Where Dharma Meets Practice

an introduction to Early Buddhism

Bhikkhu Cintita

Cover photo: Replica of a circa 700 CE late-stage Greco-Buddhist statue from Fondukistan monastery in Afghanistan. The replica was hand-crafted under the close supervision of Burmese Traditional Architect Tampawaddy U Win Maung in 2011. It is currently on display at the Sitagu Buddha Vihara in Austin, TX USA.

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Preface

Buddhism is a practice tradition, in which practice is guided by Dharma, Dharma is based on the teachings of the Buddha, and Dharma is developed, cultivated, and internalized by the practitioner through practice. Effectively, Dharma provides the skills or know-how necessary for practice, and practice—in addition to exhibiting those skills—provides the means to fully acquire, and to perfect those skills to the point that they are fully integrated into our perceptual and behavioral faculties, such that we begin to see through the Buddha's eyes, and to act with the Buddha's hands.

A lot goes on at the place where Dharma meets practice. Practice is performed to produce beneficial results and good karma. Dharma is progressively refined to produce a series of attainments culminating in awakening. Meditative states arise to optimize the efficacy of these processes. At the heart of what goes on in the encounter of Dharma and practice is a kind of executive function whereby (1) Dharma relevant to the current practice task is brought to, and kept in mind, and (2) decisions are made accordingly to determine how to proceed with the current practice task in the current practice setting.

The Buddha gave this executive function a short name, and a long name. The short name is 'recollection.' Importantly, the seventh factor of the noble eightfold path (the eight bullet points of practice) is called 'right recollection.' The long name is the

compound ‘recollection-discernment.’ Notice that ‘recollection’ by itself refers literally only to (1) above (the relevant recollection of the Dharma). Alone, it is short for ‘recollection-discernment,’ which literally refers to both (1) and (2), where (2) completes the executive function.[1]

Translators have taken great pains to find an simple English English word for the process of recollection-discernment. ‘Conscientiousness’ seems to be the best candidate, conveying both the idea of being engaged in some task and keeping in mind some set of relevant standards or principles to guide that task. It will be noticed that I will for the most part conscientiously avoid the word ‘mindfulness’ in this context. Let me briefly explain.

In 1881 T. W. Rhys Davids chose ‘mindfulness’ as a translation for recollection-attentiveness. Outside of the current Buddhist context it is pretty much synonymous with ‘conscientiousness.’ He even explained his choice much as I have for ‘conscientiousness.’ However, within the Buddhist context the meaning of ‘mindfulness’ shifted in the course of the twentieth century, and is now variously described as “being in the present,” “non-judgmental,” “in a state of bare awareness,” or even “experiencing each moment anew.” Although such factors arise in the attentiveness required in recollection-discernment, the recollection of Dharma has been lost in Buddhist “mindfulness.”[2]

Purpose. This book serves as a general introduction to the Buddha’s Dharma, and how to put it into practice. Highlighting right recollection in this book will establish a natural, and functional perspective for understanding the logic of the Buddha’s Dharma. From this perspective, even the most philosophically sophisticated and astute points of Dharma are no more than parts of the scaffold that upholds practice. Accordingly, we can place any Dharmic teaching in terms of its function by inquiring, “How do we put this into practice?” or equivalently, “Where and when do we need to bring this to mind for the benefit of our practice?”

By the same token, we can inquire how any Dharmic practice leads toward awakening.

This book advances a well-rounded, holistic view of the Buddhist life of practice as involving the development of many interrelated Dharmic skills, such as cultivating attitudes of kindness, social harmony, and generosity in everyday life; learning introspective awareness of our motivations; and sitting on the cushion to develop wisdom concerning the nature of our world. An introduction that jumps too quickly into ever-popular meditation practice often misses the point that all these diverse aspects of the Buddhist life work organically together.

This book focuses on the practice of 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),[3] which are, for the most part, records of Dharma talks or sermons of the Buddha, also called "discourses."[4] The EBT are the historical basis for all of the diverse later schools of Buddhism, such as the Zen, Tibetan and Theravada schools, which largely retain, but always supplement in various ways, the intention of the early texts. In this book, we will examine the options for making Dharma foundational "in the midst" of a modern life, including the difficulties of wrapping our minds around teachings rooted in a fifth-century BCE, South Asian worldview.

Overview. 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 about twenty pages, and is suitable as a textbook for 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 have already become known in the English language.

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 (regarded as the language of the Buddha) 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 so they can be read through in sequence without flipping back and forth between them and the main text.

The five chapters are as follows:

Living in Dharma serves as a general introduction to the Dharma and practice with particular attention to the role of keeping the Dharma in mind as a guide for practice.

Living in virtue explains the fundamental ethical practices that belong to a Buddhist life: precepts, giving, and purity of mind, and how virtue becomes integral to character.

Living in devotion discusses the wider motivational context of Buddhist practice, in order to uplift and incentivize it.

Living in wisdom takes up the issue of how we misperceive the world, and how we learn to see things instead as the Buddha saw them, through verification, and investigation of his wisdom teachings in terms of directly observable experience. Finally,

Living in the midst offers practical advice for integrating Buddhist practice into a modern life already busy with responsibilities and pursuits.

Acknowledgments. This book is an update of my 2019 book *Mindfulness: where Dharma Meets Practice*, which was printed for limited distribution. This book was subsequently published

for free distribution by Inward Path Publisher in Malaysia. It originated in response to a request from the Jade Buddha Temple in Houston to offer weekend seminar as an introduction to Buddhism, for which my earlier *Buddhist Life/Buddhist Path* was far too big to use as a textbook. This new release is intended for global distribution.

I would like to thank Colleen Kastanek, Bruce Sebecke, Tiffany Determan for proofreading the manuscript. My long-time student Jan Naidu commissioned the cover graphics, which was admirably produced by Abdul Kalam, and also benefited from the artistic advice of Linda Christianson. As I write this, Loretta Draths is about to undertake the promotion of the present book to reach a larger readership. Linda and Loretta are participants in my “Buddha’s Bookclub” here in Minnesota.

As a monk, I live in constant gratitude toward many monastery donors. During the course of this project I’ve dwelt primarily at the Sitagu Dhamma Vihara in Minnesota, and at the Sitagu Buddha Vihara in Austin, Texas. The material support received from householders allows me to undertake projects such as this at will, in the absence of a salary or academic grant support. Additionally, the monks with which I live maintain a harmonious, uplifting, and supportive environment in which to pursue meditation, study and writing.

May these teachings be a way to pay forward the generosity of those who have supported this project in one way or another, and may their merit be a causal factor in their awakening.

Idaṁ me puññaṁ bodhiñāṇassa paccayo hotu.

Bhikkhu Cintita
Chisago City, MN
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Living in Dharma

Buddhism begins with the problematic nature of the human condition, which we call "suffering."[5] We suffer 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 elusive 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 do we make everything into such a 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 snarl through more skillful behavior, and through proper understanding. We do not require a higher power to do this.

Let me introduce a couple of technical terms used to describe all this.

Samsara is this dispositional entanglement that entraps us in suffering.

The Buddha viewed samsara as enduring life after life until we do something about it. We will see the benefit of this view in the chapter on devotion: death does not give us an easy way out of samsara. Rather, samsara becomes the stage for 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 this way of framing samsara.

Awakening (aka "enlightenment"), **liberation** or **nirvana**[6] is the complete release from our entanglement.

Awakening, though difficult to achieve, is within the range of human capability. Through virtue, wisdom and aptitude 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 aptitude. Nonetheless, even if we do not reach this perfection, our skill in life will improve steadily with practice, as our life becomes less and less problematic through progressive stages.

The skill of life

We acquire skills as we learn to ride a bike, throw pottery, take care of a toddler, bird-watch, play poker, cook French cuisine, or fashion an arrowhead. In acquiring a skill we develop behavioral qualities, mental qualities, and know-how to try to produce better results of the intended kind, and we recognize thereby that there are, broadly speaking, right ways to reach these results, and wrong ways that fail to reach these 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 causing harm.

What we do in Buddhism is the same as what the potter does, except that 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.[7] Buddhism offers a gradual course of training for 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. The next few 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 generating 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 both 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 having arrived at our destination, or else with our heads in the clouds. It is still karma because in principle we have a choice.

Skillful or **wholesome**[8] 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”[9] behind the action, like kindness or renunciation. An example of a wholesome action is giving directions to a confused tourist, or meditating on kindness.

Unskillful or **unwholesome**[10] 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 is what guides practice, setting the parameters of what is skillful practice. However it also evolves with practice, such that it is defined differently the the beginning and end of practice.

Dharma, **“**doctrine” or “teachings,” the conceptual, instructional basis of practice, acquired through study.

Dharma, “things as they are,” the inexpressible truth achieved by awakened ones, acquired gradually through practice.

The first is much like a cookbook that supports successful cooking. The second is like the competence of a master chef that is so thoroughly internalized that they cannot explain more than a fraction of what they are doing in conceptual terms. For those on the path, the Dharma that guides practice is at any point some

hybrid of the two. As we engage in practice, we repeatedly make choices as to what tasks we perform in evolving circumstances, while keeping the Dharma in mind. Our practice is successful to the extent that we choose and perform skillful actions and avoid unskillful actions. Dharma is a guide to skillful karma. The following two aspects of such actions are clearly distinguished: recollection of Dharma, and effort in practice. This is "where Dharma meets practice."

Recollection or **conscientiousness** is having learned something in the past, bringing it to mind, and keeping it in mind as a guide to practice.

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 in the early texts 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 recollection as remembering "what was done and said long ago," but it also pairs recollection

with discernment of the current practice setting: the present situation is assessed conscientiously on the basis of the recollection of what is or is not wholesome. In this way, recollection "attends to" to the current setting.

> **Attentiveness** manages attention in order to optimize discernment of particular aspects of the practice setting that are relevant to the present practice task.[12]

The early texts often attribute attentiveness to recollection, when its Dharmic know-how is optimally utilized in practice. 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 this 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 instructs his monks to practice "recollection 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 primary potential distraction is the most beautiful girl of the land.

If 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 the section "How to flambé." Recollection must be attentive in order to bring to mind what is specifically relevant in the present context. For example, recollection 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, as we develop in our skills, that much of what we recollect 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 avoid or get rid of what is not skillful, according to the principles that one brings to mind.[14]

For instance, if the angry impulse arises to hit a source of insult with our umbrella, but we are nonetheless conscientious with regard to Dharma, we recognize immediately that this would violate the first precept, before we enact the impulse. 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 prevails.

We can think of recollection as a thermostat and effort as the electric heater that the thermostat controls. Recollection monitors (is attentive to) the room temperature so that it notices immediately 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, recollection or conscientiousness monitors the miso soup on the stove, bringing to mind the tip that miso soup should not be allowed to come to a boil. Effort turns off the stove at the critical moment that is conscientiously awaited, 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 attentive effort in response to appropriate recollection.[15]

These are important concepts for the Buddha,

> … 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 recollect the Dharma even while failing to make the effort to behave consistently within the Dharma, for instance by drinking booze 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 Dharma even while (for now) 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 realize benefit for ourselves or others.

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

So, we ask ourselves, do we *seek* something for ourselves in that action, 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 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* ethically based, and is 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, such that wholesome practice produces the kind of character that is outwardly kind and compassionate, ultimately saintly, and inwardly has an abiding sense of satisfaction and delight, steeped in wisdom and virtue. Ultimately Buddhist practice can lead to the perfection of the human character, to awakening.

What is skillful therefore 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 accumulation 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 new 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 resists 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 and that we remake our 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 conscientiousness 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 produce 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 in which we are doing something other than "practicing Buddhism" is bound to dominate our progress. This is why it is important to develop persistent conscientiousness. This is why it is important to learn to live in Dharma 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 and resume knitting 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 conscientiousness 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.

(1) For **the truth of suffering**, our task is to **understand** our suffering.

Understanding, or insight, is in fact a primary engine of skill acquisition for Buddhists. In acquiring Dharmic skills, we develop, and make progress toward awakening.

(2) 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 samsara. A preceding, conditioning snarl is often easier to tease apart than the one that currently occupies us. Part of under-standing suffering is to understand the conditions under which it arises.

(3) For **the truth of the cessation of suffering**, our task is to **realize** that cessation.

This is one way to state the ultimate point of Buddhist practice.

(4) 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.

(1) **Right view** is a correct understanding of Dharma, acquired through reading/listening, study, experiential investigation, repeated familiarization, and internalization.

Right view is how we understand the cookbook of practice in our progressive degrees of familiarization. Since the book before you

is intended to get you started in right view, you are, with a modicum of diligence, already practicing right view. However, it is not enough to know what Dharma is conceptually, we must acquire it as a practice skill. In this sense it is our maturing Dharmic "know-how" that is, practically speaking, what recollection brings to in mind. It is on its way to becoming the Dharma realized by the awakened.

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

Whereas right view provides the map, right intention provides the compass to ensure we stay on course in our practice. We've all gotten lost, without GPS and unable to locate ourselves on a 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 are reasonably certain we can still make progress.

(3) **Right speech** is practice so that our verbal actions become beneficial, harmless, and conducive to the qualities 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.

(4) **Right action** is to practice so that our bodily actions become beneficial, harmless and conducive to the qualities 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.

(5) **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.

(6) **Right effort** is to be vigilant in following proper choices, to do 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 final three factors of the noble eightfold path. They are themselves skills that must be carefully trained and cultivated.

(7) **Right recollection** is bringing Dharma to mind as a guide for attentive engagement in the current practice task.

This is not only the executive, or decision-making function of recollection; it also calls for utmost zeal and undistracted attentiveness in order to optimize practice. We might also characterize right recollection, when fully attained, as “skillful engagement,” where the required skill is Dharmic, or as “attentive recollection,” where attentiveness is under the guidance of recollected Dharma.

Finally, the proper integrated functioning of the first seven steps on the noble eightfold path result repeatedly—certainly, for the experienced practitioner—in the arising of the final step.

(8) **Right composure**, aka “concentration” or “samadhi,”[18] is a meditative state that is serene, clear and undistracted, that collects and balances an array of skillful cognitive factors.

Composure has various functions, but is ultimately an extremely refined instrument of insight, that is, a fine-tuned intuitive understanding of the world based on Dharma. Right composure

takes full possession of, and perfects the previous path factors, helping to make 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 conscientious in terms of that understanding, and through exerting effort to move away from the unskillful and toward the skillful in our actions. In the Buddha’s words,

> Right view is the forerunner. and how is right view 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 view, 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 view,” “right intention,” “right speech,” “right action” and “right livelihood.” This is simply the process we've been looking at, whereby right recollection monitors, and guides practice in the present situation, like a thermostat, with the relevant aspects of right view in mind, and then right effort kicks in to produce a skillful result.[21]

Cultivating skillful engagement

Recollection is itself a skill to be acquired. 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, archery, snipery, shuffleboard, bird watching, beekeeping, ceramics and deactivating bombs. I

imagine that certain kinds of provocative women's clothing demand a well-developed faculty of sustained recollection, in order to attend to the kinesthetic state of the clothing in the present situation. This requires utmost conscientiousness: norms of social propriety and even law must be kept attentively in mind. 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 passing from house to house on alms round with utmost conscientiousness.[22]

Here, we want to consider how to be attentively recollective both in Buddhist practice, and in everyday tasks.

Optimizing skillful engagement. The discussion so far suggests some pointers for being skillfully engaged.

(1) Stay on a well-defined task.

We do well to avoid multitasking, such as listening to music or practicing our two-step while cutting carrots, or such as driving while drinking coffee, smoking, talking on the cell phone, listening to music, and wishing we were already home, all at the same time. Multitasking scatters our attention, making it hard to pinpoint just what skillful guidance we are supposed to be keeping in mind. In the later, 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 stream anything that does not help us to chop carrots, including striving, or hurrying with regard to the task. However, we recollect our know-how around 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 be encouraged by being competent in our task. If the

task is not challenging enough, we can impose higher standards on our tasks by introducing certain constraints, such as cutting carrots in uniform slices, or dividing routine tasks into well-defined subtasks, and doing them in a fixed order.[23]

(4) Observe the details of the task.

We perform most tasks on autopilot, generally because we have internalized our skills so thoroughly they do not need conscious monitoring. When chopping carrots, our fingers already know what to do, even how to avoid being chopped. This has some benefits, but it means we are not optimally engaged. Instead, the mind seeks an outlet for its energy in distractions beyond the task at hand. We can restore engagement by observing what otherwise goes unnoticed: the texture of the carrots, the resistance they offer to the edge of the knife, the sound of the knife against the cutting board. As you take on the observer's stance in the primary task, it might feel like you are perched on your shoulder watching someone else chopping carrots.

If you are not engaged in any particular task, you might optionally make observation itself your task. You might conscientiously watch whatever comes up in experience: sounds, thoughts, emotions. Ardency comes with a sense of curiosity, but be careful not to fall into the distraction of letting thinking run wild. Let the world do the talking and attend to every word.

It is easy to appreciate how these four rules of thumb for skillful engagement produce stability of mind: the mind centers on a single theme, does not thrash from one thing to another, acquires a certain delight in the present, and steps back from the striving for some particular result. We will see that recollection, with little encouragement, tends to result in serenity and composure.

Being present. Modern literature often describes “mindfulness” as being “in the present moment,” even though recollection,

conscientiousness, and keeping Dharma in mind bring to the task what has been acquired in the *past*. However, avoiding distractions in recollection does induce an important shift in our relationship to the present moment.

The present is suspended between past and future. Any task we perform there is potentially conditioned by either past concerns, or future concerns, or both. The past concerns, communicated through recollection, are typically the learned values, standards and techniques that define the *know-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 *know-why* of the task.

Recollection 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 recollection upholds, striving contrives. Either tries to direct the performance of the task. As we practice recollection, the know-why of striving tends to drop out of mind, nudging the motivational structure of the task: We subjectively *inhabit* the task as something satisfying in pursuing well, rather than *utilizing* the task for some purpose beyond the task itself.[24] This is why this chapter is called "Living *in* Dharma," not "Getting what we want from Dharma." As we live in Dharma, "me" tends to get lost in the task at hand.

For instance, if our action is washing dishes, recollection brings to mind an array of basic 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 attentiveness in washing dishes, our future concerns might induce us to hurry through the job so that we can then have some "real fun": playing a video game, or garnering 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.[25] This

makes washing the dishes more an act of devotion rather than a utilitarian act. In washing in order to wash, recollection rather than striving becomes the guide.

Similarly, a sales employee named Bob in a clothing store can bring to mind the inventory, color schemes, current fashions, etc., but might also be intent on getting a commission for a successful sale, and be 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, to lie a little to a customer, and sometimes to overcharge. But with training in recollection, 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.

Three strands of practice

For understanding the logic of the noble eightfold path, it is helpful to identify three intertwined strands, those of **wisdom**, **virtue** and **aptitude**.

- The strand of **wisdom** develops an understanding of how we misperceive the world, and how we then behave on the basis of those misperceptions. It is represented in right view and right intention .
- The strand of **virtue** (aka ethics, or morality) purifies behavior in accordance with right speech, right action and right livelihood.

Since delusion leads to impulses toward unskillful behaviors, and since virtuous behaviors attenuate the perceptual distortion associated with self-centeredness, virtue and wisdom are acquired together, virtue largely through reconditioning our behaviors according to Dharma, and wisdom through investigation of observable experience in the light of Dharma.

The strand of **aptitude**[26] optimizes skillfulness in the practice of wisdom and virtue through the faculties of right effort, right recollection and right composure.

These faculties provide the qualities that we would expect of one who has an aptitude for success in fulfilling even mundane tasks, through zeal, discipline, full skillful engagement, attentiveness, concentration, and conscientiousness.

Living in virtue

The *Dhammapada*[27] tells us:

> Refraining from every evil,
> Accomplishing good,
> Purifying the mind,
> This is teaching of Buddhas.[28]

Virtue is the beginning, and the central concern of the Dharma. If recollection of virtue is established, then wisdom, aptitude, and eventually awakening have a strong foundation upon which to 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 dominates our practice increasingly as it matures.

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 clinging, and ends the self-centeredness that otherwise perpetually seeks 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 might shock, but should not cause despair. 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. We can become otherwise, but it requires discipline and persistence. Although practicing 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 conscientious engagement in human affairs. Living in virtue places our practice in the problematic world from the beginning, where wisdom and aptitude help to sharpen this skill of life.[29]

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 infidelity, and with sex with minors, where harm almost always results. The fifth promotes attentiveness 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 add 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, for instance—according to tradition—on new-, full- and quarter-moon days. Monastics, in their enthusiasm, observe hundreds of precepts. When we attend meditation retreats we may be expected conscientiously to follow 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 is 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 recollection, as we bring the appropriate precepts comparatively easily to mind, when the present situation calls for them.

Recollection 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. 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 them, we take a cold shower. In this way, recollection and effort work together in practice. If someone expresses an opinion we disagree with in an online discussion, instead of flaming harshly or maliciously, we give ourselves a chance to cool down before responding appropriately. The attentively recollective encounter between precept and practice setting encourages intimacy with our contrary impulses as effort develops the ability 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 recollection. Even as we are recollective 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.[30]

Even the recollective person might have the precept clearly in mind as they are about to violate it, as they are violating it, and after they have violated it. Nonetheless, recollection brings diligence, and bearing the precept in mind will allow them to

fully acknowledge the transgression and determine to do better in the future. Or if they are not convinced of the need for the precept —a surprising number of people actually feel that malicious backbiting benefits the world by shining the light of truth in other people's dark corners—constantly revisiting the precept through recollection may eventually convince them to engage it with more diligence. Alternatively, they may be dealing with contrary social influences in their life, and working out the dissonance—or not: it is up to them.

Recollection 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 recollection and effort that we progress in our practice. Often recollection itself fails, for instance, if we act before recollection 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 improve recollection.

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.[31] 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 fail. Precept practice might give us our first taste of liberation by lifting us out of our confining karmic ruts, to follow alternative guidelines through our own volition. Our conscientiousness 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.[32] This explains the feeling of liberation experienced in following precepts.

Giving

Giving[33] 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 giving is, in fact, traditionally the life-blood of the Buddhist community. The ubiquity of giving makes temples and monasteries uplifting places to visit. They are economies of gifts where people enjoy giving to others, and receive appreciatively 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 fulfilling the practice of giving. Such volunteer efforts can even scale up to the enterprise level, like founding hospitals in third-world

countries, or advocating for peace, for social justice, or for environmental protection. Or we can simply be on constant lookout for opportunities as they arise to help others, like helping to change a tire, or like 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 settings. Giving is different, because it is open-ended. Recollection 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 unlikely manifest results until we can commit ourselves to a structured regimen. Conscientiousness 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. Keeping any of these metrics in mind obliquely encourages the respective practice. Merit refers to the cumulative fruits of our skillful Buddhist practice, which is of benefit to ourselves, and others as well.[34]

> **Merit** conceptually quantifies the benefit of giving as an approximate composite measure. It is closely related to skillfulness and the fruits of karma.[35]

> **Merit-making** is to act in a way that accumulates merit.

Aware 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 earned according to categories of recipient, gift, manner of giving, and intention, roughly as follows.[36]

- To whom is it given?

Worthy recipients of giving are ascetics and others 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 for whom we bear a social responsibility. Monastics are often called a “field of merit,” in which our gifts are like seeds that grow through the role of the monastic in benefiting the practice of many.

- What is given?

The gift of Dharma exceeds all other gifts. 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.[37]

- 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 joy. These qualities mark full engagement in the act of giving.

- Why is it given?

Giving out of annoyance, out of fear, or 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”[38] 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.[39]

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 householder-monastic relationship is its beating heart. In fact, the Buddha did something quite clever to achieve this result: He imposed in the monastic code an enhanced level of dependence on householders, removed monastics entirely from the exchange economy, and made their dependence a matter of daily contact with householders. He then doubled down in requiring that a monk or nun not be allowed to do their own cooking, nor to save offered food until the next day, nor to have any kind of employment, nor to trade with householders, nor to ask for anything except under critical circumstances, nor even to endear themselves 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. (We are almost as cute, with our fluffy robes and bald heads.)

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. and they teach. The result is that monastics live entirely in what has been called an "economy of gifts,"[40] in which goods and services flow solely through acts of giving, and householders live at least part-time in that economy as they interact with the monks. Although the practice of giving in Buddhism tends to be centered around the mutual support of monastic and householder, at least in Asia, its spirit easily flows over the entire Buddhist community, and beyond.

Watching the mind. As we practice giving, we also conscientiously observe the effects of giving on our mind. To begin with, we watch out for signs of 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 might 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.[41] In the end we may become increasingly hungry for new opportunities for giving, and finally discover that doing things on behalf of others is one of the most meaningful parts 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 rapture, a supra-mundane pleasure beyond the sensual, that comes with giving. Become aware that this rapture 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 rapture 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 thereby bring to others. Simply ensuring that one person gets proper medical care, or teaching inmates to meditate is easy for us relative to the huge benefits that accrue for others.[42]

Purity

The intention to adhere to precepts, or to earn merit reshapes our karmic landscape. In the end we want to acquire the kind of mind that cannot be other than virtuous. This is purity. To develop purity, we take up the introspective practice of observing mind in terms of *Dharma*. 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. This is true every time effort struggles to keep up with the recollection of a precept. Every time effort overrides a contrary mental factor, we jump out of a rut and begin to de-condition 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, in which we are compelled by peer, or authority pressure, or otherwise obligated to act, 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. Check it out.

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 in the future. 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 our practice. We will have, simply through observing this precept, made the mind purer. These non-harmlessness-based precepts develop purity of

mind in much the same way as harmlessness-based precepts avert immediate harm for others.

Refrain from de-purifying 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 *de-purify* 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 householders 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 de-purify the mind, even while doing no immediate 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, urges that our practice otherwise tries to moderate. We do well to de-habituate such activities.

Greed, aversion and delusion. Our next practice task will be to evaluate our 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.[43]

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, appropriation 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 for 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, and negative judgments. It quickly manifests as anxiety and restlessness. Both greed and aversion are forms of craving, highlighted in the second noble truth.

> **Delusion** is found in erroneous views or justifications, conceptualizations, misperceptions, presumptions, 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 mind, and that is an agent in, and a perceiver of the world, a self that is fearful of the world, but is always looking for personal advantage in it. 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 in common, absent in skillful intentions:

(1) They are *rooted* either in greed, aversion, or 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 *misperceptions*.
(4) They cause personal *suffering*.
(5) They are an *obstruction* on the path to awakening.[44]

Let's take anger as an example. Anger is a particularly volatile form of aversion (root), that arises quickly and generally disperses just as quickly. It easily leads to verbal or physical assault, otherwise protected by the first precept or by 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 great, 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*).

Observation of impurity in terms of Dharma. Observation or investigation is a decisive factor in development on the path. With every action we undertake, we consistently attend to its underlying intention, careful to discern, to begin with, whether it is skillful or unskillful. We can trace these intentions as they

affect our ethical choices, and as they affect personal suffering or ease. Unwholesome intentions are those carrying some degree of suffering—stress, anxiety, uneasiness, 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 harm.

We might thereby be embarrassed at how many forms of unwholesomeness we discover making their appearances in turn, such as anger, lust, deluded views, fear, stress, envy, jealousy, spite, restlessness, anxiety, arrogance, and pride. We will discover how ubiquitous these factors are as the stress and anxiety become apparent, even when we would otherwise have imagined that 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, conscientious observation provides immediate, albeit temporary, relief from the effects of unskillful factors. For instance, when we attend to how the anger manifests in the body (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. Moreover, repeated 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.[45]

Observation in terms of Dharma 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 they must avoid the com-

pany of people who drink to avoid their own impulse to do so. We can similarly avoid circumstances that tend to lead us into undesirable but accustomed ruts.

Turning from recollection to effort, it should be possible to practice restraint. When we realize that a thought is unwholesome, we stop before that thought turns to speech. 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 before this critical juncture between thought, and bodily or verbal action, and we will discover some on our own. For instance, we might 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 de-meritorious. Recall that when we are attentive, we discern when Dharmic parameters are about to be breached, so that effort can avert this eventuality. Gradually, we learn to improve the quality of our intentions, to weed out the unwholesome and to cultivate the wholesome. Meanwhile, investigation in terms of what we have recollected improves right view, 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 of our 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 immensely 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.[46]

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 much as we watch birds, or solve puzzles simply out of delight in doing so. We noted in chapter one that attentiveness nudges the motivational structure of our activities in this direction, and skillful engagement or attentive recollection inhabits our tasks by focusing on the "how" aspect, rather than utilizing them by striving toward the "why," for striving is an unskillful, self-concerned distraction from the task at hand, and striving disrupts recollection of the Dharma that 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 recollection from the perspective of virtue, and of how striving—based in greed and/or aversion—leads to immediate suffering—anxiety, stress and so on—and to other prob-

lems. Although its nudge gives recollection an upright quality, conscientious practice of virtue provides a broader context for practice that points to the difference between "recollection" and "right recollection." A sniper or a jewel thief can engage in their skill conscientiously 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 principles of virtue. *Right* recollection, on the other hand, adheres to Dharma, and so will never neglect the principles 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 principles of harmlessness, giving, and kindness. This is why this chapter is called "living *in* virtue." As we live in virtue, we lose "me" in our concern for the well-being of all, and we enjoy a far greater sense of personal well-being.[47] 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.[48]

We noted earlier also that recollection and attentiveness naturally produce stability of mind: the mind settles into a single theme, does not thrash from one thing to another, and acquires a certain delight in the present. With purity of mind, the mind is further calmed through the larger context of satisfaction, 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 rapture arises in one who is joyful
>
> … It is natural that the body of one with a rapturous 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.[49]

Variations of the progression "delight → tranquility → composure" are often 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 aspect of practice, whose experience far exceeds, and is put into sharp contrast with normal mundane experiences.[50]

An example. Through conscientious ethical conduct, even the new practitioner can observe this dimension beginning to play out. For example, one day you are doing laundry and you find your housemate has left a lot of clothes in the dryer. At first you think,

> "I've got places to go and things to do. I'll just pull everything out and dump it in his or her hamper."

But then you recognize the Dharma of merit-making and see this as a prime opportunity. You decide,

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

Accordingly, you engage in, and stay on the task of folding clothes conscientiously, putting aside whatever thoughts are not relevant to folding clothes, in accordance with the principles you bear 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!”

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 proceed 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 satisfaction, to joy to delight and so on, possibly (especially as such practices become habituated) as far as right 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 (non-Buddhist) adage states,

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

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 attentive recollection, and with regard to virtue. We want at this time to look at the deeper motivation that induces us to practice Dharma in the first place. Buddhist understanding and practice are 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 those who buy themselves accordions, of the betrothed, and of the career bound, stirred by deep longing, or by desperation. Do they ever, *ever* really 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 fully to embrace Buddhist life, or to embrace anything at all that is vitally meaningful. When these are present, our practice and understanding are capable of providing the foundational orientation in which all other aspects of our lives find their place. Those who aspire to the greatest attainments need to be on fire. We often see this in scientists, in artists, and in activists on behalf of the oppressed. Catching fire begins with “trust” and develops into “devotion.”

Trust, aka **faith**[51] fills the gap between the little we know, and what we need to know in order to act with certitude.

Trust is a necessary part of our internal choice apparatus in all spheres of life. We are karmic beings, repeatedly called upon to choose, and to act, but—given the prevailing uncertainty of the world—almost never with certitude as to results. Trust is necessary for virtually any decision. We must trust a friend's recommendation of a movie, or of a dentist, or trust the faithfulness of a romantic or business partner. The alternative is to sit timid at home with nothing to do, with a toothache, lonely, and without prospects of financial rewards. However, no choice is also a choice, and generally not the best choice.

Trust often depends on the absence of other more viable alternatives, as when we have no idea where we are, so we make a random choice and walk “that” way. It can similarly be driven by desperation with scant odds of success. Unfortunately, we easily fall prey in our choices to irrational factors, such as a slick commercial or salesperson, the bedside manner of a doctor or the charisma of a preacher. Discernment is therefore wise, wherever feasible, though it also falls short of certitude.

Trust in something of vital concern easily takes on a motivational force, a commitment to open our heart and mind to the choice we

have made. A scientist may be motivated to pursue even an initially unlikely path of investigation relentlessly. Without motivation beyond the odds, trust serves little purpose. Motivation may grow to "wholeheartedness," which is actually the origin of the Pali word that we translate as trust or faith.[52] Big wholehearted choices with dubious certitude define the realm of greatest human foolhardiness, but also the realm of greatest human achievement.

Devotion is a sense of wholehearted commitment that motivates practice as meaningful and satisfying in itself.[53]

We have seen in previous chapters that through conscientiousness, we tend to "inhabit" a 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 principles 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."

As a motivator to begin practice, we may have been told 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.[54] Some of this may be true, but it is important to develop devotion itself as our primary motivator, since striving for personal advantage gives our practice an unwholesome edge of craving. But once devotion takes hold, we easily set such striving toward future goals aside to simply inhabit the life we have chosen with conscientiousness. This is why this chapter is called "living *in* devotion."[55] As we live in devotion, we tend to lose "me" in the practice of the Dharma.

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.[56]

In effect, in early Buddhism admirable friends are the teachers, those of higher attainment or spiritual progress 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."[57]

Admirable friends have themselves already entered with devotion 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, the adepts. Moreover, the Buddha created the "Sangha," as the monastic community where such admirable adepts are trained,[58] but there are

also householder Buddhist adepts of great attainment.

The Sangha serves to uplift the wider community by fulfilling three social functions: First, as a community of adepts and would-be adepts, 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 Sangha provides an ideal context for Buddhist practice for those who aspire to devote themselves to 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.[59] More broadly, the Sangha forms a disciplined counterculture embedded (but, at the same time, venerated) in a wider culture on which it exerts influence. (What would if be like if the beatniks of bygone days had had such influence in the broader community?)

The flourishing of the 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.[60]

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 advanced 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 exceptional, "noble" householders who have attained at least the initial stage of awakening called "stream entry."[61] In short, Sangha provides a concentration of highly qualified admirable friends, who tend to evoke trust and to inspire us to wholehearted devotion.

Refuge

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

The Buddha is the awakened one, the historical founder of the Buddhist movement.

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 of Buddhist adepts of very advanced attainment.

These three objects of trust invite two further definitions:

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

Refuge is wholehearted devotion to the guidance 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 opens our hearts and minds to the practice of virtue, wisdom and aptitude. Trust will grow progressively more discerning and acquire more depth, as we repeatedly have the opportunity to check things out in our experience. The *Dhammapada* says,

> He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma,

> and the 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.[62]

On the basis of refuge in the triple gem we open our hearts and minds to the influence of the teachings of the Buddha. We then begin to study and practice wholeheartedly, and to develop and gain insight into these teachings.[63] Refuge is the center of our faith, and of our devotion, a home we inhabit in lieu of unwholesome striving, a safe and nurturing context in which our practice unfolds. The word "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 ritual practices of devotion give attentive recollection a key role, as we bring our values, and particularly the triple gem, repeatedly to mind, so that they become ever-present supports for our path practices, an influence on the ardency and direction of our practice.[64] Such practices are verbal, mental and even bodily. They also give Buddhism much of the appearance of "religiosity."

Many modern Buddhists and would-be Buddhists (and doubtlessly many readers of this book) tend to dismiss whatever smells of "religiosity." Let me say a word about this. Modern disdain for "religiosity" itself has religious roots, primarily in the early Protestant movement (with "protest" in its name). Moreover, every ritual 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 relatively thin in early (but not later) Buddhism, but (as with path practices) they have well-established, natural (and often essential) functions

for the benefit of practice. They also produce a strong sense of community for those who participate in them wholeheartedly. No further justification should be necessary.

Verbal refuge. Refuge is meant to be borne conscientiously in mind as the backdrop of the rest of our practice. One way to develop recollection 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.[65] Repetition has helped many throughout history to internalize their devotion to the triple gem, thereby to to bear it more readily in mind (this practice seems not to move everyone equally).

> 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.[66]

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 in a few pages.

> Some **qualities of the Sangha** are that it practices well, uprightly, systematically and skillfully, is worthy of support and of respect, and is a field of merit.

This refers to the quality of monastic practice and how householders properly relate to monastics. The Sangha has also been critical, since the time of the Buddha, for the propagation

and perpetuation of Buddhist teachings, without which the Buddhist teaching we now enjoy would scarcely have survived.[67]

In addition to the recollection 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 a way of talking about the long-term karmic fruits of our actions and are therefore associated with purity of mind. Each of these six recollection practices produces similar results leading to 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.[68]

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 recollection of the triple gem gives rise to the same familiar progression "rapture → tranquility → composure."

Although we are looking at refuge primarily as a motivator for path practices, this passage tells us that refuge in itself produces some of 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 devout (not casual) religious people enjoy significantly improved mental and physical health, happiness, calm, a sense of well-being, and strong social bonds.[69] We should not sell devotion short.

Bodily refuge. We enhance the effectiveness of practice through verbal recitation, but perhaps even more so through putting our bodies into it. Buddhists take a page out of the playbook 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,[70] in which actions "count as" something beyond mere physical postures, just as gentle nips count as violent chomps for the puppy at play.

Refuge is similarly embodied through gestures of deference. 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 to him, nor walking ahead of him. These are formalities based in early Indian etiquette, and well documented in the earliest texts.[71] To bow to the Buddha (or 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, that is, 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 applies to the only *living* gem and therefore assumes a particularly personal quality.

Again, 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 benefit bowing brings to practice.[72] Devotional ritual practices also dovetail with the cultivation of engagement in non-Dharmic skills discussed in chapter one. Because of the demanding elaborate and normative nature of rituals, keeping them in mind permits little distraction. At the same time, our karmic actions take on a kind of "sacred" quality, as if every action were to have an exclamation point after it.[73]

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 have generally continued to center around refuge, but to have grown into something much more elaborate and freely mixed with elements of folk culture, such as ancestor worship, and blessings for good fortune.[74] 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,[75] commonly augmented through ritual offerings of food, light, incense and water.

Some schools, like Pure Land Buddhism and modern Soka Gakkai, are primarily devotional, much like many 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, if not practice them. They 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[76]

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 process of experiential discovery. The Dharma is something we gradually make our own until eventually faith is no longer necessary. We don't need to be so wary in the case of Dharma, properly understood.

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, aptitude, and wisdom. The Dharma itself is among history's greatest products of the human mind, skillfully articulated in its earliest form 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 avoided useless speculation about topics irrelevant to the understanding and 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."[77]

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 might give Buddhism the 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 aptitude. 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.[78]

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 all the more difficult. The *Kalama Sutta* warns us not to seek 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 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.[79]

Elsewhere it is suggested that effort is required to verify the Dharma against experience, since the Dharma is "personally experienced by the *wise*," a category most of us fail to attain. The Buddha invites us "to come and see,"[80] 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 motivate 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 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, a 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 cuff-links would make us exceedingly dashing and that that would lead to prospects for romance, and to other forms of social and perhaps even business success. Therefore, we conclude, "Craving clearly leads not to suffering, but to happiness!" However, we are looking in the wrong place. This is where taking Dharma 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 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 inseparable as a shadow. In fact, as soon as we need to have titanium cuff links there is stress and anxiety, unmistakably once we know how to look. 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 a causal relationship to what we will see for ourselves, as devotion to practice turns trust into wisdom. Trust here is not about belief.

"Holding Dharma loosely" is a quality of adherence to the Dharma, 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. It depends on 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 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.[81]

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 is that if a proper teaching is accepted as a working assumption, it will eventually give rise to something seen directly, that is, something known for oneself with wisdom, as one's practice progresses.

What recollection bears in mind is not frozen truths, but malleable or workable working assumptions that the practitioner will further shape to match with experience as they are better understood through practice, eventually to become fully intern-

alized 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 of other intermediate ways of acceptance that fall short of realization in direct experience.[82]

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, is a source of energy, responsibility, and devotion, and shapes 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.[83]

This depth of 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. Come to think of it, I would find it difficult *not* to write books like this.

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, attentively 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.[84] 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, I daresay, 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."[85]

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 puts aside the question of whether this view is true or false. Rather he weighs in on how this view is likely to condition the practice lives of such contemplatives and brahmins:

> 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.[86]

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 incontrovertible teaching, when

> poorly grasped and poorly adopted by him, covers one side. He gives up the skillful option.[87]

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*[88] 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. Elsewhere, the Buddha seems confident that the practitioner will eventually discover in their own experience the truth of rebirth. However, the practitioner may find the discovery is of something other than what they expected, something other than a personal, serial one-birth-follows-one-death scenario. Maybe it is what I discovered. The point is to be engaged in an epic battle with terrible, ancient, twisted karmic forces that threaten the future, as we stand at the gateway between past and present.

Living in wisdom

The Buddha once said,

> The wise one established in virtue,
> Developing composure and wisdom,
> That ardent and prudent monk,
> It is he who disentangles his tangle.[89]

The practice of virtue 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 misperception of the world in which we live. The practice of wisdom removes such misperception. The passage above sees this 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 view, and is perfected in composure. It starts with developing a conceptual grasp of the human condition, proceeds as we further acquire Dharma through the discovery of this condition in our lived experience, and concludes with a full internalization of Dharma. This is a matter of achieving “knowledge and vision of things as they really are,” the precursor to complete awakening.

Developing right view

The process of developing right view, or of acquiring Dharma, is described in the **stages of liberation**:[90]

(1) The Teacher, or a fellow monk in the position of a teacher teaches Dharma to a monk …

(2) He himself teaches Dharma to others in detail as he has heard it, and learned it …

(3) He recites Dharma in detail as he has heard it, and learned it …

(4) He ponders, examines, and mentally inspects Dharma as he has heard it, and learned it …

(5) He has grasped well a certain theme of composure,[91] attended to it well, sustained it well, and penetrated it well with wisdom …[92]

The early stages refer to the rote memorization necessary in pre-literate India to learn and preserve Dharma conceptually, and to make it available to others. With modern access to written texts, we generally proceed more quickly to steps four and five, but must repeatedly flip back as needed in our Dharma books, as we conscientiously investigate and penetrate the manifestations of Dharma in our observable experience: our conceptualizations and appropriations, the unending alighting and flight of phenomena around body and mind, the entangled network of conditionality and the sense of me and mine that we take as so real. Our acquisition of Dharma develops from scripture into something integrated into a wide fabric of experience, to something internalized beyond the conceptual to the point that we intuitively perceive through the eyes of the Buddha.[93]

A birdwatcher goes through a similar process, as does the student of many a multifaceted craft: They begin with reading or consulting *the Peterson Field Guide* with its invaluable sketches, descriptions and seasonal distribution maps, try to remember

colors, markings, behavioral patterns and calls, then they bring their understanding attentively to mind as they observe alightings and flights around feeder and bush. The more they engage in their hobby, the more their understanding is refined, and integrated with their knowledge of local landscape and flora. With time much of their understanding becomes internalized as a matter of direct, *intuitive* perception of the feathery realm such that they need but catch the slightest motion, and glimpse of a tail in order to identify in an instant, without thought, "Oh, a northern flicker!" Effectively, they have learned to see through the eyes of Roger Tory Peterson. Notice the key role of internalization in acquiring the Dharma, or in acquiring the skill of birdwatching.

> **Internalization** is the aspect of learning whereby an explicit conceptual, and effortful basis of a skill, or store of knowledge acquires—through repeated practice—a tacit, intuitive, and effortless basis.[94]

Internalization is the reason you can drive your car without thinking about it. It likewise underlies the development of virtue, wisdom, aptitude, and ultimately awakening in Buddhist practice.

Recollection of Dharma is instrumental at each stage of liberation, as we repeatedly bring Dharma to mind through these various stages. Where recollection and ardency are applied to a wholesome practice task, and distractions are put aside, we expect composure to arise, just as in the case of virtue, and of refuge. Indeed, composure is generally ever-present in the wisdom practices of right view. The full passage for each of the five stages of liberation cited above concludes in an almost identically refrain with the now familiar causal chain "rapture → tranquility → 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, rapture arises. For one

> with a rapturous 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, … [95]

It often goes unacknowledged in modern circles that recitation of scripture routinely leads to composure.

In this chapter we take up Dharma, how Dharma relates to lived experience and how we acquire Dharma through internalization. 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 try to lay bare 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 elusive 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 that 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 against reality itself, that is, with some 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 experience, which is likely deluded. Experiencing something as real does not entail experiencing something real.

This might not be obvious, because it sure *seems* that we have direct access to the world "out there"—chair, flowers, window, chicken—but direct access 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 must, in fact, be fabricated.[96] For the Buddha,

> Mind precedes all phenomena. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-made.[97]

A phenomenon is an event, object or other factor as it occurs in experience.[98] Examples of phenomena are urges, feelings, ideas, plans, attention, and 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 pet chicken.

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, a presumption. 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.[99]

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.[100]

This orientation grounds the Dharma and our practice empirically in what we can directly experience.[101]

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 view, 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**,[102] 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 routinely 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.[103]

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 an effect of other elements and a condition 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 insubstantial 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.[104]

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.[105]

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 self is the primary example. As we come to live in wisdom, striving for personal advantage no longer makes sense, and "me" disappears into nature, that is, into the flux.

With this in mind, the Buddha asks us always to keep in mind 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 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 find 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 internalize this teaching, we never have to take anything personally, but rather simply as the unfolding of nature. But instead, most of us fabricate an even larger sense of self from what 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. 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.[106]

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. This explains why they cause us distress when we have a stake in them, or when we try to identify with them.

> In whatever way they presume, thereby it turns otherwise.[107]

These reflections aim at the fading of passion:[108] 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.

Insubstantiality

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 minds in a certain way, then we take it seriously as something real and substantial. We become infatuated with its objects, and 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. We just have to show up. But thinking this is just another experience, one that the mind fabricates. and it gets us into trouble.

To better see the unreliability of our experience of the world "out there," we can learn to watch ourselves making it up. To do this the Buddha suggests that we segment awareness events into five groups.

The **five aggregates** serve to group experience according to categories of awareness: form, impressions, perception,

fabrications, and consciousness.[109]

Keeping the five aggregates in mind reminds us that we are, at each step, observing awareness events unfold that are mentally conditioned—as in "mind precedes all phenomena." We are not observing the unfolding of 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.

An **impression** is an affective tone of experience as mattering, one with the potential to attract attention.

A **perception** is an immediate match with a familiar exemplar of something recollected. It typically gives something a name.

A **fabrication** is a conditioned composite of factors, such as things that have parts, relations, analyses, plans. It entails choice and so includes karmic activities.

An instance of **consciousness** is the decent and growth of awareness. Decent is an alighting of attention at some point in the experiential situation. Growth is a blossoming of the various categories of awareness events at that point, generally with the *conviction* of probing into a deeper reality "out there."

This sounds complex, but you can observe these factors for yourself. They arise continuously, even right here, right now. If you track the movement of your eyes, notice they they flit around constantly, alighting here and there, as one thing after another catches their attention. If they rest in one place, even for a moment, awareness events flourish right there to provide details: new forms, new impressions, new perceptions, new fabrications, along with the overarching presumption that all these details are already part of a coherent world "out there."

For instance, some vague movement (form plus an impression of

curiosity) draws attention, which initiates consciousness, and the eyes turn fully in that direction. Where consciousness descends resolves itself into further forms and impressions, into perceptions (my cat), into fabrications (my cat has a bird in its mouth, I should go rescue the bird). For the Buddha, consciousness is always momentary, in spite of its accompanying conviction of continuity. This is all observable in principle; with composure it is observable in actuality. We will look at composure in more detail below.

Normally we view consciousness alternatively as something like an enduring flashlight that we shine on the real world, all very substantial. The aggregates provide a means to experience otherwise. Awareness events are distinguished from other mental events in that we are aware *of* something: a color, an attraction, a cat, a cat carrying a bird. These are objects that constitute the world we presume is "out there." The danger is that we often appropriate its objects as "me" or "mine." For instance, the cat is mine, and—significantly—the flashlight of consciousness is "me."

Aggregates of appropriation[110] are objects of awareness which we appropriate as me or mine.

When we classify these objects as products of the aggregates we begin to see them as shoddy merchandise. We see the cognitive seams left from the fabrication of our most cherished things in the world "out there." As a matter of practice, we are further asked to consider, in order to drive this point home, "this is not me, this is not mine, this is not of me, I am not of this."[111]

In this way we begin to pull back from taking the world "out there" seriously, eventually failing to see things as substantial, as given, fixed, or existing in themselves. We become *disenchanted* with such things. This process is given a boost in deeper states of composure, which temporarily disrupt the complex cognitive

faculties behind fabrication and consciousness. As we learn to fabricate less, we learn to experience "things" as "empty" of substantial existence.

Emptiness is the experience of objects of awareness as lacking substantial existence "out there."

In emptiness there is no presumption of something fixed or substantial "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**[112] categorizes phenomena as conditioned by 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.[113]

There is an analogous list for the other five sense faculties as well: ear, nose, and so on. Form is the sense field "out there" of sight. It arises in association with the eye, and—behold!—eye consciousness arises (form + eye → eye consciousness). This whole event is called "contact," and once contact occurs, a series of factors dependent on contact arise in relation to what consciousness has imputed to exist "out there": feeling about it, craving it, thinking about it, and so on. The six spheres thereby

highlight the sense faculties 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.[114]

The sixfold sphere serves much of the same practice function as the aggregates, in reminding us of the cognitive origins of our experiential world. It also points to a way to control our experience at will: We "guard the senses" when we simply (but not always easily) look the other way, for instance, to avoid lust. The sense of self generally originates in the bifurcation into "in here," and "out there" that consciousness convinces us is real,

> 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.][115]

Accordingly, we train to see the eye, etc. as impermanent, as suffering, as not-self, and as empty.

Dependent co-origination.

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. This can be difficult to track, with many loops and collateral effects.

> **Dependent co-origination** is the arising together of a *network* of phenomena, through conditional relations among those phenomena.[116]

For expository clarity, the early Buddhist texts speak of linear *chains* of dependent co-origination, in which each factor is

described as having (at most) a single condition and 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 single thread through a dense causal net of contingency.

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

ignorance → fabrications → consciousness →
name-and-form → sixfold-sphere → contact →
impression → craving → appropriation →
becoming → birth → this mass of suffering

A single thread through the dense snarl of conditionality, this particular chain winds 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 these detrimental factors, 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, they have to do with delusion. The links of impression, craving, and appropriation

have to do with how we respond *emotionally* to what we have mis-conceptualized, and taken seriously. 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, and perpetuate that identity into future lives.

The chain of dependent co-origination seems deceptively simple. The Buddha describes the various factors involved clearly in many discourses. However, when we understand its embedding network of conditionality, we discover that their dynamics is quite complex, with many branches, loops and overlapping instantiations of the chain. These condition the illusory sense of personal identity, and its consequences in all of its contingent complexity. 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.[117] There is a lot to investigate 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 view, turn to a detailed investigation of Dharma and to bringing this contemplation into composure in order to penetrate it with wisdom. A well-known teaching describes this process in terms of a causal chain beginning with recollection:

> The **seven awakening factors**[118] are the following causal sequence describing a process that produces insight:
>
> (1) recollection,
> (2) Dharma-investigation,
> (3) energy,
> (4) rapture,
> (5) tranquility,

(6) composure,
(7) equanimity.

The first three of these factors correspond to the last stage of liberation. Let's start with the second factor.

Dharma investigation (sometimes called 'the foundations of mindfulness')[119] is the practice of investigating, verifying and internalizing Dharma teachings in observed experience.

Recollection brings to mind a particular Dharma teaching as the basis of investigation (for instance, "impermanence"). Investigation of Dharma chooses a realm of observable experience (for instance, breath) in terms of which that teaching can be verified, examined and internalized. Energy is the ardency and focus needed to fully engage in this practice. In connection with purity in the chapter on virtue, we learned to investigate what the Buddha taught about wholesomeness and unwholesomeness of intentions in a similar manner as such intentions arise.

The early texts include a tutorial for Dharma investigation[120] that includes a select list of wisdom teachings (impermanence, non-self, the five hindrances, the five aggregates, the six-fold sphere, the seven awakening factors, the four noble truths, etc.) matched with areas of phenomenal experience (within the body, within the mind, and within conscious awareness). The tutorial begins with the Dharma of impermanence, and with the investigation with regard to breath (for which pressures and movements in the body under certain patterns of conditioning constitute the direct observables). This practice is repeated, comprehending all the observable details and patterns, until, eventually, the process of investigation is internalized, proceeds effortlessly, and is grasped intuitively as a whole.

The next three awakening factors (rapture, tranquility and composure) form a series that is familiar to the reader. It is the natural progression of factors that arise when we are skillfully

engaged in a wholesome practice task. The final factor, equanimity, is characteristic of the highest stage of composure, a state of impartiality beyond like and dislike, which is particularly conducive to wisdom, and ultimately to awakening.[121]

This brings us to the important topic of composure. The three primary characteristics of composure are (1) pleasurable abiding, (2) concentration, and (3) cognitive curtailment. Pleasurable abiding begins with the two antecedent factors of composure among the awakening factors.

> **Concentration** is thematic one-centeredness, a narrowing and strengthening of attention on what is relevant to accomplishing the current practice task.

Think of concentration as a magnifying glass in the process of narrowing the otherwise dispersed rays of the sun onto a small area, which becomes very bright (and hot, so we do not want to focus too narrowly). Bringing attention to a small area, such as breath, likewise brings out details that would otherwise be unnoticed. However, it is critically important, for functional reasons, that concentration not become too narrow. Otherwise the practice task of investigation will be cut short. It can rarely be "one-pointed."[122]

> **Curtailment** (my term) is the shutting down of one or more faculties that are normally active in human cognition.

Cognitive faculties underlie seeing, perceiving, assessing, thinking, deliberating, reasoning, presuming, and so on. Each of the aggregates, for instance, involves a particular cognitive faculty. Cognition requires a lot of energy, and often produces results that are deluded. Curtailment effectively limits our *explicit* cognitive capacity to what is actually needed. The faculties targeted for curtailment in composure begin with "thought and deliberation," which are virtually always active in everyday life, and are together described as "discursive." These

are followed by the affective faculties of rapture and pleasure, which are antecedent to composure. Affective faculties condition a lot of our cognitive activity, and are therefore also subject to curtailment. Within composure, curtailment produces four progressively deeper levels of meditation.

The **first**, **second**, **third,** and **fourth meditations** (generally called by the Pali word "**jhana**") are progressive stages of curtailment.[123]

Curtailment progresses as follows, with +/- indicating presence/absence of a particular faculty.[124]

Meditation:	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
thought-deliberation	+	-	-	-
rapture	+	+	-	-
pleasure	+	+	+	-

Each meditation proceeds from the previous meditation by losing its most energetic cognitive faculties. The first meditation gains one-centeredness, but retains a full suite of cognitive faculties. The second meditation curtails the capacity of discursive thought, such that the Buddha called it "noble silence." Investigation continues, but at a largely receptive level through the remaining meditations. The third meditation loses the excitement of rapture and various factors fueled by rapture. This results in settling into simple contented pleasure. In the fourth meditation impressions cease, attention all but disappears, and an indifferent, trance-like state ensues.[125]

Won't the curtailment of cognitive faculties disrupt the practice task of investigation, as in the case of one-pointedness? The answer is that it depends on the extent to which the task has been *internalized*. Most of us rarely need discursive thinking even in the very complex task of driving a car, because we've almost completely internalized our driving skills. Generally, discursive

thinking is still present as we drive, but it has been almost completely reallocated to listening to music, to texting, or to daydreaming. In the case of composure, however, discursive thinking has simply been cut off. Cleverly, this avoids distraction, keeps us on task, and puts an end to a lot of unskillful presuming. Well-internalized Dharma practice does not require discursive thinking. Progressing through deeper levels of curtailment is experienced as a series of altered states of consciousness in which the content of the world shifts markedly. Full consciousness with its sense of "in here" and "out there" is, in fact, difficult to sustain. At the same time, it provides greater stillness and stability, as well as clarity,

> 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].[126]

Through curtailment, we can more readily internalize the teachings under examination to the point that they become part of our perceptual apparatus.[127] Our right view is honed, polished, fine-tuned and distilled, until we begin to behold the world through the eyes of the Buddha. The eventual result is the ability immediately and directly to "see things as they really are." Once we see things as they really are, we see how we fabricate our world and thereby our suffering, we begin to drop our appropriations like hot fritters, and this leads to our liberation.

Knowledge, vision and liberation

Right view and right intention form the "wisdom group" within the noble eightfold path, and many "wisdom teachings" are found within right view. These are given a conceptual basis, because that is how humans impart knowledge. However, wisdom *per se* is generally understood as deeper knowledge acquired through practice that lies for the most part beyond the limits of conceptual understanding: knowledge and vision of things as they really are.

Knowledge and vision of things as they really are[128] is an immediate, intuitive, non-conceptual apprehension of, and response to natural phenomena.

Knowledge and vision reside in dispositions developed and cultivated through practice, consistent with the flux of nature free of conceptual, presumptive snags. It results from full internalization of Dharma through relentless practice, punctuated by sudden *insights* as new ways of envisioning things erupt. It is a product of the entire path of practice, with a repeated nod in the early texts to the critical role of composure,

> When right composure does not exist, for one failing right composure, the proximate cause is destroyed for knowledge and vision of things as they really are.[129] (AN 10.3)

Composure is critical, because it curtails faculties not needed at different levels of internalization, alters consciousness in ways that evoke further internalization, and provides the conditions (particularly in the deepest, fourth meditation) in which conceptualizing all but disappears and insights emerge.

We are nearing the full acquisition of Dharma. We now, think *with* the teachings, as it has been said, rather than *about* them. We "see with the Buddha's spectacles."[130] At this point it can be said that we live fully in wisdom. There can be no striving, for there is no "that" toward which to strive, nor "me" for whom to strive.

There is only nature in continual flux and the response of cultivated dispositions within that flux.

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 misstep, 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-origination 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 impression, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion one is liberated. When one is liberated, there comes the knowledge: "One 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]

This is a formulaic description of awakening in the early texts.

Living in the midst

Living in Dharma, 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 devotion, we lose "me" in the practice itself. Living in wisdom, "me" dissolves into nature. But how do we *not* lose Dharma, 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 degree of inspiration. Such a group will spread out along the path, with the strongest, healthiest, hiking-booted, light-backpacked, boldest, most persistent, and most enterprising go-getters 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 disappears occasionally from the path to return 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 heel upon encountering her first rock.

Similarly, Buddhists—all intent on losing themselves in nature—come with different levels of enthusiasm, aptitude and opportun-

ity, bring with them different forms of worldly baggage, and choose among different forms of practice, ofttimes inspired by the accomplishments of the go-getters, and tales of views from lofty heights. At the beginning of the path are those who have added a practice or two piecemeal into already busy lives, sometimes having come to Buddhism later in life. At the higher end of the path are those whose entire lives have been mostly about practice, for the depth of the Dharma comprehends all aspects of life. Full-time practice is held as an ideal necessary to reach the highest levels of awakening.

This chapter is concerned with how we move along the path in the midst of a busy modern life. It asks how we view, plan and arrange our lives to provide the optimal conditions for the Buddhist in us to grow, and to flourish with time.

The tribulations of the "Sunday morning" Buddhist

Most of us (not me: I'm a monk) have busy lives full of non-Buddhist responsibilities, values, pursuits and so on. Most often we leave these "externals" intact as we squeeze a Buddhist practice or two into our lives, most commonly a meditation practice, maybe some Dharma study, or regularly reading inspirational passages.[133] As a result, we practice Buddhism, say, 8% of our waking hours. Unfortunately, this generally results in a serious deficit for two reasons:

First, in a Buddhist life we are *always* practicing in principle, rightly or wrongly, whether we are aware of it or not. Recall that we are the heirs of our karma, of *all* of our deeds. If we progress in our practice 8% of our waking hours, during the remaining 92% of the day we may well be undoing any benefit we had previously gained.

Second, our practice is unlikely to be well-rounded. The various Buddhist practices are in principle highly integrated, each prac-

tice supported by all the others. A meditation practice pursued in the absence of devotion, virtue and wisdom, for instance, will be seriously handicapped.

A common result of this imbalance in our lives is that we find ourselves thrashing between two modes of being: everyday life, rife with stress, striving, and conflict, and practice life, rife with calm, delight, and temporary relief from everyday life. As a result, we very often begin to view the practice(s) that we are able to afford as a lifeline to something sane in our life, develop a strong attachment to our chosen means of practice,[134] and remain frustrated with overall progress.

Unfortunately, this attachment is often further compounded by some teachers who attribute to some single practice exaggerated claims of efficacy.[135] "Mindfulness-based" meditation,[136] for instance, is often touted as a complete path in itself, independent of other practices, leading inexorably to purer ethical behavior, better relations, greater wisdom, increased happiness, and eventually awakening in the midst of the complexities of normal life! Although a single practice generally provides many benefits and promotes a degree of trust and devotion, I have yet to see in others the more profound behavioral shifts generally promised, even in the most dedicated part-time practitioners, without significant tweaks to other aspects of meditators' lives.

Luckily, there are various tweaks we can make to our everyday lives that bring our everyday 92% into closer alignment with Buddhist life, and that require little additional time expenditure. Most of 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 recollective throughout the day

Conscientious, skillful engagement in various mundane, non-Buddhist tasks can be observed throughout the day through emulation of the aptitude faculties. Examples are preparing meals, repairing the car, caring for children, closing a door, playing ping pong, and attending a formal dinner. Each of these requires that we bear some set of principles in mind as if they were Dharma. Each occurs in a practice setting in which appropriate choices must be discerned.

Know what your task is, attend to it without multitasking or distraction, bring the mundane know-how necessary for the task fully to mind, be keenly aware of details. These principles will not only be conducive for optimal performance of the task, but will also help train the faculties of effort, recollection, and (yes) composure, which will also be a boon for whatever Buddhist practices you've committed to. It will also facilitate satisfaction, depth of experience, and acquisition of new skills that would otherwise remain largely elusive in everyday life.

At the same time, it is incumbent on the sincere Buddhist to keep ethical principles constantly in mind, for we make many ethical choices in everyday life. Try in this vein also to maintain a sense of general uprightness as you maintain precepts, and keep in mind the values enumerated in right intention: renunciation, kindness and harmlessness, as guides in your daily interactions.

Overcoming cultural limits

Everyone wishes for a unifying philosophy of life, lest life become fragmented and aimless. Moreover, the wise of the ages have recommended a life that goes beyond satisfying self-serving urges.[137] Unfortunately, we tend to put culturally imbued limits on what particular understanding and practices are acceptable to us as Buddhist devotees. This is hardly surprising, for entering the

Buddha way is—particularly for the modern person—to take to heart something developed in a distant and ancient land, with unfamiliar customs and ways of looking at things. There are many teachings of early Buddhism—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 the benefits of renunciation. Rebirth is known to raise eyebrows through the roof. Understanding the value of these teachings requires a wide-open mind, and often a willingness for serious reconsideration of tacit presuppositions that make facets of Buddhism seem unacceptable. Tacit presuppositions are artifacts of our culture that we often don't know we have, or that we attribute to universally recognizable, completely rational "common sense."[138] Many of these presuppositions actually have 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 our alternative ways of thinking.[139]

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.[140] This strategy is problematic because, as we have seen, for the Buddha each teaching serves some broader function that typically reveals itself only through practice. Our practice may be critically impaired if we leave something out. We do best to let Buddhism be Buddhism in order to comprehend the system as a whole. The problem here has an analogy in anthropology, in which researchers are challenged to analyze an exotic culture in its own terms without presumptively imposing our modern values and interpretations from the outset. The method applied there entails withholding one's own views about whatever inscrutable elements emerge, a process sometimes called "bracketing."

Bracketing is somehow what I did without thinking about it 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 that have implications for practice. We can try to understand better the cultural context in which it *does* make sense, and investigate the nature of our tacit presuppositions according to which it does *not* make sense. This gives us a lot of wiggle room for eventually integrating this teaching. How we ultimately understand the teaching may never be the same as an ancient Indian understanding, yet it might 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 that of our 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 and beneficially. Fortunately, it also turns out that we are all quite adept at bracketing things as working assumptions. Let's call a tightly held assumption or belief an "opinion," and call that which informs one's actual behavior as a basis of one's everyday decisions in life an "outlook." We all routinely hold both, even when they clearly contradict each other. For instance:

A Skinnerian behavioral psychologist might believe (*opinion*), 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.

One might sincerely believe that physical death is the end of consciousness (*opinion*), 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 (*opinion*). 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" (outlook).[141]

How many readers talk to your dog or cat (*outlook*)? How much do you think they understand (*opinion*)? I personally talk even 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 (*opinion*), and yet we behave as if it is something of substantial value (*outlook*) is present and count on others to do the same, with remarkable practical results.[142]

In brief, if you can endure the contradiction between opinion and outlook in the rest of your life, why not in your Buddhist life? Moreover, it may surprise you about Buddhism how sparse metaphysical assumptions actually are in the early Buddhist texts. Our presuppositions will be challenged repeatedly, but not so much by contrary Buddhist opinions, as by the Buddha's habit of challenging *all* opinions 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"—to cook the books, to set mouse traps, and so on.

Right livelihood is the fifth factor of the noble eightfold path. For many of us livelihood is the central extra-Buddhist obligation of our lives. We generally take on employment 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, to pay off a student debt, or to realize other values or pursuits. The Buddha warns us to beware,

> A householder 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]

Each of these sounds 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, fast-paced, high-tech corporate career in favor of what I do now.

Unfortunately, the modern economy offers all too 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 hadn't been 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 “wage slaves” rarely have much 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 heirs of our deeds.

In a recent documentary on the health insurance industry in America[146] a young woman was interviewed whose job 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 paycheck. Some people love their livelihood to the extent that they would engage in its activities even with little or no 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 its own sake, not as a way—or only incidentally as a way--of earning a living from it. This is healthier from the Buddhist perspective, as we have seen, because greed. fear, and the search for personal advantage are minimized. Moreover, such people are likely recollective of the principles

and standards of their work, 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 householders about livelihood, repeatedly puts emphasis on the way we inhabit our daily work, on carrying it out in an upright, responsible and harmless way, on diligence, on skill 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 conscientiously, and to put striving aside. Unfortunately, most of us find little satisfaction in our livelihoods beyond pay, and are kept in a relentless state of insecurity, either because we barely 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 modern society.

Simplicity

In a favorite story from the early texts, 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, then 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 a high-tech security system, and a financial advisor. More to the point, reducing our personal footprint, 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 king-turned-monk clearly had. Simplicity also means more time for practice, or for other wholesome pursuits.[150]

More generally, simplicity benefits Buddhist practice, for it

entails renouncing much of what, through our appropriations of things as “me” and “mine,” causes us suffering. Nonetheless, at a given time our appropriations may not be negotiable. A group of rather lively householders 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, great hair, wild parties, fast women, 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 prior choices about the shape of their lives, and so he takes what they have said as the parameters within which a Buddhist life 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 appropriation in most lives. As we survey our lives, many appropriations will be relatively less unwholesome 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 their 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 recollective of the Dharma even as we continue to step over its boundaries. Over time our appropriations may drop away out of dispassion, like old toys from the newly adolescent. Buddhist wisdom reveals that there is little worth keeping. The burden, appropriation, and enmeshment in samsaric existence that they entail are just too dear a price to pay. It is conscientiousness with regard to such wisdom that brings our lives slowly into greater alignment with Buddhist principles.

Simplicity is making our personal footprint—the domain of our 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 minds, seeing only the attractive side of things, even while we must 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 lawsuits, divorce, 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

If we fail to simplify something out of our life, a second option is —oddly enough—to become devoted to it. 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 other pursuits in our lives: marriage, career, education, hobbies, music, political activism. Devotion turns any such pursuit away from unskillful striving, and directs it instead toward selflessness, conscientiousness, skillfulness, and satisfaction. In essence, it turns it into a hobby.

What we call hobbies tend to be activities pursued with great devotion: surfing, knitting, bird watching, football, collecting string, bowling, karate, gluing matchsticks together. Expertise generally follows such devotion. It seems to me connoisseurs, epicures, and gastronomes are people who bring such an element of devotion into what would otherwise be pure self-serving striving for sensual satisfaction. This strategy turns the guzzler into a discriminating sipper of fine wines, and the glutton into a gourmet. This may be how elites make life a little more bearable in the midst of abundance and plenitude.

The abatement of practical purpose beyond the activity itself explains why other people may view our hobbies as pointless, religious devotees as silly, and those with detailed knowledge of 140 different types of cheese as loony. But it also explains 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 that 92% of our day. It is noteworthy that such secular topics of devotion are often accompanied by a religious level of ritual. Consider, for instance, how many obligatory ritual steps are observed at a posh restaurant in ordering and receiving a bottle of 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 by striving toward the explicit goal of a sexier, slimmer 20-pounds-lighter “me” on the beach next summer. This goal is achieved by repeatedly comparing current

weight to desired weight, while enduring 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, the misery of which only the most determined are willing to continue.

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. This 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. Conscientiousness and effort are involved, but little 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 being afraid to stand on the scale each day. One finds satisfaction in the process itself. One becomes devoted to this aspect of health, and and one becomes joyful. As an extra benefit, one attains, and maintains 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 expertise 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, food, material comfort, security, or luxury. Seeking personal advantage in this way is a prime source of suffering, and a hindrance to spiritual development. The marriage itself 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 conscientiously, 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 meditation. 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 captures this early Buddhist understanding,

> Chao-chou asked 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

It is critical that one be involved in a like-minded community of practitioners. The image many have of the solitary practitioner meditating at the root of a tree is only partially emblematic of Buddhism. We've seen in previous chapters the weight the Buddha put on community involvement in Buddhism, and in particular the necessity of admirable friends.

The easiest entry point may be a local meditation (“sitting”) group. These typically meet weekly in a yoga studio, a Unitarian church or even at someone’s house. In any urban area you will have many options. If you do not find one in your area but have at least one like-minded friend, then start one. Try to find a sponsor, or invite people to meet in your living room. Small groups generally do not have qualified teachers, but may read and discuss published books together.

Less common, but more beneficial, are dedicated Buddhist “centers,” almost always oriented toward a particular Asian

tradition, but populated by ethnic westerners. They generally provide a variety of weekly practice opportunities, a strong sense of community, and often well-informed teachers. If your meditation practice is well established, you do well to travel to a three- to ten-day residential meditation retreat. It will likely be initially grueling, but will leave you sublimely enthused.

I would encourage westerners to explore ethnically Asian "monastery/temples" as well, which—in spite of their abundance in the USA and other countries—must often be sought out. It is surprising how many westerners who will go on an expensive vacation to exotic foreign lands are afraid to venture into an ethically Asian temple, where they are challenged by exotic language, culture, peculiar devotional practices, and unfamiliar statuary, all for free!

The devotees of some of the more obscure ethnic temples are often surprised, but almost always delighted, when someone from outside that community shows up. The householder devotees generally speak English better than the monastics. Don't worry about what many dismiss as "cultural baggage." Buddhism has always mixed in freely with folk cultural understandings and practices, yet retains its core. Western Buddhism is equally immersed in cultural baggage; we generally just don't notice it any more than fish notice water.

In ethnic temples you will almost always encounter the monastic Sangha. The Sangha is possibly the most enduring institution on the planet, still following significantly the same *Discipline* after 100 generations.[154] Buddhist communities have faithfully and willingly supported the Sangha throughout history in virtually every Buddhist land, as a kind of social contract between monastics and householders. Monastics are the ones most likely to tell Buddhist principles from cultural baggage.

The pure monastic Sangha functions as 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 Buddhist life, understanding and practice have been poured, and then stirred with results open for all to inspect. The Sangha provides householders 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.

I also recommend that you maintain a more inclusive view of how our future practice might move beyond our single practice as opportunities or inclinations manifest. The Sangha 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 most effectively 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. I would encourage readers not to dismiss monastic practice as a real option, if not now, perhaps later in life, after you've been sufficiently disappointed with living in the midst of the everyday world, and your kids are grown.

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 exchange. It tightly regulates ownership of property, beautifying oneself, or engaging in any

normal livelihood. Monastics are not even allowed purposely to endear themselves to householders 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, although it might continue to haunt the mind. This kind of life would leave the monastic extremely vulnerable, were it not for entrusting their needs to the benevolence of householders. In return, monastics require little, and—while helpless with regard to *themselves*—have virtually no limits on what they can do for *others*.

For the westerner, joining the Sangha generally entails living in Asia, or affiliating oneself with an ethnically eastern temple in the west that has the well-established ethic of supporting the Sangha. Few western Buddhist communities 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

Attentive recollection is not a state of mind, it is something we do—we recollect relevant principles as we practice. That something ranges 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 skillfully engaged, makes attentive recollection very powerful in our lives. Moreover, conscientiousness, in a range of applications, is closely followed by composure, which *is* a state of mind, one that brings serenity and clarity, and amplifies the power of conscientiousness even further.

It is important to bear in mind that Buddhism is eminently practical. The natural roots of practice are not in lofty philo-

sophizing, 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 keeping the Dharma in mind 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.

Endnotes

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*.

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

DCA refers to Bhikkhu Cintita, 2021, *Dependent Coarising: meaning construction in the twelve links*.

RSP refers to Bhikkhu Cintita, 2025, *Rethinking Satipaṭṭhāna: from investigating Dhamma to dwelling in jhāna*.

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

DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*	Dhp	*Dhammapāda*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*	Ud	*Udāna*
SN	*Saṃyutta Nikāya*	Iti	*Itivuttaka*
AN	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*	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. ‘Recollection’ is *sati* in the Pali language, and ‘discernment’ is *sampajañña*. Pali is regarded as the language spoken by the Buddha. See RSP (2.2) on their etymology.
2. See RSP (ch. 4) for the history, and critique of the term ‘mindfulness’ within Buddhism. Many scholars continue to use the term ‘mindfulness,’ but consistently with its 19th century origin. Other scholars, and almost all meditation teachers use it in its anomalous 20th century popular sense.
3. Probably the best account of the scope and provenance of the Early Buddhist Texts is Bhikkhu Sujato and Bhikkhu Brahmali, 2014, *The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts*, Buddhist Publication Society.
4. A sermon or discourse is a *sutta* in Pali.
5. “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.’ I’ve even seen ‘anguish.’
6. ‘Liberation,’ ‘awakening,’ and ‘nirvana’ in Pali are *vimutti*, *bodhi* and *nibbāna*, respectively.
7. 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.
8. ‘Wholesome’ or ‘skillful’ in Pali are both *kusala*.
9. ‘Intention’ in Pali is *cetanā*.
10. ‘Unwholesome’ or ‘unskillful’ in Pali is *akusala*.
11. “With recollection 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” in Pali is *upaṭṭhahita*, from *upaṭṭhahati*, “stands near,” generally used in the sense of “attending to,” “caring for” or “serving.” See RSP 2.2.
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 ‘composure’ as a translation of the Pali *samādhi* instead of the more conventional ‘concentration.’ See RSP (ch. 3) for justification and for a detailed discussion of *samādhi*.
19. Whereas in Pali, ‘skillful’ or ‘wholesome’ is *kusala*, ‘right’ is *sammā*.

20. "… right view, right effort, and right mindfulness—run and circle around …" (MN 117). See RSP (ch. 3) for a detailed discussion of *samādhi* and the justification for this translation.
21. The noble eightfold path is discussed in much more detail in BLBP: ch. 7 (an overview), ch. 8 (right view and intention), ch. 9 (right speech, action, and livelihood), ch. 10 (right effort, recollection, and composure).
22. "Those who exert themselves, and are conscientious delight not in any abode. They are like swans that abandon their like, leaving home after home behind." (Dhp 91).
23. "… divide into subtasks …": See Thich Nhat Hanh, 1987, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, p. 86, Beacon Press.
24. 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. See Edward L. Deci, 1995, *Why We Do What We Do: understanding self-motivation*, Penguin.
25. "… in order to wash the dishes …," Thich Nhat Hanh (*ibid*., pp. 3-4). He also tells us (p. 24) that washing dishes must be the most important thing in your life.
26. 'Virtue' in Pali is *sīla* or *cariya*. 'Wisdom' is *paññā*. 'Aptitude' is my own term for the three factors of the composure group, but—except in the collective sense—'aptitude' is roughly synonymous with 'faculty' (*indriya*). Elsewhere these three factors in particular are identified as "faculties" or "strengths" (*bala*). Aptitude" seems apt.
27. 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.
28. "Refraining from every evil …" (Dhp 183).
29. "… 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."
30. "Bad deeds … are easy to do …" (Dpd 163).
31. "… a deep aversion to conventions and institutions, particularly in the religious sphere …": See David McMahan, 2008 *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (pp. 43, 76, 95, 125, 133, 244), Oxford.
32. Precepts are described in much more detail in BLBP (ch. 3).
33. '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 underlie the act. *Dāna* is the gerund of the active verb for 'give.'

34. 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.
35. 'Merit' is *puñña* in Pali. 'Demerit' is *pāpa*.
36. "… categories of recipient, … gift, … manner … intention": See *Dana: The Practice of Giving*, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995, 2013, online at https://accesstoinsight.org
37. Gifts from householders to the general public would, in later Buddhist traditions, come to include commissioning pagodas, Buddha statues and other sacred artifacts, and also to book publication and other educational projects and operating costs, alongside satisfying material needs of the needy.
38. "… beautify and adorn the mind" (AN 8.31).
39. "… happy before, during and after giving" (AN 6.37).
40. "Economy of gifts": See Thanissaro (1997, "The economy of gifts," online essay at accesstoinsight.org)
41. "… tuned neither too loose nor too tight …" (AN 6.55).
42. Giving is discussed in much more detail in BLBP (ch. 2).
43. "… three roots of what is unskillful" (Iti 3.1).
44. This list is a composite gleaned from AN 3.71, and MN 19.
45. Purity is discussed in much more detail in BLBP (ch. 4).
46. The Buddha also mentions social factors, alongside psychological factors, in the production of karmic results: a merchant suffering from greed or delusion, for instance, is likely to drive away customers. Other factors mentioned draw a direct connection between a particular action and a particular result, for instance, stealing and getting hit by lightning, though these are rare and might be regarded as allegorical in the early texts.
47. Even goal-oriented people who actually manage to achieve their goals—often exalted as celebrities in our society—generally experience *no* measurable increase in happiness. See Johann Hari, 2018, *Lost Connections: uncovering the real causes of depression–and the unexpected solutions* (p. 95), Bloomsbury.
48. "…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 nar-

cissism, anxiety, depression, lack of self-confidence, and poor social functioning. See Deci (*ibid*., pp. 127-8).

49. "… It is natural that non-regret arises in one who is virtuous …" (AN 11.2).
50. "… supramundane or even mystical aspect of practice …" (MN 59).
51. 'Faith' or 'trust' in Pali is *saddhā* which is derived literally from "put the heart on."
52. About trust or faith: "One can be half-sure without being half-hearted." Allport, (*ibid*., p. 139).
53. "Devotion" in Pali is *pasanna*, which entails a bright or elated frame of mind, purity, and piousness.
54. 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."
55. The concept of intrinsic motivation is here, once again, apt. Intrinsic and extrinsic *religion* were first described by Gordon Allport (*ibid*.), 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 excusatory, 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.
56. An admirable friend in Pali is *kalyāṇa mitta*.
57. "… the whole of the holy life …" (SN 45.2).
58. It is common in the west to use the word 'Sangha' to refer to the entirety of the Buddhist community. 'Sangha' never means this in early Buddhism ('*purisā*' would be appropriate), nor (as far as I've been able to determine) in any later Buddhist tradition in Asia.
59. "… much like the faculty of a university ...": CA (pp. 39-54) develops further the analogy of the monastic *Sangha* to the academic community.
60. "… the world should not lack for awakened ones" (DN 16).
61. Stream entry is defined and discussed in BLBP (7.3).
62. "… penetrates with transcendental wisdom the four noble truths …" (Dpd 190-1).
63. 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 belongs to the nature of choice itself: when we choose, we close the

alternatives. However, not to choose is a choice itself that also closes alternatives.

64. 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.
65. The Pali word for such recollection is *anussati*, which is just *sati* 'recollection' with the prefix *anu-*, which implies continuity, roughly 'along.'
66. Qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are listed in AN 11.11.
67. 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*.
68. "When a noble disciple recollects the Buddha…" (AN 11.12).
69. "… 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 mental health: a meta-analysis of recent studies," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 43:1 (pp. 43-55).
70. A wonderful discussion of Buddhist ritual as play is Robert H. Sharf, 2005, "Ritual," in Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (ed), *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (pp. 244-270), University of Chicago Press.
71. 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.
72. 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.
73. 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. I daresay that he intended that recollection would endow each of our actions with a ritual quality. Just as a properly performed ritual produced benefits for the client of the brahmin, a properly (conscientiously following the principles that make it skillful) performed intentional action produces beneficial fruits for the

practitioner.

74. "… mixed with elements of folk culture …": See C*A* (pp. 77-95) on "folk Buddhism."
75. The earliest known Buddha statues were not produced until the first century CE, in Mathura and Gandhara, the latter under strong Greek influence.
76. "Taking Dharma seriously while holding it loosely": This section is presented in more detail in my essay of the same title in WNT.
77. "… the few leaves I have here in my hand …" (SN 56.31).
78. Annihilationism and eternalism are discussed in DN 1, SN 44.10, etc.
79. "Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon…" (AN 3.65).
80. "…personally experienced by the *wise*…," "…come and see…" (*ehipassiko*) (AN 11.11).
81. "Only this is true; anything else is worthless" (MN 95).
82. Allport (*ibid*., p. 72) writes of "heuristic belief" held tentatively in similar terms as a characteristic of "mature religion," principally with reference to the Christian context.
83. "… *what kind of future lay beyond the barbed wire* …," Viktor Frankl, 2006, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Beacon Press.
84. "… 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."
85. "…there are some contemplatives and brahmins who hold this doctrine …" (MN 60).
86. "…they will adopt and practice these three unskillful activities…" (MN 60).
87. "… this venerable person has made a bad throw twice…" (MN 60).
88. *Kalama Sutta* (AN 3.65).
89. "…disentangles his tangle…" (SN 7.6).
90. The stages of liberation are discussed in more detail in RSP (1.5).
91. 'Theme of composure' in Pali is *samādhi-nimittaṃ.*
92. *"…a fellow monk in the position of a teacher…"* is from the *Vimuttāyatana* (Stages of Liberation) *Sutta* (AN 5.26). DN 33 (iii 241-2) provides a similar passage.
93. "…through the eyes of the Buddha …," See RSP (1.5.0, 1.5.1, 3.4.2).
94. Internalization is described in cognitive science in terms of a dual-process model of cognition (See RSP 6.2). The processes are "explicit" and "implicit." The implicit system is pervasive, surprisingly capable, and efficient. However, it is easily ignored, because it is largely unconscious, and because western scholarship has traditionally been concerned with the

Cartesian “rational” mind in contrast to all else.

95. “… the mind becomes composed …” (AN 5.26).
96. “… 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 online for a thorough questioning of our ability to see objective reality.
97. The whole passage, which constitutes the opening lines of the *Dhammapada,* is:

    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).

98. ‘Phenomenon’ In Pali is *dhamma*. Some Pali translators translate *dhamma* as ‘mental object,’ but this is misleading because feasibly most of the things that arise in experience are physical.
99. Pali for ‘the world’ is *loka*.
100. “In this fathom-long living body…” (AN 4.45).
101. Taking experience as foundational is reflected in the twentieth-century philosophical school of phenomenology. As in the Buddhadharma, phenomenology turns our attention to the question, "How do we know what we think we know?" The Buddha's "world" seems equivalent to phenomenology's "life world." Experiencing an objective reality "out there" as something real is called the “natural attitude.”
102. “Conditionality” in Pali is *idappaccayatā.*
103. “From the arising of this comes the arising of that” (Ud 1.3).
104. “… the noble truth of the origination of suffering…” (SN 56.11).
105. “… the noble truth of the cessation of suffering…” (SN 56.11).
106. Meditative practices for gaining insight into non-self are described in RSP (1.6, 5.5).
107. “… thereby it turns otherwise.” (SN 3.12).
108. ‘Fading’ and ‘dispassion’ are both *virāga* in Pali.
109. ‘Aggregate’ is *khanda* in Pali. See RSP (5.4.2) on the aggregates.
110. ‘Aggregate of appropriation’ is *upādānakkhaṅdha* in Pali.
111. Many discourses of SN 35 present contemplations on the aggregates of appropriation.

112. ‘Sixfold sphere’ is *saḷāyatana* in Pali, aka ‘six sense spheres.’
113. “… eye, form, eye consciousness, eye contact…” (SN 35.24-28).
114. “In the six the world has arisen…” (SN 1.70).
115. “… by which one is a perceiver of the world …” (SN 35.116).
116. ‘Dependent co-origination’ in Pali is *paṭicca-samuppāda*.
117. More on dependent co-origination can be found in BLBP (ch. 11), and more comprehensively in DCA.
118. ‘Awakening factor’ is *bojjhaṅga* in Pali.
119. “Dharma investigation” is a functional description of Pali *satipaṭṭhāna*, which literally translates as ‘recollection-attentiveness’ (See RSP 2.2).
120. The tutorial is the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10).
121. Right composure is discussed in more detail in BLBP (10.2).
122. There are some fundamental controversies about the nature of composure. Most scholars and teachers in the Theravāda tradition maintain both that *samādhi* (what I translate as ‘composure’) is one-pointed, and that it excludes the possibility of investigation. This is certainly the position of the influential 5th Century CE *Visuddhimagga*, but seems to belie the evidence of the early texts. I discuss this controversy in RSP (ch. 3). Reference to internalization leads a functional basis for the interpretation advocated here.
123. Pali *jhāna* literally means “meditation,” which the Buddha gives a technical meaning in this context as stage of composure.
124. See, for instance, SN 45.8 on the progression of *jhānas*.
125. *Samādhi and jhāna* are described in detail in RSP (chs. 3, 6).
126. “ … a pool of water in a mountain glen…” (MN 39).
127. “… become part of our perceptual apparatus”: See RSP (3.3.3).
128. “Knowledge and vision of things as they really are” is in Pali *yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*.
129. On composure as the condition for knowledge and vision: AN 10.3.
130. “… “to see with the Buddha's spectacles,” Richard Gombrich, 1997, *How Buddhism Began* (p. 36), Munshiram. Shulman (ibid., p. 111), calls “mindfulness” “a method by which philosophy [i.e., Dharma] is turned into an active way of seeing.” This is what I describe as “internalization.” Kuan (ibid., pp. 58-59), sees mindfulness as directing perception to conform to Dharma such that wisdom results.
131. Awakening is discussed in more detail in BLBP (ch. 12).
132. “… the holy life has been lived..”: This formula ends many discourses, e.g., MN109.
133. BTW, if you want to verify the authenticity of inspirational passages, check out fakebuddhaquotes.com .

134. "… 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 personally get something out of our practice.
135. "…exaggerated claims of efficacy": Adopting a single Buddhist practice is not uniquely modern. Historically whole schools of Buddhism have centered around a single practice, commonly initiated by monastic teachers to keep their householder disciples engaged in the midst of busy householder lives. Often the single practice is devotional, as in the householder movements of Pure Land Buddhism, or Soka Gakai, which, we have seen, can also quickly provide a sense of satisfaction and calm. Often the single practice is contemplative. Historically, Zen may have developed in this way, with its single-minded focus on meditation, in eighth century China. Although originally intended for householder devotees, it was 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* (p. 186), Sankt Ottilien). 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 accessible to busy householders, but then becoming a mainstay in many schools for monastic practice. The modern *vipassanā* movement has followed a similar trajectory, starting in Myanmar around 1900 (see Erik Braun, 2013, *Birth of Insight*, University of Chicago, and RSP ch. 4).
136. See RSP (ch. 4) on the modern understanding of "mindfulness" and how it relates to the early Buddhist texts' definition.
137. "… a unifying philosophy of life …": see Allport (*ibid.*, pp. 53-4).
138. 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*.
139. "…origin in the history of western thought…": McMahan (*ibid*.) 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.
140. The modern movement of "Secular Buddhism" is often 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 makes the rejection of certain aspects of the early Buddhist texts a matter of doctrinal commitment. In failing to hold the Dharma loosely, it also fails to take it seriously.

141. “You have to believe in free will, …” is quoted in Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner, 2011, *Quantum Enigma* (p. 32), Oxford.
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 …”: The extent to which Buddhist values and principles convey a strong critique of many aspects of modern society, economics, and political policy is not often enough recognized.
146. “… documentary on the health insurance …” refers to Michael Moore's 2007 documentary 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 settling into the intrinsic joy of hobbies—like whittling or baking pies—, we often take extrinsic pride in them, and compete with others in displaying our skills, thereby adding striving to our lives. Connoisseurs, epicures and gastronomes are also known to take excessive pride in “being a cut above.”
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 influence its motivation structure, and along with that its actual intrinsic satisfaction or lack thereof.
154. “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 online at accesstoInsight.org and in occasional free hardcopy distributions.

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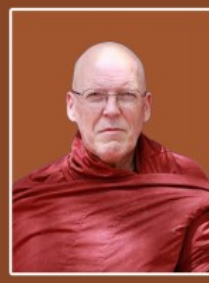

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