

Insight Journal

Summer 2008

Where the Action Is
Editor's Essay

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Venerable Posāla
Pali Poetry



For Not to be taken
from the room.
reference

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Insight involves an intuition of mind and heart that takes us beyond knowledge toward wisdom. It has to do with deeply understanding the nature of things, rather than with knowing a lot about them.

In the Buddhist tradition wisdom is nurtured by the deep investigation of experience. This involves the careful integration of both study and practice—the study of dharma (the Buddha's teachings), coupled with the practice of meditation.

This journal is dedicated to exploring some of the insights that such a balanced inquiry uncovers about ourselves, our world, and our fellow beings. We welcome you to the discussion.

Where the Action Is

There are two aspects to every moment's experience. One is the content, what it is you are aware of; the other is the intention, what your emotional response is toward that object of awareness. In the Buddhist way of looking at things, the first is largely irrelevant, while the second is immensely important.

According to Buddhist psychology, human experience is constructed anew every moment as consciousness of one of the six objects (a form, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch or a thought) arises and then passes away. An on-going sequence of such moments occurs, yielding for each of us a unique subjective stream of experience. We are always aware of something, since consciousness must always take an object—perhaps it is something we are looking at, or hearing, or touching, or thinking.

It is easy to change the content of experience. Close your eyes, and your visual field alters dramatically. Open them, and it all comes rushing back, in impeccable detail. You can choose to remember what you had for lunch last Tuesday, calculate a complex mathematical sum, or fantasize about what you would do if you won the lottery. Our mind/body apparatus is primed for content, and it lurches from one object to another quite naturally.

The attitude with which all this is done, however, is a different matter. The aggregate called formations (*sankhāra*) is so-called because it is constantly forming a response to what is happening. This too is constructed anew each moment. Whenever we are aware of an object through one of the six sense organs, we are simultaneously forming a response to that object. These responses are also part of our unique stream of consciousness, and constitute our emotional life.

When seeing this particular form, we are amused; when hearing that sound, we are annoyed; when smelling this smell, we are disgusted; when feeling that touch, we are aroused; when thinking one thought we are enraged, while when thinking another we are tranquil. An automaton might merely cognize an object by means of a sense organ; a human being both does this and responds with a rich and nuanced emotional range.

I say the content of experience is largely irrelevant because it is just the data of a perceptual apparatus. Like a camera, the senses—including the mind—can be pointed at just about anything and they will pick up and process information. It does not matter so much what we look at or touch or think, but it matters a lot how we respond to what we are experiencing. This is because all karma

is made and passed on by formations. Every emotional response is a form of action, and every action has a consequence. We are shaped not by what we do, but by how we respond to what we do.

At the heart of the Buddhist path of transformation is the recognition that some responses are healthy, skillful, and propel us a notch closer to being a better person and understanding the nature of things, while others can be quite unhealthy, unskillful, and have the effect of our becoming a slightly more debased person whose delusions only deepen. The emotional responses we enact each moment can be the source of tremendous suffering, both for ourselves and for those around us who are influenced by our actions. The harm comes not from the content, but from the intention accompanying the content of experience. The problem is not that I am thinking about someone from another ethnic or social group than my own, it is that I am thinking about that person with hatred, or jealousy, or fear.

The key is that these intentions we necessarily form in parallel with every moment's awareness of an object are not a mere accompaniment to experience. They go on to condition and determine the actions we will undertake in later experience. One moment's anger becomes the next moment's striking blow, hurtful comment, or nasty thought. We literally build ourselves and our world upon our own emotional responses, and indeed it might not be too much to say that who we are and what world we inhabit actually consists of the series of these emotional responses unfolding within us.

This puts an interesting face on the idea of practice. Everything is practice, because we are always practicing to be the person we will become next. The reason we put so much time and care and effort into learning, through meditation, how to be with whatever is arising in experience without greed, hatred or ignorance, is because by suspending their influence upon us in this moment, we become free of their effects in the next moment. How we hold ourselves right now is the key to everything we will become. It is that important.

So let's focus less upon what we are doing, or saying, or thinking, and place greater emphasis on how we are doing, saying, or thinking it. That is where the action is, on the path of transformation.

—Andrew Olendzki

Back to the Source

An Interview with John Peacock

John Peacock has been an academic and meditation teacher for 25 years, including monastic training in both the Tibetan and Theravadin traditions. He currently teaches Buddhist studies and Indian religions at the University of Bristol, and leads meditation retreats both in the United States and Britain.



"How do we live the change that is happening?"

How did you first enter the stream of the Dharma?

I became interested in Eastern religions and philosophy at about the age of eleven, and started reading around Indian thought, Nietzsche, all sorts of stuff. When I was very young, I used to take myself off to Sunday school and was inspired by the stories of Jesus, but could never buy into the theistic thing at all. At age seventeen, I went overland

to India, as many of us did in those days in Britain, and knowing very little about the climate arrived at the peak of the hot season. Seeing my distress, someone suggested I go to Dharamsala, which was a hill station and somewhat cooler. It turned out to be the center of the Tibetan Buddhist scene, of course, and as I began to learn more about it I became very intrigued. I had only intended to be in India for three months, and was there for about a year and a half. This was in 1970.

The Dalai Lama was extremely accessible then. You could knock on his door and ask for an interview, which was what I did, and I had something like a two-and-a-half hour meeting with him. I was struck by the way the Tibetan people somehow seemed to be sustained by their Dharma practice—smiling, happy, and relatively relaxed—whilst having lost just about everything. That was very inspiring to somebody my age.

Later I went down to South India, ordained as a monk, and ended up staying there for a long, long time, both in monasteries and outside the monastery. I wanted to immerse myself entirely in a Tibetan speaking environment and engage in a traditional course of study, which I was able to do. Eventually I went to Sri Lanka and ordained in the Theravada tradition.

**Every situation, here and now, is an ethical situation.
How we act depends on the amount of awareness we can bring to it.**

What led you to make the move from a Tibetan monastery to become a Theravada monk?

I went to Sri Lanka partly because I had a keen interest in the Abhidhamma and wanted to learn more about it. Tibetan studies focus almost entirely on commentarial literature; they don't read the primary texts. I had heard, "Oh, Abhidhamma, it's so boring," but I wanted to find out for myself. Going to Sri Lanka was quite a revelation, because you got to actually look at the original text.

That has really characterized my dharma practice as well as my academic study, the movement back to the source of things. Tibetan material still influences the way I teach—the stories and analogies the Tibetans have given me really help to illuminate the teachings. But I find myself not quite so convinced now about some of the later developments in Tibetan thought. For example, the study of emptiness becomes much ado about nothing—literally! It's an enormous scholarly tradition, but for me has somewhat the flavor of "How many angels can you get on the head of a pin?"

Besides plunging deeply into the Abhidhamma, I learned quite a bit from the early texts about the relationship between *samatha* [tranquility] and *vipassanā* [insight]. Both are important, but I think *samatha* is just a tool for the development of *vipassanā*, which is more transformative.

So how did you get from a Buddhist monk living in Asia to a British professor?

After I first came back to England, at the suggestion of a good friend, I did a degree in philosophy at Warwick University, and went on to do a PhD. My thesis was on a mixture of philosophy and Buddhist studies: ethics in

Heidegger and Long Chen Rab Jam Pa. The common premise was the idea that ethics, as a prescriptive form, was a metaphysics. How do you have an ethics which is based, in the *Dzogchen* tradition, on *karunā*? And *karunā* translated not as "compassion," but as "responsibility and responsiveness." I still stress the importance of ethics in my Dharma teaching.

One of the ways I usually explain Buddhist ethics to Western students is: Forget your prescriptions, your "thou shalt, thou shalt not." The precepts are rules of training, guidelines, and everything is context sensitive. Buddhist ethics actually relies heavily on *sati*, on mindfulness, because what is appropriate in one context is not necessarily transferable to another. You could be completely moral, by following some rules of behavior, but from a Buddhist point of view also be completely unethical because of the intention in your mind at that moment. Ethics, more broadly regarded, is a dialectic between your culture, which represents the moral sphere of activity, and your individual ethical conscience.

So ethics is more an enacting of one's wisdom, than a preparation for meditation?

Exactly, and insight is the key. The default is to use the precepts as a rule. But every situation, here and now, is an ethical situation. How we act depends on the amount of awareness we can bring to the situation. I like to point out that the *sīla* [virtue] dimension of the practice is not an optional extra. You need to develop *paññā* [wisdom]; that becomes the foundation. But *sīla*, the deep integrity one brings to each moment, is one of the dimensions that is often missing in Western practice. So much more emphasis is placed upon meditation, *bhāvanā*.

In the West there is a lot of clinging to rites and rituals [in the form of] a particular style of meditation.

What kind of response do you get when you say that to your Dharma students?

It's a bit of a wake-up call to a lot of people. In the current Buddhist environment in the West, in my opinion, there is a lot of clinging to rites and rituals—and rites and rituals here means meditative practice, a particular style of *vipassanā* or *Dzogchen* or whatever it might be. The lack of the *sīla* dimension has left a lot of Western Buddhism ungrounded. Buddhist practice has to do with the engagement with ordinariness, not with some kind of transcendental, mystical state. It's more about, "How can you go out and be kind, or just a little bit kinder, to the person you find really irritating?"

What about the traditional two-part model we sometimes hear about: that the Buddha taught a low-grade morality to householders, "Obey five precepts and give generously to support the monks" so that they, in the monastery or on the hill, can practice intensive meditation and reach for higher states of consciousness?

Well to begin with, I don't think the five precepts are particularly low-grade. The monastic disciplines, apart from the relevant changes made to account for celibacy and things like that, are really just an extrapolation of the five precepts. The precepts are tools for investigating the whole of our ethical lives, and for examining very carefully the subtleties of our consciousness. That's why they are deliberately hazy.

Take the first precept, for example: "I undertake a rule of training to refrain from harming living beings." It obviously implies not killing, but in the Western Buddhist context most people are not going to be killing deliberately. More deeply, it is saying, "You do a lot of harm, living in this world; look more closely at the other forms of harm you do." That might relate, for example, to

speech, or to taking what is not offered. All of the precepts are inter-dependent. They are actually very high grade, if taken seriously.

As another example, we might notice that the third precept is mistranslated most of the time. It's not just about restraining from inappropriate *sexual* activity, but refers to all forms of sensual indulgence—which is a much more broad and sensitive area for us modern lay Buddhists.

One reason I found the Abhidhamma to be such a wonderful teaching is that its primary division is ethical: ethically variable factors, neutral factors, and then you have the *kusala* and *akusala*, the wholesome and the unwholesome, dimensions of the mind. It shows us how to practice in ways that recognize and cultivate one set, while recognizing and eliminating the other.

One of the themes of your teaching is sensitivity to the context of ancient India, and your understanding that the Buddha was really quite a radical.

Yes, because it makes us look at our own culture. The Buddha's engagement with his own culture in fifth century India BCE is total. He utilizes every tool, including the language and the religious discourse of his period, in order to subvert it. I find very few words in Pali which you cannot trace back to a Vedic context or to an Upanishadic context. He knew as much about them as the Indian pundits of the period did themselves. He parodies things like the "Hymn of Creation" in the *Rig Veda*, and offers a brilliant send-up of the oldest of the Upanishads, *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Understanding these things helps us see his teaching more clearly.

So what was radical about the Buddha's teaching, beyond the sociology of it all?

The Buddha is encouraging us to be fearless in the face of radical contingency.

It's about the radically contingent nature of everything that leaves us with nothing left to grasp onto. Dependent Origination, in its universal form and in its sense of human becoming, is unique to world thought and utterly undermining of every other system of thought. It is so challenging, in fact, that both in early India and in current Buddhist teaching, few are able—or willing—to get it totally.

Can you say more about this?

Some of the movements and trends we see in Western Buddhism actually are akin to what was going on in the ancient period—a reification of some element of thought or experience. First there was an attempt to treat the notion of a person, a *puggala*, as somehow privileged metaphysically, much like with the modern psychological self. Even after Nagarjuna reiterated the absolute emptiness of *any* thing, very soon after we begin to hear that “everything is empty except for one thing,” the mind. A whole metaphysics of the mind springs up, first around a storehouse consciousness (*alaya*), and then around a primordial or perfected consciousness (*rigpa*). These ideas of course resonate easily with both Judeo-Christian, Romantic era, and New Age notions in the Western tradition and thus have great popular appeal in modern Dharma teaching.

Even if these ideas came initially as a report on experience, which I believe many of them did, it shows a tendency of the human mind to grasp after something to hold onto and to solidify it. This is what is getting us today, “Just fall back on your awareness, just be aware of awareness itself.” When awareness is used as a noun like this, it ends up looking strangely like some Upanishadic Brahman.

But the Buddha's final words in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* are “Everything

is evanescent; strive on diligently.” He is encouraging us to be fearless in the face of radical contingency. He knows that we are going to go running away to the safest haven we can just as quickly as possible. In fact if we try to create a false haven for ourselves, we end up just *dukkharing*, creating more suffering for ourselves. I think that is the absolute radical nature of it—impermanence so profound and far reaching there cannot be any fixed notion of the self.

Are we really suited for this radical emptiness?

When you begin to really take these teachings seriously, they are literally liberating. Not immediately, in the Buddhist sense of final liberation, but they can liberate us from looking for fixity, for certainty. This search for certainty has been the Western obsession since the 17th century. It began with the search for solid foundations for science with Descartes. The Buddha is helping us immensely by saying, “Give up this task of looking for certainty, and live. Be.”

Consider the amount of time and energy expended in looking for that which is not going to change. I use the example of human relationships, because that is the payout in all this. We put a burden onto the other—which the other can never actually live up to—of being certain, of being unchanging. In fact love has to do with negotiating change.

But how do you deal with the natural tendency of the mind to flip back to the opposite, to a kind of despair or radical relativism that concludes “nothing really matters”?

That is the movement that happened in the course of Buddhist history. People can't help but think “It either is or it isn't.” Either there is love which is the same forever, for example, or there isn't. The Buddha is

People can't help but think "It either is or it isn't."
To this the Buddha says: "Nonsense."



"Meditation practice is about investigating the basic teachings to an incredible depth."

really saying "Nonsense." It's a changing phenomenon, just like anything else. It's not a question of either nihilism or eternalism. This again is an example of the Buddha's radical message—"it goes on or it doesn't," this is rather simplistic. Rather the question is "How do we live this change that is happening?"

We have a huge literary romanticism around words like love here—all the pop songs, and the literary tradition going back to the medieval period, seek the reification of love: "love is eternal" is its favoured maxim. Then it's a heartbreak when it's not there. The Buddha is seeing it as a far more down to earth quality. *Mettā/maitri* is what brings relationship, where its opposite doesn't. Most of the *akusala*, the non-virtues, are dissonances which break relations with others, whereas the virtues, the *kusala cetasikas*, the wholesome mental factors, are that which bring about relationship. So one opens, and the other blinds.

We even generate romantic ideals around the words we use in Buddhism all the time, words such as "love," "fearlessness," and "compassion." But that's not an experience of what they are. This is another radical thing about the Buddha's teaching: it is entirely practical. But the practicality got left out at a very early stage, since it was far easier to talk about it than to do it.

So what is beyond the compelling ideas; what has Buddhist practice got to do with it?

Meditation practice, *vipassanā* practice, is about really investigating the basic teachings to an incredible depth. It involves investigating those things you think you know about, such as the four ennobling truths, the ennobling eightfold path, dependent origination, the aggregates. These are elements of lived experience.

I used to apologize for going back to the early teachings. I don't do that now at

Do you trust the teachings enough not to want to import psychotherapy into it?

all. Even if people are never going to learn the canonical languages, we can be aware of how they work. For example, a lot of the things that appear to be nouns in English are actually verbs in the Pali form. When the Buddha is talking about the aggregates (*khandhā*), he's not talking about static states but processes. The Buddha is always asking *how* is it, rather than *what* is it. The "What is it" question generates an essentialist answer, whereas the "How is it" question gives us an answer in terms of processes and experience. The mantra for *vipassanā* practice should be, "What's going on?" This question does not have an answer; it invites the close investigation of experience.

Is this radical message managing to get through our conventional ways of thinking?

I think it is to a certain extent, although I find it gets into fusion with so many other disciplines. I asked a group recently "Do you trust the teachings enough not to want to import psychotherapy into it? To import varieties of *Advaita* [non-dual Hinduism]? Or any other discipline?" Because in the radical nature of the Buddha's teaching, everything is there that you really need. It's not for any kind of accident that he says "In this handful of leaves is everything that you need." It is very easy to import suppositions into your practice that he actually spoke out against.

Classical *Advaita*, the *Advaita* espoused by Shankara, for example—and there is no way of getting away from it—is an absolutism, in the sense that it's talking about one thing which is not dependent on causes and conditions, called Brahman. Brahman is described as being of the nature of "pure consciousness." Yet one thing the Buddha makes absolutely clear is that there is no consciousness without it being conscious of—there is no thing that can be without being dependent on causes and conditions.

Both conceptions are ruled out very strongly by the Buddha in the texts of the Pali Canon.

So the Buddha is saying, in all compassion, "If I thought letting you rest there would end suffering for you, I would let you rest there."

That's right. The Buddha's message is not comforting. He is trying to get us to see that there is an optimum way to live this life, and there is a very debased way. This has nothing to do with transcendent realities. I find this echoed in Nagarjuna's "*Samsāra is nirvāna!*" You have the choice. This is it. This is your *samsāra*, this is your *nibbāna*. How do you want to be?

If you look at the *Nikayas* [the early literature of the Pali Canon], not everybody's convinced by the Buddha. Some of the Brahmins, having been presented with all the consequences of their thinking, go away shaking their heads, saying "What's he going on about? I still prefer to hold onto what I do." Others respond to what he says, "Okay, if those are the consequences, perhaps it's better to move towards the Buddha-Dharma."

We try to make things cozy, but there is nothing cozy about the Buddha's teaching.

But we're cozy people living cozy lifestyles in a cozy environment.

That's the big, big problem. It becomes cozy in wanting to have the Buddhadharma and have our cake as well. One of the things I often explore with groups is that the Buddha's teaching comes from a *sāmaṇera* tradition, a renunciate tradition. What are you gonna have to give up? People ask, "Is there another word we can use for renunciation?" (laughs).

We try to make things cozy, but there is nothing cozy about the Buddha's teaching.

Is there a way to integrate all this into a meaningful life for a modern person?

I think there is. When the Buddha, for example, has the injunction to his monastics, "Be content with little," I think we really have to examine that in terms of our own lifestyles. I don't think there is an overall blanket, "Well, you've got to give up this, you've got to give up that." It's a progressive vision. In terms of meditation practice, you know, renunciation is required in that. You might have to renounce half an hour in bed, or a little bit of TV. It's not a matter of "What do I have to do?" it's a matter of what you value. If you value something sufficiently you will make space for it.

Could the Buddha be trying to teach us to be comfortable with our existential discomfort, rather than trying to make it go away?

There is no zone of comfort—anywhere. So relax in your discomfort, instead of trying to fight it, or shore it up, or escape it. Buddhadhamma is not a hobby, something we do to make ourselves feel good. I think we do it a disservice if we think it's about feeling good. Now, good factors arise, to be sure! But they are not to be clung to, because they are impermanent as well. In many ways the most elemental aspect of the teaching for me is *upekkhā*, equanimity. I see *upekkhā* almost—and this is why I feel the *Brahma vihāras* are a path to awakening—as a synonym for *nibbāna*.

We seem to have this reflex to take what's flowing past us and try to nail it down. The word for that impulse is desire, and it is the cause of suffering. I think the French philosopher Michel Foucault has a wonderful phrase for it. He speaks of "the eye that cadaverizes life and then looks for its frail nerve." Put in more contemporary terms, I think it's the eye that takes the butterfly and pins it down, and then says how beautiful it is. So we take this wonderful dynamic world—and

I don't mean anything outside of ourselves, but the world in our fathom-long bodies—and we look for fixity in what is actually a marvelous flux. We don't have to do that, and we're better off not doing it.



Mindfulness Defined

Street Smarts for the Path

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

What does it mean to be mindful of the breath? Something very simple: to keep the breath in mind. Keep remembering the breath each time you breathe in, each time you breathe out. T. H. Rhys-Davids, the British scholar who coined the term “mindfulness” to translate the Pali word *sati*, was probably influenced by the Anglican prayer to be ever mindful of the needs of others—in other words, to always keep their needs in mind. But even though the word “mindful” was probably drawn from a Christian context, the Buddha himself defined *sati* as the ability to remember, illustrating its function in meditation practice with the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, or establishings of mindfulness.



“And what is the faculty of sati? There is the case where a monk, a disciple of the noble ones, is mindful, highly meticulous, remembering & able to call to mind even things that were done & said long ago. (And here begins the satipaṭṭhāna formula:) He remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves... the mind in & of itself... mental qualities in & of themselves — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.”

—SN 48:10

The full discussion of the *satipaṭṭhānas* (DN 22) starts with instructions to be ever mindful of the breath. Directions such as “bring bare attention to the breath,” or “accept the breath,” or whatever else modern teachers tell us that mindfulness is supposed to do, are actually functions for other qualities in the mind. They’re not automatically a part of *sati*, but you should bring them along wherever they’re appropriate.

One quality that’s always appropriate in establishing mindfulness is being watchful or alert. The Pali word for alertness, *sampajañña*, is another term that’s often misunderstood. It doesn’t mean being choicelessly aware of the present, or comprehending the present.

Popular books on meditation offer a lot of other definitions for mindfulness, so many that the poor word gets totally stretched out of shape.

Examples in the Canon shows that *sampajañña* means being aware of what you're doing in the movements of the body, the movements in the mind. After all, if you're going to gain insight into how you're causing suffering, your primary focus always has to be on what you're actually doing. This is why mindfulness and alertness should always be paired as you meditate.

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, they're combined with a third quality: *atappa*, or ardency. Ardency means being intent on what you're doing, trying your best to do it skillfully. This doesn't mean that you have to keep straining and sweating all the time, just that you're continuous in developing skillful habits and abandoning unskillful ones. Remember, in the eight factors of the path to freedom, right mindfulness grows out of right effort. Right effort is the effort to be skillful. Mindfulness helps that effort along by reminding you to stick with it, so that you don't let it drop.

All three of these qualities get their focus from what the Buddha called *yoniso manisikāra*, appropriate attention. Notice: That's *appropriate* attention, not bare attention. The Buddha discovered that the way you attend to things is determined by what you see as important—the questions you bring to the practice, the problems you want the practice to solve. No act of attention is ever bare. If there were no problems in life you could open yourself up choicelessly to whatever came along. But the fact is there *is* a big problem smack dab in the middle of everything you do: the suffering that comes from acting in ignorance. This is why the Buddha doesn't tell you to view each moment with a beginner's eyes. You've got to keep the issue of suffering and its end always in mind.

Otherwise inappropriate attention will get in the way, focusing on questions like "Who am I?" "Do I have a self?"—questions dealing in terms of being and identity. Those questions, the Buddha said, lead you into a thicket of views and leave you stuck on the thorns. The questions that lead to freedom focus on comprehending

suffering, letting go of the cause of suffering, and developing the path to the end of suffering. Your desire for answers to these questions is what makes you alert to your actions—your thoughts, words, and deeds—and ardent to perform them skillfully.

Mindfulness is what keeps the perspective of appropriate attention in mind. Modern psychological research has shown that attention comes in discrete moments. You can be attentive to something for only a very short period of time and then you have to remind yourself, moment after moment, to return to it if you want to keep on being attentive. In other words, continuous attention—the type that can observe things over time—has to be stitched together from short intervals. This is what mindfulness is for. It keeps the object of your attention and the purpose of your attention in mind.



Popular books on meditation, though, offer a lot of other definitions for mindfulness, a lot of other duties it's supposed to fulfill—so many that the poor word gets totally stretched out of shape. In some cases, it even gets defined as Awakening, as in the phrase, "A moment of mindfulness is a moment of Awakening"—something the Buddha would never say, because mindfulness is conditioned and nirvana is not.

These are not just minor matters for nitpicking scholars to argue over. If you don't see the differences among the qualities you're bringing to your meditation, they glom together, making it hard for real insight to arise. If you decide that one of the factors on the path to Awakening is Awakening itself, it's like reaching the middle of a road and then falling asleep right there. You never get to the end of the road, and in the meantime you're bound to get run over by aging, illness, and death. So you need to get your directions straight, and that requires, among other things, knowing precisely what mindfulness is and what it's not.



I've heard mindfulness defined as "affectionate attention" or "compassionate attention," but affection and compassion aren't the same as mindfulness. They're separate things. If you bring them to your meditation, be clear about the fact that they're acting in addition to mindfulness, because skill in meditation requires seeing when qualities like compassion are helpful and when they're not. As the Buddha says, there are times when affection is a cause for suffering, so you have to watch out.

Sometimes mindfulness is defined as appreciating the moment for all the little pleasures it can offer: the taste of a raisin, the feel of a cup of tea in your hands. In the Buddha's vocabulary, this appreciation is called contentment. Contentment is useful when you're experiencing physical hardship, but it's not always useful in the area of the mind. In fact the Buddha once said that the secret to his Awakening was that he *didn't* allow himself to rest content with whatever attainment he had reached. He kept reaching for something higher until there was nowhere higher to reach. So contentment has to know its time and place. Mindfulness, if it's not confused with contentment, can help keep that fact in mind.

Some teachers define mindfulness as "non-reactivity" or "radical acceptance." If you look

for these words in the Buddha's vocabulary, the closest you'll find are equanimity and patience. Equanimity means learning to put aside your preferences so that you can watch what's actually there. Patience is the ability not to get worked up over the things you don't like, to stick with difficult situations even when they don't resolve as quickly as you want them to. But in establishing mindfulness you stay with unpleasant things not just to accept them but to watch and understand them. Once you've clearly seen that a particular quality like aversion or lust is harmful for the mind, you can't stay patient or equanimous about it. You have to make whatever effort is needed to get rid of it and to nourish skillful qualities in its place by bringing in other factors of the path: right resolve and right effort.

Mindfulness, after all, is part of a larger path mapped out by appropriate attention. You have to keep remembering to bring the larger map to bear on everything you do. For instance, right now you're trying to keep the breath in mind because you see that concentration, as a factor of the path, is something you need to develop, and mindfulness of the breath is a good way to do it. The breath is also a good standpoint from which you can directly observe what's happening in the mind, to see which qualities of mind are giving good results and which ones aren't.

Meditation isn't just a passive process of being nonjudgmentally present with whatever's there and not changing it at all.



Meditation involves lots of mental qualities, and you have to be clear about what they are, where they're separate, and what each one of them can do. That way, when things are out of balance, you can identify what's missing and can foster whatever is needed to make up the lack. If you're feeling flustered and irritated, try to bring in a little gentleness and contentment. When you're lazy, rev up your sense of the dangers of being unskillful and complacent. It's not just a matter of piling on more and more mindfulness. You've got to add other qualities as well. First you're mindful enough to stitch things together, to keep the basic issues of your meditation in mind and to observe things over time. Then you try to notice—that's alertness—to see what else to stir into the pot.

It's like cooking. When you don't like the taste of the soup you're fixing, you don't just add more and more salt. Sometimes you add onion, sometimes garlic, sometimes oregano—whatever you sense is needed. Just keep in mind that you've got a whole spice shelf to work with, and that each bottle of spice should be clearly and accurately marked. If the cloves, rosemary, and sage are all labeled "salt," you won't know which bottle to reach for, and can end up ruining your soup.

And remember that your cooking has a purpose. The food is meant to nourish the body. In the map of the path, right mindfulness isn't the end point. It's supposed to lead to right concentration.



We're often told that mindfulness and concentration are two separate forms of meditation, but the Buddha never made a clear division between the two. In his teachings, mindfulness shades into concentration; concentration forms the basis for even better mindfulness. The four establishments of

mindfulness are also the themes of concentration. The highest level of concentration is where mindfulness becomes pure. As Ajaan Lee, a Thai Forest master, once noted, mindfulness combined with ardency turns into the concentration factor called *vitakka* or "directed thought," where you keep your thoughts consistently focused on one thing. Alertness combined with ardency turns into another concentration factor: *vicāra*, or "evaluation." You evaluate what's going on with the breath. Is it comfortable? If it is, stick with it. If it's not, what can you do to make it more comfortable? Try making it a little bit longer, a little bit shorter, deeper, more shallow, faster, slower. See what happens. When you've found a way of breathing that nourishes a sense of fullness and refreshment, you can spread that fullness throughout the body. Learn how to relate to the breath in a way that nourishes a good energy flow throughout the body. When things feel refreshing like this, you can easily settle down.

You may have picked up the idea that you should never fiddle with the breath, that you should just take it as it comes. Yet meditation isn't just a passive process of being nonjudgmentally present with whatever's there and not changing it at all. Mindfulness keeps stitching things together over time, but it also keeps in mind the idea that there's a path to develop, and getting the mind to settle down is a skillful part of that path.

This is why evaluation—judging the best way to maximize the pleasure of the breath—is essential to the practice. In other words, you don't abandon your powers of judgment as you develop mindfulness. You simply train them to be less judgmental and more judicious, so that they yield tangible results.

When the breath gets really full and refreshing throughout the body, you can drop the evaluation and simply be one with the breath. This sense of oneness is also sometimes called mindfulness, in a literal sense: *mindfulness*, a sense of oneness pervading the entire range of your awareness. You're at one with whatever you focus on, at one with whatever

*Mindfulness reminds you that no matter how wonderful this sense of oneness,
you still haven't solved the problem of suffering.*

you do. There's no separate "you" at all. This is the type of mindfulness that's easy to confuse with Awakening because it can seem so liberating, but in the Buddha's vocabulary it's neither mindfulness nor Awakening. It's *cetaso ekodibhāva*, unification of awareness—a factor of concentration, present in every level from the second *jhāna* up through the infinitude of consciousness. So it's not even the ultimate in concentration, much less Awakening.

Which means that there's still more to do. This is where mindfulness, alertness, and ardency keep digging away. Mindfulness reminds you that no matter how wonderful this sense of oneness, you still haven't solved the problem of suffering. Alertness tries to focus on what the mind is still doing in that state of oneness—what subterranean choices you're making to keep that sense of oneness going, what subtle levels of stress those choices are causing—while ardency tries to find a way to drop even those subtle choices so as to be rid of that stress.

So even this sense of oneness is a means to a higher end. You bring the mind to a solid state of oneness so as to drop your normal ways of dividing up experience into me *vs.* not-me, but you don't stop there. You then take that oneness and keep subjecting it to all the factors of right mindfulness. That's when really valuable things begin to separate out on their own. Ajaan Lee uses the image of ore in a rock. Staying with the sense of oneness is like being content simply with the knowledge that there's tin, silver, and gold in your rock. If that's all you do, you'll never get any use from them. But if you heat the rock to the melting points for the different metals, they'll separate out on their own.



Liberating insight comes from testing, experimenting. This is how we learn about the world to begin with. If we weren't active creatures, we'd have no understanding of the world at all. Things would pass by, pass by, and we wouldn't know how they were connected because we'd have no way of influencing them

to see which effects came from changing which causes. It's because we act in the world that we understand the world.

The same holds true with the mind. You can't just sit around hoping that a single mental quality—mindfulness, acceptance, contentment, oneness—is going to do all the work. If you want to learn about the potentials of the mind, you have to be willing to play—with sensations in the body, with qualities in the mind. That's when you come to understand cause and effect.

And that requires all your powers of intelligence—and this doesn't mean just book intelligence. It means your ability to notice what you're doing, to read the results of what you've done, and to figure out ingenious ways of doing things that cause less and less suffering and stress: street smarts for the noble path. Mindfulness allows you to see these connections because it keeps reminding you always to stay with these issues, to stay with the causes until you see their effects. But mindfulness alone can't do all the work. You can't fix the soup simply by dumping more salt into it. You add other ingredients, as they're needed.

This is why it's best not to load the word mindfulness with too many meanings or to assign it too many functions. Otherwise, you can't clearly discern when a quality like contentment is useful and when it's not, when you need to bring things to oneness and when you need to take things apart.

So keep the spices on your shelf clearly labeled, and keep tasting the flavor of what you're cooking. That way you'll learn for yourself which spice is good for which purpose, and develop your full potential as a cook.

Ajaan Thanisarro (Geoffrey DeGraff) has been a Theravadin monk since 1976 and is the abbot of Metta Forest Monastery in San Diego County, CA.

Resourcefulness

A Jātaka Story

Once there was a poor boy who happened upon a dead mouse lying in the road. He wondered if he might turn that mouse's misfortune into some sort of opportunity for himself.



He picked up the mouse and brought it to a tavern, where he offered it to the tavern-keeper to feed his cat. The tavern-keeper was grateful, and gave the boy a penny.

With this penny the boy went to the market and bought a very small amount of honey. Then he borrowed a large water pot, filled it with water, and carried it into the fields where he knew there were some women picking flowers. It was a hot day, and he offered the flower-pickers a drink of water, each with a drop of honey in it to make it sweet and refreshing. The flower-pickers were grateful, and each gave him a handful of flowers. He sold these in the market, and now had a whole handful of pennies.

Soon afterwards a great storm blew in, bringing with it a mighty wind that blew down a large number of twigs and branches from the trees of the king's pleasure garden. The gardener was scratching his head, wondering how he would clean it all up, when the boy popped up. He offered to clean up the entire mess in one day, if he were allowed to keep the wood he collected. The gardener agreed on the spot, greatly relieved.

The clever boy went immediately to the playground and offered the boys playing there a penny each to gather up all the wood and pile it beside the road. They were happy to do so, and had the task done in no time.

Just then a potter who worked nearby was looking for fuel to fire his clay pots in a kiln. The boy offered him the pile of wood, and the potter was delighted he did not have to scavenge wood himself in the forest. He rewarded the boy handsomely, with a handful of money and several very large water pots.

Meanwhile the boy went to a tavern and befriended both a merchant and a sea captain. From the merchant he learned that a large caravan with five hundred horses was due to arrive in the village soon.

Using the money he got from the potter, he hired some wagons, loaded his new water pots on them, and filled them with water. He also was able to buy some honey, which he mixed in with the water as before.

It was the season for taking in hay, and at least five hundred men were toiling in the fields cutting grass. The boy brought his water to the parched field hands, and in return they each gave him a bundle of grass. He gathered all this grass on the wagons and brought it to the gate of the city, and was there to greet the caravan when it arrived.

The traders had crossed many miles of barren country on their journey, and their horses were famished. They gladly purchased his entire stock of grass, giving him in return from their goods a fine set of clothing, a fancy tent, and a large jeweled ring.





The boy next learned from his friend the sea captain that a ship was due in port with a rich cargo from foreign lands, and he hatched a plan.

Putting on the fine clothing and the jeweled ring, he had just enough coins left to hire an expensive-looking carriage and driver for an hour. He drove down to the shore to meet the ship as soon as it arrived, with all the appearance of being the son of a very wealthy merchant. He said his father had instructed him to buy the entire ship's cargo at a generous price, to be paid when the goods were unloaded. He offered the ship's captain his ring as security for the purchase. The captain was happy to sell all his goods at once, and accepted the offer.

Then the boy drove a short distance off, set up the tent he had gotten from the caravan traders, and promised a handful of coins to three boys if they would help him by acting as his servants. He draped each in a scrap of the fine cloth, and gave them the following instructions. They were told to usher into his presence anyone who turned

up wanting to see him, but to do so in three stages. The first boy was to escort the visitor into the vicinity of the tent, the second was to accompany him up to the door, while the third was to usher him in to the presence of the boy posing as a rich merchant's son.



Before long a hundred merchants went to the dock to buy goods from the ship, but were told by the captain that his entire cargo had already been sold to the wealthy merchant. They fell over one another to reach the boy in his tent, but were made to wait as the "servants" led them one by one to see the "wealthy merchant." He auctioned off all the goods one by one, making each merchant bid against the others to get what he wanted. The process took a long time, as you might imagine, but the merchants were all so eager to acquire the goods that they drove the prices up very high indeed. By the end of the day the boy had enough money to pay the captain what he had promised him and keep three times as much again for himself.

The boy returned to his village, married the girl he had loved since childhood, and lived a long and prosperous life. He used his wealth to help out anyone in need, and was renowned for his generosity.

—Andrew Olendzki



It may surprise you to hear such a practical tale in a Buddhist context. In fact the Buddha himself was quite down-to-earth in many ways and, perhaps because so many of his listeners were of the emerging merchant class, he often praises such qualities as industry, thrift, and a certain entrepreneurial flair. These qualities are certainly in abundance here, as we follow the progress of this boy's dealings from the most humble beginnings to great riches. The key for the Buddha is always that the resources be honestly gained by hard work, and that they ultimately be used not only to support oneself, but also to benefit one's family, friends, community, and—most importantly—those in all traditions who strive for liberation from unwholesome states.

—AO



Downspout Bodhisattva

oh how this water is
all other water:
raincloud gutter gusher
sewer ocean sky,
mouth & throat & belly
bloodstream guts & out

—Jeanne Larsen

The Relief of Understanding

1
Infinitely divided are the ways of misunderstanding;
Singly unified, the ways of good will.

2
Good will tunes the purposive heart
As gravity teaches us to dance.

3
Dance cannot refuse the body's dreams
Or speak on behalf of any standard but humility.

4
Humility is the seed of grace
That grows in oneness with itself.

—Catherine Parke

Meditation on the Grain: Oak Chest with Six Drawers

1.

Layer upon layer
we build ourselves up,
and for what?

2.

All we oppose
still flows within us,
dark, rushing river.

3.

A landscape so vast
there is room
for forgiveness.

4.

Strong winds
from every direction,
a single destination.

5.

From the still point
a dream of water
that quenches all thirst.

6.

Flashes of color,
a sudden brilliance,
the radiance of death

—Kathleen M. Kelley

This page contains material sent in by our readers. If you have a poem, drawing or photograph you would like to share with others, relating to your meditative insights or retreat experience, please send it to the editors at BCBS.

Evensong

The Wood-thrush and I
chant together as the sun sets,
he with his puja,
I with mine,
the Dhamma
emerging through us both:
What is, is.
What isn't, isn't.
Then, as silence gathers
we settle into stillness,
and the daylight comes to rest:
This being so,
That arises.
When this ceases,
So, at last,
Does that.

—Virañani



Autumn's Approach

Gold leaf drifts from birch
rests upon butterfly bush
stirs whispers of wings

—Amy Gustavson

Escaping the Karma of Addiction

Paul Simons

It might seem strange to talk about “spiritual self schema” as something to aspire to in a Buddhist context. In the psychological language of Self-Schema Therapy, it describes an alternative to the “addict self,” the type of mistaken identification with one’s negative thoughts and feelings that perpetuates a cycle of addiction to dangerous substances and behaviors.

Spiritual Self-Schema (3-S) therapy, developed at Yale University, is designed for those trapped in cycles of addiction and for the mental health professionals who work with them. It combines Western cognitive-behavioral therapies with Buddhist psychology to provide a very practical, day-to-day set of tools for empowering people to free themselves from habits that harm themselves and those around them.

For those of us not trapped in addictions to physically dangerous substances and behaviors, some of this might seem strange and unrelated to our experience. On the other hand, while perhaps not as physically dangerous, some of our addictions to unwholesome mind states can seem just as strong, making the raw experiences discussed here seem oddly familiar.

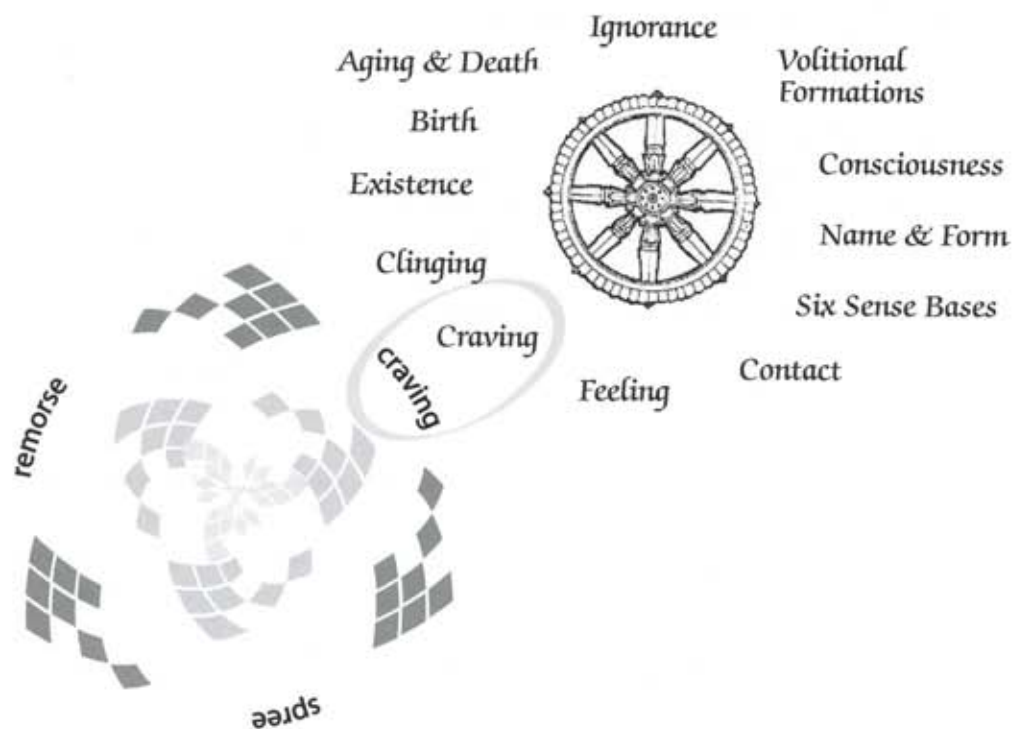
This article is based on teachings given at BCBS in January, 2008 by Paul Simons & Gregory Bivens in a course called Working with Addiction: Spiritual Self-Schema Therapy.

The therapy process draws on all aspects of Buddhist psychology, notably mindfulness as a tool for interrupting dangerous thought patterns leading to addictive behaviors. This article focuses on how the moral discipline (*sila*) sections of the noble eightfold path—right speech, right action and right livelihood—and its relationship to karma (in this case, cycles of addiction) are brought into the process of mental health professionals working with clients.

Non-harming as the first step

The second section of the intervention begins with the training in *sila*, a word meaning integrity or morality. Morality here in the United States is sometimes confused with sexual morality, as if morality is totally encompassed by sexual relations; but this is not the case. Since morality can be such a loaded word in our culture, we might better think of *sila* as “training in integrity.” The flavor of this training is suggested by the verse from the *Dhammapada*, “As I am, so are others, and as others are, so am I. Having thus identified self and others, harm no one and give no harm.”

The three sections of the Buddhist eight-fold path dealing with integrity are right speech, right action and right livelihood. In the 3-S therapy, we begin by teasing out from the client some addict speech, addict action and some addict livelihood. The therapeutic goals of this are to look at these and see they are incompatible with getting on a spiritual path.



3-S therapy finds inspiration and support for teaching and practice in the Buddha's understanding of our mental processes, such as Dependent Origination. The parallels with addiction can be striking.

We are going to reinforce the whole concept of integrity as “no harm to self and others.” Then in the experiential component we are going to replace some really negative addict-self scripts with some scripts of loving kindness about ourselves. It is not easy to do.

Discussion centers around the whole idea of morality being the foundation of a spiritual path. In all traditions, including Buddhism, basic morality—how I treat myself, how I treat others—is key to being able to move forward in a positive way on any path. We can then show how the addict self is a habit pattern of the mind incompatible with the spiritual path. The addict self is rather ambivalent about harming oneself and harming others.

You want to ask the client—and this is a great piece of the session—“Let’s talk a little bit about addict speech, what does the addict self say when the addict self is talking?” And you get some really wonderful expositions about

types of things that the addict self actually says. Lying and manipulating are only the first iteration; gossiping, swearing, boasting about one’s capabilities of doing amazing amounts of crack and things like that. Then moving on to addict actions, we hear of drug use, of course, but also of sharing drug paraphernalia, having unsafe sex—these relate directly to the HIV, Hepatitis-C piece of the intervention. For addict livelihood, they are never really sure what to say. How does the addict make his money? What does the addict do to keep drugs in her system?

A better way to feel good

From there, the big issue is, why change? What’s in it for me? This is where it’s nice to be able to offer pieces of Buddhism as an ethical psychology. People are so used to morality being presented as being coerced and demanding, where one is good to others because that’s what

Buddhist ethics says that once you understand how the mind works, "doing the right thing" has a lot to do with feeling good.

God told you to do. Buddhism doesn't really play that game. One of the things I like about the Buddha is he's asked over and over again, tell us about Brahma. Can you tell us about God? And the Buddha says that's really not what he's teaching here. "I teach only about suffering and the end of suffering." Of course many of his Brahmin listeners cannot imagine a path to perfection that did not involve God, but this is one of the things that makes the Buddhist perspective unique.

In the 3-S approach we are not going to present "do no harm" as a moral imperative from any other source, because undoubtedly our clients have been hearing that since Sunday school. If anything we are drawn more in the direction of the Christian teaching, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." We appeal rather to the client's existing desire for self-gratification. And Buddhist ethics says that once you understand how the mind works, "doing the right thing" has a lot to do with feeling good, though not in the conventional sense of mere pleasure. Interestingly, it is the opposite of what we're told in the West; where "doing the right thing" takes time, money, effort and self-denial.

There are two aspects of this to cover. The first is the Buddha's understanding of the inherently harmful nature of hatred. Just as acid first burns the container in which it is held, before it can ever be used to harm another, so also hatred has a corrosive effect on its bearer. It harms us even before it harms others, and in many cases hatred might well do us a great deal of harm and never touch those to whom it is directed. As an example of this, I took a trip recently and the airline lost every last piece of my baggage. It was a teaching trip, and I lost all the handouts I was relying upon. I spent the entire night in my hotel room, prior to presenting 3-S therapy, writing nasty letters to the airline in my head. I was livid. How dare they? Then I thought, wait a minute, it's not about me. They don't even care if they've lost my bags. Who lost the sleep that night,

the chairman of the airline, or me? I did. I was poisoned by it. Those of you in 12-Step programs have heard the line, "What is the nature of resentment?"—It's where I take poison and wait for you to die, right? It is the same basic concept. You cannot do evil without poisoning yourself first. You always harm yourself first before you harm others.

Karma also means the freedom to let go

The second aspect of the Buddhist teaching on integrity is that you are the heir of your actions. Nobody on earth should understand more clearly than drug users and alcoholics the consequential way that our universe works. I commit action A, consequence B arises. I could have that happen over and over and over in my life when I was using heroin, but I never drew the line between action A and consequence B; it was always through a series of missteps and miscommunications that I was picked up by the police. It had nothing to do with me, right? I always thought that one of the best headstones for an alcoholic or an addict would be "It's all your fault." What is that about?

The whole point is that the universe operates on certain fundamental rules, whether we want to accept them or not. The law of karma is: Wholesome actions result in positive consequences, unwholesome actions result in negative consequences. When you assist clients in drawing these lines between action A and consequence B, you begin to see clouds lifted from foreheads. They think, "Wow, I never realized that when I got stopped in the car it had something to do with them watching me cop heroin."

So, draw the lines for clients. The good news about Buddhism—making friends with this whole concept of not-self—is this: At every moment I'm presented with an infinite amount of potential in terms of my choices. I can change at any time, because I don't need to carry around the baggage of my past. I want

*I tell them the purest, cleanest shot of dope you will ever take
is doing a kind deed for someone else.*

you to think about it in the context of today; you are a very different person than the person who walked in those doors at nine o'clock this morning. You've had different experiences, you may have meditated for the first time, had different thoughts; you're a very different person. At the level of physiology, every six years, every molecule in our bodies is changed out and we become literally a different person. The same can be true psychologically. You don't need to carry around the baggage of the past.

Further, and I think this is key: There is an escape from the trap. One of the most brilliant expositions about alcoholism and drug addiction that I've read comes to us, through the 12-Step program, from the big book about Alcoholics Anonymous. It's written by a doctor who doesn't believe in the spiritual stuff, but is grounded in the empirical evidence of his work with alcoholics and addicts. He identifies a continuing cycle of spree and remorse by which the addict is caught, and he says that what always generates the energy for this cycle is not the spree but the remorse. If I can let go of that remorse, if I can let go of that past—make amends for it certainly—then I move into a place where I am changing and options open up to me over time. At any moment there is this link between *sila*—right speech, action, and livelihood—and karma, on the positive side.

The spiritual self does take responsibility for its actions, does recognize change, and is willing to learn from the past rather than use it as a weapon, as a lot of people do. I like the Zen story of the master and student preparing to cross a river when a woman comes along and asks for help crossing over. The master picks her up, places her on his back, carries her across the river, and sets her down on the riverside. The student and master then walk on for three days, until the student suddenly turns to the master, livid, and says "I cannot believe it! You are a monk, yet you touched a woman. Her garment was all up around her legs; it was a disgusting display, I am horrified." The master replies, "You must be a very powerful man, because I just

carried her across the river, but you've carried her all the way from there to here."

Learning to let go is one of the hardest parts about penance, alternately making amends and then beating ourselves up for it. Being able to let go of it, and recognizing that is not me, that is not mine, that is not a permanent piece of who I am—it's tough. If you can't do that, then you are again on that larger cycle of spree and remorse. But whether by twelve steps or by the eightfold path, you can put that behind you.

Better than drugs: compassion

At last we talk about compassion. All beings suffer, all beings experience anxiety and stress, and all beings have a desire to be happy. Let's return to the first iteration of Buddhist ethics, "How does it feel?" What are the physical sensations of hatred, of ill-will, of cruelty? The whole point of doing good things for people is because it makes me feel good.

When I work with clients, using a language they understand, I tell them the purest, cleanest shot of dope you will ever take is doing a kind deed for someone else, while the worst withdrawal you've ever had is by being cruel or unkind. It can be a revelation for people to comprehend that doing good can feel good, since it goes against so much what we are normally taught. I was raised a Mormon, and what was presented to me in Sunday school is that doing good things is really difficult. When you tell clients it can actually feel good, they say, "Oh, I never thought about that before." But it's true. The Buddha explained that the reason why it physically feels good to do good is because we're feeling the karma of our former actions coming to fruition.

Experientially, this results in a lot of interest in loving kindness (*mettā*). It is something consistent through all the world's traditions, and it is where the mind resides on the spiritual path. Some people get the sense that *mettā*

*Even if I wake up from auto-pilot and find myself on Dope Street,
I still have a thousand options in front of me.*

is like praying for someone or sending them positive vibrations. But it is not really about changing the environment in any way, it is about changing what's going on in your mind, as you encounter others and as you encounter yourself. By evoking a sense of empathy, and identification with all human beings, we are going to experience the immediate benefits of generating loving kindness.

Healing from addiction also has a lot to do with learning to replace harmful addict scripts with more healthy scripts. Not all these scripts, we find, are just justifications to use drugs or alcohol. Some of the most deeply toxic ones are things like "I'm no good," "I wish I had that car," "I wish I earned more money." I'm sure none of you have ever had that kind of thought. It's remarkable how we'll accept hearing things from ourselves that we would never accept from others.

The key factor in all of this is awareness, the ongoing awareness of what's happening in the mind-body over time. We train people to be aware of some of the feelings they're having, some of the thoughts they're having, and learn to see whether they are coming from that unwholesome addict-self. With that awareness, they can be encouraged to avert the mind from these unwholesome thoughts, leading to unwholesome behaviors, and to turn instead to more wholesome thoughts and to different behaviors. Even if I wake up from auto-pilot and find myself on Dope Street, I still have a thousand options in front of me. I can still choose. I know this to be true, and am helping other see that it is true also.



For more on 3-S therapy, see www.3-s.us.

About the Presenter

What is salient in my story is first that I was a heroin addict for about twenty years. In most people's minds that conjures images of street life, sleeping behind dumpsters and the like. In my case, I was, until the very end, pretty successful. I ran companies, supervised employees, directed HIV prevention services at a large metropolitan public health department, and was a lobbyist at a state legislature—all the while sneaking around the corner to get high. I finally crashed spectacularly and found myself alone and living on the streets of Denver. My family intervened and I awoke one morning in a treatment center in Southern California.

While there I began looking into various forms of spirituality, and since the great, important things in our lives have a tendency to find us, I encountered, while visiting a Pure Land Buddhist temple in Anaheim, a group of Zen monastics who in the space of an afternoon taught me a very truncated version of the Dhamma.

It all clicked and I knew I'd found what I had been looking for, or perhaps what had been looking for me. Again, what is salient is the central concept of suffering and how its root is craving, clinging. For a heroin addict in withdrawal, craving takes on a powerful, unpleasant, and seemingly unending physical manifestation. For that individual Dhamma becomes second nature.

Since that time I have been drawn more to the Theravadan tradition, and as a result got a chance to work on the training in Spiritual Self Schema Therapy and then to train hundreds of therapists, in the U.S. and Canada, in its implementation. I currently teach a number of workshops around the country for federal, state and local agencies, and am also creating some new training material on spiritual practices as they relate to the clinical setting.

—PS

How to be a Bodhisattva

Jan Willis

Shantideva is one of the most revered teachers of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. His most important text, the *Bodhicāryāvātāra*, was composed in Sanskrit in the eighth century and translated into Tibetan in the eleventh century. There are numerous translations and commentaries to this text, most of them drawn from the Tibetan tradition, and the text we will be using today is from the Tibetan.

Like many Buddhist teachers, we do not know a lot definitively about Shantideva, whose name means Lord (*deva*) of Peace (*śānti*). There are different versions of his life, with one source, for example, saying he is an oldest son, and another calling him the youngest son. It may even be that there were more than one person by the same name, or that texts written by others were attributed to him. At any rate his dates are generally accepted to be 685-763 C.E.

Shantideva was a very idiosyncratic Indian monk living and teaching at Nālanda, the great Buddhist institution located not far from Vulture's Peak in Bihar. Its ruins can still be observed today. It was destroyed by one of the Muslim invasions of India, but there are still monks' bowls partially filled with rice that you can see there among the ruins. Nālanda was the premier Buddhist university of its time, and Shantideva was one of its more colorful inhabitants. In some versions of the story he is not called Shantideva, but Bhusuku. It sounds almost Japanese, but perhaps it is meant to be humorous. It means he was kind of a lazy monk: He did nothing except bhu, su, and ku,

which means to eat, to walk around, and to shit. Bhusuku, "lazy monk"--that was all he was good for.

The monks at Nālanda were all real scholars, and they tended to look down on Bhusuku. He didn't take part in the ceremonies. He didn't take meals or join communal prayers. He always showed up late to things. There was a tradition at Nālanda that each of the monks was to contribute to the community by reciting scripture. And Shantideva missed his turn every time. He could never quite make it. So the monks devised a plan to show him up, to give him his comeuppance. Can you imagine this community of monks thinking, "Let's get this little..." So this is the legend:

They arranged for a time when they would get him there and they would announce as a surprise that it was his turn. They had built a throne where the teacher sat, and they had made it so high that he would fall and embarrass himself in front of the community just trying to get up to it. They were really kind of spiteful; they didn't like anybody not pulling their weight, and he was definitely a slacker.

So here's Shantideva, they get him there on some ruse, and then say, okay, it's your turn, go sit on the throne. And to their amazement, he had no problem at all getting up there. He turned to them and said, "Now, would you like me to recite an ancient scripture, or would you like to hear something new?" So they said "Lay something new on us." And he started to recite none other than the text we're going to read

“Even the fleas and the gnats, even the grubs, who hear this text being recited, will one day attain enlightenment.”

together, the *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, completely new, completely beautiful, and in flowing Sanskrit verse.

Old Bhusuku did it! He did it! This is not just my opinion. This man Shantideva found a way to say it in verse, how a thought of bodhicitta—the heartfelt aspiration that one will commit to the goal of awakening all sentient beings—comes to arise, how it can be maintained, and how it can be increased. The way of the Bodhisattva. The full title of this text means entering or going down into (*avatāra*) the way, the behavior, or the activities (*cāriya*) of a Bodhisattva, one whose whole being is set on enlightenment for all beings.

This text is slightly under a thousand four-line verses, and the structure of it was unique in its time. It is divided into ten chapters, and Shantideva has written it—in this case recited it—such that every three chapters forms a unit, with the tenth being a dedication of merit for having created the text. It deals with everything from the beginning of the thought of enlightenment, up to Buddhahood itself.

The ninth chapter is the famous wisdom chapter, which stands as a text in its own right. And the story is told that when he came to the ninth chapter, and he was reciting, he suddenly started to levitate, his body just rose from his seat. I found one depiction of this. Here we see Shantideva, with the famed Nālanda University in the background. His cushion throne is there, and he's not sitting on it; there is air between his body and the cushion. He floats right on out of sight as he's reciting the ninth chapter on wisdom, Voidness of Self. And he completely disappears, never to be seen again. They don't see him anymore, but they hear his voice. And they recognize that what he is saying is something totally new.

One of the verses from Shantideva's text says, “Even the fleas and the gnats, even the

grubs, who hear this text being recited, will one day attain enlightenment.” I'm absolutely convinced it's true. Even the grubs will attain enlightenment. So it's often a practice in Tibetan monastic institutions that the *Bodhicāryāvatāra* will be taken outside and read aloud so that everything in the natural environment, the insects, the birds, would hear it, and from hearing it, they would form an aspiration, that all beings, without exception, would one day attain complete and perfect enlightenment. So reading the text is a practice. Reading it aloud is an additional kind of practice. Reading it in the hearing of others, that too is a practice. So here in the Dharma Hall today, we will practice first by reading this text, in our own voices, to the other folk in this room.

There are five translations of the text in English that I know of, and four very fine commentaries. This one we'll read from this weekend is the only one translated to be read aloud in iambic pentameter. I think it's really the best translation out there. It's the only translation that bears in mind one of the reasons this text has been so powerful throughout history, and that is because it is so beautiful in verse. They did it! These people did it so that it's pleasing to people. That's another reason to read it aloud, because it's pleasing not only to the gnats or the grubs, but to us as well.



Why is this such a special text? Tibetans have treasured it for several reasons. In the wisdom chapter Shantideva has captured in verse the profound point of view of the Madhyamaka. This is the premier wisdom school of Nāgārjuna which articulates the wisdom that liberates us from *samsāra*. He thus captures in verse the core teaching of the Mahayana in the context of telling us the path to Buddhahood.



The story is told that when Shantideva recited the ninth chapter of the Bodhicāryāvātāra, he spontaneously rose into the sky.

when we see Tibetan Tantra—these are simply different methods of practice.

Shantideva's text is about the heart of Mahayana practice, which is bodhicitta, the thought of enlightenment that begins with including others. I sit on the cushion, presumably, because I have some concern for myself. And we can wed that concern with the concern for all others. That liberation should be something that is open to

all of us, and we should start our practice from there—that is Mahayana. And that is what this text is about.

The text explains first, in its first three chapters, that bodhicitta—that precious bodhicitta, so rare in this world—is a totally virtuous thought. How is it that something so precious and rare as the virtuous thought, bodhicitta, arises in the world? "May all other beings be free from suffering; then I'll think about myself"—that is a rare thought. How does that happen at all? Then in the next three chapters the theme shifts to maintaining what has arisen. "May bodhicitta, precious and sublime, arise where it has not yet come to be. And where it has arisen, may it never fail, but grow and flourish ever more and more."

From the time of the Buddha, almost 2600 years ago, in India, sixth century BCE, a person named Siddhartha Gautama expounds this teaching. The fundamentals of that teaching—which British explorers, who like to put "isms" on things, called Buddhism—is referred to as Dharma. Dharma is what holds us back from harm. Dharma—from the Sanskrit verb root "dhy", to hold—holds us back from harm and holds us together. The Buddha expounded the Dharma, which can be summed in terms of the Four Noble Truths: There is suffering, there is the cause of suffering, there is the cessation of suffering, and there is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering. Under the rubric of "path," it is said that the Buddha taught 84,000 different methods. We should be able to commit to one of them! When we see Japanese Zen, when we see Theravadan Vipassana or Insight,

The final three chapters address how it may be increased and spread through the worlds.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama was recently asked by a reporter—and this is rare given the circumstances of Tibet right now, there being a very real crackdown —“Do you really think, your Holiness, that good is possible in this crazy world, and that it has any chance of overcoming the chaos, the evil and all the negativity in the world today?” And His Holiness, without a moment’s delay, said “But of course it does. Sure.” Now I find that amazing. But, on some level, I understand it.

I do battle all the time with the thought “How in the world can compassion compare with the negative stuff that is out there?” But this just shows up my own limitations. Because in the same way that even those grubs will get enlightened one day, I hope there will come a time when the positive will outlive the negative. That’s His Holiness’ opinion, and I’m coming more and more to agree with it. The positive, almost magical, idea that it is possible to think we will all become, each one of us, enlightened beings. That is a powerful thought. That is the bodhicitta.

For a long time I dealt with really low self-esteem; I’ve still got traces of it. I grew up in the Jim Crow South—white drinking fountains, colored drinking fountains, that whole thing. People were saying, “What’s the matter with you? You’ve got a place. You’re trying to get out of it. Don’t you know your place?” It cuts deep on a kid’s psyche, especially a sensitive, moody, delicate kid. But I think there are methods capable of helping us actualize outlooks and actions that are virtuous, in any situation. Little by little, step by step, we train ourselves. I found these methods of transformation in the Tibetan tradition, and there are others in other Buddhist traditions. I’m still Baptist, though—a Tibetan Baptist Buddhist.

Tibetans have been using these methods since Buddhism was introduced there, so for centuries upon centuries, they have been practicing this. The hallmark of Tibetan Buddhist practice is this: that one can transform one’s ordinary body, speech and mind into the body, speech and

mind of a Buddha, an enlightened being. And I think when you meet certain Lamas who model or manifest this, you believe in this possibility. It’s real. The Tantra says, even in these degenerate times, it is possible to transform one’s ordinary body, speech and mind into the body, speech and mind of an enlightened one. That’s possible for each and every one of us, even if we can’t see the end now.

We might as well begin now on this Bodhicitta Bodhisattva Mahayana path. Because eventually, even if it takes lifetimes, one day we are going to do it. I don’t know about this lifetime reincarnation thing, but we can see the incremental changes, step by step, even in this lifetime. So imagine the day, maybe countless lifetimes in the future, when we do it. If we’re changing negative habitual thinking to positive habitual thinking, the negative will run its course and the positive will eventually outweigh the negative.

The *Dhammapada* says, “Hatred is never appeased by hatred. Hatred is only appeased by love. This is an eternal law.” The term for eternal law there is Dhamma. If you want to know the Dharma in a nutshell, it is here in this verse. And this book, Shantideva’s *Bodhicāryāvātāra*, is about love and compassion.

Each of our sessions in the Dharma Hall will end with one of Shantideva’s dedication verses. I think it sends us on the way from our Dharma Hall well. I really hope we get a chance to read all of these, even if we don’t explicate all of them. Let’s try reading this one together now. See if you can connect with this and make it heartfelt.

*May beings everywhere who suffer
Torment in their minds and bodies
Have, by virtue of my merit,
Joy and happiness in boundless measure.*

(Chapter 10, verse 2)

One can transform one's ordinary body, speech and mind
into the body, speech and mind of a Buddha.

Let us try to form that wish. Let's try to reflect on that a while: "May all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness." Let us think, as we will, in a *mettā* way, with loving kindness, by thinking these lines:

*May all beings be free from danger,
may all beings have bodily happiness,
may all beings have mental happiness,
may all beings know the ease of well being,
may all beings be free from danger.*

Like a blind person who finds a jewel in his house, let us take up bodhicitta, embrace it, and make it our own. Let's begin here.



This article is extracted from a program offered at BCBS in March 2008 by Prof. Jan Willis, professor of Religion at Wesleyan University and one of the earliest American scholar-practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism.



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January	10	Ellison Findly	Buddhist Art
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	30-Feb 1	Claire Stanley & Jack Millett	Mindfulness for Educators
February	6-11	Andrew Olendzki & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia	Integrated Study & Practice (Prior Students Only)
	15-20	Andrew Olendzki & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia	Buddhist Psychology
	21	Phillip Moffitt	Twelve Insights from the Four Noble Truths
	27-Mar 1	Ajahn Thanissaro	The Ten Perfections
March	7	Susan Greenland	Mindful Parenting for Professionals
	8	Susan Greenland	Mindful Parenting for Parents
	15-20	Andrew Olendzki	Abhidhamma: Buddhist Psychology
	21	Bill Waldron	Self, No-Self, & the Unconscious
	27-29	Roshi Pat O'Hara	Lotus Sutra
April	3-5	Jan Willis	How to Become a Bodhisattva
	11	Neuro Dharma: Mindfulness & Brain	Rick Hanson, Rick Mendius
	14-19	Bill & Susan Morgan, Janet Surrey	Mindfulness for Mental Health Professionals
	24-26	Mu Soeng	Understanding Practice & Liberation
May	2	James Austin	Zen & Brain Transformation
	3	Rajesh Kasturirangan	Buddhism & Cognitive Science
	10	Ellison Findly	Buddhist Activism: At Home & in Asia
	15-17	Paul Fleischman	Putting Your Practice Into Words
June	5-10	Andrew Olendzki & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia	Integrated Study & Practice (Application Only)
	13-20	Andrew Olendzki & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia	Bhāvanā Program
	26-28	Brahma Vihāras for Mental Health Professionals	Rebecca Bradshaw
July	10-12	Jason Siff	Meditation from Within
	17-26	Leigh Brasington	Dependent Origination & Jhāna
August	7-9	Mark Unno & Taitetsu Unno	Shin Buddhism
	15-16	Jātaka Tales	Margo McLoughlin
September	6-11	John Peacock	Desire in Buddhist Thought & Practice
	12	John Makransky	Compassion Beyond Fatigue
	25-27	David Loy	Personal & Social Transformation
October	2-6	Martine & Stephen Batchelor	Buddhism, Agnosticism & Atheism
	9-14	Andrew Olendzki & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia	Integrated Study & Practice (Application Only)
	17	Joseph Goldstein	Buddha's Song of Enlightenment
	18-23	Andrew Olendzki & Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia	Buddhist Psychology
	30-Nov 1	Gregory Kramer	Dharma Contemplation: Bhava
November	2-8	Gregory Kramer	Insight Dialogue
	13-15	Chip Hartranft	Patañjali, Yoga Sutra & Insight Practice
	27-29	Identity, Personality & Freedom	Mark Hart
December	4-9	DaeJa Napier	Brahma Vihāras (Bhāvanā Program)
	11-13	Mu Soeng	Restlessness, Narcissism, Ignorance

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Attached to Nothing

Sutta Nipāta 1112-1115

icc-āyasmā Posālo:

yo afitam ādisati
anejo chinnaśamsayo
pāraguṃ sabbadhammānaṃ
atthi pañhena āgamaṃ:

vibhūtarūpasaññissa
sabbakāyapahāyino
ajjhatañ ca bahiddhā ca
'n' atthi kiñci' ti passato

ñānaṃ Sakkānupucchāmi,
kathaṃ neyyo tathāvidho.

Posālo ti Bhagavā:

viññāṇatthitīyo sabbā
abhijānaṃ Tathāgato
tīṭhantaṃ enaṃ jānāti
vimuttaṃ tapparāyanaṃ

ākiñcaññāsambhavaṃ ñatvā
'nandi saṃyojanaṃ' iti
evam evaṃ abhiññāyo
tato tattha vipassati,

etam ñānaṃ tathaṃ tassa
brāhmaṇassa vusīmato ti

Venerable Posāla:

To the one who reveals the past,
Is unperturbed, with doubts cut off,
To he who's gone beyond all things
—It's with a question that I come.

For one whose perception of form
Has dissolved, who's let go all form,
Who inwardly and outwardly
Sees that "Nothing at all exists,"

I ask, Sākya, to understand:
How would one guide someone like this?

Buddha to Posāla:

All the stations of consciousness
Are known to the Tathāgata.
He knows how one established there
Goes beyond that to become free.

Knowing "delight is a fetter,"
Even where nothingness occurs,
He thereby fully understands
And gains insight into that state.

This is the knowledge that truly
Fulfills the life of a brahman.



achieved through yogic meditation, but the content of that state is by definition empty of all discernable forms of knowing. Is this wisdom? He may also be fishing for confirmation that he is in no further need of guidance.

If so he would have been disappointed. The Buddha seems to answer that true knowledge consists of understanding the second noble truth, that desire is the source of suffering, rather than of reaching altered states of consciousness. If the mind has any attachment at all, including a subtle delight in the pleasure of a mind without the clutter of mental objects, it is bound to renewed existence and to the construction of suffering. One needs to go beyond this state to get truly free.

This poem neatly captures the point of diversion between the view of the older yoga meditation practices and the Buddha's innovative discovery that only insight into the nature of experience results in liberation of the mind from clinging.

—A. Olendzki

This is an archaic poem in the *Sutta Nipāta*, and the language is thus rather compressed. Existing translations vary widely, and this is my best attempt to make sense of the verses while matching the traditional meter's eight syllables per line.

I think Posāla is a yogi of the old school, skilled in attaining formless states of consciousness through intensive concentration practice, including the seventh of the eight stations of consciousness known as "the sphere of nothingness." This is a mode of consciousness accessible to the advanced

meditator in which the conceptual workings of perception become so subtle that no mental construction of form appears to be taking place at all. Some practitioners of the time construed this to be the highest attainment possible, and equated the experience of nothingness with final nirvāna.

Posāla approaches the Buddha respectfully, and seems to be asking about one who attains this state of attenuated consciousness. There is an apparent paradox: An advanced stage of knowing is