see shortly. Mindful of the mental component of all phenomena, we are less apt to take the world "out there" seriously, not attach to its things. The Buddha brings this unskillful tendency to a head in an extremely clever way by intersecting two rather contrary

categories:

**Aggregates of attachment**[111] are cognitively/epistemically classified phenomena which we appropriate as me or mine.

Normally we attach to things, that is appropriate or identify with them, because we think they exist "out there." But we cannot attach to what we don't experience and therefore they are of the phenomenal world. When we classify them or their various attractions mentally, the result is that we see, as in shoddy merchandise, the cognitive seams left from the fabrication of our most cherished things of world "out there." We are furthermore asked to consider, as if to drive this point home, "this is not me, this is not mine, this is not of me, I am not of this."[112]

In this way we begin to pull back from fabricating a world "out there," eventually failing to see things as real, given, fixed or existing in themselves. This process is consummated through right mental composure, which alters temporarily our cognitive faculties themselves. As we learn to fabricate less and we learn to experience "things" as "empty" of substantial existence.

**Emptiness** is the experience of a phenomenon as lacking substantial existence, or a self or anything that pertains to a self.

In emptiness there is nothing specific "out there" to cling to.

### *The role of the senses*

Without the sense faculties – eye, ear, nose, tongue and body (touch) – we would fail to experience a world "out there." But wait: even if the five senses were cut off, we would still experience a world "in here," wouldn't we? Yes! That is why in Buddhism, rather than just the five physical senses, we also have a sixth, mind sense through which we experience our inner thoughts and emotions, mental processes, dreams and so on.

Accordingly we array the world as follows:

> The **sixfold sphere**[113] arrays phenomena as conditioned by one of the six sense faculties.

For instance, in the eye sphere we have:

> eye, form, eye consciousness, eye contact and whatever arises with eye contact as a condition.[114]

Form is the object "out there" of sight that falls on the eye from which eye consciousness arises ("form + eye → eye consciousness"). This event is called "contact," and once contact occurs, a series of factors dependent on contact arise in relation to the form imputed to exist "out there": feeling about it, craving it, thinking about it and so on. This passage is repeated with respect to the other five senses as well. The six spheres thereby highlight the senses as the initiators of experience in the causal network constituting our samsaric condition:

> In the six the world has arisen,
> In the six it holds concourse.
> On the six themselves depending,
> In the six it has woes.[115]

The sixfold sphere serves much of the same function as the aggregates, in reminding us of the internal origins of our experiential world. Also, it points a way to control our experience at will: We "guard the senses" when we simply look the other way, for instance, to avoid lust. The sense of self generally originates in the bifurcation implied by contact along with the conviction that there is an "out there."

> The *eye* is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world. [similarly: … *ear* … *nose* …, etc.][116]

Accordingly, we train to see the eye, etc. as impermanent,

suffering and not-self, as empty.

### *Dependent co-arising.*

Although conditionality is described as a relation between a phenomenon and its cause or its set of conditions, when scaled up into a network of such relations, the resulting system can exhibit a quite complex dynamic, which can be difficult to track, with many loops and collateral effects.

> **Dependent co-arising** is the arising of a *network* of phenomena together, through multiple relations of conditionality among those phenomena.[117]

On the other hand, for expository clarity, the early Buddhist texts speak of linear chains of dependent co-arising, in order to attribute a single condition to a single effect, even when, properly speaking, any single factor virtually always has multiple conditions, as we saw with fire, as well as multiple effects. Accordingly, there are many references to linear causal chains of this kind in early Buddhism, each of which should really be understood as a thread through a dense causal net of contingency.

Most often, "dependent co-arising" is used to refer to one specific causal chain, which we will call "the standard chain," of twelve links as follows:

> ignorance → formations → consciousness →
> name-and-form → sixfold-sphere → contact →
> feeling → craving → attachment → becoming →
> birth → this mass of suffering

A thin thread through the dense snarl of conditionality, this particular chain wends its way through the center of Buddhist psychology, in which it exposes the arising step-by-step of the near-universal pathology that characterizes the human condition. The chain not only describes the arising of the human pathology,

but also what we do about it: our practice is directed at weakening or breaking its various problematic links until the entire chain ceases to function. A given link might cease much like a fire ceases when deprived of one of its conditions, such as fuel. The practice of the noble eightfold path weakens all links, a kind of universal elixir for all that ails us. The removal of ignorance, as the first link, results in the utter breakdown of the entire chain, which is to say that a complete *understanding* of what, in our phenomenal world, ails us and why, suffices to liberate us from our woes.

The links from ignorance to contact have to do with how we mistakenly conceptualize the world, that is, have to do with delusion. The links from feeling to attachment have to do with how we respond emotionally to what we have conceptualized and taken seriously, particularly with greed and aversion. The links from becoming to this entire mass of suffering have to do with how we consolidate a full personal identity, thus compounding our delusion, then perpetuate that identity into future lives.

The chain of dependent co-arising above is deceptively simple. When we actually understand the various factors involved, each of which the Buddha describes in many discourses, we find that their dynamics is quite complex, with many branches, loops and overlapping instantiations of the chain, conditioned by which the illusory sense of personal identity in all of its contingent complexity emerges. The Buddha, in describing this chain, presented us with a most profound model of the common, dysfunctional mind. Having revealed something of its logic and its method of disrupting that causal chain, we do not have room, in this brief introduction, for the details of this far-reaching teaching.[118] There is a lot to track here, but – hey – we've got lifetimes to do it.

### *The art of investigation*

The last two "stages of liberation" through which we develop right understanding turn to detailed examination of Dharma and to bringing this contemplation into mental composure finally to penetrate it with wisdom. A well-known teaching describes this process in detail as a causal chain beginning with mindfulness:

> The **seven factors of awakening**[119] are the following causal sequence describing a process that produces insight:
>
> (1) Mindfulness.
>
> (2) Investigation of phenomena.
>
> (3) Energy.
>
> (4) Delight.
>
> (5) Tranquility.
>
> (6) Mental composure.
>
> (7) Equanimity.

The first three of these factors correspond to mindful observation described in the first chapter. "Mindfulness" is the entry point of Dharma. "Investigation" is observation itself, along with "clear comprehension." Energy is "ardency" and non-distraction. "Investigation of *phenomena*" is specifically the *fourth* practice of mindful observation, that is, "observing phenomena in phenomena," the practice most focused on internalizing the Dharma.

We note further that we actually began investigation of phenomena in exactly this way in the development of purity, two chapters ago. What we report here extends that practice to our conceptualization of the world. In either case, we begin by selecting a topic of Dharma and let mindfulness of that topic attend to phenomena as they arise. Dharma thereby drives our interpretation of phenomena arising in experience, in order to

deepen our ability to fully comprehend that experience. Topics listed in the Pali texts[120] include the five hindrances,[121] the five aggregates, the six-fold sphere, the seven awakening factors (which we are in the middle of discussing) and the four noble truths.[122] It is clear that the scope of this fourth task is also quite extensive, encompassing all aspects of the phenomenal world touched on by Dharma,[123] such as those around the twelve links in the standard chain of dependent co-arising.

The next three factors of awakening – delight, tranquility and mental composure – form a series that should by now be familiar to the reader. It is the natural progression of factors that arise when we are mindfully inhabiting a wholesome practice task with undistracted mind. The final factor, equanimity, is characteristic of the highest stage of mental composure.[124] This is a state of impartiality, beyond like and dislike, which is particularly conducive to wisdom, and ultimately to awakening.

At this juncture we need to say more about mental composure and how it is used in investigation. In Buddhism, we can distinguish three primary functions of right mental composure:

- pleasurable abiding,
- mental attenuation, and
- clarity.

Pleasurable abiding is a karmic fruit that we enjoy when we are engaged in wholesome practice. The other two are involved in gaining wisdom. Mental attenuation (my term) occurs as we enter greater levels of mental composure. Mental composure progresses through four levels:

> The **first**, **second**, **third** and **fourth meditations**, aka **jhanas**, are four progressive stages of greater mental composure.[125]

Equanimity is actually associated with the fourth meditation.

Each meditation proceeds from the previous meditation by losing its most energetic factor(s). Briefly, the first meditation retains all of the awakening factors prior to mental composure and also still permits discursive thought in the process of investigation. The second meditation loses the capacity of discursive thought, such that the Buddha has called it "noble silence," although examination continues at a receptive level through all of the meditations. The third meditation loses the excitement of delight, settling into simple contented pleasure. The fourth meditation loses even this.[126]

As we enter deeper meditations certain mental faculties are attenuated or cease altogether, for instance perception or conceptualization, and our experiential world – including the world "out there," since it is fabricated – shifts markedly. This attenuation allows us to explore from a different angle the dependence of all phenomena on mind and thereby gain a better sense of the fabricated nature of the world. We can even steer this process into higher realizations, to see reality as infinite space, infinite consciousness or voidness.

Higher levels of mental composure also provide clarity, that is, more immediacy of vision as we continue the process of investigation in a decreasingly conceptually laden context.

> Just as if there were a pool of water in a mountain glen – clear, limpid, and unsullied – where a man with good eyesight standing on the bank could see shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also shoals of fish swimming about and resting, … In the same way – with his mind thus composed, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability – the monk directs and inclines it to the knowledge of the ending of the mental fermentations [basic unskillful qualities].[127]

By establishing mindfulness with regard to key experiential factors, we can fully internalize the teachings about these factors to the point that they become part of our perceptual apparatus.[128] Our right understanding is honed, polished, fine-tuned and distilled, until we begin to behold the phenomenal world through the very eyes of the Buddha. The result is to see things as they really are. Once we see things as they really are, and we see how we create our world and thereby our own suffering, we begin to drop our attachments like hot fritters, and this leads to our liberation.

### *Knowledge, vision and liberation*

Most of the knowledge a master potter possesses has come from actually working with the clay, and is found in his fingers not in his head. Or consider the knowledge we put to use in riding a bicycle, for which we were initially told, "To go forward, turn the pedals in *that* direction, to turn right, move the handlebars in *this* direction," but then for which we learn to maintain our balance, etc. inexplicably by "feel," that is, through practice rather than through thinking about it. Buddhist practice is also like this: the role of right understanding becomes refined as intimacy grows with our own experience, to be replaced or supplemented by a "feel" for the workings of the mind. This deeper knowledge, also known as wisdom, lies for the most part beyond the limits of conceptual understanding and will unfold with the experience of practice.

> **Knowledge and vision of things as they really are**[129] is a clear, immediate and intuitive right understanding of the phenomenal world which minimizes delusive fabrication.

In fact, it would seem that such perception is the farthest extent of mindful observation, since it involves bringing past experience to bear on the interpretation of present phenomena in a spontaneous way. As this learning process concludes, we begin,

as it has been said, to think *with* the teachings rather than *about* them, or "to see with the Buddha's spectacles."[130] At this point we can be said to live fully in wisdom, and give this chapter its title. There can be no striving, for there is no "me" for whose advantage it might strive, there is only nature.

If we put our hand on a hot stove we are not likely to repeat that experience. Samsara is too hot to handle, but most of us fail to see where it is exactly that we are putting our hand when we feel the pain, and, as a result, we repeat that experience, and have been doing so from beginningless time. When we know and see things as they really are, then we see where the pain is coming from, and this initiates disenchantment and dispassion. Ignorance comes to an end, and we let go. When we let go of everything, this is liberation. With the end of ignorance, the entire chain of dependent co-arising ceases, including craving and thereby suffering, and including (re)birth. This is awakening.[131]

> Seeing thus, a well taught noble disciple becomes disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with formations, disenchanted with consciousness. Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion [his mind] is liberated. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: "It is liberated." He understands: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of becoming."[132]

# Living in the midst

Living in mindulness, we tend to lose “me” in the task at hand. Living in virtue, to the extent we attain purity, we lose “me” in concern for the well-being of all. Living in wisdom, “me” disappears into nature. Living in devotion, we lose “me” in the practice itself. But how do we *not* lose mindfulness, virtue, wisdom and devotion in the midst of the chaos and contingencies of normal worldly life?

Setting out on the Buddhist path is like taking a hike with a large and very mixed group of people of every age, state of health, type of footwear, backpack size, degree of inebriation, and so on. Such a group will spread out along the path, with the strongest, healthiest, hiking-booted, light-backpacked, boldest, most persistent and most enterprising leading the way. In the middle there might be a mutually infatuated teenage couple that keeps up in spurts, but keeps getting side-tracked and disappearing from the path and returning with ruffled hair, some chubby middle-aged people who huff and puff, along with some fit but ancient birdwatchers. Falling way back are parents and their little kids who “cannot walk another step,” a couple of people sitting on a rock drinking beer, an elderly gentleman watching fire ants devour his cane, and a lady who broke a heal upon encountering her first rock.

Similarly, Buddhists – all intent on losing themselves in nature – come with different levels of enthusiasm, aptitude and opportunity, bring with them different forms of worldly baggage

and choose among different forms of practice, ofttimes inspired by the accomplishments of the leaders, and tales of views from lofty heights. At the beginning of the path are those who add a practice or two piecemeal into already busy lives. This is where most of us start who come to Buddhism later in life. At the higher end of the path are those whose entire lives are practice, for the depth of the Dharma comprehends all aspects of life. This is held as an ideal necessary to reach the highest levels of awakening. This chapter is concerned with how we move as far up the path as possible in the midst of our busy lives, that is, it asks how we view, plan and arrange our lives to provide the optimal conditions for the Buddhist in us to grow and flourish with time.

### *The tribulations of the "Sunday morning" Buddhist*

As we start out, we typically add a Buddhist practice or two to our busy lives to the "externals," that is, to all our non-Buddhist responsibilities, values, pursuits and so on, which we leave intact. Typical modern, and valid, ways to enter Buddhist practice are through mindfulness-based meditation, through devotional practices and through reading inspirational texts. Each of these specialized practices quickly provides an inspiring sense of bright and sunny satisfaction and calm, encourages further practice, is rather modular in relation to externals, and demands moderate time and effort.

However, this kind of specialized practice has severe limitations, for a couple of reasons: First, we have learned that everything we do throughout the day, even if we do not consider it to be particularly Buddhist, even if we do not consider ourselves to be particularly Buddhist, bears on practice, either as right practice or as wrong practice, whether we are aware of it or not, for we are the heirs of our karma, of *all* of our deeds. Second, each of these practices is fundamentally a support for the rest of Dharma practice. Mindfulness, for instance, is a powerful multi-purpose

faculty whose full power comes from how it is applied. Certainly, this practice cannot become substantially fulfilled except in service of ethics, right view and refuge, generally somewhat neglected in specialized meditation. Mindfulness without Dharma develops as a powerful all-purpose faculty, but with limited content to be mindful of.

The result of this dedication to a single-practitice is that practice integrates poorly with the externals of life, and practitioners find themselves thrashing between two modes of being, one rife with stress, striving and conflict, and the other calm, uplifting, and affording temporary relief from the other mode of life. The practitioner begins to view meditation as a lifeline to something sane in her life, and develops a strong attachment to the chosen means of practice,[133] all the while frustrated with overall progress. This is much like the knitter of chapter one who watches his partially finished sweater unravel through most of the day.

With attachment often comes dogmatic and self-involved adherence to one's chose practice as “true Buddhism.” In fact, whole schools of Buddhism have developed around such narrow understandings of both meditation and devotional practices.[134] Mindfulness-based meditation,[135] for instance, is often touted as a complete path in itself that leads with no additional effort to stronger ethical behavior, better relations, greater wisdom, happiness and eventually awakening, all possible in the midst of a busy life! Although this single practice provides many benefits and turns quickly to trust and devotion, I have yet to see in others the more profound behavioral shifts generally promised, even in the most dedicated practitioners, without significant changes to other aspects of meditator's lives.

Although we are likely to begin focused on a single practice, it is important not to set limits on our practice, but rather to maintain a more inclusive view of practice, then where possible, to try to expand the scope of practice ever further, even while remaining

centered in a single practice. The rest of this chapter is about overcoming limits in a practical way in order to integrate practice more thoroughly into our lives in the midst of the externals and to bring as many aspects of our lives as possible into closer alignment with Buddhist practice and understanding so that we might progress more rapidly toward awakening.

### *Being mindful throughout the day*

Both mindfulness and devotion are kinds of infrastructure in that, like a road or like the Internet, their purpose is in the content they convey, and also their usefulness generalizes beyond Buddhist practice. Mindfulness can be brought to bear on the most mundane tasks throughout the day: preparing meals, repairing the car, caring for children, walking to the mail box. Simply knowing what your task is, keeping your mind there and doing it competently not only trains our faculty of general mindfulness, which we put to good use in Buddhist practice, but facilitates a satisfaction, depth of experience and proficiency that otherwise remains elusive in everyday life. It also requires no additional time commitment, is strengthened by our on-the-cushion practice, which greatly magnifies our capacity for retaining mindfulness throughout the day. Moreover, a sense of general uprightness ensues that can be developed as we keep in mind the values enumerated in right intention: renunciation, kindness and harmlessness, as guides in all of our daily activities. We will further consider devotion in similar terms below.

### *Overcoming cultural limits*

Everyone wishes for a unifying philosophy of life, lest life become fragmented and aimless, one that goes beyond satisfying self-serving urges.[136] Unfortunately, we tend to put unnatural limits on what is acceptable to us in Buddhist practice. This is hardly surprising, for entering the Buddha way is, particularly for

the modern person, to enter an unfamiliar land with unfamiliar customs and ways of looking at things. There are many teachings of early Buddhism – and still alive in Asian traditions – that raise more than a few eyebrows, for instance rebirth, ritual, the monastic institution, awakening, transcendence of samsara, heavenly realms and renunciation. Understanding the value of these teachings requires a wide-open mind and often a willingness to reconsider our own tacit presuppositions, which are artifacts of our own culture that we often don't know we have. Sometimes what we attribute to “common sense”[137] actually has complex origins in the history of western thought – in Protestant Christianity, in the European Enlightenment, in European Romanticism, in psychotherapy, in modern consumer culture – that have limited alternative ways of thinking.[138]

In fact, there is a strong tendency for modern Buddhists, upon encountering a novel teaching, simply to attribute it to Asian “cultural baggage,” thereby dismissing it from the purview of Dharma.[139] This strategy is problematic because, as we have seen, for the Buddha each teaching serves some function that reveals itself in how we practice, and therefore our practice may be rendered critically incomplete if we leave something out. We should hope that we could rather let Buddhism be Buddhism and try to comprehend the system as a whole, lest our holistic perspective be compromised. The problem here has an analogy in anthropology, in which the challenge is to analyze an exotic culture in its own terms without pretentiously imposing our own modern values and interpretations from the outset. The method applied there entails withhold one's own views about whatever inscrutable elements emerge, a process sometimes called “bracketing.”

Bracketing is somehow what I did spontaneously when I first took rebirth seriously, as described two chapters ago. Even if rebirth makes no sense to us, we can nonetheless continue to

explore how it relates to other aspects of Dharma and has implications for practice, understand better the cultural context in which it does make sense, and understand the influence of our own tacit assumptions according to which it does not make sense. This gives us a lot of wiggle room for eventually integrating this teaching seriously.[140] How we ultimately understand the teaching may never be the same as an ancient Indian understanding, yet can still serve much the same function. It is always helpful to ask from the beginning, "Why did the Buddha teach this?" before we ask, "Is this true?" In this way we start from the perspective of Dharma rather than of our own preconceptions, and sustain a curious, questioning mind.

As we bracket aspects of Dharma, we should keep in mind the point made with regard to taking seriously but holding loosely: Our concern is not to be able to say, "Only this is true; anything else is worthless." Rather it is to practice skillfully, that is, beneficially. Now, it also turns out that we are all quite adept at bracketing, which is what holding a working assumption is all about. Let's call a tightly held assumption or belief a "viewpoint," and call an "outlook" that which informs one's actual behavior as a basis of one's everyday decisions in life. We all routinely hold both, even when they clearly contradict each other. For instance:

A Skinnerian behavioral psychologist might believe (*viewpoint*), in the lab or in the classroom, that human mental states are not real, yet shouts out encouraging motivational words (*outlook*) to his teenage son as he plays on the school football team, or consoles his little daughter after the dog scarfs down her pizza.

One might sincerely believe that physical death is the end of consciousness (*viewpoint*), and yet one treats the remains of one's newly deceased loved ones with great care and respect, having their rotting remains arranged to produce a pretense of peace and comfort (*outlook*).

Many believe that the universe is entirely material, simply playing itself out mechanically and deterministically (*viewpoint*). Yet *none* of us knows how to live in such a world! As Isaac Bashevis Singer put it, "You have to believe in free will. You have no choice."[141] Free will is a universal outlook even of those of entirely contrary viewpoint.

How many readers talk to your dog or cat (*outlook*)? How much do you think they understand (*viewpoint*)? I personally even talk to squirrels, frogs and bugs.

There is physically nothing more to money than 1's and 0's in computer memory or markings on pieces of paper or metal (*viewpoint*), and yet we behave as if it is something of substantial value (*outlook*) is present and count on others to do the same, with remarkably practical results.[142]

In brief, loosen up! What is surprising about Buddhism is how thin metaphysical assumptions actually are in the early Buddhist texts. Our presuppositions *will* be challenged repeatedly, but not so much by contrary Buddhist viewpoints, as by the Buddha's record of undermining *all* viewpoints as illusory and empty of substance.

### *Right livelihood*

What we do for a living is likely to be a particularly significant influence on our practice. For instance, if we interact with customers for a living, we may be required, as a condition of employment, to stretch the truth a bit – "That dress looks, uh, *great* on you" – or to cook the books, to set mouse traps and so on.

Right livelihood is the fifth factor of the noble eightfold path. For most of us livelihood is the central extra-Buddhist obligation of our lives. We obligate ourselves to fulfilling a livelihood in order to sustain our life style, to feed our family or to be able to afford

opera tickets, fine cuisine and a luxury car, or to pay off a student debt, or to realize other values or pursuits. The Buddha warns us to beware:

> A lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in human beings, business in meat, business in intoxicants, and business in poison.[143]

Elsewhere he recommends:

> And what, monks, is a wrong mode of livelihood? Trickery, cajolery, insinuating, dissembling, rapacity for gain upon gain.[144]

These sound embarrassingly like modern job descriptions. I myself used to be employed in R&D under U.S. Defense Department contracts. When I took up Buddhist practice and study, I saw I was probably contributing to weapons systems and this ended up being a major factor for me in ending my high-paid, high-tech corporate career in favor of what I do now.

Unfortunately, the modern economy often offers few wholesome choices for the job hunter living under normal constraints. The radical redirecting of my own career path would have been extremely difficult if I were not at a point in life in which my family obligations were loosening up. If I wasn't designing weapons systems, I might have been working in marketing, trying to convince the public that ingesting some horrid concoction of petrochemicals, high fructose corn syrup and saturated fats will add zest to their lives. Alarmingly, large modern enterprises typically distribute decisions in such a way that obscure personal ethical responsibility, and workers who are compensated through wages have little control over the products of their labor.[145]

A **wrong livelihood** is one that obligates us to unethical or

> other behaviors inconsistent with Dharma, particularly by breaking precepts: killing, stealing, lying and so on.

This raises two important questions: If our livelihood requires that we kill, for instance, (1) are *we* really the ones harming others and (2) do *we* suffer karmic results, that is, does this impair the well-being and development of *our* minds? After all, the killing is our boss's decision, and if we were not there to act out his orders, wouldn't someone else be called on to do so instead? The Buddhist answer is much like the decision of the Nuremberg Trial: We are not off the hook, orders are not just orders, we are the heir of our own deeds. In a recent documentary on the health insurance industry in America[146] a woman was interviewed whose job is was to deny insurance policies for preexisting conditions. She was visibly upset, almost in tears, when she asserted, “When someone comes in, I don't want to be friendly, I don't want to know them, I try just to look at their application.” Now imagine how that will bend her character over five, ten, fifteen, thirty years. Her livelihood was plainly taking a karmic toll on her already. That is the kind of thing that makes wrong livelihood a detriment to practice.

This raises also the question of motivation in livelihood, aside from the pay check. Some people love their livelihood to the extent that they would engage in its activities even with little pay. Some scientists or historians are like this, some artists or actors, many craftspeople and horse breeders. These people are lucky, for they inhabit their livelihood, that is, they engage in their life's work devoutly for the sake of their life's work itself, not as a way, or only incidentally as a way, of getting something out of it. This is healthier from the Buddhist perspective, as we have seen, because greed and fear, and its concomitants like ego-involvement, are minimized. Moreover, such people are likely mindful of standards and very proficient, and enjoy satisfaction and well-being in their work. They are also likely to be quite successful without the distraction of striving for external goals.

It is noteworthy that the Buddha, in advising laypeople concerning livelihood, repeatedly puts emphasis on the way we inhabit our work, on carrying it out in an upright, responsible and harmless way, on diligence, on proficiency and on protecting the results of our labor, rather than on getting rich. In the *Mangala Sutta* (*Blessings Discourse*) he extols "much learning and handicraft"[147] as among the highest blessings. Elsewhere, he also states,

> What is the accomplishment of persistent effort? Herein … by whatsoever activity a householder earns his living — whether by farming, by trading, by rearing cattle, by archery, by service under the king, or by any other kind of craft — at that he becomes skillful and is not lazy. He is endowed with the power of discernment as to the proper ways and means; he is able to carry out and allocate (duties). This is called the accomplishment of persistent effort.[148]

This is to work mindfully and to put aside striving. Unfortunately, most of us find little satisfaction in our livelihoods beyond pay, and are kept in a relentless state of insecurity, either because we do not earn enough to support ourselves or our families, or because we are under constant threat of being fired or otherwise exploited. Even the affluent can feel that they are in a perpetual state of desperation when their wealth is threatened or fails to support their status. Such desperation is experienced as poverty, even in the midst of splendor, and is ethically compromising, making greed, aversion and delusion a matter of necessity. Such a condition provides little basis for spiritual progress. That so many are forced to live under such conditions is a strong indictment about the health of our society.

### *Simplicity*

In a favorite story from the *suttas*, an older monk was often heard by other monks to exclaim, "What bliss, what bliss!" Since he had, as a layman, been a king, they did not assume that he was enjoying the delights of the renunciate life, but rather that he was reminiscing about his previous cushy life. Upon word of this, the Buddha summoned the monk and discovered that the monks were underestimating his level of attainment. This was his account:

> "Before, when I was a householder, maintaining the bliss of kingship, I had guards posted within and without the royal apartments, within and without the city, within and without the countryside. But even though I was thus guarded, thus protected, I dwelt in fear – agitated, distrustful, and afraid. But now, on going alone to a forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, I dwell without fear, unagitated, confident, and unafraid – unconcerned, unruffled, my wants satisfied, with my mind like a wild deer. This is the meaning I have in mind that I repeatedly exclaim, 'What bliss! What bliss!'"[149]

What this simple monk had left behind is not so different from the lives many of us live, with an asset-laden personal footprint protected by high-tech security system and a financial advisor. More to the point, reducing our personal footprint,[150] or that of our family, is one way to reduce the desperation we may feel about livelihood as we thereby broaden our employment options. Part of what makes simplicity possible is also to be humble enough to let go of our ego-involvement or identification with income, profession or status, as this venerable monk clearly had. Simplicity also means more time for practice or for other wholesome pursuits.

More generally, simplicity benefits Buddhist practice, for it entails renouncing much of what, through our attachments,

causes us suffering. Nonetheless, at a given time our attachments may not be negotiable. A group of rather lively laypeople once approached the Buddha to ask for spiritual guidance, but made clear that certain comforts and responsibilities were not up for discussion:

> "We, Lord, are laymen who enjoy worldly pleasure. We lead a life encumbered by wife and children. We use sandalwood of Kasi. We deck ourselves with garlands, perfume and unguents. We use gold and silver. To those like us, O Lord, let the Exalted One preach the Dharma, teach those things that lead to weal and happiness in this life and to weal and happiness in future life."[151]

Modern people's lists of comforts might similarly include football, financial success, designer clothing and great hair, wild parties, fast women and fast cars, and abundant thumbs up for our social media posts. Significantly, the Buddha does not dismiss the lively group as unworthy of his teaching, but respects that they have made certain choices about the shape of their lives, and so takes what they have said as the parameters within which Buddhist lives can nonetheless take root. How we live our lives is our choice. In the future we may make other choices.

Certainly family is a central point of attachment in most lives. As we survey our lives, many attachments will be relatively wholesome from a Dharmic perspective, others quite unskillful and prone to harm and unhappiness. We should give special attention to letting go of the more unskillful. For instance, an amateur hunter might trade rifle for binoculars and instead take up bird watching. Moreover, contemplating our situation, we are likely to discover that many once seemingly pleasurable pursuits are the most painful and problematic in our life, that popularity or endless partying or sexual intrigue does not bring anything like lasting happiness, quite the contrary. This investigation can, and should, go on for many years by being mindful of the Dharma

even as we continue to step over its boundaries. Over time our attachments may drop away like old toys from the newly adolescent. Buddhist wisdom reveals that there is little worth keeping; the burden, attachment, and enmeshment in samsaric existence they entail are just too dear a price to pay. It is mindfulness of such wisdom that brings our lives slowly into greater alignment with Buddhist principles.

Simplicity is making our personal footprint – the domain of our own affairs, what we choose to have a personal stake in – as small as we possibly can. Everything we've brought into our lives has come at a cost to our well-being. Like a well-run corporation we tend to externalize costs in our own minds, seeing only the attractive side of things even while we covertly bear the costs. Simplicity will nonetheless be a welcome relief as we let go of things like long commutes, debt, chauffeuring of teens, the constant ringing of the phone, unpaid bills, nagging neighbors, the threat of law suits, divorce, and keeping up with never-ending housework and with the Joneses. It will free up time and obligations in our lives, and give us more freedom to shape our lives as we see fit.

### *Being devoted*

We can at least be devoted to what we fail to simplify out of our lives. We have seen the importance of devotion to the triple gem as the prime wholesome, selfless motivator of Buddhist practice. Devotion is something we can similarly develop for many external pursuits in our lives – marriage, career, education, hobby, music, political activism. Devotion turns any such pursuit away from unskillful striving, instead directing us toward selflessness, mindfulness, proficiency and satisfaction.

Interestingly, what we call hobbies are almost always, but usually implicitly, topics of great devotion: surfing, knitting, bird

watching, football, collecting string, bowling, karate. It seems to me connoisseurs, epicures and gastonomes are people who bring an element of devotion into what would otherwise be pure self-serving striving for sensual satisfaction, turning, for instance, the guzzler into a discriminating sipper of fine wines, and the glutton into the gourmet. This may be how elites make life a little more bearable. The absence of practical purpose beyond the activity itself explains both why other people may view our hobbies as pointless, and connoisseurs as silly, but also why our hobbies provide quite palpable and welcome relief from the relentless drive for personal advantage with which we tend to be afflicted during most of the day. It is noteworthy that such secular areas of devotion are typically accompanied by a sometimes religious level of ritual. Consider, for instance, how much ritual is observed at a gourmet restaurant, for instance, in simply opening a bottle of fine wine. It is important, though, to avoid pride or competition, for these reintroduce striving.[152]

We can never entirely eliminate striving toward goals from our lives. How would we become educated, build a career, or even become awakened? Luckily, we can often moderate our goal-orientation mentally quite easily in favor of wholesome, selfless motivations, without substantially changing the outer form of the pursuit, nor sacrificing the goal, but in a way that benefits our practice and well-being. Often this is simply a matter of how we frame our goal. For example, dieting:

Most typically one diets with the explicit goal of a sexier, slimmer 20-pounds-lighter “me” on the beach next summer. This goal is achieved by keeping eyes on the prize while undergoing starvation and exercise, a process that provides little satisfaction in itself, for as any dieter knows, there is a lot of emoting and suffering in the process, constantly weighing oneself, continually prodded by shame and longing for the end result. Moreover, when the goal is reached, satisfaction is short-lived, for now one

must by the same means *maintain* one's sexier, slimmer and healthier “me” for the *following* summer.

Alternatively, one might instead frame the same pursuit in terms of a simple health standard to bear in mind, that of living an optimal lifestyle with daily nutritional intake and bodily activity optimized for one's body type. The standard never lies in the future, but is achieved each day. In case of lapse, one acknowledges it and determines to do better the next day. There is mindfulness and effort involved, but no striving or emoting. In fact, as one inhabits this practice, one is very likely to become an expert on nutrition, on exercise and on the other real needs of the human body, to which one's attention is directed in lieu of standing on the scale each day and emoting accordingly. One finds satisfaction in the process itself. One becomes devoted to this aspect of health and joyful. As an extra benefit, one attains with ease the goal one gave up in the first place.[153]

Devotion also applies to our larger pursuits in life as well – such as education, marriage and child rearing – much as it does to Buddhist practice. Do we go to college to study what we can turn into a lucrative profession, like business management, medicine, law or electrical engineering? Or do we go to college to study what we really love (not that we can't love the foregoing), like medieval French poetry, theoretical linguistics, existentialist philosophy or Buddhist studies? Pursuing the latter is likely to seem foolish to others, particularly to one's parents, but the deeper level of proficiency achieved in doing so might end up surprising everybody. Joseph Campbell is said to have written somewhere:

> “I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be. If you follow your bliss, doors will open for you that wouldn't have opened for anyone else.”

I can report that my life bears this out. My bliss in graduate school was theoretical linguistics, not because I was following Campbell's sage advice, but because I've always been foolhardy by nature. Sure enough, trained in a field where employment is the remotest possibility, doors did open up one by one that I never would have expected. Where they ended up leading me has come as a complete surprise, and I'm not aware that this particular series of doors has ever opened for anyone else.

Similarly, marriage can be a means to an end or a meaningful end in itself. Does the marriage serve us or do we serve the marriage? With insufficient devotion it might be a means to sex, social prestige, housekeeping, child care and meal preparation, or to material comfort, security and luxury. Seeking personal advantage in this way is always a source of suffering and a hindrance to spiritual development, and the marriage is easily abandoned in favor of trading up to a more promising partner. With devotion, on the other hand, marriage is a refuge, likely pursued mindfully, with sensitivity and deeply as a source of personal satisfaction, intimacy and meaning.

We see that devotion to even extra-Buddhist pursuits resonates well with the Buddhist path in that it leads to a purer mind, and is not so different from the devotion we bring to Buddhist practice, or, for that matter, to any non-Buddhist religion. On the other hand, striving for personal advantage can easily infect both secular and religious domains. Many of us, particularly in the beginning years of Buddhist practice, show great pride, compare ourselves to others, excel in debate and boast great attainments in the higher meditations. When we apply the higher meditations to achieving mystical states, perhaps known only to ourselves, we are also striving, craving and suffering, which are actually impediments to the calm and composed mind. When we meditate for its own sake, with no goal in mind, simply out of devotion, that is best. A famous Zen koan reads:

Chao-chou aked Nan-chuan, “What is the Way?”

Nan-chuan said, “Ordinary mind is the Way.”

Chao-chou asked, “Then may I direct myself towards it or not?”

Nan-chuan said, “To turn toward it is to turn away from it.”

### *Community involvement*

We've seen in previous videos the weight the Buddha put on community involvement in Buddhism, and in particular the importance of having admirable friends. There are a number of options in western lands for encountering like-minded people, all of which can be quite wonderful, but whose appropriateness at any time depends on our current level of practice or what level of practice we aspire to.

In the USA we find basically four kinds of community organizations: (1) “Meditation groups” generally focus on a single practice with limited resources for those who wish to embrace the whole of practice. (2) “Western temples” generally appeal to European-Americans (however, generally intent on achieving ethnic and racial diversity[154]), identify with a particular Asian school of Buddhism and are led by people with a degree of knowledge and experience. What is generally missing is a Sangha.[155] (3) “Eastern temples” generally serve a particular ethnic group of Asian origin. You might be surprised at how many of these there are in the most unexpected places is the USA. Eastern temples fall into two categories relevant to our purposes: (a) “Asian missionary temples” seek to promote Buddhist practice and understanding to people outside of their core ethnic base. They are likely to have a bilingual Sangha and offer some programs in English. (b) “Asian neighborhood temples” are generally founded by a local ethnic community, and are surprised – but happy – when someone from outside that

community shows up. Language is generally an issue. I imagine (3) (b) represents the great preponderance of American Buddhism.

It is surprising how many westerners who will go on an expensive vacation to exotic lands will not venture into eastern temples, where they are challenged by language, culture, peculiar devotional practices and unfamiliar statuary … all for free. Bearing in mind that much of the "religiosity" is a later, albeit harmless, development, this is typically where we find Buddhist life in its most complete, holistic form. In particular, this is where the Sangha is fundamental.

The importance of the monastic institution in Buddhism is evident in the significance the Buddha attached to it, as he consistently referred to the entirety of his teachings as the "Doctrine and Discipline," "Discipline" in reference to the monastic code laid down by the Buddha.[156] Accordingly, Buddhist communities have faithfully and willingly upheld the Sangha throughout history in virtually every Buddhist land as a kind of social contract between monastic and lay. Remarkably, the Sangha is probably the most enduring institution on the planet, still following significantly the same *Discipline* after 100 generations.

The pure monastic Sangha functions a kind of universal counter-culture standing *against* many of the mainstream currents found in whatever culture it is embedded, and *for* the quite radical ancient values and social norms espoused by the Buddha. It even distinguishes itself in coiffure and apparel much like beatniks, hippies, punks and goths. It provides a reality check for the mainstream culture to the notion that personal excess leads to happiness, with each monk or nun serving as a very visible walking science experiment, a test tube in which the ingredients of the highest standards of Buddhist life have been poured and then stirred with results open for all to inspect. The Sangha

provides the laity with the world's cheapest clergy, a rich source of admirable friends, a fertile field for making merit and an abiding influence on the general culture.

The Sangha also offers a unique opportunity for the most devout and engaged Buddhists: membership secures the optimal social conditions, material support and insulation from the kinds of vulnerabilities encountered “in the midst,” in order to progress on the path to awakening. There was a time for me when monastic practice would have been a wild flight of fantasy, but I discovered that it is quite doable, even for a European-American, and my practice and understanding have benefited enormously from taking this step.[157] I would encourage readers not to dismiss monastic practice as a real option, if not now perhaps later in life.

A core function of the “Discipline” is systematically to prohibit virtually every opportunity for seeking personal advantage, self-enhancement, or self-gratification. In this regard, it prohibits sexual relations and economic activity, and tightly regulates ownership of property. It prohibits beautifying oneself or engaging in any normal livelihood or exchange. Monastics are not even allowed purposely to endear themselves to laypeople with the aim of receiving better offerings of food and clothing. Since the monastic code allows one to do almost nothing for oneself, “me” has virtually no permitted function and easily loses its foothold, though it might continue for a time to haunt the mind. This kind of life would leave the monastic extremely vulnerable, were it not for entrusting her needs to the benevolence of the laity. In return, monastics require little and – while helpless with regard to *themselves* – there are virtually no limits on what the monastic can do for *others*.

For the westerner, joining the Sangha generally entails living in Asia or affiliating oneself with an eastern temple in the west that supports the Sangha in the traditional way, since so few western temples succeed in supporting a Sangha. This has certainly been

my path, having been welcomed in Myanmar and in Burmese-American temples, but able to serve both western and Burmese communities.

### *Last words*

Mindfulness is not a state of mind, it is something we do – we recollect – and it is something that has an object – we are mindful *of* something. That something ranges without limit in Buddhism, over the entirety of the Dharma, over the entirety of the Discipline, and by analogy can be used to bring the extra-Buddhist externals of our life more or less in accord with the example of the Dharma. This, along with the specialized training in becoming more mindful, makes mindfulness very powerful in our lives. Moreover, mindfulness, in a range of applications, is closely followed by mental composure, which *is* a state of mind, one that brings serenity and clarity, and amplifies the power of mindfulness even further.

It is important to bear in mind that Buddhism is eminently practical. Its natural roots are not in lofty philosophizing, but in real communities, in human interaction, in the practice of harmlessness, kindness and generosity towards one another, in engagement in everyday affairs. The Buddha's thinking emerged from the nuts and bolts practice realities of life, and it is here where mindfulness practice finds its place. It is important as we enter into Buddhist practice, perhaps a little bit at a time, to keep this all-inclusive perspective in mind. The Buddha's message was quite radical and continues to be radical when properly understood, both personally and socially. His message does not begin with transcending the human condition, it only ends there.

# Notes

**CA** refers to Bhikkhu Cintita, 2014, *A Culture of Awakening: the life and times of the Buddha-Sasana*, Sitagu Buddha Vihara.

**BLBP** refers to Bhikkhu Cintita, 2017, *Buddhist Life/Buddhist Path: foundations of Buddhism based on earliest sources*, Sitagu Buddha Vihara.

**WNT** refers to Bhikkhu Cintita, 2019, *With Needle and Thread: essays on early Buddhism*, Sitagu Buddha Vihara.

The following abbreviations refer to traditional compilations of early Pali sources:

| | |
|---|---|
| **DN** | *Dīgha Nikāya* |
| **MN** | *Majjhima Nikāya* |
| **SN** | *Saṃyutta Nikāya* |
| **AN** | *Aṅguttara Nikāya* |
| **Dhp** | *Dhammapāda* |
| **Ud** | *Udāna* |
| **Iti** | *Itivuttaka* |
| **Kdp** | *Kuddakapāṭha* |

The sutta number that generally follows one of these abbreviations follows the conventions of the Wisdom Publications translations, and of the Access to Insight and Sutta Central Web sites.

1 Pali is an ancient Indic language widely regarded as the language of the Buddha in which the texts of the Theravada or Southern tradition of Buddhism are preserved.

2 Probably the best account of the scope and provenance of the Early Buddhist Texts is Sujato, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Brahmali, 2014, *The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts*, Buddhist Publication Society.

3 Jon Kabat-Zinn perhaps represents the leading edge of secular mindfulness. For him, "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally." He has applied this inner experience and the training that produces it, divorced from all other aspects of the Dharma, initially in clinical settings for stress reduction, but then into the corporate and even military environment to improve proficiencies, while proclaiming that this is a recontextualization that preserves the essence of the Dharma. There are now 100,000 books (+1, counting the present book) that have "mindfulness" in their titles, and mindfulness research has attracted $100,000,000 in NIH funding. Ronald E. Purser, 2019, *McMindfulness: how mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality*, Repeaterbooks.com, presents an overview of some scathing critiques of modern "mindfulness." The critiques are not so much against the efficacy of mindfulness in these settings, as against what is lost from Dharma.

4 "Suffering" is *dukkha* in Pali. It is useful to learn the technical terms in Pali at some point as points of reference, since these terms are generally not consistently translated into English. *Dukkha*, for instance, is also rendered as "stress" and "unsatisfactoriness."

5 "Liberation," "awakening" and "nirvana" in Pali are *vimutti*, *bodhi* and *nibbāna*, respectively.

6 In introducing Buddhism as a skill I follow the lead of the American monk Thanissaro Bhikkhu, who repeatedly describes Buddhist practice in these terms in his many talks and writings.

7 "Wholesome" or "skillful" in Pali is *kusala*.

8 "Intention" in Pali is *cetanā*.

9 "Unwholesome" or "unskillful" in Pali is *akusala*.

10 "Mindfulness" in Pali is *sati*, which is a derivation of a root meaning 'memory' or 'recollection' and corresponds to the verb *sarati* 'remember' or 'recollect'. The cognate word in Sanskrit *smṛti* has a similar meaning and is commonly used specifically in reference to memory of the sacred Brahminic texts.

11 "With mindfulness as his gate-keeper …" (AN 7.67, iv 110-111). SN 48.9 also uses the language "… things that were done and said long ago."

12 "Attentive mindfulness" in Pali is *upaṭṭhahita-sati*, using the past participle of *upaṭṭhahati*, "stands near," generally used in the sense of "attending to,"

"caring for" or "serving." Both this verb and its causative *upaṭṭhapeti*, are used, for instance, to mean "care for" and "have someone care for" [e.g,, a sick person] respectively (AN 10.34 v72), and the causitive is found in the well-known phrase *parimukhaṃ satiṃ upaṭṭhapetivā* "having made mindfulness attend to what is before one" (MN 10). See Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, Wisdom, pp. 1504, 1915, for further discussion of this verb, which he, however, translates as "establishes."

13 "… between the crowd and the most beautiful girl of the land …" (SN 47.20)

14 "Effort" (Pali, *viriya*) is defined in SN 45.8.

15 In Pali, "diligence" is *appamāda.*

16 "… all skillful qualities are rooted in diligence" (AN 10.15). The Buddha's final instructions to the Sangha before passing away is said to have been, *appamādena sampādetha*, "Accomplish [the goal] with diligence" (SN 6.15).

17 "… to that will I fall heir" (AN 5.57).

18 I choose to use "mental composure" as a translation of the Pali *samādhi* instead of the more conventional "concentration" for the following reasons: First, this is what *samādhi* means, "put together"; "collectedness" would also be an acceptable translation. Second, the word "concentration" suggests something much more narrow and intense and requiring more effort than what is meant in the early Buddhist texts, and is also thereby suggestive of the semantically distinct meaning of *samādhi* that entered the Theravada traditions by the time of the commentaries. See Richard Shankman, 2008, *The Experience of Samadhi*, Wisdom Publications, on this. *Samādhi* in the early Buddhist texts is open, fluid, rather spontaneous and supportive of close examination of phenomenal experience, particularly as described in the fourth chapter of the present book. I also thank Kumāra Bhikkhu of Malaysia for discussion of this matter.

19 Whereas in Pali, "skillful" or "wholesome" is *kusala*, "right" is *sammā.*."

20 "… right understanding, right effort, and right mindfulness – run and circle around …" (MN 117).

21 The noble eightfold path is discussed in much more detail in BLBP ch. 7 (an overview), ch. 8 (right understanding and intention), ch. 9 (right speech, action and livelihood), ch. 10 (right effort, mindfulness and mental composure).

22 Pali for attending by mindfulness is *satipaṭṭhāna*, where *sati* 'memory' + *upa* 'near' + *ṭhāna* 'standing'. The compound *upaṭṭhāna* is thereby generally used in the sense of attending to, looking after or serving (see note 12

above). This makes sense as an expression for careful examination of phenomena through bringing relevant Dharma to mind. Most modern scholars today analyze *satipaṭṭhāna* as *sati* + *upaṭṭhāna* rather than the obsolete alternative *sati* + *paṭṭhāna*., e.g., Anālayo (2006, 29-30), Bodhi (2000, p. 1504). It should be noted that the related verb *upaṭṭhahati*, "attend to," is often used in connection with *sati*, as we have indicated earlier.

23 "Here, monks, a monk dwells observing the body in the body…" (MN 10 i57).

24 "Those who exert themselves and are mindful, delight not in any abode. They are like swans that abandon their like, leaving home after home behind." (Dhp. 91)

25 Gethin (2011, 272) proposes defining mindfulness as follows:
> "… if we have mindfulness then we will remember what it is that we should be doing in a given moment."

26 "… divide into subtasks …," see Thich Nhat Hanh, 1987, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, Beacon Press, p. 86.

27 On inhabiting rather than utilizing a task: Research on motivation in psychology suggests a correlate of this shift in our relationship to the present moment. This research differentiates between "extrinsic motivation," in which a task is performed to achieve some goal outside of the task itself, for instance, receiving a reward or avoiding a punishment, and "intrinsic motivation," in which a task is satisfying in itself, such a playing just to play. Mindfulness would seem to discourage extrinsic motivation and therefore have a high correlation with intrinsic motivation. This research makes clear a huge advantage of intrinsic over extrinsic motivation in terms of life satisfaction and mental health. See Edward L. Deci, 1995, *Why We Do What We Do: understanding self-motivation*, Penguin.

28 "… in order to wash the dishes …," Thich Nhat Hanh, *ibid*., p. 3-4. He also tells us (p. 24) that washing dishes must be the most important thing in your life.

29 "Virtue" in Pali is *sīla* or *cariya*. "Wisdom" is *paññā*.

30 "… folds in the previous seven factors…":
> *"There are right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort and right mindfulness. The unification of mind equipped with these seven factors is called noble right mental composure with its supports and accessories."… is called noble right mental composure …"* (SN 45.28).

31 The *Dhammapada* is a must for any Buddhist library. This collection of sayings of the Buddha is also a great inspiration for the beginning student. There are many translations into English, but one cannot go wrong with Gil Fronsdal's *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations*, 2006, Shambhala.

32 "Refraining from every evil …" (Dhp 183).
33 "… progress will be largely illusory ...": I should caution that modern practice often has this backward: we practice on the cushion, experience some exalted state of mind, then we are at a loss as to how to "practice in the world."
34 "Bad deeds … are easy to do …" (Dpd 163).
35 "… a deep aversion to conventions and institutions, particularly in the religious sphere …," David McMahan, 2008 *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, Oxford, pp. 43, 76, 95, 125, 133, 244.
36 Precepts are described in much more detail in BLBP ch. 3, pp. 43-61.
37 "Giving" is *dāna* in Pali. *Dāna* is often translated as "generosity," though this obscures the distinction between a karmic act and a quality of character that might underly the act. *Dāna* is the gerund of the active verb for "give."
38 This is generally thought in terms of how much merit we accumulate during the course of this life and the fruit is pictured as a felicitous rebirth, hopefully into a divine state.
39 "Merit" is *puñña* in Pali. "Demerit" is *pāpa*.
40 "… categories of recipient, … gift, … manner … intention," see *Dana: The Practice of Giving*, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995–2013, on-line at https://accesstoinsight.org.
41 Religious gifts made to the general public would, particularly in later Buddhist traditions, include contributions to building pagodas, Buddha statues and things along those lines, and also to book publication and other educational educational projects and operating expenses. Otherwise gifts satisfy mundane material needs.
42 "… beautify and adorn the mind" (AN 8.31).
43 "… happy before, during and after giving" (AN 6.37).
44 "Economy of gifts," Thanissaro, 1997, "The economy of gifts," on-line essay at accesstoinsight.org.
45 "… tuned neither too loose nor too tight …" (AN 6.55).
46 Giving is discussed in much more detail in BLBP ch. 2, pp. 23-41.
47 "… three roots of what is unskillful" (Iti 3.1).
48 This fivefold list of qualities of the unskillful can be gleaned from AN 3.71 and MN 19.
49 Purity is discussed in much more detail in BLBP ch. 4, pp. 63-81.
50 There may be other factors at work at the same time as psychological factors in the production of karmic results. The Buddha also mentions social factors: a merchant suffering from greed or delusion, for instance, is likely to drive away customers. Other factors mentioned draw a direct connec-

tion between a particular action and a particular result, for instance, stealing and getting hit by lightning, though these are rare and can just as well be regarded as allegorical in the early texts.

51 Even goal-oriented people who actually manage to achieve their goals – often exalted as celebrities in our society – experience *no* measurable increase in happiness. See Johann Hari, 2018, *Lost Connections: uncovering the real causes of depression–and the unexpected solutions*, Bloomsbury., p. 95.

52 "…greater sense of well-being": The framework for this work is motivation theory, mentioned in an earlier endnote in terms of "intrinsic" and "extrinsic motivation." Experimental evidence shows some remarkable advantages realized when our task is intrinsically as opposed to extrinsically motivated: better conceptual understanding, higher creativity, improved problem solving, improved focus and an improved sense of well-being. Moreover, many people who are habitually extrinsically oriented tend to suffer poorer mental health, including narcissism, anxiety, depression, lack of self-confidence and poor social functioning. See Deci (ibid.), p. 127-8.

53 "… It is natural that non-regret arises in one who is virtuous …" (AN 11.2).

54 "… supramundane or even mystical aspect of practice …" (MN 59)

55 "Trust" in Pali is *saddhā* which is derived literally from "put the heart on."

56 "One can be half-sure without being half-hearted," Gordon Allport, 1956, *The Individual and his Religion*, McMillan, p. 139.

57 "Devotion" in Pali is *pasanna*, which entails a bright or elated frame of mind, purity and piousness.

58 The concept of intrinsic motivation is here once again apt. Intrinsic and extrinsic *religion* were first described by Gordon Allport in his 1950 book *The Individual and his Religion*, but initially in terms of "mature" and "immature religion," as a way of defining the quality of religious engagement and spiritual development for psychological research. The intrinsically religious see their religion as an end in itself, the extrinsically religious as a means to some other end, often political, social or in terms of self-justification, often involving some degree of ego-involvement. Research demonstrates that intrinsic religion, much more than extrinsic religion, promotes well-being, virtue, open-heartedness and mental health. Extrinsic religion, on the other hand tends to provide easy targets for criticism among the non-religious.

59 A 2012 issue Wired Magazine tells us, "Meditation and mindfulness are the new rage in Silicon Value. And it is not just about inner peace – it's about getting ahead."

60 An admirable friend in Pali is *kalyāṇa mitta*.

61 "… the whole of the holy life …" (SN 45.2).

62 "… much like the faculty of a university ...": CA (pp. 39-54) develops further the analogy of the monastic Sangha to the academic community.
63 "… the world should not lack for awakened ones" (DN 16).
64 Stream entry is defined and discussed in BLBP, pp. 134-142.
65 "… penetrates with transcendental wisdom the four noble truths …" (Dpd 190-1).
66 Many critics of religion argue that devotion to a particular set of standards and viewpoints entails close-mindedness and a loss of freedom. However, this is the nature of choice itself: when we choose we close the alternatives, but not to choose is a choice itself that also closes alternatives. We are dealing here with major choices that reshape our lives, but the logic is the same, and it is not limited to the religious realm. Thomas Kuhn (1962, *The Stucture of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press), for instance, shows how "normal science," is based on dogged commitment by a community of researchers to a particular paradigm in spite of counterevidence until the counter-evidence becomes so overwhelming that some, usually very young, upstart with a new paradigm ignites a revolution. Now, in Buddhism we have, like science, encouragement of skepticism and self-verification built in, as we will see by the end of the chapter. To appreciate the necessity of these life-altering choices, imagine – roughly following Decartes, I think – you are dropped into the middle of a barren desert with no evidence of water in any direction. You choose a direction arbitrarily and head that way in the hopes you will reach water, for not to choose is certain death and to waver is almost certain death.
67 Similarly, Rupert Gethin, 2011, "On Some Definitions of Mindfulness," *Contemporary Buddhism*, v. 12:1, p. 270, points out that, while we are remembering to keep the breath in mind, this practice is backed up by a nested set of recollections, for instance about the importance of mental cultivation, the need to root out greed, aversion and delusion, and refuge itself. In my terms, these are principles that support attentive practice of keeping the breath in mind.
68 The Pali word for such recollection is actually *anussati*, which is just *sati* 'mindfulness' with the prefix *anu-*, which implies continuity, roughly 'along'.
69 Qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are listed in AN 11.11.
70 Buddhist teaching is in Pali *sāsana*, and it generally refers to Buddhism in an historical context. CA examines the many aspects of the historical *sāsana*.
71 "When a noble disciple recollects the Buddha…" (AN 11.12).

72 "… enjoy significantly improved mental and physical health…": This applies to the devout adherent of Allport's "mature religion" or "intrinsic religion." See, for instance, Charles Hackney and Glenn Sanders, 2003, "Religiosity and menatl health: a meta-analysis of recent studies," *Journal for the Sceintific Study of Religion*, 43:1, 43-55.

73 A wonderful discussion of Buddhist ritual as play is Robert H. Sharf, 2005, "Ritual," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (ed), University of Chicago Press, 244-270.

74 In fact, traditional Indian cultural expressions of veneration, such as *añjali* (palms together), have been carried with Buddhism to every land in which it has alighted. That it shows up as the Christian prayer gesture is suggestive of some as yet unverified ancient historical connection between the traditions.

75 Zen master Suzuki Roshi, the Japanese founder of the San Francisco Zen Center, in whose lineage I began my Buddhist practice, discovered that many of his American students had a resistance to the three full prostrations traditionally performed during morning service. Accordingly, he decided to modify the tradition for his American students: Instead of *three*, they were required to perform *nine* full prostrations during morning service. They got over it, and maintain this practice today.

76 It is probably significant that when the Buddha adopted the word "karma" to describe *intentional* action, he appropriated a word that brahmin priests had used specifically for *ritual* action, for he, I daresay, intended that mindfulness would endow each of our actions with a ritual quality, for just as a properly performed ritual produced benefits for the client of the brahmin, a properly (mindful of the standards that make it skillful) performed intentional action produces beneficial fruits for the practitioner.

77 "… mixed with elements of folk culture …": See C*A*, on "folk Buddhism," pp. 77-95.

78 The earliest known Buddha statues were not produced until the first century CE, in Mathura and Gandhara, the latter under strong Greek influence.

79 "Taking Dharma seriously while holding it loosely," this section is presented in more detail in my essay of the same title in WNT.

80 "… the few leaves I have here in my hand …" (SN 56.31).

81 Annihilationism and eternalism are discussed in DN 1, SN 44:10, etc.

82 "Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon…" (AN 3.65).

83 "…personally experienced by the *wise*…," "…come and see…," (*ehipassiko*) (AN 11.11).

84 "Only this is true; anything else is worthless." (MN 95)

85 Allport (1956, *The Individual and his Religion*, McMillan, p. 72) writes of "heuristic belief" held tentatively in similar terms as a characteristic of "mature religion," principley with reference to the Christian context. The

"mature mind," he writes, can act wholeheartedly without absolute certainty.

86 "… what kind of future lay beyond the barbed wire …," Viktor Frankl, 2006, *Man's Search for Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy*, Beacon Press.

87 "… did not feel compelled to analyze …," in phenomenological terms I simply "bracketed" this assumption. This is one of the ways we hold teachings loosely, by making no particular commitment one way or the other to "only this is true."

88 "…there are some contemplatives and brahmins who hold this doctrine …" (MN 60).

89 "…they will adopt and practice these three unskillful activities…" (MN 60).

90 "… this venerable person has made a bad throw twice…" (MN 60).

91 *Kalama Sutta*, AN 3.65.

92 "…disentangles his tangle…" (SN 7.6).

93 "Object of mental composure" in Pali is *samādhi-nimittaṃ.*

94 *"…*a fellow monk in the position of a teacher*…,"Vimuttāyatana* (Spheres of Liberation) *Sutta* (AN 5.26). DN 33 (iii 241-2) provides a similar passage.

95 "…through the eyes of the Buddha …": As Eviatar Shulman, 2014, *Re-thinking the Buddha*, Cambridge, pp. 106-112, argues, mental composure effectively turns Dharma into a mode of perception.

96 "… the mind becomes composed …" (AN 5.26).

97 In modern terms only the last stage of liberation, or maybe the last two, would be classified as *vipassanā* practice, leading to deep insight or internalization.

98 "… everything … is fabricated …": How delusively is an interesting question and difficult to answer. For all we know, we may actually live in a computer simulation, as in *The Matrix*. There is some practice value, as we engage with the delusive nature of "reality," to consider possibilities like this. I highly recommend Donald Hoffman's 2019 *The Case Against Reality: why evolution hid the truth from our eyes*, Norton, or many of his talks available on line for a thorough questioning of our ability to see objective reality.

99 The whole passage, which constitute the opening lines of the *Dhammapada* are:

*Mind precedes all phenomena.*
*Mind is their chief; they are all mind-made.*
*If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts,*

*Suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.*
*Mind precedes all phenomena.*
*Mind is their chief; they are all mind-made.*
*If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts,*
*Happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow."* (Dpd 1-2)

100 "Phenomenon" In Pali is *dhamma.* Some Pali translators translate dhamma as "phenomenon," others as "mental object," etc. "Mental object" is misleading because we experience much of the world as physical.

101 Pali for "the world" is *loka.*

102 "In this fathom-long living body…" (AN 4.45).

103 Taking experience as foundational is reflected in Phenomenology, an important twentieth-century school of philosophy founded by mathematition turned philosopher Edmund Husserl. As for the Buddha, phenomenology turns our attention to the question, "How do we know what we think we know?" It thereby lays bare the foundations of science as well as of the humanities, of cultural presuppositions and of religion as different ways of experiencing the world. Where phenomenology undermines the hubris of modern science, the Buddha undermines the hubris of the common man. A good introduction to phenomenology is Robert Sokalowski's 2000 *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Chambridge University Press. The word "phenomenon" is chosen above deliberately with this connection in mind, also recognized by other translators. The Buddha's "world" seems equivalent to Husserl's "life world." Experiencing an objective reality "out there" as something real is called by Husserl the "natural attitude."

104 "Conditionality" in Pali is *idappaccayatā.*

105 "From the arising of this comes the arising of that" (Ud 1.3).

106 "… the noble truth of the origination of suffering…" (SN 56.11).

107 "… the noble truth of the cessation of suffering…" (SN 56.11).

108 "… thereby it turns otherwise." (SN 3.12)

109 "Fading" and "dispassion" are both *virāga* in Pali.

110 "Aggregate" is *khanda* in Pali.

111 "Aggregate of attachment" is *upādānakkhaṅdha* in Pali.

112 Many discourses of SN 35 present contemplations on the aggregates of attachment.

113 "Sixfold sphere" is *saḷāyatana* in Pali, aka "six sense spheres."

114 "… eye, form, eye consciousness, eye contact…" (SN 35.24-28).

115 "In the six the world has arisen…" (SN 1.70).

116 "… by which one is a perceiver of the world …" (SN 35.116)

117 "Dependent co-arising" in Pali is *paṭicca-samuppāda.*

118 More on dependent co-arising can be found in BLBP, 205-223. I am currently writing a book on this complex but central topic, and it is taking me longer than anticipated to complete.

119 "Factor of awakening" is *bojjhaṅga* in Pali.

120 Variants of the early Buddhist texts preserved in different schools and languages vary in the particular topics of contemplation are listed.

121 The five hindrances are the basic forms of distraction: lust, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt.

122 "… the five hindrances, the five aggregates …" (MN 10 i60-62)

123 Tse-fu Kuan, 2008, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, Routledge, p. 128, states, "Therefore dhammas in the fourth *satipaṭṭhāna* can cover virtually whatever phenomena become the objects of consciousness, which are contemplated from the Buddhist point of view."

124 Right mental composure is discussed in more detail in BLBP pp. 192-197.

125 Pali *jhāna* literally means "meditation," which the Buddha gives a technical meaning in this context as stage of mental composure. Interestingly, our word "Zen" is a transliteration of the Sanskrit variant of *jhāna*, basically a Japanese mispronunciation of the Chinese abbreviation (*Chan* from *Channa*) of a Chinese mispronunciation of the Sanskrit word.

126 *Jhāna* is described in more detail in BLBP pp. 194-197.

127 " … a pool of water in a mountain glen…" (MN 39)

128 "… become part of our perceptual apparatus." See Eviatar Shulman, 2014, *Rethinking the Buddha*, Cambridge, for more on this. Also my essay, "Seeing through the eyes of the Buddha," in WNT.

129 "Knowledge and vision of things as they really are" is in Pali *yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana.*

130 "… "to see with the Buddha's spectacles," Richard Gombrich, 1997, *How Buddhism Began*, Munshiram, p. 36. Shulman (*ibid*.), p. 111, calls mindfulness "a method by which philosophy [i.e., Dharma] is turned into an active way of seeing." Kuan (*ibid*.), pp. 58-59, sees mindfulness as directing perception to conform to Dhamma such that wisdom results.

131 Awakening is discussed in more detail in BLBP pp. 225-243.

132 "… the holy life has been lived..": This passage ends many discourses, e.g., MN109 iii 20.

133 "… thrashing between two conflicting life modes …": The Buddha warns about such "clinging to behaviors and observances" (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) as one of ten "fetters" (*saṃyojana*) to awakening. This might also be seen in terms of problematic extrinsic, in contrast to intrinsic, motivation, i.e., seeking to get something out of our practice.

134 "…whole schools of Buddhism…": Single-practice Buddhism is not uniquely modern. Historically whole schools of Buddhism have centered around a single practice, commonly initiated by monastic teachers to keep their lay disciples engaged in the midst busy lay lives. Often the single

practice is devotional, as in the lay movements of Pure Land Buddhism or Soka Gakai, which, we have seen, can also quickly providing a similar mindfulness-based sense of satisfaction and calm. Often it is contemplative. Historically, Zen may have developed in this way, with its single-minded focus on meditation, in eighth century China originally intended for lay devotees, but subsequently folded back into monastic practice (Robert Sharf, 2019, "Why Buddhists Taught Zen Meditation to Christians," In Elizabeth Harris and John O'Grady, eds, *Meditation in Buddhist-Christian Encounter*, Sankt Ottilien, p. 186). Subsequent revival movements have had a similar trajectory, such as the introduction of koan introspection into meditation in the eleventh century, apparently also an innovation intended to make meditation easier for laity, but then becoming a mainstay in many schools for monastic practice. The modern vipassana movement has followed a similar trajectory, starting in Myanmar around 1900 (Erik Braun, 2013, *Birth of Insight*, U Chicago).

135 See my essay "How did mindfulness become bare non-judgmental present-moment awareness," in WNT, for the modern understanding of "mindfulness" and how it relates to the early Buddhist texts definition.

136 "… a unifying philosophy of life …," see Gordon Allport, 1956, *The Individual and his Religion*, McMillan, pp. 53-4.

137 Einstein is reported to have said that common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen. This statement appears in Lincoln Barnett's 1948 book *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, for which Einstein wrote a preface.

138 "…origin in the history of western thought…": McMahan (2008) provides a excellent and detailed discussion of the western intellectual influences on Buddhist modernism. Also see Thanissaro Bhikkhu's "Romancing the Buddha," in *Tricycle Magazine*, Winter 2002.

139 The modern movement called Secular Buddhism is concerned not only with removing aspects of "religiosity" from Buddhism, but also with making Buddhism consistent with modern intellectual, particularly scientific, thought. My deepest criticism of the movement is that it not that it is skeptical of certain aspects of the early Buddhist texts – that is healthy – but that it makes their rejection a matter of doctrinal commitment. In failing to hold the Dharma loosely, it also fails to take it seriously.

140 "… a process sometimes called 'bracketing'": This paragraph owes much to Heuman Linda Heuman's hugely important article "A New Way Forward, *Tricycle*, Spring 2015, which adopts a phenomenological perspective encompasses multiple perspectives in a single life world, privileging none. Her article discusses in particular how we tend to privilege the scientific perspective and how this presents problems as we try to understand Buddhism.

141 "You have to believe in free will, …," quoted in Bruce Rosenblum and

Fred Kuttner, 2011, *Quantum Enigma*, Oxford, p. 32.

142 "… nothing more to money than 1's and 0's…": *The Onion* (2010) published a satirical news article in which the economy grinds to a halt as "Nation Realizes Money Just a Symbolic, Mutually Shared Illusion."

143 "… should not engage in five types of business…," (AN 5.177).

144 "…trickery, cajolery, insinuating…" (MN 117 iii 75).

145 "… modern enterprises …": It is not generally acknowledged the extent to which Buddhist values and standards convey a strong critique of many aspects of modern society, economics and political policy. Our virtue makes us concerned that all enjoy the conditions most conducive to developing virtue and spiritual well-being. This is at odds with GDP as a metric of success, and with working conditions in which we sell our time as "wage-slaves" unable to take ethical and proficient responsibility for the products of our labor, as was the norm in pre-industrial market economy.

146 "… documentary on the health insurance …," Michael Moore's film *Sicko*.

147 "Much learning and handicraft" (Kdp 5).

148 "… by whatsoever activity a householder earns his living…" (AN 8.54).

149 "'What bliss! What bliss!'" (Ud 2.10)

150 See some of the resources in the Voluntary Simplicity movement for more on this advice, for instance, Duane Elgin, 2010, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*, Harper.

151 "… laymen who enjoy worldly pleasure…" (AN 8.54).

152 It is odd that rather than whittling or baking pies for the joy these hobbies bring self and others, we take pride and compete for recognition, thereby adding stress to our lives. Snobs are likewise, it seems, the connoisseurs, epicures and gastonomes who take excessive pride in their good taste.

153 "… one attains with ease the goal one gave up in the first place.": Deci (ibid., 116-7) refers to this principle by quoting, "If you dare to be fat, then you can be thin." This book describes many studies that show how simply reframing a task verbally can greatly influences its motivation structure, and along with that its actual intrinsic satisfaction or lack thereof.

154 The Japanese Soka Gakkai school is a large exception, having a quite racially diverse membership in the USA.

155 "missing … a Sangha": The best developed Buddhist clergy supported in ethnically European centers in the USA is found in the Japanese Zen tradition, substantially the first wave of Buddhism to take root in the USA these communities. The Zen priesthood comes historically from the traditional Buddhist Sangha, and tends to afford a great deal of training, but has substantially compromised many of the Sangha rules laid down by

the Buddha, including those around celibacy and family. Japan is the single Buddhist land that has substantially lost the traditional Sangha. Probably without this compromise the priesthood would not have grown as quickly as it has in the USA. Centers attended by predominately by other than ethnic Asians but with a traditional monastic core exist, but are quite rare.

156 "Doctrine and Discipline" is in Pali *Dhamma-Vinaya*. "The Discipline "in Pali is *Vinaya*, literally "leading away," apparently because it so thoroughly subverts the impulses that normally drive our workaday lives. A good introduction is Ariyesako, Bhikkhu, 1999, *The Bhikkhus' Rules: a Guide for Laypeople*, available at AccesstoInsight.org, and in occasional hardcopy distributions.

157 "…from this step": For a full account of my own decision to enter monastic life and its fruits, see Bhikkhu Cinitita, 2014, *Through the Looking Glass: an American Buddhist Life*, Sitagu Buddha Vihara.

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**Other resources related to this book**

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**Other books by Bhikkhu Cintita**

*A Culture of Awakening: the life and times of the Buddha-Sasana.* (2014, also in Italian translation)

*Through the Looking Glass: an American Buddhist life.* (2014)

*Buddhist Life/Buddhist Path: the foundations of Buddhism based on earliest sources*, second edition. (2019)

*With Needle and Thread: essays on early Buddhism*. (2019)

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**Mindfulness, where Dharma meets Practice**

**Bhikkhu Cintita**

This book is about Dharma, practice, and how they intersect in mindfulness. It is a nutshell introduction to Buddhism based almost exclusively on the earliest Buddhist sources, which are the historical basis for all of the diverse later schools of Buddhism, and which represent what the Buddha actually taught, as best as we can determine. It is a textbook that has been used to supplement about ten hours of class time.

In spite of its conciseness, this text provides a comprehensive overview of the range of Buddhist practice and understanding and contains practical advice on how we can integrate Buddhist practice into busy modern lives. It begins from the premise that Dharma serves solely as a support for practice and that the role of mindfulness is to enable Dharma effectively to inform practice.

Bhikkhu Cintita is an American-born Burmese-ordained Buddhist monk. A former academic, he studies, meditates, teacher and writes in Austin, TX and Chisago City, MN USA.