Buddhist Life
Buddhist Path

Foundations of Buddhism
based on earliest sources

Bhikkhu Cintita

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Preface

> *He who, having traversed this miry, perilous and delusive round of existence, has crossed over and reached the other shore; who is meditative, calm, free from doubt, and, clinging to nothing, has attained to nibbāna – him do I call a holy man.* (*Dpd* 414)

I present herewith an introductory textbook on Buddhism based on the earliest stratum of scriptural sources, on early Buddhism, one that encompasses not only the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path, that is, systematic training toward awakening, but also the prerequisite instructions for leading an upright, virtuous and devoted Buddhist life, a life rooted in basic Buddhist values. This textbook is accordingly divided into two books: *Buddhist Life* for the foundational teachings and *Buddhist Path* for systematic training in the higher path leading to awakening. Each book can be studied independently and in either order. My intention is to provide the support either for two separate short courses on introductory Buddhism, or alternatively for a single longer course.

Early Buddhism

Buddhism began with the Buddha, a towering figure who lived some hundred generations ago, taught for forty-five years, developed a huge following of monastics and laity, kings and paupers, and whose teachings were systematically memorized, compiled and edited over several centuries before being entrusted to written media. As long as Buddhism had not wandered too far from the person of the Buddha and his immediate disciples, its teachings would have remained reasonably uniform. This was the case in the period we call *early Buddhism*. As Buddhism spread into

increasingly remote regions and endured through eras increasingly distant from the Buddha's, sects developed, evolving as a result of regional variation, philosophical elaboration, and adaptation to varying demographics and cultures, eventually stretching from Sri Lanka to Mongolia, from Central Asia to Japan. Often, originally local innovations became movements that then swept out over a large part of the entire Buddhist world introducing new commonalities into existing distinct sects. In this way, early Buddhism within a couple of centuries of the Buddha started to gave way to the *sectarian Buddhism* and to the distinct traditions that further evolved to produce the various schools found today.

Buddhism is now found in a wide array of forms, with little agreement as to what scriptures to take as primary. For instance, Japanese Soto Zen takes many texts of Chinese composition as primary, such as the lives of the early masters, the koan collections, the Chinese *Platform Sutra*, and monastery regulations, along with certain Indian Mahayana sutras of late composition (such as the *Flower Ornament Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra*) and the voluminous writings of the brilliant thirteenth century Japanese master Eihei Dogen. It is rare that any reference at all is made to early Buddhist sources. Analogous observations could also be made about any of the Chinese or Tibetan schools. Only the Theravada school makes regular use of the earliest texts, having kept alive not only the earliest Pali corpus, but also the understanding of the ancient Pali language. Nonetheless, even in the Theravada tradition additional strata have been deposited, particularly in the form of the massive corpus of *Commentaries* from some nine to ten hundred years after the time of the Buddha, and through the development over some fifteen hundred years of the *Abhidhamma* system.

In spite of such variation, the development of sects has not always meant distortions of the intent of early Buddhism. In fact, it is striking that the brilliance of the Buddha's insight seems to shine through most of the historical sects, even while each presents it in a sometimes rather unique way . This I view as a strength of Buddhism and a testament to the firm roots, planted in early Buddhism, that have permitted so much variation without losing sight of its original mission, much like a tree that remains firm even as its branches grow this way and that. I am convinced that there are many perfectly good variations of Buddhism. Nonetheless, our concern here will be with early Buddhism, the common historical root of all of Buddhism.

We know a lot about early Buddhism because a substantial common body of scriptures has been preserved reasonably consistently in diverse sects (even when they are rarely read in most), suggestive of their common origin in early times. Scholarly text analysis has furthermore given great insight into the relative dates of texts within the early Buddhist corpus. Most importantly, the early Buddhist scriptures represent a very consistent, comprehensive, sophisticated and integrated system of thought, the monumental genius of whose originator clearly illuminates these texts.

There are a number of advantages gained that make it apt to focus on the earliest stratum of the massive Buddhist scriptural corpus in an introductory text:

- The earliest stratum is the closest we can come to what the Buddha actually taught and how he taught it. Undoubtedly others have contributed, generally without attribution, to shaping these ancient texts, but for the most part these would have been disciples very close to the time of the Buddha.
- This stratum is pre-sectarian and the many later schools and sects of Buddhism are common heirs to this corpus. Comparing the later scriptures with the early stratum gives us an idea of how the later schools and sects developed historically and how well they have preserved, at some level, the original intent of the Buddha.
- The earliest stratum is astonishingly profound and comprehensive, and, with some scholarly understanding of the cultural and intellectual milieu in which it arose, brilliantly coherent and as intelligible for the modern student as the scriptures of any later school. The genius of the Buddha leaps out in this corpus, not only in the doctrine but in its manner of exposition.
- A complete representative version of this early corpus is now available in English translation, much of it in multiple English translations. This is the early Pali corpus. Progress is also being made in translating the equivalent equally representative Chinese corpus.

For these reasons, I have found it, in my own teaching of introductory classes on Buddhism, desirable and most fruitful for students to focus on these very early texts, rather to attempt a survey of later schools. In this way I hope to make a reasonable attempt

at conveying both the scope and the depth of Buddhist understanding and practice in a single short book.

Scope of the textbook

The perspective of this book is rather orthodox, in that I take almost the entirety of the early Buddhist teachings seriously, dismissing nothing out of hand, subject of course to the limitations of my own understanding and to what we can determine to be later redactions of early texts. At the same time I am concerned to provide modern readers with the means to wrap their minds around teachings that may sometimes appear arcane, given that these teachings arose in a time and place so distant from our own. I often attempt to provide modern ways of looking at the teachings – about *kamma* (Sanskrit and English, *karma*), to take one example, or renunciation, to take another – that I hope will offset the alarming tendency in modern Westernized Buddhism to dismiss large swaths of the teachings out of hand as archaic remnants no longer relevant today. They are.

We do well to note that the Buddha described his teachings as going "against the stream," by which he meant they upset conventional values, ways of looking at things, behaviors and habits. Buddhism, when entered deeply, is radical in *any* culture. For this reason alone we should be very reluctant to dismiss any element with the thought of adapting Buddhism to our *own* culture before we understand its implications completely. Sometimes this entails deconstructing unexamined *modern* presuppositions, much as the Buddha did for his time. Sometimes this entails understanding the *function* each of the individual teachings serves within the entire system of teachings: Why did the Buddha teach *that*?

I hold functionality to be a hallmark of the teachings, for the Buddha's approach was consistently practical. One of my primary intentions in this book is to convey a sense of the Buddha's teachings as a functioning integrated whole. At a gross functional level we can picture the teachings entirely as a support for practice and practice as entirely a support for realizing certain benefits, pictured as follows:

BENEFIT
PRACTICE
TEACHINGS

The Buddha's teachings, the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, pertain to the val-

ues that underlie a Buddhist life, *kamma* and the fruits of *kamma*, merit-making, precepts, purity of mind, the role of refuge and of monastic practice, the four noble truths, the workings of the human mind, meditation instructions, and so on. These inform practice, which pertains the way we live our lives, the kinds of attitudes we carry with us and the kinds of actions we routinely perform. Benefits accrue from practice, occasionally awakening, but before that the fruits that come prior to awakening: fulfillment, happiness, calm, virtue and wisdom, along with ensuing the kinds of social conditions that encourage individual development of these kinds.

At the same time, I feel that the modern perspective can be invaluable in correcting traditional calcified misunderstandings of the earliest scriptures, because modern "converts" approach these teachings with new eyes. Certainly modern scholarship is invaluable in this role and many of the sophisticated modern understandings of psychology or philosophy can sometimes be used to elaborate or elucidate principles we find in early Buddhism.

The reader will find particular attention given to three themes in this book that are often neglected or minimized in other introductions to Buddhism in favor of more "hard-core" teachings like the four noble truths and mindfulness meditation, but are nonetheless absolutely foundational in the Buddha's early teachings:

(1) The ethical foundation of Buddhism, particularly the recognition that *Dhamma* (Sanskrit, *Dharma*) is *almost entirely* an expression of ethics,

(2) Refuge, the Buddhist version of faith, and

(3) Buddhism as a *culture*, some say a *civilization*, driven by a formalized reciprocal relationship between community and individual practice, whereby the former supports but also enjoys the fruits of the latter.

Because its focus is limited to pre-sectarian Buddhism, we will have the space to give sufficient attention to "hard-core" teachings, the topics of *Book Two: Buddhist Path*, albeit while neglecting the historical evolution of Buddhism.

Who should read this book?

I hope that this book will most directly meet the needs of three kinds of readers. The first are the beginners to Buddhism who are

confused about where to begin. For you, a sweeping survey of the options would fail to convey the profundity of Buddhism and leave you just as confused as before about where to begin. Virtually all books take a sectarian perspective, even though the early teachings are in fact among the most accessible to modern people. Should a reader, through circumstance or inclination, later take up the practice of a particular school or sect, Zen, for instance, she will be well prepared through understanding its early Buddhist origins.

The second kind of reader is the experienced Buddhist, already trained and practicing in some particular vital tradition, such as some form of Tibetan Buddhism. I hope that, for you, an historical snapshot of where your tradition originated (in early Buddhism) might provide alternative perspectives and thereby improve the understanding of key teachings as they are articulated in your school.

The third kind of reader I hope this book will appeal to is the person of another faith (or non-faith), who wants to acquire some comparative knowledge of Buddhism. The early Buddhist perspective will take you to the essence of Buddhism with little embellishment and with enough depth to begin to allow more than superficial comparisons with your deeper knowledge of your own faith (or non-faith).

Using this book

In a classroom setting, I devote one and one-half hours of lecture time to each of the twelve chapters. I recommend that students read through each chapter twice, once before lecture and once after, since each chapter has supplementary material that cannot be covered in that much lecture time. Either the first six chapters, *Buddhist Life*, or the final six chapters, *Buddhist Path*, can be taught as a separate course, though studying *Buddhist Life* before *Buddhist Path* is recommended. In fact each of he chapters within each book are for the most part reasonably self-contained, and to that extent might be read in any order. However, chapter 8 (foundational wisdom) should be read before chapter 11 (disentangling the mind), and chapter 11 before chapter 12 (awakening). For optimal results read all the chapters in the order of presentation.

Notes on language

Foreign technical words are *italicized*. Almost all of these words are standard romanized Pali, the only surviving early Buddhist language and the Indic language in which the early scriptures have been preserved and widely studied in the Theravada school of Buddhism. I will prefer the use of the Pali forms over the often similar Sanskrit forms for providing the technical vocabulary of early Buddhism, even when the Sanskrit forms might be better known to English speakers. For instance, *Dhamma* will be used rather than *Dharma,* and *kamma* rather than *karma.* I suspect there are more students of Pali than of Sanskrit among the readership, since Pali is widely *studied* in the southern school and Sanskrit generally only *referred to* in the northern. Besides, the Sanskrit forms that English has borrowed generally have non-Buddhist meanings which are shed in the Pali. However, I will often point out Sanskrit equivalents.

The point of including ancient Indic terms at all is to establish the connection of the English terms chosen to the fixed technical vocabulary of early Buddhism. For instance, the key concept *dukkha* variously becomes *suffering*, *anguish*, *dissatisfaction*, *dis-ease* and *stress*, in English translation. Without the aid of the Indic word, the serious student who pursues further study based on English translations may not recognize that *stress* here is talking about the same as *suffering* there, namely *dukkha*. Nonetheless, the more general reader should be able to put aside most of the Pali vocabulary offered, since I have generally used consistent English translations of the Pali terms throughout in this text, and referred to the Pali parenthetically only at first mention to make the technical usage clear. A few Pali words – such as *mettā* (kindness) – or their Pali equivalents have become so widely used in the English Buddhist literature that knowing them has become a part of Buddhist literacy. I *underline* these at first mention and then use them more freely so that readers might remember them.

Also, I have included the *diācriṭics* for the convenience of students of Pali. Others can safely ignore the diacritics to approximate the pronunciation. The diligent reader is invited to google "Pali pronunciation" for further guidance in this matter.

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Abbreviations for early Buddhist literature

Pali sources:

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

The sutta number that generally follows one of these abbreviations follows the scheme of the Wisdom Publications books of these collections, and of the Access to Insight Web site. The Wisdom collection (Walshe 1996; Nyanamoli and Bodhi, 1995; Bodhi 2003, 2012) is probably the most accessible source for the discourses cited here.

Bhikkhu Cintita
Austin, Texas USA
April, 2017

BOOK ONE: BUDDHIST LIFE

1. Buddha

> *The Tathāgata, the worthy one, the rightly self-awakened one, is the one who gives rise to the path unarisen, who engenders the path engendered, who points out the path not pointed out. He knows the path, is expert in the path, is adept at the path. And his disciples now keep following the path and afterwards become endowed with the path.* (SN 22.58)

Some hundred generations have passed since Gotama, the sage of the Sakyans, the *Tathāgata* (*thus-gone one*), eighty years of age, announced that he would soon depart from the world. The Buddha's foremost disciples, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, had already passed away. The Blessed One asked his assistant Ānanda to summon all of the monastics (*bhikkhus*) living near Vesāli to meet so that he could make his prophesy public. When they had convened he spoke these words:

> Bhikkhus, I have now taught you things that I have directly known: these you should thoroughly learn and maintain in being, develop and constantly put into effect so that this holy life may endure long; you should do so for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good and welfare and happiness of gods and men. ...
>
> Indeed, bhikkhus, I declare this to you: It is in the nature of all conceived things to dissolve. Attain perfection through diligence. Soon the Perfect One will attain final *nibbāna*. (DN 16)

Nibbāna[1] (Sanskrit, *nirvāna*) is awakening and *final nibbāna* is complete release from conventional existence at death of the

body. In the forty five years since his awakening, the Buddha had realized the goals he had set for himself, when he had vowed that he would not leave the world …

> … until the monks, nuns, laymen followers, laywoman followers, my disciples, are wise, disciplined, perfectly confident, and learned,
>
> until they remember the *Dhamma* properly, practice the way of the *Dhamma*, practice the true way, and walk in the *Dhamma*,
>
> until after learning from their own teachers they announce and teach and declare and establish and reveal and expound and explain,
>
> until they can reasonably confute the theories of others that arise and can teach the *Dhamma* with all its marvels.
>
> … [until] this holy life has become successful, prosperous, widespread, and disseminated among many,
>
> until it is well exemplified by humankind. (DN 16)

Dhamma, (Sanskrit, *Dharma*), refers to the body of doctrinal teachings. Indeed, his disciples on the Gangetic Plain of northern India roughly 500 BCE already numbered in the many thousands by the end of the Buddha's life, included those from all walks of life and from every caste, and had in his lifetime even included kings. Those who, through understanding the Buddha's teachings and through putting them into practice, had awakened themselves, to share the Buddha's awakening, now numbered in the hundreds.

He had additionally instituted a well-regulated community of monks (*bhikkhus*) and within a few years an order of nuns (*bhikkhunīs*), providing them with a detailed code of conduct, the *Vinaya* (Discipline), setting standards for governance, for maintaining harmony, for relations with lay people, as well as for renunciation of worldly ways, so that future generations might live the holy life.

In the years to come, the vast corpus of the Buddha's teachings would be remembered, and preserved, sometimes reformulated in new cultural contexts, and its civilizing influence would sweep over almost half of the world. Today, hundreds of millions of people still count as sons and daughters of the Buddha, and both

monastic communities persist, following the same discipline the Buddha defined one hundred generations ago. More importantly, he had set a *civilization*, a *culture of awakening* in motion, that alongside many cases of individual awakening would infuse peace, wisdom and virtue into the broader society.

Buddhism is not a revealed religion, that is, of otherworldly origin communicated through a human prophet to benefit mankind, nor the product of patching together various ancient and obscure sources of wisdom. Rather it is, particularly in its early form, the product of this single mind, the Buddha's, whose life and being also illustrate and motivate the teachings he espoused. The British scholar of early Buddhism Richard Gombrich calls the Buddha "the first person." By this he means that we know almost nothing about any prior historical figure anywhere in the world. He is certainly the most influential personality in all of South Asian history. The tale of the Buddha's life has been told many times, sometimes in highly mythical and embellished forms with which the reader may already be familiar.

The noble search

The Buddha-to-be grew up in the ancient city of Kapilavatthu (Sanskrit, Kapilavastu), in the Sakyan Republic in present day Nepal. He was born of the warrior/administrative caste and his father seems to have had a prominent role in the government of the republic. Moreover, the Buddha tells us of a privileged upbringing, as a kind of Nepalese playboy:

> Monks, I lived in refinement, utmost refinement, total refinement. My father even had lotus ponds made in our palace: one where red lotuses bloomed, one where white lotuses bloomed, one where blue lotuses bloomed, all for my sake. I used no sandalwood that was not from Varanasi. My turban was from Vārānasī, as were my tunic, my lower garments, and my outer cloak. A white sunshade was held over me day and night to protect me from cold, heat, dust, dirt, and dew.
>
> I had three palaces: one for the cold season, one for the hot season, one for the rainy season. During the four months of the rainy season I was entertained in the rainy-

> season palace by minstrels without a single man among them, and I did not once come down from the palace. Whereas the servants, workers, and retainers in other people's homes are fed meals of lentil soup and broken rice, in my father's home the servants, workers, and retainers were fed wheat, rice, and meat. (AN 3.38)

Pretty cushy. His privilege must certainly have also entailed an optimal education, perhaps particularly in statecraft. Yet, he was not satisfied with a life of ease and sensual pleasure. As the passage continues, he began reflecting on the inevitability of old age, sickness and death.

> Even though I was endowed with such fortune, such total refinement, the thought occurred to me: "When an untaught, run-of-the-mill person, himself subject to aging, not beyond aging, sees another who is aged, he is horrified, humiliated, and disgusted, oblivious to himself that he too is subject to aging, not beyond aging. If I – who am subject to aging, not beyond aging – were to be horrified, humiliated, and disgusted on seeing another person who is aged, that would not be fitting for me." As I noticed this, the young person's intoxication with youth entirely dropped away. (AN 3.38)

The exact same passage with regard to aging/aged/youth is then repeated in this discourse with regard to illness/ill/health and then death/dead/life.[2]

Like many of us at a young age, the Buddha experienced an existential crisis, and like the hippies of olde, he set off for India on a spiritual quest. Young Gotama became a wandering ascetic.

> Before my awakening, when I was still an unawakened *bodhisatta*, the thought occurred to me: "The household life is crowded, a dusty road. Life gone forth is the open air. It isn't easy, living in a home, to lead the holy life that is totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell. What if I, having shaved off my hair and beard and putting on the ochre robe, were to go forth from the home life into homelessness?"
>
> So at a later time, when I was still young, black-haired, endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of

> life, having shaved off my hair and beard – though my parents wished otherwise and were grieving with tears on their faces – I put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness. (MN 36)

A *bodhisatta* (Sanskrit, *bodhisattva*, "awakening-being") is a future Buddha, that is, one intent on the path to Buddha-hood. Gotama's youthful noble spiritual quest went through three identifiable phases: (1) discipleship, (2) extreme austerities and (3) the middle way. The first phase entailed training under an accomplished yogi.

> Having gone forth in search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I went to Ālāra Kālāma and, on arrival, said to him: "Friend Kālāma, I want to practice in this doctrine and discipline." (MN 36)

Soon the Buddha-to-be soon understood the *Dhamma* of Ālāra Kālāma, as did others, and progressed in his practice. The highest extent to which Kālāma declared that he himself entered and dwelt in this *Dhamma* was the meditative attainment of "nothingness." Before long the Bodhisatta also entered and dwelt in that dimension, but nonetheless realized that …

> This *Dhamma* leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to awakening, nor to *nibbāna,* but only to reappearance in the dimension of nothingness. (MN 36)

Dissatisfied with that *Dhamma*, he left. But, undaunted, the Buddha-to-be sought out a second teacher, this time one Uddaka Rāmaputta, through whom he learned to dwell in the dimension of "neither perception nor non-perception," but whose *Dhamma* also did not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to awakening, nor to *nibbāna*.

At this point the Bodhisatta's period of discipleship came to an end. His second plan was to practice extreme austerities, a way of life common to many homeless mendicants of the time, which he seems to have entered in a way both extreme and austere, and which he describes with some humor.

> I thought: "Suppose I were to take only a little food at a

> time, only a handful at a time of bean soup, lentil soup, vetch soup, or pea soup." So I took only a little food at a time, ... My body became extremely emaciated. Simply from my eating so little, my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems... My backside became like a camel's hoof... My spine stood out like a string of beads... My ribs jutted out like the jutting rafters of an old, run-down barn... The gleam of my eyes appeared to be sunk deep in my eye sockets like the gleam of water deep in a well... My scalp shriveled and withered like a green bitter gourd, shriveled and withered in the heat and the wind... The skin of my belly became so stuck to my spine that when I thought of touching my belly, I grabbed hold of my spine as well; and when I thought of touching my spine, I grabbed hold of the skin of my belly as well... If I urinated or defecated, I fell over on my face right there... Simply from my eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair – rotted at its roots – fell from my body as I rubbed, simply from eating so little. (MN 36)

He practiced in this way for years, much of this period with five companions in the austerities, but once again became frustrated with the progress he had made.

His third plan was the middle way and he discovered it himself. It is the middle way that would carry him to final awakening. In discovering the middle way the Buddha seems to have recalled a childhood incident, in which he had entered spontaneously into a meditative state (*jhāna*), and to have considered it to be of pivotal significance. As he recounts,

> I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then – quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful mental qualities – I entered and remained in the first *jhāna*: rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. "Could that be the path to awakening?"
>
> Then, following on that memory, came the realization: "That is the path to awakening." I thought: "So why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual-

> ity, nothing to do with unskillful mental qualities?" I thought: "I am no longer afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful mental qualities, but it is not easy to achieve that pleasure with a body so extremely emaciated. Suppose I were to take some solid food: some rice and porridge." So I took some solid food: some rice and porridge. (MN 36)

He would have been familiar with *jhānic* states of some kind from his training with his two meditation teachers, so we can assume that a critical difference in his childhood experience was that it was fun. He had already abandoned the pursuit of sensual or worldly pleasures in his spiritual quest, and it seems that others had been telling him that all pleasure must be squeezed out of practice and discarded ("no pain, no gain"). Nonetheless, he had discovered a crack in this understanding that he would pry open to gain access to the middle way. The crack was the difference, previously unnoticed, between *worldly* (*loka*) pleasure and *supramundane* (*lokuttara*) pleasure. Likewise, fear of pleasure would no longer be the primary consideration in his dietary habits, but rather keeping the body healthy in order to sustain his practice. Apparently, his five colleagues saw things differently, thinking Gotama had fallen into "luxury," and so they left him in a huff.

Gotama's awakening

It is reported that the Buddha-to-be sat down at the root of a *bodhi* tree and entered the first level of meditative concentration (*jhāna*), then progressed to the second, to the third and to the fourth and final. He describes the unfolding of his awakening as follows.

> When the mind was thus collected, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of recollecting my past lives. I recollected my manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two... five, ten... fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction and expansion: "There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance.

> Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here." Thus I remembered my manifold past lives in their modes and details.
>
> This was the first knowledge I attained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose – as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, and resolute. (MN 36)

This is clearly a direct recognition that the present life is one link in a long and monotonous continuum of death and rebirth, what is known as *samsāra* (faring on). In more concrete terms, we can also think of *saṃsāra* as stuck-ness in normal existence, the inability to free ourselves from the recurring patterns of thinking and responding, from the soap opera of life. Rebirth was not a universally accepted notion at the time of the Buddha, but was presented by him as the conceptual context for Buddhist practice. We will see later that awakening entails a break from the cycle.

> When the mind was thus collected, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings. I saw – by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human – beings passing away and re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their *kamma*: "These beings – who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, and mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views – with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But these beings – who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech and mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views – with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destinations, in the

> heavenly world." Thus – by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human – I saw beings passing away and re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their *kamma*.
>
> This was the second knowledge I attained in the second watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose – as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, and resolute. (MN 36)

This recognizes that *saṃsāra* generalizes to all beings and that our past actions (*kamma*, Sanskrit *karma*) determine the circumstances of our rebirths. We build in this life through our ethical choices the house that we will live in next. But our choices will serve to end this process.

If the first two knowledges are cosmological in nature, the last is psychological, in that it provides an introspective view of what happens in the process of awakening.

> When the mind was thus collected, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of the ending of the mental fermentations. I discerned, as it had come to be, that "This is suffering... This is the origination of suffering... This is the cessation of suffering... This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering... These are taints... This is the origination of taints... This is the cessation of taints... This is the way leading to the cessation of taints." My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the taint of sensuality, released from the taint of becoming, released from the taint of ignorance. With release, there was the knowledge, 'Released.' I discerned that "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world."
>
> This was the third knowledge I attained in the third watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose – as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, and resolute. (MN 36)

The third knowledge makes implicit reference to the *four noble*

truths, which we will revisit in later chapters, as well as to the taints of sensuality, becoming and ignorance. We will see that the Buddha regarded mind in terms of networks of mutually conditioning mental factors. Upon awakening, Gotama is said to have uttered the following verse, oft recited to this day:

> Through the round of many births I roamed without reward, without rest, seeking the house-builder. Painful is birth again and again. House-builder, you're seen! You will not build a house again. All your rafters broken, the ridge pole destroyed, gone to the unconditioned, the mind has come to the end of craving. (*Dpd* 153-154)

The house-builder is to be found in our own minds. Once we find him, he will not provide us with a new home in *saṃsāra*. Gotama had discovered the *deathless*, the end of suffering, the extinguishing of the flame (which is what the word *nibbāna* means). Henceforth he would be known as *Bhagavā* (the Blessed or Fortunate), *Buddha* (the Awakened), *Sammāsambuddha* (the Perfectly Awakened) and *Tathāgata* (the Such-gone).

What is awakening? By the end of this book we will be in a much better position to appreciate that it entails a radical reworking of human cognitive faculties. For now we can roughly understand it as the perfection of human character in three aspects: The perfection of virtue, the perfection of equanimity and the perfection of wisdom. The awakened person is virtuous: selfless, kind, compassionate, actively concerned with the well-being of all beings. The awakened person is equanimous: unruffled by the contingencies of the world, experiencing neither lust, nor aversion, nor fear, but rather blissfully content in all circumstances. The awakened person is wise: able to see things as they really are, unbiased, unprejudiced, without fixed views. It will be appreciated that these three aspects are mutually supporting; none can be perfected without perfecting of the other two. The awakening person has mastered the skill of life.

Someone who shares the Buddha's awakening is also called an *arahant* (worthy one). Although the *arahant* realizes what the Buddha realized, the Buddha is much more: he is the discoverer and teacher of the path to awakening, upon which the awakening of others has been grounded ever since.

Setting the wheel of Dhamma in motion

The Buddha seems at first not to have been committed to the role of teacher. Assessing the profundity of what he had experienced, he doubted that others would grasp what he might teach, for ...

> This *Dhamma* that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, is excited by attachment, enjoys attachment. For a generation delighting in attachment, excited by attachment, enjoying attachment, conditionality and dependent co-arising are hard to see. This state, too, is hard to see: the resolution of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, cessation, *nibbāna*. And if I were to teach the *Dhamma* and if others would not understand me, that would be tiresome for me, troublesome for me. (MN 26)

Perhaps, he thought, a life of meditative ease would be preferable. Where we might expect an inner dialog to ensue, Brahmā Sahampati, an eves-dropping deity, took up the cause in favor of teaching. Showing now appropriate veneration – for deities are never introduced in the early texts as objects of worship but rather to venerate the Buddha and often other Buddhist monastics – the deity knelt down, bowed to the new Buddha and said,

> Lord, let the Blessed One teach the *Dhamma*! Let the Tathāgata teach the *Dhamma*! There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the *Dhamma*. There will be those who will understand the *Dhamma*. (MN 26)

On reflection the Buddha discovered some truth in the deity's words. The Buddha at first thought to teach the *Dhamma* to his former teachers, but they had both died. So he decided to seek out the five ascetics who had abandoned him in a huff when he had begun to eat "luxuriously," according to newly discovered middle-way principles. On the way thither he encountered another ascetic, Upaka of the Ājīvika school, who recognized something special in this monk's demeanor:

> "Clear, my friend, are your faculties. Pure your complexion, and bright. On whose account have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? In whose *Dhamma* do you delight?"

To this the Buddha explained that he had no teacher, but was fully awakened through his own efforts. He was, indeed, just now, on his way to turn the wheel of the *Dhamma* and beat the drum of the deathless. Upaka's response was a bit disappointing.

> "May it be so, my friend,"

Shaking his head and taking a side-road Upaka departed.

Having botched his first awakened encounter with another ascetic, then having walked for many days, the Buddha found his five former friends at Vārānasī at the Deer Park in Isipatana. They too noticed something special about their former colleague, something that wasn't there before, aside from weight gain. The Buddha declared,

> The Tathāgata, friends, is an *arahant*, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the *Dhamma*. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach and remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realizing it for yourselves in the here and now. (MN 26)

And then the Buddha began his very first *Dhamma* talk, the *first turning of the wheel* of *Dhamma*. First, he explained the *middle way*, to justify his "luxury":

> There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the *Tathāgata* – producing vision, producing knowledge – leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to *nibbāna*. (SN 56.11)

Then, he enumerated the *noble eightfold path*:

> And what is the middle way realized by the *Tathāgata* that – producing vision, producing knowledge – leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to *nibbāna*? Precisely this *noble eightfold path*: *right view, right intention*, *right speech, right action*, *right livelihood*, *right effort*, *right mindfulness* and *right concentration*. This is the middle way realized by the *Tathāgata* that, producing vision and producing knowledge, leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to *nibbāna*. (SN 56.11)

We will devote *Book Two: The Path,* precisely to the noble eightfold path, the master checklist for advanced practice that, when taken up with diligence, ensures progress toward awakening.

The Buddha then discussed the *four noble truths*:

> Now this, monks, is the noble truth of suffering: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are suffering; association with the unbeloved is suffering, separation from the loved is suffering, not getting what is wanted is suffering. In short, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering.
>
> 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.
>
> 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.
>
> And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering: precisely this noble eightfold path – right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. (SN 56.11)

At the core of the four noble truths is the principle of conditionality: Since that arises, this arises. Since that ceases, this ceases. *Conditionality* is the foundation of most of the Buddha's think-

ing. Here, as elsewhere, what the Buddha presents initially as a concise statement unfolds into something much more complex in practice. Suffering and craving are prominent conditionally related mental factors that provide initial points of investigation for the Buddhist practitioner.

With the offering of this one discourse, one of the five ascetics, whose name was Kondañña, attained the *vision of Dhamma*, a brief view of the deathless, an insight that marks one as a *stream enterer*, ideally fit to embark firmly on the path with no going astray. We will have more to say about the vision of *Dhamma* and stream entry in later chapters. It was at that moment of insight also that the *Saṅgha* , the Buddhist monastic community, arose, with the first adept monastic disciple.

It is said that the Buddha awakened at the age of thirty-five and died at the age of eighty. He taught for the intervening forty-five years. The remaining chapters of this book describe the core of what he taught over those years. We have abundant reports of the discourses he delivered to diverse audiences in diverse locations on the Gangetic plain, venues that he reached by foot, wandering from place to place, generally in the company of disciple monks, living on alms, often living in monasteries, land donated by kings or wealthy donors and developed for habitation for monks.

The Buddha is particularly renowned for his unique skill as a teacher, as is abundantly evident in the earliest discourses. Particularly noteworthy are his many apt metaphors and similes, often tuned specifically to his target audience to convey quite vividly some very subtle or sophisticated realization, and his common technique for teaching those trained in non-Buddhists systems by initially adopting their perspective, but then reinterpreting their terminology, thereby subverting them in the direction of more useful views or practices. We will see examples of these in the course of this textbook. The Buddha is reported to have been remarkably skilled in shining the light of *Dhamma* in the most unlikely corners. A great example was the conversion of the mass-murderer Aṅgulimāla, whom the Buddha apparently sought out for just that purpose. Aṅgulimāla later became an *arahant*.

His preferred target audience would be those profoundly dedicated to spiritual development, of great aptitude and dedication,

willing and able to give up all other significant assets and responsibilities in order to practice twenty-four/seven. Nuns and monks remained the Buddha's focus throughout his teaching career. Nonetheless, progress toward awakening comes incrementally and each step forward entails some share of the benefits of awakening. Long before full awakening, our life becomes ever less of a problem, we become kinder, more compassionate, calmer, sustained increasingly by an inner strength independent of external contingencies and we become more balanced in our judgments and more penetrating in our insight. In short, we become more content, happier, and much nicer to be around.

With time, the Buddha broadened the goal – without sacrificing depth – to provide guidance for those who do not fit the ideal profile, in order to ease the harshness of the human condition rather than to transcend it. For these he also provided wise advice on how to live a conventional life with dignity and with virtue. He was comfortable moving through every level of society, speaking with paupers, lepers, with those suffering calamities, with brahmans, merchants and with kings and ministers. On an early visit to his home town of Kapilavatthu his wealthy father was aghast at seeing him walking through the streets of the city collecting alms. Another account has him spending the night in a barn with the permission of a farmer, to be joined by another itinerant Buddhist monk, who had never met him and had no idea who he was until after long *Dhamma* discussion.

The Buddha also moved about in high social circles. King Bimbasāra, in whose kingdom Gotama had awakened, became, it is said, a stream enterer on hearing a discourse by the Buddha and then became a major benefactor of the *Saṅgha*. King Pasenadi of Kosala became a disciple of the Buddha and visited the Buddha daily when the Buddha was nearby, often asking advice on matters of state. A banker from Sāvatthi, the capital of Kosala, Anāthapiṇḍika, became a disciple and a stream enterer and donated land to the *Saṅgha*, which then became the Buddha's primary residence for the yearly three-month rains retreats in the years to come, and the most frequent site of the Buddha's discourses.

Establishing the Saṅgha

The Buddha was a three-fold genius. First, he became awakened without dependence on a teacher to explain the path to awakening. Second, he succeeded in describing, explaining, illustrating and elaborating the path he had discovered so that many (hundreds) of his disciples were able to realize his awakening in his lifetime. Third, he succeeded in perpetuating his teachings and their practice so that future generations might realize awakening and that still others would share the civilizing effects of their awakening. Thereby, the Buddha created not only a path to awakening, but a *culture of awakening*. He founded an institutional structure that has perpetuated awakening up to the present day.

The community of the Buddha's most dedicated disciples seems to have grown by leaps and bounds beyond the original five. A wealthy young man named Yassa, who was disenchanted with dancing girls and other worldly pleasures, showed up, his father in hot pursuit. As a result, Yassa became a monk and then an *arahant*, and his father a stream-enterer, and the very first lay follower of the Buddha. Soon, the Buddha was off to visit the three Kassapa brothers, matted-hair ascetics who among them had one thousand followers. Convincing the eldest of the brothers, who had fancied himself already fully awakened, that he was not, he, his brothers and their whole complement of followers became disciples of the Buddha.

Upitissa and Kolita were ascetics and best of friends since childhood. Searching for the deathless, they agreed that whichever found the path thereto would immediately inform the other. One day Upitissa noticed a lone ascetic gathering alms, whose comportment so impressed him that he suspected some degree of attainment must lay behind. In fact, this ascetic was Assaji, one of the Buddha's first five awakened disciples. Upitissa approached Assaji to inquire about who his teacher might be and what he taught. Assaji named the recluse Gotama of the Sakyan clan and stated his teachings in a single verse:

> Of those things that arise from a cause,
> The *Tathāgata* has told the cause,
> And also what their cessation is.
> This is the doctrine of the Great Recluse.

This is a brief statement of this very principle of conditionality. Immediately, Upitissa attained to the vision of *Dhamma*, thereby achieving *stream entry*. Later that day, Upitissa repeated this verse to Kolita, with exactly the same effect. Upitissa and Kolita would soon achieve the deathless, and indeed become the two leading disciples of the Buddha, and be known respectively as Sāriputta and Moggallāna.[3]

The Buddha had been planting seeds in fertile fields. With time, however, the quality of his many new monastic disciples began to slack off, to become more like arid or rocky patches of land, sometimes falling into actions and speech that caused others harm, that disrupted the harmony of the *Saṅgha*, that were inconsistent with a life of renunciation and simplicity, or that reflected poorly on the entire *Saṅgha* in the public eye. In response the Buddha began tightening up, in a very explicit way, the parameters of the monastic life, sometimes in response to complaints from lay people, for he understood as practical matters that the *Saṅgha* was critically dependent on the goodwill of the laity and that the laity took inspiration from the *Saṅgha*. The full set of monastic rules is called, in Pali, the *Pātimokkha*. The *Pātimokkha*, supplemented by procedures for governance within the *Saṅgha*, along with supplementary discussion and narration became *Vinaya*, the full monastic code of discipline.

Although there were ascetics in India before the Buddha, "... among all of the bodies of renouncers it was only the Buddhists who invented monastic life,"[4] that is who provided an organized institution capable of sustaining its teachings. The Buddha himself consistently referred to the body of his teachings at *Dhamma-Vinaya*. It is not often appreciated that institutionalizing the *Saṅgha* in this way was a truly monumental achievement. It has been observed[5] that the Buddhist *Saṅgha* is likely the oldest human organization in continual existence on the planet! If the Buddha were to return to modern times he would recognize his *Saṅgha*, so enduring is it. This amazing institution, democratic and decentralized, is the product of one genius, who cobbled it together from diverse elements already present in ascetic life in his time, who clearly articulated for it a mission and a charter, and who released it into the world, never to perish.

About five years after the beginning of the monks' *Saṅgha*, the

Buddha also established a nuns' (*bhikkhunī*) *Saṅgha*, roughly equivalent to the monks' *Saṅgha*. The Buddha seems to have had the highest regard for women's potential for awakening, and the many recorded awakened *bhikkhunīs* bear this trust out. Indeed, a number of nuns became prominent teachers whose discourses are found alongside the Buddha's and Sāriputta's in the earliest sources.

Aftermath

The *sāsana* ("teaching," but often translated as "dispensation") is the living Buddhist tradition viewed from a social or historical perspective. Many of his closest disciples met shortly after the Buddha's death in order to recite together the discourses of the Buddha and the *Vinaya* from memory in order to ensure uniformity of what would be preserved in memory for future generations. We know a lot about the teachings as they existed during this early period, either as spoken by the Buddha himself or as reworked or augmented by his closest disciples before the development of separate sects, which developed largely as a result of geographical dispersion. We know because separate sects accurately preserved these teachings even as they added new texts.

The primary sources we have of early Buddhism are largely parallel collections of early discourses (*Dhamma* talks) of the Buddha and his contemporary disciples transmitted through different later sects: The Pali *Nikāyas* are preserved in an early Indic language. The Chinese *Āgamas* are translations into Chinese of texts originally transmitted to China through various South Asian and Middle Asian sects in a variety of languages, commonly through classical Sanskrit. In addition, the early Buddhist monastic code, the *Vinaya*, exists in several parallel versions preserved and studied in diverse sects. This close agreement among equivalent texts transmitted through distinct sects makes it clear that, for the most part, the teachings of early Buddhism been accurately and uniformly preserved.

About two centuries after the Buddha, the Mauryan Empire had extended its boundaries to encompass an area larger than present-day India, and its emperor, Asoka, became a great promoter of Buddhism, in true Buddhist style without neglecting other religious and philosophical traditions. Asoka endeavored to run his

empire according to *Dhammic* principles, caring for the poor, for travelers, for the sick, in what was probably the first known welfare state. He also sent monks as missionaries to far-flung places, even as far as the Mediterranean, in many of which Buddhism took root. In the following centuries the Buddhist movement spread westward as far as Persia, eastward into Indochina and Indonesia, northward into Central Asia and from there eastward into China and the rest of East Asia.

We will look at the teachings of early Buddhism in the remaining chapters.

Further reading

The Life of the Buddha by Bhikkhu Ñanamoli, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1992.

Buddhist India by T.W. Rhys Davids, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903.

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1 Recall, *underlining* encourages the reader to remember this term.

2 A formulaic text that is repeated verbatim but with certain substitutions is known in Biblical research as a *pericope*.

3. Nyanaponika (1997), p. 76.

4 Gombrich (2006), p. 19.

5 Gombrich (2009), p. 2.

2. Generosity

> *Go your way, monks, for the benefit of the many: for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the benefit, the happiness of gods and men.* (*Vinaya*, "Mahāvagga")

We all give to others and we all take for ourselves. The Buddhist practice of generosity radically shifts, for most of us, the balance between the two. Giving becomes habitual, new satisfaction is found in giving and a shift also occurs in how we view our role in the world and in who we think we are. The systematic practice of generosity sets the direction our life will take in the most fundamental way, pointing it toward selflessness rather that toward self-advantage, which surprisingly turns out to be the direction that brings the greatest personal satisfaction and that leads eventually to awakening.

A Pali word for generosity is *dāna*, literally "giving," which is commonly left untranslated in English-language Buddhist literature. (As a cognate of the English word *donate*, it is easy to remember.) It can refer to giving of material or immaterial things, from rice to teachings, from labor to advice, from cooking a meal that will delight and nourish one's family or rescuing a flood victim from perilous waters, to helping overturn an unjust economic order. Generosity is eschewed by the stingy.

Some of us keep our life of generosity close to home, others think globally. Some of us respond to needs as they happen to arise, others actively seek out opportunities to give. We might feed and clothe the homeless or contribute to a nonprofit that gives educational opportunities to the disadvantaged. We might see a turtle in the road, stop the car and carry it to one side lest it be run over by

a less mindful driver, or we might be present when a friend is going through a personal crisis. Being of benefit is practiced in more different ways than can be enumerated.

The gradual instruction

Buddhist practice begins with generosity. This is evident in the *gradual instruction* (*anupubbi-kathā*), which the Buddha presents in various discourses[1] as a step-by-step guide for those just embarking on a spiritual quest. The gradual instruction[2] begins with generosity and unfolds as follows.

(Buddhist Life)

- Generosity (*dāna*).
- Virtue (*sīla*).
- Heavens.
- The drawbacks, degradation and corruption of sensual passions.
- The rewards of renunciation.
- On the basis of the understanding and pursuit of the foregoing, "a mind ready, softened, unbiased, elated and trusting," a precondition for the last step.

(Buddhist Path)

- The four noble truths.

The current text loosely follows the sequence of the gradual instructions. I've marked the sections here that pertain to each of the two books *Buddhist Life* and *Buddhist Path*. Notice that a Buddhist life is thereby strictly a prerequisite for success on the Buddhist path.

The purpose of the Buddhist life is to establish us in the set of values, attitudes, understandings, practices and other conditions, based in virtue, harmony and contentment, that bring benefit to the world and are conducive to personal well-being and fulfillment. Most devout Buddhists historically have begun to live this way as very young children and have lived this way into old age, albeit with varying degrees of commitment. I hope here in *Book*

One to convey an appreciation for the remarkable practical depth and wisdom of the Buddha's early teachings on Buddhist life.

The purpose of the Buddhist path is to establish us, beyond this, in a set of understandings and practices that ensure progress toward awakening, which for present purposes we can view as the perfection of human character, including absolute virtue, wisdom and equanimity. This is the higher training, profound and highly sophisticated, which traditionally a small minority of the Buddhist population has fully committed itself to. The Buddhist life enables us to establish ourselves on the Buddhist path.

The reasons we begin with generosity in the gradual instruction must certainly include the ease with which the practice is understood and taken up, even by children, the traditional community support around conventional generosity that the Buddha fashioned, and the immediate gratification that arises in conjunction with the practice of generosity, both on the giving and on the receiving end. Generosity also sets the theme of selflessness at a fundamental behavioral level, which will bear fruit on the Buddhist path in the profound realization that the notion of the self – at least in the way we normally understand it – is a kind of conceptual mistake.

The next factor in the gradual instruction, *virtue* (*sīla*), supplements generosity with the practice of harmlessness, the subject of chapter 3. Here the Buddhist *precepts* (ethical guidelines) are central.

Heavens here is the prospect of personal fulfillment that comes with the virtuous life. This has to do with *kamma* (Sanskrit, *karma*) and the *fruits of kamma*, the understanding of which provides a primary incentive for undertaking these practices as the accrual of *merit*.

The next two factors (*drawbacks, degradation and corruption of sensual passions*; and the *rewards of renunciation*) are realizations that we all too easily overlook in our own experience, but that arise with *appropriate attention* from the practices of generosity and harmlessness. Together they provide the entry way into *purification of mind*, the topic of chapter 4. The Buddhist Path is largely an extension of the practice of purity. Precepts and generosity force us to struggle and compromise with those

mental aspects that attempt to divert us from those practices. Sensual passions are our primary human motivations when no ethical considerations are present. These are presumably what motivate animals almost entirely, but for humans ethical practices repeatedly force restraint of these impulses. Generosity, in particular, gives frequent rise to supramundane feelings of delight and joy, which, like meditative states, are not rooted in sensuality. These considerations put a new light on the efficacy of the pursuit of sensual pleasures as a path to personal well-being. In fact, at some point these considerations will throw us for a loop and make us wonder why we ever began living the self-centered way we do in the first place. The more we investigate this, the more we discover the shallowness of pursuing satisfaction in selfish pursuits. This begins the process of renunciation, the gateway to the remainder of Buddhist practice.

The topics on generosity, harmlessness and purity (chapters 2-4) describe three aspects of Buddhist ethics referred to in the gradual instruction. The topic of chapter 5, on *harmony*, is not explicitly mentioned in the gradual instruction, yet is an aspect of ethics that weaves together generosity, harmlessness and purity, is a constant theme and value in the Buddha's teaching, and is more relevant than ever in our own disharmonious age. Therefore, I've devoted a chapter to it.

The phrase, *the mind is ready, softened, unbiased, elated and trusting* has to do with faith or trust, and with opening up the heart and mind fully to receive the *Dhamma*. These are qualities of *refuge*, the topic of chapter 6. The gradual instruction up to and including this passage is thus the topic of *Book One: Buddhist Life*.

The four noble truths encapsulate the *Dhamma* and the practice of the *Dhamma*. The noble eightfold path is the fourth Noble Truth and represents the path upon which we will embark in *Book Two, Buddhist Path*. In summary, *Buddhist Life* constitutes the more general aspects of Buddhist practice and understanding, the kinds of things familiar to most Buddhists and integral to how Buddhists live their lives. *Buddhist Path* provides a much more focused and specialized course of training that presupposes a Buddhist life, but that terminates in awakening.

Understanding consequences

Back to generosity. Generosity is about bringing benefit. Accordingly it belongs to the class of ethical systems that philosophers call *consequentialism*. It is guided by understanding the benefit, particularly for others, for any proposed action. Its ideal motivating principle is *kindness* (*mettā*), though one might begin its practice even when kindness is initially weak. The Buddha introduced this practice to his newly ordained son as follows:

> "What do you think, Rahula: What is a mirror for?"
>
> "For reflection, sir."
>
> "In the same way, Rahula, bodily actions, verbal actions, and mental actions are to be done with repeated reflection.
>
> "… if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction… it would be a *skillful bodily* action with *pleasant* consequences, *pleasant* results, then any *bodily* action of that sort is *fit* for you to do." (MN 61)

What is said in the last paragraph about *skillful* bodily actions with *pleasant* consequences being *fit*, is then said in this discourse with regard to *unskillful* bodily actions with *unpleasant* consequences being *unfit*, and then what is said with regard to *bodily* actions is said about *verbal* and *mental* actions as well.[3] Bodily, verbal and mental are regarded throughout the discourses as the three basic kinds of action.

The word for *action* here is *kamma* (Sanskrit, *karma*). *Kamma* means "volitional action." Since all of our generous deeds are volitional, they are *kamma*. In fact all deeds that have an ethical quality (beneficial or harmful, wholesome or unwholesome) are *kamma*. Moreover, all elements of Buddhist *practice*, ethics-based or not, are *kamma*. Notice that mental actions are referred to in this last passage as well. This makes purity of thought and such things as meditation practice *kamma*. Given that Buddhism is really about practice, *kamma* is a very important concept; *kamma* and *practice* are inseparable.

Our practice of generosity is, in its broadest sense, to aim for

good consequences, and thereby to give to the world. The world carries a burden of great suffering; it needs people to accomplish good, now more than ever. The great challenge of accomplishing good is to trace as best as possible, with discerning wisdom, just what the heck all the consequences of our actions might be. We live in a very complex and highly interdependent world in which the consequences of the simplest action run very deep, playing themselves out almost forever. Consider the butterfly (as in *butterfly effect*) who, by choosing to fly from one flower to the next, will, as meteorologists tell us, trigger storms and hurricanes on the other side of the world in the decades and centuries to come that otherwise would not have occurred, or prevent those that would have. Similarly our actions may (or, more likely, will) enable wars to happen or not to happen, and we may never know. We, like chess players, can only see a few moves ahead, to a certain *horizon*, with relative certainty. Beyond that, *we are, each of us, simultaneously nearly omnipotent and absurdly near-sighted.* This is why the Buddha recommended that Rahula must consider his actions with great care.

Merit-making

A groundbreaking operating principle in Buddhism is that an ethical, virtuous, generous, non-harming, pure life is not only beneficial to *others*, but is at the same time quite reliably a source of benefit and satisfaction for *ourselves*. We can begin to appreciate the intimate connection between the two when we observe that generous open-hearted people tend to be happy people and stingy self-centered people tend to be unhappy. As we do generous deeds – rescue some kittens from a fire or offer the plumber a cup of coffee – we can think of ourselves as earning personal merit, much as a cub scout earns merit badges. *Merit* (*puñña*) is a kind of approximate composite measure of the ethical value of an action, a tool that incorporates both external consequences and the intentions and sacrifice of the actor in performing an action. Merit is closely related to *kamma*, and particularly to what are called the *fruits* of *kamma*, which we will explore more deeply in the next two chapters. Actions that bring harm to others and are ill-intentioned make *demerit* (*pāpa*).

Merit-making conceptually quantifies generosity as something

we accumulate, something that is vaguely measurable. Since the practice of generosity benefits both others and ourselves this way of looking at the practice makes sense, but might seem unnecessary as an incentive. However, something like merit-making is commonplace in many of our activities when we want to ensure persistence in our practice. For instance, the jogger generally tracks how many miles he runs per day or per week as a hedge against creeping negligence. Similarly the meditator typically tracks hours on the cushion for similar reasons. Whenever we take on a practice commitment we want to evaluate how well we are fulfilling that commitment. Merit gives us a rough metric.

Although I have emphasized the intrinsic open-ended nature of generosity, merit-making is most often applied in conventional contexts in which accrued merit can be associated with a specific array of factors. In addition to consequential benefit, merit is attributed to certain categories of recipients, to certain categories of gifts, to certain manners of giving and to certain intentions behind giving, roughly as follows.

- To whom is it given?

Worthy recipients of generosity are ascetics and priests (who live on alms), destitutes, wayfarers, wanderers, the sick and beggars, as well as family members and guests. These are generally those in need or for whom we bear a special responsibility. Additionally, the purity of the recipient correlates with the amount of merit made. For instance, offerings to those of great spiritual attainment gain oodles of merit (DN 5, DN 23, DN 26). Notice that these, in turn, are people with a great capacity for making merit themselves, and so supporting them is likely to multiply the beneficial consequences of our deeds. In analogy to planting seeds, such recipients are often called *fields of merit* (*puñña-khetta*). Buddhist monks and nuns tend to be distinguished in this regard.

- What is given?

The gift of *Dhamma* (*dhamma-dāna*) exceeds all other gifts, which tends to give monastics and those of great spiritual attainment an edge in merit-making.[4] Although most gifts are material, the gift of service (*veyyāvacca*) is also very meritorious (SN 1.32, *Dhammapāda* 224). It is important to note that the merit earned tends to correlate inversely with one's resources, for instance, a meager

offering from a pauper might easily gain more merit than a sumptuous gift from a tycoon. This is because it is ultimately the intentions and level of sacrifice that count, which we will come to in a moment.

- 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. It is also best to give at a proper time and to give what is not harmful (AN 5.148).

Notice that these recommendations encourage direct engagement in, and full experience of, the act of giving. In this way, these measures encourage feelings of friendship, appreciation and interpersonal harmony in association with the act of generosity. They also enhance the personal benefit of giving, to such a degree that one begins to lose track of who is the giver and who is the receiver in a particular transaction, for giving feels so good that one begins to think of *oneself* as a recipient. This manner of giving would also suggest that it is better to be actively present at the orphanage to which we are donating, rather than simply writing out a periodic check, or arranging an automatic fund transfer. Notice that that would also allow us more closely to track the consequences, for harm or benefit, of one's generosity.

- Why is it given?

One might physically give with different intentions: out of annoyance, out of fear, in exchange, thinking "generosity is considered good," to gain a good reputation, out of kindness, with awareness of the personal consequences, or to "beautify and adorn the mind." The first three of these are fairly neutral with regard to merit, since in each case one's intention is generally to gain something as much as to give something. The last one earns a truckload of merit (AN 8.31). Again, we find intention to be critical, for merit ultimately is about purity of mind. In general, it is best to give with no expectation of personal benefit. (AN 7.52)

Also, if we feel happy before, during and after giving we are in the swing of this practice (AN 6.37), for …

> When this gift of mine is given, it makes the mind serene.

> Gratification and joy arise. (AN 7.49)

Accordingly, we should take care that there is later no resentment for having given (SN 3.20). The purest form of giving is with the attitude:

> This is an ornament for the mind, a support for the mind. (AN 7.49)

Notice how the Buddha's emphasis in discussing generosity moves freely from benefit for others to our own pleasant personal experience and back again. Pure acts of giving are expected to gladden the heart and contribute to the development of personal character. This often creates some confusion concerning intention for the modern student of Buddhism: Are we practicing generosity for *them* or for *us*? Out of *benevolence* or out of *selfishness*? Many conclude merit-making is a self-centered enterprise, but paradoxically, generosity gains the most merit for us when our intentions are based in pure kindness and compassion for the other, and the least merit when our intentions more self-centered. It feels great when our intention is to benefit others. We attain the most personal benefit when personal benefit is not our primary aim. In fact, one of the ways we practice generosity is to be gracious in our acceptance of gifts from others, and to be a fertile field of merit by paying that generosity forward to others. Welcome to the *Through the Looking Glass* world of generosity.

Lifeblood of the Buddhist community

We should appreciate the extent that the practice of generosity is adapted to and presupposes the structure of the traditional Buddhist community, in which the relationship of laity to monastic has played a central role since the time of the Buddha and still does in Buddhist lands to this day. The Buddha gave great attention, in the *Vinaya,* the monastic code, to organizing and regulating the monastic community to a level that seems to have been unknown in other ascetic communities of the time, with full understanding that the lay behavior would shape itself to the behavior of the monastics. Alms-giving, the support of ascetics in various traditions, was already prevalent in India at the time of the Buddha, and has been a natural part of merit-making for Buddhists ever since.

Moreover, the Buddha did something surprising: He imposed on the monastic community, through the selfsame monastic code, an *enhanced* level of dependence on the laity, removing them entirely from the exchange economy and making their dependence a matter of daily contact with the laity. He made the monks and nuns as helpless as house pets or as young children with regard to their own needs, but then did not substantially restrict what monastics can do for others. The result is that monastics live entirely in what has been called an *economy of gifts*[5] in which goods and services flow solely through acts of generosity. The laity participates in this economy in their interactions with monastics, but generally also still participates in exchange in the normal economy as customers and wage earners. However, the economy of gifts also generalizes, to a significant extent, to the larger community.

Generosity is the lifeblood of the Buddhist community and the conventional interaction between lay and monastic, its beating heart. In Burma, for instance, I observed how readily this classical practice of generosity carries beyond the monastery walls, how people naturally take care of each other with a sense of obligation that requires no compensation. The Buddha fashioned an economy particularly conducive to the practice of generosity. Although the same *material* benefit might be realized in an exchange economy, the economy of gifts affords more opportunity for merit-making, manifesting in more *spiritual* benefit for the persons involved.[6]

There is also a skill in being a recipient of generosity. In our balance-sheet-obsessed culture one might imagine that we make *demerits* by being the recipient of generosity, but that is not so. In fact, as a recipient we have a good opportunity to practice generosity ourselves, simply by being a worthy and appreciative recipient. One discovers this quickly as a monastic, for instance, when one says, “I can do it myself,” and sees the disappointment in the eyes of the devout and generous layperson, or when one is invited for lunch at a layperson's house but has to travel two hours to get there. Also, just practicing to be a field of merit for others' generosity is an act of generosity as one realizes the investment lay folks have in one's own spiritual progress..

Likewise you, the reader, are already a recipient of generosity simply by reading these words, in fact a recipient of the the great-

est gift, that of the *Dhamma*, the gift that keeps on giving. I give the gift freely, without compulsion and without compensation (as noted, as a non-participant in the exchange economy I cannot receive material compensation, for instance, as royalties from a publisher). You can only imagine how many hours and how much effort have been put into composing, editing, checking references, reflecting, reviewing literature, and utilization in a class setting to produce this text for you. Whatever my skill or ineptitude is in its production, I make the offering sincerely because I think you might benefit from it as I have benefited in my life from receiving the gift of *Dhamma* from others. The greatest gift you can possibly give to *me* is to accept this gift, to learn from it, to reflect on it with an open heart and to put it to use in your life. Be a fertile field of merit! Your spiritual progress will bring me immeasurable joy.

Open-ended generosity

We have been discussing the garden-variety practices of generosity. However, this is only a part of our hugely open-ended capacity for accomplishing good. This would include addressing a range of local social needs, such as providing care for the sick or for orphans, organizing education and charitable projects, or addressing more global issues like ending wars, oppression, crime or ecological degradation, sometimes through advocacy for changing social, economic, political or cultural structures and institutions. Presumably because of its diverse range, the Buddha had few specifics to offer about wider range of ways generosity can manifest, except insofar as he provided examples for us in as he responded to circumstances that arose in his life.

In an incident described in the *Vinaya* (Mv 8.26.1-8) the Buddha and Ānanda come upon a monk sick with dysentery, uncared for, lying in his own urine and feces. After he and Ānanda had personally cleaned the monk up, the Buddha admonished the other monks living nearby for not caring for the sick monk, famously proclaiming:

> Whoever would tend to me, should tend to the sick.

We can imagine the shame of the monks who had neglected this sick monk. The quote with which this chapter began, “Go your

way, monks, for the benefit of the many …," is wonderfully evocative of the disposition toward generosity he encouraged in his followers. This is spoken to a large group of monks, all of them *arahants*. They would practice "for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the benefit, the happiness of gods and men." Although the primary opportunity for a person of spiritual attainment to benefit others is through teaching the *Dhamma*, and also by setting a behavioral example for others through embodying certain values in their lives, this person will also tend to serve others in other ways wherever possible.

In one discourse the Buddha describes a chaplain offering wise advice to a king concerning the relationship of crime, poverty and general prosperity:

> Your Majesty's country is beset by thieves, it is ravaged, villages and towns are being destroyed, the countryside is infested with brigands. ... Suppose Your Majesty were to think: "I will get rid of this plague of robbers by executions and imprisonment, or by confiscation, threats and banishment," the plague would not be properly ended. Those who survived would later harm Your Majesty's realm. However, with this plan you can completely eliminate the plague: To those in the kingdom who are engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, let Your Majesty distribute grain and fodder; to those in trade, give capital; to those in government service assign proper living wages. Then those people, being intent on their own occupations, will not harm the kingdom. Your Majesty's revenues will be great, the land will be tranquil and not beset by thieves, and the people, with joy in their hearts, will play with their children, and will dwell in unlocked houses. (DN 5)

We do well to note here and elsewhere a characteristic feature of the Buddha's method of ethical scrutiny: its uncommon tolerance and forgiveness. He thereby maintains unwavering kindness for *all* common participants in human society, even thieves and brigands, whose worldly actions he sees as almost unavoidably conditioned by circumstances, to be brought under control to the extent that conditions can be changed, sometimes by kings, sometimes by ourselves. The advice to the king here is also an instance

of the practice of *appropriate attention* (*yoniso manasikāra*, literally, "thinking from the source"), a hugely important principle in early Buddhism which we will encounter a number of times in this textbook. The plague addressed in this passage arises directly from observable social conditions that a king can control, not from some unseen unconditioned evil of thieves and brigands that a king cannot. In fact, blaming the situation on the latter would lead to a counterproductive and hateful response.

We have seen that as we, with Rahula, contemplate possible actions it often becomes difficult to assess if they are for benefit or for harm beyond a certain horizon. To take a mundane example, what are the consequences of driving slow in the fast lane of a highway? It is easy to convince ourselves that it is a beneficial thing to do: "It will be good for the long line of drivers stuck behind me to slow down; their lives are probably too fast-paced anyway." It is easy to convince another that it is a harmful thing to do: "If someone wants to drive fast and you are in the way, they will become angry, will start zig-zagging from one lane to another to get around you and have a good chance of causing an accident." In fact, we can proliferate the exploration of consequences of our choices endlessly and at the same time find justification for almost any course of action that we want. This is certainly not the kind of ethical thinking the Buddha expected of Rahula.

Nonetheless, there is a variety of means at Buddhist disposal for making ethical choices that do not depend on accurately tracking consequences of our potential actions beyond that horizon, and so we may refine our attempts at benefiting others. The next three chapters consider harmlessness, purity and harmony as alternative determinants of our ethical choices. For instance, purity involves constant assessment of our intentions. In the case of driving in the fast lane, one asks, "Why am I driving in the fast lane? Am I just too lazy to move to another lane? Am I really concerned about the spiritual development of the vexingly impatient driver behind me?" Recall that the merit of our actions depends on our intentions, particularly benevolence or ill-will. If the intentions are impure, most likely the consequences of our actions will be harmful, since we are very likely to have introduced a personal bias into our actions. This is why the ultimate determinant of merit, and predictor of ultimate benefit, is its

intentional quality, which we will learn more about in the next chapters. Our actions *should* be an ornament for the mind, even behind the steering wheel looking over our hood ornament.

It is instructive to look at one of the great ethical questions in Western philosophy, whether the ends justify the means, from a Buddhist perspective. A purely consequentialist ethics would seem to entail this principle, for instance, sacrificing one life is justified if it saves three. The weakness of this principle is that we can rarely foretell all consequences, and our attempts to do so beyond a certain horizon are generally ideologically driven or focus too narrowly on a single end ignoring collateral consequences.

Military attacks on civilian populations, divide and conquer as a means of enforcing colonial rule, economic austerity measures that create massive poverty, the Cultural Revolution in China, the attempt of the Khmer Rouge to impose a rural peasant society on Cambodia and the remaking of European society through ethnic cleansing by the National Socialists in Germany are examples of this way of thinking, in which a desired but elusive or ill-considered end is used to justify human suffering, and in which it is generally the suffering that in the end prevails and endures after the intended end is long forgotten. And yet at the time the perpetrators of these policies often imagine – or convince themselves – that they are performing acts of generosity, of producing on balance an ultimate benefit for others.

What does Buddhism have to say about this? First of all, Buddhism is not purely consequentialist; it involves a *hybrid* ethical system that is based partially on anticipating consequences, but also constrained through precepts based on the qualities of the actions themselves and also constrained through careful considerations of the purity of intentions behind our actions. In other words, the practices of harmlessness and of purity, discussed in the next two chapters, nullify the notion of the end justifying the means beyond a limited horizon. If some grand plan involves killing or stealing, then we need to find another means. If we recognize personal greed or self-interest, or anger or hatred, as we are about to execute some grand plan, then we need to abandon the plan.

Moreover, Buddhism casts great doubt on our capacity for reasoning beyond a certain horizon. The Buddha repeatedly dispar-

aged ideologies, fixed views and conceptualizations as inherently ignorant or deluded. The idea of some utopia or final solution that had justified many of the greatest ethical lapses of human history is quite unwelcome in the Buddhist way of thinking.

The practice of generosity

This is a book on *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* undergirds practice, which is to say, it provides the values and understandings that determine what we do in our lives. It is not a speculative philosophy pursued for itself, but a practical manual that at every point should make a difference in our lives. With this in mind, we will conclude this and each subsequent chapter with a "***The practice of …***" section. In this section I offer practical advice for integrating the topic of the chapter into one's practice life, taking into particular account the opportunities and pitfalls encountered in applying these ancient teachings to modern culture.

A devout Buddhist life is, before anything else, a life of generosity. Before coming to Buddhism, you have certainly already practiced generosity at some level, particularly with regard to family and friends. If you just put aside any inherent stinginess, generosity can flow quite naturally to others. Nonetheless, we are a profoundly self-centered culture, conditioned as we are by incessant advertising for personal consumption (and we suffer accordingly). In a Buddhist life, on the other hand, your job is to seek out opportunities to benefit others. Generosity is something anyone can practice; children have an inborn, if simple, understanding of generosity, and experience quite readily the joy that can come with giving.

In the modern context you might first consider more open-ended forms of generosity. You 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. You might also donate financially to charitable or educational organizations. Regular volunteering and support are highly recommended as a means of fulfilling the practice of generosity. Such volunteer efforts can even scale up to enterprise-level efforts, like founding hospitals in third-world countries, or advo-

cacy for peace, social justice or environmental protection.[7] Or just be on constant look-out for opportunities as they arise to help others.

Depending individually on your current level of engagement and on your current life circumstances, you might begin to broaden the various ways in which you practice generosity. However, you should take care not to push any practice too hard, lest you suffer resentment and burnout, just as you might begin a jogging practice by running down to the corner and back, and only gradually work your way up to six miles every morning. 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 (AN 6.55). In the end you may become hungry for new opportunities for generosity and finally discover that the most meaningful part of your life in doing things on behalf of others.

As you practice generosity, keep in mind the criteria for merit-making. For instance, when giving to a homeless person, you should give not begrudgingly, but in a way that preserves the dignity of the recipient. In giving to an orphanage it is better to drive to the orphanage with the check rather than to set up an automatic fund withdrawal … unless the inconvenience of doing so will likely subvert the donation altogether. You should also keep in mind that if your funds are limited, each gift gains that much *more* merit. Giving of labor is of great merit. You should also take care to avoid expecting reciprocation.

As you practice generosity, you should also be aware of the effects on your own mind. You will experience many sensual pleasures in your life: food, music, sex and zombie movies. You should become aware as well of the great joy, a pleasure beyond the sensual, that comes with generosity. Become aware that this joy is greatest when your intentions are purest, when the recipients of your generosity are worthy and when the manner of giving is proper. This joy is the direct experience of the merit you have earned. Consider how much joy there must be in a lifetime dedicated to generosity. If this is not enough incentive, it is helpful to keep in mind how much benefit you are bringing to others; you might work hard and save in order to not quite afford a degree of comfort for yourself and your family, but ensuring one person gets proper medical care in a crisis can save a life, and

turning the life of a single troubled youth around is huge. Generosity is relatively easy in comparison to the weight of its potential benefits for others.

We have seen that the practice of generosity in Buddhism tends to be centered around the Buddhist community itself. This has some advantages. There is a certain energy sustained in the communal context as we inspire and provide role models for each other. Young children learn generosity particularly effectively in the communal contexts as they see Buddhist values exemplified. The community is a source of wise *admirable friends* (*kalyāṇamitta*), who – we will see in a later chapter – are an essential condition for Buddhist practice and who not only exemplify the practice, but explain it. For many Buddhists conventional communal generosity remains the primary practice for one's entire life.

In community practice, a family or an individual will commonly pick a particular practice of conventional generosity according to a daily or weekly schedule. This might be to prepare and offer rice or other foods for monks on alms round every morning, or to bring a meal offering to the monastery once a week, or to provide work for the community one day a week. All of this works pretty smoothly in Asia especially at the village level. However, in the West it may be more difficult to find such communities, though traditional ethnic Asian Buddhist communities are more common in America and much of the West than most people realize.

Buddhist communities developed by Western converts, in my experience, are generally far less successful in implementing, or even understanding, the economy of gifts, though there are exceptions. For instance, it is rare for a Western-based Buddhist organizations to operate without fee or dues. Yet any financial exchange is in principle an opportunity lost for the practice of generosity. In fact, one exchange is *two* lost opportunities for merit-making. As culturally Western Buddhism matures this is one of the primary ways in which it is likely to shift, under the example and guidance of our ethnic Asian counterparts.

Let me conclude with a word about children as Buddhists, oft eager practitioners of generosity. I have sometimes encountered the view among modern Buddhists, who, like myself, were not born into Buddhist families, so-called "*convert Buddhists*," that Buddhist parents should not teach Buddhism to their children, but

that they should let their children grow up to decide whether they want to be Buddhists or not. I understand the motivation for this view: Most such people were brought up in a religion that they came to reject, for one reason or another, as teens or adults. Furthermore, most such Buddhists are frustrated to the extent they have tried to present Buddhism to their children, because they see Buddhism centered in meditation, not in things like generosity (a view the present book tries to correct).

Nevertheless, we generally acquire the greater part of our values and understanding as children, much as we acquire language. If the parents do not instill values and understanding, the popular culture will, and will do an exceptionally poor job of it. If you have come to a book like this, you are already intent on developing personal wisdom in your values and understanding beyond what your parents or culture have provided. I regard it as the duty of any parent to encourage, as best as you possibly can, wise values and understandings in your children during their undiscriminatingly impressionable early years. Withholding these is like withholding your own language so that your child can decide what language they want to speak as an adult. Besides, your children can still choose to become a Sufi or a Wiccan after they are grown, just as they might choose to move to Costa Rica and learn Spanish.

Further reading

Dāna: the Practice of Giving by Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1998, Buddhist Publication Society. This is a collection of essays on generosity.

The Buddha: the Social-revolutionary Potential of Buddhism by Trevor Ling, 2013, Pariyatti. This work does a very good job of exploring the intended social implications of the Buddha's thinking, placing it in the social and political context of the Buddha's world.

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1 *Udana* 5.3, for instance.

2 See the *Dhamma* sections of Thanissaro (2001a), Thanissaro (2005-2013) for further discussion of the gradual instruction.

3 In this case a pericope is actually repeated six times in the original text with these substitutions.

4 Religious gifts made to the general public would, particularly in later Buddhist traditions, include contributions to building pagodas, Buddha statues and things along those lines, and also to book publication and other educational educational projects and operating expenses. Otherwise gifts satisfy mundane material needs.
5 Thanissaro (1997).
6 This theme is further explored in Cintita (2010).
7 Buddhism has not traditionally been as known for its enterprise-level efforts as has Christianity, for instance. But there is no reason that the ethic of accomplishing good should not scale up in this way. Probably social conditions in Asia have been, until recently, less conducive to enterprise-level efforts of this kind. On the other hand, Ven. Rahula (not the Buddha's son, but the author of the widely read *What the Buddha Taught*) devoted a book to making the case, specifically for Sri Lanka, that the widespread reputation of monks as indifferent to social concerns arose during European colonization, in which the *Saṅgha* was systematically disenfranchised from responsibilities in which it had previously routinely engaged, such as running schools. In fact, in recent decades Buddhist communities have become quite socially engaged, often inspired by Christian example.

3. Harmlessness

Refraining from every evil,
Accomplishing good,
Purifying the mind,
This is teaching of Buddhas. (Dhp 183)

Seeing his complete awakening through meditation as the Buddha's greatest accomplishment, we often fail to recognize how thoroughly Buddhism is about ethics or virtue or morality. The Buddhist path creates saints before it creates awakened ones. Buddhism begins with ethics and ethics provides the foundation of subsequent teachings. Buddhist children learn generosity and harmlessness from toddler-hood. Ethics provides the foundation without which higher development of the mind is unattainable. Without the perfection of virtue, awakening is impossible. Starting with ethics, we most easily come to understand the logic of the entire Buddhist path, including that of meditation and of awakening.

The opening verse above gets to the heart of Buddhist ethics. It enumerates the three distinct but interrelated systems of Buddhist virtue: *Refraining from every evil* involves behaving harmlessly according to Buddhist ethical codes or precepts, which define norms of appropriate behavior. This is the topic of the present chapter. *Accomplishing good* is acting in ways that produce beneficial consequences for others. This is generosity and was the topic of the last chapter. *Purifying the mind,* the most characteristically Buddhist of the three, makes of virtue not only something we do in the world, but something integral to who we are and the way we think and respond. This will be the topic of the next chapter. The three, in the Buddha’s teachings, are mutually con-

straining and mutually supporting, like the legs of a tripod.

The primary motivating principle of refraining from evil is *harmlessness* (*ahiṃsā*). The Sanskrit for of this word has become well known in the English language: *ahiṃsā*, generally associated with Mahatma Gandhi and often translated as *nonviolence.* Although generosity, i.e., being of benefit, would seem to reach farther than simply not being of harm, living harmlessly is actually a great challenge. Without ethical standards most people cause great harm almost daily through physical injury, deception, betrayal, discord and exploitation. Nonetheless, the practice of refraining from evil can much more effectively be reduced to a set of practice rules in a way generosity, because of its open-endedness, generally cannot. Refraining from evil is also sometimes described as a specific practice of generosity in itself, for when we are harmless we thereby give to others the gift of freedom from fear, specifically freedom from fear of us. We become a refuge.

Precepts

Harm is also easier to track than benefit. Whereas benefit, in principle, involves a weighing and predicting of future conditions, harmfulness is generally an immediate quality of particular types of action. For instance, killing harms the object of the killing almost regardless of what other circumstances obtain. For this reason, limiting harm, or avoiding evil, can quite effectively be reduced to prohibitive rules of thumb, which we call *precepts* (*sikkhā-pada*) in Buddhism. The Pali word for virtue, *sīla*, is also used, especially in its plural form, to refer to precepts, so we can think of precepts as virtues.

Buddhist precepts are similar to the ten commandments of the Bible, or to traffic laws, or to the bothersome things your parents told you to do when you were a kid, like not to watch more than seven hours of TV a day nor to eat the dog's food. They are also comparable to professional rules of ethics, such as those observed by psychotherapists (not sleeping with clients) or members of the scientific community (not falsifying data). They are almost invariably in early Buddhism stated as abstentions, things *not* to do, for instance, “do not kill,” rather than “protect life,” which is why they may be described with the phrase *to refrain from every evil.*

Traditionally lay people throughout the Buddhist world have observed, and routinely recite as a reminder, at least the following five precepts since the time of the Buddha:

(1) I undertake the precept to refrain from assaulting living things.

This translates literally "… from attacking breath [breathing things]" (*pāṇātipātā*). Killing or bodily harm is not limited to humans, but includes even snakes and insects. It thereby covers in itself a huge swath of our options for causing harm and regulates our most violent tendencies.

(2) I undertake the precept to refrain from taking what is not given.

This prohibits stealing. We practice this so that others will have a car to drive to work the next day, something to eat when they get home that evening and something to write with if they need to jot something down. Also so that they will not need a security system or a guard dog.

(3) I undertake the precept to refrain from committing sensual misconduct.

Sensual misconduct has primarily to do with sexual relations. The primary example is adultery, which is to say, having extra sexual partners or becoming an extra sexual partner (in the context of a formal marriage or not). Sex with a minor is also excluded. When we practice this, our partner gains trust in us, does not need to feel jealous and need not fear the financial hardship and emotional distress that would come with the breakup of the family. This precept has, by the way, nothing to do with the perceived "kinkiness" that might adhere to sexual acts according to societal norms, which between consenting adults is not generally harmful.

(4) I undertake the precept to refrain from false speech.

This prohibits lying, which undermines trust and social harmony and is implicated in many forms of exploitation. We practice this so that others have accurate information on which to base their decisions, even when our impulse might be to misdirect their decisions in our own favor.

(5) I undertake the precept to refrain from the heedlessness of

spirits, liquor and intoxicants.

This precept is unlike the others in that the harm otherwise committed is less certain and less immediate. In fact, no definable harm might result in a particular case of violating this precept. Nonetheless, imbibing alcohol is implicated statistically in car accidents (or presumably ox-cart and chariot misadventures in the Buddha's day), barroom brawls, spouse abuse, family neglect and mental illness. The sharp and heedful mind is not only highly prized in Buddhism, but also fundamental to purity of mind, the topic of the next chapter, with all of its ethical implications.

This standard set of precepts cover five basic pitfalls whereby harm occurs. Some people choose a higher level of practice commitment by adding some more finely tuned precepts. Common are the following two, both, like the fourth precept, having to do with proper speech.

- I undertake the precept to refrain from harsh speech.

Harsh language injures the one we are speaking to and leads to disharmony in human relations.

- I undertake the precept to refrain from malicious speech.

The word *malicious* already tells us that harm is intended. This is speech that, even when it is truthful, is intended to create divisions and animosity. These additional precepts having to do with speech will be discussed further in chapter five, on harmony. Buddhists have commonly, from the earliest days, observed an extended set of precepts, beyond the basic five, including these last two, specifically on *uposatha days*, that is, every quarter moon, just to push the envelope of practice a bit.

Since most readers will be somewhat familiar with Christian commandments, let me make a few contrasts to draw out some peculiar qualities of Buddhist precepts. Precepts pertain, at least in early Buddhism, to actions of body and speech, but not of thought. Commandments, on the other hand, seem sometimes to apply to thoughts such as coveting our neighbor’s house, cow or wife. Thoughts as a matter of ethics are covered in Buddhism in much more sophisticated detail in purifying mind. Although thoughts, along with bodily and verbal actions, are a kind of *kamma* (they are mental actions), thoughts are much more dif-

ficult to bring under control and therefore require wielding something more refined than a practice rule.

Precepts are taken on in Buddhism entirely as *trainings;* the Pali word for precept, *sikkhā-pada*, means literally "training step." That is, they are undertaken voluntarily as part of a personal practice commitment, rather than as an imposition by a God, Pope, government or other authority. In this sense, there is no *sin* in Buddhism: whereas violating a commandment in Christianity or in other Abrahamic faiths insults the will of God, precepts reflect a duty to oneself or to the world.

Although precepts and commandments widely overlap in content, the difference noted entails that one can logically break a commandment without doing or intending harm, or observe a commandment while doing and intending harm, for God's will can work in mysterious ways that we know not of. Murder, theft, bearing false witness and adultery are actions *both* harmful to others *and* displeasing to God. Homosexual acts, on the other hand, making for ourselves an idol or handling leather made from pig skin would seem rather harmless (we say they are "victimless crimes"), but nonetheless – so we are told in the *Old Testament* – are displeasing to God. Stoning someone to death is clearly harmful to others and clearly violates the first Buddhist precept, yet might be sanctioned by God as an appropriate response to others' misdeeds (never in Buddhism). As a practical consequence of the absence of sin, we rarely find "victimless crimes" in early Buddhist ethics. In fact, the Buddha's precepts are to a surprising degree free of cultural norms and quite relevant to this day.

Strengths and limitations of precepts

Precepts provide the most primitive and concise form within the three kinds of ethics – generosity, harmlessness and purity. Their primary advantage is that they provide reasonably clear guides to conduct, even when we are drawing a blank and cannot work out all the consequences of a proposed action. This reduces much of our conduct to rules of thumb that are easy to learn and remember, even for the young or young at heart, or for the beginning Buddhist or one with beginner's mind. A precept tends to highlight a basic problem area in human conduct that the sages of past

ages must have experienced and recognized.

The weaknesses of precepts as guides to ethical conduct are that they generally allow loopholes and they don't permit appropriate exceptions, that is, *precepts are porous and rigid*. There is the case in which the Gestapo shows up at our front door and asks us, gleefully aware that a Buddhist will not lie, if we are hiding Jews in the attic, or the case in which one of us just happens to be returning from a softball game with a bat in his hand and walk in right behind a man who has just "gone postal" and is about to embark on neutralizing fellow employees. There are, moreover, many harmful – generally mildly harmful – behaviors that simply are not covered in precepts, like taking up two parking spaces or telling dull stories.

Nonetheless, it is significant that the Buddha rarely sanctioned exceptions to precepts to correct their rigidity. I suspect this is because he wanted us to be fully aware of, and live with, the contradictory nature of the human condition rather than regulate it away. The one example I am aware of in which the Buddha discusses the kinds of contradictions that may arise in following precepts is in MN 38 where the Buddha was challenged for his own use of harsh speech, of all things, against Devadatta, his misguided cousin who had (1) created a schism in the *Saṅgha*, (2) had injured the Buddha in an assassination attempt, (3) had induced a prince to murder his father in order to become king, and (4) had committed various other odious misdeeds. The Buddha's response was that sometimes it is necessary to dig a pebble out of a child's mouth even though it causes great discomfort. Providing a metaphor for choices we must sometimes make, rather than admitting loopholes, was wise: given the smallest loophole, many people will become quite creative in finding exceptions to precepts, for instance, soon disregarding non-harming in the case of people one does not like, or for whoever is otherwise imagined to be "undeserving."

Kamma and its fruits

We learned in the last chapter that *kamma* means "volitional action," and that it is closely related to merit-making, but that more generally all Buddhist practice is *kamma*. A generous act is *kamma*, a harmful act is *kamma*, following a precept is *kamma*,

breaking a precept is *kamma*. Furthermore, sitting down to meditate or fixing the mind on the breath is *kamma*, for *kamma* can be of body, speech or mind. I want to go into some more depth with respect to the critical concept of *kamma* here, and then even more depth in the next and subsequent chapters.

The violation of a precept is always *kammic*,[1] that is, although it must involve a physical act of speech or body, it also requires a mental intention. For instance, accidentally running over the neighbor's cat or inadvertently taking someone else's suitcase does not violate a precept against killing living beings or stealing because it lacks volition. Also, violating a precept entails *demerit* (*pāpa*), whereas performing a generous action entails *merit*.

Now, the term *kamma* originally meant simply *action*. However, it is worth noting that the Brahmanic religious tradition had by the time of the Buddha long used this word in a specialized sense to capture the key concept of *ritual* action, where rituals were supposed to determine the future well-being of the person on whose behalf the ritual was conducted by a *brahmin* priest. A properly performed ritual, often an animal sacrifice with some incantations of memorized texts, was *good kamma*, an improperly performed ritual was *bad kamma*.

For the *brahmin*, *kamma* = action + ritual.

For the Buddha, on the other hand, *every* intentional action that we perform has this solemn role as a determinant of the actor's future well-being, for no one can intercede on our behalf through ritual in this way. Moreover, the benefit for us is found not in the *ritual* quality, but in the *ethical* quality of our actions. That ethical quality is inherent in our intentions, roughly, whether we intend harm or benefit to others, or whether we are instead motivated by desire for personal advantage.

For the Buddhist, *kamma* = action + intention.

Kamma, in Buddhism, is explicitly defined as "volitional action," but intention is as sacred for the Buddhist as ritual is for the *brahmin*, and therefore must be carefully deliberated, just as ritual action must for the *brahmin* priest.

We (in modern culture) generally differentiate between benefit or harm for others and benefit or harm for ourselves, and think of

ethical conduct as a balancing act between the two. The Buddha, in contrast, equated the two, saying,

> Whatever I do, for good or evil, to that I will fall heir. (AN 5.57)

In short, our *kammic* acts not only shape the world for others, but also shape our personal fortune. Good deeds work to our own benefit as well as to the benefit of others. Bad deeds work against our own benefit as well as against the benefit of others. The effect of one's own action accrued for oneself is called its *kammic result* (*vipāka*) or alternatively its *kammic fruit* (*phala*). Likewise, we can talk about the results or fruits of practice. Without producing results, it would be fruitless to practice. So if I intentionally harm someone, it will be to my own detriment, and if I give generously to the benefit of another, it will be to my own well-being. This seems a bold generalization, but one that can be verified in our own experience and found to hold up quite well.

For instance, we enjoy some of the fruit of a generous deed right away when it brings us joy. Others become a bit more well-disposed toward us and we may benefit in the near future from their cooperation or support. After a lifetime of generosity we die peacefully and without regret. In contrast, with the tension of anger or of greed, we taste the bitter fruit of a malicious deed right away. Others become a bit more ill-disposed toward us and we suffer when they refuse to cooperate with us or to support us in the near future. After a lifetime of harming others we die in anguish and with remorse.

As we explore in our own experience the bold generalization that the ethical quality of our *kamma* determines our own well-being, we are likely to note various factors conspiring to produce that result. Our harmful actions tend to incite retribution, to our detriment, from those affected, because people tend by nature to be vengeful. Moreover, the more we act in this way, the more we develop our dispositions to act this way and eventually we become trapped in a disposition that repeatedly produces unfortunate results. Such dispositions define our character. Our angry or greedy disposition gives rise to loneliness, because people tend also not to like those of angry or greedy disposition and therefore distance themselves from them. Soon we view the world as determined to torment us. Habitual anger and other unwholesome mental fac-

tors are demonstrably associated with physical health problems. Even physical beauty adheres to ethical character: kind people often exhibit a kind of angelic glow where hateful people often seem perpetually under a cloud with furrowed brow. Through our kamma we are quite capable of creating a personal hell right here on earth … or a heaven.

Very specific examples of the fruition of *kamma* may raise the skeptical reader's eyebrows, such as offering a certain worthy monk alms on one occasion in one life and then receiving great riches for oneself in the next life. Such examples of *kammic* cause and specific effect are actually relatively rare in the earliest texts and could well be entirely allegorical. Exactly how and why *kammic* acts produce their results according to ethical quality in this way is not explicitly clarified by the Buddha, nor is it necessary to know. We need only to verify this generalization in our own experience. In any case, it does not require some kind of mysterious cosmic accounting mechanism, something like Santa keeping track of who is naughty and nice, which I emphasize lest we dismiss the notion altogether. In fact, practical psychological, physiological and sociological processes in themselves seem adequately to motivate virtually all of the claims about *kammic* fruits. We will investigate *kamma* primarily in psychological terms in the next chapter, on purity.

Moreover, I should note a common misunderstanding about *kamma* that may also mystify the critically thinking reader. This is that everything that happens to us for our benefit or harm necessarily has a previous *kammic* basis, that is, as fruits of our own actions, for instance, the assumption that winning the lottery or being blown away by a tornado must be the fruit of some generally indeterminate past deed. This misunderstanding, very widely accepted in many modern schools of Buddhism, is, in fact, unambiguously denied by the Buddha in the *Sīvaka Sutta* (SN 36.21). Quite simply, there are many causal forces at work in the world in addition to *kamma* and we are subject to most of them. If a tree's roots have rotted, a gust of wind can fell the tree. If the tree falls where we stand, entirely through no *kammic* fault of our own, we are likely to be injured. Previous *kamma* is beside the point in explaining this eventuality.

More important than understanding the mechanisms that produce

kammic fruits is understanding why the Buddha taught *kamma* and the fruits of *kamma*. The Buddha was characteristically not interested in speculative philosophy, nor in science in the sense of unearthing the universe's hidden mechanisms. Rather his teaching is intended as a determinant of our practice, which, in turn, is a determinant of our personal development, hopefully in the direction of perfect virtue, perfect wisdom and perfect serenity. Our practice is *kamma*, and each of the hundreds of intentional actions we perform throughout the day is a factor in determining our developmental progress. Therefore it is imperative to take great care in what we choose to do, including gaining merit where we can, and by all means remaining harmless. This is what the teachings around *kamma* bring to our practice.

Rebirth

In the early discourses the results of *kamma* are most often attributed to the circumstances of one's future *rebirth*. Recall that the third step in the gradual instruction, immediately after generosity and ethics, is simply *heavens:*

(Buddhist Life)

- Generosity (*dāna*).
- Virtue (*sīla*).
- Heavens.
- …

Heavens are reached as the *kammic* result of practicing generosity and ethics. The idea is that by leading a virtuous life, much as we can create a heaven for ourselves here on earth, we can be born into a heavenly realm in the next life. By leading a depraved life, much as we can create a hell for ourselves here on earth, we can be born into a hellish realm in the next life. More specifically, the Buddha states that the fruits of *kammic* acts can ripen in this life, in the next life or in subsequent lives, but the realm of heavenly rebirth is highlighted as the goal of one's practice in this life.

Although kamma and its fruits are observed and verified in the present life, by introducing rebirth the Buddha greatly extends the scope of kamma and its fruits beyond a few decades of a single

life and therewith the scope and significance of Buddhist practice. Rebirth endows our practice with a transcendent meaning, in the words of Bhikkhu Bodhi, with "that panoramic perspective from which we can survey our lives in their broader context and total network of relationships,"[2] that comes from realizing that our lives and therefore our practices are woven inextricably into something far grander in scale, a rich and immense tapestry of human affairs. We realize that we are each engaged in an epic struggle with karmic forces from the ancient past that will project *kammic* outcomes endlessly into the future. Our practice therefore has vastly more at stake than happiness and comfort in this present life and therefore different incentives. From rebirth comes the urgency that impels us to deep practice and that thereby opens up the prospect of awakening. It is no wonder rebirth is so pervasive in, and inextricably interwoven into, the Buddha's teachings.

This "panoramic perspective" facilitated by rebirth is not as farfetched as it might at first sound to many modern people. Any parent knows that children manifest well-articulated little characters from the earliest age, and most of us can remember our own peculiar qualities from toddlerhood. One child is terrified of thunder storms, another of dark places. Paradoxically, infants seem in other respects to perfectly exemplify the fabled tabula rasa, having to discover, for instance, simplest laws of physics and the nature of their own bodies on their own. But this is misleading, because right behind that come remarkably firmly established *kammic* dispositions, a recognizable little character. One child seems particularly stingy, another freely generous at the very youngest age.

Each child follows a script so precisely that it must have been written then revised and rehearsed over countless years, and certainly not composed anew. In other words, we each carry *kammic* dispositions communicated to us from past lives: our responses to sensual stimulation, to irritation or insult, to fear; how we order our lives or array the things of the world, how we like to spend our time, what we value. Where else would these dispositions come from? In this life we continue to revise our dispositions, learning new ones some, unlearning old ones or revising old ones to produce new. But just as we have somehow inherited dispositions from past lives, by the same token it must be the case that we somehow hand down dispositions to future lives. From

where else will posterity get its initial dispositions?

The reader will notice that I have made a case not for the specifics of linear rebirth as it is generally understood, but only for validity of a more general principle consistent with a variety of methods by which *kammic* results might perpetuated, including, for instance, genetic or social . We do not have space to do full justice to the topic of rebirth here,[3] but will explore some of its implications briefly at different points in this book. At this point it is only important to recognize that our lives and our practices *are* woven inextricably, in one way or another, into something far grander in scale, a rich and immense tapestry of human affairs, and this suffices to give gravity and urgency to our practice. This is what impels us to make practice the overarching quality our lives rather than simply making it another thing we do in our lives.

Regulatory precepts

Some precepts are not directly about harmlessness, for they prohibit actions that are not intrinsically harmful. A non-Buddhist example is the rule mandating that cars drive on the right side of the street in the U.S. and in many other countries. There is nothing intrinsically harmful in driving on the left side of the street; in fact, the British do it all the time. Rather, once everyone agrees to the same arbitrary rule, the rule produces a social benefit in improving the efficiency of traffic flow (it only then becomes hazardous to break it). Likewise, we have seen that monks observe a precept of not saving food offered today until tomorrow's meal. Again, there is nothing intrinsically harmful in saving food until tomorrow, and laypeople do it all the time. Rather the rule produces a social benefit in ensuring daily contact between lay and monastic and a forges a stronger bond of dependence of monastic on laity. It is itself a kind of traffic law.

Other precepts that are not directly about harmlessness, nor directly about social benefit, but rather serve in the task of developing purity of mind. An example of this is the following:

- I undertake the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, music or watching shows.

This precept is undertaken by novice monks and often supple-

ments the five standard precepts for laypeople on special occasions dedicated to Buddhist devotional or contemplative practice. It is also reflected in the code of fully ordained monks and nuns. There is nothing intrinsically harmful in not observing this precept (irksome boom boxes or blaring late night music aside). Rather it serves to restrain the senses and the practice of restraint of the senses is a key contributing factor to purification of mind, as we will see. If we have a daily meditation practice, for instance, and intersperse it with such activities as these, we will find it quite challenging to settle the mind properly in meditation.

Likewise, we have seen that the precept about alcohol is justified both in terms of purification – inebriation inhibits mindfulness – and at the same time in indirect terms of harmlessness – inebriation is commonly implicated in abusive relations, accidents and violence. Most precepts that have to do directly with harmlessness also, at the same time, serve purification of mind, as we will see in the next chapter.

The monastic life

We have referred to monastic and lay a number of times, particularly in the last chapter with respect to social roles that open up the practice of generosity and give it a communal basis. The reader might suspect that a Buddhist life is the domain of the lay person and the Buddhist path that of the monastic. This is not the case. Rather, monastic and lay are a matter of two tracks in the Buddhist life, where the Buddhist path has but one. The two tracks of the Buddhist life are distinguished in terms of the large number of additional precepts the monastic undertakes. It is therefore appropriate to discuss what constitutes the monastic life right here.

The monastic's life is a kind of enhanced (or pared down, depending on how we choose to look at it) form of Buddhist life. This enhanced form does tend to prepare the monastic for the Buddhist path much more thoroughly that the lay life does. As a result, monastics tend to navigate the Buddhist path with more facility than the lay person, but otherwise the path practices themselves are the same and there are no special practices or parts of the path reserved exclusively for monastics. The basis of the monastic life

is renunciation, and renunciation is enforced through precepts found in the *Vinaya*, the monastic code, in fact hundreds of them. For this reason we describe the monastic life in brief here.

The early scriptures report that there was among the Buddha's earliest disciples an unwritten understanding of what the conduct and deportment of a monastic should be, but then these were exceptional practitioners who were awakening right and left. As monastics of less exceptional talent began to ordain, they increasingly behaved in ways that went beyond the limits of this unwritten understanding. In response to such behaviors, the Buddha began mandating prohibitory precepts and continued doing so, along with amending existing precepts, for many years in a rather piecemeal way.

For instance, a certain monk was talked by his family into having sex with his former wife in order to perpetuate the family name, so the Buddha explicitly prohibited sexual intercourse. Another monk responded to justified constructive criticism by other monks in a vengeful way, so the Buddha introduced a precept that prohibited being difficult to admonish. Other monks accumulated so many robes that the Buddha asked if they were planning on opening a shop, so the Buddha put a limit on the number of robes a monk could possess. Other monks wore their permitted robes in such disarray that the Buddha became concerned about the implications of this for the reputation enjoyed by the entire *Saṅgha*, which was important to protect, not only to sustain the *Saṅgha*'s material needs, but to enable monastics to teach effectively. So the Buddha required that robes be worn even all around. Some of these are regarded as serious offenses, others as mere etiquette.

As a whole, only a relatively small set of monastic rules are directly about harmlessness. These correspond roughly to the five standard precepts, though they are more numerous and more detailed in their application. Other rules regulate interactions with laity and with other monastics with consequent social benefits. A particularly large proportion enforce renunciation. Renunciation includes restraint of the senses and an almost blanket prohibition of self-serving actions. The former category puts emphasis on disallowing sexual activity, which tends not only toward distraction from the holy life in itself but also toward responsibilities to spouse and newly spawned children.

The ban on self-serving actions is quite systematic in the Buddha's formulation and has strong implications for Buddhist practice. People are by nature needy and hateful creatures and generally this neediness and hatred is encouraged by the need for self-protection and self-enhancement. We chase after sensual pleasures, after fame, after power, after wealth, we compete for others for these, and we have aversion for anything or anyone that threatens us physically or tends to undermine what we chase after. Even the most pure Buddhist practice is compromised in a competitive environment, in the dog-eat-dog world, as soon as we are forced to the point of protecting our own interests. Students sometimes express a concern, with all this emphasis in Buddhism on selflessness, on non-harming, on kindness, that we open ourselves to others taking advantage of us. You bet we do. At some point we need to draw a line and push back at the world or at least stand firm.

This is, however, barely the case for monastics; they are not allowed, as long as they follow their precepts, to interface with the world in a conventional way. They might be internally greedy, but they have extremely limited ways of seeking sensual pleasures, fame, power or wealth and no way to push back at the world: they do not negotiate with the world, they do not even participate in exchanges. Although they might still have a self, it effectively serves no function, nor does it functionally serve any efficacy. How is this possible? Because the monastic cannot act on his or her own behalf, his or her well-being can only be secured by the laity. The monastic is the ward of the laity. The monastic can even mentally disappear into emptiness and know that the laypeople have a lifeline to draw him or her back at meal-time. The monastic lives in a very rarefied context offered by the Buddhist community which was designed to unleash to full potential of the Buddhist path.

The practice of harmlessness

Without the practice of refraining from evil, you quite likely might take more from the world than you give, harm others, maybe unspeakably, as you accrue personal material advantages. You might become ever more entrenched in reprobate behaviors as you act out your greed, hatred and delusion. Even as you prac-

tice with precepts, you are likely to struggle with needy and aversive impulses rooted in the central importance of a misperceived self that must navigate a harsh, competitive and often abusive world, at least until you are able to dispel the opposition of self and other that the recognition of *kammic* results undermines.

> Bad deeds, and deeds hurtful to ourselves, are easy to do; what is beneficial and good, that is very difficult to do. (Dpd 163)

All the while, you might imagine yourself as a good, sound person, in sharp contrast to the welfare cheats, terrorists, financial speculators and ignoble ruffians beyond your doors, yet holding your own so that your family might survive.

Taking on the precepts sincerely and with dedication can be a shock. It is often the first of the Buddhist life's landmark decisions, like choosing a spouse, career path or dog. Keep in mind that precepts are not imposed upon you; they are your choice. However, they are meaningless unless you yourself honor this decision with a sense of *vow* or commitment, dedication or devotion, with full awareness that, "*This will be the shape of my life.*" Vow is how you enter into all of Buddhist practice, step by step. Accordingly, like marriage vows, a public ceremony is appropriate to add gravity and the feeling of linking arms with like-minded people. Talk to your local teacher, monk/nun or priest about what support might exist for this.

In general, you probably want to commit to the five standard precepts listed above. I generally ask anyone who wants officially to become my student, after discussing the nature of their commitment, to formally accept the refuges to be discussed in chapter six, and to commit themselves to the eight *lifetime precepts*, which include the five standard precepts, but also proscribe harsh, malicious and useless speech, in addition to false speech, as a counterweight to some of the excesses our culture seems specifically to encourage. If you begin taking meditation retreats you may be expected to observe almost absolute silence, forgo all sexual activity (even flirtatious glances) and give up entertainments and self-beautification for the duration. Consider this an opportunity to push the precept envelope a bit.

Once committed, you might nonetheless find yourself wandering

over the bounds of certain precepts. Different people are challenged by different precepts and at different points. Your job is not to feel guilty, but to fully acknowledge each transgression and determine to do better in the future. Perfection is a high standard that often eludes mere humans and may even cause some a degree of remorse and anxiety that is inimical to practice. Sometimes it is appropriate to adhere to precepts by degrees. For instance, suppose you currently routinely enjoy some form of alcohol with friends or after work, and are either not yet convinced of the harm to yourself or others, or simply stuck in this routine. Initially, you might limit your intake to one beer, or two, but if you consistently acknowledge that you are overstepping a precept, you will probably find you can progressively tighten your limit and, at some point, will give up alcohol altogether. In fact, this was my experience in my early days of Buddhist practice. Just let your acknowledgement be an opportunity for reflection on the purpose of the precept and that alone will tend to wear away your reluctance to follow it.

Your observance of precepts will be challenged from two directions: your mind and social circumstances. In following precepts, you cannot help but confront the mind; you may find yourself repeatedly sitting on the fence between what your mind demands and what the precepts ask of you. Many of us start Buddhist practice with little awareness of our own minds, so you do well to take this opportunity to investigate your mind as a preparation for the practice of purifying the mind. We find that sometimes the confrontation involves immediate impulses that follow familiar habit patterns, such as the impulse to flirt with someone other than our own spouse, or the impulse to overcharge customers. As you follow or (in particular) break a precept, try to become aware of the countervailing impulses. This is the beginning of developing purity of mind, discussed in the next chapter.

In following precepts, you probably also confront social circumstances (in this, monastics generally enjoy a great deal more liberty). Your livelihood is likely to be particularly prominent in this regard. For instance, if you interact with customers, you may be required, as a condition for employment, to stretch the truth a bit, “That dress looks, uh, *great* on you,” or to cook the books, to set mouse traps and so on. I recommend that you evaluate the ethics of your job very carefully, and change profession if appropriate

and feasible, realizing this may be all but impossible, since today we have whole industries founded on the shards of broken precepts. It may be difficult to find an honorable occupation and still be able to support a family. Aside from this, you should closely evaluate any personal agendas you might have and what future actions they might entail that violate precepts. For instance, a plan to secure a promotion at work, might entail controlling who in authority knows what, and accordingly result in telling lies to cover up or alter inconvenient truths. Precept practice has a way of breaking up personal agendas.

Further reading

Being Upright: Zen Meditation and the Bodhisattva Precepts by Reb Anderson, 2000, Rodmell Press. A lively discussion of precepts and refuges by a remarkable American Zen master.

The Bhikkhus' Rules: a Guide for Laypeople by Bhikkhu Ariyesako, 1999, available from AccesstoInsight.org, and occasionally in hardcopy distribution. This provides an excellent overview of the range of precepts that define the monastic life, organized by topic.

Rebirth as Doctrine and Experience: Essays and Case Studies by Francis Story, 1975, Buddhist Publication Society. This gives a readable discussion of the teachings on rebirth. Interesting are case studies based on early childhood memories of the kind documented very thoroughly by Ian Stevenson and his associates.

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1 I use *kammic* as the adjectival form of *kamma*. When spoken, care should be taken not to pronounce it like the English word "comic," which occurs in many of the same contexts, such as "comic actions" or "comic results." Note that the double "m" in Pali is actually held longer than "m" in English. Accordingly, I advise holding the "m" to avoid comic results.

2 Bodhi (1987).

3 Readers who would like to explore the topic of rebirth further are encouraged to start with Story (1975), Nagapriya (2004), and Stevenson (2000). Stevenson documented and thoroughly researched thousands of case stud-

ies of early childhood memories during his long career, some of which are quite astonishing. The book referenced is the most readable introduction to his method, but the most convincing cases are found in his more academic writings.

4. Purity

*Well-makers direct the w*ater*;*
Fletchers bend the arrow.
Carpenters bend a piece of wood.
Good people fashion themselves. (Dhp 145)

Our actions, for harm or benefit, arise first in the mind, as thoughts with certain intentionality behind them. For most of us, as we attempt to refrain from evil and accomplish good, the mind is often contrary and unsupportive, agitated and rebellious, intent on another, generally selfish, agenda. As a result, following the precepts and practicing generosity is often a struggle. Occasionally, however, we may experience the enormous joy when mind and body come into full alignment and our most virtuous intentions flow effortlessly into actions harmless and beneficial. This is a moment of purity of mind. There are those noble ones among us who experience life like this all of the time. The mind for them has become an instrument of virtue, of kindness and of compassion, of wisdom and of strength. They have become adepts in virtue through the practice of purifying the mind, and so walk the earth with unbounded goodwill, equanimity and wisdom, selfless, beyond delusional views, with clarity about what is of harm and what of benefit. They are, by the *kammic* way, also the happiest and most fulfilled among us.

Purifying the mind begins with the practices of refraining from evil and practicing good, but also to a significant degree it takes on a life of its own and in the end floods the practices of refraining from evil and practicing good with pure intentions.

Wholesome and unwholesome thoughts

The basic principle of purifying the mind is expressed in the first two verses of the *Dhammapāda* as follows:

> 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.
> (Dhp 1-2)

The practice of purifying the mind belongs to what is called in Western philosophy *virtue ethics*, ethics as a quality of character rather than as consequences in the world. Its motivating principle is *renunciation*, the putting aside of concern for personal advantage. Purifying the mind places the emphasis of ethics on the development of the kind of mind that naturally seeks benefit and shuns harm.

Training the mind toward virtue might, at first, seem like a hopeless task. Most of us have a lot of endless activity rattling and buzzing around between our ears, and it is not clear how it might be brought into any reasonable order, much less under control:

> "Hubba hubba." "That jerk!" "Out of my way!" "It's his own fault." "Oh boy! Beer!!" "Aha!" "There, there now; let me get you a paper towel." "If I slide my sunglasses up my forehead I'll look really cool!" "Good Morning, God!" "Arrrrgh." "Yaaawn." "What th..., huh?" "I'm gonna get even!" "Good God: Morning!" "Yikes!" "Yakity yakity yak." "Relaaaaaax." "Tomorrow … is another day!" "Let's be logical about this." "Mine, all mine! Haha." "No more … Mr. Nice Guy!"

How do we sort through this, much less point it in the general direction of virtue? Exactly what is a *pure* thought as opposed to a *corrupted* thought anyway? Can we actually get rid of one and keep the other so that *happiness* will follow like a shadow, in-

stead of *pain* like a wheel? The Buddha reports that he had begun with such questions early on:

> Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened *bodhisatta*, it occurred to me, "Suppose that I divide my thoughts into two classes." Then I set on one side thoughts of sensual desire, thoughts of ill will, and thoughts of cruelty, and I set on the other side thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of kindness and thoughts of nonharming. (MN 19)

Notice that the thoughts on the second side – renunciation, kindness and nonharming – are the motivating principles for purity, generosity and harmlessness, respectively.

The Buddha called the first class of thoughts *unwholesome* or *unskillful* (*akusala*) and the second class *wholesome* or *skillful* (*kusala*). Both wholesome and skillful are common translations of the Pali *kusala* and should be understood as synonyms, as should their negative counterparts. Wholesome thoughts have the intentional quality of meritorious deeds. Unwholesome thoughts have the intentional quality of demeritorious deeds. Wholesome (*kusala*) and meritorious (*puñña*) (or unwholesome and demeritorious) are interchangeable in most contexts, except that "wholesome" is more generally used for a mental intention and "meritorious" for the wholesome physical or verbal action that that intention gives rise to. It is significant that the Buddha chose terminology suggestive of skill, which – like tennis or crossword puzzles – is something we get better at with practice, rather than of moral judgment.

For instance, among the thoughts identified as unskillful are restlessness, agitation, conceit, jealousy, guilt, pride, cynicism, greed, miserliness, thoughts of revenge, spite, envy, grumpiness, ill-will, anger, hate, rage, sorrow, fear, bias, delusion, stubbornness, narrow-mindedness, torpor, complacency, affection, and lust. Among those identified as skillful are generosity, renunciation, kindness, compassion, patience, intelligence, discernment, shame, rectitude, mindfulness, concentration, equanimity, pliancy, buoyancy, conviction, open-mindedness, composure, proficiency and gladness for the good fortune of others.

Greed, hatred and delusion

What criteria did the Buddha employ to create this dichotomy? Unless we understand this, we will never thoroughly understand the role of skill and non-skill in our own mind, we will continue to be driven by forces we do not understand, we will cause great harm, and we will never find satisfaction in our life. The Buddha discovered that several criteria coincide remarkably in the designations skillful and unskillful.

> There are these three roots of what is unskillful. Which three? *Greed* as a root of what is unskillful, *hatred* as a root of what is unskillful, *delusion* as a root of what is unskillful. These are the three roots of what is unskillful. (Iti 3.1)

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

Greed (*lobha*) is the desire, longing, attachment or lust for sensual pleasures, for reputation or fame, for wealth, for power, for comfort, for security and so on. I would prefer to translate *lobha* as the more general "neediness," but "greed" has become standard in English. Greed causes anxiety and restlessness, initially from not having what we desire, then later, if we have acquired what we desire, from knowing we will lose it, or from simply wanting more.

Hatred (*dosa*) is the aversion, dislike, dread or fear of pain, of discomfort, of enemies and so on. It includes thoughts of anger, revenge, envy or jealousy (these last two also have an element of greed), resentment, guilt, self-hate, disdain, judgmental attitudes and so on. "Aversion" is probably a better translation for *dosa,* though "hate" or "hatred" has become standard. Hatred immediately manifests as anxiety and restlessness, in short, suffering, because it entails dissatisfaction with the world as it is. Typically it arises when our desires are thwarted or threatened and in this way is intimately bound to greed. Both are forms of craving, greed for the presence of something, hatred for its absence.

Delusion (*moha*) is found in erroneous views or justifications, misperceptions, ignorance and denial. Many of our delusions may be widely held beliefs in a given society, or even across cultures,

for instance, that material abundance produces happiness, that unconditionally evil people walk among us, or that one race or class is the master of others. These lead to endemically misguided decisions and actions. Others are often pervasive across cultures, manifesting particularly in the sense that certain things are unchanging, fixed or reliable, and that there is fun, happiness and beauty where in fact there is decay and suffering. The greatest delusion for the early Buddhist is that there is an abiding self, a "me," that in some way remains fixed in spite of all the changes that happen all around it, that is also the owner and controller of this body and this mind. We will learn a lot more about this last delusion in *Book Two: Buddhist Path*. For the Buddha, delusion is the most dangerous of the three unwholesome roots.

> But there is a taint worse than all taints: delusion is the greatest taint. Bhikkhus, throw off that taint, and become taintless! (Dhp 243)

The root of delusion is also the basis of the other two roots. In fact, the delusional sense of self is the ultimate source of it all that ails us and the basis of our resistance to ethical conduct. Greed and hatred have their basis in the sense of self, which tends to take things personally, in a self-centered way.

This relation of delusion to greed and hatred is also reciprocal. The Buddha observed:

> Greed, hatred and delusion, friend, make one blind, unseeing and ignorant; they destroy wisdom, are bound up with distress, and do not lead to *nibbāna*. (AN 3.71)

Here we see that the arising of any of these is tied up with misperception, that is, they distort reality thus producing delusion for those under their influence. They also cause personal suffering. *Suffering* (*dukkha*) is a key concept in Buddhism. The Pali word has also been translated into English as "stress" or "dissatisfaction," and in any case ranges from the slightest feeling that something is out of kilter to the worst mental or physical anguish. "Suffering" is the standard translation for the Pali *dukkha*.

The second of the *four noble truths* (e.g., SN 56.11), that craving is the origin of suffering, should also be mentioned here, since greed is a kind of craving for the presence of something, and hatred for its absence. We will look at the doctrine of the four noble

truths in *Book Two,* for the Buddhist path centers around it.

Let's take anger, one of the great fountainheads of *kammic* intentions, as an example of the dangers of greed, hatred and delusion. Perceived through angry eyes, the object of our anger, even a close friend or family member, easily appears as a jerk or a schmuck if not a demon, that, when the anger subsides, will remorph back into its normal more amiable form. The level of *dukkha* associated with the arising of even slight anger is astonishing when mindfully observed, and great anger plunges us into a hell-like state right here and now. 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.

The Buddha also discovered that an unwholesome or unskillful thought ...

> … leads to my own affliction, to others' affliction and to the affliction of both; it obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties, and leads away from *nibbāna*. (MN 19)

This reiterates the suffering, misperception of reality and crippling of progress on the Buddhist path associated with the unwholesome, and adds to it the inflicting of harm on others. Harm naturally results when greed, hatred or delusion forms the volitional basis of our *kammic* acts. Consider how often violence or dangerous behavior, such as reckless driving, arises from anger, or how our anger leads to fear in others. On the other hand, skillful thoughts bring proportionate success to the practices of refraining from all evil and accomplishing good.

There are two reasons why greed, hatred and delusion lead to harm for others: First, we misperceive reality under the influence of greed or hatred; our actions are like driving with a frosty windshield. We may vaguely make out our ignoble goals through the icy film, but we don't know whom we might be running over as we head toward those goals. As we have seen, it is difficult enough to track consequences of actions into the future even when we see the present reasonably clearly.

Second, the self-centered basis of greed, hatred and delusion po-

tentially makes us willing to sacrifice the well-being of others in favor of the perceived well-being of ourselves. These unskillful thoughts tend to stand in constant opposition to our practice of generosity and harmlessness.

We can summarize the Buddha's observations just discussed in terms of the following handy checklist:

Unwholesome or unskillful thoughts:

(1) They are grounded either in greed, in hatred or in delusion.

(2) When they give rise to actions, those actions generally cause some degree of harm.

(3) They give rise to misperception.

(4) They cause personal suffering.

(5) They retard development on the path to *nibbāna*.

Wholesome or skillful thoughts lack these qualities.

Fruits of kamma

Notice that the last two characteristics of the unwholesome, that is, suffering and retarded development, lend support to the familiar saying:

> Virtue is its own reward.

As long as we act with unskillful intentions, we suffer. Moreover, since we also fail to make progress and, in fact, regress on the path, we sacrifice the future well-being enjoyed by those of advanced spiritual attainment, for when we repeatedly weaken the habit patterns that trigger skillful thoughts and strengthen the habit patterns that trigger unskillful thoughts, we ensure greater suffering in the future as well. The Buddha describes this process of strengthening habit patterns:

> Whatever a monk keeps pursuing with his thinking and pondering, that becomes the inclination of his awareness. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with sensual-

> ity, abandoning thinking imbued with renunciation, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with sensuality. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with ill-will, abandoning thinking imbued with non-ill-will, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with ill will. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with harmfulness, abandoning thinking imbued with harmlessness, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with harmfulness. (MN 19)

By the way, the reader should never feel excluded from the Buddha's instructions specifically addressed to monks for lack of robes nor head of hair. This usage simply reflects the circumstance that most of the time his audience was monastic (certainly nuns would also have been included on many of these occasions). He said himself that he did not "teach with a closed fist," that is, he had no esoteric teachings reserved for the few.

In short, when we act with unskillful intentions, we suffer twice, first, immediately and, secondly, through the replaying of the habit patterns that thereby accrue. The Buddha's psychological observations are in accord with what was said in the last chapter about the *fruits of kamma:*

> Whatever I do, for good or evil, to that I will fall heir. (AN 5.57)

Recall that while we make the world through our actions, we also make ourselves. While we perform virtuous actions, we become virtuous people. While we perform beastly actions we become cads. We therefore expect merit-making or good *kamma* to adhere to the *intentions* (wholesome or unwholesome mental actions) behind our actions more directly than to the particular physical actions themselves.

Purity of mind in this way deepens as we practice generosity and harmlessness with pure intentions, and as a result we suffer less and we make progress in our practice on the way toward *nibbāna*. An act of generosity or harmlessness is an act of body or of speech. The Buddha tells us there are *three* kinds of volitional actions or *kamma*, those of *body*, those of *speech* and those of *mind*. In the first two our intentions are acted out externally in the world. An act of mind, on the other hand, in

itself lacks bodily or verbal expression, yet still has intention behind it. For instance, we can harbor ill-will … or kindness through thought alone.

Acts of mind are important in our practice because they can be used to cultivate purity directly and efficiently independently of bodily action or speech. Mindfulness and concentration practices while sitting on a meditation cushion are primary examples, which we will look at in detail as part of the Buddhist path. Indeed, these mental exercises have ethical value, even while producing no direct harm or benefit to others, because they result in greater purity of mind as a growing inclination toward wholesome intentions, and that greater purity eventually produces benefit and reduces harm. Cultivating the mind in this way is something like tuning a running engine without actually shifting it into gear. The car does not move during the tune-up, but it will drive much more smoothly after the tune-up.

Sensual passions

Let's take *lust* or sensual passion (*rāga*) as another example of an unwholesome mental factor. Along-side anger, lust is another major fountainhead of human intentionality. Although we tend to think of lust in western culture as a positive factor in our lives (unlike anger), in terms of the five factors listed above, we readily discover otherwise.

(1) Lust is grounded in greed, that is, in neediness.

(2) Lust also tends toward harm.

For instance, stealing is often a result of lust, including stealing someone’s man or someone’s woman. Often lust is even consciously self-destructive: people sacrifice physical health out of lust for food, drink, cigarettes, hang gliding and so on, and sacrifice mental health out of lust for electronic entertainment, drugs and so on. People are often propelled by lust from one unhealthy and unhappy sexual relationship to another.

(3) We lose wisdom under the spell of lust.

Sometimes we sacrifice careers and marriages as well as health in the hopes that "love will find a way." When the object of lust is not attained or is lost, depression, and even suicide or murder can result.

(4) Lust is always at least a bit painful.

Sometimes it is so painful we can hardly stand it. It often flares up into a fever of longing. Relief is possible if the object of lust is realized, but otherwise lust may lead to bitter disappointment, itself a kind of aversion or hatred.

(5) Finally, lust diverts us from the path to awakening.

It agitates the mind, obstructing stillness and other skillful factors. It easily spins out other unskillful thoughts such as anger, jealousy, and greed for various means needed for satisfying lust, such as those sporty clothes or that sexy sports car. It easily becomes ingrained as unskillful habit patterns, that is, addictions.

This is quite an indictment against lust, one that the Buddha makes repeatedly. Why, then, do most of us tend to think of lust as something positive? I think it is because we confuse *lust* with *pleasure*. Lust seeks pleasure, and pleasure tends to evoke lust for more of the same, or for an escalation of pleasure. Together they are commonly bound in an intimate cycle of mutual conditionality, and are thereby mistakenly identified with one another. However, the two are quite distinct: lust is painful, pleasure is, uh, pleasurable. Addiction is when this cycle spins out of control. The failure to properly understand the cycle of lust and pleasure, and to recognize which is which, has miswritten many lives, and even the histories of nations. The Buddha warns us,

> There is no satisfying lust, even by a shower of gold pieces. He who knows that lusts have a short taste and cause pain, he is wise; Even in heavenly pleasures he finds no satisfaction, the disciple who is fully awakened delights only in the destruction of all desires. (Dhp 186-7)

Caught up in such a cycle of pleasure and pain, we imagine we are having … fun. Worth investigating is the question, How much of our "fun" is pleasure and how much of it is pain? The answer may surprise us.

Renunciation

Our job at this point is to become fully aware in our own experience of the nature of lust, and particularly of the dangers it brings. This tends to go against the grain of commonplace and commonsense attitudes about lust. Aren't the passions the spice of life? Isn't it better to have loved and lost rather than never to have loved at all? Isn't life drab and aimless without the quest for sensual pleasures? Are we to renounce all that? In fact, we are in good company in these considerations. The Buddha-to-be entertained similar considerations:

> Even I myself, before my awakening, when I was still an unawakened bodhisatta, thought: "Renunciation is good. Seclusion is good." But my heart didn't leap up at renunciation, didn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace. The thought occurred to me: "What is the cause, what is the reason, why my heart doesn't leap up at renunciation, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace?" Then the thought occurred to me: "I haven't seen the drawback of sensual pleasures; I haven't pursued it. I haven't understood the reward of renunciation; I haven't familiarized myself with it. That's why my heart doesn't leap up at renunciation, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace." (AN 9.41)

We do well to follow his example. Notice that the point, at least at this stage, is not to squelch sensual passions, but to understand them and see how they get us into trouble. In fact, this is what is described in the next two steps in the gradual instruction that we are tracing through in this exposition of the Buddhist life:

(Buddhist Life)

- …
- The drawbacks, degradation and corruption of sensual passions.
- The rewards of renunciation.
- …

When lust arises, this is an opportunity for investigation. When we act out of lust, this is another opportunity. The unfolding of consequences upon acting out of lust provides yet another opportunity. The re-arising of lust in association with this unfolding provides still another opportunity for investigating the drawbacks, degradation and corruption of sensual passions.

At the same time, we do well to contrast these qualities of sensual pleasures with those pleasures that arise rather independently of lust, including the sublime pleasure of generosity practiced with purest intentions as described in the second chapter. The primary example referred to by the Buddha of supramundane pleasures are those that arise through meditation (*samādhi* or *jhāna*), which we will discuss when we take up the Buddhist path. In this way, we come to understand the rewards of renunciation. In fact, the passage just cited about the unawakened *Bodhisatta* goes on to contrast worldly (lust-entangled) pleasures with the supramundane pleasure found in the states of meditation, along with the need to set worldly pleasures aside, at least temporarily, in order to enter into a meditative state. In this way we discover that the pleasure of those meditative states has a much more profound and purer quality than mere worldly pleasures. Giving up worldly pleasures for the supramundane pleasures is a good trade.

Renunciation (*nikkhamana*) takes this understanding of drawback of sensual passions a step further by avoiding them. A primary way to practice this is through *sense restraint* (*indriya-saṃvara*) or *guarding of sense faculties* (*indriyānaṃ gutti*), whereby we avoid the sensual contact that gives rise to passion in the first place.

> On seeing a form with the eye, do not grasp at any theme or details by which, if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye, evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Guard the faculty of the eye. Secure your restraint with regard to the faculty of the eye. (SN 35.199)

This is a challenging practice which can be implemented

gradually by becoming progressively less self-indulgent. In this way we live our lives less on the basis of sensual pleasure with its attendant suffering, and more on the basis of supramundane pleasure without concomitant suffering. Another of the many functions of the monastic community is to embody this kind of practice. Monastics are in principle renunciates and observably on average the most joyful members of a Buddhist community. Their presence in the community provides a reality check for the more profligate members of the community, supplementing the inner work of studying drawbacks and rewards as described here. With them in our midst, we begin to realize the futility of finding lasting happiness in sensual pleasures.

In practice, renunciation can also occur quite naturally, almost without notice, without squelching anything. Through careful investigation of the drawbacks of passion, one experiences, in one area of human affairs or another, *dispassion* (*virāga*), which is much like to losing interest in childhood toys in favor of more adult things as we grow older. In fact, we might think of the goal of Buddhist practice as that of growing up, of becoming adults in a more profound way than we might have imagined. A fully awakened being has no regard whatever for sensual passions, but enjoys the constant bliss of supramundane serenity. Such is the aim of renunciation.

Further progress in purity, renunciation and dispassion is significantly what the Buddhist path is all about. We will see in *Book Two* that there are points at which we will get stuck along the path, largely related to recalcitrant delusional conceptualizations that need to be broken down through very refined practices. This is why the Buddha also gave us a noble eightfold path and a very sophisticated understanding of human psychology. Walking the Buddhist path for the most part extends the practice of purity, and awakening perfects it.

Abode of the gods

Purity is generally associated with abandonment and renunciation of the unwholesome and the worldly, which thereby draw in the wholesome and the unworldy to fill the vacuum. There are also practices that directly develop wholesome and supramundane

qualities, which thereby push out what is unwholesome and worldly. The *brahmavihāras* are virtues that we try to encourage in Buddhist practice. They are almost always known by their Pali name, which means "abodes of the *Brahma* gods." The *brahmavihāras* have ethical implications and can be developed as an aspect of purity at an early stage through reflection and simple visualizations. They are four in number:

- Kindness (*mettā*),
- Compassion (*karuṇā*),
- Gladness (*muditā*),
- Impartiality (*upekkhā*).

Kindness is the root virtue here. We have already encountered it as the basis of generosity and the opposite of ill-will or hatred. Kindness is found close to home in the affection we feel for family and friends. However, in Buddhism we encourage a kind of kindness that extends far beyond our realm of self-interest in that it embraces also those toward whom we would otherwise feel indifferent, and then, further, those for whom we would otherwise feel animosity.

Compassion and *gladness* are manifestations of kindness, compassion in relation to those who suffer bad fortune, and gladness in relation to those who experience good fortune. Compassion is a primary motivator to relieve the suffering of other, for instance, by feeding the hungry and rescuing the vulnerable.

"Gladness" is a poor translation of a word that has no equivalent in English. It is often translated as "appreciative joy," which I find no clearer. The best way to describe it is as the opposite of envy or jealousy. For instance, if our neighbor puts in a new swimming pool, wins the lottery or purchases a new BMW, many of us experience envy, a form of hatred. We think, "That should be me!" The exceptional among us are glad for our neighbor and enjoy her good fortune. That's gladness.

Equanimity perfects the other *brahmavihāras* ensuring impar-

tiality. This means that the other virtues cover everyone – like rain that falls on goody-goodies and scoundrels alike – but also that the emotive elements that often accompany the other three *brahmavihāras* are absent, rendering us unattached to the outcomes of the actions they inspire, lest we become frustrated when our compassionate or kind actions fail to achieve their intended results. With equanimity we can engage in compassionate action without the burnout that the word *compassion* (suffering along) suggests. In fact, the *brahmavihāras* become ornaments of the mind, sources of supramundane joy.

The *brahmavihāras* are often practiced through meditative visualization techniques, with special emphasis on developing kindness (*mettā*), for instance, by imagining that we are extending kindness in all directions to an ever widening circle of beings.

The practice of purity

I hope none of this discussion evokes images of goose-stepping thought police in the minds of readers. In fact, if you have entered into the practices of generosity and harmlessness, you have inevitably already stepped into the practice of purifying the mind. This is because you are forced to confront volitional impulses wherever they tend toward harm or away from benefit. Every time you override a contrary mental factor in order to adhere to a precept, you are deconditioning an existing unskillful habit pattern and thereby purifying the mind. Every time kindness or generosity inspires your good deeds, you are strengthening your tendency in that direction, and thereby purifying the mind. Even mixed motives, such as responding to peer or authority pressure, or just a sense of obligation in the absence of kindness, have a way of eventually giving way to purer motives.

For instance, recall the precept not to kill living beings. Maybe you do not initially understand why the life of an ugly twiddle bug matters one snippet, but a twiddle bug is a living being, and you want to be a good Buddhist, so you don't kill twiddle bugs. After a few months you will discover something that was not there before: a warm heart with regard to twiddle bugs; they will have become your little friends. And you will find that this result generalizes to other ugly beings as well, and even to certain peo-

ple that you had once put into the same category with twiddle bugs. Your mind has become purer. Try it! Put away the bug swatter and the Twiddle-Enhanced® Raid and see if you don't soften right up.

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. A precept against idle chatter, for instance, is rather victimless, especially given that cases in which it spills into disparagement of others are covered by other precepts concerning speech. Nonetheless, if you refrain from idle chatter over many months you will discover a quieter mind, less prone to proliferation of spurious thought and therefore less prone to delusion. You will have, through observing this precept, made the mind purer.[1] The non-ethics-based precepts develop purity of mind in much the way as ethical precepts but they just don't happen to avert immediate harm for others.

Just as precepts and other physical practices define habit patterns that over time purify the mind, existing habit patterns that characterize your lifestyle may inadvertently *depurify* the mind. You do well to avoid those. A rather complex precept, commonly observed by laypeople every quarter moon, and by monastics always, is the following:

> I undertake the rule of training to refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, smartening with perfumes and beautifying with cosmetics.

These are activities that would turn the mind toward lust and pride. Similarly, 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. Channel or Web surfing will turn the mind toward restlessness and discontent. Entertainments that excite lust will tend similarly to depurify the mind, even while doing no outward harm. You do well to moderate such habitual activities. Today we are awash in the playing out of unskillful habit patterns associated with the ubiquity of electronic media, so that the process of sensual restraint is even more challenging, but even more appropriate, than ever before. In summary, there are

kinds of bodily or verbal actions that have few immediate consequences in terms of benefit or harm to the world, yet carry *kammic* fruits insofar as they condition the mind toward decreasing skillfulness.

Moreover, merit-making asks of you that you constantly monitor your intentions. For the gregarious minglers and mixers among us it may be the first introspective encounter with the inner, subjective world, generally extolled in Asian cultures, while Western cultures praise the outwardly directed individual, quick of response and versatile of task.

At the same time that you note your basic intentions, you should notice when discomfort, such as stress or anxiety, arise – this is suffering – as well as the moments of satisfaction and joy that come with benefiting others. How is this satisfaction and joy different from the pleasure of buying new clothes, say, or an new electronic gadget?

You should observe when greed or neediness or lust arises, when hatred or aversion or fear arises. At what point do you feel satisfaction as you pursue sensual pleasures?

You should observe when you fall into the cycle of lust and pleasure and ask how much suffering there is in that cycle, particularly the anxiety of anticipation, relative to actual pleasure. When you might be experiencing pleasure, are you instead already lusting after the next potential pleasure?

You should observe delusion in the excuses and rationalizations you probably fabricate, if you are like most people, to explain your actions. These are delusive acts of mental *kamma* that have their own intentions behind them; look at these. With the observation of your own suffering and pleasure along with your intentional impulses insight into the human condition will arise.

Shifting topics, I highly recommend that you begin a regular meditation practice at this point if you do not already have one. Following the breath, or any of what in the Theravada traditions is known as *samatha* (*tranquility*) or *absorption* meditation is highly recommended. This can be a Yoga meditation instead of a specifically Buddhist form of meditation. Buddhist meditation is an advanced topic, not discussed until

chapter ten of this book, that builds on many prerequisite practices. However, a general meditation practice will bring immediate benefits, including:

(1) Meditation will take the edge off the hectic flash and dazzle and anxious ebb and flow of modern life, and settle the mind in a way that comes more naturally in simpler societies. You will find it therapeutic.

(2) With the serenity you achieve in meditation, you will find that the mind slows down, thoughts are fewer even off the cushion, and the introspective world becomes more accessible. This is a boon for practicing purity of mind.

(3) You will probably begin to experience, as your practice deepens, the supramundane pleasure of the meditative states discussed above, and even learn to enter them at will. This will give a better appreciation of the rewards of renunciation.

(4) You will be in a better position to take up the Buddha's more specialized techniques that turn meditation into a refined tool for generating insight, beyond the more general function of producing serenity.

Resources for simple meditation instruction abound and its practice can be very enjoyable and rewarding.

Further reading

“Trading Candy for Gold: Renunciation as a Skill” by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1999, found in *Noble Strategy*, Metta Forest Monastery, also accesstoinsight.org. This discusses many of the themes of this chapter and focuses on the difference between worldly and supramundane pleasures.

The Four Sublime States: Contemplations on Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity by Nyanaponika Thera, 1993, Buddhist Publication Society, Wheel #6. This offers more details by a German monk on the *brahmavihāras*.

1 Similarly, there have traditionally been practices in which accomplishing good is *enacted* but not actualized – such as making food offerings to an inert and definitely not hungry Buddha statue – that serve to develop generosity and reverence and are found in virtually every later Buddhist tradition, but also quite make sense from the perspective of early Buddhism.

5. Harmony

> *… although they wish to live without hatred, harming, hostility or malignity, and in peace, they yet live in hatred, harming one another, hostile and malign …* (DN 21)

We are a social species; we live in relationship to others, occupy social roles and obligations and are in constant negotiation with one another. But our interpersonal and communal lives are all too often marked by discord, ruffled feathers, infighting, argument, insult, exploitation, violence and war.

At the same time, it is substantially within the realm of interpersonal and communal relations that the practices of generosity, harmlessness and purity of mind that we have discussed in previous chapters play out. As we perfect our generosity, our harmlessness and our purity, our relationship with our fellow social beings improves. We treat them with more kindness and compassion, we take care not to step on their toes nor harm nor insult them, and we do what we can to help them rather than to exploit them. Imagine what the world would be like if *everyone* developed in this way!

Nevertheless, the interpersonal/communal realm has its own peculiarities and pitfalls that most of us are slow to master. We get stuck. Fortunately, the Buddha has given us abundant wise advice about these. That is the topic of this chapter.

Be careful of what you say

A primary conditioning factor of interpersonal and communal harmony or disharmony is how skillfully we wield the instrument of speech. The Buddha has a lot to say about this skill; we will

see later that one of the eight factors of the Buddhist Path is right speech, which in particular opposes *false*, *harsh*, *divisive* and *frivolous* speech. Here are the primary requisites for speaking skillfully in a nutshell:

> Bhikkhus, possessing five factors, speech is well spoken, not badly spoken; it is blameless and beyond reproach by the wise. What five?
>
> 1. It is spoken at the proper time;
> 2. what is said is true;
> 3. it is spoken gently;
> 4. what is said is beneficial;
> 5. it is spoken with a mind of kindness.
>
> Possessing these five factors speech is well spoken, not badly spoken; it is blameless and beyond reproach by the wise. (AN 5.198)

We notice all three systems of ethics intersect here, for avoiding harm, producing beneficial consequences and checking the purity of one's intentions all come into play. Furthermore, finding the right time and speaking gently harmonize with the delicate nature of human sensitivities. Notice, also, that truthfulness is a necessary, but not in itself sufficient, basis for speech. Our job is not to shine light in every dark corner (except in our own minds).

For instance, a common, and one of the most awkward, social situations arises when there is need to reproach someone for doing something felt to be inappropriate or harmful – someone is stepping on our foot, for example, or has failed to complete an agreed task – and to do this out of kindness, without causing offense and in such away that the proffered advice is actually usefully accepted. Considering the right time takes note of such things as whether the person to be admonished is now in a good or receptive mood. Sometimes a bit of friendly small-talk will serve to set the mood before the topic is broached, "It's good to see a familiar face. By the way, can I give you some advice based on my own years of experience on that project you are doing otherwise so splendidly?"

Nonetheless, many people are difficult to admonish, easily of-

fended and ready to fly off the handle no matter how skillfully we present the situation. If no benefit is likely to accrue, then discretion suggests saying nothing, thereby cutting our losses and preserving harmony.

Significantly, the monastic code includes a rather important precept[1] that *prohibits* monks or nuns from being *difficult* to admonish, for instance, from being argumentative or conjuring up counter-admonitions. Our practice typically makes us more thick-skinned and our egos less easily bruised, so that we begin to see admonishment as advice rather than personal attack. Nonetheless, most other people will remain quite fragile.

One of the greatest dangers to communal harmony that the Buddha warns us about is speaking *divisively*. Rather than attempting to admonish someone for his perceived errors, this person speaks about them to others, generally in their absence, whether truthfully or falsely. Unfortunately, once unleashed, such speech is often repeated with little deliberation by others and may even go viral.

> Having heard something here, he repeats it elsewhere in order to divide [those people] from these; or having heard something elsewhere he repeats it to these people in order to divide [them] from these. Thus he is one who divides those who are united, a creator of divisions, one who enjoys factions, delights in factions, a speaker of words that create factions. (AN 10.176)

Divisive speech may target individual people or entire groups of people. It can occur quite frivolously, often as an attempt at humor or wit. Or it can be used as a way of building countervailing group solidarity. Many people routinely speak ill of others in an attempt to build self-esteem or to reassure themselves of their own righteousness. Increasingly, particularly with the rise of mass communications, it arises deliberately and with great precision, spreading half-truths or total fabrications as a way of controlling whole populations. Consider that racism and ethnic cleansing begin with divisive speech and colonial empires could not have been built without the policy of "divide and conquer." Divisive speech is poison to both large societies and small communities. It undermines our trust in the targeted people and populations and ultimately undermines our trust in each other. We

should take great care not to divide with our speech, nor to repeat divisive speech we have heard elsewhere. Even if it happens to be true, the potential for harm in communicating to those of ignoble intent can be great.

The error of retribution

Much of natural human behavior is based on reciprocation. Friendship is reciprocated, our economy is based on the principle of mutually agreeable exchange. It is not surprising that our natural response when someone harms us is retaliation. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," is a pervasive ethic to this day. Much of American criminal justice, not to mention foreign policy, is based on retaliation.

Nonetheless, Buddhist ethics is different. Recall that generosity is not pure if some kind of payback is expected, and an equal exchange is two missed opportunities for merit-making. Harmlessness is practiced toward all living things across the board, just as the mental qualities of renunciation and kindness are not selective.[2] We don't exclude some as not "deserving" the benefit of our pure intentions. This makes our practice simple: our job is to embody generosity, harmlessness and kindness toward all others in all circumstances, regardless of how *they* behave. Their practice is their own, ours is our own; we cannot do it for them. The closest we can come is to inspire them through our example.

The *Dhammapāda* wisely states in this regard:

> Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world.
> By kindness alone is hatred appeased.
> This is a law eternal. (Dhp 5)

Hatred is both cause and result of abuse. Where hatred is aflame, bringing more hatred to bear only adds fuel to the fire. Yet this is how foolish people almost invariably think and behave. Kindness is that which seeks benefit and is therefore most capable of correcting disharmony.

> He practices for the welfare of both,
> His own and the other's,
> When, knowing that his foe is angry,
> He mindfully maintains his peace. (SN 11.4, SN 7.2)

The famous simile of the saw presents one of the strikingly gruesome of the Buddha's images. Through this vivid image the Buddha challenges us to give up the error of retribution even under the most challenging circumstances.

> Monks, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hatred towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. (MN 21)

We should, in brief, do everything we can in our effort to maintain harmony even in the most adverse conditions.

Anger, a kind of hatred, is our great retributive emotion and one of the primary and most immediate conditions of disharmony. There is no wisdom in anger; it knows only one thing. Yet many of us are so afflicted by anger that ridding ourselves of its grip becomes a primary focus of our practice. In one of the Buddha's discourses he describes three kinds of persons: The first is like a line etched in *stone*; he gets angry and anger persists for a long time. The second is like a line etched in the *ground*; he gets angry, but his anger erodes quickly. The third – and this is what we should aspire to be – is like a line etched in *water*; even if spoken to harshly he does not anger, but "remains on friendly terms with, mingles with and greets" the one who would make the first two types of people angry (AN 3.132). The last has the mind most conducive to harmony.

We are inclined to reserve our most virulent anger for fellow humans. We do not, for instance, generally get angry at gravity or rain, no matter how implicated these may be in our personal hardships. Yet even a hint of disrespect or an unskillful word from a human can put us into instant rage. Anger also has a tipping point, past which the object of our vexation becomes dehumanized, demonized, becomes – at least temporarily, for this same person might, paradoxically, at other times be one of our dearest friends – a source of irremediable evil, rather than a conditioned complex of pleasing virtues and vexing faults like the rest us. This is the great delusion anger evokes.

Anger is a conditioned response that can be unlearned as a part of purification of mind. However, there are also a number of reflections or thought experiments that many find useful in this regard.

The Buddha suggests that we put ourselves in the shoes of others (SN 55.7) by fully recognizing our common humanity, our suffering, our desire for happiness. He also points out, in view of anger's *kammic* implications, that in responding with anger we are doing to ourselves just what our most ill-intentioned foe would want for us, (AN 7.64).

In the end, we should be able to echo Sāriputta's "lion's roar," spoken to the Buddha:

> Just as they throw pure and impure things on the earth – feces, urine, spittle, pus and blood – and yet the earth is not repelled, humiliated or disgusted because of this; so too, Bhante, I dwell with a mind like earth, vast, exalted and measureless, without enmity and ill will. (AN 9.11)

This is how we learn to harmonize in a disharmonious world.

Respect

Another condition for harmony in the Buddha's teachings is *respect* (*gārava*). The larger ascetic tradition to which the Buddha and Buddhism belonged in ancient India, quite readily rejected prevailing cultural norms, as often did the Buddha. The ascetic tradition could sometimes also be raucous and disrespectful.[3] The Buddha was different: he placed great emphasis on the social lubricants of courtesy, etiquette and respect. The *Saṅgha* met with mutual respect, was expected to meet "in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, while blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes" (MN 31), and to adjourn in harmony. A large part of the monastic code consists of rules of etiquette. The attention Buddhist monastics characteristically give to proper attire and grooming, in contrast to matted-hair ascetics, is a further example.

Respect has two aspects: mental attitude and physical or verbal expression. The attitude of respect is at its base to regard something or someone as *mattering*, to keep in mind the *value* of something or somebody. Literally the English word *respect* means "see again." It is what we do when we refuse to dehumanize or demonize someone who annoys us. There is wisdom in respect. We don't have to agree with someone, or find them agreeable, to respect them as a human, someone who is in the most es-

sential respects just like us. It is easy to appreciate that respect can contribute to harmony. And, as a matter of fact, as we practice non-harming and develop qualities of kindness towards living beings, we find we naturally come to respect them more and more. As we respect them more, it becomes harder for us to harm them, feel anger toward them or speak divisively about them. In fact, respect puts to rest the dehumanizing quality of anger discussed above.

The most basic physical expression of respect in India was, and still is, placing one's palms together in *añjali* (in Pali or Sanskrit), much like the Christian prayer posture. The fact that *añjali* has been preserved in all the diverse Asian cultures into which Buddhism has been transmitted indicates the importance accorded to respect. Just as practicing ethically toward living beings encourages respect for them, acknowledging people and even things through physical expression encourages a respectful attitude toward them. This coming together of attitude and expression is not unfamiliar to us in the West, though perhaps not so ubiquitous as in Indian or in Buddhist culture: a handshake, a hug or a wave is also an expression that engenders or amplifies related attitudes of mind.

The famous *Sigalovada Sutta* (DN 31) tells of a young man, Sigala, the son of a householder, who rises early in the morning, leaves town with wet clothes and wet hair, and then bows to the East, the South, the West, the North, up and down. Then the Buddha comes along with a valuable lesson for young Sigala.

> Then the Exalted One, having robed himself in the forenoon took bowl and robe, and entered Rājagaha for alms. Now he saw young Sigala worshipping thus and spoke to him as follows:
>
> "Wherefore do you, young householder, rising early in the morning, departing from Rājagaha, with wet clothes and wet hair, worship with joined hands these various quarters – the East, the South, the West, the North, the Nadir, and the Zenith?"
>
> "My father, Lord, while dying, said to me: 'The six quarters, dear son, you shall worship'. And I, Lord, respecting, revering and honoring my father's word, rise

early in the morning, and leaving Rājagaha, with wet clothes and wet hair, worship with joined hands, these six quarters."

"It is not thus, young householder, that the six quarters should be worshipped in the discipline of the noble ones."

"How then, Lord, should the six quarters be worshiped in the discipline of the noble ones? It is well, Lord, if the Exalted One would teach the doctrine to me, showing how the six quarters should be worshiped in the discipline of the noble."

"The following should be looked upon as the six quarters:

The parents should be looked upon as the east,

teachers as the south,

wife and children as the west,

friends and associates as the north,

servants and employees as the nadir,

ascetics and *brahmins* as the zenith." (DN 31)

Now, although Sigala's practice was motivated by respect for his father and involved a lot of bowing, the six quarters toward which Sigala was bowing had no particular significance for him. The physical aspect was present, but the mental attitude alluded him. The Buddha's reply is a primary example of the Buddha giving a non-Buddhist conceptual scheme a Buddhist interpretation, in this case turning that which to Sigala was an empty ritual into a valuable teaching about living harmoniously and responsibly in the world. The Buddha provided an interpretation of each of the six quarters as a distinct social relation that would, or at least should, matter to him. And the Buddha did not stop there, as we will see momentarily.

Deference is a kind of respect that bestows some degree of authority or elevated status to the other. Degrees of deference in ascending order are reverence, homage, veneration and worship. We find *veneration* for the Buddha himself clearly expressed

physically in the early sources through full prostrations sometimes touching the Buddha's feet, by circumambulation while keeping the Buddha on one's right, by covering one's otherwise bare shoulder with one's robe, by sitting on a lower seat than the Buddha, by standing when the Buddha would enter the room, by walking behind the Buddha or not turning one's back to the Buddha and by use of by proper forms of address. In Western culture deference is expressed through title: “sir,” “your honor,” “doctor,” etc. Most European languages, but not English, have different forms of the pronoun for “you,” to underscore deference, such as German “du” vs. “Sie,” or French “tu” vs. “vous.” The military salutes according to rank.

Deference harmonizes human relations in two ways: First, it makes us subject to the influence of another. We cannot learn from a teacher, for example, that we do not respect, and we learn all the more quickly from a teacher that we revere or venerate. Deference opens channels of non-coercive authority through which wisdom flows. The Buddha asked that monastics not bother teaching those who fail to show deference. Second, deference helps us develop humility, by knocking the ego out of its accustomed position at center of the universe.[4] It also undercuts the tendency in groups of people to compete for authority. We will have more to say about respect and deference in the context of refuge in the next chapter.

Social responsibilities

Two other conditions of harmony in the Buddha's thought have to do with how *we* fulfill our social roles and what we expect of *others* concerning their social roles. Where fulfillment and expectation are in accord, harmony generally results. Reading further in the *Sigalovada Sutta,* we find that each of the six quarters actually corresponds to two reciprocal roles, each of which carries five responsibilities, except for six responsibilities accorded to monastics in the last case.

> In five ways … a child should minister to his parents as the east:
>
> (i) having supported me I shall support them,
> (ii) I shall do their duties,

(iii) I shall keep the family tradition,
(iv) I shall make myself worthy of my inheritance,
(v) furthermore I shall offer alms in honor of my departed relatives.

In five ways … the parents thus ministered to as the east by their children, show their compassion:

(i) they restrain them from evil,
(ii) they encourage them to do good,
(iii) they train them for a profession,
(iv) they arrange a suitable marriage,
(v) at the proper time they hand over their inheritance to them.

In these five ways do children minister to their parents as the east and the parents show their compassion to their children. Thus is the east covered by them and made safe and secure.

In five ways … a pupil should minister to a teacher as the south:

(i) by rising from his seat in salutation,
(ii) by attending on him,
(iii) by eagerness to learn,
(iv) by personal service,
(v) by respectful attention while receiving instructions.

In five ways … do teachers thus ministered to as the south by their pupils, show their compassion:

(i) they train them in the best discipline,
(ii) they see that they grasp their lessons well,
(iii) they instruct them in the arts and sciences,
(iv) they introduce them to their friends and associates,
(v) they provide for their safety in every quarter.

The teachers thus ministered to as the south by their pupils, show their compassion towards them in these five ways. Thus is the south covered by them and made safe and secure.

In five ways … should a wife as the west be ministered to by a husband:

(i) by being courteous to her,
(ii) by appreciating her,
(iii) by being faithful to her,
(iv) by handing over authority to her,
(v) by providing her with adornments.

The wife thus ministered to as the west by her husband shows her compassion to her husband in five ways:

(i) she performs her duties well,
(ii) she is hospitable to relations and attendants,
(iii) she is faithful,
(iv) she protects what he brings,
(v) she is skilled and industrious in discharging her duties.

In these five ways does the wife show her compassion to her husband who ministers to her as the west. Thus is the west covered by him and made safe and secure.

In five ways … should a clansman minister to his friends and associates as the north:

(i) by liberality,
(ii) by courteous speech,
(iii) by being helpful,
(iv) by being impartial,
(v) by sincerity.

The friends and associates thus ministered to as the north by a clansman show compassion to him in five ways:

(i) they protect him when he is heedless,
(ii) they protect his property when he is heedless,
(iii) they become a refuge when he is in danger,
(iv) they do not forsake him in his troubles,
(v) they show consideration for his family.

The friends and associates thus ministered to as the north by a clansman show their compassion towards him in these five ways. Thus is the north covered by him and made safe and secure.

In five ways should a master minister to his servants and employees as the nadir:

(i) by assigning them work according to their abil ity,
(ii) by supplying them with food and with wages,
(iii) by tending them in sickness,
(iv) by sharing with them any delicacies,
(v) by granting them leave at times.

The servants and employees thus ministered to as the nadir by their master show their compassion to him in five ways:

(i) they rise before him,
(ii) they go to sleep after him,
(iii) they take only what is given,
(iv) they perform their duties well,
(v) they uphold his good name and fame.

The servants and employees thus ministered to as the nadir show their compassion towards him in these five ways. Thus is the nadir covered by him and made safe and secure.

In five ways … should a householder minister to ascetics and *brahmins* as the zenith:

(i) by lovable deeds,
(ii) by lovable words,
(iii) by lovable thoughts,
(iv) by keeping open house to them,
(v) by supplying their material needs.

The ascetics and *brahmins* thus ministered to as the zenith by a householder show their compassion towards him in six ways:

(i) they restrain him from evil,
(ii) they persuade him to do good,
(iii) they love him with a kind heart,
(iv) they make him hear what he has not heard,
(v) they clarify what he has already heard,
(vi) they point out the path to a heavenly state.

> In these six ways do ascetics and *brahmins* show their compassion towards a householder who ministers to them as the zenith. Thus is the zenith covered by him and made safe and secure." (DN 31)

I quote this at length because of the importance of this teaching. It provides what we could consider a fourth system of ethics alongside generosity, precepts and purity. Although elements of all three of these are found in this itemization of responsibilities, this is, like precepts, a kind of duty ethics, a code of obligations. However, like the Confucian code, its focus is on the harmonizing or ordering of human affairs. This *Sigovada Sutta* is often referred to as a *lay Vinaya*, corresponding to the monastic code of conduct.

We can note a few qualities of this system of responsibilities. First, it is balanced, allocating more-or-less equal responsibilities to each side of each reciprocal relation. In this way, it is not exploitive as long as all adhere to their own responsibilities. I think the point is that if the reciprocal relation is out of balance, as when employees or wives are simply treated as property, harmony suffers. Second, this itemization focuses on responsibilities, not on rights. A common modern tendency is to see the social landscape in terms of *my* rights but *their* responsibilities. Finally, although the specifics might require some adaptation to modern social relations, this allocation of responsibilities still applies remarkably well, and very critically, to our modern circumstances.

The ideal society

An important conditioning factor in communal harmony or disharmony that goes beyond individual interactions and relations is certainly governance or the institutional structures of the society. This also was not beyond the Buddha's purview, for the Buddha was the architect of a community, the *Saṅgha* of monks and nuns. It is instructive to see what kinds of choices the Buddha made to form this ideal society writ small.

In Gotama's time, the Gangetic plain encompassed a number of small kingdoms and republics. The two dominant kingdoms of the region were Magadha and Kosala. The republics were largely

lined up along the northern edge of the Gangetic plain in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains, which were coming increasingly under the dominance of the kingdoms. The westernmost of these was the Sakyan Republic where the Buddha-to-be grew up. These republics were generally governed by an unelected assembly of elders from the *khattiya* or warrior/administrative caste. It is likely that the Buddha, as a *khattiya*, was familiar with matters of governance. This was also a patriarchal society that would become more patriarchal with time, such that spiritual practice and education were widely (though not entirely) considered masculine pursuits and women were generally subject in all stages of life to masculine authority.

Although there were ascetics in India before the Buddha, "... among all of the bodies of renouncers it was only the Buddhists who invented monastic life,"[5] that is, who provided an organized institution capable of sustaining its practice and teachings. The Buddha never attempted to organize the lay community in this way, except indirectly by putting the monastic community in their midst and letting them sort out what to do about it. The monastic *Saṅgha* is a multi-functional institution, defined in the *Vinaya* with a mission statement, a code of conduct, rules of governance, guidelines for handling grievances and many other features.[6]

Some of the notable hallmarks of the *Saṅgha*, as conceived by the Buddha, are as follows: The *Saṅgha* observes no class distinctions and an exemplary level of gender equality.[7] It is regulated in a way to avoid conflicts and maintain harmony, and observes procedures to negotiate disagreements should these arise. It rules by consensus of all monastics in a *local* community and, as such, is only minimally hierarchical. For instance, there is no system of Pope and bishops, so that, although monastics live under the code of the *Vinaya*, they are not subject to any distant centralized authority. Serious transgressions of the monastic code entail no corporal punishments, but rather sanctions, none more severe than expulsion from the local community. Rectifying transgressions is much dependent on acknowledgement of guilt. Committing one of the most serious offenses, for instance killing another person, is simply *by definition* no longer to be a monastic; if one hides the offense, one is impersonating a monastic. Aside from limited coercive control over each other, monastics have no coercive power whatever over the laity. There is, for instance, nothing like

excommunication. Their authority derives entirely from the respect they receive as teachers and role models for those committed to the *Dhammic* life. In fact, the laity has significant coercive power over the *Saṅgha,* since a displeased laity can at any time withdraw the support on which the *Saṅgha* depends on a daily basis.

The constitution of the *Saṅgha* embodies so many social ideals that it might seem rather pie-in-the sky. But keep in mind that the *Saṅgha* has outlived every other contemporaneous institution, and almost every one that has arisen since. It has seen great empires come and go, and yet persists fully intact to this day. This is evidence of the profound and practical comprehension of social factors that the Buddha brought to bear as he carefully constituted the monastic *Saṅgha*. He created something unprecedented, something that just keeps going.

The Buddha did not actively champion the similar reformation of civil society, but did have a bit to say about responsibilities of kings toward their subjects, sometimes describing the *righteous* or *wheel-turning king* as a kind of ideal. For instance, he recommended that such a king seek ethical guidance from wise monastics:

> Whatever ascetics and *brahmins* in your kingdom have renounced the life of sensual infatuation and are devoted to forbearance and gentleness, each one taming himself, each one calming himself and each one striving for the end of craving, from time to time you should go to them and consult them as to what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, what is blameworthy and what is blameless, what is to be followed and what is not to followed and what action will in the long run lead to harm and sorrow, and what to welfare and happiness. Having listened to them, you should avoid evil and do what is good. (DN 26)

This is quite a bit different than depending on corporate lobbyists for advice. This passage is significant in view of the common understanding that monastics should not get involved in political or social matters, and are perhaps ill-equipped to do so. It clearly opens a nonpartisan role for them as moral advisors.

The practice of harmony

The skill of harmonizing with others is developed on top of the skills of generosity, harmlessness and purity. It adds to these the specialized skill of dealing with the complexities of the common human personality as we interact with others, including respect for their humanness and acknowledgement of a conditioned complex of faults and virtues that we all possess (aside from the *arahants* among us). It also adds to these a handle on some of your most deeply rutted inclinations, for we commonly reserve a particularly pronounced capacity for harshness for our fellow humans.

As you practice harmony you may often be frustrated at the limits of your control over the consequences. Harmony is something shared by people in relationship or in community, yet you exercise some degree of control over only one side of the relationship, and over one locus in the dynamics of a community. The best you can do is to uphold, in your practice and from your side, the conditions conducive to harmony and leave the rest up to others, who may have entirely different understandings and less pure intentions than your own. Recall that your practice and its results are your own. That way you at least do not contribute to the disharmony when it arises in spite of your best intentions, and you may even set a good example for others.

You must take care as the urge arises to control a particular situation through admonishing others, for, unless this is done with great skill, this risks still greater disharmony. There are ways, however, in which you can influence others in the direction of greater harmony. For one thing, when others begin to realize that you consistently refuse to participate in the kinds of social behaviors that precipitate disharmony, such as responding to insult with insult, you become a kind of refuge for them from such behavior, a safe place in which they do not have to be so defensive. And soon, they begin to emulate your behaviors. you may become a role model, sometimes of significant influence. Monastics tend to wield particular influence of this kind because of the deference traditionally accorded to them.

Also, within any culture certain people enjoy a degree of authority in relationship to others as wise advisors or teachers, either by social role or reputation. In the *Sigovada Sutta*, parents, teachers,

ascetics and *brahmins* may enjoy this status. Granting reverence or veneration to another is an act of trust or faith that opens you up to their influence, making of them a role model, sometimes of astonishing influence. The Buddha, to take the primary example, certainly received that degree of veneration from his thousands of disciples and thereby gained the right freely to admonish many others. It is only through granting this level of respect or trust to the wise that the Buddhist movement (*sāsana*) has grown. Likewise monastics traditionally enjoy this authority born of respect in Buddhist cultures. Respect and veneration in the Buddhist context is the topic of the next chapter.

As you interact with others a range of unskillful thoughts will likely come up, involving anger, resentment, envy, arrogance, vanity, personal insult, conceit and so on. In the practice of purification, you gradually to let go of your tendency toward such thoughts. Your first line of defense is not to act bodily or verbally on the basis of such thoughts as they continue to arise, to remain physically and verbally harmless, whatever the mind might be doing. If you can do this, you are already to a degree accomplished in not contributing to disharmony. Precepts about speech in particular – not speaking falsely, not speaking harshly, not speaking divisively and not speaking frivolously – will take you far in this direction.

One of the most dangerous ways you can act on the basis of such thoughts is through divisive speech. It is helpful to guard against this with a further rule of thumb: Do not speak ill of others at all.[8] There will be cases in which this rule of thumb cannot be sustained, for instance, where you need to warn others, out of compassion, of the sailor of dubious intent around the corner who is swigging rum, swearing and brandishing a cutlass. But consider that, in general, speaking ill of others is generally a huge responsibility:

First, in the situation where it is likely to come up, you may well be speaking falsely or repeating rumors; if there is anger involved, there will almost certainly be some degree of misperception on your part and therefore bias in what you communicate.

Second, the consequences of your speech might easily get

out of hand, even if you are speaking truthfully. Even if your intentions are relatively pure, how about the intentions of those you speak to who are likely to repeat it to others, and so forth? Furthermore, if you are talking with someone who lacks familiarity with the person or group of which you speak ill, what is said is likely to become their dominant impression for a long time to come. The hearer of such disparagement may then repeat it much less skillfully than you have, and with quite impure intentions.

Third, it is difficult to maintain kindness in a mob: Even if you speak ill of another in all kindness for that person, others who happen to agree with you may be of questionable kindness. Another rule of thumb: Never take sides in interpersonal disputes, even if you are friends with one party; don't become part of a coalition set in opposition to some other person or group.

It is advisable to become open to, familiar with, and demonstrative of gestures of respect and general etiquette in whatever local Buddhist community you might belong to. It should be noted that although these go back to common Indian roots in virtually any Buddhist community, these have evolved into somewhat different forms through different Asian cultures. It is also wise to become skilled in the modern gestures and etiquette of the prevailing culture. Although these are generally different from those found in most Buddhist communities, they generally served much the same function.

Further reading

The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon by Bhikkhu Bodhi (editor), 2016, Wisdom Publications. This is a systematic look at the Buddha's teachings on harmony with valuable commentary by a renowned American monk and Pali scholar.

Working with Anger by Thubten Chodron, 2001, Snow Lion. This highly regarded work, by an American nun, focuses on reconceptualizing situations that normally lead to the arising of anger. It is strongly based on the insights of the great eighth-century Indian monk and scholar Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, which is also recommended in translation.

1 *Saṅghadisesa* 12.
2 There is a kind of reciprocation in *kammic* results, but this is not reciprocation between agents, rather a personal balancing out. In fact, when we keep karma and its results in mind, we are likely to be less concerned with reciprocation between agents.
3 … as Thanissaro (2001b) points out.
4 In fact this might be a basic function of the worship of God in many religions.
5 Gombrich (2006), p. 19.
6 These same features are common in modern organizations, surprisingly, given that the monastic *Saṅgha* has followed all these years essentially the same regulations codified in the *Vinaya* (discipline) in the early Buddhist era.
7 See Cintita (2012) on the issue of gender equality in Early Buddhism.
8 The seventh of the *Bodhisattva Precepts*, originating and widely followed by Buddhists in East Asia, is more complex, but often interpreted as saying just this.

6. Refuge

> *He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma and his Saṅgha, 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.* (Dpd 190-1)

Buddhist faith takes the form of *refuge*, trust in and devotion to the three sources of Buddhist wisdom: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. I will use "trust" and "faith" interchangeably for the Pali *saddhā*, since *saddhā* has aspects of the meaning of both. I should note at the outset that faith here is quite different from how faith is understood in most religious contexts, having more to do with "working assumption" than with "belief," and quite distinct from "blind faith," which the Buddha in no way endorsed.

With faith we fall in line behind the teaching, devote ourselves to practice and begin to make rapid progress. The discussion of this chapter fulfills the next step of the Buddha's gradual instruction, the last step in what we have classified as the Buddhist life and the step that puts us at the trailhead of the Buddhist path.

(Buddhist Life)

- Generosity (*dāna*).
- Virtue (*sīla*).
- Heavens.
- The drawbacks, degradation and corruption of sensual passions.
- The rewards of renunciation.

- On the basis of the understanding and pursuit of the foregoing, "a ready mind, a softened mind, an unbiased mind, an elated mind and trusting mind," a precondition for the last step.

  (Buddhist Path)

- The four noble truths.

Refuge is represented in the transitional qualifications as "a mind ready, softened, unbiased, elated and trusting." It is the kind of faith or trust or receptiveness required to embark wholeheartedly on the path. Notice that it occurs late in the gradual instruction, after the overall teachings have had a chance to establish a track record and to have earned the practitioner's trust.

Faith or trust

Faith belongs to the nuts and bolts of human cognition; it is not unique to religion. We live in a relentlessly uncertain world and yet we are active agents and therefore must make decisions virtually always in the absence of absolute certitude. *Trust* or *faith* (*saddhā*) is that which bridges the gap between the little we actually know and the plenty we would need to know in order to act with certainty. Although we have no choice about whether to trust, we can be discerning about *who* or *what* to trust. For instance, if a bridge creaks and groans as we pass over it the first time, we might decide to entrust our safety to another bridge the next time. But, even with discernment, in the end we necessarily make what feels like a jump, big or little, into the unknown,

"[Gulp] Well, here goes!"

In this way we have entrusted ourselves, for better or worse, to our parents, to our teachers, to our accountant, to TV pundits, to our dentist, (for fewer and fewer of us) to our national leaders, to a map or to our GPS system.

Life-altering decisions generally arise from a sense of urgency and demand big acts of trust and therefore enormous courage; they are way beyond the reach of the timid or of the deniers who cling fearfully to their certitude. This is the courage of the great explorers, of the hippies of yore on quest in India with nothing but a backpack, and more commonly of the betrothed or of the

career bound, stirred by deep longing or by desperation. Establishing ourselves on the path toward awakening will shake our life to the core and this will demand particularly courageous trust.

For adults Buddhism may represent a fresh perspective, but our minds may be unready, closed or biased because of our presuppositions. Presuppositions here are tacit assumptions, often instilled at a young age before our faculty of discrimination has fully developed, or so widely accepted in our society that we too have accepted them without ever having examined or questioned them. They are, in fact, actually instances of blind faith. Such presuppositions constitute for most of us of whatever "faith" we are raised in, including the Buddhist born. Many of us have learned at an early age to place enormous faith in science.

Some tacit and generally unexamined assumptions that many of us share include the following: All reality is physical, that is, matter and energy in space and time, such that all mind or consciousness is reducible to physical phenomena, particularly to neurological processes in the brain. There is an objective reality that exists prior to human observation, and humans are capable of understanding that reality. There are good people and evil people in the world, and evil people must be fought and defeated harshly and decisively and deserve no remorse. Spirituality arises along with creativity from within an inner core that each of us is endowed with, but which is commonly suppressed by social conventions and institutions.

Tacit and unexamined assumptions like these, which may or may not be wrong, are generally attributed to "common sense," since we aren't aware of any other source for them. In fact, many of them common in Western culture arose with Protestant Christianity, the European Enlightenment or European Romanticism and have simply been carried along in our culture ever since.[1] Others have been enforced by messages implicit in the many war movies, adventure movies, thrillers, romances and news stories we've watched. In this modern age we are mired in faith; the marketing industry even manufactures faith in the craziest things. Unfortunately, faith in our presuppositions hinder our receptivity to fresh perspectives, even while we imagine we are exercising powers of rationality and free-thinking. This is an important function of refuge, to put aside tacit unexamined assumptions and to

let the Buddha speak for himself.

The triple gem

In Buddhism we place our faith in three sources of wisdom, which we trust to guide us in our spiritual development and in how we conduct our lives. These three sources of wisdom are the *Buddha*, the Awakened One; the *Dhamma*, what the Buddha taught; and the *Saṅgha*, the living noble Buddhist adepts who have carried the Buddha's realization and understanding forward into our own time. These three together are known as the *triple gem* (*ti-ratana*) and according trust to them is called going for *refuge* (*saraṇa*).

Faith in the triple gem is essential for becoming receptive to what Buddhism teaches and then bending our minds around it, since Buddhism includes many sophisticated understandings and practices that take time and effort to grasp. Until we understand what it is the Buddha realized, what it is the Buddha taught and what it is the *Saṅgha* has upheld for one hundred generations, we cannot be absolutely certain where this way of life and the path of practice will lead us; we can only trust what the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha* have to say about it.

Until we have experienced this way of life and traveled far on this path we require trust, ardent trust in the triple gem, to nourish our Buddhist aspirations. Faith in the triple gem is what first turns our heads resolutely toward virtue, wisdom and peace. However, when we see and fully experience these things for ourselves, faith will no longer be necessary. But we are not there yet.

Moreover, there is some urgency in taking refuge. Keep in mind that we already trust in our lives many people and understandings, already placing undiscerning trust in a mass of unexamined, and for the most part faulty, presuppositions. Our trust in the triple gem must be great enough to override these, not to be hindered by them, if we are to bring ourselves in line with the path. This is why, as described in the gradual instruction, we require a *ready* or *receptive mind* (*kalla-cittaṃ*), a *softened* or *open mind* (*mudu-cittaṃ*) and an *unbiased* or *unhindered mind* (*vinīvaraṇa-cittaṃ*). We do best to embark on the path from the perspective of the Buddha, not from that of Madison Avenue or Rupert Mur-

dock. It is the alliance of trust and discernment that reaches furthest.

Those born into Buddhist cultures and families are commonly taught trust in the triple gem from infancy, before they possess the gift of discernment. We modern people have often been taught trust in science or free enterprise in the same way. However, the gradual instruction is primarily for those without this background in Buddhism, who acquire faith differently than the Buddhist born. Many of us gain an initial degree of trust through encounters with Buddhists – who can often exhibit profound peace and kindness – or through the brilliance that shines through the Buddha's teachings, even before we grasp more than a hint of its full import. We need a small degree of trust to take heed of the gradual instruction in the first place and to begin the practice of generosity. That initial trust will grow progressively more discerning and acquire more depth, as we repeatedly have the opportunity to check things out in our own experience. By the time our minds become "ready, softened, unbiased, elated and trusting," there is a lot of experience behind our discernment. It is on the basis of this that we are ready to set out boldly and wholeheartedly on the higher path of practice.

There is great drama in the great decisions that shape our lives. Initial urgency and fear turns to reflection, then to vow, then to spiritual attainments. Where faith is ongoing, reverence, commitment and devotion typically follow. This provides the energy and enthusiasm for practice. The resort to trust in the midst of uncertainty, this moment of resolution, is experienced as a sudden relief, as if we have reached a place of safety. The uncertainty that had given rise to fear and urgency may not yet be eliminated, but once urgency has turned to dedication to a course of practice, worry tends to dissipate. This sense of ease has the feel of a *refuge*, a sense of *entrusting oneself* to something, much as we as children once entrusted our well-being to our parents. This is why we refer in the gradual training to the *elated mind* (*udagga-cittaṃ*) and the *trusting mind* (*pasanna-cittaṃ*). The trusting mind is that possessed of the same faith (*saddhā*) we've been talking about (*pasanna* and *saddhā* are near synonyms), but *pasanna* also conveys this sense of calm and clarity.

The trust we place in the triple gem often arises from a sense of

urgency which in Pali is called *saṃvega*, not easily translated, but a kind of alarm at the realization of the full nature and depth of the human condition (AN 5.77-80). It is said that the Buddha-to-be experienced *saṃvega* when he learned, to his dismay, of sickness, of old age and of death, and in response began his quest. *Saṃvega* arises when we lose our capacity for denial. The *Bodhisatta* then recognized, at the sight of a wandering ascetic, an option that gave rise to the bold resolution to address his despair. It is said that he then experienced the sense of calm relief associated with *pasanna*, the antidote to the distress of *saṃvega*.

Underlying the metaphors of both refuge and gem is protection or safety. A refuge at the Buddha's time was understood as the protection provided by a mentor, patron or benefactor in return for a vow of allegiance.[2] Gems, similarly, were generally believed to have special protective properties. Refuge in the triple gem represents, particularly for those not born Buddhist, the resolve to entrust oneself to a way of life, understanding and practice that will at first have all the uncertainty and mystery that virgin territory has to the explorer or that a deep and dark cave has to the spelunker. Just as a solid plan of action is a refuge to relieve the panic of the castaway or of one buried in rubble but miraculously still alive, entrusting oneself to a path of practice toward awakening provides a refuge from *saṃvega*.

Refuge in the Buddha

A practice recommended in the early texts is to recollect the qualities of the Buddha as follows:

> The Blessed One is an *arahant*, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of *devas* and humans, the Awakened One, the Blessed One. (AN 11.11)

Most religions venerate some personality. Buddhism is striking in that the object of veneration is occupied primarily by a now deceased human being rather than a deity or supernatural being, albeit a person who attained some remarkable qualities in his lifetime. We already tend to venerate people with remarkable qualities, for instance, our favorite geniuses like Einstein or Mozart, or

compassionate agents of change like Gandhi or King, sometimes hanging their pictures on our walls as reminders. The Buddha's most remarkable quality is his awakening, such that trust in the reality of his awakening is an important aspect of refuge as one embarks on the path. The wisdom and virtue of the Buddha are also included in the recollection of the Buddha above, as well has his skill as a teacher.

In the last chapter we discussed the ways in which the Buddha was venerated in his lifetime, through prostrations, circumambulation, covering one's otherwise bare shoulder, sitting in a lower seat, standing upon the Buddha's arrival, not turning one's back on the Buddha and walking behind the Buddha. Such physical practices of respect, along with periodic recollection of the Buddha, actually help to open ourselves to the influence of the Buddha, as a part of developing faith or trust. The text above continues:

> When a noble disciple recollects the *Tathāgata*, on the occasion his mind is not obsessed by lust, hatred, or delusion; on that occasion his mind is simply straight, based on the *Tathāgata*. A noble disciple whose mind is straight gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the *Dhamma*, gains joy connected with the *Dhamma*. (AN 11.11)

After the Buddha's death devotees would venerate symbols of the Buddha as well: *stupas*, bodhi trees, representations such as footprints of the Buddha and eventually Buddha statues.[3] It is important to note that these practices are not worship, in the sense of appealing for help to the object of veneration. Rather their function is within the mind of the devotee in whom refuge thereby develops. Even the practice of offering such things as food, incense and water to a Buddha image, found in almost all current schools of Buddhism, is similarly an *enactment*, integrating many of the same ancient expressions of veneration, that also produces a sense of intimacy with the Buddha. There is no magic, only psychology, in physical and verbal acts of veneration as supports for refuge.

Refuge in the Dhamma

The formula for recollecting the qualities of the Dhamma is as follows:

> The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise. (AN 11.11)

Most religions have some form of doctrine or belief system, generally providing a metaphysics, an account of the origin of the world, of mankind or of a particular tribe, and so on. The *Dhamma* stands out in its enormous sophistication (particularly when we get to the path in the second half of this book) and its emphasis on the mind rather than on external forces. It deals with the human dilemma, existential crisis, anguish, suffering and dissatisfaction, delusion, harmfulness, meaninglessness and the rest, as *human* problems with *human* causes that arise in *human* minds, and as problems that require *human* solutions. The *Dhamma* provides a program whereby the mind is tuned, honed, sharpened, tempered, straightened, turned and distilled into an instrument of virtue, serenity and wisdom. The *Dhamma* itself is among the greatest products of the human mind, skillfully articulated by the Buddha. It is on the basis of trust in the triple gem that we begin to study, practice, develop and gain insight through the teachings of the Buddha. As the Buddha states,

> ... when someone going for refuge to the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha* sees, with right insight, the four noble truths: suffering, the arising of suffering, the overcoming of suffering and the eightfold path leading to the ending of suffering, then this is the secure refuge; this is the supreme refuge. By going to such a refuge one is released from all suffering. (Dpd 190-192)

The *Dhamma* also stands out in its parsimony. The Buddha characteristically took care not to teach more than was necessary. As a result, he carefully avoided useless speculation or expressing views on topics irrelevant to the understanding or practice of the *Dhamma*. This method is made clear in the famous 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 Blessed 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, does not conduce to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, tranquility, higher knowledge, enlightenment or *nibbāna*. That is why I have not revealed it." (SN 56.31)

Recall that the doctrine of the Buddha is only useful insofar as it promotes skillful practice. The resulting agnosticism with regard to many religious views and folk beliefs gives Buddhism its characteristic tolerance that allows it to blend easily with the presuppositions of various cultures. For instance, whether one believes in tree spirits or in the flying spaghetti monster doesn't really matter, as long as these beliefs are compatible with virtue and practical wisdom and do not obstruct serenity. On the other hand, the Buddha did not hesitate to criticize views that detract from spiritual development, such as *annihilationism*, the widely held view that nothing remains, including our *kammic* effects, after the death of the body, which limits our willingness to take responsibility for the future, or *eternalism*, the opposing view that some essence (our soul) survives death, which promotes obsession. The *middle way* that he advocated led between these views.

The *Dhamma* also stands out in its empirical quality, as the formula for recollecting the Dhamma indicates. The *Dhamma* points *almost* entirely to what can be verified in our direct experience. Many cautious people in the West are inspired to trust the *Dhamma* in the first place upon learning of this refreshing see-for-yourself quality of the *Dhamma*. 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 Dhamma against those experiences is that much more difficult.

The *Kālāma Sutta* warns us *not* to see certainty in one's own thinking, or in much of anything else:

> Come, *Kālāmas*. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon repetition, nor upon what is in a scripture, nor as a result of though,; 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." *Kālāmas*, 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. (AN 3.65)

The formula for recollecting the Dhamma suggests that there a degree of effort in verifying the *Dhamma* against experience, since the *Dhamma* is "personally experienced by the *wise*." The Buddha invites us "to come and see" (*ehipassiko*) in the formula, but when he says "Come," he is shouting down to us flatlanders from the mountaintop. To arrive at his vantage point we need to scramble up hills, struggle through brambles and ford creeks. When the Buddha says "See," we need to focus our eyes intently in the right direction to barely make out what the Buddha sees with great clarity of vision.

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

For instance, the Buddha taught that craving is the origin of suffering (the second noble truth). At first this may seem, at least to some, an abstract 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 that snazzy shirt we so want would make us exceedingly dashing and that that would lead to improved prospects for romance and other forms of

social and perhaps even business success. Therefore, we conclude, craving clearly leads not to suffering but to happiness!

However, refuge entails instead that we decide to trust the *Dhamma* before we draw naive or premature conclusions from our own experiences. Eventually, perhaps after years of investigation, on and off the cushion, we might discover that the second noble truth is not an abstraction 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. In fact, as soon as we have to have that snazzy shirt there is stress and anxiety, unmistakably. We might discover we have been living in a world of incessant suffering, a world aflame, all along without noticing it.

In brief, faith, what we trust to deal with uncertainty, bears a close relationship to wisdom, what we see for ourselves. We can plot the relation like this:

Faith/trust ➪ Practice ➪ Wisdom

The *Dhamma* also stands out in how loosely it is held. When we have *faith* in the *Dhamma*, this does not mean that we *believe* the Dhamma, rather that we *accept* it in the sense that we take it seriously at least as a working assumption. In fact, notice that in the passage from the *Kālāma Sutta* above, the ultimate criterion for evaluating a teaching is ethical or practical, that is, whether practice on the basis of the teaching is of benefit. In the *Caṅki Sutta* we learn that anything accepted through faith, approval, oral tradition, reasoning or pondering may or may not turn out to be true. At this the young *brahmin* Caṅki asks how, then, truth is to be preserved:

> If a person has faith, his statement, "This is my faith," 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, Bharadvaja, 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. (MN 95)

The Buddha then repeats this formula with regard to a person who *approves* something, who holds an *oral* tradition, who has

reasoned something through *analogy* or who has views he has *pondered* out, just as with regard to a person who has *faith*. Nothing is believed unconditionally, and so blind faith cannot arise under the Buddha's instructions. The Buddha then shows how truth is discovered and then finally realized, the implication being that if a correct teaching is accepted as a working assumption, it will eventually be seen directly, that is, known with wisdom, as one's practice progresses.

This passage is a remarkable illustration of the care the Buddha accorded faith and other ways of accepting beliefs that fall short of realization in direct experience. We are not to take these as conclusive, but rather to keep their context, and thereby their provisional nature, in mind. We are asked to accept them under these conditions.

Nonetheless, some assumptions should be accepted and others not. The criterion is in terms of human benefit, not in terms of absolute truth. The Buddha gives us an example;

> There are some contemplatives and brahmans 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." (MN 60)

These views deny almost every teaching regarding Buddhist life that we have visited here. He then points out how these views are likely to condition the behavior 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. (MN 60)

Here is the kicker: people of this view cannot win, whether or not

their view turns out to be true in the end:

> Assume there is no other world, regardless of the true statement of those venerable contemplatives and *brahmins*. This good person is still criticized in the here and now by the observant as a person of bad habits and wrong view: one who holds to a doctrine of non-existence. 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 reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. Thus this incontrovertable teaching, when poorly grasped and poorly adopted by him, covers one side. He gives up the skillful option. (MN 60)

Fundamentally, this describes a purely pragmatic condition for accepting one of two alternative theses 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 *Kālāma Sutta* (AN 3.65) with regard to realizing the fruits of *kamma* in the next life. It is clear that he recommends that *kamma* and rebirth be accepted as working assumptions by the skeptical, but is confident that their truth, which he endorses, will eventually be discovered and finally realized in the diligent practitioner's own experience.

So far we've had a lot to say about the qualities of the Dhamma but little about the practice of refuge in the Dhamma. Perhaps the most thorough way venerate the Dhamma is to put it into practice and, over time, repeatedly verify aspects of the *Dhamma* in our own experience, for these teachings are profound and wise. As its track record becomes established, our trust will naturally grow and, with that, the depth of our practice and accordingly the rate of continued verification. Additionally, memorization of scriptures is perhaps the most ancient way of venerating the *Dhamma*. Physical books did not exist in the early Buddhist period, but treating these with great care alongside memorization became a natural part of practice in later traditions.

Refuge in the Saṅgha

The formula for recollecting the *Saṅgha* is as follows:

> The *Saṅgha* of the Blessed One's disciples is practicing the good way, practicing the straight way, practicing the true way, practicing the proper way; that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals. This *Saṅgha* of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutations, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world. (AN 11.11)

Refuge in the *Saṅgha* is trust in the living representatives of the Buddha, those who understand, embody, impart and maintain *Dhamma*. They, like the Buddha and *Dhamma*, are sources of Buddhist wisdom, worthy of veneration. Who are these people and how do we recognize them? The definition of *Saṅgha* is ambiguous, apparently deliberately so, sometimes seeming to refer to what is known as the *noble Saṅgha* (*ariya-saṅgha*), whose membership is determined by progress on the path, and sometimes seeming to refer to the *monastic Saṅgha* (*bhikkhu-saṅgha*), easily recognizable by their robes and bald heads.

We have met and visited with the monastics already, but let me briefly introduce the *noble ones* or *noble Saṅgha* at this point. The two *saṅghas* have a natural overlap, but are not identical. The four pairs of persons referred to in the *Saṅgha* recollection have to do with the *stream enterers*, the *once returners*, the *non-returners* and the *arahants*. These are people who have reached progressive stages of awakening through following the path. The last is full awakening, the others can be regarded as different degrees of partial awakening. All are graduates from the ranks of mere *worldlings* (*puthujjana*) to *noble ones*. For each of these stages we further distinguish between the *path* and the *fruit*. For instance, those on the path to stream entry are not yet stream enterers, but are on a path of training that is coming close. Stream enterers *per se* enjoy the fruit.

> This *Dhamma-Vinaya* is the abode of such mighty beings as stream-winners and those practicing to realize the fruit of stream-entry; once-returners and those practicing to realize the fruit of once-returning; non-returners and those

> practicing to realize the fruit of non-returning; *arahants* and those practicing for *arahantship* … (Ud 5.5)

This is a bit complex, but this is what gives us "the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals," in the recollection of the *Saṅgha*. So this passage seems to refer to the *noble Saṅgha*. However, "worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings" seems to refer to monastics. Recall from chapter two that worthy recipients of generosity are ascetics and *brahmins*, that is, those dependent on alms. Ascetics and *brahmins* of high attainment, we should recall, are fertile "fields of merit." So there is indeed an intentional ambiguity between the two types of *Saṅgha*. My own theory is that the Buddha, in implicitly equating the two groups, was asking monastics to resolve to become noble ones, and was asking noble ones to ordain as monastics, if they haven't already.

The whole point of refuge in the Sangha is to establish a deferential and ongoing relationship to an important source of Buddhist wisdom. This might be implemented individually by establishing a relationship to a teacher. However, early Buddhism did not articulate the role of teachers, apart from the Buddha himself, but instead extolled the *admirable friend* (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), a wise person who can perhaps provide some teachings, but also from whom one can learn by emulating his conduct and one who provides inspiration in the *Dhamma* overall. In general, those of higher attainment or spiritual progress are those from whom we are likely to learn the most. The importance of the admiral friend is expressed in this curious but well-known passage:

> As he was seated to one side, Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed 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." (SN 45.2)

Admirable friends put us right on the path, the topic of the remaining chapters of this book. The *Saṅgha* serves as admirable

friends for worldlings, for these are where we are likely to find people advanced or even perfected in virtue and in understanding, virtuous, serene and wise. These tend to be the contemporary teachers and protectors of the *Dhamma*. Members of the *Saṅgha* themselves are expected to seek out admiral friends ideally of even higher attainment.

A monastic may or may not be a noble one, and a noble one may or may not be a monastic. However, both kinds of *Saṅgha* are intimately connected in that the monastic *Saṅgha* is the natural home of the noble ones and the noble *Saṅgha* is largely a product of the monastic institution. We have seen that the monastic *Saṅgha* provides an ideal context for Buddhist practice by defining the life most conducive to upholding Buddhist principles, a life so barren of any opportunity for personal advantage that a self can scarcely find anything to do, though it might continue for a time to haunt the mind. Into this life flow wisdom and compassion that, liberated from the tyranny of personal neediness, burst here and there into the various stages of awakening. As an ascetic renunciate community, monks and nuns depend completely on material support from the lay community. Not only does this afford the monastic the leisure of practice, study and accomplishing good, but it insulates the monastic from the ups and downs of the contingencies and from the competitiveness of the common world.

In this way the monastic *Saṅgha*, as long as it follows the discipline scrupulously, tends to produce noble ones of progressively higher attainment from among its ranks. The flourishing of the monastic *Saṅgha* in this way ensures the flourishing of the noble *Saṅgha* as well. The Buddha stated that,

> … if the monks should live the life to perfection, the world should not lack for *arahants*. (DN 16)

The world will even less lack for noble ones still aspiring to become *arahants*. The monastic *Saṅgha* is therefore both training ground and dwelling place for the noble *Saṅgha*, much like a university is both a training ground and a dwelling place for scholars.

Noble ones, in turn, ennoble the general Buddhist community. Just as it benefits us to have artists and good plumbers among us,

or those educated in the humanities, it ennobles us to have saints and sages, adepts and *arahants* in our midst, the more the better. These noble ones, disciples of the Buddha who root their lives entirely in the *Dhamma* and are an inspiration and a resource for us all, constitute an effective civilizing force. Where there are noble ones, faith will be inspired, for they display first-hand the peace and happiness, wisdom and compassion that result from complete immersion in the Buddhist life. The noble ones are close at hand, they teach, they inspire with their deportment, their good works and their knowledge. They inspire self-reflection concerning one's own life, and tend to dispel *saṃsāric* tendencies. They keep the flame of the Buddha's teaching alive.

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 highly sophisticated teachings of the *Dhamma* are clarified step by step to lead the instructling toward and along the path. Keeping the flame of the *Dhamma* burning bright is critical for the perpetuation of the teachings in their full integrity: because those teachings are so subtle and sophisticated, they are easily misinterpreted and corrupted if they are not put into practice and experienced by the noble ones among us.

Finally, many of the same physical expressions of veneration that applied to the Buddha were also applied to the monastic *Saṅgha* in his day, and continue to be aplied in the present day. Because of their formal status in the Buddhist community, the monastic *Saṅgha* also symbolizes the noble *Saṅgha* and thereby spiritual attainment and the Buddhist movement at large, for it is the *Saṅgha* that has preserved the essential core of the Dhamma and transmitted it for one hundred generations.

The practice of refuge

To practice trust in the triple gem is to open your heart and mind to the influence of the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha*. The point is not to put discernment aside; indeed you want, with time, to verify point by point for yourself what these sources of wisdom have to teach you to the point that trust is no longer necessary. The point is to listen attentively to what these sources have to teach you, to consider them seriously and to make them the ba-

sis of your own investigation.

Refuge is necessary for entering the path. Refuge comes with vow, a series of bold commitments to live and practice in certain ways, a determination that this will be the shape of your life. Refuge comes with respect.

We have seen that veneration for the Buddha was clearly expressed in the early sources.[4] He understood that without such deference he was wasting his time talking to an unreceptive audience. Likewise, reverence for the *Dhamma* for many years after the Buddha was naturally enacted in the effort to recite, remember and preserve his words.

Deference toward the *Saṅgha* is, in a sense, easier, because it applies to the only *living* gem and therefore assumes a particularly personal quality. The reverence for the monastic component of the *Saṅgha* dovetails with the project of satisfying their material needs, the root lay practice of generosity, discussed in chapter two. Monastics were also recipients of many of the same kinds of physical expressions of respect accorded to the Buddha during his life and likewise see in those who show proper reverence a fruitful field of merit. One of the issues we encounter in western cultures is the sparseness of the monastic *Saṅgha.* Nonetheless, there are many highly qualified lay teachers; think of them as *Saṅgha* and treat them with respect.

Refuge is substantially a physical practice. To bow to the Buddha is to enact reverence for the Buddha, to enact reverence for the Buddha is to feel reverence for the Buddha, to feel reverence for the Buddha is to put aside one's presuppositions and open one's heart to the teachings of the Buddha. To do this is to align with the Buddha's path. We tend to be dismissive of reverence in modern, and certainly American, culture, and yet reverence is recommended by the Buddha.[5] You will be surprised to learn how much power there is in bowing.[6]

Further reading

Refuge: an Introduction to the Buddha, Dhamma, & Sangha, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2001, Metta Forest Monastery, also available on-line. This adds depth to the present chapter and provides a wealth of citations from the early scriptures.

A Culture of Awakening: the life and times of the Buddha-Sasana, by Bhikkhu Cintita, 2014, Lulu.com, also for download on-line. This discusses Buddhist community, refuge and the relationship between laity and *Saṅgha*, largely from a historical perspective.

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1 See McMahan (2008), Thanissaro (2002).

2 Thanissaro (2001a), p. 16.

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

4 Veneration of the Buddha was enhanced in virtually all of the later traditions, by treating symbols of the Buddha, for instance, pagodas and later statues, in the way we would have treated the Buddha. Some traditions accorded the Buddha a supernatural status unknown in early Buddhism, perhaps out of similar veneration, but mixed with a lot of imagination.

5 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.

6 Zen master Suzuki Roshi, the Japanese founder of the San Francisco Zen Center, 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, they were required to perform *nine* full prostrations during morning service. They got over it, and maintain this practice today.

BOOK TWO: BUDDHIST PATH

7. Higher Training

> *As a great flood carries away a sleeping village, so death seizes and carries away the man with a clinging mind, doting on his children and cattle. For him who is assailed by death there is no protection by kinsmen. None there are to save him — no sons, nor father, nor relatives. Realizing this fact, let the wise man, restrained by morality, hasten to clear the path leading to nibbāna.* (Dpd 287-9)

The householder Upāli was a disciple of a prominent spiritual teacher at the time of the Buddha and had sought out the Buddha in order to debate him on a matter of doctrine. After the Buddha had taken the wind out of Upāli's sails, as he always did in such circumstances, the Buddha continued the conversation.

> Then the Blessed One gave the householder Upāli the gradual instruction, that is, talk on generosity, talk on virtue, talk on heavens; he explained the drawbacks, degradation, and corruptions of sensual passions and the rewards of renunciation.

We need say no more about the foregoing: In the preceding chapters we have outlined the values, attitudes, understandings, practices and other conditions that constitute the Buddhist life. These are based on virtue, harmony and contentment, on refuge in the sources of Buddhist wisdom and on a community supportive of the Buddhist life, supportive of the preservation of Buddhist wisdom and supportive of admirable Buddhist practice. Together, these factors in a Buddhist life bring benefit the world and are conducive to personal well-being and fulfillment. Let's continue:

> When he knew that the householder Upāli's mind was ready, receptive, unbiased, elated and trusting, he ex-

> pounded to him the teaching special to Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

Once generosity and ethical conduct are fulfilled, the dangers of sensual pursuits and the benefits of renunciation understood, and an abiding trust in Buddhist teachings realized, we are ready to move on the next step, to receive and understanding the teaching special to Buddhas, which is precisely the *four noble truths*, which brings us to the noble eightfold path, the path of practice that culminates in awakening and that provides the topic of the remaining chapters of this book.

As the Buddha finished expounding the gradual teaching, the effect on Upāli was astonishing, albeit one oft repeated in such circumstances, in many discourses:

> Just as a clean cloth with all marks removed would take dye evenly, so too, while the householder Upāli sat there, the spotless immaculate *vision of Dhamma* arose in him:
>
> "All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation."
>
> Then the householder Upāli saw the *Dhamma*, attained the Dhamma, understood the *Dhamma*, fathomed the *Dhamma*, he crossed beyond doubt, did away with perplexity, gained intrepidity, and became independent of others in the *Buddha-Sāsana*. (MN 56)

Upāli had not awakened, but had embarked fully on the noble eightfold path, from which there could be no regression.

"All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation," is one of the simplest formulations of the principle of *conditionality* (*idap-paccayatā*) or *dependent co-arising* (*paṭicca-samuppāda*): *That* is entirely contingent on *this*, and is real only by virtue of *this*. Conditionality undergirds the teaching special to Buddhas and is a constant theme in the remaining chapters of this book. The four noble truths themselves involve an instance of conditionality, whereby suffering is contingent on our own neediness.

Conditionality, at the same time simple and profound, provides a distinctive lens with which to view the world, one that sees right through that which we have always taken to be substantial. To first see through this lens is to acquire the vision of *Dhamma*

(*dhamma-cakkhu*, sometimes translated as the "Dhamma eye"). To acquire the vision of the Dhamma is to become a stream enterer (*sotapanna*), one who has fully attained the path, or entered the stream.

The noble eightfold path is the path for those who aspire to excellence in the context of a Buddhist life. Indeed the path builds on and enhances the Buddhist life before it leads to the perfection of *nibbāna* (Sanskrit, *nirvāna*), which is variously described as awakening, as the end of all suffering, as escape from the round of rebirth, as freedom from sickness, from old age and from death, as the end of greed, of hatred and of delusion, as the relinquishing of all attachments, as the stilling of all passions and conceptualizations, as seeing things exactly as they really are.

The Buddhist path, discussed in these remaining six chapters, is a systematic course of training, integrating many of the factors of the Buddhist life, but with an overarching emphasis on gaining penetrating insight into the nature of the world and of the intricacies of the human mind. Before that, the path takes us through many intermediary attainments, not only through stages of awakening but also progressively through greater virtue, through the purification of mind from defilements, through renunciation, through an increasing sense of serenity and well-being, through the easing of personal suffering, through impartiality and clear seeing, and through the cutting away of delusions, views and conceptualizations that give rise to misperceptions, particularly the mis-perception of a substantial self. The path cleared by the Buddha leads through improving, to ultimately perfecting, human character.

Introduction to the noble eightfold path

The final step of the Buddha's gradual instruction, discussed in *Book One: Buddhist Life*, is the *four noble truths*, which are:

1. the truth of suffering,
2. the truth of the origin of suffering,
3. the truth of the cessation of suffering, and
4. the truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of

suffering.

The fourth truth is just this noble eightfold path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*), taught in the very first discourse of the Buddha, the discourse known as the *Turning of the Wheel*. In this discourse he had first declared the middle way as a path between the practices of austerity and indulgence, then continued:

> And what is that middle way? It is simply the noble eightfold path, that is to say,
>
> (1) right view,
>
> (2) right intention,
>
> (3) right speech,
>
> (4) right action,
>
> (5) right livelihood,
>
> (6) right effort,
>
> (7) right mindfulness,
>
> (8) right concentration.
>
> That is the middle way discovered by a Perfect One, which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and which leads to peace, to direct acquaintance, to discovery, to *nibbāna*. (SN 56.11)

Book Two: Buddhist Path is organized according to this noble eightfold path. We will come back to the rest of the four noble truths as part of right view.

The word *right* here in each of these eight factors is normative, much as *skillful* and *meritorious* were normative when we discussed ethics. In fact, the development of a skill is an apt way to describe the development of human character: we develop behavioral qualities, mental qualities and knowledge in order to produce certain results. There is generally a right way to realize these results and a wrong way that does not produce the desired results (or maybe a couple of right ways and an array of wrong ways). 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 experience what life offers, but not with fulfillment and joy, nor without causing great harm to others. What we do in Buddhism is the same as what the potter does, except we are shaping our characters, our lives, rather than clay. To do this, we need to distinguish the right way from the wrong.

Right view. This is the correct understanding of the Dhamma or Buddhist doctrine, the insights of the Buddha that underlie Buddhist life and practice. This book is intended to establish the reader in right view. We will see that these insights are for the most part grounded in human psychology and verifiable in our own experience. The content of right view includes, for instance, the four noble truths along with the noble eightfold path itself, the understanding of *kamma* and the fruits of *kamma*, and dependent co-arising, the Buddha's core teaching on human psychology.

Right intention. This is the proper set of values that we carry on the path, briefly, renunciation, kindness and harmlessness. Whereas right view provides the map, right intention provides the compass to ensure we set our course in the right direction.

Right speech. This is to practice according to the standards by which our speech becomes beneficial, harmless and conducive to the purity of mind that we seek to develop on the path and that is perfected in awakening. This and the next factor have been discussed in detail in the context of Buddhist life, but will be somewhat refined in Chapter 9.

Right action. This is to practice according to the standards by which our physical actions become beneficial, harmless and conducive to the purity of mind that we seek to develop on the path and that is perfected in awakening.

Right livelihood. This is to choose one's career path carefully so that we do not obligate ourselves to conditions that require wrong speech or wrong action, and that do not undermine the various other aspects of practice. This is the one factor of the path in which monastic life and lay life are distinguished, for monastics have no livelihood. Otherwise, the nature of livelihood is a major determinant of our success on the path.

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

to choose what contributes to our development on the path, and to eschew what produces regression. Right effort underlies right everything else, but is particularly directed toward purity of mind.

Right mindfulness. This is cultivate a mind that is attentive to what is arising and falling away, and that responds appropriately. It keeps us on task in the practice of each of the other path factors. It also is engaged to bring about meditative states. Right mindfulness is the engine of insight, the intuitive understanding of the world, the mind and the relation between the two. Right mindfulness is a very powerful quality of mind.

Right concentration. This is to bring the mind to a meditative state that is collected and composed, that is clear and undistracted. Concentration is a natural consequence of continued mindfulness, but turns it into an extremely refined instrument of insight. Right concentration requires a degree of mastery of all of the previous seven path factors.

The eightfold path is divided in one of the discourses into three parts: the *wisdom group*, the *virtue group* and the *concentration group* (MN44). This three-way partition, incidentally, was defined not by the Buddha but by his disciple the great awakened nun Dhammadinnā, who delivered this particular discourse.

The *wisdom group* (*paññāk-khandha*) includes those steps on the path that constitute the prerequisite understanding and aspirations we bring to practice. The understanding is, at least initially, what we acquire from hearing or reading the Dhamma, including the understanding of the other two groups, which is why it comes prior to them. The wisdom group consists of:

(1) right view,

(2) right intention.

The *virtue group* (*sīlak-khandha*) is a refinement of the practices of virtue found in *Buddhist Life*. It consists of:

(3) right speech,

(4) right action,

(5) right livelihood.

The *concentration* group (*samādhik-khandha*) has to do with the practice of cultivation of the mind, which in its most pure forms is practiced with the serene and collected meditative mind (*samādhi*). It is this final group that develops the vision and intuitive knowledge of things as they really are (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*) that lead to liberation, to awakening. The *concentration* group consists of:

(6) right effort,

(7) right mindfulness,

(8) right concentration.

Chapter eight will be concerned with the wisdom group, chapter nine with the virtue group and chapter ten with the concentration group. Chapter eleven will follow up on the discussion of chapter eight and deepen our understanding of right view. Finally, chapter twelve will discuss the last stages of practice and the experience of awakening.

One sutta adds two factors not generally found in descriptions of the path and experienced only upon attaining awakening. The fully awakened one is also known by the Pali word *arahant*, literally, a "worthy one."

(9) right knowledge,

(10) right liberation. (MN 117)

Right knowledge refers to the consummation of wisdom, a penetrative intuitive understanding of things as they really are. Right liberation is awakening. The reason these do not occur in the standard eightfold path is certainly that these are products of the first eight factors, not so much practices in themselves, except for the *arahant*, who abides in these, as in the other eight factors, but effortlessly, once his training has ended.

The noble eightfold path can be seen as perfecting three fundamental qualities of human character: virtue, serenity and wisdom. Perfected virtue is to be outwardly generous and harmless, and inwardly incapable of being otherwise, without greed or hatred, but selfless, manifesting a vast reserve of kindness and compassion. Perfected serenity is to be perfectly clear and composed, unmoved by the contingencies of life and without bias toward what-

ever arises. Perfected wisdom is insight into how things really are that spans right view and right knowledge and blossoms into awakening.

Ethics and beyond

Although the overarching trajectory in the Buddhist path, in contrast to the conventional Buddhist life, is toward penetrating insight into the world and mind, it is important to keep in mind in what way this practice of the path is still grounded fundamentally in virtue or ethics. This is particularly apparent in the three of eight folds that constitute the virtue group. In addition, the virtue group is bookended by two factors from the wisdom and concentration groups that also relate directly to virtue:

(2) right intention,

…

(6) right effort,

Both of these have to do with upholding *wholesome* intentions, right at the heart of purification of mind already discussed with respect to Buddhist life in chapter four. Right intention is to understand and set the mind firmly in the direction of renunciation, kindness and harmlessness, the three classes of skillful thoughts. Right effort, as we will see, is the continual process of cultivating skillful or wholesome intentions and of discouraging the unskillful or unwholesome. Although right intention belongs to the wisdom group of the path and right effort to the concentration group, right intention and right effort are also clearly directed, above all, toward ethical conduct.

This leaves but three folds, one in the wisdom and two in the concentration groups:

(1) right view,

...

(7) right mindfulness,

(8) right concentration.

These are not so obviously about virtue and have an aspect that

moves beyond virtue with the development of knowledge and vision and finally awakening. Nonetheless, right view includes the teachings about virtue, for instance in laying out the fruits of *kamma*, the relationship of suffering to craving, and the matrix of interrelated mental factors that produce *kammic* actions. In addition, right mindfulness keeps us on task in all the factors of virtue, for we must be mindful of our intentions and of the ever changing possibility of harm or benefit in order to behave ethically. Moreover, right mindfulness and right concentration together fulfill an additional function that applies the power of introspective investigation for really deep purification of the mind that is necessary for perfecting virtue.

We discussed purification in chapter four, where we learned that, in addition to practicing virtue at the level of speech and bodily action, we also practice virtue at the level of thought or intention by encouraging wholesome factors and discouraging unwholesome, for it is these that give rise to speech and bodily action. However, we did not learn of a deeper level of practice, that of remaking underlying dispositions, the faulty mental factors that give rise to unwholesome thought or intention. It is *relatively* easy to bring reckless driving or harsh speech under control. It is much more difficult to bring the angry impulse which seeks expression through road rage or harsh speech under control. It is much, much harder still to bring the *disposition* for anger that is triggered by certain kinds of circumstances under ultimate control. It is through mindfulness and concentration that we do just that, for these shine a spotlight on the most subtle mental processes, in ways we will explore by the end of *Buddhist Path*.

With the resolution of dispositions we begin to see that there is a limit to the ethical perspective, that it is not a complete resolution of the woes of the world. Even when pure of intention, we nonetheless suffer: we suffer from sickness, from old age and from death, we still have lingering conceit and cling to the results of our intentions no matter how noble, and so we suffer again. Virtue is directed toward easing the pain of *samsāra* for self and others, but does not lead to release from the soap-operatic drama of life altogether, that, in fact, reveals itself, with growing wisdom, increasingly as a sham. And yet, complete transcendence of that drama is possible, as illustrated in the Buddha's awakening. It is striking that the deepening of ethical foundations, particu-

larly in working deeply with purifying the mind, seems to take us *almost* all the way to final liberation. Yet, the final breakthrough comes through a radical reworking of the cognitive mechanisms with which most of us are afflicted.

Although the path shares with the Buddhist life an overriding concern with ethics, concern with communal aspects of Buddhist life – for instance, the roles of monastics and laypeople, or with social obligations – significantly shifts as we enter the path toward an emphasis on individual development and attainment. This is perhaps because the transcendent dimension of the teachings in general do not refer to interacting agents, but rather to interacting mental factors. There is consciousness but now no cognizer, feeling but no feeler, seeing but no seer, much as there is rain resulting from various conditions of temperature, pressure and humidity, but no "rainer."

Although the trajectory of the path for the most part inclines toward the perfecting of ethics, the overarching or subsuming trajectory is toward awakening or *nibbāna*, more precisely defined in terms of a cognitive breakthrough in knowledge and vision, or intuitive wisdom.

> Just as the river Ganges inclines towards the sea, slopes towards the sea, flows towards the sea, and extends all the way to the sea, so too Master Gotama's assembly with its homeless ones and its householders inclines towards *nibbāna*, slopes towards *nibbāna*, flows towards *nibbāna* and extends all the way to *nibbāna*. (MN 73)

The stream enterer

Buddhism does not expect uniformity of practice among its members, as many religions do. In fact, Buddhism cannot expect such uniformity because its highest standards are *extraordinarily* high: its benchmark is the rare attainment of complete awakening, which entails perfect purity in action and thought, penetrating insight and imperturbable equanimity, acquired through rigorous dedication to practice, over years or over lifetimes.

Individually we do what we can to make progress toward that goal, or do what we have the opportunity and inclination for, or what we are inspired to accomplish. Refuge and admirable

friends are huge factors in our asspirations, as we saw in chapter six. Some of us jump exuberant off the diving board into the deep end and some of us swim content with dog-paddling. Many remain unclear about the four noble truths and never fully embark on the path, but lead, nonetheless, virtuous lives within the frame of the understandings and practices that define a Buddhist life. Many enter the path rather tentatively, taking up meditation long before virtue is strong, while the mind is neither ready nor trusting. Still others have nearly perfect virtue, absolute trust in the sources of Buddhist wisdom, and an immediate grasp of the four noble truths, become firmly established on the path and dedicate their lives to it. It is a matter of personal choice and opportunity.

Stream entry (*sotapatti*) is a kind of tipping point in our practice life in which the entire Buddhist path and what precedes it make complete sense, and from which we can no longer regress. It completes the transition from mere Buddhist life to Buddhist path, for the *stream* (*sota*) is a synonym for the noble eightfold path itself.

> [Buddha:] "Sāriputta, 'The stream, the stream': thus it is said. And what, Sāriputta, is the stream?"
>
> "This noble eightfold path, lord, is the stream: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration."
>
> "Very good, Sāriputta! Very good! This noble eightfold path – right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration – is the stream." (SN 55.5)

Now, any one of us can take up the noble eightfold path or some part of it. However, until we reach stream entry, we are not fully in possession of it, we easily wander off the path. It is a bit like taking night classes for many years at a local college according to interest with no degree in sight, rather than being fully on a course of training toward in a degree program with a recognizable outcome, for stream entry is an attainment that allows us to see the entire path ahead.

The one who has accomplished stream entry is the *stream enterer* (*sotapanna*). We also call one of such or higher attainment a *no-*

ble (*ariya*), as in the *noble* eightfold path, for noble ones fully possess the path, whereby the rest of us are *worldlings* (*puthujjana*). Similarly, a noble one, who has entered the stream, is also called a *trainee* (*sekha*), for that one is training fully in accordance with the path. Although the term "noble" applies also to those of higher attainments beyond stream entry, including *arahants*, the term "trainee" ceases to apply to *arahants*, who have completed their training and are therefore known as ex-trainees (*asekha*).

The *stream enterer* is also an *admirable friend* who will serve as a guide for embarking on the path; we do well to get to know her and to try to emulate her as we plod the path. The steam enterer is personally fully possessed of all of the qualities necessary for establishing herself firmly on the path, and who therefore provides a role model for our practice. The stream enterer has made great progress in mastering the common practices and understanding, has an absolute conviction in the efficacy of the path and, through possession of what is know as the *vision of Dhamma*, has already reached the first level of awakening. She is someone who has not only embarked on the path, but knows where it leads, as if, upon reaching the trailhead and proceeding some distance, after which the path makes a turn and disappears into the trees and underbrush, she had been able to scale a tree and to see the entire path from on high, to observe for herself whither it wends, and had found its terminus to be even more beautiful than she had anticipated.

To get more precise, stream entry is often described in two stages: *path* and *fruit*. The *path of stream entry* is the training that directly results in stream entry. Please don't confuse the path of stream entry with the noble eightfold path. To be on the path of stream entry is generally described as guaranteeing the fruit of stream entry in this very life. The *fruit of stream entry* is stream entry *per se*, and the simple term "stream entry" will refer to the fruit unless stated otherwise.

The qualities developed in the stream enterer are described in various ways.

> And which are the four factors of stream-entry with which he is endowed?

> There is the case where the disciple of the noble ones is endowed with:
>
> - unwavering trust in the Buddha …
> - unwavering trust in the *Dhamma* …
> - unwavering trust in the *Saṅgha* …
> - virtues that are appealing to the noble ones: untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, leading to concentration. (AN 10.92)

Here we learn that a stream enterer is one possessed of virtue and trust: virtue may be developed through common practice and understanding, and, as we saw in chapter six, trust is described in the gradual instruction as the fundamental qualification for instruction in the four noble truths, equivalent to refuge in the Buddha, in the *Dhamma* and in the *Saṅgha*.

With regard to common practice of generosity, or rather its opposite, stinginess, we find a rather definitive claim:

> Monks, there are these five forms of stinginess. Which five? Stinginess as to one's monastery, stinginess as to families, stinginess as to one's gains, stinginess as to one's status, and stinginess as to the *Dhamma*. These are the five forms of stinginess. … Without abandoning these five things, one is incapable of realizing the fruit of stream entry. (AN 5.254, 5.257)

This is stated in the context of the monastic's potential unwillingness to share lodgings, donors donations or respect with other monastics, or to share his understanding of the *Dhamma* with other monastics or with laypeople. This can be generalized to a layperson's wider field of self-interest.

Elsewhere, the stream enterer is said to have eliminated the first three of ten *fetters* (*saṃyojana*). As a set, the fetters are used to distinguish four levels of awakening as practice attainments, from the lowest to highest: stream enterer, once-returner, non-returner and *arahant*. They are kinds of dispositions, that is, they arise repeatedly in the mind rather than being constantly present.

> And which are the five lower fetters?

1. Self-identity view,
2. doubt,
3. attachment to virtue and observances,
4. sensual desire and
5. ill will.

These are the five higher fetters. And which are the five higher fetters?

6. Passion for form,
7. passion for what is formless,
8. conceit,
9. restlessness, and
10. ignorance.

These are the five higher fetters. (AN 10.13)

In this community of monks there are monks who, with the total ending of [the first] three fetters, are stream enterers, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening. (MN 118)

I will discuss here only the three fetters that are ended for the stream enterer. The remaining will be discussed in the final chapter, on awakening.

The second fetter, doubt (*vicikicchā*), is clear enough: it is the opposite of trust in the the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha*.

Self-identity view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), is the the conceptualization of ourselves as a fixed self: the one who performs *kammic* acts and experiences their fruits, the one who craves, thinks, feels and gets angry. This tells us that the stream enterer possesses a significant degree of wisdom, since seeing through self-identity view requires a significant insight. I hope that self-identity view will make some sense to the reader by the end of *Buddhist Path*.

The third fetter, attachment to virtue and observances (*sīlab-bata-parāmāso*), is sometimes misleadingly translated as "attachment to rites and rituals." The compound here is *sīla* + *vata*, where *sīla* refers to virtue or precepts, a main theme of Buddhist life, and

vata to vows or practices, any practice we devotedly follow, including merit-making or meditation, to take two examples. Although these have been strongly endorsed in a Buddhist life, there is nonetheless typically a degree of *I-making* involved in such practices, in seeking *kammic* fruits or personal improvement or perfection. This is what makes attachment to these a fetter that must be let go of on the path to awakening. We will explore this further in chapter eight.

We learn also from this passage that the one firmly established on the path will not take a wrong turn or regress in practice. We will talk about the remaining ten fetters as we get closer to awakening.

How do we become a stream enterer? By one account,

- Association with people of integrity is a factor for stream-entry.
- Listening to the true *Dhamma* is a factor for stream-entry.
- Appropriate attention is a factor for stream-entry.
- Practice in accordance with the *Dhamma* is a factor for stream-entry. (SN 55.5)

People of integrity are admirable friends, discussed in chapter six, or noble ones. Listening to the true *Dhamma* is critical because both the gradual training and the path involve an interplay between understanding and practice. It is through the *Dhamma* that we acquire common understandings to support common practice and it is through the *Dhamma*, that we engage in the practice of the path. Of course, in modern times we also *read* the *Dhamma*, a privilege unavailable in the early days of Buddhism, and *listening* to the *Dhamma* is often just a mouse click away. Appropriate attention is described in another account of the path to stream entry, where it specifies some degree of insight into the four noble truths:

> He attends appropriately, This is suffering... This is the origination of suffering... This is the cessation of suffering... This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering. As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: self-identity view, doubt, and grasping at virtue and observances. (MN 2)

The practice of ethics and the development of selfless virtue, and an understanding of the merits of renunciation as factors of the Buddhist life have already prepared us for the abandoning of identity-view. Going for refuge has prepared us for the abandoning of doubt. The understanding of *kamma* and its fruits has prepared the way for ending the grasping of virtue and observances. Appropriate attention concerning the four noble truths pushes us over the edge to stream entry.

Abandoning self-view goes hand in hand with appropriate attention, which we encountered briefly way back in chapter two. *Appropriate attention* (*yoniso manasikāra*), is a hugely important factor in Buddhist practice, about which the Buddha stated,

> Appropriate attention is a quality of a monk in training: nothing else does so much for attaining the superlative goal. A monk, striving appropriately, attains the end of suffering. (Iti 1.16)

The Pali for "appropriate attention" is more literally translated as "thinking from the source," and involves a skill for avoiding distraction through speculation or conceptual abstractions, and in accord with the Buddha's understanding of conditionality. Our example from a previous chapter recognizes poverty as a direct conditioning factor for crime, rather than criminals. It also recognizes birth as a direct conditioning factor for death, alongside ill health. It also recognizes craving as a direct conditioning factor for suffering, rather than irksome circumstances. Phenomena arise from conditions and appropriate attention traces those conditions in the most direct way.

Notice the absence of agents, such as thieves, in these examples. An agent, or a self, is one of those conceptual abstractions that become transparent as far as appropriate attention is concerned. Generally, the insight reported for the stream enterer is not so much about craving and suffering as it is more generally about conditionality, which relates craving and suffering, and many other factors as well. The insight revealed by appropriate attention penetrates to a level of understanding that supplants these three fetters once and for all. This insight is called the *vision of Dhamma* (*dhamma-cakkhu*).

There are a number of anecdotes in the discourses in which a dis-

ciple discovers the vision of *Dhamma*. Recall from chapter one the story of Sāriputta's encounter with one of the Buddha's first five disciples, in which Assaji evoked the the vision of *Dhamma* in Sāriputta by quoting a passage about conditionality, and then Sāriputta evoked the same result in Mogallāna by repeating the passage to him. Sāriputta claimed to have *seen* the deathless (*nibbāna*), yet he was not yet an *arahant*. The vision of *Dhamma* seems to provide this first glimpse of *nibbāna*; after all, seeing the conditioned nature of reality gets close to the idea of an unconditioned reality. As the monk Nārada describes it:

> My friend, although I have seen properly with right discernment, as it actually is present, that "The cessation of becoming is *nibbāna*," still I am not an *arahant* whose effluents are ended. It's as if there were a well along a road in a desert, with neither rope nor water bucket. A man would come along overcome by heat, oppressed by the heat, exhausted, dehydrated, and thirsty. He would look into the well and would have knowledge of water, but he would not dwell touching it with his body. In the same way, although I have seen properly with right discernment, as it actually is present, that "The cessation of becoming is *nibbāna*," still I am not an *arahant* whose effluents are ended. (SN 12.68)

Elsewhere the related insight into impermanence is attributed to the stream enterer. This passage also gives us an idea of two tracks of development on the path to stream entry.

> One who has trust and belief that these phenomena are this way [impermanent] is called a *faith-follower*: one who has entered the orderliness of rightness, entered the plane of people of integrity, transcended the plane of the run-of-the-mill. He is incapable of doing any deed by which he might be reborn in hell, in the animal womb, or in the realm of hungry ghosts. He is incapable of passing away until he has realized the fruit of stream entry.
>
> One who, after pondering with a modicum of discernment, has accepted that these phenomena are this way is called a *Dhamma-follower*: one who has entered the orderliness of rightness, entered the plane of people of integrity, transcended the plane of the run-of-the-mill. He is

> incapable of doing any deed by which he might be reborn in hell, in the animal womb, or in the realm of hungry ghosts. He is incapable of passing away until he has realized the fruit of stream entry.
>
> One who knows and sees that these phenomena are this way is called a stream-enterer, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening. (SN 25.1-10)

The faith-follower and the *Dhamma*-follower are both on the *path* to stream entry prior to the fruit of stream entry, but ultimately the fruit of stream entry ripens in insight for both faith- and *Dhamma*-follower. Faith is refuge in the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha*. *Dhamma* here is what one has, significantly by that point, verified for oneself.

The practice of higher training

This chapter has given you an initial pass through the noble eightfold path, one that will be fleshed out in the chapters to come. There we will learn how to practice with each of the eight folds of the path. For now you can appreciate that the Noble Eightfold Path gives you a handy checklist of higher practice. You should remember that you do not need to be a stream enterer to begin these eight points of practice; initially you will likely take them on only at a fairly mundane level without complete understanding. In the next three chapters we will describe these eight folds of higher training in more detail and provide pointers to their successful practice, before taking the more recalcitrant issues and finally breaking through to awakening.

We have emphasized in our discussion the transition from the Buddhist life to the Buddhist path, which the stream enterer has completed. Through an accomplished Buddhist life you will have already satisfied most of the requirements for stream entry. The tipping point will come with realization of the vision of *Dhamma*, also known as the *Dhamma* eye, a kind of insight into the contingent nature of reality, associated with conditionality and appropriate attention. As you begin to explore the path, you will want to give particular attention to these factors, for if you reach

this tipping point you will be in complete possession of the path.

Further Reading

The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering, by Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2006, Pariyatti Publishing. A concise introduction by an American monk and translator.

Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha's Path, by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, 2001, Wisdom Publications. An excellent introduction by America's foremost Sri Lankan monk.

The Island: an Anthology of the Buddha's Teaching on Nibbāna by Ajahns Pasanno and Amaro, 2009, Abhayagiri Monastic Foundation. This has substantial discussion of stream entry.

8. Foundational Wisdom

> *When the Dhamma and Vinaya declared by the Tathāgata is being taught, he listens well, gives ear, applies his mind to knowledge, rejects what is worthless, takes up what is worthwhile, and is endowed with the patience to conform with the teaching.* (AN 6.88)

The wisdom group consists of the first two factors of the path:

right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*) and

right intention (*sammā saṅkappa*).

Wisdom (*paññā*, also translated as "discernment") can be understood in a number of ways, as intellectual understanding, as intelligence or as insight, the latter an intuitive knowledge resulting from seeing directly for oneself. The place of wisdom at the beginning of the path highlights the intellectual understanding of Dhamma, since this is where our pursuit of the path starts. For this reason this chapter is called "Foundational Wisdom." Alternatively, we can think of it as both the beginning and the end of the path as we envision intellectual knowledge gradually replaced by insight as we proceed along the path.

Right view

To follow the path is to train in a skill, and there are similarities with acquiring and perfecting the ability to play the ukulele, to make pottery or to conduct scientific research. Training in each of these fields involves two intertwined components: understanding (*pariyatti*) and practice (*paṭipatti*). Practice is what brings understanding to life and understanding is useful only as a support for

practice. We might think of understanding as a skeleton and practice as the flesh supported and given shape by the skeleton. Right view is understanding; it is that skeleton. Right view, for a Buddhist or for a would-be potter, begins with "book learning," conceptually expressible knowledge conveyed from master to student or apprentice. It provides the orientation, the instructions, the road map, on the basis of which practice can proceed. In order to make a ceramic object a potter needs to understand his materials and tools: the varieties of clay, how much water to add to the clay, how the clay behaves under pressure, what conditions will cause a pot to crack or explode in the kiln, what happens to clay at different baking temperatures, the various types and properties of glaze, etc. Likewise, in order to fashion a life in the *Dhamma*, we also must understand the body, the mind, the nature of the world we are embedded in, how thoughts are triggered, how actions are triggered, how our habit patterns evolve. Each needs its own kind of *right view,* a very practical nuts-and-bolts understanding about things that we can then put to use in practice.

Through practice based on right view, a deeper understanding will emerge with time, acquired through hands-on experience. This deeper knowledge, also known as wisdom, is beyond the limits of conceptual understanding and will unfold with the experience of practice. Consider that most of the knowledge a master potter possesses has come from actually working with the clay, and is found in his fingers not in his head. Or consider the knowledge we put to use in riding a bicycle, in which we were initially told, "To go forward, turn the the pedals in *that* direction, to turn right, move the handlebars in *this* direction," but then we learn not to lose our balance by "feel," that is, through experience. Buddhist practice is also like this: the role of right view may fade as intimacy grows with the domain it covers, to be replaced or supplemented by a "feel" for the workings of the mind. This is a deeper wisdom that develops at the end of the path, not at the beginning, and that is perfected through meditation practice.

Right view is relevant and needed only insofar as it sustains practice and the development of purity of mind and awakening. The Buddha was reluctant to teach anything that was not relevant to practice (AN 10.96). In fact, the Buddha was somewhat reluctant to endorse any views at all, for they tend to be intellectually faulty and to be objects of clinging. For this reason the Buddha

has chosen his views pragmatically and sparingly, as pointers and guides and largely as ways of undermining pernicious views we might otherwise hold. *Dhamma* consists of views that can actually make a beneficial difference in support of practice. Speculative philosophy and views irrelevant to spiritual development are not *Dhamma*. But even *Dhamma* should not be clung to once it has outlived its usefulness, that is, once it has produced awakening. The Buddha compares this mistake to building a raft in order to cross a body of water, then once on the other shore to be so pleased with the raft as to carry it hither and thither on one's back (MN 22).

Factors of right view

A primary factor of right view has to do with kamma and its results, which was foundational to a Buddhist life as well, and which provides continuity with the Buddhist life. It is that we are the owner of our own deeds. This working view makes reference to an agent or self, the owner of our deeds, the one that is born, gets sick and old, then dies and is reborn. This view is eventually eclipsed to a large extent by the other factors of right view, which are stated impersonally, primarily as mental factors arising independently of an agent and by the causal or conditional relationships among them. According to these latter views, to the extent that an agent or self is present, it is accounted for as something conjured as a kind of illusion conditioned by this complex of mental factors. We will discuss *kamma* and it fruits in more detail as we go along.

In many places in the discourses right view is described simply as the *four noble truths* (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*), certainly one of the central teachings of early Buddhism and often taken as an encapsulation of the entire *Dhamma*. We touched on the four noble truths in our exploration of purity in chapter 4. The four truths referred to are:

- Suffering (*dukkha*), which is to be understood,
- The origin (*samudaya*) of suffering, which is craving, and which is to be abandoned,
- The cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering, which is the cessa-

tion of craving, and which is to be realized,

- The path (*magga*) of practice to the cessation of suffering, which is right view, right intention, right action, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right, mindfulness and right concentration, and which is to be developed.

Notice that the fourth truth, the path to the cessation of suffering, is simply the noble eightfold path, the "path" in *Buddhist Path*. In this way everything reported in the last half of this book is subsumed under the four noble truths.

A significant point about the four noble truths, aside from their highlighting of a conditional relation, is that they merge fact and value, that is "is" and "ought." Stated in their most concise form, they appear to be four empirical propositions subject to verification, and are in fact referred to as truths (*saccāni*). In their full formulation, we are given a practice for each of the truths: understanding, abandoning, realizing and developing, respectively. More generally, right view can be seen as the view that results in wholesome action (*kamma*), which is to say practice, with beneficial results. This establishes the relationship of understanding to practice referred to earlier.

Together these practices conspire to rid us of suffering. Suffering is where we begin our spiritual quest. If we did not suffer, if life were already nothing but delight and joy, it would never occur to us to have spiritual aspirations nor to begin Buddhist practice. But few understand the nature of our suffering; it needs to be examined carefully. When we understand suffering, we can discover its origin in craving.

Recall from chapter four that unskillful mental factors are those based in greed, hatred and/or delusion, and that the arising of an unskillful factor has suffering as its shadow. Well, greed and hatred are forms of craving – craving to gain what is desired and to avert what is not desired – and delusion is the source of greed and craving, particularly the delusion of a fixed self. We should abandon greed, hatred and delusion. If we abandon greed, hatred and delusion, we realize the cessation of suffering and our spiritual quest is at an end. We find that the full understanding of all of these truths brings in indeed the whole of the *Dhamma*, and in this sense the four noble truths by itself exhausts right view.

The formulation of the four noble truths has been compared to a doctor's evaluation, which also merges fact and value. Suffering is the *symptom*, the origin is the *diagnosis*, the cessation is the *prognosis* and the path is the *treatment*. The Buddha uses this same basic formula with respect to other mental factors besides suffering and craving, as we will soon see, with the treatment in each case consisting of this same noble eightfold path. For convenience, I will call this general formula in the discussion of these cases *the four truths formula*.

In other suttas, in particular in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN 9), right view is described more exhaustively as involving knowledge of the following topics:

- Wholesome/skillful (*kusala*) and unwholesome/unskillful (*akusala*) volitional actions (*kamma*).
- Suffering, whose origin is craving,
- Aging and death, whose origin is birth,
- Birth, whose origin is becoming,
- Becoming, whose origin is attachment,
- Attachment, whose origin is craving,
- Craving, whose origin is feeling,
- Feeling, whose origin is contact,
- Contact, whose origin is the sixfold-sphere,
- The sixfold-sphere, whose origin is name-and-form,
- Name-and-form, whose origin is consciousness,
- Consciousness, whose origin is fabrications,
- Fabrications, whose origin is ignorance,
- Ignorance, whose origin is the taints,
- The taints, whose origin is (reciprocally) ignorance.

We looked at the first topic, wholesome and unwholesome volitional actions, in detail in chapter four, and how they condition our own well-being. Each of the remaining topics highlights two factors and a conditional relationship between the two, compara-

ble to suffering and craving in the second noble truth; in fact the second topic is about the second noble truth itself. All of the factors mentioned after the first topic are undesirable, though they might not all seem so at this point. And all are cured in exactly the same way suffering is cured: through the noble eightfold path. The path is a kind of universal elixir for all that ails us. Each conditional relation can be expanded by applying the four truths formula. For instance, applying it to the seventh, craving, gives us:

- Craving, which is to be understood,
- The origin of craving, which is feeling, and which is to be abandoned,
- The cessation of craving, which is the cessation of feeling, and which is to be realized,
- The path to the cessation of craving: right view, right intention, right action, …, and which is to be developed.

It should be noted that most of these factors, starting with aging and death and ending with ignorance, form a long series in which one factor is the origin of the previously listed factor. This series is often grouped together entirely or in part as the chain of *dependent co-arising* (*paṭicca-samuppāda*):

(taints →) ignorance → fabrications → consciousness →
name-and-form → sixfold-sphere → contact →
feeling → craving → attachment →
becoming → birth → old age, death

This particular chain wends its way through the center of Buddhist psychology, in which it exposes the near-universal pathology that characterizes the human condition. Occurring with sometimes more or fewer links, its most common variant in the suttas are the twelve links shown here, but without the taints (*āsava*). We will refer to this the *standard chain* or the *twelve links* of dependent co-arising. The path, as the cure-all for all that ails us, serves to weaken and finally break down the standard chain. The virtue group, with the support of right intention and right effort, tends to weaken craving, the weakest link in the chain. As craving weakens, so do subsequent factors. The

concentration group tends to weaken ignorance and fabrications, which in the end results in the utter breakdown of the whole chain.

Psychology

The chain of dependent co-arising above is deceptively simple. When we actually understand the various factors involved, each of which the Buddha refers to many times, we find that their dynamics is quite complex, with many branches, loops and new instantiations of the chain, conditioned by which the illusory sense of self in all of its contingent complexity emerges. The Buddha, in describing this chain, presented us with a highly sophisticated model of the working of the mind. Because of its complexity, I will devote a separate chapter to exploring this particular chain, chapter eleven on disentangling the mind. In the meantime I will provide a general orientation to early Buddhist psychology and describe a couple of alternative models of mind that relate many of the same factors in different ways. These will be a bit easier to comprehend and will make the chain of dependent co-arising easier to grasp when we come back to it.

From the beginning, it is important to recognize the strongly subjective orientation of the early *Dhamma*, particularly with regard to mind. The field of inquiry is almost completely restricted to elements as they occur in *experience*, with almost no interest in mechanisms that might underly experience or persist behind the scenes. In fact, the world itself is understood as not something "out there," but as the *world of experience*.

> 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. (AN 4.45)

Until this is pointed out, we become easily disoriented in our understanding of early Buddhist psychology, since many of us tend to give "objective reality," that is, the world "out there," primacy. For those readers of a philosophical inclination, the early twentieth century philosophical movement of Phenomenology, founded by Edmund Husserl, who advocated the primacy of experience as the ultimate foundation of knowledge, comes perhaps closest to the Buddhist perspective.[1] The Buddhist practitioner may in fact

find the move to a subjective perspective very satisfying, even if unconventional from a Western standpoint, since it is based on what we can verify for ourselves, empirically, particularly in quiet meditative states, in our own experience.

In developing right view, we need to negotiate the conceptual framework, the map that the Buddha provides for us in order to point out the relevant elements of experience we need to attend to in our practice. Not surprisingly, this map is, in some ways, a bit curious from the modern intellectual perspective. At the highest level, the Buddha seems to have given us two alternative schemas to categorize our world of experience, firstly, in terms of *sense spheres*, and secondly in terms of *aggregates*. Each of these is often used as a whole to refer to the entire world of experience, but its conceptual elements are also individually important in other contexts.

First, let's look at sense spheres (*āyatana*). The world of experience arises in or through our senses: in our eyes, in our ears, in our nose, on our tongue and as sensations in our body. Without the senses, there could be no experience. But wait: even if the five senses were cut off, we would still experience thoughts and emotions, wouldn't we? Yes! That is why in Buddhism, rather than *five* senses, we have *six*. We have the five that we are already familiar with: eye or seeing, ear or hearing, tongue or tasting, nose or smelling and body or touching. In addition, we have, as the sixth, the mind sense (*mano*) through which we experience our inner thoughts and mental processes, in times of introspection or imagination, for instance. Happiness, lust, products of reasoning and dreams thereby fit snuggly into our world of experience.

The Pali word for *sphere, āyatana*, like the English, suggests a space or location, or a realm of activity, in contrast to the sense *faculty* (*indriya*) itself. The *Sixfold Sphere* division of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN), variously lists a number of factors that belong in each of the six spheres. For instance, in the eye sphere we have:

> … eye, form, eye consciousness, eye contact and whatever arises with eye contact as a condition. (SN 35.24-28)

Expanding this to all six spheres looks like this, with feeling,

craving, etc. as factors that arise with contact as a condition.

faculty	object				
eye	form	consciousness	contact	feeling	craving …
ear	sound	consciousness	contact	feeling	craving …
nose	odor	consciousness	contact	feeling	craving …
tongue	taste	consciousness	contact	feeling	craving …
body	touch	consciousness	contact	feeling	craving …
mind	*dhamma*	consciousness	contact	feeling	craving …

Eye itself is the faculty. *Form* (*rūpa*) is the object of seeing with the eye, say, a cow, but in the form of the colors and shapes dancing around on the retina that constitute the experience of the seen. The object is not the thing "out there" itself, as we might imagine. The thing "out there" itself can only be experienced as a form appearing in the eye, and might not even exist "out there," as in the case of a mirage. Similarly, sound is the object of hearing with the ear, say, a bird twitter, but in the form of vibrations playing out on the ear drum that constitute the experience of the heard, and so on. *Consciousness* (generally differentiated as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, etc.) is discrimination of that object. *Contact* (generally differentiated as eye-contact, ear-contact, etc.) is something consciousness does, which is to *impute* the existence of an abstract object "out there," located in space.

Once contact occurs, a series of factors dependent on contact arise in relation to the object imputed to exist "out there": feeling about it, craving it, thinking about it and so on. *Mind* consolidates and coordinates everything playing out in all of the other sense spheres; notice that almost all these factors are subjective. It will be noticed that many of these factors, including consciousness and contact, also occur in the standard chain of dependent co-arising, which makes their causal relationships clear. We will return to these factors in that context in more detail in chapter eleven.

Various suttas refer to the six sense spheres as *the all* (*sabba*), in the sense that they exhaust the world, that is, the realm of experi-

ence. The *All Sutta* states:

> If anyone, bhikkhus, should speak thus, "Having rejected this all, I shall make known another all," that would be a mere empty boast on his part. … that would not be within his domain. (SN 35.23)

Buddhist practice, directed at the end of suffering, needs nothing beyond this all:

> In the six the world has arisen,
> In the six it holds concourse.
> On the six themselves depending,
> In the six it has woes. (SN 1.70)

Conceptualizing the world of experience in terms of the six sense spheres highlights the senses as the initiators of experience. This in turn highlights the importance of *sense restraint* (*indriya-saṃvara*), particularly attending selectively to sense objects as a way to bring the world of experience under some kind of control.

The five aggregates (*khaṅdha*) provide a less structured way than the sense spheres to divide up the world of experience conceptually. The word *khaṅdha* in Pali refers simply to a mass, heap or pile, that is, an unstructured grouping The wisdom, virtue and concentration "groups" are also called *khaṅdha*. The word *aggregate* is a little fancy for this, but is the standard translation. These are the five aggregates:

- *A form* (*rūpa*) is a material thing, which includes objects of the eye, the ear, the nose, etc., but not the mind. Notice that *form* (*rūpa*) is more narrowly understood in the context of the sense spheres as objects specifically of the eye. Here it is every type of materiality.
- *A feeling* (*vedanā*) is an affective assessment of an object as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. It falls anywhere in the range within that single dimension from heavenly bliss to hellish anguish, but should not be confused with the multidimensional gamut of complex human emotions, which we also call "feelings" in English, but most of which fall under fabrications (below).
- *A perception* (*saññā*) is a conceptual feature of an object,

such as color, texture, shape or another categories.

- *A fabrication* (*saṅkhāra*) is a putting-together of something. It has a volitional quality and so includes *kammic* acts, but is commonly used with reference to fixed or accustomed notions or creative ideas.
- A *consciousness* (*viññāṇa*) is discrimination within the complexity of experience. Consciousness has the ability to refer to something outside of itself (we are conscious *of* something), as well as to focus on, or give attention to something.

The aggregates thus break experience into experiences of five degrees of ascending complexity. Unlike the sense spheres, it is not certain that they are meant to be entirely exhaustive of all experience.

This schema is commonly mentioned in reference to the elements of experience with which we might identify ourselves in order to construct a sense of self. A form helps locate the self in space. A feeling tells us something about how the self is doing. A perception can point out any characteristic feature of the self. A fabrication might tell us what the self is doing. And consciousness tells us where the self is directing its attention. Nonetheless, by observing that the members of each of the aggregates is actually impermanent and a source of suffering, we can arrive at the conclusion, "this is not my self."

Likewise, the aggregates are mentioned in relation to objects of *attachment* (*upādāna*), which are the the cumulations of repeated cravings around objects that we begin to self-identify with. The term *aggregates of attachment* (*upādānak-khaṅdha*) often groups all of our attachments into five heaps. The self-identification with attachments gives rise to becoming (*bhava*), the resulting full sense of self. We will learn more about this in chapter eleven.

Conditionality

The Buddha recognized that all elements of experience arise from causes and conditions and, in turn, represent causes and conditions for the arising of other phenomena. We see this principle in dependent co-arising, in the four truths formula and

in the various conditional relations expressed with → above. The teaching of *conditionality* (*idappaccayatā*), or cause and effect, is most often formulated in the suttas 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.
> (Ud 1.3)

This in a nutshell might be considered the Buddha's greatest insight, the one which cracked open our deluded and persistent misperception of the world to reveal the true nature of reality. This insight is associated with the breakthrough to stream-entry that establishes ourselves firmly on the path. Recall, once again, the words in chapter one that the Buddha's disciple Assaji spoke to Sāriputta and that Sāriputta repeated to Moggallāna, in each case arousing the vision of *Dhamma*:

> Of those things that arise from a cause,
> The *Tathāgata* has told the cause,
> And also what their cessation is.
> This is the doctrine of the Great Recluse.

It should be noted that the specific *mechanisms* of conditionality are not of particular relevance, only the fact that the arising or persistence or cessation of one phenomenon correlates with the rising or persistence or cessation of others. It should be appreciated that conditionality makes all elements of experience contingent on other elements. Since a given element is both cause and effect, experience is in constant flux. Famous examples of conditionality are the second and third noble truths.

> 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.
>
> 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. (SN 56.11)

The Buddha's reliance on conditionality is generally refreshingly satisfying to the rationally scientific modern person. Taken to its logical conclusion, it excludes the supernatural, which would violate natural laws and thereby ignore the norms of conditionality. However, although we moderns readily acknowledge the conditioned structure of the physical world, we do not so readily do this in the mental world, perhaps because we assume this world to be dominated by oodles of unconstrained "free thinking." Although the Buddha attributes a degree of volition to the mental realm, he views it as highly conditioned by factors that can only gradually and with great effort be brought under control.

The understanding of conditionality in the physical or mental realms, in fact, allows us to engineer desirable outcomes by finding a point in a chain of conditionality that we can intentionally effect so as to produce those desired outcomes further up the chain. Ultimately we hope, through Buddhist practice, to bring the fires of suffering under some degree of control. To control a fire we cannot directly will it to extinguish itself, nor to burn more brightly, so we try to control its conditions: heat, oxygen and fuel. Dousing it with water deprives it of oxygen. Blowing on it may give it more oxygen but also reduce its temperature. Building a fire break might deprive it of fuel. Similarly, we cannot will suffering to end with the command, "Don't worry, be happy!" so we try to control its conditions, such as craving. We cannot will craving to end with "Don't be so needy," so we look for the conditions of craving and then try to control *those*, and so on. Appropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) is a process of recognizing causal factors directly without speculation about underlying mechanisms.

Conditionality, for the Buddha, is taken as a universal principle, underlying all experience and events. Nothing happens of itself, but only through conditions and there is no first condition to anything. Conditionality is the fabric of the world. 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 phenomena, the resulting system can be quite complex and difficult to track, with many loops and collateral effects. It becomes, in other words, like an ensnarled wad of yarn, difficult to disentangle. The term dependent co-arising is not necessarily limited to the standard chain that we discussed, but can be used more

generally for a network or chain of conditional relations.[2] For instance, the *Upanisa Sutta* (SN 12.23) reveals for us a chain which it also calls dependent co-arising that begins like the standard chain, but then continues,

> …→ becoming → birth → suffering → faith → joy →
> delight → tranquility → happiness → concentration →
> knowledge and vision of things as they really are →
> disenchantment → dispassion → emancipation →
> knowledge of the destruction [of the taints]

The *Mahānidāna Sutta* (DN 15) presents an alternative chain of dependent co-arising that branches away from the conventional twelve links after the link of craving, then takes us out of the subjective perspective and into bodily actions performed in the world "out there":

> … → feeling → craving → seeking → gain →
> valuation → fondness → possessiveness →
> ownership → avarice → guarding →
> taking up sticks and knives, contention, disputes

Although every factor of experience, or of the world "out there," is highly contingent and in flux, the mind generally does not perceive them as such. Consciousness and its concomitants tend to idealize things as more permanent, more pleasurable, more personalized and more beautiful than things really are. We fabricate, in our delusion, a world of rather fixed things, then become attached to them. In fact, our own self is the primary example. To bring us back to reality, the Buddha asks us always to keep in mind the *three signs* (*ti-lakkhaṇa*), sometimes called *marks of existence*, as the real qualities underlying what we imagine:

- *impermanence* (*anicca*),
- *suffering* (*dukkha*),
- *non-self* (*anatta*).

The Pali word *lakkhaṇa* was apparently in common use at the

time of the Buddha in the context of fortune telling, as signs of what is to come. What we think is more-or-less fixed will really turn out to be impermanent. Because we attach to what is what we think is fixed, it is a source of suffering. If it is impermanent and a source of suffering it cannot be our self.

> In whatever way they imagine, thereby it turns otherwise. (SN 3.12)

Because of conditionality, everything in our world is in a state of flux, continually born from conditions and also dying with conditions: food we buy, our furniture, our car, our own bodies, even mountains. 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.

Our conceptual constructions simply do not keep pace with the unfolding of the world. Because things are impermanent, when we seek gratification in something fixed, we forget that *saṃsāric* 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. And we particularly suffer when what we cherish is closely identified with ourselves, such as our immediate family members or our bowling championship. We crave because we do not fully understand the three signs.

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, the three signs win all debates, yet we find it perplexingly easy to overlook them. The three signs remind us of the primary human absurdity, that we grow the world "out there" in our own minds in a certain way, then take it seriously as something real and substantial; we become infatuated with its objects, then crave them. The three signs remind us that these objects are by nature unreliable, and explain why they cause us distress when we have a stake in them or try to identify with them. These reflections aim at *the fading of passion* (*virāga*): Our infatuations are over things that are too hot too handle, things that are not what they promise. A meaningful life lies elsewhere.

Right intention

Right intention, the remaining wisdom factor of the noble eightfold path, is also sometimes translated as "right resolve" or "right thought." If right view is the map, right intention is the compass that keeps us headed in the right direction. A potter, in crafting a bowl, not only needs to know about clay, glaze and potter's wheel, he also needs to have an idea of what he hopes to produce. This is his right intention. For the potter, right intention might be to make a bowl of exquisite elegance and beauty, and at the same time of practical functionality. For the Buddhist, right intention is to fashion a character of highest virtue, one that embodies:

- renunciation,
- good will,
- harmlessness.

> And what is right intention? Being intent on renunciation, on freedom from ill-will, on harmlessness: This is called right intention. (SN 45.8)

By golly, we've seen these three factors before, in fact, in *Buddhist Life*. These are the motivating principals of purity, generosity and harmlessness, the three systems of ethics. These factors also represent the three classes of *wholesome* or *skillful* thoughts recognized by the *Bodhisatta* in a passage in chapter four. These are all ethical values that will have been internalized through diligent practice of the gradual instruction. Right intention is a commitment to wholesome intentions, and thereby to meritorious deeds.

Renunciation, goodwill and harmlessness are not, for most people, an obvious set of qualities around which to orient their lives. Many might think that the perfected character is wealthy, attractive, popular, fun-loving, sporty, and ever young, .. and, oh, enlightened. Others might have come to Buddhist practice because of inner pain, so with the intention to fix themselves and to suffer less. Buddhism might not make us sporty, but it will ease our suffering as a consequence of pursuing right intention.

Renunciation, in particular, runs counter to our cultural norms, in any culture but particularly in a consumer culture like ours, yet the whole path is sometimes called a path of renunciation, for

progress on the path entails repeatedly letting go of what we cling to. At the material level renunciation is to live simply, with a small personal footprint. At the mental level it is to hold what we possess lightly, not to be needy, but rather easily contented. Keep in mind the following point:

> *Liberation in Buddhism is not to get what we want, but rather not to want.*

Nonetheless, renunciation should be implemented in a balanced way, with deliberation rather than with unyielding discipline. With appropriate attention it tends to come naturally – much like children outgrowing toys – as we realize increasingly the spiritual cost of clinging to things. Renunciation is also the greater part of generosity.

Overall, the compass of right intention keeps out mind oriented consistently in the direction of virtue. This becomes our constant intention, our resolve, our aspiration as we tread the path.

The practice of foundational wisdom

Your primary task in practicing right view is to acquire, generally over a long period of time, a conceptual understanding of the Dhamma. Your second task is to reassess and confirm what you have learned in your own experience as you practice the remaining factors of the path. You can satisfy the first task in listening to the wise expound the *Dhamma*, in reading books on the Dhamma, in considering what is thereby learned, in asking questions about what is uncertain, and so on.

> Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful mental qualities even while listening to the true *Dhamma*. Which six?
>
> When the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* declared by the Tathāgata is being taught, he listens well, gives ear, applies his mind to gnosis, rejects what is worthless, grabs hold of what is worthwhile, and is endowed with the patience to conform with the teaching. (AN 6.88)

In the beginning many Buddhist views will be obscure and com-

plex, and therefore not immediately verifiable in your own experience. Although verification in your own experience is the point – and blind faith is entirely beside the point – it is important from the beginning that you be ready to accept Buddhist teachings with an open mind and heart, at least provisionally as working assumptions. This is the function of refuge in the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha*, the trust we learned about in chapter six. Too much initial skepticism will leave you with no starting point for your practice; the need for immediate certainty is as pointless as refusing to open the refrigerator until you know for certain that you will find something eat-worthy in there.

There is a wealth of *Dhammic* textual material available for study. But be aware that the *Dhamma* comes alive with practice; the *Dhamma* is inert if it remains in the head. A would-be potter does not read *Pottery for Dummies* then claim to be a potter. A would-be chef does not read *The Joy of Cooking* then claim to be a cook. A would-be explorer does not sit around reading *National Geographic* then claim great adventures. A would-be follower of the Buddhist path does not read this book then claim to be a stream enterer. Rather you need to feel the clay between your fingers, to whip the eggs, to get chased by overwrought natives, to become intimate with suffering and craving and the rest in your own experience. Practice is very much an introspective project developed from its own perspective in each of the steps of the noble eightfold path. But beginning with right view you can at least begin to identify the various factors and their conditions or origins in your own experience.

Fulfilling right intention is somewhat different from fulfilling right view. Right intention highlights three fundamental values whose understanding should have begun in a Buddhist life, but will be unquestioned as foundational for those fully engaged in the Buddhist path, even if they are not yet always consistently practiced. This requires that the benefits of renunciation, goodwill and harmlessness to the world at large and to your personal development have been examined, verified and reverified in your personal practice experience. Recall the discussion of the dangers of sensual passion and the advantages of renunciation in chapter four, the merits of kindness in chapter two and the role of harmlessness in chapter three. The practices described in these chapters will have reached a high level of success by the time

these three values have become foundational.

Further reading

The Four Noble Truths by Ven. Ajahn Sumedho, 2011, Amaravati Monastery. By a very senior American monk, this little book looks closely at this primary teaching of the Buddha, including a chapter on the noble eightfold path.

The Principles of Buddhist Psychology by David J. Kalupahana, 1992, Sri Satguru Publications. Part One of this book by a prominent scholar covers early Buddhism, and the subsequent parts cover later sectarian developments.

Unlimiting Mind: the Radically Experiential Psychology of Buddhism by Andrew Olendzki, 2010, Wisdom Publications. A very readable account of many of the ideas brought up in this chapter.

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1 What the Buddha generally refers to as *the world* seems very close to Husserl's *life world*.

2 In the Mahayana tradition "dependent co-arising" almost always refers to its general sense, whereas in early Buddhism or in Theravada Buddhism it most commonly refers specifically to the standard chain.

9. Perfecting Virtue

> *Of all the fragrances – sandal, tagara, blue lotus and jasmine – the fragrance of virtue is the sweetest. Faint is the fragrance of tagara and sandal, but excellent is the fragrance of the virtuous, wafting even amongst the gods.* (Dpd 55-6)

The traveler on the path will become a saint long before he becomes an *arahant*. The *virtue group* (*sīlak-khaṅdha*) consists of:

right speech (*sammā vācā*),

right action (*sammā kammanta*) and

right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*).

Together these represent exemplary conduct in the world. Of the three groups of the noble eightfold path, the virtue group has most continuity with the Buddhist life. Consequently, the present chapter substantially overlaps but also supplements the discussion found in *Book One*. There we discovered three primary ways in which virtue is practiced in Buddhism: generosity, harmlessness and purity.

Generosity is found in speech or action that benefits others, realized in many different ways, conventionally in community.

Harmlessness is found in speech or action that respects the safety of others, realized conventionally through adhering to precepts, which are rules of thumb that tend to protect others.

Purity is found in the kind of mind that tends toward generosity and harmlessness, the kind of mind grounded in renunciation rather than in greed, in kindness rather than in hatred and in

wisdom rather than in ignorance, the mind from which generosity and harmlessness flow naturally.

These three forms of practice continue in the Buddhist path, though purity, developed further in the wisdom and concentration groups, effectively becomes elevated to the primary emphasis of the path. After discussing right speech, right action and right livelihood, we will take up *kamma* (*karma*) once again, the underlying foundation of Buddhist virtue, but also the foundation of higher attainments along the path.

Right speech

It is important to appreciate how much emphasis the Buddha placed on *right speech*. This is true in many of the discourses and in the *Vinaya*, the monastic code, and the importance accorded speech is probably why it comes as the very first factor in the virtue group. In is easy to think that speech is relatively harmless when compared to bodily actions. We all know sayings like, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me," and "Actions speak louder than words," But consider that racism, sexism, nationalism and eventually war and ethnic cleansing all start with, and are driven by, many acts of wrong speech. We abuse speech to seek vengeance, to turn one person or group against another, to deceive and manipulate, to get people to buy things they do not need and cannot afford and to exalt the magnificence of ourselves. Saying what is not true, in particular, undermines our trust in each other, which a society requires to function.

In this modern age of mass communication right speech has become even more critical as it finds expression through the many forms of media, and the speech of each of us can easily reach mass audiences, sometimes even inadvertently going viral. Given a few advances in technology since the Buddha's day, "speech" now includes the written word, blogs, videos, radio broadcasts and maybe even pantomime.

The conventional five Buddhist precepts include an abstention from lying. The following enhanced set is specified in the context of the path (e.g., AN 10.99):

- Not to lie – "I have here in my hand the names of eighty

communist sympathizers who have penetrated the State Department!"

- Not to speak divisively – "He's got two wives and a bartender to support."
- Not to speak harshly – "You %&$(*@ jerk! Why don't you learn how to drive?"
- Not to chatter idly – "Well, the commercials were almost over, and I was still trying get the top off the toothpaste with my nail clippers, ..."

Violation of any of the first three precepts here clearly brings harm, but the last precept, like the precept concerning intoxication, more specifically supports purification of mind, in this case controlling our tendency toward restlessness and obsession. Again, modern media enhances our capacity for this kind of wrong speech. For instance, watching talk shows generally constitutes being a party to idle chatter.

As most of us are aware, there is an art to speech. We can use it skillfully to involve others in desired results, to avoid offense and maintain interpersonal harmony, to inspire and to instruct. The Buddha, the master communicator, has a lot to say about the art of speech. He gives particular attention to inter-personal harmony, as we learned in chapter five.

With regard to idle chatter, the Buddha provides us with examples of topics of conversation to avoid, at least for monastics, whose behavior is highly regulated.

> Whereas some *brahmins* and contemplatives, living off food given in faith, are addicted to talking about lowly topics such as these – talking about kings, robbers, ministers of state; armies, alarms, and battles; food and drink; clothing, furniture, garlands, and scents; relatives; vehicles; villages, towns, cities, the countryside; women and heroes; the gossip of the street and the well; tales of the dead; tales of diversity [philosophical discussions of the past and future], the creation of the world and of the sea, and talk of whether things exist or not – he abstains from talking about lowly topics such as these. This, too, is part of his virtue. (DN 2)

He also warned of our relentless tendency to cling to views, turn these to debate and to take pride in being right.

> Whereas some *brahmins* and contemplatives, living off food given in faith, are addicted to debates such as these – "*You* understand this doctrine and discipline? *I'm* the one who understands this doctrine and discipline. How could you understand this doctrine and discipline? You're practicing wrongly. I'm practicing rightly. I'm being consistent. You're not. What should be said first you said last. What should be said last you said first. What you took so long to think out has been refuted. Your doctrine has been overthrown. You're defeated. Go and try to salvage your doctrine; extricate yourself if you can!" – he abstains from debates such as these. This, too, is part of his virtue.
> (DN 2)

The ethics of speech is directly connected with purity of mind, for the simple reason that thought is very close to speech, or as the Buddha phrased it,

> Thought is that which is about to break into speech.
> (MN 44)

We can generally guess someone else's intentions simply from which precept concerning speech is being violated. Lying involves gaining some kind of personal advantage in competition with others' interests through deception, speaking divisively is an attempt to destroy someone's reputation out of retribution or general ill-will, idle chatter comes from restlessness in a fog of delusion. To encourage these forms of speech would be to encourage defiled thoughts. To restrain these tendencies provides a very good opportunity for insight into the mind and support for practicing purity of mind.

Right action

Everyone agrees that sticks and stones really *can* break one's bones. Right action is the core of virtue, and many examples have been given in *Buddhist Life*. However, discussions of right action generally highlight three virtues:

- Not to assault living things. – "Take that [wack wack],

cockroaches from hell!"

- Not to take what is not given. – "Hmm [snatch], I don't think anyone will miss this."
- Not to commit sensual misconduct. – "With the wife out of town [suavely adjusting necktie], I can have some *real* fun."

These are the first three of the conventional five precepts that Buddhists try to uphold. These are wide ranging, since the first inhibits intentions rooted in hatred, the second intentions rooted in greed and the third intentions rooted in delusion, interestingly enough. It is important that we give these precepts free range, for instance, extending the first to protecting living beings wherever they may be threatened and developing kindness toward all living beings.

We should also recognize the importance of minor precepts, including rules of thumb of our own creation. Often these serve as an expedient for avoiding conditions in which a major precept might be violated. For instance, if I am a master safe-cracker newly released from prison but determined to live a blameless life ever more, I might want to shun my old colleagues in crime, lest they have new seductive perpetrations afoot.

Notably missing from the three-part account of right action is the fifth of the standard five precepts:

- Not to enter the heedlessness of spirits, liquor and intoxicants.

Here, the harm this precept avoids is less direct than assault, theft or sensual misconduct, and more of the nature of visiting old colleagues in crime, in that we can anticipate only eventual harm. Observing this precept shapes the purity of our *kammic* landscape and our characters at a more subtle, more cautionary level in avoiding a habit pattern that can easily spin out of control. Similarly for the following precept, commonly followed by monastics and monastic-like people:

- Not to dance, sing, play music or watch shows.

This supports purity of mind at a deep level, in this case control-

ling our tendency to restlessness and obsession around sensual pleasures by guarding the senses.

Right action properly includes finding and implementing ways to bring benefit to others, as discussed in chapter two, on generosity. Much of the discussion of this in the early texts includes actions affecting local communities, such as supporting the monastics and caring for the sick or indigent. However, we now live in a smaller and more complex world of enormous suffering, such that higher and more complex levels of social engagement are appropriate as part of the practice of virtue, as long as these bring benefit to people or other living creatures.

Right livelihood

Right livelihood is the third and final factor of the virtue group of the path. Including it as a whole factor of the path addresses a critical issue in pursuing the higher path of practice. This is that our chosen career might limit our *kammic* choices during our workday in unfortunate ways. Not only might we have substantially given up control of our practice during working hours, but, regardless of whether we are taking orders from another person, our actions are still a part of our practice, that is, they will still have harm or benefit and will bear fruits that shape or misshape our future development and well-being. Therefore, it is important that we choose our livelihood with great care.

So, when is a particular livelihood right? We might begin by looking at the job description. Is each task mentioned consistent with right speech and right action and, while we are at it, conducive to wholesome thought? Does a task involve deceit? Does it involve killing or otherwise harming living beings? Does it entail taking what is not given freely? Does it involve or encourage misuse of sexuality? If a livelihood forces us to act habitually with greedy or cruel intentions, our character will develop to be marked by greed or cruelty. Consider that when we take on employment, we rent ourselves out, such that our boss predetermines many or most of our choices during our work day. Effectively, his practice becomes our practice. This means that our character might come more and more to resemble that of our boss rather than our *Dhammic* ideals.

The Buddha specifically points out the following as characteristic

of wrong livelihoods,

> … scheming, persuading, hinting, belittling, usury … (MN 117)

which sound embarrassingly like a modern corporate business model. It suggests that it would be a challenge to find right livelihood in sales or marketing, or in investment (but exceptions may exist for many otherwise wrong livelihoods where intentions remain pure).

The Buddha also listed the following as livelihoods to be avoided (AN 5.177):

- Business in weapons. This includes hunting, fishing, soldiering (see SN 42.3 for more on this) or weapons manufacture.
- Business in intoxicants. This includes tending bar, selling or producing alcohol, pushing drugs, growing opium, and so on. Modern allowances should be made for compassionate medicinal uses of intoxicants and poisons. It should be noted that Benedictine monks would no longer be able to brew beer if the Buddha had a say in the matter.
- Business in meat. This includes raising animals for slaughter, slaughter itself or selling meat.
- Business in poison. This would include manufacturing pesticides and herbicides but also applying them to crops. This would include their use in pest extermination.
- Business in human beings. In the Buddha's day this had to do with dealing in slaves and in prostitutes.

Notice that these criteria are broader than those of the more standard precepts in that they also proscribe providing supporting conditions for *others* to violate precepts. To manufacture a weapon is not to kill directly, but certainly provides a condition for that. To sell someone a drink is to be implicated in intoxication even if we remain completely sober ourselves. In this way, right livelihood reaches beyond the letter of the simple precepts, but then in wrong livelihood one might be repeatedly and relentlessly implicated in such behaviors over the course of one's entire career.

Nonetheless, many of us are forced into wrong livelihoods, generally because our options are limited and we need the income that whatever work we can get provides. If we have debt or a family to feed, or own property or possessions that must be maintained and insured, we are forced into earning a certain level of income, narrowing our choice of livelihood.

Right livelihood raises an important question, already alluded to: If we are compelled by our boss to sell pesticides to a customer (and to convince him he needs *two* cans, where *one* would do), is it really *our* bad *kamma*? If our act of killing an enemy combatant is under orders of our commanding officer, are *we* breaking a precept or is *he?* After all, if we don't do it someone else will, so aren't we off the hook? 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 still the heir of our own *kamma*, as we will see below. This accurately reflects how such actions effect the mind; for instance, combat veterans are known to commit acts of domestic violence at rates much higher than the general population, though they have presumably just followed orders; military training and combat experience leaves deep ruts. This conclusion may have awkward practical consequences, for it often puts us in the position of choosing between failing to care for our families and compromising our practice.

Now, monastics already have the great benefit of what might be called the ideal livelihood, i.e., none. First, in order to be ordained into the *Saṅgha* one must be quite free of conventional societal obligations: no wealth, no debt, no family to speak of. Second, one lives entirely outside of the exchange economy. Third, one has relative autonomy in day-to-day affairs; rarely is there anyone else telling us what to do and the communal activities of a monastery are relatively benign. The factor of right livelihood was clearly included in the path with laity in mind, who often must find a balance between social obligations and choice of livelihood. Reducing obligations as much as possible is nonetheless an option in the lay life, for instance, living simply, buying used merchandise and avoiding credit-card debt. This might serve to expand the range of livelihood options.

Kamma (karma)

Virtue in Buddhism is founded on a principle that equates our own benefit or harm with the benefit or harm we intend for others. This principle has been described in *Buddhist Life*, but I will briefly summarize it here and refer the reader to chapters two, three and four for more discussion.

Kamma (Sanskrit, *karma*) is defined by the Buddha as "intentional action." The action itself may be of body, speech or mind. The relationship between *kamma*, and the *results* or *fruits of kamma* (*kamma-vipāka* or *kamma-phala*) are primary motivation principles by which we find our own relative well-being within *samsāra* in the practices of giving, of harmlessness and of purity of mind. We will see how the Buddhist path brings out a distinct aspect of *kamma* that turns our practice from making good kamma to ending *kamma* altogether.

It is easy to appreciate how *kamma* is relevant to virtue, but also how, more generally, *all* Buddhist practice is *kamma*. The ethical quality of a deed is inherent in the intention itself, roughly, whether we intend harm or benefit to others, or whether we are motivated by the quest for personal advantage or by concern for others. The Buddha called the first of each of these pairs *unwholesome* or *unskillful* (*akusala*) and the second class *wholesome* or *skillful* (*kusala*). Unwholesome intentions are rooted in greed, hatred or delusion, wholesome intentions are rooted in at least one of their opposites: renunciation, good-will and wisdom. The practices of merit-making (performing generous deeds for the benefit of others) and adhering to precepts (avoiding the pitfalls that lead to harm to others) fall into accord with wholesome intentions and into discord with unwholesome intentions.

It is natural to think that benefit or harm for others and benefit or harm for ourselves are two opposing matters, and that ethical conduct is a balancing act between the two. The Buddha saw it differently,

> Whatever I do, for good or evil, to that I will fall heir.
> (AN 5.57)

Our *kammic* acts not only shape the world for others, but also shape our own character at the same time. Good deeds work to

our own benefit as well as to the benefit of others. Unwholesome deeds work against our own spiritual development as well as against the benefit of others. The principle is described as follows:

> Greed, hatred and delusion, friend, make one blind, unseeing and ignorant; they destroy wisdom, are bound up with distress, and do not lead to *nibbāna*. (AN 3.71)

The effect of one's own action accrued for oneself is its *kammic result* (*vipāka*) or alternatively its *kammic fruit* (*phala*). Likewise, we can talk about the results or fruits of other aspects of practice whereby we experience the results of properly directed practice as personal well-being culminating in awakening, and improperly directed practice as personal hardship. Without producing results, practice would have no purpose. Every deed has the potential for producing significant *kammic* results. For this reason we should,

> … see danger in the slightest fault. (MN 6).

This requires the help of precepts, of understanding the consequences of our actions in the world and close monitoring of the purity of our intentions under all circumstances.

An immediate consequence of the practice of virtue is that we progressively weaken craving, a key factor in the four noble truths and in the standard chain of dependent co-arising. As craving is weakened, suffering diminishes. Since craving is also the weakest link in the standard chain of dependent co-arising, discussed in chapters eight and eleven, subsequent factors are also weakened – in particular, we become less attached to things and less obsessed with our sense of identity – preparing for the eventual collapse of the chain through the development of wisdom.

Notice how firmly ethics in early Buddhism is based in psychology and the pressing need to end suffering. It has been pointed out[1] that this is in sharp contrast to the common view of ethics as a system of potentially arbitrary values imposed on our actions that define what we “ought” to do. The “ought” in this case is not a command, but rather the compulsion to try to cure or relieve the human spiritual pathology.

The fine-grained intentional aspect of *kamma* is a *fabrication* (*saṅkhāra*), and thereby belongs to the fourth aggregate

(*khaṅdha*) discussed in the previous chapter. A fabrication is a choice, which can commit us to a particular physical or verbal action, but can also to a particular way of conceiving or perceiving, planning or designing. Fabrications are often called "volitional formations." We might think of them as little packets of free will, but we must be aware that they are much less free than conditioned, rarely deviating from certain limits except in moments of brilliant deliberation. Generally fabrications arise without our even noticing them, simply by following well-worn habit patterns or dispositions.[2] Through Buddhist practice we become more aware of fabrications as choice points, that is, we become brilliantly deliberative.

I like to think of fabrications as forming a landscape deeply rutted by ox cart tracks (thereby mentally situating the landscape in the Buddha's ancient world). The wheels are disposed to falling into the deepest ruts and, when they do so, those ruts become ever deeper. But we are always, in principle, free to steer toward open ground, beginning a new rut, or to choose the rut least traveled on (which might well make all the difference). Fabrications are also sometimes called dispositions, emphasizing the ruts rather than the new choices, or *kammic* results rather than *kamma* itself.

In this simile, the current state of the fabricated landscape is what is sometimes called *old kamma*, whereas any choice to follow or to break out of the established ruts is called *new kamma*. Our character, at any point, reflects old *kamma,* since old *kamma* largely determines our choices, how we perceive and experience things, how we respond to evolving conditions, etc. But old *kamma* is continually being shaped by new *kamma*, particularly deliberate choices that defy the attraction of the ruts. Our practice of virtue takes us out of the ruts which habituate greed and hatred, into directions in which our character evolves for the better, producing sweeter *kammic* fruits. The word *Vinaya*, the guidebook of monastic conduct, actually means "leading in a different direction."[3] It is through our actions that we make and remake our *kammic* landscape, that we make and remake our character.

There is another aspect of *kamma* that makes this process even more imperative. The Buddha saw that *kammic* results reached beyond the bounds of the individual life and that the practice of

awakening typically spans many lives, that we have been engaged in an epic battle with *kammic* forces from beginningless time.[4] This puts our lives into a much broader context and our practice into a much wider perspective. In fact, old *kamma*, the root of character, coalesces into a sense of individuality or self, what we call becoming (*bhava*) and so it is *kamma* that propels that sense forward into another life, a process that ends with awakening. We will see more about how this process occurs in chapter eleven.

After many years of practicing virtue in this way we can expect our character to become marked by virtue, at which time little trace will remain in us of the ruts that once turned us toward craving, ill-will or harm. We are, in effect, *made of virtue* (*sīla-maya*), a cumulation of wholesome old *kamma* that has made us content and destined for a heavenly realm. This sounds awfully good, but there is nonetheless a deeper more subtle level of impurity that remains still untouched.

The end of *kamma*

Even though our *kamma* may be consistently wholesome, it is nonetheless productive of *kammic* results, of continued grasping at becoming and of continued *saṃsāric* existence. We are still attached to the results of our good deeds, we identify with our virtue and with our practice of virtue, we see ourselves as saints, as shining examples of Buddhist practice, destined for felicitous rebirth and eventual awakening, and this viewpoint partially defines who we are. Even wholesome kamma produces a sometimes ever-so-slight amount of craving and therefore suffering and continued existence.

Recall that the stream enterer has eliminated three fetters, one of which is attachment to virtue and observances. In overcoming this fetter, he has already begun to loosen the grasping at becoming that ensues in spite of, and as a result of, successful Buddhist practice. Under “observances” are included such things as meditation practice, which notoriously calls forth attachment to higher states of mind. Nonetheless, even the stream enterer continues to produce *kamma* and therefore grasps at becoming, even while also having abandoned self-identity view.

How do we stop producing *kamma*?

> And what, bhikkhus, is the way leading to the cessation of kamma. It is this noble eightfold path. (SN 35.145)

Of course: the elixir that cures all ills, the noble eightfold path. But wait, isn't the path a matter of practice and isn't practice just *kamma* with *kammic* results? Yes, but the Buddha actually distinguished four kinds of kamma that we perform:

1. Dark *kamma* with dark result,
2. Bright *kamma* with bright result,
3. Dark-and-bright *kamma* with dark-and-bright result,
4. *Kamma* that is neither dark nor bright with neither-dark-nor-bright result, *kamma* that leads to the destruction of *kamma*. (AN 4.235)

Dark kamma is simply unwholesome *kamma* and *bright kamma* is wholesome *kamma*. These new terms are fortunate because, rather than sounding like ethical categories, they hint at how our intentions actually feel as they arise. The third category is that of mixed intentions; most of our intentions are, in fact, complex, for instance, wishing benefit for others, yet being attached to results as a matter of pride.

Kamma that is neither dark nor bright has no ethical feel; it's simply functional. It tends to break the cycle of mutual conditioning between old and new *kamma* by appeasing the fabrications (*saṅkhāra-samatha*) or weakening their conditions, as we will see in chapter eleven. The practices that lead to the end of *kamma* are generally found outside of the virtue group, particularly as right mindfulness and right concentration, which are able to approach fabrications at a very subtle level. The best we can do within the virtue group is to cultivate the wholesome and remove the unwholesome, for replacing unwholesome *kamma* with wholesome *kamma* brings us closer to ending all *kamma* (MN 78). But the consequences of neither dark nor bright *kamma* are felt ultimately also in the virtue group.

The end of *kamma* does not entail the end of virtue in the sense that beneficial conduct observably drops off or harmful conduct observably picks up for the *arahant*. Quite the contrary. Instead,

virtue is no longer motivated as a self-improvement or character-building project. Keep in mind that such motivations completely disappear only as we are approaching complete awakening. Rather, as the self gets completely out of the way, virtue flows uninhibited, without bias or constraint, without attachment to virtue nor to results, but attempting to alleviate suffering wherever it can. We become truly virtuous (*sīlavā*) rather than just virtue-made (*sīla-maya*) (MN 78).

The practice of virtue

When you first begin to follow precepts, conventional generosity or even ritual, this regulation of your behavior may feel restrictive, like you've fit yourself uncomfortably into a box that affords little freedom of movement. It is possible that your non-Buddhist friends will think that that is exactly what you've gotten yourself into. Remarkably, within a short while, if you have been practicing diligently, these practices will probably instead feel liberating. Certainly, most monastics seem to discover this sense of liberation even in following the hundreds of precepts we follow. How can this be?

Recall that,

> *Liberation in Buddhism is not to get what you want, but not to want.*

You were already oppressed before coming to Buddhism by the ever deepening ruts of your *kammic* landscape that kept you locked mindlessly and relentlessly in certain unfortunate patterns of behavior and thought, much of which were unskillfully dedicated to the fruitless search for personal advantage, that is, to wanting, and were thereby also painful. The practice of virtue will give you your first taste of liberation by lifting you out of your *kammic* ruts, by showing that there is no inevitability in your conditioning, that there is a different way of being in the world, a more deliberate way, a happier way. But finding this out does take discipline.

Moreover, as you practice this different way of being in the world, you will get a clearer picture of the intentions that had been driving your actions in the world, intentions that you hadn't noticed while you were on autopilot, passively following the ruts

of habitual action. But as you regulate your behaviors and begin to bump up against the walls of the box your friends think you have fit yourself into, you will notice those intentions, as you leave many of those intentions frustrated, or as you leave some unconsummated impulse or agenda dangling. This is a prime opportunity for *investigation.* At one point you might see a bit of ill-will hanging unexpressed, and, peeling off of this, unmistakable stress, and maybe notice the potential victim out there in the world who has just benefited as a consequence of your choice not to give expression to your deeply rutted ill-will. You will thereby begin to see in what sense many of your thoughts and impulses are indeed unskillful, in fact dangerous, and how restraining them is quite appropriate. Indeed, you will have the opportunity to discover who or what you really are.

Another way to practice virtue is to start with intentions rather than with precepts. In fact, these might become your *primary* guides for right action, as well as for right speech, as they become an object of practice in their own right. You should learn to be very mindful of them throughout the day. They can become easy to spot: Unwholesome intentions are those wearing some degree of suffering – stress, anxiety, dis-ease or dissatisfaction – like a shadow. They will also give rise to misperception and will take you away from the path, and, when acted out, will almost certainly cause someone harm. They also fall under at least one of the categories of greed, hatred and delusion. Refer back to chapter four, on purity, for more on the qualities of unwholesome intentions.

With mindfulness of intentions, it should be possible to practice restraint, for instance, to stop at the point where thought turns to speech whenever you realize that the thought will be unwholesome. Particularly challenging are angry thoughts, which can overwhelm your discernment very quickly, but even these will come under control as you reach advanced stages of practice. There are a variety of techniques for stopping at this critical juncture between thought and bodily or verbal action, and you will discover some on your own. For instance, never ever write an email in an angry frame of mind; if some issue needs to be addressed 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 you quietly and abruptly leave the room

to go simmer down, lest you utter something demeritorious.

As objects of practice in themselves, you learn to improve the quality of your intentions, to weed out the unwholesome and to cultivate the wholesome. Sometimes this involves attending to the conditions that bring about these unwholesome factors. For instance, if you avoid stressful activities, anger is less likely to arise. Note that if the recovering alcoholic avoids the company of people who are drinking alcohol, he is less likely to have the impulse to do so. You can similarly avoid circumstances that tend to lead you into undesirable but accustomed ruts. Sometimes weeding out an arisen unwholesome intention involves simply diverting the mind away from it, or instead directing the mind *toward* it as an object of *mindful investigation*. These techniques all belong to right effort, the first of the three path factors of the cultivation-of-mind group, which we take up in the next chapter.

Another way to practice virtue is to protect the purity of the mind from activities that cause no imminent harm, but which develop unskillful habit patterns nonetheless. For instance, you do well to avoid playing violent video games or watching violent television programs, or listening to hateful speech on the radio, because you know that these activities will condition the mind toward anger and fear, with time scoring deep ruts in your *kammic* landscape. Likewise, channel- or Web-surfing may train the mind toward restlessness and discontent. Entertainments that excite lust will tend similarly to depurify the mind, even while doing no outward (verbal or physical) harm. Modern times have produced new channels for speech or speech-like activities: situation comedies, talk shows, hate radio, crime dramas, war movies, soap operas, pundits propounding, cell phones aringing, ads enticing, thumbs agaming, Webs asurfing, email, texting, social media and crossword puzzles. The volume and vacuity of much of this content have put what counts as idle chatter off the charts in our modern world.

Moreover, the degree of misrepresentation, stereotyping, deceit and swindle at play in our culture represents an unprecedented height in exposure to untruth. Examples of divisive or harsh speech along with more than occasional depictions of physical violence abound, which your *children* are learning to emulate. It is imperative that you, as a Buddhist practitioner, serious about the path, try substantially to limit your and their media exposure

to elucidating kinds of content. Some modern Buddhist writers provide similar advice concerning modern media, but as a generalization of the precept concerning intoxication. This emphasizes the stupefying effect of much media, which also cannot be overemphasized.

With the time you save by making less use of modern media, you might think about fulfilling your practice of generosity through meritorious social engagement: show up to city hall meetings, visit some charitable organizations to see what help they need, find a way to make the world a better place.

The practice of right livelihood focuses primarily on understanding the consequences of our major life choices, the benefits and harm thereof. This assessment might occur at a young age, before choosing a college major or embarking on a career plan. It might involve a reassessment of decisions already made. I used to write software, in what now seems like a previous life, sometimes under U.S. Defense Department contracts. One project, for instance, involved an automated intelligent GPS-based route planning some kind of small autonomous aircraft, whose description was highly redacted, but which everyone in our team agreed was some kind of weapon system.[5] This ended up being a major factor for me in ending my high-paid high-tech corporate career in favor of what I now do. However, the radical redirecting of my career path would have been extremely difficult if I were not at a point in life in which my children were reaching adulthood and my family obligations were loosening up.

In these modern times it is probably particularly difficult to find a right livelihood. If you do not design weapons systems, you might work 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. You often have little choice of livelihood simply because the economy offers few choices. Moreover, what is considered a respectable livelihood in our society may be quite a bit different from what is right livelihood in Buddhist culture. Being a soldier, or a banker, investing in real estate, exterminating insects and pests or stretching the truth a little to make a sale is in good stead in one but not the other. Furthermore, large modern enterprises typically distribute decisions in such a way that obscure ethical responsibility,

and workers who are compensated through wages have little control over the product of their labor. You might be lucky to find a job at a retail store, in which you will be required to sell pesticides, booze, meat, and (especially in the USA) guns, with whatever scheming, persuading and hinting will close the sale. No religious exemptions are generally offered.

This too is *saṃsāra.* In general, the contingencies of your life and your decisions are likely to make your Buddhist practice a part-time matter. Unfortunately, our practice does not fit into a part-time box, for all your *kamma* committed throughout the day bears fruit, whether sweet or bitter.

Perfecting virtue is a long practice that requires patience. As you begin Buddhist practice you might think, "I am already a nice guy. I've got virtue covered." Accordingly, you might place your primary focus on the more alluring practice of meditation. However, if you sincerely engage with the practice of virtue, you are likely to discover that you are not as nice as you thought, far from it (this was my experience). However, this discovery should never be cause for guilt or despair (which would just be a further accretion of unwholesome factors). You are human and humans are intrinsically faulty beings; if it were otherwise the world would be a much saner, kinder place than it is. To become otherwise is a monumental undertaking that requires discipline and persistence. You can, in fact, find enormous satisfaction in the realization that you are, after beginningless time, finally doing something to correct the intrinsic the fault of human nature. Be forgiving of your own faults, and also of those of others.

Further reading

An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics by Peter Harvey, 2000, Cambridge University Press. A thorough introduction the the huge topic of virtue in Buddhism.

Kamma and the End of Kamma by Ajahn Sucitto, 2009, Amaravati Publications. An account of the working of kamma and fabrications by a British monk with many vivid illustrations and pointers for practicing with these concepts.

The Engaged Spiritual Life: a Buddhist approach to transforming ourselves and the World by Donald Rothberg, 2006, Beacon

Press. This provides an overview of social engagement from a Buddhist practice perspective along with many resources.

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1 Kalupahana (1995, 37-46)

2 See Sucitto (2009, 2-4, 14), Kalupahana (1995, 50-52) for more on fabrications in this role.

3 Kalupahana (1995, 131).

4 We should take care to observe that we are born with, or discover at an absurdly young age, an already deeply rutted, and very individualized *kammic* landscape. I know of no more immediate confirmation of the continuity of our *kammic* history beyond a single life.

5 This system was probably a precursor to the GPS systems people use in their cars now. Although we discussed this possibility, no one in our team thought to file a patent for this application.

10. Cultivating Mind

> *But there comes a time when his mind becomes inwardly steadied, composed, unified and concentrated. That concentration is then calm and refined; it has attained to full tranquility and achieved mental unification; it is not maintained by strenuous suppression of the defilements. Then, to whatever mental state realizable by direct knowledge he directs his mind, he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions obtain.* (AN 3.100)

The final three steps of the noble eightfold path constitute the concentration or cultivation of mind group. They are:

right effort (*sammā vāyāma*),

right mindfulness (*sammā sati*), and

right concentration (*sammā samādhi*).

These together represent a precise integration of the mental faculties into a well-oiled engine of virtue, calm and insight that can be achieved through dedicated training. These steps are generally found fully engaged by the *yogi* in seated meditation, though the first two also frequently occur in less formal contexts. Their role in producing insight is highlighted in their inclusion in the *five faculties* or *five strengths* (SN 48.10), listed by the Buddha among the factors that lead to awakening. They are (punctuation is mine):

faith/trust ⇨ energy – mindfulness – concentration ⇨ wisdom

I interpret the middle three factors here graphically as a collaborative process that takes faith as input, slices and dices it, and

produces wisdom as output, for we accept views provisionally as right view, then through the practice of effort, mindfulness and concentration, we come to verify those views in our own experience as higher wisdom.

Right effort

Right effort is the workhorse of our practice. It continually encourages wholesome or skillful thoughts and discourages unwholesome or unskillful. Right effort is also involved in following every other factor of the path, that is, in abandoning wrong view and entering into right view, in abandoning wrong intention and entering into right intention, in abandoning wrong speech and entering into right speech, in abandoning wrong action and entering into right action, in abandoning wrong livelihood and entering into right livelihood, in maintaining right mindfulness and navigating right concentration (MN 117), for the normative duality unskillful/skillful (*akusala/kusala*) is largely equivalent to that of wrong/right (*sammā/micchā*).

More specifically, we practice right effort when we bring,

> … desire, work, persistence and intent to bear:
>
> 1. … for the sake of the non-arising of unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen...,
> 2. … for the sake of the abandoning of unskillful qualities that have arisen...,
> 3. … for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen...,
> 4. … for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, and culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. (SN45.8)

I think of right effort as like the work of a gardener. The first effort is like the gardener preventing weeds from growing, the second like pulling weeds that have grown, the third like planting desirable seeds and watering them so they sprout, and the last like protecting and cultivating the existing desirable plants so that they thrive. In this way, right effort purifies our intentions prior to speech or action.

Right effort provides the energy of practice. Every time there is resistance to right anything, then right effort is called for. If it is time to meditate and we are just too lazy, laziness is to be weeded out and ardency needs to be watered. If we really want to flirt with our neighbor's husband, sensual passion is to be weeded, contentment with our own husband watered. Often the effort required is enormous; we may be dealing with ingrained habits or natural instinctive behaviors. Right effort is fundamental to our practice, beginning with living a Buddhist life, for we need to overcome unskillful tendencies in order to practice generosity, harmlessness and harmony.

A variety of techniques are provided in the discourses for performing right effort. For instance, suppose an unskillful thought arises. Then we can:

- replace it with a different, skillful thought, like getting rid of a coarse peg with a fine one, or
- consider the downside of unskillful thoughts, which will make us disgusted as if by a carcass hung around our neck, or
- empty the mind, like shutting the eyes, or
- step backward to the origin of the unskillful thought, like walking slowly instead of fast, or standing instead of walking slowly, or
- subdue and beat it down with clenched teeth, like a strong man restraining, subduing and beating a weaker man down. (paraphrase of MN 20)

As a result of removing such unskillful thoughts, we are assured that "the mind will stand firm, settle down, become unified and collected." (MN 20) This language suggests that this result will play a causal role in bringing the mind to concentration.

A short list of five categories of mental factors are distinguished as particularly vexing when we practice mindfulness and bring the mind to concentration, because they naturally keep the mind in a state of agitation or distraction. These are known as the *hindrances* (*nīvaraṇa*). Holding these, at least temporarily, at bay is necessary for a strong meditation practice.

- Lust. "Hubba-hubba."
- Ill-will. "That darn %&$*@!"
- Sloth and torpor. "Zzzzzz."
- Restlessness and remorse. "If only I had …, I know, I'll …"
- Doubt. "What do I think I'm doing here anyway?"

These factors are expressions of greed (1), hatred (2) and delusion (3-5) and are therefore unskillful. Subduing all of them for a period of time, we produce a degree of seclusion from worldly concerns, which is very conducive indeed to contemplative practice, for instance, in seated meditation. Notice that they are *unskillful* factors that trouble us, that prevent the mind from settling. The mind delighting in renunciation or overflowing with too darn much kindness is not the one hindered from moving on to mindfulness and concentration.

Right mindfulness

Mindfulness is to remember what it is we are doing, fully cognizant of the present circumstances. It is to be "on task," undistracted by what is not relevant to the task. It reminds us to apply precepts, to recognize our skillful and unskillful thoughts, to guard the sense faculties at the right time.

Mindfulness is the conventional translation of Pali *sati*, which is generally a satisfactory translation. It conveys the qualities of being present and giving attention to detail. The word *sati* is a derivation of a root meaning *memory*, which is also an aspect of the English word mindfulness, as when we are mindful to rotate our tires at regular intervals.

> And what is the faculty of mindfulness? There is the case where a monk, a disciple of the noble ones, is mindful, highly meticulous, remembering and able to call to mind even things that were done and said long ago. (SN 48.10)

Many people think of mindfulness as awareness, but actually it is more a matter of filtering the awareness that is already there according to relevance according to *Dhamma*, maintaining what should be kept in awareness to achieve *kammically* wholesome

states of mind and ultimately to end *kamma*.

Formal training in mindfulness is described as of four kinds in the *Sati-paṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness) *Sutta*. In teaching the four foundations of mindfulness, the Buddha recommends attending to four specific topic areas of contemplation that promote insight into the nature of experience, thereby turning right view into seeing things as they are. This is the standard passage that introduces the four foundations of mindfulness.

> And what, monks, is right mindfulness? Herein:
>
> 1. a monk dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief concerning the world.
> 2. He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings, ardent …
> 3. He dwells contemplating states of mind in states of mind, ardent …
> 4. He dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief concerning the world. (DN 22, MN 10)

Right mindfulness thereby begins by choosing a topic of contemplation within one of the four categories of body, feelings, mind states and phenomena. Practicing mindfulness of body, for instance, we might attend to bodily postures and movement, or attend to the breath, or attend to the decay of a body at death. In mindfulness of feeling we attend to what pleases us and what irks us (but not complex emotional states), most typically bodily sensations of comfort and discomfort. In mindfulness of mind we attend to the present general quality of mind, for instance, whether it is calm or agitated, sharp or dull, etc. The last category, phenomena (*dhamma*), is the most broad and targets individual experiental factors specifically elucidated in the teaching of *Dhamma*, such as the five hindrances that we just discussed under right effort, or the relationship of craving to suffering as described in the four noble truths. The consummation of wisdom entails insight into all the factors of right view, so mindfulness of phenomena

should be taken very broadly indeed. In each case, we try to stay on task as we attend to our topic.

What are these various factors of mindfulness in the passage above?

Contemplating the body in the body, *contemplating feelings in feelings*, etc. is to see directly, without conceptual proliferation, the object directly as it presents itself without wrapping ideas or preconceptions around it.

Ardent is the energy we commonly associate with mindfulness.

Clearly comprehending suggests a degree of investigation or evaluation, but minimally conceptual, as we perceive the rising and falling of objects in our experience, letting them speak to us. This is, in fact, the locus of insight, where intuitive wisdom develops.

Notice that the word *mindful* occurs in the definition of mindfulness, contrary to a proper western standards of definition, but such a pattern seems to be common in the early texts.

Finally, *putting away covetousness and grief concerning the world* is suggestive of holding the hindrances at bay, thereby attaining a degree of mental seclusion conducive to contemplative practice, as described under right effort.

Although mindfulness is something we can carry around all day, it is something we can sit with under a tree in lotus posture as well.

It is important to understand that what we practice and cultivate here is not any old mindfulness, but *right* mindfulness, just as we practice and cultivate not any old view, but *right* view, and just as we practice and cultivate not any old action but *right* action. Mindfulness is something we all have to some extent, usually to a widely varying extent, and it is generally there when we most need it and it is even systematically trained in certain professions and in other contexts. It is there when a sniper is pulling the trigger that will neutralize what has some indications of being a possible enemy combatant. It is there when a cat burglar removes the famous gemstone with an adeptness that avoids setting off the alarm system. But this is not *right* mindfulness. *Right* mindful-

ness is the mindfulness that is implicated in every other path factor. *Right* mindfulness does not exist independently of the rest of the path.

> First establish yourself in the starting point of wholesome states, that is, in purified moral discipline and right view. Then, when your moral discipline is purified and your right view straight, you should practice the four foundations of mindfulness. (SN 47.3)

Right mindfulness is a critical component of right effort, and both work in collaboration with right view.

> 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 is mindful to abandon wrong action and to enter and remain in right action: This is one's right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities – right view, right effort, and right mindfulness – run and circle around right action. (MN 117)

This passage circles around right action but it is stated verbatim with each of intention, speech, view and livelihood replacing action in turn. Right view is the forerunner and with right effort and right mindfulness applied critically to the practice of each of the first five path factors. Right view is what we understand, right effort is its present observance and right mindfulness is the present recollection of what is to be observed. Mindfulness is like a thermostat that keeps the temperature right.

There is a kind of art to *clear comprehension.* It is a kind of immediate conceptual *investigation* of experiences as they rise and fall. It serves to develop wisdom or insight, but stays clear of intellectual reasoning, for reasoning intellectually would be to wrap ideas or preconceptions around what is experienced. It is a matter of noting or verifying, sometimes as far as noting a conditioning relation between two factors. For instance, in contemplating feeling in feeling, one might note an instance of suffering, perhaps a twinge of anxiety, and note right before that a covetous thought, then recall the second noble truth. *Feeling in feeling*, etc. places a constraint on how far a thought might wander.

Right concentration

The term *samādhi* can be aptly translated as "collectedness," "composure" or "unification," as well as the most conventional "concentration." None is ideal, but we will adopt the last, but with a caveat: Concentration should not be confused with absorption in a meditation object or "one-pointedness" found in most yogic meditation techniques. Significantly, the term *samādhi* may well have originated with the Buddha himself,[1] suggesting a desire on his part to distinguish *samādhi* from existing techniques of meditation, which had traditionally been called *jhāna* in Pali. The concentrated mind is one with a special stillness and clarity, with all its factors arrayed, that is conducive, in fact necessary, for the final leg of the path to awakening.

> 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 concentrated, 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. (MN 39)

Non-Buddhist meditation methods typically bring the mind to a single point of concentration[2] in which mental processing, even the senses, can stop, which is often experienced as profound and blissful. Right concentration is different: it is the natural extension of the path, and most immediately the natural extension of mindfulness with investigation into the calm abiding of a still mind, but not generally of one absorbed in a meditation object.

> For one of right mindfulness, right concentration springs up. (SN 5.25-6)

It is then only through right concentration that the higher realizations and awakening are possible.

What mental factors are collected in concentration?

First, our mind must be secluded from distracting and haphazard factors, particularly by holding the hindrances at bay through right effort. This produces a relative purity and seclusion

of mind in which we can practice mindfulness effectively, which provides the conditions for additional factors of concentration to arise.

Second, the seven *factors of awakening* (*bojjhaṅga*) appear, lined up in a causal chain as follows (MN 118):

1. mindfulness (*sati*),
2. investigation of experience (*dhamma-vicaya*),
3. energy (*viriya*),
4. delight (*pīti*),
5. calm (*passaddhi*),
6. concentration (*samādhi*),
7. equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Mindfulness underlies *investigation of experience*, referred to as clear comprehension in the standard passage on mindfulness discussed above.

Investigation, when ardently undertaken, takes on a degree of *energy*, which in turn tends to lead to *delight*.

Delight (*pīti* is often translated as "rapture") is a feeling of well-being that includes *pleasure*, but it is more energetic than simple pleasure, because it has a bit of excitement in it. Investigation is fun.

Nonetheless, the feeling of well-being that comes with delight leads to *calm* even as a bit of excitement persists. The transition from delight to calm is a kind of tipping point, since up to now the three previous factors of awakening have been energizing.

Calm sets the conditions for *concentration* in which these factors become neatly arrayed as if looking into a mountain pond, clear, limpid, and unsullied.

Notice that through concentration we additionally reach *equanimity*, or impartiality, which is very conducive to wisdom, and ultimately to awakening.

It should be appreciated that mindfulness and investigation of ex-

perience persists in the concentrated, but not absorbed, mind. In fact, one of the designated subjects of investigation listed under the fourth foundation of mindfulness, phenomena, is the set of factors of awakening itself, which indicates that mindfulness persists while the subsequent factors naturally arise and are each investigated in turn, thus turning right view about the factors of awakening into wisdom as we witness the factors arising in our own experience.

Meditation comes in different forms, but it is not *right concentration* unless it derives from straightened views and intentions, from purified virtue and from a basis in right effort and right mindfulness.

> There are right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort and right mindfulness. The unification of mind equipped with these seven factors is called noble right concentration with its supports and accessories. (SN 45.28)

Right concentration is repeatedly, in the early discourses, divided into four stages called *jhāna*. *Jhāna* also had the meaning "meditation" or "contemplation" before the Buddha, but the Buddha regularly used it in this technical sense, for which almost all translators retain the Pali word.

> And what is right concentration?
>
> There is the case where a monk – quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful qualities – enters and remains in the first *jhāna*: delight and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by thought and evaluation.
>
> With the stilling of thoughts and evaluations, he enters and remains in the second *jhāna*: delight and pleasure born of composure, unification of mind, free from thought and evaluation – internal assurance.
>
> With the fading of delight, he remains equanimous, mindful and alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters and remains in the third *jhāna*, of which the noble ones declare, "Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasant abiding."
>
> With the abandoning of pleasure and pain – as with the

> earlier disappearance of elation and distress – he enters and remains in the fourth *jhāna*: purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.
>
> This is called right concentration. (SN 45.8)

A table will clarify the logic behind the otherwise seemingly arbitrary lists of factors explicitly collected in each of the *jhānas*.

Jhana:	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
thought-evaluation	✔			
delight	✔	✔		
pleasure	✔	✔	✔	
unification		✔	✔	✔
equanimity			✔	✔+
mindfulness	✔	✔	✔	✔+

The progression from one *jhāna* to the next is consistent with the trend already evident in the seven factors of awakening: a trajectory from more energetic to more calm. Recall that the four *jhānas* are stages of concentration itself in this series. The first three factors here are energizing, and so degrade as we enter higher stages of *jhāna*. The last three are calming, and so grow as we enter higher states of *jhāna*. Specifically, each successive *jhāna* is produced from the preceding by the loss of the most energetic remaining factor.

The factors of thought and evaluation (*vitakka-vicāra*), found in the first *jhāna*, are particularly energetic, having a discursive quality, generally centering around the topic of investigation:

> Thought and evaluation are the verbal formation, one breaks into speech. (MN 44)

With the loss of thought and evaluation, we enter the second *jhāna* and beyond. Since these discursive elements are absent, the second *jhāna* is referred to as *noble silence*. The loss of these two factors together by the second *jhāna* necessarily shuts any tendency toward intellectual proliferation out of investigation.

The loss of more subtly energizing factor of *delight*, which is also fourth of the seven factors of awakening, puts us into the third *jhāna*.

Even the quiet *pleasure* that initially accompanies delight is too energetic for the fourth *jhāna*.

Meanwhile, more serene factors accumulate to offset the loss of the the more energetic factors. Notice that mindfulness must in fact be present as a causal factor in the first *jhāna*, as a condition of concentration in the first place, though it is not explicitly listed for the early *jhānas*. Its mention in the higher *jhānas* suggests that it becomes increasingly strong, acute and self-sustaining in the higher *jhānas*. In this way, mindfulness and concentration are mutually supportive. It is important to bear in mind that evaluation, as a factor of mindfulness, continues unabated, even in the fourth *jhāna*.

> A monk in each *jhāna* regards whatever phenomena connected with form, feelings, perceptions, fabrications and consciousness as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, a void, non-self … (AN 9.36)

Jhāna is therefore *not* the state of extreme absorption common in non-Buddhist traditions, which would cut off all conceptualization altogether. For instance, the Buddha praises Sāriputta for his talents in investigation in all *jhānas*,

> Whatever qualities there are in the first *jhāna* … he ferrets them out one by one. Known to him they remain, known to him they subside... (MN 111)

He then makes exactly the same statement but with regard to second *jhāna*. third *jhāna* and fourth *jhāna*.

A practice that intersects with *jhāna* practice progresses instead through increasingly refined perceptions. Each step focuses on a sphere (*āyatana*) of perception which is empty of the grosser aspects of the previous sphere, and is thereby said to be empty (*suñña*) of them. In this process of deconstruction we no longer perceive people, but perceive the forest, then no longer perceive the forest, but perceive the ground, the final material realm. Then we see the world as infinite space, then as consciousness itself,

then as nothingness and finally we enter the sphere of neither perception or non-perception. (MN 121, 122) These final four immaterial spheres (*arūpa āyatana*) are sometimes listed in conjunction with the four *jhānas*. The Buddha claimed to have spent most of his time in this way "dwelling in emptiness."[3]

In summary, right concentration is the natural progression of the practices of right effort and right mindfulness into a refined state of serenity and unification of mind. The telescoping of the three final steps of the path explains why the three together are called specifically the *concentration group* (*samādhik-khandha*), since the factors arising in right effort and right mindfulness are collected in right concentration. As the awakened nun Dhammadinnā put it:

> Unification of mind is concentration, the four foundations of mindfulness are its themes, the four right efforts are its requisites, and any cultivation, development and pursuit of these qualities are its development. (MN 44)

Since right concentration depends on all the previous steps of the path, the mind, as it enters concentration, already inclines toward wisdom and virtue, toward viewing reality in terms of impermanence, suffering and non-self, toward renunciation, kindness and harmlessness, toward purification of the mind from unwholesome factors and toward appropriate attention and mindfulness. Right concentration consolidates all of the path practices, into a crystal clear state in which practice really starts to cook, to produce the delectable odors of wisdom.

> There is no *jhāna* for one with no wisdom, no wisdom for one without *jhāna*. But one with both *jhāna* and wisdom, he's on the verge of *nibbāna*. (Dhp 372)

The birth of insight

The path begins with right view, belonging to the wisdom group of the path. Wisdom (*paññā*) is a broad category constituting everything from an intellectual or conceptual understanding, through procedural knowledge of some skill, to a intuitive feel for how things really are. The path begins with an intellectual understanding dependent on faith, and progresses to a more intuitive

understanding gained through directly seeing for ourselves, such that faith becomes less and less necessary to sustain our understanding. This latter wisdom is generally called *knowledge and vision* (*ñāṇa-dassana*) or *knowing and seeing* or simply *insight*. It is for the most part a product of right concentration, keeping in mind that right concentration has already folded in right mindfulness and right effort, along with the rest of the path. The Pali word *ñāṇa* (knowledge), built on the same root as *paññā* (wisdom), is most generally understood as intuitive wisdom. "Vision" or "seeing" roots knowledge in experience. The two words often are found together in the compound *knowledge and vision of things as they are* (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*).

> That one could fulfill the wisdom group without having fulfilled the concentration group that is not possible. (DN 18)

> Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A monk with concentration understands in accordance with reality. (SN 22.5)

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

> The knowledges are for one with concentration, not for one without concentration. (AN 6.64)

Right view gives us a lot of material for investigation. Right concentration, in effect, transforms right views into knowledge and vision.

> When his mind is thus collected in concentration, is purified, bright, rid of blemishes, free of taints, soft, workable, steady and attained to imperturbability, he bends and inclines his mind toward knowledge and vision. He understands "this my body is material, made of four elements. … Just as if a man with good sight were to examine a beryl gem in his hand, saying 'this beryl gem is beautiful, well made, clear and transparent, and through it is strung a blue, yellow, red, white or brown string." In just the same way he inclines his mind to knowledge and vision … to potency … understands the four noble truths. (DN 2)

Why do we want to develop wisdom beyond right view? A primary reason is that it is necessary to perfect purity of mind, and therefore to perfect virtue. With limited wisdom we can still correct our conduct and habit patterns, but we cannot correct the most recalcitrant ways we have of mis-perceiving the world.

> "When, Bāhiya, there is for you in the seen only the seen, in the heard, only the heard, in the sensed only the sensed, in the cognized only the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no 'you' in connection with that. When Bāhiya, there is no 'you' in connection with that, there is no 'you' there. When, Bāhiya,there is no 'you' there, then, Bāhiya, you are neither here nor there nor in between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering." (Ud 1.10)

Most of us have a very deep-rooted view that we are a clear and substantial separate self. Unfortunately, this is an impediment to perfecting virtue. Most fundamentally, we misperceive the world because of a constant bias in favor of this needy self. Nonetheless, through the practice of ethical conduct we gradually learn to behave toward others as if that self were barely there, by not stealing, by not harming, and so on. Through the practice of purification of mind we can mitigate the affective mental factors that that self manifests, the various forms of greed and hatred that arise in the self's quest for personal advantage, to try to wrest control of our thoughts away from the self.

Now, all of this will tend to loosen the iron grip of the self, but not eliminate it. Through the development of wisdom we get at our most recalcitrant views, including the view of self. Most fundamentally we come to know the conditional or fabricated nature of what we once took to be solid and real. This is knowledge and vision of things as they really are. Ultimately, the development of wisdom also underlies the goal of awakening, the final ending of all suffering, the deathless, *nibbāna*, that transcends the *kamma* committed by the fabricated self.

In the next chapter we will deepen our understanding of right view to comprehend the conditional factors implicated in the arising of the deluded human condition and how these are broken up with the light of wisdom mediated by concentration. In the final chapter we endeavor to explain the nature of the higher attainments, particularly complete awakening.

The practice of cultivating mind

Right effort and right mindfulness can each be practiced independently of right concentration, but it is in right concentration that the three become unified, particularly in the specialized practice of seated meditation. Right effort in everyday life begins with attending to skillful and unskillful thoughts as they arise in the mind. You can begin to do this in a Buddhist life with merit-making, for a primary factor in the merit gained in an act of generosity is the intention behind the act. Your unskillful intentions are highlighted wherever they run up against a precept you are trying to uphold. With time you will learn to monitor your intentions habitually throughout the day.

With every action you undertake you should become consistently aware of the motivations behind it, because that defines its *kammic* quality. As you begin this practice, you might be embarrassed at how much unwholesomeness you discover, as a constant stream of factors such as anger, lust, deluded views, fear, stress, envy, jealousy, spite, restlessness, anxiety, arrogance and pride arises. It is important to accept this stream as a natural part of the untrained human condition, lest you feel guilty (guilt is just queing another unskillful thought – one rooted in aversion – behind the others). However, just this mindfulness has a way of wearing down our unskillful habit patterns over time. This is dispassion or "fading away" (*virāga*). With persistence and time, the mind shifts remarkably. This is purity of mind. In addition to the list of mental techniques involved in right effort provided above, you are likely discover some of your own, from changing your perspective or conceptualization of the situation to bringing the thought into the focus of attention until it dissipates of itself. There are a couple of useful modern books that bring together Buddhist teachings specifically on anger, which many of us identify as an area of particular personal weakness.[4]

Right mindfulness is practiced in conjunction with any other path factor. For instance, right action in a particular situation requires mindfulness to note where you might be about to break a precept or to note the arising of unwholesome intentions. Right effort requires constant evaluation of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness. Ethical practices engage us constantly in mindfulness because they challenge us continually to recall what we are sup-

posed to be doing, often in contradiction to our habituated impulses.

Mindfulness can also be cultivated in everyday life by remembering to return to the present task over and over. For instance, during any day you probably perform the task of leaving a house or building many times. If you are like most people, your mind is probably through the door, down the hall, out on the street and in your car even before you get up from your chair; you will never even notice how you got to your car. To be mindful is to be present with the turning of the doorknob, to be present as the door clicks in place, to be present with your steps. Make this a habit. Routine tasks sound dull, but they are excellent opportunities for mindfulness: If you are cutting potatoes, see if you can put everything else out of mind that is not potato-cutting for the few minutes you are engaged in this task. In fact, make the task a little more challenging: try to cut the potatoes into pieces of equal size; then, if you relax your mindfulness, the sizes will begin lose their uniformity. Formalities and ritual are, it may surprise you to learn, very good opportunities for developing mindfulness because they require a certain amount of attention; you can even invent your own, for instance, around how and when you brush your teeth.[5] Again, we generally think ritual or routine is boring in our culture, but it serves to improve mindfulness.

Become aware of how our lifestyles and culture discourage mindfulness, and make adjustments accordingly. Mindfulness becomes difficult when there is too much going on at once: when the kids are barking at you, the dog needs a ride to his piano lesson, the TV is trying to sell you something that is whiter than white, your cell phone is ringing and you don't know how you are going to pay the mortgage. You might love to multi-task and think that life is empty if a lot of things are not going on at once. You might be addicted to the dispersed mind, while the Buddhist way of being thrives on simplicity. Many of us love to drink alcohol, which disperses the mind so much we forget our cares, often while fostering new ones. Most of what you think of as modern conveniences are just ways to avoid the effort of being mindful. For instance, you have different buzzers that go off to remind you of things that you would otherwise have had to be mindful about, such as fastening your seat belt. Doors open for you so that you do not even need to touch, much less be mindful of, a physical

doorknob.

You do best to try to neutralize these tendencies. Cultivating simplicity tends to reduce potential distractions, so we should not make too many commitments, nor live beyond our means (try to have no debt), nor own a lot of things. Generally low-tech demands more mindfulness then high-tech. You should give up your addiction to multitasking if you have one. If you are cutting potatoes in the kitchen, you should not listen to the radio. You should not leave the TV on all the time, nor talk on the phone while driving. Attending exclusively to the primary task at hand is to be mindful.

For advanced practice, in which you engage with the foundations of mindfulness and are likely to reach concentration, you should seek meditation instruction from a qualified teacher. Everyone develops differently and occasionally gets stuck in an often creative ways that a teacher can help with. My task here has been to provide a conceptual overview of meditation and to put it in its broader context, not to provide hands-on instruction. There are also many excellent books, videos and audios available that can get you started.

Be aware, however, that the instructions vary among and within modern Buddhist schools and may obscure the Buddha's teachings in various ways, even while preserving their intent. For instance, within the Theravada school the meanings of *samādhi* and *jhāna* have shifted historically to become equated with absorption.[6] Accordingly, concentration has become an optional practice and the whole causal sequence from mindfulness to concentration and from concentration to insight is obscured in their instruction. What is known as *vipassana* practice otherwise generally stays close to the foundations of mindfulness and where mindfulness arises the remaining factors of awakening will, with diligence, also arise. The Zen instruction in *shikantaza* (Japanese, “just sitting”) is taught in terms even more radically removed from the Buddha's instructions, but much simpler. The line between mindfulness and concentration is vaguely defined in Zen, but I can report from personal experience that the results are very similar such that each of the steps in the Buddha's instruction are clearly experienced in Zen meditation, even if they are not named.

Although the Buddha does not seem to have taught nor endorsed absorption meditation, most *vipassana* teachers recommend it as a preparation for mindfulness practice and I concur. Early forays, before the path is well developed, into simple absorption is a way to still our busy modern minds and to get a feel for the power of the collected mind. Absorption meditation typically involves a practice of following the breath with a very narrow focus of attention and with the goal of becoming completely absorbed in the breath. Although this is not conducive to insight, you are likely to achieve states of calm very quickly. This will encourage, and open up space for, Buddhist concentration practice.

Further reading

Mindfulness in Plain English by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, 1991, Wisdom Publications. This is possibly the most popular book on Buddhist meditation in the English language, a wealth of techniques presented in a very readable form. "Bhante G." is a Sri Lankan-born monk who has been one of the most influential Buddhist teachers in the USA for many years.

The Buddhist Path to Awakening by R.M.L. Gethin, 1992, Viva Books: New Delhi. Written by an important British scholar, this book, like the present chapter, has a more theoretical orientation than the one above. It covers the seven factors of awakening in detail, in addition to many other factors implicated in awakening.

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1 Walsh (1996), p. 556.

2 The Pali work *ekagga* in the suttas is often misleadingly translated as "one-pointed." This word can just as well be translated as "having a single highlight or theme," or even "uniform."

3 In a later tradition these immaterial spheres came also to be regarded as additional *jhānas*. Emptiness in another tradition would take on a more ontological meaning and become a key concept of Mahayana Buddhism.

4 Chodron (2001), Nhat Hahn (2002).

5 The Zen practice tradition, which developed in a very rich Confucian ritual culture, makes extensive use of formalities to very good effective in order to cultivate everyday mindfulness.

6 See Shankman (2008), Kumara (forthcoming).

11. Disentangling Mind

"A tangle within, a tangle without,
People are entangled in a tangle.
Gotama, I ask you this:
Who can untangle this tangle?"

"The wise one established in virtue,
Developing concentration and wisdom,
That ardent and prudent monk,
It is he who disentangles his tangle." (SN 7.6)

Suppose a man wants to walk to the top of a mountain in the fog without a map. By repeatedly stepping toward the upward incline he will find himself making steady vertical progress. This is similar to what we do when, step by step, we embrace the wholesome and eschew the unwholesome and find ourselves of progressively purer mind. In either case, at some point, the venturer will get stuck and progress will come to a halt. For the hiker this will happen when he finds himself either in a cave or atop a foothill. For us, on the other hand, this will happen when we find ourselves entangled in our own fixed ways of thinking, perceiving, conceptualizing and responding. In either case, the venturer will need a map and keen vision to discover what is going on and how to resolve it in order to resume progress to the top. For us, *right view* is that map, and *concentration* is the keen eyes that see. *Knowledge and vision* dispel the fog of ignorance, providing insight into how these *saṃsāric* tangles arise.

This chapter outlines (in a necessarily cursory manner) how we get entangled, and, as a corollary, how we get *dis*-entangled. It provides a deeper look at aspects of what we have already encountered in chapter eight under right view. The subject matter is

largely human *cognition*, particularly how we conceptualize or picture the world, in conjunction with *affective* qualities of mind, such as craving and suffering, that closely adhere to the artifacts of human cognition and that thereby turn our misperceptions into harm and suffering. The focus here will be on what we have already described as the standard twelve-link chain of dependent co-arising.

Let me say at the outset that sometimes there are disagreements about the intricate details of early Buddhist teachings on the mind. This should not surprise us: The teachings are sophisticated, have doubtlessly suffered, at best, small errors in transmission and have lost much of the cultural and intellectual context in which they were originally understood. This should, however, not distress us as much as we might at first suppose: The primary function of the psychological teachings is to provide a map for the exploration of our own experiential world; we naturally make corrections in our understanding as we go along, and even if the understanding of some part has been mis-transmitted, such that we end up taking an occasional wrong fork in our experiential thicket, we should nonetheless be able, as we continue to explore, to orient ourselves by means of other features of the landscape. I have at a couple of points below taken what is my best estimation of the correct fork in matters of controversy, but in each case I try to let the early texts speak for themselves in preference to any favored later sectarian view. I take responsibility for any errors in my choices.[1]

A tour of the twelve links of dependent co-arising.

In its linear step-by-step formulation, the conventional twelve-link chain of dependent co-arising can appear deceptively simple. In fact, Ven. Ānanda was once confused by this and revealed this in discourse with the Buddha:

> "It's amazing, lord, it's astounding, how deep this dependent co-arising is, and how deep its appearance, and yet to me it seems as clear as clear can be."
>
> "Don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Deep is this dependent co-arising, and deep its appearance. It's because of not understanding and not penetrating this *Dhamma*

> that this generation is like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, and bad destinations." (DN 15)

When we begin to flesh out the chain with additional causally related factors and consider the dynamics of these factors in cognitive processing, we begin to appreciate the complexity of its snarl. In fact. no other of the major teachings – neither four noble truths, nor five aggregates, nor six sense spheres – is so comprehensive as the standard chain of dependent co-arising. Dependent co-arising is an entrance into an understanding (1) of the nature of the human dilemma, that is, how we have managed to get ourselves so ensnarled in *saṃsāric* existence, and, at the same time, (2) of the resolution of that dilemma, that is, how we can weaken or break that chain. It is certainly in reference to this comprehensiveness that the Buddha said,

> Whoever sees dependent co-arising sees the *Dhamma*; whoever sees the *Dhamma* sees dependent co-arising. (MN 28)

The general theme of the twelve links is the conditioned arising of the illusory human identity, as something with individual characteristics and needs, existing in and interacting with the world, caught in *saṃsāra*, in short, the conditioned arising of the sense of the self, of "me" and "mine" and of all that entails. Although it is presented as a simple linear chain for expository purposes, the chain actually represents a single thread through a broad network of conditional relations, since each factor is typically conditioned by, and conditions, many other factors, and its full complexity is revealed as it is fleshed out, for its dynamics actually involves many branches, loops and overlaps so that our single thread becomes twisted and knotted with other threads along the way.

This is, once again, what the basic twelve-linked thread looks like:[2]

ignorance → fabrications → consciousness →
name-and-form → sixfold-sphere → contact →
feeling → craving → attachment → becoming →
birth → old age, death, suffering

We've run into most of these factors before.

Ignorance is the failure to see the delusive nature of reality as it is.

Fabrications are volitional ways we conceptualize, imagine or plan things, the building blocks of our delusions.

Consciousness is the cognition of things, building interpretations of what we focus on, from fabrications.

Name-and-form is the experiential situation.

The *sixfold-sphere* is the external reality witnessed through the senses.

Contact is the encounter with that external reality.

Feeling is the immediate affective response to this encounter.

Craving is the desire for what is contacted.

Attachment is the cumulative habituation of craving.

Becoming is the consolidation of an identity characterized by its attachments.

Birth is the projection of becoming into a new life.

Old age, death and suffering are experiences of the new life as the round of *saṃsāra* perpetuates itself.

The perspective of the twelve links does not comprehend all of the human mind but is limited to that which brings about trouble and suffering, to the human pathology. For instance, although we learn a lot about the arising of greed, hatred and delusion, we learn nothing about where kindness, compassion and generosity come from, though these seem to displace the former as the chain is weakened and collapses. Also, the pathology it exposes has little to do with the actual *content* of experience, and much to do with its *architecture*. Craving, for instance, is just craving, regardless of whether it is rooted in childhood deprivation or in unrequited love or in too much exposure to TV advertising. Although each instance of craving has content, the pathology results primarily from the causal structure expressed in the various links.

We can divide the chain into three segments based on their pri-

mary functions.

The first six factors, up to and including contact, have to do with cognition or conceptualization that result, among other things, in the fabricated duality of subject and object or self and other.

The next three factors – feeling, craving and attachment – add to this the affective or emotive aspects of personality.

The remaining three factors have to do with the consolidation of the personality around a strongly present sense of self able to propel itself into future existence toward the continuation of suffering that that entails.

The purpose of the exposition of dependent co-arising is to bring the faulty structure of human cognition and emotion within the scope of mindfulness, concentration and the other corrective factors of awakening. Let's take up the links of the chain according to these three segments.

The origins of subjects and objects

The first half of the chain is a sequence of six cognitive factors that build up a particular way of conceptualizing or understanding the world.

ignorance → fabrications → consciousness →
name-and-form → sixfold-sphere →
contact *(→ feeling …)*

Consciousness plays the central role in this chain and the role of the other factors largely derives from their relation to consciousness, so let's begin there.

The role of consciousness. *Viññāṇa*, the Pali word for consciousness, is yet another variant of *ñāṇa* (knowledge). With the prefix *vi-* it means literally "knowledge apart," or "discriminative knowledge." It is the last of the five aggregates and always arises in one of the six sense spheres. It is generally focused on one thing but flits around as interest draws it here and there. Its fundamental function is to cognize, that is, to comprehend the experiential situation conceptually. Its most striking quality is its abil-

ity to designate something outside of itself, that is, to be conscious *of* something often in elaborate detail, which is an almost magical quality.

The Buddha compared consciousness to a magic show,[3] creating an imaginary world through props and sleights of hand, but a more modern example makes his point perhaps more directly. A television is a physical object with a flat screen and a speaker. When it is turned on, pixels of changing colors dance around on the screen and the speaker vibrates audibly. Consciousness tells us this, but it does not stop there: We are suddenly transported into another time and place in which John Wayne is a gunslinger whose inner goodness is brought out by a young Quaker woman, who cares for him as he recovers from a gunshot wound. And John Wayne is more than a shape on the screen: he is three dimensional, with emotions and plans, and is even now standing there behind his horse where we cannot see him. We cry and we laugh in empathy with the characters present in this other time and place. Consciousness has conjured up a whole alternative world simply as an interpretation of flickering pixels and audible vibrations, and it has then transported us there, where we may even forget occasionally that we are at the same time sitting in front of a television munching popcorn. It seems so real. It doesn't matter that this alternative world does not *really* exist; it becomes part of our experience and we are conscious of things in that world, just as we can be conscious of the popcorn in our mouths. Consciousness is the master of illusion.

The activities going on in the television effectively *designate* something going on elsewhere, in this case in an entirely fictitious world, through the mediation of consciousness. Many kinds of things similarly designate something outside of themselves. A book is a designator: a novel can designate a fictitious world almost as well as a television can. A framed picture can designate a happy family. Words and language, of course, designate all over the place. This book designates aspects of the Dhamma. But consciousness is what makes designation possible. It's magic.

Everything we are conscious of is a designation. So, if I look out the window and become conscious of a cat stalking a bird, what is the designator in that case? The simple answer: the designator is activity in the eye: colors and shapes playing on the retina, much as the designator of the activity in the John Wayne world is

colors and shapes playing on the screen. The Buddha actually gave a much more sophisticated answer, as we will see below. But first:

How does consciousness fabricate a designation? A magician presents activities on stage in such a matter that each spectator is conscious of a reality that just cannot be. The magician has his scantily clad assistant lie in a box, saws the box in half, and the assistant emerges unscathed. How can that be? The answer is that the spectator has interpreted what he sees on stage according to certain expectations about what the various props on stage are and how they behave, but the magician has fabricated props and sleights of hand that defy those expectations, through false bottoms, mirrors, black curtains and so on, not apparent to the spectator. It is said that the Pali word *saṅkhāra* (fabrication) was used in the Buddha's day also to describe a magician's or an actor's props. It also describes the spectators' expectations.

Fabrications (*saṅkhāra*) are ways we conceptualize, imagine or plan things. They are also one of the five aggregates we have already met and the seat of both new and old *kamma*. They are also the immediate condition of consciousness in the chain of dependent co-arising. The Pali word is also commonly translated as "formations," "volitional formations," "preparations" or "activities," but literally means "put together." For instance, we are conscious of two eyes and a mouth and we cognize a face. We are conscious of a particular sequence of sounds and we cognize a chickadee. We feel hungry and see an apple tree and the conception arises of a plan to walk over to the tree, pick an apple and eat it. Fabrications range from engineering feats, to our interpretations of what we think is going on around us. They also, as when a television is cognized, impute a designation.

Fabrications are subject to habituation, that is, as learned habit patterns, dispositions or inclinations that can also be unlearned. For instance, a bird watcher becomes very adept at cognizing a particular species of bird from simple movements and color patterns. A particular kind of anger response is triggered in a particular individual in a predictable way when particular conditions are present. Through Buddhist practice this kind and most other anger responses might be unlearned. The reader might find it helpful to recall the analogy of *kamma* to a rutted landscape in

chapter nine.

Fabrications provide the conceptual building blocks of human cognition. Consciousness is made of them. But fabrications tend to overreach, to produce delusive or unreliable results that we tend to take seriously and that thereby cause problems for us. The Buddha expresses this with regard to the analogy of the magic show.

> Now suppose that a magician or magician's apprentice were to display a magic trick at a major intersection, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, and appropriately examine it. To him — seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it — it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a magic trick? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, and appropriately examines any consciousness that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him — seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it — it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in consciousness?" (SN 22.95)

Now, when we look out the window and see the bird chasing our cat, we tend to think we are experiencing things directly as they really are in the world "out there." This is not true: consciousness has fabricated what we see as a designation of light and patterns on our retina. This is not to say that there is not a degree of correspondence between what we are conscious of and what is actually happening in some objective reality, but the Buddha was primarily interested in the illusory nature of consciousness, since that is what gets us into trouble and leads to the human pathology. With mindfulness we might see ourselves fabricating what we otherwise think is real, just as we might see the magician's tricks if we sneak backstage to observe the show from the right place.

One way that consciousness is consistently and annoyingly deluded is that it attributes way too much permanence to things. It fails to cognize the flux of nature that keeps all things so contingent we can hardly regard them as things at all. It also fails to recognize the unsatisfactory nature of these things, and erroneously identifies the self with many things. In short, it fails to acknowledge the *three signs* (*ti-lakkhaṇa*) mentioned in chapter

eight. It also attributes beauty to things far too liberally. In short, what it conceptualizes does not keep pace with with the world as it is. And this is on a good day, for it is also prone to gross misperception, as in the case of a mirage or of a magic show.

Fabrications are immediately conditioned by ignorance in the standard chain. *Ignorance* is like darkness, it fails to provide the conditions that might prevent the unfortunate from happening, in particular it is the absence of insight into the delusive nature of fabrications. Much of our practice aims to dispel ignorance by shining the light of wisdom here and there to reveal what is actually happening in the subsequent links of dependent co-arising.

The primary designator. Consciousness interprets a visual, auditory or other experience that unfolds in each of the six sense spheres. In the discussion of the sense spheres in chapter eight, sense objects, as distinct from the senses themselves, were mentioned with little discussion. In the chain of dependent co-arising sense objects do not occur as such, but instead we have name-and-form. *Name-and-form* (*nāma-rūpa*) is perhaps the most difficult to understand, and most misunderstood, factor of dependent co-arising, so hold on to your hats for the next few paragraphs.[4]

Name-and-form is the most immediate, intimate, rich and vivid part of sense experience. It is the conceptualized experiential situation. An example at hand is your conscious visual experience as a reader as you read this page, or as you look out the nearest window. Name-and-form might also be an audible experience, perhaps of music, traffic or birds, or a gustatory, aromatic or tactile experience. As I look out at, say, a forest – *consciousness* has alighted there – certain physical elements impinge on my eye faculty, experienced as vibrant colors, alluring shapes and graceful movements and dark and ominous spaces.

Name-and-form is clearly defined as *activities* in SN 12.2, first by listing the constituents of name, and of form:

> Name: feeling, perception, volition, attention, contact,
>
> Form: earth, water, air, fire and derivatives thereof,

and secondly by describing two mutually conditioning processes driven by those factors: *Designation contact* (*adhivacana-samphassa*) is driven by the factors of name, and *impingement con-*

tact (*paṭigha-samphassa*), is driven by the factors of form. Working together, these provide a conceptual handle on sense data. If impingement contact tentatively identifies colors and shapes as we view a forest, say, then the following happens on the name side: *Feelings* arise concerning these impingements. Specific objects emerge as *perceptions*, for instance as tree trunks astanding, leaves arustling, rabbits ahopping, and bluebirds aflittering. My present *volitional* task – maybe I am a hunter, intent on prey, or a birdwatcher, binoculars in hand, or a fire lookout – provides an overlay, tending to bring certain objects to the fore, such as bunny, bluebird or billowing smoke. As a result, the eye will then make *contact* with the shifting of attention to that object. *Attention* arises to highlight a more specific object of perception for further cognition, and the process will repeat itself, this time with a narrower focus, backgrounding the rest of the forest that constituted a previous name-and-form.

In short, name-and-form, the primary designator, is not a matter of purely physical activities but already includes evaluative and interpretive processes in addition to raw physical data. Name-and-form is certainly the most glaringly subtle (and consequently most comprehensively misunderstood) link in the chain of dependent co-arising. The Buddha also attested to its critical importance:

> Where name-and-form as well as sense and designation are completely cut off, it is there that the tangle gets snapped. (SN 7.6)

Consciousness is in constant interplay with name-and-form. In fact we learn in the *Mahānidāna Sutta* (DN 35) that, although consciousness is the condition of name-and-form in the standard chain, they are in fact mutually conditioning:

consciousness ↔ name-and-form

Consciousness does not arise without name-and-form, that is without a designator, and name-and-form does not arise without the attention of consciousness. The two dance around each other, each constraining and inciting the other. With attention, consciousness contacts a particular focus area of name-and-form for further investigation, bringing in thought and reasoning as name-and-form reveals further details, and constantly projecting name-

and-form onto the world "out there." In this way consciousness paints an external reality, one brush stroke at a time. Where consciousness alights, name-and-form grows as more details are revealed in immediate perceptual experience.

As a designator, name-and-form in the eye, in the ear, and so on is reflected as a designation in the illusory external world "out there." In fact, the purely subjective name-and-form is typically projected wholesale onto the external world, and then enhanced. The rich experience of colors, sounds and smells are attributed to the external things themselves along with the evaluations, and the focus of attention seems to apply to external objects, which seem to be real, including the five factors of name, some of which we are otherwise inclined, on close analysis, to take as subjective in nature: We take the *feeling* of an experience, gloom, for instance, to be an intrinsic property of the thing "out there." The *perceived* parts of the experience are what we assume exists out there. Our *volition* becomes the intrinsic utility we attribute to the things out there. What we *attend* to becomes the highlights of the thing out there. And what we *contact* becomes the greater part of the thing out there, as its details become increasingly known, while what we don't contact remains sparse in detail.

We are reminded of the illusory nature of projecting mental attitudes to external objects when we hear the folk wisdom, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Indeed beauty also becomes intrinsic to things "out there." The overall result is that our experience of the external world, entirely conjured up by consciousness, has the same richness as the subjective name-and-form but is also assumed to be real. In fact, name-and-form has a dual identity, its inner or subjective manifestation and its outer or objective manifestation, the one a reflection of the other, and related as designator and designation.

The interplay of consciousness and name-and-form is sometimes described as a cycle or a vortex (*vaṭṭa*) that underlies the entirety of *saṃsāric* life. The Buddha makes the following quite remarkable and sweeping statement:

> In so far only, Ānanda, can one be born, or grow old, or die, or pass away, or reappear, in so far only is there any pathway for verbal expression, in so far only is there any pathway for terminology, in so far only is there any path-

> way for designation, in so far only is the range of wisdom, in so far only is the round kept going for there to be a designation as the this-ness, that is to say: name-and-form together with consciousness. (DN 15)

It is between name-and-form and consciousness that concepts take shape, the world arises, we arise in our becoming a self as the this-ness, and our *saṃsāric* lives are lived.

Subject and object. Consciousness fabricates an *external world* "out there" as a primary sphere of experience that contrasts with experience of our own mental states and physical sensations, which appear to be "in here." The illusion is completed through the next two factors of the chain of dependent co-arising: the six-fold-sphere and contact, which constitute the experience of looking out from the vantage point of the world "in here" through the sense doors into the world "out there," which sure *seems* to exist independently but which we can directly apprehend. This illusion is also fabricated by consciousness and obscures what can be directly experienced in concentration, that we fabricate the world "out there," that it is itself simply part of our world of experience.

This bifurcation into inner and outer is taken very seriously because the fabricated external world is taken as very real. This is basis of subject and object and also the root of the conceptual self, for if there is an "out there," there must be an "in here," and some kind of wall or fence between the two. We look, in our conceptual experience, out through the wall between inner and outer by means of a *sense door* (*dvāra*) at an external object. For instance, I look out through the eye door to see my cat cowering under a deck upon which angry bird stands "out there," and I listen through the ear door to hear a bird squawking, all "out there." These spheres onto which the sense doors open are the *sixfold-sphere* (*saḷ-āyatana*). Recall, from chapter eight, that a sense sphere is where consciousness, contact, feeling and craving play out, as distinct from the sense *faculties*, such as the eye per se, which would be *saḷ-indriya*. In the chain of dependent co-arising it seems to stand for the space in which contacting, viewing and responding to the external world occur.

Contact is then the apparent particular encounter with something in the world "out there." After peeking through one of the six sense doors we apprehend what we find there. Normally we think

that the self, which we often identify vaguely with a kind of enduring consciousness, contacts the object. Contact, conceptualized in this way is a critical step in the development of the human dilemma in that it establishes a relationship between self and other, on the basis of which feeling, greed, aversion, attachment, obsession, scheming, speculation, views, self-identity, and the perpetuation of *saṃsāric* existence unfold in response. To give an example, the *Brahmjāla Sutta* (DN 1) rejects sixty-two erroneous speculative views of non-Buddhist schools, each one with the conclusion, "that too is dependent on contact."

Becoming attached and obsessed

Contact puts us in relation to things of the outside world and this has profound consequences. "Where there is a fence, there is offense and defense."[5] The world "out there," becomes a source of assets to exploit and dangers to repel. The world "in here" lives in a quest for personal advantage, lusting for the assets and fearful of the dangers, but with only limited control over what is taken as an independent reality "out there." A flood of consequences ensues.

The next segment of the standard chain follows contact and consists of three escalating emotive responses to, or degrees of interest in, the objects of contact:

(… contact →) feeling → craving → attachment
(→ becoming …)

Taking an interest. A *feeling* (*vedanā*) is the affective quality that follows from, and accompanies, an instance of contact, essentially an immediate positive, negative or neutral evaluation of the thing "out there," that is, the experience of pleasure, displeasure or indifference in response to the associated external object of consciousness. Feeling is one of the five aggregates we have already met. Experience tells us that pleasure and suffering come in a variety of intensities, from mild pleasure or agitation to bliss or agony. Suffering is perhaps most directly associated with our own bodily discomfort.

A *craving* (*taṇhā*) builds upon a feeling and adds to it a forward-looking concern for the future attainment or retention of objects

of gratification, or for the future avoiding or voiding of objects of threat. Craving is of three kinds: craving for sense pleasures, for becoming and for becoming other. Sense pleasures include avoiding displeasure and acquiring things like wealth and fame, as well as the more immediate forms of sensual pleasure. Craving for becoming or becoming other has to do with our existential concerns: the need for survival, the need to be someone in particular or the desire to end it all or be someone else at some stage. Existential craving suggests the existence of a self, which the subject-object duality has created a home for, and which becomes more substantial through our attachments, to be consummated in a subsequent link of the standard chain, *becoming*.

A lot of drama happens around each instance of craving. Craving is a condition for suffering (*dukkha*), ever shadowed by suffering, as the four noble truths tell us. This represents a branch off of the standard chain like this:

craving → suffering

At the same time, craving is the locus of unwholesome *kamma*, since it is rooted in the fires of greed, hatred and delusion, greed for objects of gratification, hatred of objects of threat, and delusion in that it is dependent on the fabrication of an illusory "out there." Craving impels us to volitional bodily or verbal action, which calls for another branch from the standard chain.

Attachment (*upādāna*) results from the cumulation of craving around the mass of objects that grow where craving was initially present, sometimes to the level of self-identification. It should be noted that whereas feeling and craving are experiences that arise moment by moment, attachment is cumulative, a potency built up by many instances of craving over time. Attachment also has a broader scope than craving, consisting of four types: attachment to sensual pleasures, to virtue and observances, to views and to becoming.

Views are particularly noteworthy here as they seem to develop in order to justify and personalize the other forms of attachment. Primary among views is self-identity view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), which we have encountered before. It can be appreciated how this arises from the subject-object dichotomy, reinforced by craving of object by subject. Additional existential views such as the alterna-

tives of eternalism and annihilationalism may follow on this view. Included here may also be very specific views, not mentioned in the early discourses. For instance, those attached to personal wealth may develop strong opinions about property rights and taxation. Since attachment is made of habituated cravings, it is clear that any attachment will provide an additional condition for the recurrence of craving, a kind of hotbed of craving and therefore of suffering.

The Pali word for attachment also means *fuel*; the idea is that fire attaches itself to fuel. Since each of the five aggregates can provide objects of attachment in dependent co-arising, the term *upādānak-khaṅdha* stands for the *aggregates of attachment*. Cleverly, since the Pali word for attachment also means "fuel," "aggregates of attachment" also means "heaps of fuel" or "piles of firewood," which give rise to the flames of becoming. *Nibbāna* ("extinguishing") is what finally happens to those flames at awakening.

Attachments individuate us, they mark our behaviors and give us a sense of me and mine, that is uniquely ours.

> If one is preoccupied with form that is what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that is how one is classified. (SN 22.36)

This same passage with form is then repeated for each of the other aggregates: feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness.

Growing the world. Feeling, craving and attachment turn our conceptual misperceptions into drama. They also provide fuel for additional misperceptions. There is a side branch from the standard 12-link series of dependent co-arising described in the *Honey-ball Sutta* that looks like this:

(contact →) feeling → perception → thought →
obsession → perceptions-and-notions

The relevant passages ends with,

> With that about which one has mentally obsessed as the source, perceptions and notions born of mental obsession beset a man with respect to past, future and present forms

> cognizable through the *eye* . (MN 18)

The exact same passage with forms/eye is then repeated with sounds/ear odors/nose, etc. Obsession (*papañca*) is identified as the point at which this process runs wild. For instance, we contact through name-and-form the movement of a yellow object. Finding it of interest, we perceive Fluffy, the cat, based not only on the sense data, but also on remembered knowledge that we own said cat and that it frequents this forest. One thought leads to another and pretty soon we are wondering if Fluffy is hungry, has fleas, has caught the mouse we saw yesterday, and so on. Soon we have a very busy mind indeed.

All the while, we should keep in mind that consciousness is continually arising anew and is drawn to points of interest, that is, to objects of non-neutral feeling, of craving and particularly of attachment, both to what is desired or relished and to what is despised. When it alights somewhere it brings with it a flood of fabrications that grow the experiential world from that point. When consciousness spends most of its time with what is craved, a world of craving is what grows, a world in which almost everything is an opportunity for, or a hazard to, one's personal advantage, a world in which we are relentlessly in one moment enticed and in the next repelled. This basis by which the world grows is described metaphorically as follows.

> Consciousness is the seed, *kamma* the soil and craving the moisture. (AN 3.76)

Kamma here is the *kammic* landscape, made of the fabrications on which consciousness depends. What grows reflects our personal cravings and attachments, a world created in our own image. This represents a further, and particularly pernicious, distortion as we fabricate a world "out there," in which what is uninteresting or not of personal relevance is simply absent or just barely existent in that world. This has grave ethical consequences. For instance, international leaders or captains of industry often and notoriously make momentous political, military or business decisions that take virtually no notice of the adverse impact they might have on millions of people or on entire ecosystems. In their experiential worlds, in which more personal concerns occupy their minds, those people or ecosystems simply are not there. This is how denizens of the human realm become

monsters, and might well be one of the reasons the Buddha considered delusion much more dangerous than either greed or hatred.

The perpetuation of the self

We have seen that our crackling attachments measure us, they define who we are, they define our personal footprints, and they delineate me and mine. They keep us embroiled in our own special kind of suffering. And they give rise to becoming, rebirth and the continuation of *saṃsāra*.

(… attachment →) becoming → birth → old age, death, suffering

Becoming (*bhava*), often translated as "existence," is the consummation of the sense of self, the consummation of this-ness. A conceptual space for the self is initially provided through the bifurcation of the world into an "in here" and an "out there." It is further established in the relation between self and other, realized in feeling, craving and attachment. In becoming, it becomes fixed in an identity, as we cognize who we are and who we want to be. We become in name-and-form, a rich locus of both subjective and objective experience, existing both "in here" and "out there" as a fully functioning and persisting entity in relation to the world we have fabricated. Continuing the metaphor for attachment, we are like the fire that arises from the fuel of our own needs.

A fire has vitality; it sustains itself wherever it can. *Birth* is the projection of the consolidated and arisen being into a new life after this one. This is the only step in dependent co-arising we cannot explore directly in daily or meditative experience; we have to wait. Hot on the heals of birth are *old age, death, suffering,* the prospect of *saṃsāra* as the self takes on a new life with all the conditions present in this life.

The standard twelve-link chain of dependent co-arising lists the most pernicious primary factors of human experience and the causal relations among these, an account that reveals the delusive quality of human cognition and how these qualities give rise, step by step, to the demon of self that possesses our bodies, thoughts and actions to fill them with personal suffering and to bring harm

to the world. This process persists in an *almost* hopelessly entangled snarl of *saṃsāric* existence. The twelve links describe the arising of a self-centered pathology, common to virtually all persons.

The practice of disentangling mind

The purpose of understanding the standard chain is that it exposes the points at which the pathology described here can be broken down, for if one link is broken, then the subsequent links cannot arise, for each link represents a necessary condition – though in general not a sufficient condition – for the link that follows. Awakening is the breakdown of the whole chain and thereby a total reworking of the age-old cognitive structure of the human mind.

The key to untangling the tangle is progressively to loosen each of the knots and snarls of dependent co-arising a little at a time. As one becomes looser, you will gain some more room for working on those nearby. Given enough time the tangle will slowly unravel. As at least some of the snarls loosen, you will begin to gain some freedom and to suffer less; life becomes less of a problem. Because the snarls co-arise, loosening one will tend to loosen the others. In the end, progress is likely to come quickly. The Buddha employed a similar simile to describe this situation:

> Just as when an ocean-going ship, rigged with masts and stays, after six months on the water, is left on shore for the winter: Its stays, weathered by the heat and wind, moistened by the clouds of the rainy season, easily wither and rot away. In the same way, when a monk dwells devoting himself to development, his fetters easily wither and rot away. (SN 22.101)

Loosening the links is accomplished by the great cure-all, the noble eightfold path. Wisdom is practiced by coming to understand the teachings the Buddha provided concerning the various factors mentioned here. If you are intent on awakening, you should engage the teachings I have tried to clarify here. The practice of virtue tends to struggle against a single link: self-centered craving. We have seen that craving leads to the suffering of attachment and becoming. It also provides a footing for consciousness

and is associated with the further growth of the fabricated world "out there" and with obsession with the things of that world. Virtually all links weaken with the weakening of craving, but the mast and rigging will not yet come down.

Your primary practice with regard to the standard chain is mindfulness and concentration, for these develop investigation, insight, knowledge and vision. It is through these that you will come to see the illusive way in which you fabricate your world. When you see this clearly and often, dispassion will arise and your fixed conceptualizations will become less compelling. These conceptualizations will fall away, like well-worn toys or the enacted fantasies of childhood.

Further reading

The Law of Dependent Arising (Paṭicca Samuppāda) by Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇānanda,, 2015-6, Dharma Grantha Mudrana Bharaya: Sri Lanka. This consists of transcripts of twenty lectures given by the venerable Sri Lankan monk and Pali scholar on the topic of this chapter.

Great Discourse on Causation: the Mahānidāna Sutta and Its Commentaries, by Bodhi, Bhikkhu, 1995, Corporate Body of the Buddha, Taiwan. This short book, focusing on the seminal DN 15, provides a more traditional interpretation of name-and-form than that represented here, but also excellent discussion of the issues involved.

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1 I have benefited in my understanding of these issues most especially from the insightful writings of Venerable Katukurunde Ñāṇānanda listed in the references.

2 There are variants in this sequence in the suttas. For instance, *Mahānidāna Sutta* (DN 15) lacks the first two and the fifth factors.

3 SN 22.95.

4 See Cintita (2016) for a more detailed exposition on name-and-form. At the time of this writing, I am also in the early stages of a book on dependent co-arising, which will reveal and motivate the content of this chapter in more detail.

5 Ñāṇānanda, (2008, sermon 15).

12. Awakening

Those whose minds have reached full excellence,
In the factors of awakening,
Who, having renounced acquisitiveness,
Rejoice in not clinging to things.
Rid of taints, glowing with wisdom,
They have attained nibbāna in this very life. (Dhp 89)

Liberation (*vimutti*), *awakening* (*bodhi*) and *nibbāna* (Sanskrit, *nirvāna*) describe both the beginning and end of the Buddhist path. It is the beginning in that the Buddha's awakening and the potential for awakening in ourselves represent the highest aspiration we might have as we undertake Buddhist practice. It is the end in that its achievement is the culmination of successful Buddhist practice. It is also the middle in that it provides the compass we use to find our way through the many vicissitudes of practice. This is the stock description of its occurrence:

> Dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, and resolute, he … reached and remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realizing it for himself in the here and now. He knew: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world." (AN 6.55, etc.)

In common usage, liberation means the freedom to do what you want: If you want to speak harshly of others, freedom of speech allows you to do so. If you want to eat ice cream, money in your pocket ensures that you can. In Buddhism, liberation is something deeper: It is freedom from having to want. Buddhist practice begins with virtue and generosity and the discovery that per-

sonal well-being is also found there. It deepens into the project of purification of mind, where we encounter resistance in the form of deeply rutted greed, hatred and delusion in many manifestations. In the end, it is our delusions, our persistent mis-perceptions and convoluted ways of viewing things that lie at the knotty root of the human condition, only to be dug up with the help of penetrating wisdom. The constraints of our own entangled minds, in spite of relentless effort, perpetuate a fearful and needy self ever discontent with the world. To break through these complexes completes liberation, attains awakening and realizes *nibbāna*. It remains to describe the unfolding of this attainment.

Awakening is generally regarded as ineffable, a mystical state that cannot be described with words, to be approached only through analogy or through poetry, like describing sight to the blind. Nonetheless, there are at least three systematic perspectives on awakening provided in the early teachings that help us to gain some conceptual understanding of what awakening is, and also to track our progress toward awakening. These perspectives are cosmology, dependent co-arising and the fetters.

The cosmology of attainment

The Buddha provided us with a precise, integrated functional system of thought, grounded in ethics and psychology, accessible through understanding, training and practice, practical in terms of its beneficial results. I hope I have conveyed in this book an understanding of the depth of his insight and method. Early Buddhist discourse often takes a cosmological perspective that contrasts markedly with the perspective represented here. This is almost a parallel account that runs through the discourses. We see this in the gradual instructions, for instance, where the whole topic of *kamma*, the fruits of *kamma* and rebirth is summarized as "heavens." Similarly, *jhānas* and attainments on the path of awakening are given cosmological correlates. I have had relatively little to say about the cosmological perspective so far in this short book, so let's try to understand the purpose of this perspective briefly at this juncture.

Buddhist cosmology seems to share many elements with *Védic* and *Upaniṣadic* cosmology and to have some unique features of its own, but not to have been very systematically developed in its

early stage, as it would become in the later Buddhist traditions. Its basis is multiple *realms of existence* distributed over many world systems. We are reborn over and over again into one realm or another; in fact the key term *saṃsāra* (wandering on) is a reference to this process.

Two of the realms are luckily already quite familiar to us all: the *human realm*, in which, I trust, most of the readership lives, and the *animal realm* ("Hi, Fluffy!").

Lower realms are unfortunate realms of woe. They include at least:

- the animal realm (though Fluffy doesn't really seem to have it so bad),
- the hungry ghost realm, and
- a number of hell realms.

Higher realms are happier places, though even they do not exclude suffering. They include:

- the human realm, and
- multiple heavenly (*deva*) realms.

The higher heavenly realms are said to be *formless* (*arūpa*), for beings there do not have bodies, only minds.

Although virtually any of us can be reborn into any realm, from there to die and be reborn anew, we learned in the last chapter that being reborn is in fact a kind of conceptual mistake that the *arahant* will not make, since with the ending of delusion, the great snarl of *saṃsāric* existence has unraveled and, with it, becoming has ceased, after which there is nothing even mistakenly to be reborn. Nonetheless, the vast majority of beings have been reborn over and over again in this way since beginningless time, sometimes slipping from one realm into another, now high, now low, and will generally continue to doing so indefinitely into the future, in the absence of practice on the Buddhist path.

Buddhists are fond of describing practice attainments in terms of this cosmological model, and indeed this seems to have begun with the Buddha: Meritorious acts tend to produce rebirths in higher realms, demeritorious acts tend to produce rebirths in

lower realms. This is the first correlation between psychology and cosmology. The former allows for kammic benefits or deficits to accrue in a single life, such that a saint or a scoundrel can create a heaven or a hell right in this world. The latter sorts saints into higher realms and scoundrels into lower realms

Moreover, cultivation of states of concentration tend to produce rebirths in Brahmā realms. A noble one, that is, a stream enterer, a once returner, a non-returner, or an *arahant*, is nearing the very end of the *saṃsāric* round and is incapable, in any case, of ever being reborn in any future life in a lower realm.

A stream enterer will be reborn at most seven times altogether, so either in the human or in a deity realm.

A once-returner will return once more to the human realm.

A non-returner will return no more to the human realm but attain awakening in a *deva* realm.

The most striking point in the Buddhist cosmology is that awaking, that is, final liberation, which is the goal of the entire Buddhist project, entails the complete escape from *saṃsāra*, for an arahant will never again know rebirth.

A lesser aspect of this cosmology that we have already encountered is visitation between realms, a valuable contributor to the more exciting story lines of many ancient texts. We are already all familiar with visitation between the human and animal realms from our modern experience; in fact our temple cat is visiting me as I write this, along with a couple of flying insects.

Similar visitation is common in the ancient texts between the deity and human realms, as we have seen. It should be noted that deities (*devas*), the inhabitants of heavenly realms, clearly do not have a role as objects of worship in early Buddhism; the Buddha never endorsed such a practice for his disciples, and in fact visiting deities, even the highest in the Indian pantheon, venerate the Buddha and even the monastics.

The most common visitor is the infamous Māra, actually a kind of fallen deity, always ready to tempt, discourage, seduce and disarm, to do anything to bring the Buddhist practitioner away from what is wholesome, from what leads to *nibbāna* or supports the *sāsana*, with remarkable persistence given that his rate of suc-

cess seems quite low in the early texts.

It is often pointed out that Buddhist cosmology parallels Buddhist psychology. This has been called the *principle of the equivalence of cosmology and psychology*.[1] More generally, some scholars have argued that mythic elements of religions in general often serve to communicate an underlying psychology. The underlying psychology is rarely so directly articulated as such as it is in Buddhism, although this does have some precedent in the early *Upaniṣads*, which predate the Buddha. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that many mythic elements of early Buddhism probably were taken to some extend as literally true, or at least open to that interpretation, and that we should avoid gratuitous demythologizing.[2] At the same time we should recognize that the early texts often demythologize these matters themselves, for instance:

> Where the eye exists, Samiddhi, where visible forms, eye consciousness and *dhammas* cognizable by the eye exist, there Māra or the manifestation of Māra exists. (SN 35.65)

Also as examples of this equivalence of cosmology and psychology, we should note that each of the realms corresponds to a mental state within the scope of human psychology. For instance, it is possible to create a figurative hell realm right here as part of the human realm and many of us do, for instance, by habituating anger and hatred. The clever reader can work out what an animal realm would feel like, or a hungry ghost realm. Some of the deity realms are even explicitly associated in the early texts with different levels of *jhāna*.

With regard to rebirth, the cosmological and psychological perspectives seem to intersect. In dependent co-arising, we become someone in this life at the link of becoming. What we have become propels us into the next life, so that we begin the next life as what we have become in the last. In this way our figurative hell might well project us into the cosmological hell. Nonetheless, it is the cosmological hell that is repeatedly highlighted in the early Buddhist texts for those in need of a motivational boost for avoiding demeritorious deeds and for purifying the mind of unwholesome factors.

Similarly, the self-perpetuating nature of *saṃsāra* is reflected in

continuous becoming as a psychological process. The word *saṃsāra* also carries over figuratively to this present life, as the feeling of entanglement or stuck-ness most people feel day by day, and call "the rat race," what I like to call "soap-operatic existence." Few of us can find our way out of this.

Why do we have these two alternative perspectives, the cosmological and the psychological? Good science was doubtlessly not a consideration in the times of early Buddhism; as always, good doctrine was motivated in terms of benefit to practice. The cosmological perspective with respect to attainments, particularly higher attainments, is more useful than the psychological at the beginning of practice and through most of the middle of practice when simple ways to frame, understand and motivate the practice are needed, and when actually working with mental factors in detail has yet to develop. The cosmological perspective would also have represented a natural and probably expected way of expression at the time of the Buddha. The psychological perspective is more useful than the cosmological toward the end of practice and, in fact, will carry the practitioner to awakening, because practice has matured to become progressively about working with mental factors and to require a more nuts-and-bolds, empirical and psychological approach.

For instance, dispassion is a quality that leads to relinquishing attachments, a quality taught quite early on in the gradual training. A means of developing dispassion is to reflect on the monotony of existence, of reliving the same kinds of experiences over and over. Focusing narrowly on daily experiences, one must make the argument one case at a time. But the cosmological level supports sweeping statements like this:

> Which is greater, the tears you have shed while transmigrating and wandering this long, long time – crying and weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing – or the water in the four great oceans?… This is the greater: the tears you have shed… (SN 15.3)

The Buddha similarly talked about the mountains of bones we have left behind, and the vast quantity of blood we have spilled. The cosmological perspective invites further myth,

and myth can be outrageous when it wants to be. But the way we relive the same kinds of experiences endlessly over and over *is* outrageous, can hardly be exaggerated and is difficult to capture in a more sober, objective means of expression. That is why, even for one not inclined to take the cosmological view of early Buddhism literally, filling the great oceans with tears can be a very effective image to frame and motivate our practice. It expresses an otherwise almost inexpressible truth, perhaps with a lot of poetic license.

When conditions stop arising

Let's turn to a psychological account of awakening.

Nibbāna is variously called the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving and dispassion. It is also called the end of suffering, the end of the three fires of greed, hatred and delusion, and the end of *kamma*. We have seen that the word *nibbāna* means extinguishing or blowing out, like a fire, and have tied that in with the metaphor of attachment as fuel that gives rise to the fire of becoming. All of these are factors that are implicated in the chain of dependent co-arising, which we discussed in the last chapter, and all of these will cease together with the unraveling of its vexing snarl. For the *arahant*, ignorance has ceased and therefore consciousness has ceased. Consciousness has ceased and therefore name-and-form has ceased, the six-fold sphere, contact, feeling, craving, attachment, becoming, birth and death have ceased.

> Where do earth, water, fire and air find no footing? Where are long and short, small and great, fair and foul, where are name and form wholly destroyed?
>
> … Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous. That's where earth, water, fire and air find no footing. There both long and short, small and great, fair and foul, there name and form are wholly destroyed. With the cessation of consciousness, this all is destroyed. (DN 11)

Is this actually what happens? No consciousness?

There might be an enterprising reader out there who, until reading this, had been entertaining a plan to travel abroad to seek out,

phrase book in hand, one of those rare *arahants* living in seclusion deep in the forest among the tigers and pythons, hoping to bask in the radiance of his wisdom and to receive final instructions on topics on which the present book turns murky. Now, however, that enterprising reader might already be reconsidering that this *arahant*, with the cessation of perception, of conceptualization, of thought, and of consciousness, might be incapable of functioning in any conventional way, beyond perhaps sitting under a tree and drooling into his alms bowl. Certainly he would be incapable of the delusive fabrications needed to discern this enterprising reader as more than the arising of a mirage or a bubble out of the emptiness all around, and would lack, in any case, the wherewithal to assemble the fabrications necessary for conducting a conversation, much less for imparting a single sentence of *Dhammic* wisdom. Does an *arahant* really have no consciousness?

Not exactly. Recall that descriptions of dependent co-arising focus single-mindedly on the disadvantages of all of the implicated factors, and therefore on the total eradication of the factors as an advantageous goal. However, this is misleading as to what actually happens when the goal is achieved. *Arahants* have overcome ignorance, which is to say that fabrications no longer have persuasive power. Although they no longer believe in "I," nor in "you," nor in "that other guy," they do remember what all these concepts used to represent. Houses have not vanished altogether, rather they have become like children's sandcastles, as pretend, and are described in what is now like an adult's use of children's language to talk with children.

Let's take another analogy: As we know from the last chapter, if we watch television or go to see a movie, we worldlings and trainees might easily be transported into a fictional John Wayne world or into some other reality. We comprehend that world with its twists and turns of plot, but we do not completely believe it, because we know it is fiction. Nonetheless, we might laugh, cry, be frightened witless, be quite immersed in that world, that is until the credits roll by, at which time none of it has really mattered. We can think of this alternative world as built of ghost fabrications, since in our more rational moments we see through them, and may even appreciate how the director, actors and cameraman have cleverly created the conditions that give rise to them.

The fictional world is quite different from the real world in this respect: We can enter a theater, cry through a tear-jerker or be scared witless, come out of the theater and, returning to reality, say, "I thoroughly enjoyed that movie!" We knew the whole time it was not real, that the cravings and attachments that arose were simply ghost cravings and attachments. On the other hand, our attitude is quite different toward the external world that we assume is really real, in which we do *not* enjoy the horrifying tear-jerker in which most of us actually live.

Here is what I think is going on for the *arahant*: The world we take to be real is as unreal to the *arahant* as the movie world is to us, and it is experienced by the *arahant* through ghost fabrications, ghost feelings, ghost cravings and ghost attachments that the *arahant* remembers as *once* being real in his own experience, but which he no longer takes as real. He now sees right through them. This capability is called *nibbāna with residual fuel* (or attachments) (*sa-upādisesā nibbāna*), and has been likened to a fire that has been extinguished, but in which the embers are still warm (a ghost fire). He experiences this world with joy no matter how it unfolds, yet also with kindness and compassion toward the suffering of the ghost beings that live there. In fact he appears quite active on behalf of others, appears decisive, responding immediately and fluidly to the needs of others, because the slightest hint of a self that might stand in the way is absent. Even if he sometimes conceptualizes a self he does not believe in it. His activities are likewise beyond *kamma*.

Since no traces of the residual fuel survive death, the physical death of the *arahant* is described as *nibbāna without residual fuel* (*anupādisesā nibbāna*) or *parinibbāna* (Sanskrit, *parinirvāna*, higher *nibbāna*). The arahant can enact being a normal human in the world, the way children can enact being cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers. Without this they could not communicate with worldlings nor be effective in working out of compassion for the good of the world. They are *awake*, and recognize that the rest of us are still aslumber in a dream world.

> What, bhikkhus, is the *nibbāna*-element with residue left? Here a bhikkhu is an *arahant*, one whose taints are destroyed, the holy life fulfilled, who has done what had to be done, laid down the burden, attained the goal, de-

> stroyed the fetters of being, completely released through final knowledge. However, his five sense faculties remain unimpaired, by which he still experiences what is agreeable and disagreeable and feels pleasure and pain. It is the extinction of attachment, hatred, and delusion in him that is called the *nibbāna*-element with residue left. (Iti 2.17)

The *arahant* can also withdraw from this world at will and enter into what is called the *fruit of arahantship concentration* (*arahatta-phala-samādhi*), a state in which fabrications, and therefore the sense spheres, cease. The Buddha recounted an incident in which he was resting in this particular concentration.[3] Re-engaging with the conventional world he saw a great crowd gathered in a nearby field and was informed that just a few moments ago it was raining in torrents with streaks of lightning and peals of thunder and that two farmers and four bulls had been struck dead. The Buddha, though percipient and awake, had completely failed to witness this commotion.

Once, in response to a question from a deva, Rohitassa, who in a former life had a paranormal ability to travel to distant places very quickly, whether one can travel to the end of the world in order to overcome *saṃsāra*, the Buddha replied:

> "I tell you, friend, that it is not possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the world where one does not take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear. But at the same time, I tell you that there is no making an end of suffering without reaching the end of the world. Yet it is just within this fathom-long body, with its perception and intellect, that I declare that there is the origination of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the world." (AN 4.450)

The least we can say is that awakening constitutes a radical restructuring of the human cognitive apparatus.

Losing the fetters

A common way to track the progressive attainments culminating in complete awakening, and one that also has a psychological basis, is in terms of the *fetters* (*saṃyojana*).

> There are these ten fetters. Which ten? Five lower fetters and five higher fetters. And which are the five lower fetters?
>
> 1. Self-identity view,
> 2. doubt,
> 3. attachment to virtue and observances,
> 4. sensual desire, and
> 5. ill will.
>
> These are the five lower fetters. And which are the five higher fetters?
>
> 6. Passion for form,
> 7. Passion for non-form,
> 8. conceit,
> 9. restlessness, and
> 10. ignorance.
>
> These are the five higher fetters. And these are the ten fetters. (AN 10.13)

The four levels of awakening – stream entry, once-returning, non-returning and full awakening – are described in terms of the progressive elimination or weakening of fetters. Let us consider these in turn.

(1) Self-identity view. We have seen in chapter seven that the stream enterer has eliminated the first three fetters. The most significant of these is this very self-identity view. The full sense of self is constructed in dependent co-arising at various levels, is rather pernicious and is completely lost only with the loss of the eighth fetter, conceit. The elimination of self-identity view is a first step in weakening the sense of self, at least at the conceptual level, by recognizing its constructedness and its contingency, and by seeing that life's processes continue perfectly well without encapsulating them in a self. For at least a moment, fabrications must fail to convince us, so that we see through, for that moment, the artificiality of what consciousness otherwise magically conjures up as a self. Although the self continues to be a vexing

problem, we thereby gain some initial insight into the nature of the problem that will prove invaluable in disentangling the mind. This is the vision of *Dhamma*, seeing the conditionality of existence and thereby glimpsing the unconditioned.

(2) Doubt. Overcoming this fetter ensues from acquiring complete trust in the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha.*, which can be developed as a part of Buddhist life. This can happen as a natural consequence of acquiring the vision of *Dhamma*, through which we can see that the path leads indeed to *nibbāna.*

(3) Attachment to virtue and observances. Our practice is rooted in virtue and observances, in generosity, ethics, purity, devotion, giving ear, meditation and the rest. Yet awakening lies primarily in letting go even of the path that leads us there, and awakening goes beyond the intermediate satisfaction and joy that comes with practice. If we are still attached to the fruits of our practice, our minds are easily agitated at the slightest disruption. We need to loosen that attachment to begin to realize liberation. This entails a shift from goal to *vow*, from practice as a means to get something, to practice as what we commit our lives to on a daily basis. Thereby we do not give up virtue and observances, we give up our attachment to them.

(4) Sensual passion, and (5) ill will. These are said to be weakened for the once-returner and eliminated for the non-returner, the latter of whom is now ever so close to *nibbāna.* The complete loss of these fetters represents the radical remaking of the affective life of the individual, for this marks the end of all but the most subtle forms of craving.

From now on, neither scantily clad lass nor debonair hunk, neither chocolate cheese cake à la mode nor catchy tune will ever again make the heart beat faster with lust. Neither plunge into nest of snapping vipers, bite of bear nor lunge of lion, neither ghoul nor remorseless torture need raise a hair in fear. Neither fender bender nor rude waiter, neither computer crash with total loss of data nor out o' cash with total loss of face need curl the lip or wrinkle the brow one snippet in ire. Life will simply cease to be a significant problem or a struggle. The senses continue to function, even physical pain can still be discerned, but nothing will necessitate an offensive or defensive posture, ever.

> As a single mass of rock isn't moved by the wind, even so all forms, flavors, sounds, aromas, contacts, ideas desirable and not, have no effect on one who is such. (AN 6.55)

(6) Desire for form, (7) desire for non-form. Eliminating the final five fetters is the achievement of the *arahant*. If we are non-returners, then, having given up passions of the senses, we still hang on to existence (*bhava*), to being somebody, to having a self-existence. This is the topic of these two fetters, which distinguish themselves cosmologically: The first seeks existence as a form, that is, with a body, in the human or in one of the lower deity realms. The second seeks a lighter formless existence, that is, one of mind only, in one of the higher deity realms. At this point we give up both aspirations. We have already recognized with the loss of the first fetter that such existence is not really substantial, now we go one step further and actually give up our attachment to whoever we we continued to imagine we had become or had aspired to become. Nonetheless, the self still hangs on by a thread.

(8) Conceit. This fetter is tied up with the sense of self still running on fumes. Often the elimination of this is equated with awakening itself and its order among the fetters suggests it is very close to being right. A group of monks in one of the discourses suspects that an ill monk, Khemaka, might already be an *arahant*, and they ask him whether he regards any of the five aggregates of grasping – form, feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness – as "this is mine, this am I and this is my self," as a test. Khemaka asserts that he does not, but that he nonetheless is not an *arahant*. He explains,

> "Just as, friends, there is smell in a blue or red or white lotus, whoever says that the smell comes from the petal or from the color or from the filament, is he speaking rightly?"
>
> "No friend"
>
> "Then how can one explain it rightly?"
>
> "One has to say that it is the smell of the flower. That is all one can say about it."
>
> "Even so, friend, I do not see any of the aggregates as my-

> self. However there is in me a subtle conceit as I am." (SN 22.89)

Nonetheless, once Khemaka would lose the smell of conceit he would, it seems, … still have two fetters to go.

(9) Restlessness. Fidgeting – indeed a problem for the beginning meditator but long abandoned by one about to attain awakening – is clearly not meant here, but rather the subtle feeling that there is something better over there or waiting just in the future. This is an insidious addiction to the promise of other, better circumstances, very difficult to shake off. Ajahn Chah once said, brilliantly, "A monk has no future."[4] This describes a person who has completely abandoned restlessness, and is perfectly and absolutely at all times content in the here and now with nothing better to look forward to, ever. For such a one, it is never greener on the other side of the fence.

(10) Ignorance. Once the last vestiges of ignorance go, everything goes, the entire chain of dependent co-arising collapses, the snarl is disentangled. We no longer believe fabrications, we no longer believe in the world that consciousness has been painting for us. We no longer believe in whatever is conditioned, in a self, in life and death. The darkness has lifted. We are able to shine the light of wisdom in all the dark corners of the mind, dwelling in the unconditioned, in the deathless, in *nibbāna*.

> "Bhikkhus, there are these four radiances … the radiance of the moon, the radiance of the sun, the radiance of fire, the radiance of wisdom. Bhikkhus, among these four, the radiance of wisdom is indeed the most excellent." (AN 4.142)

The practice toward awakening

The Buddha described his teachings as against the stream. They make little sense to the common worldling until they are directly encountered and experienced. Renouncing sensual pleasures? In favor of … what, exactly? This is no less true of *nibbāna*, which, on first description, must seem hardly more appealing than bungy jumping or swallowing goldfish. Ending existence and rebirth? In favor of … what, exactly? The world is nothing like what we start out supposing it to be; at each step we proceed anew with trust

that the Buddha knew what he was talking about, only in retrospect seeing that he indeed did. We cannot see *nibbāna* with the Buddha's eyes until we reach *nibbāna* ourselves and acquire his way of seeing.

In a favorite story from the *suttas*, Ven. Bhaddiya Kaligodha 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 Ven. Bhaddiya and discovered that the monks were underestimating his stage of insight. This was Ven. Bhaddiya's 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 dwelled 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!'" (Ud 2.10)

What Ven. Bhaddiya had left behind is not so different from the lives most of us live, with an asset-laden personal footprint protected by high-tech security system and financial advisor. We generally don't like or understand, initially, the idea of giving up sensual pleasures, nor fame and gain. But consider how much we gave up in the process of growing up. Toys and games and certain interpersonal concerns that one year seemed so alluring, but the next year had so little appeal. All of the sentiments of *saṃsaric* existence are one by one similarly shed in the process of completing, at long last, the process of growing up. The toys and games and interpersonal concerns are themselves, in the end, without appeal. Notice that even our greatest pleasures or those things that we have longed for the longest, if indulged in to excess, become stale, then tedious, then irritating. There are those among us, the foolishly glamorous, who are known for their sensual indulgences and idolized by the masses. But few of them

lead happy lives. Instead, they frequently turn to drug or alcohol addiction, which in turn turns to despair and often even to suicide. Worldly pleasures are not what we take them to be at first; they break their promises.

It is only with a great deal of trust, courage and resolve that we enter the stream. But the path inclines toward *nibbāna* and as we practice the path diligently we will make progress, albeit gradually, in that direction.

> There are these gross impurities in gold: dirty sand, gravel, and grit. The dirt-washer or his apprentice, having placed it in a vat, washes it again and again until he has washed them away.
>
> When he is rid of them, there remain the moderate impurities in the gold: coarse sand and fine grit. He washes the gold again and again until he has washed them away.
>
> When he is rid of them, there remain the fine impurities in the gold: fine sand and black dust. The dirt-washer or his apprentice washes the gold again and again until he has washed them away.
>
> When he is rid of them, there remains just the gold dust. The goldsmith or his apprentice, having placed it in a crucible, blows on it again and again to blow away the dross. The gold, as long as it has not been blown on again and again to the point where the impurities are blown away, as long as it is not refined and free from dross, is not pliant, malleable, or luminous. It is brittle and not ready to be worked.
>
> But there comes a time when the goldsmith or his apprentice has blown on the gold again and again until the dross is blown away. The gold, having been blown on again and again to the point where the impurities are blown away, is then refined, free from dross, pliant, malleable and luminous. It is not brittle, and is ready to be worked. Then whatever sort of ornament he has in mind — whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain — the gold would serve his purpose.
>
> In the same way, there are these gross impurities in a

> monk intent on heightened mind: misconduct in body, speech and mind. These the monk — aware and able by nature — abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence. When he is rid of them, there remain in him the moderate impurities: thoughts of sensuality, ill will and harmfulness. These he abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence. When he is rid of them there remain in him the fine impurities: thoughts of his caste, thoughts of his home district, thoughts related to not wanting to be despised. These he abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence.
>
> When he is rid of them, there remain only thoughts of the *Dhamma*. His concentration is neither calm nor refined, it has not yet attained serenity or unity, and is kept in place by the fabrication of forceful restraint. But there comes a time when his mind grows steady inwardly, settles down, grows unified and concentrated. His concentration is calm and refined, has attained serenity and unity, and is no longer kept in place by the fabrication of forceful restraint.
>
> And then whichever of the higher knowledges he turns his mind to know and realize, he can witness them for himself whenever there is an opening. (AN 3.100)

The Buddhist practitioner enters a stream that leads to far greater, rewarding and reliable pleasures. This begins, and for the most part is sustained, quite remarkably, with the satisfaction in giving, in harmlessness, in bringing benefit to the world. It continues as the mind becomes purified of craving and as suffering recedes. Building on a foundation of refuge and virtue, it is found in the utter stillness of concentration, and increasingly in the gaps that open up in not having to worry about this or that. This bliss seems to arise naturally just by making room for it. Oddly, the greatest happiness does not seem to be a feeling (*vedanā*) at all:

> By completely transcending the base of neither perception nor non-perception, the bhikkhu enters in and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is that other kind of happiness more excellent and sublime than the previous kind of happiness. (SN 36.19)

It seems that the absence of suffering makes room for this sublime happiness; nothing more needs to be done. Those who have attained *nibbāna* consistently report an abiding feeling of bliss. It is the bliss of serenity, the bliss that arrives as suffering departs, the bliss of settling in with things as they are, and of not seeing them as personal problems, the bliss of renunciation, of no personal stake, that abides by its own accord, that will not and cannot depart.

Final awakening comes with the disentanglement of our conditionality, to realize and abide in the unconditioned, unfettered, needing nothing, no longer existing in the conventional way as a separate self.

> One who is dependent has wavering. One who is independent has no wavering. There being no wavering, there is calm. There being calm, there is no desire or inclination. There being no desire or inclination, there is no coming or going. There being no coming or going, there is no passing away or arising. There being no passing away or arising, there is neither a here nor a there nor a between-the-two. This, just this, is the end of suffering. (Ud 8.4)

What needed to be done has been done. This is transcendence, the end of worldly existence that mystics of other traditions speak of. However, it is not suddenly to leave this world for another, it is the gradual realization that this world is not what we thought and never was. With practice, the world as we knew it fades away.

> There is, monks, an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unconditioned. If, monks, there were no unborn, no unbecome, no unmade, no unconditioned, then no escape would be discerned from what is born, become, made, conditioned. But because there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unconditioned, therefore an escape is discerned from what is born, become, made, conditioned. (Iti 43)

Further reading

The Island: an Anthology of the Buddha's Teaching on Nibbāna by Ajahns Pasanno and Amaro, 2009, Abhayagiri Monastic Foundation. This is a very readable overview of the experience of *Nib-*

bāna and how it relates to practice by two Western monks.

Nibbāna: the Mind Stilled by Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇānanda, 2015, Dharma Grantha Mudrana Bharaya: Sri Lanka. This collects the transcripts of thirty-three lectures by a prominent Sri Lankan monk and Pali scholar for the serious student. It delves deeply into the intricacies of Buddhist psychology.

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1 Gethin, 1998, p. 114.

2 Gethin, 1997.

3 Although the text does not specifically refer to this state, Ñāṇānanda (2015, 569) makes the case that this incident, from DN 16, is indeed a case of *arahatta-phala-samādhi*.

4 Passano and Amaro (2009, 117). The authors were both students of Ajahn Chah.

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10/12/17

Buddhism began with the Buddha, a towering figure who lived some hundred generations ago, taught for forty-five years, developed a huge following of ascetics and householders, kings and paupers, and left behind a vast corpus of teachings, astonishingly profound and comprehensive, consistent, brilliantly coherent and still intelligible today.

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He left behind a culture of peace and awakening and a monastic community that persist to this day. This textbook, based on the earliest stratum of Buddhist texts, provides a holistic and proportionate account of the range of the Buddha's Dharma, interpreted for the modern student.

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