

The Mystic Quest

Piercing the Veil of Conditioned Perception

An Introduction to Buddhist Techniques
of Mental Cultivation



by Anonymous Monkey

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Special thanks to Guy Adams for his computer generated rendition of the 10 Ox Herding pictures of Zen Buddhism. These images illustrate 10 stages on the path to enlightenment and its conclusion, with the ox representing the mind. The pictures are titled:

- 1 Searching for the Ox
- 2 Seeing the Footprints
- 3 Seeing the Ox
- 4 Catching the Ox
- 5 Tending the Ox
- 6 Riding the Ox
- 7 Forgetting the Ox
- 8 Forgetting Ox and One's Self
- 9 Return to the Original Place
- 10 Entering the Marketplace

DEDICATION OF MERIT

May all Beings find the ease of compassion, the jewel of wisdom, the treasure of kindness, and the splendour of enlightenment. May the merit of this endeavour benefit all Beings. May it do honour to my teachers and the people of Thailand and Sri Lanka who supported me as a monk and gave me the opportunity to seek the wisdom of Dharma.

The well of spirituality is like an oasis in a vast desert, crisscrossed with the tracks of all the pilgrims that have sought its location. It is an oasis of cool fresh, life-giving water hidden amidst the dunes of artifice and illusion. As a person trying to help all seekers find that pool of infinite blessings, the saddest thing to know is that so many travelers get lost in the confusion of trails laid down by those that have gone before them. Paths there are that will take them safely through the desert, but many paths end only at the bleached bones of the unfortunate people who failed in their quest to find the oasis. How sad that so many mistook the vessel of religion to be the goal. Seeking the pool hidden in the vastness, their vessels held securely, they thought they would fill them yet died of thirst before ever finding their way. They never realized their vessels had always been full and they had only to drink from that which had always been in their own hands.

10 STAGES ON THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT



1



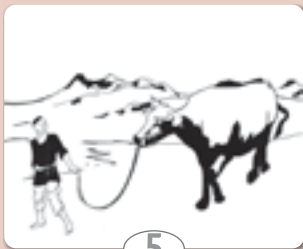
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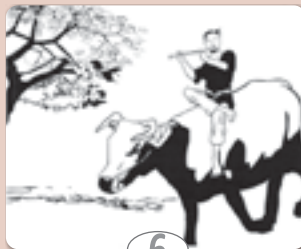
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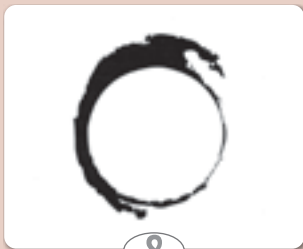
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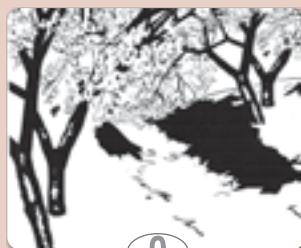
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Searching for the Ox



There are many reasons why people seek out philosophical and religious teachings. Some people are looking for knowledge and understanding while others might hope for redemption or salvation; to ease their sufferings or to fulfill a need to help others through service; some, of course, seek God and other kinds of religious experience. And still others see an opportunity to gain wealth and power by using and manipulating organized religions and peoples beliefs. To me, the real purpose of spiritual practice and religion is to feel better and to be better integrated within oneself and with the external world. The difference between religion and spiritual practice for me is that religion is more community oriented where the needs of the individual are placed at a lower priority than the welfare of the group. Spirituality is one's own pursuit and puts personal development to the fore which includes how we relate to others and the world. A group is just individuals and therefore is better served by bettering the individuals it's comprised of. I view Buddhist teachings as a guide to spirituality

and not as a religion telling people how to think or be. It really is about growing up psychologically, becoming wise (sensible) and not making a mess of our lives.

This work is not an attempt to convey Buddhism in any official sense. It is one person's encounter and just some of the aspects of Buddhism and other spiritual teachings that I have found helpful to know while engaged in the practice of meditation and mindfulness. My hope is that it will introduce some clarity to the subject as many people interested in Buddhism do not learn the meanings of important terms that are routinely rendered in English without explanations. These include words like suffering, desire, hatred, reincarnation, enlightenment, nirvana and Buddha. A Buddhist-English dictionary can be useful for learning to understand the teaching in a deeper way. Theravada Buddhism is the source for most of the information presented in this work. My exposure to Tibetan practices is limited and I have not had the good fortune to study with the Zen tradition. The three main divisions of Buddhism are Theravada, Tibetan and Chan (Chinese and Zen). They are very different in appearance but all rest on the same basic teachings of the man known as the Buddha.

One of the most important things I have gleaned from my studies is that Buddhism is not to be believed. Not being based on faith, it is to be investigated and known experientially for oneself. It is a rediscovery of what the Buddha experienced to profoundly alter his perception of reality. It is possible to completely ignore all the teachings especially a literal interpretation of the mythology which has a psychological function. Buddhism is likened to someone pointing at the moon. When we get too caught up in all the teachings, the trappings of cultural expressions, the rules, customs and history, we are in danger of missing the moon. It is the sight of the moon and the effects that produces within the perceiver that is the point of all the teachings. Inner awakening is an important element in developing a way of being that is especially user friendly.

The Buddha's stated purpose in teaching people was to help them overcome the tendency to occasion suffering for themselves and others through the unskillful use of their thought, speech and actions. Just how that is accomplished needs to vary according to place and circumstance. Basic ethical principles of not doing harm are what are focused on rather than inflexible rules since cultural norms differ so

widely. We can in some ways measure our progress along the path of spirituality simply by how we feel after having done spiritual practices compared to how we felt before starting the practice. If practice is done properly, allowing for the swings of positive and negative moods and feelings that can arise through daily life and introspective exercises, it will be seen over time (sometimes quite short) that there are changes in how we typically feel and respond to the things in life. Comparing ourselves to others is not wise. If you feel you must judge yourself then compare how you are now to how you were before trying to make a difference by practicing.

It is fair to say that spiritual practice is about gaining knowledge but I disagree with many people about the nature of that knowledge. The Buddha left many questions unanswered like whether or not he would reincarnate, whether the world was infinite or finite and where in the body was the seat of consciousness, the head or the heart. About death the Buddha was silent. Enlightenment is not omniscience. About the states of consciousness attained through meditation it was said that even the Buddha's words failed him. And God was left for people to work out for themselves. His view was that a person perceived a God or not in their experience of the Self (the non-self, *anatta*) and enlightenment according to their temperament. He never told people what to see just how to look. Open the mind, undercut conditioned perception and thinking (cultural conditioning) and create within ourselves a "bubble" that fashions a way of perceiving more amenable to peaceful living and development.

The bubble is all the constructs and axioms we use to interpret our perception of reality. Because we believe reality to be a certain way we see it that way often even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Language profoundly shapes our interpretation of things. Yet language cannot encompass all of reality so Buddhist practice seeks to transcend it through stilling the mind. Sit, look and learn by observing. Creating a mind at peace is central to that endeavor and a wonderful feature of bubble-making is that the wall-paper we paste on the inside need not be true. The mind reacts to what is before it whether true or not. It is of course helpful and probably prudent to keep the bubble as real as possible where we need it to interact with the world. However, our existential mythology can be anything that gives us pleasure or meaning. I know of no religion that

is not at some level a collection of fantastical stories in which cultural and psychological truths, histories and fables are imbedded. Any can be used by a Buddhist because Buddhism does not offer ultimate answers to life's questions. Many Buddhists also practice other religions. In Sri Lanka, the Hindu gods are worshiped in the Buddhist temples with some monks being trained as Hindu priests.

My preceptor, the monk that officiated at my ordination, was the senior monk on the island of Phuket, Thailand. He had become a monk as a child and studied in India where he learned English. At the age of 86, his summation of the Buddha's position regarding God was the Buddha did not teach 'no God' but rather no God concept. The same applies to the concept of the self where it is not seen as a real independent entity. Concepts blind the mind as much as they have the capacity to clarify things. Having a concept of the self can be self-limiting as well as forming a reference point around which suffering can arise. A pain in the leg is not just a physical pain but becomes psychological as well once it is termed "my" pain. The suffering is augmented by being of two kinds. The Buddha sought to impart the knowledge of how to eliminate the mental anguish that accompanies physical pain. Learning mental tricks for optimal mental functioning and enjoyment is a natural by-product of seeking to not create unnecessary suffering for oneself and others. Wisdom is its own reward as it leads to peace and ease in the form of freedom from *dukkha*.

Dukkha is the Buddhist term that is usually translated as suffering but is really a particular idea of suffering. This term includes what is considered happiness and all the positive states we typically experience in life. Happiness is viewed as "suffering" because it contains the seeds of its opposite within it. Neither it nor any other emotion is permanent. It cannot be maintained and its loss is perceived as unhappiness. The kind of happiness we are talking about is also often based on outside events and conditions. The kind of happiness sought through spiritual practice is based on the state of our inner selves. By fortifying ourselves from within we gain the ability to deal more effectively with life's difficulties. In effect, what could be called happiness (the lack of suffering) becomes easier to gain and maintain. This seems a natural consequence of reaching psychological maturity where clear, logical reasoning instead of rationalizations may predominate and guide one's actions and interactions with the world.

When reading Buddhist scriptures it can be noted that Buddhists do not divide reality into true or false as many people do. There are four possibilities in Indian logic: true, false, both true and false and neither true nor false. It is a more comprehensive way of thinking through ideas when examining philosophical positions. Keeping an open mind is a central tenet of the Teaching as is the idea of “letting go.” If we can just manage to let go of things we can save ourselves an enormous amount of potential heartache. Meditation is a wonderful device for achieving that goal. No particular philosophy or beliefs need accompany the practice. It is not dependent on ideas for its functioning for it is about clearing thoughts away to perceive a deeper state and reach deeper levels of relaxation. Acting on both the conscious and unconscious minds, meditation has the ability to make substantive changes to how we think and feel. Aspects of ourselves that stubbornly resist any attempts at change can be directly affected in a positive way.

The practice of the Buddha rests on three basic elements: cultivating virtue by refraining from occasioning suffering for oneself and others, cultivating the mind through meditation and mindfulness and renouncing the pursuit of unnecessary wealth. Most Buddhists do not practice the third element unless they are a monk, nun or some other kind of mendicant. The reasons for the renunciation of wealth is both personal and social. Having few and simple needs is easier on oneself as well as the world. Not harming other living things, including plants is a central concern of the teachings and is reflected in the rules which govern the orders of monks and nuns. Balancing the needs of providing support for oneself through work while attempting to live the teaching can be a challenge. Moderation was the Buddha’s basic answer to life. Earn what you need while attempting to remain aloof from seductions of pursuing wealth. Time is a commodity we never regain. The Buddha felt it was important to use it wisely. The time we spend working can be made into practice by taking opportunities when they arise to do a bit of introspection. Simple chores can be turned into meditation and mindfulness exercises. Interactions with co-workers can be a means of refining our interpersonal skills. We can learn to control our responses to people and events around us, remaining calm when things are getting hectic. The ability to use all things in life as stepping stones to greater awareness is a useful practice to add to the collection of spiritual techniques.

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The ascetic Gotama, who became known as the Buddha, taught a method of living that he said would lead to the experience of an unconditioned state of perception, a perception that lay beyond the illusory nature of ordinary consciousness. Buddhism teaches philosophical and psychological techniques for overcoming the propensity to create suffering for ourselves and others through the unskillful use of our thoughts, speech and actions. This is achieved by eliminating the root causes for the arising of negative emotional states. This state of mind is known as *nirvana* (Sanskrit) or *nibbana* (Pali). The person reaching this state is called an *arahat*. It is a state that lies further along the path than enlightenment which many people mistakenly believe is the goal of Buddhism. The real goal was overcoming self-created mental anguish, i.e. suffering. May you have good luck in that endeavor.

CHAPTER II

The Pursuit of Divine Madness

Seeing the Footprints



The title of this book reflects two aspects of spiritual and religious teachings. First, the term “mystic” reveals that the subject involves and is surrounded by numerous mysteries. The mysterious, often arcane language used by priests, yogis, shamans and philosophers when discussing spiritual states frequently prevents people from serious consideration of the knowledge compiled by religious traditions and the people that have travelled the path to illumination. Second, there is “the quest,” a plot that runs through many of the myths relating to spiritual transcendence, immortality, death, dying and the meaning of life. In this book, the quest refers to a journey we take to find a truth that must be experienced, and which can involve many trials and tribulations. It is both a mythic and a mystic quest, a search for the Holy Grail or the Philosopher’s Stone, or the Wish-fulfilling Gem as the Tibetans call it. This quest is mythic and common in ancient legends and fables and mystic in an important sense. It is the mysterious psychological process not experienced by the majority,

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but in its fullest sense, by a minority of people in all lands and cultures. Of this experience Joseph Campbell writes,

“...whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain, always on a mystery of transfiguration—a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand.”

Evelyn Underhill begins her treatise titled, *Mysticism*, with these words:

“The most highly developed branches of the human family have in common one peculiar characteristic. They tend to produce—sporadically it is true, and often in the teeth of adverse external circumstances—a curious and definite type of personality; a type which refuses to be satisfied with that which other men call experience, and is inclined, in the words of its enemies, to “deny the world in order that it may find reality.” We meet these persons in the east and west; in the ancient, mediaeval, and modern worlds. Their one passion appears to be the prosecution of a certain spiritual and intangible quest: the finding of a “way out” or a “way back” to some desirable state in which alone they can satisfy their craving for absolute truth. This quest, for them, has constituted the whole meaning of life. They have made for it without effort sacrifices which have appeared enormous to other men: and it is an indirect testimony to its objective actuality, that whatever the place or period in which they have arisen, their aims, doctrines and methods have been substantially the same. Their experience, therefore, forms a body of evidence, curiously self-consistent and often mutually explanatory, which must be taken into account before we can add up the sum of the energies and potentialities of the human spirit, or reasonably speculate on its relations to the unknown world which lies outside the boundaries of sense.”

The mystical, esoteric traditions of Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, the Kabala in Judaism, the Gnostics and contemplatives of Christianity, and the Sufi of Islam all deal with the subjective experience of an individual undergoing spiritual transformation. They are paths that lead to illumination and individuation; to the maturing of consciousness, relief from suffering, and to deeper spiritual insight. These paths have been in continuous use for thousands of years and contain a wealth of knowledge for living in ways that take us to a perception and sagacity that is not commonly found in the world. From a mystic's perspective, this experience is the organic unfolding of the creative potentiality of the Absolute. It can be experienced as Divine Madness, a temporary, abnormal state of consciousness that may be referred to as the mystic or shamanic trance (although there are important distinctions in the aims of these different religious practices).

The "call," the apparently external prompting to become a shaman, nun or priest varies in different cultures. The call can be viewed as hereditary, spontaneous and brought about by a god or spirits, or sought through a deliberate quest. This shamanic quest may include some states identical with those sought through meditation and the cultivation of states of bliss, rapture, and ecstasy, but will also include states not deliberately sought in many religious traditions. Some people might call this process kundalini awakening, some a mental illness, others might term it grace, revelation, self-realization, enlightenment, or cosmic consciousness. Others may make large distinctions between commonly sought shamanic encounters and stages of realization, insight, or enlightenment. These states, whether shamanic, mystic, or yogic, may occur with powerful releases of emotion as unconscious elements flood awareness. They may be triggered by deep states of mental quiescence, beauty, shock, despair, or by a host of other means from drumming and dance, to drugs, self-inflicted pain, and sensory deprivation. The myth, the religious "story," forms a psychological container that aids in comprehending and assimilating experiences of altered states of consciousness and to linking them with one's personal "self," culture, and community. Myths can also act as an intellectual means to comfort a person engaged in the process of dying. A subjective belief in heaven or in reincarnation may do much to console the dying and their loved ones regardless of its objective truth.

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The desire to impart the knowledge gained through spiritual practices and the states of extraordinary consciousness they occasion has long been disseminated by the use of stories commonly referred to as myths. Though the tales may be mythological in the sense that they are fabrications (conscious or unconscious), they are often profound sources of a knowledge that has been gleaned over many generations and that embody phenomenal and psychological truths that can be readily derived from them. These truths may be too terrible to state bluntly or too beautiful or profound to express in ordinary language with its inherent limitations; they are veiled in metaphor, allegory, anecdotes, and poetic verse. The themes of religious myths bear a striking resemblance to each other and Jung theorized that they ultimately derive from the structure of the psyche and he coined the term archetypes to denote them. All the major religious traditions use myths to augment the teachings of their founders who may also be mythical in their attainments, attributes or even their existence. For many people, their understanding of religion does not go beyond the stories of miracles, angels, demons, heaven and hell, reincarnation or some other form of after-life. At this level of understanding, the accumulated knowledge of countless generations in cultures around the world is often dismissed without thought to what it means to those who have not only studied or adopted a faith, but who have combined that study with the practical psychological exercises which lead the mind to states beyond the imagination's ability to follow. It is from the states of mind that transcend mind's language function that the most profound teachings are ultimately derived. In Tibetan Buddhism, this state is referred to as pristine cognition. A belief in the objective reality of a myth still has many useful applications and can significantly counter the fear of death or provide meaning to one's life and pursuits.

It is possible that many psychotic-type episodes are mislabeled incidences of naturally occurring states that can lead to experiences of higher mystic states. These may be aggravated by public censure, lack of prior knowledge, or the deliberate or indifferent abuse by persons or power hierarchies in medical, government, and religious institutions. This is not always by personal malice, but is a feature of any fixed social setting that tends to support a culture-based definition of sanity that may be limited by a particular religious or ideological view. This conditional perception is not grounded in the extraordinary percep-

tion of mystic states but in “normal” everyday consciousness that has no access to the insights of these special mental states. Unfortunately, institutionalized religions often lose their genuine spiritual function and become a means of control and a method to condition people to a perspective chosen by others. Religion’s real purpose though is to strip the mind of its conditioning. This stripping is the result of spiritual practice being properly engaged in and the clarity of this “unconditioned perception” has been the object of my quest.

Myths from all over the world attest to the pervasiveness of the theme of the Great Quest, through trials and tribulations to a grand view of Truth and Beauty. This is in keeping with the very real psychological reality as it is experienced. In Christianity, there is the Beatific Vision, the contemplative’s reward for treading the path of devotion and renunciation; or the quest for, and attainment of, enlightenment in Buddhism. It should be noted that while some mystic experiences do involve a passage into states that might properly be termed psychotic, the most sublime mystic states by-pass or pass through those states, to reach the deepest realm of experiential perception. Mystic states are by definition ineffable because they pass beyond the language function of the mind. Awareness remains, but ordinary sensory perception and discursive thought based on language may not.

Referring to the various mystics that have left us their insights into the realm beyond the senses, Evelyn Underhill writes:

“Under whatsoever symbols they have objectified their quest, none of these seekers have ever been able to assure the world that they have found, seen face to face, the Reality behind the veil. But if we may trust the reports of the mystics — and they are reports given with a strange accent of certainty and good faith — they have succeeded where... others have failed, in establishing immediate communication between the spirit of man, entangled as they declare amongst material things, and the “only Reality,” that immaterial and final Being, which some philosophers call the Absolute, and most theologians call God.”

The various religious traditions acknowledge and give special names to many different states of consciousness that have a relevance to the

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process of spiritual growth. Psychology too, assigns names to states of consciousness and defines them and their value in accordance with the current trends and whims of people who may be psychologically handicapped in their understanding of these states by their own conditioned perception and lack of experience with them. R. D. Laing quotes Gregory Bateson, in an introduction to an autobiographical account of schizophrenia:

“It would appear that once precipitated into psychosis the patient has a course to run. He is, as it were, embarked upon a voyage of discovery that is only completed by his return to the normal world, to which he comes back with insights different from those of the inhabitants who never embarked on such a voyage. Once begun, a schizophrenic episode would appear to have as definite a course as an initiation ceremony—a death and rebirth—into which the novice may have been precipitated by his family life or by advantageous circumstances, but which in its course is largely steered by endogenous process.”

In terms of this picture, spontaneous remission is no problem. This is only the final and natural outcome of the total process. What needs to be explained is the failure of many who embark upon this voyage to return from it. Do these encounter circumstances either in family life or in institutionalized care so grossly maladaptive that even the richest and best organized hallucinatory experience cannot save them?

This passage illustrates a positive view of what many people assume to be a wholly negative experience. It refers to a kind of journey taken within the mind that leads to insights not common to most people. This is the essence of the spiritual quest. We seek what we cannot simply learn by reading or by being instructed by others. Only the individual can embark upon this journey. The Buddha called this special knowing *panna*, (pron. *panya*) a wisdom gained through intuitive insight into impermanence, emptiness, and dissatisfaction. It was the knowledge and wisdom he gained through his renunciation and the practices of asceticism and meditation.

For far longer than recorded history, people have been engaged in the personal quest for the knowledge of being, for Truth, God, Ab-

solute Reality, for a meaning and reason to life, death, love and suffering. Visionary and other altered states have been an important feature of the quest, although scientists and other skeptics may often denigrate them. While some people claim to have found these truths, they may confess to being unable to explain or share them directly with others. How can a subjective experience and perception be shared? The Buddha said we must each untangle the tangle for ourselves. Each can know truth only through his or her own illumination even if it happens to be triggered by another person. What then is “illumination” and how do ordinary people come to the experience of it? How does this process happen? If we do not know exactly how it happens, does it even matter?

We cannot directly share an experience, particularly one that is not common to everyone, but we can still speak intelligently about it. The descriptions of illumination differ to some degree in various religions, but I believe this has more to do with the style of language, the influence of cultural heritage, and the established dogma used by religious institutions than with any actual experiential differences. The important thing for those embarked upon the quest is not how these states occur, but that they do occur and, more importantly, are natural phenomena with the potential for effecting both positive and negative changes in conscious awareness. It is also helpful to know that religious hierarchies are often more interested in maintaining their authority rather than showing others how to find Reality for themselves and they have no genuine authority to determine the validity of your Reality! Religious hierarchies are comprised of ordinary people who may have no actual spiritual experience from which to base their views. The most sublime genuine spiritual experiences are not involved with dualistic, conceptual thinking. They transcend language completely while occurring and cannot be adequately explained or expressed because our language is not based on the view of unity glimpsed in a mystic state, but on the type of perceptions characteristic of ordinary consciousness. It is a consciousness largely devoted to separating aspects of the perceptive field by labeling, comparing, analyzing, etc. This type of thought process is needed to survive in the world and to communicate with other people; but absolute reality cannot be stated or explained solely by the manipulation of concepts, only known to the extent humanly possible through direct perceptive

experience. Reality contains language and goes beyond “everything;” but language cannot begin to encompass the whole of reality.

People have been using spiritual techniques for thousands of years and would not likely continue doing so if they did not benefit from them. These techniques are commonly used in conjunction with myths, stories or fables and cultural history and it seems strange that there should still be so much misunderstanding about the knowledge possessed by the various spiritual traditions. A theory is often no more than a myth but it can still be effective. Beliefs, theories, and myths are alike in that they state a truth that is accepted but not known. Myths underlie much of what we casually take for reality. The myth of the physical world is one of them. Physicality is a perception created by the mind and not, as physicists have shown, an actuality. Though we speak of subatomic particles, no “particles” are found, only energy. Many consider illumination to be a myth but there have always been people who passionately believed in its existence or knew it by their own experience. Illumination is a term used in a broad fashion for many kinds of consciousness or as denoting a particular type of experience with certain characteristics. How the mind goes into this state is a complex issue with many factors involved. From the perspective of the ancient traditions we do not really need to explain the process, but we do need to allow it, or create it, if we can. The experience will be the same to the person who has it whether science can explain it or not. It exists as a fact of being whether past, potential, or presently occurring.

The idea of transcendence is known in much of the world as a belief, a theory, an experience, or a myth. Genuine knowledge of these states comes only from experience. From the perspective of being, as the only experienced reality, the reference point of awareness, it makes no difference whether the knowledge gained is true or not, only the efficacy of the experience matters. Can you use it to enhance your life and eliminate needless suffering? God as myth or theory can be just as beneficial as the belief in God. They all can lead to the experience of God and that experience of consciousness need not involve any god at all. As religions are usually understood, they are essentially myths based on truths just as science is comprised of myths based on facts. Science is in a process of continuous change and the underlying paradigms used to interpret natural phenomena cannot be

shown to be immutable laws. They are amended or discarded as new insights, facts, and anomalies are encountered.

The value of forming a spiritual awareness is in the lasting changes in perception it produces, the suffering it mitigates, and the joy and creativity it inspires. Successful integration of the spiritual experiences may result in improvements in relationships, better coping skills, loss of the fear of dying, a heightened degree of compassion and empathy, clear comprehension, and an experiential understanding of the aim of religious training techniques. It does not matter if these spiritual experiences are true in any of their many scientific, religious, or philosophic interpretations. A thing can be not real yet still valuable. Money is a perfect example of something that is real yet not real and potentially useful or destructive. Money is merely a piece of paper symbolizing wealth. It does not matter that it is not real wealth but only pieces of paper people have decided to make valuable. It is still used as an excuse for the destruction of nature, people, and the environment. Life of all kinds becomes a commodity convertible into scraps of paper implying the paper is worth more than the life sacrificed to produce it. People will spend much of their life obsessively trying to get money. Some, no matter how much they get, can never get enough to know peace and contentment.

We live by many dangerous myths. Fictitious wealth, not the true wealth of health, love, wisdom, serenity, and contentment, is easily manipulated and used to control others through greed, desire, and the need to flee suffering. Indoctrination is forced on people through government, schools, institutions, religions, family, and society in general with and without deliberate intent. It is important to see the root causes for our own and the world's present circumstance to know that it is solely within the hands of individuals to make the essential changes within themselves in order to make a difference in the world.

Long ago people found a way to rise above the crazy tumult of the world by focusing on the reality of personal consciousness. Being transcends cultural expression and our ability to encapsulate it through language. Language is an abstraction of rational concepts and constructs that often fail to glimpse the essential paradox inherent to the occurrence of perceptive being. Through meditation we gain an understanding of how to transcend consensus reality to glimpse a truth that is not sullied by the interpretations and agendas

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of our lesser selves or others. The silence between our thoughts is the emptiness we are. In that silence can be found a perception of the origin of all things.

There has been a revolution in many peoples' awareness of the world's spiritual traditions. The emerging field of transpersonal psychology actively makes use of the mystical traditions to understand the spiritual component of mental life. Ancient traditions possess psychological knowledge about the phenomena of consciousness and its process of maturing. This is knowledge of the spectrum of conscious states attainable through natural operations or deliberate inducement. That is, the range of cognitive functions including what may be mislabeled as psychosis or mental illness, as well as states more generally understood as indicating spiritual growth. Knowing the range of mind is a matter of personal perception. Moving through that range is a natural operation that under favorable, and sometimes unfavorable conditions, will be experienced as a new and more positive mode of being. Myths of the world have a great deal to offer the prospective seeker with their allegorical teachings regarding this natural process of transformation.

People engaged in meditation and other types of spiritual practice are having transformative experiences of a kind common to shamans, mystics, yogis, saints and other spiritual practitioners. With modern medical techniques, near-death survivors are becoming more common and their insights are changing the way many caregivers conduct their duties. Many professional people are beginning to see the merit of ancient techniques in medicine, health maintenance and psychotherapy, and in gaining relief from chronic pain, the emotional impact of trauma, terminal illness, and the physiological and psychological processes of dying. A host of different philosophies and views are tied to these realities, but all philosophical debates aside, we experience suffering and the truth of our own frailty and mortality. We are at the same time the infinite experience itself, the universe self-cognizant; this present occurrence of being.

Potentially included in the experience of being are perceptive states that do not produce awareness based on a rational understanding of presently occurring sensory perception. These types of perception may be heavily influenced by unconscious material. A waking, dream-like state or psychosis that manifests a drama with the partici-

pant often unable to control the condition is sometimes part of a successful spiritual quest. The Buddha faced the temptations of Mara in the mythological story of the Buddha's enlightenment. Mara literally means "the killer" in Pali. The scriptures of the Pali Canon show Mara to be a personification of evil and the passions. Though recorded as a kind of deity, this does not imply Buddhism conceives a discreet entity known as Mara, but is a feature of the story-telling component found in religious traditions. In the story of Jesus, there is the devil to overcome and mystics of all traditions have reported the experience of heaven, hell, angels, demons, psychic phenomena and otherworldly perceptions. Mohammed heard his voices and saw his visions with his mind's eye. People and the histories of their cultures attest to the experiences of God and this experience is found all over the globe in vastly different cultures. The Indian yogis, Buddhist monks, nuns, and lamas, First Nation shamans and every variety of ordinary person have had these kinds of events happen to them. When the stories of religions and their philosophical interpretations are set aside and a critical examination of techniques employed by the spiritual systems are seen in relation to the psychological effects they produce, there can be seen an underlying unity of purpose. It is unfortunate that language itself may always prove a barrier to the successful communication of the actual experiences sought by religious aspirants.

My background as a Buddhist monk and wandering ascetic has shaped much of the language I use to present my view of the path. I hope to convey a clear understanding regarding the difference between religious teachings, institutions, the religious experience, and the types of mental events typical of spiritual awakening regardless of faith. In an important sense mature faith comes after the experience of spiritual awakening although we may need a preliminary faith to begin and continue in a spiritual quest. Religious traditions can be thought of as repositories for the experiences and techniques used by people to induce the transcendent experience, as well as speculations regarding their meaning. Spirituality is an apt term for the science of Being, the art of cultivating the more developed or higher Self. Spiritual aspirants are concerned with the spirit, the vital force that gives life its feeling, charge and direction. This is very much a science in that it is the result of thousands of years of continuous study by people all over the world. We become observational scientists when

we embark on the deliberate quest for self-knowledge, for the nature of being and meaning of life. Though the language of this manuscript may be principally Buddhist, the book is meant to be about what we all have in common, what we share as individuals, cognitive beings all alike in the nature of our body and personhood. I use the term “self” despite the traditional Buddhist teaching of anatta, no-self, or the absence of a self-concept, because this is meant as a spiritual treatise illustrating the commonality of religious purpose and not a strictly Buddhist manuscript.

Buddhism and mystic traditions in general are methods for training the mind to have the ability to clearly view reality without conceptual bias and needless intellectualism or emotionality. They are a means that can be used to step back from the senses and their reaction to the world. In this respect, Buddhism is neither a religion nor a philosophy, although it does include a philosophy that aims to promote a more harmonious relationship with the world, with other living things and with one’s self.

Early in my studies of comparative religion, I noted that the methods used to engender religious attitudes and mystical experiences were virtually identical, although the manner of explaining the origin of the effects and their importance and place in the religious traditions would vary. These techniques include meditation, contemplation, renunciation, seclusion, fasting, prayer, rituals, celibacy, the cultivation of love, peace and virtue, and an active search for truth. The knowledge gained through the practice of meditation, asceticism and other disciplines has confirmed for me that the primary difference between religions is the language used to describe the experience of spiritual development and fulfillment and not the actual spiritual experience that is explained in many ways. Religions also function much as rival businesses and the people involved in them need not develop genuine insight to perpetuate the material rewards gained by occupying positions of spiritual authority, real or imagined. As political and economic franchises, religions must be advertised, protected from “heretics,” require wealth for maintenance and facilities and depend on controlling or influencing the thoughts and beliefs of others.

This negative side to religious practice dissuades many people from seriously investigating the cumulative knowledge of countless generations of humanity. Knowledge is open to interpretation by everyone

and is the property of anyone who cares to seek it. Accurate and accessible teachings abound throughout the modern world but are often obscured by the proliferation of countless mediocre or worthless accretions. Anyone can add to the sum of knowledge or detract from it by accidentally obscuring or deliberately obfuscating the truth. Gaining the knowledge that is truly helpful is the task we have before us should we decide to pursue the quest for enlightenment. That quest is the accumulation of knowledge gained through the teachings and practice of mysticism, the core of the major traditions of Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the study of the mystery and journey of a human life, of the Self and its relation to the Whole.

In a mystic experience the mind is literally beyond rational thought. There is a distinct change in mental processing. Sometimes this state may be identified as a transient psychosis as it can include periods where consciousness is destabilized. The experience may induce a lasting change in perception, understanding and behavior. Shamanic experience or illness, mania, some forms of schizophrenia, near-death experiences, and other conditions described in psychology are some possible examples of psychological states that can be related to or confused with mystic states. When ordinary consciousness resumes, the person may find a rationale for their experience, but the failure to do so may lead to extensive difficulties. The rationale might take the form of whatever religious background the person is familiar with, or perhaps as a new religion if there is no knowledge of traditional religions, or if there is disillusionment with known traditions. These states may also be presented in terms of a psychological theory. Buddhist meditation does not demand any particular philosophical view, although there are views that are considered more beneficial for cultivating insight than others. In meditation, the mind opens to itself. It is a practice of being aware without adding ideas to that awareness. The Buddha's message was to come and see, find for yourself what is real, what is truly of value. There is no need to simply believe others no matter how holy they might appear. Their holiness, real or imagined, is their own. They may have some advice about how we can cultivate our own wisdom or they may just take advantage of our naive conception of what a holy person is by appearing to be just what we want to see and saying just what we want to hear. Genuine

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insight coupled with compassion, a wisdom that is lived, is the real measure of spiritual maturity, not just accumulated information or charisma. If you care to know the spiritual maturity of another person, look more at what they do and feel rather than listening just to what they say. Anyone can say anything, but truly mature people (of decent intent) present a coherence of speech, emotion, and behaviour or actions.

CHAPTER III

MYSTICAL EVENTS

Seeing the Ox



A *spiritually transformative experience* (STE) is an altered state of consciousness (ASC) from a class of mental states that tend to change (often dramatically) the person to whom they occur. This term can include states of perception usually viewed as an indication of some form of mental illness in the West. This term is principally concerned with spiritual experiences recognized by religions, especially in their mystical traditions. These states are especially important in the context of transpersonal psychology where they are appreciated for the positive transformational effect they have on consciousness. Not everyone having an experience is changed by it but many people do experience a radical change in their awareness, their beliefs, goals, relationships, attitudes and general feelings about life and death. The experience may be positive or negative in its effect. These experiences are usually temporary episodes that vary in frequency and intensity. If the experience becomes overwhelming a person may require or benefit from treatment. These states may precipitate or be the result

of what have been termed spiritual emergencies. STEs can occur to anyone and may be related to certain types of activity, emotional states, conscious and unconscious resolutions of conflicts and issues, and to changes in the body through various factors including illness and the process of aging and natural growth. This is a fascinating field of study and I cannot adequately represent the wealth of information to be had. The interested reader is encouraged to seek some of the titles listed in the reference section. Classes in shamanism and mysticism are also becoming more common and contain much useful information.

One of the most common triggers for these events is meditation. Close encounters with death, prayer, concentration, the breath, work, sex, music and sleep are other common means. Other possibilities include yoga, chi-kung or qi gong, tai chi, kundalini yoga, vision questing, solitude, love, happiness and childbirth. Creative work, silence, contact with a special teacher, illness, religious services, art, nature, a sacred place, death of a friend or close relative, eye contact, physical activity, personal crisis, depression, relaxation, drugs (both anesthetic and psychotropic), tantric sexual practices and sex with a person with active kundalini are other possibilities. These states can be viewed as a natural balancing function of the mind that changes the emotional and energetic make-up of consciousness through the release of unconscious contents. They may be a natural phenomenon often accorded a supernatural origin.

A number of different patterns of activity seem to occur to people. A peak experience is a particularly intense or profound experience; in some cases, it may be viewed by the subject as an epiphany but may also require treatment because of the disruption it can cause to conscious functioning. It can be very disturbing to friends and relatives since few people have knowledge of these states other than psychologists, healthcare workers and spiritual teachers. Unfortunately, many healthcare workers are not familiar with the potential benefits of these kinds of experiences; psychiatrists, psychologists and other health officials may actively work to suppress or otherwise interfere with it. In his numerous books, Dr Stanislav Grof has detailed an interesting assortment of experiences termed *perinatal* and *transpersonal* experiences. These include mystic states, heaven and hell realms, past-life recall and psychic phenomena. While any of the various triggers may

be involved, it remains difficult to determine just what the critical components are for initiating these types of ASCs.

The mind is better prepared for these experiences if there is foreknowledge of their existence and the methods that have been developed to engender, support, control, and assimilate them into a positive change of attitude and behavior. In my opinion, these experiences are not dependent on religious doctrines, but are the subject of spiritual teachings and the object of spiritual practice, although they can occur to anyone through the natural processes of mind's functioning, through illness, growth, and the process of dying. Though there are different headings in this section, it should be understood that these are not necessarily exclusive divisions. Mystical states are included in Grof's Transpersonal States but are defined separately because they do form a specific type of experience which is sought in religious practice, unlike some of Grof's states which are not deliberately sought out. The divisions in this section are really to give the reader an appreciation for different terms used to describe these aspects of our conscious life.

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

The feeling of union with God, the experience of God's presence, the Oneness of everything and Universal Consciousness are positive expressions of mystical states. There can be an expansion of Self, a feeling of one's presence expanding beyond the body a few feet or to infinity. Bliss episodes, periods of extreme joy, ecstasy, rapture, awe, trance or wonder may engulf the individual. Visionary images and journeys may begin. Deities, saints, gurus, angels and other spiritual archetypes can appear in consciousness. Heaven and hell realms might be seen. These entities may be viewed as productions or projections of the mind or they may be viewed as actual beings. This is largely dependent on belief or prior knowledge. They can also be viewed as both mental but still actual, beyond one's limited self. Illumination is a term often used for this state. It can mean insights and revelations, perceptions of light both inside and outside the mind and unconscious contents becoming conscious. Another quality of the mystic experience is the spiritual rebirth that signifies the successful completion of this portion of life's journey. This could be as

a religious conversion, a sense of dying and possibly the perception of being reborn or as shamanistic encounters with transpersonal elements of the unconscious. All or some of these aspects may occur in a mystical state. Mystic and other STEs may all be in some way related to kundalini activity. Kundalini is the name for the energy that arises when certain psycho-physiological processes occur which cause or accompany changes in cognitive functioning and metabolism.

There are many lists that describe different features of the mystic experience and many books that can give the reader more detail. *Mysticism*, by Evelyn Underhill and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, by William James are two excellent and well-known books. It is beyond the scope of this work to do more than introduce the use of these unusual states for effecting changes in consciousness and to provide an alternative understanding for some mental states commonly thought of as illnesses.

The main characteristics of a mystical event include its ineffability, the impossibility to describe the grandeur, importance or profundity of it. There is the noetic quality, meaning it is both a feeling and a knowing state, an experience of mind. These events are transient and rarely persist for long periods. It is a passive event from the perspective of the ego and is perceived as an irresistible force outside one's control. The sense of timelessness may include a loss of the perception of time, a change in the way time is experienced, or the perception that one is at a different time, perhaps re-living an event from a past life. There may be many instances of synchronicity. Synchronicity in the sense Jung suggested, as symbolically meaningful events that seem to bridge the gap between the mind and the physical world. A general familiarity with the existence and characteristics of these unusual states of consciousness is helpful for maintaining composure during the event and in its positive assimilation. They are also a great deal of fun, rid the mind of needless negative energies, and change the perception of the nature of reality.

In *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill divides the mystic's process into five stages. A person begins by experiencing an awakening to a consciousness of the "Divine Reality." She remarks that the experience is usually abrupt and is accompanied by feelings of joy and exaltation. The next level marks the point where the person realizes their own imperfection when compared to the divine truth they have been exposed

to. She calls it the stage of “Purgation” and defines it as a state of pain and effort. The next stage is “Illumination.” Through purgation, the Self has become detached from “things of sense” and acquired spiritual virtues. It has awakened to knowledge of transcendent reality but is not yet fully developed. The final purgation stage has been called the “mystic pain” or “mystic death.” It is also known as the “dark night of the soul.” She states, “The consciousness which has, in illumination, sunned itself in the sense of the Divine Presence, now suffers under an equally intense sense of the Divine Absence: learning to dissociate the personal satisfaction of mystical vision from the reality of mystical life.” It seems like the Divine had abandoned the soul. The Self must then surrender itself in order to reach “union,” the “mystical marriage.” This she views as the final goal of the Christian mystic quest.

I have not yet found any indication that Buddhism marks a stage similar to the dark night of the soul in its approach to *nibbana*. Theravada teachings do commonly characterize the path as one of purification however. There is the idea that highly unusual states lessen with practice and finally disappear altogether but there does not seem to be a prolonged crisis that must be transcended. This may reflect a cultural difference as Buddhism, unlike Christianity, does not have the same types of concepts about guilt and sin. There is no original sin to overcome. Ignorance is viewed as the main stumbling block to developed awareness. There are recognized in Buddhist scripture and folklore, five acts which are said to prevent entrance to the heaven realms and the attainment of *nibbana*. These are killing one’s father or mother, killing an arahat (spiritually developed person), doing physical harm to a buddha, and causing a schism in the Buddhist monastic order, the sangha.

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

Many people may be surprised to find out just how common psychic experiences actually are. Our tradition of science rests on a number of dubious assumptions and generally discounts these phenomena as being delusional aberrations of consciousness. The subjectivity of the experience makes it difficult to study but enough research has been done to suggest that the “perception” of these phenomena do

occur. In much of the world, these things are commonly accepted as a fact. They are dealt with in religious teachings, are a common feature of shamanistic healing practices, occur in conjunction with religious drug ceremonies, dreams, myths and rituals, and form a legitimate type of knowledge and skill. These phenomena also occur in relation to meditation and some types of practice are designed to stimulate the activity of psychic powers. In Buddhist teaching these powers are viewed as a natural by-product of concentration and the practitioner is cautioned that these abilities can become a serious hindrance to practice because of the temptation to try to develop them rather than proceeding with the proper cultivation of concentration, mindfulness, and insight. Power and ego trips are also a cause for concern. Psychic abilities may also be of little value and haphazard in the nature and frequency of occurrence.

Psychic disorders can involve painful clairsentience that may be felt as an intense pain that can often manifest as a headache. There can be the phenomena of possession or a struggle for the dominance of mental control by various sub-personalities or archetypes. Excessive clairvoyance is too much information that cannot be stopped. Intrusive past-life recall is too rapid, too frequent, or too intense and is another potential difficulty. Horrific visions of the Devil, demons, ghosts, hell realms, or images of death may assault awareness. There can be channeling disorders where a person is compelled into trance, more than one “entity” is trying to channel, negative entities are being channeled, or negative entities may be pretending to be angels, gurus, or spiritual guides, etc. These terms need not imply real entities. Consciousness is still largely a mystery to science and there is no theory beyond criticism that can account for why images such as these should be experienced by people all over the world whether real or projected by the mind. Different cultures, religions, and tribes all have their own accounts of what the phenomenon is, what it means and the appropriate response to its occurrence.

TYPES OF PSYCHIC ACTIVITY

Abstract Intuition – knowledge without logically processed thinking.

Astral Travelling – a perceived relocation of awareness outside one's body or to a different time, place or dimension. This may be related to the phenomena of past-life recall.

Automatic Writing – writing done without conscious thought.

Clairaudience – mentally or physically hearing outside the normal human range.

Clairsentience – the ability to know the true feelings of others. Sometimes the person may be able to locate pain in others by feeling it within their own body.

Spirit Guides – the impressions of Beings sensed by seeing, hearing, feeling, or smelling their presence.

Clairvoyance – refers to seeing auras, chakras, meaningful colors, patterns or symbols.

Spiritual Healing – healing effected by touch, focused thought or prayer.

Past-Life Recall – means knowing, sensing or seeing what appear to be previous lives.

Precognition – to know, sense or see the future through premonitions, dreams, voices, or visions.

Psychometry – the ability to intuit information about persons or things by touching them.

Out-of-Body (OBE) – the same as astral travelling but awareness always remains in sight of the body. Linked to stimulation of the right angular gyrus in the brain.

Telekinesis – moving objects by thought.

Telepathy – sending and/or receiving thoughts or mental images.

Telepyrokinesis – starting fires by thought alone.

Trance Channeling – uses the spirit or the unconscious to communicate by words, writing, art, etc.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

The near-death experience (NDE) has become a highly documented psycho-physiological event. Of importance to those on the quest are the lessons this experience can still provide to people who have never had it. Through various methods of practice, spiritual aspirants attempt to achieve a natural wisdom comparable to that glimpsed in an NDE. The light described in an NDE may be identical to the light perceived in states of illumination. There is definitely a correspondence in terms of the subjective facticity of the event and the subsequent effects it can produce on consciousness, values, behavior, life goals, and the personal view of the meaning of life.

NDE researchers acknowledge that a person does not have to die to experience the phenomena described by people who have survived close encounters with death. The experience typically begins with an out-of-body experience (OBE) followed by passage through what is usually referred to as a tunnel. In the tunnel, there is perceived a light that the person is moving towards. Coming out into the “light” brings about very peaceful feelings and often encounters with deceased loved-ones, angelic Beings, a Being of Light or what is believed to be God. There may be a life-review where the person re-experiences significant events in their life, their whole life seems to be reviewed or they may experience the effects their life had on other people. Regarding the return to the body, many people report being pulled back to life, sometimes against their will or receive instruction to return. Many people have only some of these phenomena happen and not the entire sequence.

I do not recall the source, but I once read about a religious practice in ancient Egypt where the new Pharaoh was placed in an airtight sarcophagus long enough to induce what sounded like an NDE occasioned by near suffocation. The sarcophagus was quickly opened to attempt revival once it was observed that the Pharaoh had become unconscious. The state induced was to give the Pharaoh his god-like view of life in order that he might better fulfill his role as a living god. I cannot attest to the accuracy of this account, but in view of the modern research of NDEs and their psychological after-effects, it would not surprise me if a culture did actually

utilize a technique that, if it did not end in death, could sometimes induce an NDE.

Some researchers have suggested that depletion of oxygen to the brain accounts for the visions dying people experience and this may be a factor. Grof has suggested that the effects of LSD may include inhibiting the transfer of oxygen on the enzymatic level and he does mention the aboriginal use of suffocation as a means to induce altered states. Pranayama, an Indian practice that works by manipulating the breath may use changes in oxygen in the brain to achieve its effects. To suggest, however, that the visions of the dying are “merely” hallucinations of an oxygen-starved brain misses the point that they have a profound relevance for the lives and psychology of the people having them and this theory does not address why the experience takes its particular form. Dr Grof makes this statement in discussing the role of preparing for death by inducing death-rebirth experiences: “We believe that the struggle and agony that are associated with dying in some persons are due to the fact that the physiological and biochemical changes in the organism activate painful unconscious material from the individual’s history that has not been resolved and the imprints of the agony of birth that have not been worked through and consciously integrated.”

Kenneth Ring, a long-time researcher of the NDE, has divided it into three levels of insight which he says are related to the recurrent themes which can be deduced from a survey of the reports offered by near-death survivors. The highest and most universal level he calls the “beatific vision.” In this state, the individual becomes aware of the perfection of the universe and of the self as an integral part of it. For some, it is the encounter with God, a realm of unconditional love and acceptance. For others, it is simply referred to as “the Light.” The next level he calls “earthly realizations” where the importance of “certain human values, beliefs and strivings” are gained: the expression of love; the pursuit of knowledge; living life to the fullest; turning away from materialism and a competitive lifestyle; understanding the preciousness of life; and the conviction that death is nothing to fear are the elements that comprise this stage. Dr Ring’s last level of insight is termed “personal revelation.” In NDEs a “Presence” is found: a Being, person, or guide that is interested in our welfare and path through life. Sometimes

it is described as a Being of Light, God or Jesus and this Presence is perceived as having always been interested in our welfare. This guide helps the person to understand their path and to put it back into an order that leads them to greater love and fulfillment.

In the “core” experience there is the initial out-of-body experience, the passage through the “tunnel”, a darkness or nothingness, and the encounter with a Presence or the Light. There is also commonly reported a life-review. In this phase of the NDE the person re-experiences their life. They may not only experience their own thoughts, feelings, and sense perceptions in an inordinately detailed manner, but can also experience the effects their thought, speech, and actions had on others. They do this by perceiving from the perspective of those they have affected. People describe the anguish felt at how they had abused themselves and others with insensitive thought, speech, and actions. Though coupled with a boundless compassion and acceptance by the Being of Light, people report gaining from the experience, the desire to change and be more loving even in the smallest details of life. There is implicit in this the idea that truly, “as we sow, so shall we reap.”

In these accounts of the NDE, we can experience the mental and physical suffering we have created for others. As a psychological reality, this could be the origin for the idea of the Day of Judgment or the teaching of karma as an impersonal power operating through one’s own consciousness. Kenneth Ring quotes a passage from a convict that experienced a scroll unrolling before him while in the NDE. He writes:

“...the only pictures on it were the pictures of people I had injured. It seemed there would be no end to it. A vast number of those people I knew or had seen. Then there were hundreds I had never seen. These were the people who had been indirectly injured by me. The minute history of my long criminal career was thus relived by me, plus all the small injuries I had inflicted unconsciously by my thoughtless words and looks and omissions. Apparently, nothing was omitted in this nightmare of injuries, but the most terrifying thing about it was that every pang of suffering I had caused others was now felt by me as the scroll unwound itself.”

This of course, is only a single example. There are many books dealing with NDEs and the suggestion that people may lose some of their fear of death or sense of grief over the death of loved ones simply by reading other people's accounts. A phenomenon comparable to the NDE has also been recorded in cases of severe stress and has been credited with unusual physical and psychological healing capacity. Kenneth Ring suggests that this healing capacity even extends to people reading the testimony of NDE survivors. In the minds of many near-death survivors the experience itself is a form of teaching. There are reported many lessons but its most profound aspect seems to be love. There is the all-embracing love of the Divine, the Light, God, the Being of Light or the Presence. There is typically gained or reinforced, a love for all people and nature. Greater concern for the earth; beliefs in life after death or reincarnation may develop; lessening of materialistic interests; seeing a divine plan to life; and having a new view of one's own course in life are other facets of the NDE.

Reports of increased psychic activity, seeing auras and electromagnetic effects are other features common in NDE testimonies. The list of potential physiological, neurological, psychological and behavioral changes Kenneth Ring supplies in his book, *Lessons from the Light* are:

- Greater appreciation for life
- Greater self-acceptance
- Increased concern for others
- Expanded reverence for life
- Anti-materialism (acquisition for its own sake is seen as pointless)
- Anti-competitiveness (caring, not achieving is seen as what matters)
- Spirituality (organized religion seen as less important, universal principles as more important)
- Quest for knowledge (heightened desire to gain knowledge)
- Sense of purpose (life perceived as meaningful and having a sacred purpose)
- Loss of the fear of death (normal fears of a painful process of dying remain)
- Belief in life after death
- Belief in God

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- Expanded mental awareness (states where the mind is flooded with information)
- Heightened paranormal sensitivities
- Development of healing gifts
- Hyperesthesia (unusual sensitivity to environmental stimuli)
- States of physiological hypoarousal
- Energetic states and kundalini activation
- Brain changes

While it seems a majority of NDErs find what they believe to be God, some are said to go farther. To a place “beyond” the Light, to the Void, the source of the manifest universe. In reading the accounts of NDErs I was struck by the parallels with Eastern and Western religious traditions. This in no way surprises me as my quest has confirmed for me that these kinds of states are possible and can be triggered by many means. What may be impossible is to achieve consensus on the interpretation of NDEs and other ASCs, hence I make no real attempt to do so in this work. Truth, like beauty, is not only in the eye of the beholder, it is the beholder.

It is important to note that not all NDEs are received in a positive fashion. For personal reasons, as well as the negative reactions by family members, clergy, or doctors and other health professionals, people can be made to feel foolish for believing in the experience. They may be advised to seek help for their “delusions,” or others may expect more “enlightened” behavior from them since they may claim to have met with, or witnessed, God. NDEs are like other mystical experiences in so far as they can produce both positive and negative effects depending on a variety of factors. It is because there is no guarantee of a positive outcome to mystic states and NDEs without preparation, or at least prior understanding, that spiritual practice can be seen as a kind of insurance to safely and joyfully assimilate these kinds of experiences should any of them occur.

KUNDALINI AWAKENING

Kundalini is the name used in the Indian tradition of yoga for the energy that is released through the activity of as yet undetermined structures of the body and brain. The yoga system of thinking regarding these energies includes the teachings of the charkas; vortexes of energy located in a number of points in the body. Carl G. Jung has stated he believed kundalini to be related to the structure of the psyche itself. There are many books on the subject and I would encourage the reader to investigate this subject more fully if they are truly interested in pursuing spiritual practice to its conclusion. As kundalini activity is a potential result of meditation and spiritual disciplines, and can induce extreme physical and psychological reactions, it is best to have some understanding of the range of possible activity. One of the more dramatic manifestations of kundalini appears to an onlooker as an epileptic-type seizure. Kundalini activity in the West may often be misdiagnosed as mental illness. Unfortunately, there is little knowledge of kundalini phenomena in the Western psychiatric tradition and people who are unfamiliar with it have few options but to accept the verdict of whatever “authority” they happen upon. Kundalini activity can arise through the proper practice of traditional meditation and contemplation techniques and not only through kundalini yoga so it can be important to know of it. Tibetan Buddhism has teachings regarding kundalini but Zen and Theravada teachings do not. Kundalini is usually not active at the beginning of meditation practice but can occur in the higher stages. Chi-kung or qi gong, the Chinese art of energy flow, can also trigger kundalini-type events as well as a type of psychosis that results from an overly intensive practice of qi gong exercises. Qi gong is a practice designed to balance the energy flow through the body in accordance with the same understanding that guides the placement of acupuncture needles. It is used to treat many types of illness but can be harmful if misused.

In discussing spiritual practices, I have met many people practicing kundalini yoga. I confess to being somewhat alarmed by the fact that most of the people I have spoken to seem to have little or no knowledge of the effects activating kundalini can produce. Many view kundalini yoga as just another form of meditation leading to peaceful states or as a system of physical exercises. I would encourage people

engaged in kundalini yoga to study the literature, in particular, the writings of Gopi Krishna. In his autobiographical accounts, Gopi Krishna relates the power of the experience and its disorienting effects. He states that at various times he wondered if he was dying or going insane. He relates too, his inability to find anyone knowledgeable about his experiences despite living in India where this knowledge has existed for millennia.

PHYSICAL AND METABOLIC SYMPTOMS OF KUNDALINI AND OTHER STATES

The physical, psychological, and metabolic effects of kundalini awakening may vary in duration and frequency. Symptoms might include cranial pressure or sensations of energy moving up and out or into the head. This may be accompanied by a feeling of the expansion of consciousness or self. Inner sounds likened to bells, bees, wind, rushing water, humming, music, etc. are often heard. Spinal energy can sometimes be felt like heat or vibrating energy in the lower back or moving along the spine. Light of different colors like white or gold and perceived as illuminating the mind or the person's surroundings might occur. Things may appear brighter or objects may appear to radiate light. Also, the face of the person having this experience is said to radiate light. Note the depiction of halos common to religious paintings around the world. Paranormal types of consciousness including mystic, psychic, revelatory, creative or expansive episodes may coincide with this activity. There might also be sexual sensations or sensations of activity in the genital region. This could be a form of unusual or intense arousal without external stimuli. Spontaneous orgasms directed inward and upward are another potential feature.

Physical sensations include rushes of energy through the body, especially in the lower back, spine and head. There may be involuntary jerking of the limbs. The back may arch or jerk along with energy rushes or vibrations throughout the whole body or in parts of it. There may be body pains or pressure that cannot be diagnosed or pulling in the pelvic area and burning sensations along the spine. Tightening of the throat and chest pains or pressure might be mistaken for a heart attack. Other symptoms may include abdominal

pain with or without nausea, pain or pressure between the eyebrows, and unusual sensations, pressures or pains in the center of the head, crown of the head, or between the eyes.

Metabolic symptoms include increased appetite and cravings for certain foods, especially high protein, dairy, fresh fruit and vegetables. There may be an aversion to certain foods like concentrated sugars, alcohol, caffeine and fried foods. A need to eat more frequently, the desire for smaller meals or a loss of appetite may occur. Also, an increase of bowel movements and bowel gas might arise. Rapid pulse, cold or chills, intolerance to heat or sensations of intense heat, hot flushes and night sweats are possible features. There may be frequent awakening, a need for more sleep, the desire for day naps, insomnia or decreased need for sleep during STEs, profound fatigue, a general feeling of grogginess or difficulty sleeping due to intense heat sensations. Fluctuations in energy might manifest as an increase in moodiness or irritability, being abnormally energetic or lethargic, susceptibility to illness, periods of high energy with a need to exercise, a speedy or hyper feeling, high or low mental energy or fluctuations between high and low energy.

There can be a kind of activity known as spontaneous yogic phenomena. This refers to involuntary yogic breathing, breathing patterns that are used by yogis for manipulating the body and mind. Adopting yogic postures not previously known and using mantras (sound syllables) and mudras (symbolic hand and body gestures) not previously known is another phenomenon commonly reported.

SEXUALITY AND KUNDALINI

There may be an increase or decrease in the sex drive from mild to extreme or it may manifest as unusual fluctuations in the sex drive. Confusion about the suitability of one's regular partner may be disturbing but is usually temporary. There can also be confusion about sexual orientation. Verbal and behavioral affectations of the opposite sex may appear, perhaps as elements of a person's anima or animus become better integrated into conscious awareness. There can be menstrual irregularities and sexual orgasms centered in the head or the spine or spontaneous orgasms related to prayer, meditation, and spiritual contemplation might occur. Orgasms may be associated with

mystical, psychic or out-of-body experiences. Unusual sensations in the sexual organs, swelling of the labia, fluctuations in erect penis size, and an increase or decrease of ejaculate or vaginal secretions are other recorded symptoms of kundalini activity.

SHAMANIC CRISIS

Shamanism, although originally a term applied to religious specialists in Siberian tribes, now often refers to magic based healing arts that have existed all over the globe since perhaps the Paleolithic era and which are still being practiced. A shaman is a man or woman that enters non-ordinary states of consciousness through the use of drugs, chanting, music, fasting, rituals, meditation, or by possessing the mental ability to let the mind slip into trance and transpersonal states. The rituals and ceremonies shamans use might appear to an outsider as only magic based nonsense but have often been found to be very successful at curing people through both physiological (herbs, etc.) and psychological means. Many people who become a shaman experience a peculiar illness prior to becoming a candidate for shamanic training or before being recognized by their society as a shaman. This illness may have mental and physical symptoms that cannot be cured by medical intervention. Societies that value shamanism have a high regard for non-ordinary states that are viewed as pathological by mainstream Western psychology. The fledgling shaman may experience visionary states they perceive as taking them to another realm. In that state, they might be attacked by demons or spirits, experience torture and trials of various kinds, and there might be the sense of dying and being reborn, having seen heaven, hell, a ghost or spirit realm and of receiving insights into the secrets of creation or the desires of the spirits.

This kind of illness can last years and the person often suffers both mentally and physically. Shamanic crisis may appear to be similar to mental illness but it is distinguished from insanity by the fact that the shaman is able to return to normal functioning and to be a full participant in the life of the community, often as a healer, spiritual leader or seer. Some religious orders will not admit people who have not had these kinds of experiences for training as priests, monks or shamans. This facet of human behaviour in response to what the West

routinely classifies as mental illness presents us with an alternative model for the successful integration of unusual states into a means for personal healing and development. It is interesting to speculate how knowledge of shamanic states might affect the coping ability of a person that suddenly finds they are faced with a condition recognized by their own culture as a mental illness. Talking to Western Buddhist practitioners about their experiences of altered states suggests to me that they are better prepared to deal with any states that arise and are not likely to want or require assistance when experiencing them.

RENEWAL THROUGH RETURN TO THE CENTER

John Weir Perry, a psychiatrist and Jungian analyst, proposed this process of healing and renewal through transient psychosis based on his experience with schizophrenics and psychotics. The view of this theory is that psychos has a healing and transformative potential that is often ignored by the dominant medical models of mental illness. When this process is properly facilitated it allows the subject to successfully process and assimilate the experience. Too often, family and physicians are not able to suspend their own views of how the person should be. Working from incorrect assumptions about mental illness and spirituality, they seek to interfere with what is in essence, a natural process where the mind is drawn inward and becomes immersed in archetypal imagery including death and world destruction. The rational mind seems to disintegrate and the subject may perceive that they have passed into the after-death state. Compare this to the Tibetan teachings of the *bardo*, the after-death plane. It would seem that many practices used by yogis and other spiritual practitioners are deliberate attempts to induce just this state of consciousness.

The various categories of STEs may be dealing with essentially the same basic process that manifests differently to different people. The range of phenomena that is experienced by a person having a kundalini episode, a near-death event, or a transient psychosis is remarkably similar. Perhaps the particular phenomena we encounter is less important than the process itself no matter how it manifests. This seems to be the Buddhist perspective and the Buddha recognized the importance of personal psychology when illustrating the different

techniques that were appropriate to people with different temperaments. Buddhist teachings in one way or another always come back to the nature of Mind.

The center to which the person returns is the Self as the unified center beyond the limited ego consciousness. It is the direct experience of this center that initiates the transformation of consciousness and is often of such a spectacular nature that it may give rise to a belief in God where none existed before or be seen as confirmation that God exists. Buddhists will typically view it as the nature of Mind. Although Buddhism does not postulate a God in the theological sense it cannot be stated that it actually denies it. This can be stated provided it is made clear what constitutes the exact definition of God and Emptiness or Mind. If the question is pursued far enough it will be found that both are inexplicable and remain not as philosophical postulates but are that which lies beyond the pure and total presence of this cognitive moment. Language is transcended, cognition flashes and Emptiness is glimpsed, the question of God or the statement that God is, or I am, becomes lost in what the Tibetans call *primordial awareness*, the state of non-duality, hence no question or questioner.

GROF'S PERINATAL AND TRANSPERSONAL STATES

Stanislav Grof has conducted many years of research using LSD and other drugs to treat people with psychiatric problems and to explore consciousness. The other techniques he has developed include holotropic breath work (increasing the depth and frequency of breathing) as well as several other methods that encourage the occurrence of transpersonal states. It is these transpersonal states that are of primary concern for those on a quest as they include, but are not limited to, the states of consciousness sought through spiritual practice. He sums up this work by stating:

“Clinical work with LSD and other psychedelics...is not the study of a powerful and exotic psychoactive substance or a group of compounds, but probably the most promising avenue of research of the human psyche and nature. The findings from psychedelic explorations are directly applicable to other situations in which consciousness is altered by various non-pharmacological means. They throw entirely new light

on the material from history, comparative religion, and anthropology concerning the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, rites of passage of various cultures, shamanic procedures of all times, aboriginal healing ceremonies, spiritual practices of various religions and mystical traditions, and other phenomena of great cultural significance.”

This body of information regarding transpersonal states has a great deal to offer anyone undertaking a spiritual quest or undergoing a profound shift in cognitive functioning which may include states generally considered pathological by mainstream Western psychology. Grof goes on to say:

“While the model of the human psyche used in traditional academic psychotherapy is conceptually limited to the *recollective-analytical level*, this new cartography includes two additional levels that are transbiographical. These are the *perinatal level*, characterized by emphasis on the twin phenomena of birth and death, and the *transpersonal level* that can in principle mediate experiential connection with any aspect of the phenomenal world and with various mythological and archetypal domains. I consider the knowledge of this cartography to be indispensable for the safe and effective inner quest.”

As the primary interest in this section is the spectrum of potential conscious states, particularly when engrossed in a deliberate spiritual quest and not the objective truth of these states or the insights revealed by them, no attempt will be made to express or review all of Grof's findings or theory. Dr Grof stresses that objectifiable evidence lends surprising credence to the truth of the information found in these states. For the edification of the seeker I list some of the states Dr Grof has distinguished through his considerable research but these headings are only briefly described and do not contain all the information available. His work is in my opinion, extremely relevant to people on a quest for inner knowledge and I would encourage the interested reader to pursue that knowledge by availing themselves of the literature produced by Dr Grof and other transpersonal psycholo-

gists. The following is largely paraphrased from Grof's *The Adventure of Self-Discovery*, though some other information is included. It begins with the Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM I-IV). These states may be experienced in conjunction with spiritual practice and may even be required before being able to attain higher exposure and healing from transpersonal states.

PERINATAL EXPERIENCES

The term perinatal comes from the association of these states with memories of life in the womb, the onset of birthing, the process of delivery through the birth canal and finally, delivery.

BPM-1 (PRIMAL UNION WITH MOTHER)

This matrix is related to the primal union with the mother in the intrauterine state. The mother and child form a symbiotic unity. The situation can be ideal as all needs are met but adverse conditions can occur that interfere with that satisfaction. Diseases, the mother's emotional states, and influences from the outer world may play a part in disturbing the fetus. Dr Grof suggests that the experience of cosmic unity can arise in this state as elements of an *undisturbed intrauterine existence*. Reconnecting with this experience later in life, the subject may view it as an experience of their unity to God, to the universe, other people, or nature. Elements from *disturbances of intrauterine existence* can be experienced as encounters with demonic appearances or evil forces.

Dr Grof lists schizophrenic psychoses (paranoia, mystical union, encounter with evil forces), hypochondriasis, hysterical hallucinations, and confusing daydreams with reality as being related psychopathological syndromes to this state. In LSD sessions, the phenomenology includes recall of "good womb" experiences: an oceanic type of ecstasy, cosmic unity and visions of paradise. Disturbances in intrauterine life present realistic recall of "bad womb" experiences: fetal crises, diseases and emotional upheavals of the mother, attempted abortions; also, paranoid ideation, unpleasant physical sensations, and associations with transpersonal experiences may occur. These include archetypal elements, racial and evolutionary memories and past life experiences.

BPM-11 (ANTAGONISM WITH MOTHER)

Biological delivery destabilizes the original equilibrium of the womb through chemical signals and then muscular spasms. The fetus is constricted by uterine contractions with no way out available yet. Grof refers to this state as the *experience of cosmic engulfment*. He states, “subjects feel encaged or trapped in a monstrous claustrophobic situation and experience incredible psychological and physical tortures, Subjects tend to experience their immediate environment or the entire world through a sense of paranoia.

Related psychopathological syndromes are schizophrenic psychoses (hellish tortures, a meaningless world); severe, inhibited endogenous depressions; irrational inferiority and guilt feelings; hypochondriasis; alcohol and drug addiction. The phenomenology displays immense physical and psychological suffering. The situation may seem unbearable and inescapable. Images of hell, an apocalyptic view of the world, horrors of war, concentration camps, the Inquisition, disease, death and the meaninglessness of life can be experienced.

BPM-111 (SYNERGISM WITH MOTHER)

This stage correlates with the second stage of biological delivery where the fetus begins the crushing experience of moving through the birth canal. There is sensed a struggle for survival; an experience of suffocation and anoxia may occur. In this stage, the fetus may come into contact with blood, mucus, fetal liquid, urine and feces. These aspects give this experience its particular character.

Schizophrenic psychoses (somasochistic and scatological elements, auto mutilation, abnormal sexual behavior), agitated depression, obsessive-compulsive neuroses, psychogenic asthma, stammering, conversion and anxiety hysteria, frigidity and impotence are some of the related syndromes Dr Grof links this stage with. Phenomenology includes an intensification of suffering. There may be explosive types of ecstasy, visions of brilliant colors, somasochistic orgies, murders and sacrifices, engagement in battles, scenes of harms and carnivals and experiences of dying and being reborn. Intense physical manifestations may be felt as pressures and pains, suffocation, muscular tension, tremors and twitches, nausea and vomiting,

hot flushes and chills, sweating, cardiac distress, ringing in the ears and problems with sphincter control.

BPM-IV (SEPARATION FROM MOTHER)

Related to the final stage of delivery, the agonizing process is terminated with the passage through the birth canal. Grof states:

“As in the case of the preceding matrices, some of the experiences belonging here seem to represent a realistic re-enactment of the actual biological events during this phase, as well as specific obstetric interventions. The symbolic counterpart of this final stage of delivery is the *death-rebirth experience*; it represents the termination and resolution of the death-rebirth struggle. Physical and emotional agony culminates in a feeling of utter and total annihilation on all imaginable levels. It involves an abysmal sense of physical destruction, emotional catastrophe, intellectual defeat, ultimate moral failure, and absolute damnation of transcendental proportions. This experience is usually described as “ego-death”; it seems to entail an instantaneous and merciless destruction of all the previous reference points in the life of the individual.”

Schizophrenic psychoses (death-rebirth experiences, messianic delusions, salvation, redemption, identification with Christ, destruction and recreation of the world), manic symptomatology, female homosexuality, and exhibitionism are listed as related syndromes. Phenomenology consists of an expansion of space, or visions of gigantic halls, radiant light and beautiful colors, feelings of rebirth and redemption, sometimes manic activity and grandiose feelings, and humanitarian tendencies. There may be a transition to elements from BPM-I.

TRANSPERSONAL EXPERIENCES

TRANSCENDENCE OF SPATIAL BOUNDARIES

These are experiences of merging with another person, assuming another's identity, and identifying with anything in the universe. Consciousness can expand to that of a specific group of people or to all of humanity. It may also transcend human experience and identity with the consciousness of plants, animals, inorganic objects and processes, the biosphere, the whole planet, or the entire universe. A partial list of transpersonal states detailed by Dr Grof follows:

EXPERIENCE OF DUAL UNITY

There is a sense of merging with another person in a state of unity although the subject maintains awareness of their own identity. In perinatal memories, there can be identification with the mother, the child, or both at the same time. This experience may be accompanied by a sense of love and sacredness.

IDENTIFICATION WITH OTHER PERSONS

Similar to the preceding heading, this refers to a state where the subject identifies with another person but to the point where they may lose their own sense of identity. It can involve people from a person's childhood, their ancestry, or what is perceived as a past-life. The new perception of the body image, thought processes, memories, emotional reactions and attitudes, facial expressions, mannerisms and voice inflections may all be viewed as characteristic of the personality identified with. Historical figures may be identified with but Dr Grof states that unlike past-life experiences, there is no sense of having actually been the particular person. He goes on to say that experienced shamans may use this technique to make their psychic diagnosis of a patient and to conduct their healing.

GROUP IDENTIFICATION AND GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS

Here the identification is with an entire group of people rather than with an individual. These may be racial, cultural or political groups. Identification with the suffering of prisoners, soldiers, all humanity, or martyrs may occur. This is an experience common in spiritual literature including Buddhism where the Buddha is recorded as having seen the sufferings of humanity caused by delusion and ignorance, perhaps from this type of all-embracing perspective.

IDENTIFICATION WITH ANIMALS

Identification with various animal species can include the body image, instinctual drives, the animal's perception of the environment and its physiological sensations. Shamanic literature frequently records a similar state. Some very interesting psychophysiological effects can occur for people trained in any of the animal styles of Chinese kung-fu should they receive the proper stimulus to "activate" the creatures whose fighting natures they have been working to emulate.

IDENTIFICATION WITH PLANTS AND BOTANICAL PROCESSES

Consciousness becomes identified with plants, parts of plants, plankton, bacterial cultures, bacterium, and biochemical or physiological processes. Plants may be seen as having spiritual lessons to teach humanity and this state may result in an interest and appreciation for vegetarianism.

ONENESS WITH LIFE AND ALL CREATION

Consciousness expands to include all of life rather than a particular species. It may focus on one aspect of life such as hunger, the sex drive or the maternal instinct. Natural laws of life and evolution may be perceived; life seen as a phenomenon of a cosmic intelligence rather than a process explained by mechanistic science may develop.

EXPERIENCE OF INANIMATE MATTER AND INORGANIC PROCESSES

The identification of consciousness with water in the oceans and rivers, fire, the earth or mountains, electric storms, volcanic eruptions, tornadoes, precious stones, crystals, metals, molecules, atoms, electromagnetic forces and subatomic particles can be experienced.

PLANETARY CONSCIOUSNESS

All aspects of the planet are contained in this state from the geological to the biological. The earth can be seen as “one complex organism.” It may be seen as Mother Earth or a divine Being in its own right.

EXTRATERRESTRIAL EXPERIENCE

This includes celestial bodies, astronomical processes and parts of the universe. There can be the perception of travelling to the sun or moon, to other planets, stars and galaxies, or to experiencing the explosion of supernovas, the activity of stars or passage through a black hole.

IDENTIFICATION WITH THE ENTIRE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

Listed as a rare experience, consciousness has here expanded to include the entire physical universe. Grof states that it “...is typically associated with the insight that while various entities of the phenomenal world are experiencing only certain specific aspects of the material reality, the cosmic or divine consciousness has a complete and total simultaneous experience of everything there is....”

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA INVOLVING TRANSCENDENCE OF SPACE

Here are found out-of-body experiences, travelling clairvoyance and clairaudience, “space-travels,” and telepathy. Clairvoyance and clairaudience may occur without a sense of actually being at the location perceived or the person may astral travel or project themselves there.

TRANSCENDENCE OF THE BOUNDARIES OF LINEAR TIME

Many people experience states described as fetal and embryonic memories. Memories of ancestors, past-lives or of the racial and collective unconscious may occur. Animal ancestors from the human evolutionary tree or other animals may also be experienced. Some people experience the history of the universe from the Big Bang to the formation of galaxies, the solar system, and geophysical processes of the earth.

EMBRYONAL AND FETAL EXPERIENCES

Any stage of development may be connected with. Experiences may include states of ecstasy and mystical connection with life or traumatic episodes; or prenatal development can cause the perception of paranoia, anguish, physical distress and even attacks by demons or demon-like beings. This state includes Grof's first basic perinatal matrix, BPM 1.

ANCESTRAL EXPERIENCES

The content of the experience is generally applicable to the subject's racial and cultural history. It may relate to a parent or grandparent or be farther removed in time going back centuries. The experience may involve reliving episodes from an ancestor's life or complete identification with the ancestor which includes body image, facial expressions, emotions, thoughts, and gestures. Insights into cultural beliefs, attitudes, traditions, superstitions and prejudices may be gained in some states. This state is distinguished from racial and collective experiences by the ancestor being linked by blood (DNA) to the perceiving subject.

RACIAL AND COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES

Here a person may identify with any racial group to which they belong or to any group of humanity. Memories can be related to any race, culture or historical period regardless of a person's background and interests.

PAST INCARNATION EXPERIENCES

Unlike the above categories, there is the perception of having actually been the consciousness recalled. Though it usually involves another person, or other people, it can occasionally include animals. In the Buddhist sutras, there are stories of the Buddha recounting lives prior to his enlightenment that includes lives as animals. It is impossible to know for certain if the Buddha actually had these experiences and related them or if it was a symbolic teaching device used in a country where most people accepted reincarnation as a fact. However, with the confirmation of this experience as a psychological state, it becomes more likely that these tales may be genuine accounts of the Buddha's experience in becoming enlightened. According to Buddhism, past-life recall is one of the powers that a person may obtain when they have ascended to a high level in pursuing the path to enlightenment. These experiences have a therapeutic potential and some psychologists have successfully used past-life regression to cure their patients of various physical and psychological ailments.

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA INVOLVING TRANSCENDENCE OF TIME

Precognition, clairvoyance and clairaudience of past and future events, psychometry, and time travel comprise this heading. Dr Grof distinguishes this time travel state from reliving historical events in childhood, racial and collective memories, or ancestral experiences by the subject's ability to voluntarily chose the location they will view. He notes that while these kinds of experiences undermine the assumptions of the prevailing Western view of time and reality they are compatible with some current theories regarding time and consciousness.

PHYSICAL INTROVERSION AND NARROWING OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In this category, consciousness is said to appear to become identified with parts or locations in the body or individual organs and tissues. Dr Grof records subjects extending consciousness to both the cellular and sub-cellular levels. As a Buddhist monk, I once came across a book on a type of meditation that had this ability as its aim. Unfortu-

nately, I do not have the book and never practiced the technique as it was not a feature of the insight meditation I was doing at that time.

EXPERIMENTAL EXTENSION BEYOND CONSENSUS REALITY AND SPACE-TIME SPIRITISTIC AND MEDIUMISTIC EXPERIENCES

Here we have encounters with deceased friends and relatives, disincarnate entities, and the astral realm. There may be telepathic communication involved directed to the medium or to other people using the medium to convey it. Trance states where the medium is possessed by the entity are also included.

ENERGETIC PHENOMENA OF THE SUBTLE BODY

Perceiving the aura surrounding the human body has been described by people with no knowledge of this phenomenon which is more commonly known and accepted in Eastern spiritual traditions. The experience of kundalini is the other element in this category.

EXPERIENCES OF ANIMAL SPIRITS

This is the perception of the connection with the archetypal nature of the animal rather than the identification with its physical form. The animal may be seen as a teacher or friend; a guide aiding in the process of spiritual understanding. Some of the experiences known by shamans the world over fall into this heading and form a fascinating body of knowledge and experience.

ENCOUNTERS WITH SPIRIT GUIDES AND SUPERHUMAN BEINGS

Spiritual literature of all kinds reports encounters with guides, teachers, and protectors from higher planes of existence and consciousness. These can occur during spiritual practice or through inner crisis. The guide or teacher may then continue to appear in the person's life either spontaneously or by request.

VISITS TO OTHER UNIVERSES AND MEETINGS WITH THEIR INHABITANTS

The experience of alien worlds, universes existing in different dimensions, UFOs, and the perception of alien inhabitants are another possible transpersonal state. Experiences of this sort are often viewed with a sense of danger. Kenneth Ring has noted that alien encounters and abductions bare a similarity to shamanic initiations where the person is beset by demons or entities, tortured, then released. These experiences might be colored by modern ideas yet, in essence, be the same type of experience when viewed from the psychological perspective. This experience is thought by some psychiatrists to possibly be the result of transpersonal elements suddenly entering consciousness.

There are also parallels with other types of mental states such as kundalini episodes. Commonalities include perceiving a bright light or strange sounds, psychic and visionary phenomena, and psychotic-type features including states of physical distress accompanied by delusional thinking. Some see the UFO encounter as a subjective crisis of transformation that can be divorced from the notion of an objective reality. This does not imply any validity to critical arguments against the existence of extraterrestrial life and the possibility of a visitation. It does suggest that people can have these experiences of sightings, encounters, and abductions regardless of whether or not they actually occur.

Buddhism and the phenomena of religion, shamanism and mysticism in general, are ancient methods for engendering, supporting, surviving and assimilating these STEs for the purpose of gaining knowledge of Self, life and death, and the release of suffering from unconscious conflicts, wrong understanding, and lack of comprehension and compassion. The question of life on other planets does not occur in Buddhism; it is taken for granted. In a simple sense, life is reality. From the perspective of life as a process of living and dying, the coming of aliens, while certainly remarkable, entertaining, and possibly fruitful, would likely do little to change the fundamental nature of being human and so in Buddhism it has no relevance to philosophical discussions about the nature of being. Still, wouldn't it be cool! Ah, the infinite potentiality of reality; it could happen... perhaps it already has.

EXPERIENCES OF MYTHOLOGICAL AND FAIRY-TALE SEQUENCES

Myths, fairy tales and legends from any culture can be witnessed in this state. There may be identification with mythological heroes or heroines or with mythological creatures. Dr Grof states that these may take the form of independent transpersonal themes or as being meaningfully related to personal problems and he links it to the idea of Jung's collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is that part of our unconscious which is common to humanity and a source of symbolic archetypal images from which many mythological tales emerge.

EXPERIENCES OF SPECIFIC BLISSFUL AND WRATHFUL DEITIES

These can be from any culture and may be known or unknown to the experiencer. They may be seen in a vision or the subject may identify with them. The experience of the Tibetan *bardos*, where the peaceful and wrathful deities appear, falls into this category. In the Tibetan practice of Mahamudra, a person perceiving frightening images is instructed not to try to dispel the fear that arises. Instead, the practitioner is to dwell on the fear with clear mindfulness and if the images vanish they are told to try to conjure even more frightful apparitions. Death is also used in this practice and this grounding exercise is used to discourage the arising of fear and perplexity when engaged in the process of dying. Buddhism acknowledges this state of perceiving deities but does not attach the same importance to it that these occurrences have in some other traditions. While indicative of progress on the path, they are viewed as secondary phenomena, mind-created, and are ultimately to be transcended.

EXPERIENCES OF UNIVERSAL ARCHETYPES

To really understand this category, it is essential to study Jung's descriptions and theory of the archetypes existing in the collective unconscious. Dr Grof narrows the term used by Jung to represent universal patterns rather than specific cultural variations. Grof's list of archetypes includes Woman, Man, Lover, Father, Mother, Good or Terrible Mother, Tyrant Father, Wise Old Man or Woman, Despot, Ascetic, Fugitive and the Hermit among others.

INTUITIVE UNDERSTANDING OF UNIVERSAL SYMBOLS

These are archetypal experiences wherein the esoteric or transcendental meaning involved in various symbols becomes apparent without intellectually studying them. Insight into esoteric teachings, the function and meaning of mandalas, deeper meanings in alchemy, astrology and divination may arise.

CREATIVE INSPIRATION AND THE PROMETHAN IMPULSE

This category can include the increase in creativity that often accompanies changes in cognition stimulated through spiritual practice and to dramatic improvements in the ability and skill of artistic execution and quality. This might be in science or the arts, humanitarian pursuits, physical skills, or in mental agility or capacity. Creativity is the essence of being. The illuminated mind is a wondrous instrument affording a radically altered perspective and intuitive appreciation and interaction with reality. Heightened states of creativity prompted by spiritual practice may be temporary or permanent. The Zen tradition refers to a state similar to this as the “Zen sickness.” It often appears as a strong need to pour out poetry or other creative writings during meditation retreats and which, if indulged in, effectively dissipates the energy that is being cultivated for deep introspection, attainment and stillness.

Dr Grof specifically refers to the type of inspiration that comes in the form of a dream, during a state of exhaustion, meditation or a sudden revelation or inspiration. He divides these occurrences into three forms: situations where there has been a struggle to find a solution and the answer comes through a non-ordinary state; the form of an idea or system of thought comes suddenly long before there is evidence in that particular field to support it; and where the inspiration takes the form of a finished product. He cites as an example, Nikola Tesla creating the electric generator after having a detailed vision of the finished working prototype.

EXPERIENCE OF COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Identifying with cosmic consciousness results in "...the feeling of encompassing the totality of existence and reaching the Reality underlying all realities." Here we find an experience that is central to many spiritual systems of practice. It is the realm sought by mystics all over the world and has been described by many writers. It is often conveyed through the use of poetry, metaphor, and analogy that most mystics appear to find more appropriate for sharing the insights gained through this unique experience.

THE SUPRACOSMIC AND METACOSMIC VOID

Dr Grof says of this state, "...[this] is the most enigmatic and paradoxical of all the transpersonal experiences. It is the experiential identification with the primordial Emptiness, Nothingness, and Silence, which seem to be the ultimate cradle of all existence. This is emptiness, *sunyata* (pron. soonyatta), the primordial emptiness out of which everything arises. It is beyond space and time, beyond form or any conception. While empty it is full; the source of all possibilities. This appears to be identical to the deepest stage of an NDE as recorded by Kenneth Ring. It is perhaps the single most important experience in Buddhism as Buddhist philosophy largely derives directly from its perception. Language fails completely to adequately convey this state hence the unfortunate inability of various religions and their practitioners to ever transcend their mutually exclusive semantics, dogma or cultural assumptions. Buddhism views this as a rare experience even amongst serious meditators and the resumption of normal consciousness does not preclude the experience being filtered through cultural ideas, motifs or one's education and linguistic ability.

To garner an appreciation of the profundity of this state and its philosophical implications it is useful to examine the modern science of quantum physics. The parallels with ancient traditions that relate back to emptiness or the primordial void are astonishing and there are many aspects that may shed light on the objective reality of psychic phenomena, synchronicity and other mystic or transpersonal insights and occurrences. Not being a physicist, I do not feel qualified

to discuss these aspects but encourage the reader to investigate this area of knowledge. Whole books have been written to explain or establish the validity of emptiness as a philosophical postulate or empirical truth and it is beyond the scope of this work to attempt to do so. Buddhism stresses the need to experience this state, not just intellectually understand it although that can be helpful when embarking on the quest since it does suggest a direction to look.

SYNCHRONISTIC LINKS BETWEEN CONSCIOUSNESS AND MATTER

First described by Carl Jung, synchronicity is a connecting principle that does not follow the Newtonian-Cartesian model of linear causality. Dreams, visions, and other mental phenomena seem at times to be directly related to physical events in a person's life. Although Jung included various kinds of psychic phenomena with synchronicity, I prefer the more precise definition by physicist Victor Mansfield. In his definition, synchronicity relates only to those events that are inherently meaningful in terms of their relation to unconscious compensation, a type of guidance from the unconscious. This phenomenon is viewed as acausal, there being no direct material or psychological link between events such as a person's actions causing another person to have a dream or someone's dream causing another person to think or act a certain way. Of particular interest to me in this section, Dr Grof notes that people coming close in their inner exploration to the experience of ego death, a fundamental part of the mystic quest, often encounter an accumulation of dangerous situations and accidents, including those caused by other people or external events.

SUPERNORMAL PHYSICAL FEATS

Physiological changes and achievements that would seem to be impossible occur to people in unusual states of consciousness. Stigmata and luminosity of the body as it has been depicted around various saints from different traditions are two examples of supernormal feats.

SPIRITUALISTIC PHENOMENA AND PHYSICAL MEDIUMSHIP

This includes phenomena studied by parapsychologists in the experiences found in hauntings and séances such as sounds, the sudden appearances of objects, objects moving through the air, and levitation. In Thailand, I met people who kept Buddha relics, articles or bones belonging to a Buddhist saint, and they swore that the objects kept safely in a shrine would sometimes be found to multiply even when no one could have gained access to them. I heard stories of this kind told often enough that it appears to be a commonly accepted reality amongst many Buddhists though I can give it no credence based on experience.

SIDDHIS

This term has a distinct meaning in Buddhism and these powers or attainments are seen as a natural result of mental cultivation. The ability to control autonomous functions of the body, levitation, appearing in two places at once, teleportation and materializing or dematerializing objects or one's body are here listed. Not all the abilities claimed have been documented but some have such as the control of the body by yogis that lead to the development of biofeedback technology.

SUMMARY OF THE TRANSPERSONAL STATES

I find this list of states very interesting, but also note that unlike mystic traditions, there is no clear distinctions made as to what states should really be sought and which, if any, may be unimportant for the pursuit of enlightenment. Perhaps all these states have a relevance to the person on the path to the maturation of consciousness, although no individual need necessarily experience them all. Buddhism acknowledges many but not all of these states. Some are viewed as being not particularly important for the development of wisdom and some are viewed as potentially dangerous, such as psychic powers, because they may lead one away from the goal of enlightenment. Some unusual states are also seen as “delusional” but can still be valuable for restructuring perception. The mind can be likened to the air filling the space we inhabit, and the mind's activity, to the wind it makes

when it moves. We do not see the air or perceive the mind directly; we come to know them by watching what they cause to happen. The movement of air bends the trees and waves the grass. The movement of mind gives rise to states of cognition where all manner of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and intuitions can be experienced. All of them can help us better understand the mind. On our quest, the mind or some aspect of it will be the vessel that takes us safely across to the other shore, to glimpse or obtain the truth we seek.

Mystic traditions tend to focus on the universal aspects rather than the particulars of one person's progress. One of the most incredible features of pursuing a quest through the inner reaches of one's own mind is that no matter how many people have travelled that road before, it is for the one treading it, a journey into unknown territory. While the goal of enlightenment may be described, and the features and dangers of the path elucidated, no one can tell another just which dangers and vistas they will encounter. As meditators, we are enjoined to sit as if we were beside a quiet pool deep in the forest. If we are still and quiet, many strange and exotic animals seldom ever seen will come to drink at the pool. This analogy aptly captures the feeling of an in-depth practice. There is an incredible sense of joy, wonder and surprise, arising from viewing the "animals" that come to drink at the still pool of the quiet mind. There can also be a captivating kind of fear as in the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. The "animals" may be exotic and beautiful, but can be frightening and dangerous as well.

PATTERNS OF STE ACTIVITY

Yvonne Kason M.D. has noted particular patterns in STE activity that she lists as follows:

Slow Gradual Increase—This is common to meditators, spiritual disciples and intensely religious people. Intensity and frequency may increase over the years with some experiences being more pronounced than others.

Intense STEs with Few or No Experiences Between Them—The intermediate period between experiences may be normal consciousness or it may be depressed and lethargic.

Peak STEs—Symptoms may become recurrent mystical, psychic, or creative episodes that may include kundalini activity. There are episodes of peak experiences with gradually increasing levels of STE activity.

Peak Followed by Gradual Increase—Common to people that have had a near-death experience.

Explosive Peak Followed by Continuing High STE Activity—A peak experience is an extremely intense or over-powering release of energy that may suddenly flood awareness. This may be more than the person is prepared for or more than a person can prepare for.

On Going High Activity from Birth—Many famous gurus in India including the Buddha are claimed to have manifested this kind of activity from birth or in early life.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

Positive aspects of STEs include a maturing of personality that sometimes occurs quite rapidly. Self-destructive habits are lessened or abandoned. There is often a re-evaluation of career, goals and relationships. Psychological blocks can be resolved and there is certainty concerning a higher power. Loss of the fear of death and an increase in love, empathy, compassion and altruistic activities are common features. Inspiring memories of the experience, higher ideals of morality, the perception of ethics, decreased materialism, more creativity and spontaneity, a more developed intuition and a new spiritual focus are other aspects of a positive effect.

Anxiety, confusion, mental lassitude, depression, fixation on the experience, despair that it has ended, or the fears of losing control, dying, insanity, possession and the Devil are negative aspects which can confront those experiencing these states. There might be greater inhibitions regarding the expression of love, inexplicable mood swings, emotional distress, gender crisis, relationship conflicts, the inability to control the sex drive and an intensification of psychological issues. Recurrent cycles of depression and lassitude known as cyclothymia can also be a result of these events. Descriptions of the mystic path include experiences known as the dark night of the soul. The mind is processing its negative elements and this is seen as nec-

essary to allow the mind to become established in a less negatively influenced state. Negative states are thought of as a kind of hell realm in Buddhist teachings. Sometimes these states are encountered and must in some way be borne. Meditation cultivates detachment from the senses and this skill can be employed during episodes of altered states whether positive or negative.

SPIRITUAL EMERGENCY AND PSYCHOSIS

A spiritual emergency is a crisis in personal transformation. While it is a crisis, which can be traumatic for the individual concerned and for family and friends, it is also an opportunity for personal growth leading to new levels of awareness and modes of being. In a spiritual emergency, the person is challenged by the experience. They may have great difficulty functioning, but their thinking is still relatively clear. There may be some fear of losing control, an inability to fully separate inner and outer realities. The subject might engage in mildly unusual behaviour or have transient grandiose ideas, but maintains an awareness of the internal nature of the event. Negative visions can be endured and voices can be ignored. Making judgments can be difficult, but moral and ethical values remain intact. One's emotional responses are reasonably appropriate.

In spiritual emergency with psychotic features, the subject is overwhelmed by the experience. There is an inability to function because of incoherent thoughts, possibly delusions of grandeur, and disorganized or destructive behavior. There may be paranoid delusions, an inability to separate inner and outer realities, inappropriate emotional responses, loss of ethical and moral values, and the inability to make logically reasoned judgments. The person is out of control and can be overwhelmed by negative voices and visions.

MANIA

Mania is defined as a period of elevated, expansive, or irritable mood which lasts a week or more. There may be a decreased need for sleep and an unusual pressure to keep talking. There can be the subjective experience that thoughts are racing. Attention may be easily distracted by unimportant or irrelevant details. Goal directed activity might

increase and excessive involvement in pleasurable activities that may have harmful consequences can occur. The mood disturbance can cause impairment in occupational functioning, in social activities, and relationships. Mania can also include psychotic features. In Tibetan medicine, a particular form of manic state called *sok-rlung* is believed to derive from meditation. It is thought to be more likely to arise in meditators that have not received proper instruction in the practice. If the meditation object being used to develop concentration is inappropriate, if developed concentration is influenced by negative states of mind, or the mind is not concentrated with a proper degree of effortlessness, *sok-rlung* may arise. Effortlessness refers to a lack of strain. It is possible to push the mind too hard and this may be the most important aspect of meditation which can lead to the manic state. The practitioner may become restless, anxious, excessively emotional, and may be resistant to the guidance of their teachers because of their inability to focus on what they are told and the nature of the racing mind in a manic state. A good teacher will be able to spot the signs of a manic onset by frequently questioning the practitioner as they engage in practice. Changing the meditation object or more precise instruction in meditation can cure this type of mania in its early stages. In a more advanced stage or full-blown mania, meditation should be discontinued, a high-protein diet encouraged, and the practitioner is advised to relax, not dwell on thoughts that occasion worry, and to not spend a lot of time alone.

Mania, while it can definitely be problematic, is often seen by the people experiencing it to be very enjoyable. There can be a manic euphoria; a feeling of being at the top of the world. It is often a very different perception from that of family and friends. Some of the people I have met who were being treated for hypomania were particularly disappointed that the state of mind they found most productive was being denied them. Hypomania is a milder form of mania which does not necessarily impair functioning and some people resent the idea that they should be treated to prevent the occurrence of a state they find particularly productive. Patients are not alone in their belief that states like mania can be of value in life. Peggy La Cerra and Roger Bingham, looking at the mind through evolutionary psychology and cognitive neuroscience, detail evolutionary advantages to states such as mania and depression. In *The Origin of Minds*, they refer to mania

as “...systematic calibrations that reflect a sense of diminished social viability and their work takes into account the cost/ benefit analysis that characterizes life forms from humans to bacteria.” In this regard, they make the observation that mental conditions listed in the DSM should not be viewed simply as illness. While they are not suggesting that pharmacological treatments should be bypassed, La Cerra and Bingham do note that it would be beneficial to view states like mania and depression as “natural” processes since it would help remove the unwanted stigma. The stigma of having a “mental illness” can be more destructive than the effects of the “condition” that is being treated.

POTENTIAL CAUSES FOR SPIRITUAL EMERGENCY AND PSYCHOSIS

Spiritual emergency and psychosis may arise from intense spiritual practice for which the person is physically or psychologically unprepared. These states may also be related to various “disorders” in terms of what is described in the Western mental health field such as bi-polar disorder, manic depression and schizophrenia. Intense concentration may affect the brain as in meditation and may arise through excessive study or trying to solve a particularly vexatious problem or dilemma. An unbalanced lifestyle in the form of irregular meals or an unbalanced and low nutrition diet, lack of sleep, excessive sexual activity, drugs and alcohol, cigarettes, a stressful schedule, lack of physical activity and exercise, lack of outdoor activity and recreation, lack of time for reflection and contemplation might all be contributing factors. There may be inadequate psychological conflict resolution. Consciousness may be overwhelmed by suddenly released repressed conflicts which may be traumatic in nature. There may be no supportive person or environment available. The experience can be sudden and intense, not so much like psychotherapy which is more slowly induced. Unresolved past-life issues, excessive greed or desire for wealth, excessive ambition for power or a fixation on psychic gifts may disrupt normal functioning. Unresolved conflicts with a God concept, unresolved spiritual guilt, terminal illness or hereditary factors may also play a role in some types of mental illness and altered states of a spiritual nature.

It is important to note that there are two divisions or types of psychotic states. Ego-dystonia is the type most people think of when they hear the word psychosis. It is the form that is overwhelming to the subject who loses their ability to deal effectively with objective reality because of the nature of the emotional, hallucinatory and delusional components of the psychotic state. They may feel themselves dissolving, disappearing as the focal point of awareness and may become lost in the voices and visions, mistaking them for reality. This is the type of psychosis that mystics try to avoid through proper preparation. The type they may actively seek is an ego-syntonic state. The phenomena produced by the mind may be the same but the subject retains their ability to differentiate between objective reality and mentally produced perceptions. While ego-dystonic states may be depressing or terrifying, ego-syntonic states may be perceived as pleasant or even blissful. There is a type of detachment from hallucinatory phenomena and the subject can know clearly that they are experiencing a visionary state. Even when the ego's emotional experience is fearful, the mystic can remain inwardly calm by knowing the nature of the state, its impermanence, and its utility as an aid to understanding the mind and for reaching higher states of consciousness.

PROBLEMS OF ADJUSTING

The tendency for self-inflation is a well-known pitfall of spiritual development. Many teachers suffer this trick of the ego and the Buddhist sutras refer to spiritual conceit becoming ever more refined as development proceeds. Only in the final stages of mind's maturation are the elements of conceit said to subside permanently. Another difficulty can be the perception of infallibility. Unconscious contents have an almost irresistible quality to them. It may be very hard to view them objectively. There can be a lack of restraint or not knowing the proper time or circumstance for sharing information welling up from deep, unconscious levels of mind. Lack of judgment or discretion may cause one to share information regardless of its suitability. The tendency some people exhibit to become cult leaders or to believe they are Christ or some other special spiritual being might in certain cases be related to identification of the limited ego with the transpersonal elements and processes. It is unfortunate that such

people often do a great deal of damage to themselves and others both through their dubious counseling and the negative image this manifestation can convey to others. Spirituality is often rejected by people only because they cannot disassociate it from the abuses of religious institutions, governments, fanatics, cultists, con men, misinterpretations, misguided aspirants, superstition and bad press. The fact that an STE experience may not be initially positive or can lead to ego inflation is accepted as one of many potential pitfalls in the quest for illumination. The theme of spiritual trials is a common one among religious traditions and the study of classical mythology will provide numerous examples of what can go awry.

It is helpful to realize these kinds of experiences are normal. Contemplate the positive effects of STEs rather than focusing on the negative energies. Prayer, light meditation, positive affirmations, reading spiritual writings, a balanced lifestyle with proper diet, exercise, sexual activity and activity in general will help too. To counter difficult STEs reduce exposure to stress, spend time in natural and tranquil settings and talk with supportive people such as friends, relatives, a priest, psychologist or counsellor. Stop meditating and follow a daily routine. Avoid drugs, alcohol, caffeine and junk food. Increase protein intake, especially red meat and eat smaller more frequent meals. Find a creative outlet for excess energies and if necessary, the amount of sleep can be increased.

HELPING EMERGENTS

People undergoing spiritual emergence or emergency, need a safe place in which to go through the process. Unfortunately, Western psychiatric care is strongly influenced by a cultural paradigm that views any distortions of ordinary consciousness as being indicative of mental illness. Great harm can be perpetrated by denying the validity of a person's experience when they have no knowledge of the nature of these experiences and the spiritual and psychological literature dealing with them. A safe, accepting environment with compassionate supporters can significantly aid in the unfolding and assimilation of such experiences. Teaching people about these experiences, giving them books to read detailing the experiences in a positive light, or spiritual works appropriate to the individual can

be found. Body-work of various types can be engaged in and diet worked with. Diets heavier in meat and dairy products are listed as being of benefit for grounding a person undergoing spiritual emergence. Simple chores are another method of grounding and are a common feature of monastic practices that have purposes beyond the mere utilitarian. Traditional or personal ritual practices may also contribute some emotional stability. Exposure to nature or reconnecting with the social world can be other important aids in returning to the demands of ordinary life.

The belief that one is going crazy because of the experiences being had is a very real, and in itself, a potentially traumatic event. Family, friends, doctors, even priests, may suggest or insist on “treatment” through their own lack of understanding, fear, or bias regarding these states. Validating a person’s experience as a positive, life-enhancing event can curtail or avoid depression ranging from mild to suicidal in its severity. It is a difficult situation because mental illness is very real and easily confused with the states we seek in the quest.

CHAPTER IV

Teachings of the Buddha

Catching the Ox



THE MYSTIC PATH

Padmasambhava was the great Buddhist yogi believed to be the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. He is said to have subdued the local deities, demons and spirits and to have converted them to be protectors of the Dharma. Tibetan Buddhism uses images of him, other beings, and various buddhas as meditation objects for visualizations and the safe channeling of released archetypal energies when the energy of the unconscious becomes conscious. Padmasambhava was a tantric teacher and taught many practices including those of the *bardo*, the experience of the after-death plane. The following statement of method about the path that cultivates the special class of experiences forming the basis of spiritual traditions and pursuits is common to mystic traditions found in many parts of the world.

Although I did not know of Padmasambhava or this summary of the Path when I began my own quest it does reflect the path I took. Dogma has no place in a search for truth. There can be no

consensus reality, only openness to the experience of being. No pasteurization and homogenization of the immediacy of being can remain for the conditioned mind to experience the transcendent Mind. Each person must make the query, engage in the observation and determine their own assessment of reality, then chose their course for interacting with the world and the components of being. They must go beyond their reason to what lies outside the realm of the rational, outside their concepts of self and reality and the conditioning of a lifetime. Religious traditions do not speak of miracles, angels, demons and other realms without reason. They are spoken of because they have always been a feature of mind's nature, thus they are the experience of many. Christian missionaries in Tibet found that when they tried to convert the people by telling them of the miracles of Christ the Tibetans would nod and smile and say, "Yes, that was Padmasambhava." The missionaries gave up when they realized they could not make the Tibetans see any difference between Padmasambhava and Jesus. Much to the consternation of the Christians, they were seen as identical in the compassionate miracles they wrought and in the wisdom they shared. Padmasambhava's synopsis of the mystic path:

"Read many books on various religions and philosophies and choose one doctrine among those one has studied." This is knowledge gained by learning, *sutamaya panna*.

"Remain in a lowly condition. Do not seek to be conspicuous or important in the eyes of the world. Behind one's insignificance, let the mind soar high above all worldly power and glory. Be indifferent to all. Be like a dog or pig that eats whatever chance brings. Not making choices among things and abstaining from any effort to acquire or avoid anything. Accepting with equal indifference whatever comes; riches or poverty, praise or contempt; giving up distinctions between virtue and vice, honour and shame, good and evil. Being neither afflicted by nor repenting what one has done, nor elated or proud by what one has accomplished." This develops knowledge by contemplation, *cintamaya panna*.

“Consider with perfect detachment and equanimity the conflicting opinions and activity of Beings. Understand the inevitable nature of things and remain serene. Look at the world as a person on top of a mountain looking at all below. Realize the ‘Void,’ Emptiness, the Inexpressible Truth.” This is the goal: knowledge that comes by experience of the Path, *bhavanamaya panna*.

There are three kinds of knowledge listed here and Buddhism applies these kinds of knowledge to understanding relative and absolute truths. It is extremely important to understand this particular aspect of Buddhist teaching. Knowledge of the type being discussed is not simply a matter of compiling ideas or theories or in any way solely as conceptual knowledge. It is the result of a process of cultivation that may last one’s entire life. Whether we come to it naturally or through deliberate cultivation, it is the highest perception that affords the total view. How we get to the top is not as important as getting there at all. This is about life and death, living and dying, and not just a mere myth or some frivolous philosophical indulgence. Spirituality, religion, ethics, philosophy and ancient psychologies may be some of the most fruitful means of preparing for the vicissitudes of living and dying.

In this brief synopsis, we find the goal of the quest expressed as Emptiness, or the Void. This emptiness is not nothing but the potentiality of everything, the “Ground of Being,” or in Christian theology, the Godhead. Referred to as *sunnata* in Pali, it is Mind’s essential nature, the backdrop for all that we experience, all we are, and out of which everything proceeds. The Tibetans say this Mind is like the sky. It is in finite, clear, and calm. It contains all things yet its expanse is not diminished. Mind is seen as more infinite than space since space is contained in Mind! This is more significant than mere sophistry. In this view, “reality” is the occurrence of Mind. Tibetans use the term *rigpa* to denote this state of profound clarity. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Sogyal Rinpoche relates a description of a yogi walking through a garden who is fully present and awake to the beauty around him. The scents, colors, shapes and fragrances of the flowers are relished, but there arises no clinging or attachment to them. Everything is left in its splendor, the pure

immediacy of it. This is like the view of a child not yet jaded to the world and its things. He quotes Dudjum Rinpoche:

“Whatever perceptions arise, you should be like a little child going into a beautifully decorated temple; he looks, but grasping does not enter into his perception at all. So, you leave everything fresh, natural, vivid and unspoiled. When you leave each thing in its own state, then its shape doesn’t change, its colour doesn’t fade and its glow does not disappear. Whatever appears is unstained by any grasping, so then all that you perceive arises as the naked wisdom of *Rigpa*, which is the indivisibility of luminosity and emptiness.”

Sogyal Rinpoche declares, “The confidence, the contentment, the spacious serenity, the strength, the profound humour and the certainty that arise from directly realizing the View of Rigpa is the greatest treasure of life, the ultimate happiness, which once attained, nothing can destroy, not even death.” He then quotes Dudjum Rinpoche:

“Once you have the View, although the delusory perceptions of samsara may arise in your mind, you will be like the sky; when a rainbow appears in front of it, it’s not particularly flattered and when the clouds appear, it’s not particularly disappointed either. There is a deep sense of contentment. You chuckle from inside as you see the facade of samsara and nirvana; the View will keep you constantly amused, with a little inner smile bubbling away all the time.”

The joy, deep compassion, and wisdom that can be seen displayed by developed contemplatives in all the great spiritual traditions who have glimpsed this state are ample testimony to its reality and effectiveness.

BUDDHIST MONASTICISM

The Buddhist monastic order was founded to promote the practices of meditation and contemplation, to preserve the Dharma (teachings), and to maintain a community of like-minded individuals for mutual support and development. This was founded on the principles of renunciation: leaving the pleasures and distractions of the world and the senses; maintaining rules of conduct founded on principles of virtue and compassion; celibacy in most orders and the original order lead by the Buddha; and subsistence by silent begging. The rules of the order are for the purpose of mental training and to promote harmonious relationships within the order and with lay and non-Buddhist people. Originally, the Buddha did not have rules. He simply stated that all beings suffer and that there is a method for overcoming the propensity for creating it by maintaining a suitable vigilance of the mind, its reactions to the senses, and by closely scrutinizing the constituents of reality while living in harmony with those truths. A monk was called a bhikkhu, meaning a beggar, because they subsist through the charity of others, originally by silently collecting alms each morning at dawn. Theravadin monks are not allowed to ask anyone for anything unless the person has given them a special dispensation to do so. This is valid for one year and the monk can only ask for things determined to be appropriate for the monastic life.

Buddhist orders vary greatly in the forms of methods they employ, but they refer to common teachings about the nature of mind and reality. The profusion of different styles can be intimidating to those unfamiliar with the core teachings of Buddhism and the manner in which Buddhism has been amalgamated into the local customs, traditions, language, and psychology of a people. In general, people are confused by the apparent differences between religions and the myths and stories they use to illustrate their respective teachings. This can all be cleared away if we begin to look more closely not at what they are saying, but at what they are doing. Spiritual techniques are remarkably similar in all the major religious traditions. Let us then focus on the techniques and the experiences they engender rather than worrying too much about explanations. Buddhism in particular does not value intellectual understanding over person-

al experience. It states from the outset that its purpose is to lead the mind beyond mere intellection.

The Buddhist monastic order could be thought of as a sanctuary in which to begin the work of mind development or recovery from the trauma of living. It is a refuge from the tumult, distractions, and obligations of ordinary life. It is, of course, not suitable for everyone's temperament, but the principles it illustrates can be integrated into daily living and the Tibetans have created many practices that are especially suitable for lay people. The present work draws extensively on my experience as a monk and the practices I engaged in while wandering about Southeast Asia as a homeless ascetic. Working people may have more difficulty because of their responsibilities, but these techniques can still be applied by anyone and there is no need to leave ordinary life in order to practice them. Most people though, would derive a great deal of benefit by going into some form of prolonged, if temporary retreat. Ten days is a common time period and there are many places that cater to those interested in doing retreats. Renunciation is one of the central and defining characteristics of monastic practice. Other elements are simplicity, virtuous conduct, and honesty. For most monastic orders, celibacy and other practices that work to promote changes of perception are included.

Of special relevance to some of the immediate problems of our modern world is the forest tradition propagated by the Buddha twenty-five hundred years ago and still practiced to this day. There is an ease and simple beauty to this practice with its capacity to renew the spirit and draw the mind to the inexorable rhythms of nature. Living alone in the forest promotes loss of anger and the yogi can more easily practice undisturbed. Allow nature to teach Her secrets and confirm your insights. There is no burden of things, no bustle and tumult. Each day blends into another spectacle of the drama and dance of form and emptiness. There is the blue sky, clouds, animals, birds, the sun and wind, basic chores and pleasant musings while viewing the sun rise and set. There is the kindness, delight, and friendship of lay supporters and the beauty of ceremonial life where everything becomes meaningful yet can remain empty of any artifice. The play of being-awareness delighting in its own radiance and its remove from the insanity of politics, commerce, dysfunctional relationships, crime, pollution, taxes, the house-holder's fears and burdens. Many people

think this is hedonistic or escapist. This is not so. This is directly confronting reality both in the deepest aspects of oneself, in beliefs, self-identity and patterns of thought and behaviour, and in complete harmony with the reality of nature and emptiness, the suchness of things. The purpose is to develop tranquility and insight, to cut through defilements, to live in harmony with all, injure nothing, and guide others to the states beyond self-created and needless suffering, beyond the wrong-views of conditioned perception.

Poverty, except where the lack of money or resources prevents the acquisition of life's requirements, is largely a perception. A person who has no interest in wealth is already rich. Sustaining life is cheap if one is resourceful. It is paying for pleasures, security, reputation and importance that add up. These include luxuries like big houses, higher educations, personas, cars, and almost everything the consumer world has to offer. Pleasures and artificial needs, the standards of living that have been indoctrinated into so many people, and even just the minimum of what a person must have to subsist without having to live in the street demand in some fashion, our attention and effort. This fact is inescapable which is why cultures have systems, institutions, and traditions to sustain people devoted to the quest. A monk's poverty is not seen or felt as poverty. It is taking what is required to care for life. It needs no more than the least possible and can still know contentment. With the liberation from desire there is nothing lacking hence, no feeling of impoverishment. The world appears to be consuming itself. It could easily stop if people chose not to consume it. If you find free pleasures, distractions, and fulfillments, if you learn the joys of a mind free from conditioning, from indoctrinated desires, you will have no need of the toys that trick you into the web of samsara and the misery it sows. You can then exercise your true freedom to use or change things for the benefit of everyone. This form of renunciation is a monk's or a yogi's path though and not suited to most people. The house-holder can however, adopt a lifestyle that promotes the same principles. This was always the Buddha's teaching. There is no need to be a monk or nun. They are just simpler vehicles for some because they avoid so many difficulties and one's time may always be turned in the direction of comprehension, detachment, compassion and mental training.

The cultural aspects linked to the traditional sects can make it very difficult for the Western Buddhist monk or nun. All the negative elements that can exist in samsara can exist within the monastic sangha, the congregation of monks, nuns, and lay people. It is quite common for groups of Buddhists to shun or disparage each other. Disillusionment is not an uncommon experience for people who expect the monks to be honest, peaceful, and sagacious. Corruption is an aspect of samsara and is as prevalent inside Buddhism as it can be in any organization. Despite the obstacles that can be a feature of a monastic practice, there is no shortage of rewards for those who put in their best efforts. Taking the time to think deeply about many of life's mysteries can aid in developing the fullest appreciation for the breadth and beauty of the experience of being. The monks' job is to learn Dharma through their own realization and then to be a guide to others. If they chose to become a lay person again there is no real quality lost. They are free by virtue of their realization to act upon their own enlightenment to find their way in life. No attachment to the form of being a monk or nun need arise. Of course, lay people do not typically share this view and often cannot see the person disrobing as not having changed. It is the opposite view from that of the realized individual who knows there is no change in their experience, principles, view, knowledge, ability to teach, and possibly even lifestyle. Anyone can practice as a monk or nun in terms of the rules they set themselves to govern their thought, speech and behaviour.

It is beyond the scope of this work to go into detail about the particulars of monastic practice. Schools are too diverse for it to be very helpful to discuss them. This work has been written as a general guide and introduction to spiritual practice rather than Buddhism. I would like to convey my esteem for the monastic institution, the Buddhist sangha, and the gifts it provides its members and those who support it. However, it is my belief that for Buddhism to be properly understood in the West it will need to be stripped of its cultural baggage, so I have tried to present it as much as possible without any cultural overlay. The value of religious orders is they provide a means of support and a place of sanctuary. The fault is that even though they are in a sense fictitious, an ideal held in a practitioner's mind, they may become a kind of composite entity and begin to take precedence over the needs of the individual seekers of which they are composed.

No institution is immune to this propensity. Monks too, have their own foibles as well as varying rules and customs, temperaments and abilities. Most monks cannot marry or engage in sexual relations but here too there is no consistency. In many countries, monastic orders exist that do allow marriage. It should be born in mind that a monk is just a person in training so do not be too surprised if one still seems to have a lot of personal work to do. That work is psychological and the progression through the healing and awakening process can involve much time, difficulty, effort, and many unusual states and stages.

One point of misunderstanding for both lay people and monks or nuns working to understand and embody the knowledge of self-realized Dharma is they may be able to give good teachings and advice before they have fully assimilated those aspects into their habitual thought, speech, and actions. Without the awareness that there is a kind of legitimate understanding which proceeds full assimilation into changes of personality, attitudes, or character reflected in speech and actions, lay people may view the teacher as hypocritical, or not really knowledgeable, and the monk or nun may also suffer guilt, or decreased self-esteem because they do not realize this point. Intellectual knowledge comes first, the ability to share that knowledge comes after, to do so with skill takes longer, and to do so with great skill having fully embodied those teachings can take many years beyond the time when one could teach them in a skillful way.

Western monks have an added disadvantage because there is no Western tradition that will acknowledge their attainment. In cultures that are Buddhist, monks have a system of validation for their sacrifice and achievement but seldom recognize these aspects to the same degree when a Westerner is involved. It can be very disheartening to a person to realize that after all the hard work they have done and the insights they have gained they may have no forum from which to share their experience. People from their own culture may not value the knowledge they have acquired and often cannot begin to comprehend where and how it was found. There is also no readily available support in the West as can be found in some cultures that have a tradition of Buddhism and so the life of a monk in the West may necessitate work that interferes with the real job of being a monk. There is also the problem that to become a monk means taking ordination through some particular school or tradition. This has the effect of

cutting off acceptance in other Buddhist schools despite the fact that they are supposedly Buddhist as well. Theravadin monks in Thailand will not necessarily accept a Westerner that has become a Theravadin monk in Sri Lanka. A Western Theravadin monk or nun may also find themselves unacceptable to many practitioners in Mahayana traditions as they may be perceived as “belonging” to the Hinayana school. It is important to know the limitations of becoming a monk just as it is important to know the advantages.

Inherent in Buddhism is the view that this quest is a solitary journey. A path tread alone like the one the man who taught it followed in his own quest for knowledge. It is in this area where a person may make good use of the practice known as “skillful means.” Find creative ways to share your knowledge which does not force others to consider or accept a philosophy alien to their understanding and culture. It can be an endless source of personal growth and enjoyment as new insights are developed just trying to understand new ways to communicate very old truths and knowledge in a way that is readily acceptable by people from other faiths and philosophies. This is not meant as an effort to trick or deceive. The purpose is to cut through ignorance, bias, misinformation, and to not offend other people’s religious or philosophical views or beliefs. Coming from a psychological perspective, Buddhist teachings can be completely divorced from the Buddha, philosophy and any religion. It can be conveyed in simple common-sense ideas and terminology that are easily understood based on the common experiences of being human.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The first teaching of the Buddha is said to have been four truths and these four truths are the basis and distinguishing characteristic of Buddhist theory and practice according to the Buddha. Other religious systems, the Buddha said, lead to many of the same attainments but fail to elucidate these four truths. These are not seen as religious truths. They are facts of reality that the Buddha said we could not escape; metaphysical truths we can acknowledge or ignore but never change. Knowing these truths means knowing what the Buddha defined as the problem, the cause of the problem, its absence, and the method for removing it. The Buddha said the knowledge of

his enlightenment was like all the leaves on all the trees in a forest. In that forest, there was a tree and that tree was the knowledge of suffering, of *dukkha*: dissatisfaction arising from craving. It was this knowledge the Buddha chose to share over all he realized from his enlightenment. The Four Noble Truths are the Buddha's teaching for using ethics and the natural laws and permutations of consciousness to transcend our propensity for creating suffering for ourselves and other people and creatures.

Dharma in the Mahayana tradition includes teachings not given by the historical Buddha but which have been developed since his passing. These usually have to do with meditation techniques, and with philosophical works on the nature of emptiness, but never change the nature of the Four Truths and their central importance in Buddhist philosophy and practice. This teaching illustrates the task and the means for completing it. By practicing virtuous and mindful thought, speech and actions, we condition the mind to lose the cause of *dukkha*, which is craving, and with the absence or extinction of *dukkha* we experience *nibbana*, the extinction of mental suffering. This method is the essence of the Buddha's philosophy for gaining release from needless mental anguish.

SUFFERING OR DISSATISFACTION (*dukkha*)

The first Truth is suffering, or what might be best understood as inherent dissatisfaction. There is no exact equivalent translation for *dukkha* in English. Birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are *dukkha* or suffering. As well, happy states derived from an impermanent base are *dukkha* since they cannot be maintained. This is the "disease" to be fully understood. It is said to have been the first truth the Buddha taught. This does not refer only to what we normally think of as suffering: dissatisfaction, depression, pain, mental anguish, etc. It also includes the common types of pleasure, happiness and joy. By common is meant mental states that are derived by the temporary satisfaction of desire or through causes outside ourselves. These are viewed as dissatisfying because they are based on factors outside of us which are impermanent. Positive emotions like happiness become a source of attachment, but since they are inherently impermanent and cannot last, we will experience

suffering at their loss. The continual process of trying to fulfill our desires, seeking happiness through the accumulation of pleasant sensory experiences, knowledge and material possessions, etc., keeps us bound to the “wheel of life,” to *samsara*, the cycle of happiness and sorrow of which we may have little control. Death is a fact of existence in Buddhism and freedom from the potential suffering our dying and anticipation of death may cause us is an important impetus for many seekers of *nibbana*.

The Tibetans divide suffering into three basic types. There are the ordinary pains of the physical body and the mind with its emotions. Then there is the type of suffering which results from impermanence, the “set-up,” wherein we approach a task or activity with the thought of securing pleasure and happiness (buying a car, getting married, a new job, etc.) but the happiness cannot last and so leads directly to its opposite, suffering at the loss of the happiness or the object that made one happy. Last, there is what is called “pervasive compositional suffering.” This is a notion dealing with the suffering inherent to cyclic existence, *samsara*, and the round of endless lives and deaths that can only be ended by the liberation of enlightenment. Tibetans have a very literal understanding of rebirth and the “magical” abilities of a Buddha. Theravada practice is characterized by a view of the Buddha as no other than a very exceptional person. When he died, he entered *parinibbana* and may not be. This however, is not the view in Mahayana Buddhism generally, and certainly not in Tibetan Buddhism where the Buddha is still working for the benefit of sentient beings.

Few would deny that there is suffering in life but people who have not yet experienced it deeply can often undervalue the importance of knowing ways to cope with it. What the Buddha taught was that our own thoughts, speech, and actions are responsible for most of the mental suffering we experience. Much of our physical suffering too has a mental cause, as in stress related illnesses or as the consequences of our speech or actions. There is also physical suffering beyond our ability to control or avoid. Illness and accident, violence, and personal frustration are not always the result of karma and may occur despite our best, most enlightened efforts to live in complete peace and harmony. The mind, according to Buddha’s theory, has states of consciousness wherein the perception of pain cannot arise

because the sense functions are not operating. These are absorption states, and with training they can be entered at will. There is also the state characterized by the absence of *dukkha* known as *nibbana*, the “quenching of the fire.” The Buddha did not blame everything on karma. Karma has a volitional quality, a mental intention and is different from cause-effect relationships found in natural processes or physical interactions. For example, an illness can be caused by activities that lead to exposure to toxic chemicals or to a virus. This shows a cause-effect relationship but is not dependent on the wholesome or unwholesome intentions with which the activities were engaged in. We have the ability in large measure to influence the way we perceive and experience reality and thus, to determine the quality and content of our mental states. However, we also have limitations that are as important to know as the manner in which we are truly boundless. The Buddha exhorted his followers to hurry in their quest for *nibbana* as the duration of life is ever uncertain.

ORIGIN OF SUFFERING (*tanha*)

The second Truth is the Origin of Suffering, the cause of suffering through unskillful mentation. Sensual craving (*kama-tanha*) is the craving for pleasant sensory experience. There are also the cravings for existence (*bhava-tanha*) and the craving for non-existence (*vibhava-tanha*). Craving, the energy of wanting and clinging gives rise to *dukkha*, to dissatisfaction or suffering. It is the cause that must be abandoned. This is said to be the result of the mind being conditioned by attraction, aversion, and bewilderment. Attraction is attraction both to and for what we like, enjoy, or want. It is craving and attachment. Anger, hatred or other manifestations like jealousy, etc., disturb the mind and prevent clear comprehension of the situation, inhibit positive mental states from arising and may become habitual responses. Anger has been said to be based on unfulfilled desire and misunderstanding. It is also the rejection or aversion to what we dislike and do not want. Bewilderment refers to conflicting emotions, viewing ourselves and our life experience through mistaken beliefs, and to lack of attention to our experience in the present moment. Any belief (even one that may approximate Absolute Truth) is still a delusion when not known through genuine intuitive insight into the

nature of reality. Bewilderment, delusion, and ignorance have the same basic meaning in Buddhist teachings.

The mind can be viewed as being unable, in its *conditioned* state, to remain balanced so it can examine and appreciate all sensory experience without forming attachments or aversions to what it perceives; this gives rise to the experience of *dukkha*. All the complicated permutations of meditation practices, aims, and philosophical ruminations can be dispensed with if one simply understands this basic teaching of the Buddha. The de-conditioning of the mind occurs as one applies scrutiny and a restraining influence on one's thought, speech and behaviour. Meditation is not essential for this practice but certainly will aid in the process for most people. Though there is an implicit idea in this technique that there is a certain goal that is desired it is important to know that there is a view that avoids the idea of a distant goal. In the Tibetan teaching of Dzogchen, the present, with all its limitations and obstacles is seen as the end point. Mind is already its own nature. There is nothing to accomplish beyond being fully present with whatever is presently occurring. Energies are said to become liberated by allowing them to exist and fade away without undue effort, attention, or manipulation.

EXTINCTION OF SUFFERING (*nibbana*)

The third Noble Truth is the Cessation of Suffering. It means the fading away and extinction of *tanha*, of craving and attachment, and the liberation from negative tendencies. It is the cure to be realized. This truth states that suffering can be terminated at its origin. As mental anguish is created by the mind itself it can also be extinguished by the manipulation of mental content. This is accomplished by the attainment of *nibbana*. In Theravadin teachings, this is the end state sought by the Buddha and is the full development of the enlightened mind. In Tibetan teachings enlightenment is the goal and *nibbana* is not sought out. *Nibbana* means "to extinguish" or "to quench." It may be defined as an extinguishing of the causative factors that lead to mental suffering. That means the elimination of desire /attachment, anger/aversion, primitive beliefs about reality, and the conflicting emotions that arise from these. These elements are often referred to as greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*) and

delusion (*moha*). Delusion, also known as ignorance, is viewed as the most difficult obstruction to defeat. Greed and anger are said to derive from ignorance and ignorance is the last of the “ten fetters” (*samyojana*) to be overcome by the aspirant. The resultant state of being that arises with the extinction of *dukkha* is cognitively different in character from the mental state that is prone to perpetuate self-induced suffering. The mind that is the focus of the *nibbana* experience is not viewed as having changed in its essential nature, but only in the way it operates and in the maturation of specific qualities. These qualities are benevolence (*karuna*), compassion (*metta*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*); the four *brahma vihara*, or “divine abodes.”

THE NOBLE EIGHT-FOLD PATH

This is the path that leads to the extinction of suffering and can be thought of as the medicine that needs to be applied then realized. The Path is the principle topic of the Buddha’s teaching, commonly known as Dharma. Since the Buddha’s passing, particularly in Tibetan traditions, this teaching of the Path has become very sophisticated. It has been expanded to contain many teachings on the nature of mind and reality which the Buddha did not teach but which have come to be included in what is termed Buddhism. The Buddha has given us an incredible wealth of wisdom and practical yogic advice for accomplishing the task of self-realization. That knowledge has been developed for two and a half thousand years by generations of ordained and lay practitioners who have become enlightened or self-realized through their own practice. This Path represents a method for effecting lasting changes in cognition that is brought about with an adjustment in philosophy, mental balance, lifestyle, and conduct, and through the psychic, shamanic, mystic, meditative, and other unusual states of consciousness produced by naturally occurring or manipulative means. This is a process that consists of a great variety of potential states and phenomena and may take a long or short period of time before it comes to completion. It may be largely pleasant or unpleasant and is likely dependent on the predisposition of the individual, their temperament, experience, the setting they are in, and the type of practices used.

The Eight-fold Path is the most commonly taught version of the Path. There is another record in the *Vimutti-Magga (The Path of Freedom)* that illustrates a ten-fold division which some scholars feel is the complete record of the Path. In the ten-fold scheme, proper insight and proper mindfulness are the last two aspects of the Path. Proper insight is typically included under the heading proper mindfulness, but there is justification for viewing them as being different since mindfulness (*satipatthana*) is a practice in itself just as insight (*vipassana*) is. This shows that tranquility practice was followed by insight practice. Insight being the direct link to liberation.

THE EIGHT ASPECTS OF THE PATH:

Proper View – Understanding the Four Noble Truths

Proper Thought – Thoughts free from sensuous desire, ill will and cruelty.

The development of proper View and Thought constitutes the cultivation of wisdom, *panna*.

Proper Speech – Abstaining from lying, gossip, harsh speech and foolish babble.

Proper Actions – Abstaining from killing, stealing and unlawful or harmful sexual conduct and alcohol.

Proper Livelihood – Abstaining from a livelihood that harms oneself or other beings.

These three aspects combined, Speech, Actions and Livelihood, constitute the practice of virtue, *sila*.

Proper Effort – The effort to not give rise to unwholesome physical and mental states, ridding yourself of them should they arise and developing and maintaining wholesome states are cited as the four proper efforts.

Proper Mindfulness – Mindfulness and awareness in contemplating body, feelings, mind and mind objects.

Proper Concentration – Concentration of mind associated with wholesome consciousness that may eventually reach the level of the absorptions.

These three aspects, Effort, Mindfulness and Concentration are combined in the term *samadhi* (concentration) and will be explained in more detail in subsequent chapters. The Buddhist formula for enlightenment is the cultivation of virtue and the cultivation of tranquility and/or insight meditation. The cultivation of these two aspects leads to “discriminating” wisdom. This is summed up in the Pali phrase: *silā samadhi pañña* or virtue — concentration — wisdom. They each work to develop the other qualities but this phrase demonstrates the connection between virtue which aids concentration which then leads to wisdom.

The definitions of what constitute the eight elements of the Path will vary with different teachers. Many will explain them in traditional Buddhist terms or in accord with their own particular culture, training, or personal preference. There may be references to the sutras or other famous teachers. Each aspect of the Path can be divided into two levels, the beginning or training aspect and the attainment aspect. The training aspects are of primary concern as they lead to the attainment aspects. The attainment aspects are based on insight and the absorptions; on first-hand experience. No attempt will be made to explain the attainment aspects. It is up to each individual to discover, interpret, and respond to the ineffable experiences of meditative attainment as they deem appropriate.

PROPER VIEW

The first level of proper view (*sammā-ditthi*) requires the close examination of our life experience and consciousness in order to understand the factors that determine the quality and types of experience and perception that we have. It is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. This is the understanding that takes account of karma, the *dukkha* that can result from it, and the value of virtue and compassion. It comprehends the nature of things with a clear awareness. Proper view is where we acknowledge that we do not know the causes for our present state of being, its meaning and purpose, or the proper manner in which to develop the wisdom necessary to gain the experiential understanding of reality, the knowledge of the “Ground-of-Being” that is the ever-present reality behind normal perception. It is the knowledge that there is something to do. This can involve the

contemplation of impermanence, suffering, consciousness, life, death and dying. We can know that our understanding and perception of experience is filtered through our beliefs and judgments and is often done incorrectly.

We can deduce that the means of perceiving correctly will be dependent on the way we utilize, and ultimately change the manner of, our attitudes and reactions to sense perceptions. We can acknowledge that our beliefs may not be correct and our judgments may be bias. Most truth is relative. It is however, difficult to simply stop believing in our conceptions of truth, but judgment can be more easily worked with. While practicing mindfulness, take note of the manner in which the mind determines the worth of a thing. This kind of observation can lead to the ability to suspend these judgments to develop a more balanced view that does not imbue people, ideas, and objects with the inherent qualities of good and evil. The benefits of perceiving things directly without the addition of value judgments and preconceptions cannot be overstated. Judging perceptions and experiences as good and bad prevents the mind from developing detachment and maintains an illusory view of reality by reinforcing erroneous or one-sided assumptions. Judgements do have survival value and we make them every day, but there are times when this type of critical analysis should be suspended. A value judgment is a specific type of judgment that determines the inherent worth of an object, idea or person. The inflation of an object with qualities it does not possess leads to exaggerated attachment or aversion and thus to *dukkha* arising from an unbalanced perception.

This process of dividing things into good, bad or evil, inconsequential or sacred prevents the clear perception of “suchness,” *tathata*, the perception of reality “just as it is.” Maintaining concepts, particularly that of good and evil, as a way of understanding keeps the mind bound to attraction and aversion and locked into a conceptual view of reality that tends to inhibit the arising of intuitive insight. The mind is very skillful at filtering out anything that might upset its chosen perspective. Proper view at this level can be said to be the view that seeks wisdom through introspection and the close observation of the mind and its interaction with the constituents of psychic life. This will, in turn, lead to the understanding that our experience of life is dependent on our thoughts, speech and actions. By observing

how the mind is conditioned we become skilled at determining which types of thoughts, speech and actions produce beneficial results and which should be avoided. In the Christian story of the Fall, humanity fell from the Garden of Eden as the result of eating “the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.” Dividing original unity is the loss of paradise, the loss of the perception of the real.

Our conceptions of reality limit our ability to perceive reality directly. The Eight-Fold Path is designed to develop a fundamental change in mentation and the accompanying emotional states; to an understanding that may then be conveyed to others by various linguistic, artistic, or demonstrative means. For some practitioners, it may be helpful or even necessary to first acquire an intellectual understanding of Buddhist philosophy and psychology through the study of the sutras and other writings. The *Abhidharma* is the Buddhist collection of teachings regarding the nature of mind and the perception of psychophysical reality. It is extremely detailed but there are a number of good books that distil the information it contains. The important thing with regard to concepts is to understand the limited nature of this kind of knowledge. There are concepts that will bring us closer to developing intuitive understanding but also concepts that will prevent us from that attainment. Ultimately it is the totality of our own open mind, mind without concept, Mind, which finally conveys the truth to the fullest degree it can ever be known.

PROPER THOUGHT

This heading refers to thought that is the basis for our speech and actions. By cultivating good, compassionate, and proper thoughts (*samma-sankappa*) we naturally produce proper speech and actions. Thoughts of ill will, greed, jealousy, envy or delusional thoughts would be examples of improper thought because of the negative states and situations they can occasion. It is important to note that by “negative” is meant emotional states which are contrary to the arising of love, compassion, joy, and mental balance or unperturbedness (the states actively being sought). This reflects a psychological orientation rather than an abstract morality based on concepts of “right” and “wrong.” We can also consider some thoughts as habitual or spontaneous, arising in a flash out of the mind while some thoughts

are directed with awareness as we pursue a train of thought. Both should be understood and worked with. The term proper thought has also been translated as proper intention. Proper intentions are compassionate and include intentions to help or do no harm. We can divide thoughts into two main types for the purpose of mental cultivation without implying that these are the only divisions that could be made. The two types of thinking are spontaneous and directed. Spontaneous thoughts arise out of the subconscious, conscious or semi-conscious mind, occur in a moment and cannot be influenced directly. It is through the practices of mental cultivation that the quality and content of spontaneous thought will be indirectly affected. Our principle field of activity then will be concerned with directed thoughts. We may not be able to control spontaneous thoughts but we can, with practice, make a conscious effort to not pursue a particular train of thought or to not reinforce negative thoughts and emotions by dwelling on the subjects of disturbance.

When anger arises, we can observe the anger but need not dwell in the cause of that anger. When dwelling in anger through our line of thinking we make the anger stronger and more lasting. We have the inherent ability to cut off this type of thought replacing it with the opposite thoughts of love, kindness, compassion and understanding. It should be understood that dwelling on anger or other emotions is not the same as the contemplation of those emotions and their causes. Practicing actively with emotions is extremely important, but so is lessening their influence on the quality of our mental content. Much of our directed thought occurs as habitual thought patterns that may be dependent upon past experiences, neurotic repression, or conflicting emotions. These types of thought will be difficult to work with but there are many kinds of directed thought we can deal with. Observing and regulating the mind will have discernible effects on our experience of being. By the practice of working with directed thought we can begin to take control and responsibility for the way we use our thought processes. If we have control of thought, we also gain greater awareness and control of our speech and actions. Part of the process involved with thought and the resulting speech or actions is the intention. The intention arises with the original thought that leads to directed thinking, speech and actions. When fantasizing, for example, the intention may be to produce a pleasant mental state or

to take revenge on someone by imagining them suffering. A close examination of the intention can often reveal the purpose for the action that can then be evaluated as potentially wholesome, unwholesome or neutral in the effects it may produce. In Buddhism, wholesome is defined as not causing suffering and helpful to oneself and/or others.

PROPER SPEECH

Speaking the truth, praising others, conveying useful information, encouragement, or kind and gentle words are examples of proper speech (*samma-vaca*) that tend to produce positive states of being. Language can have a profound effect both to the one who is speaking and to those spoken to. With words alone we can hurt or heal. Thought, speech and actions are the three spheres of our activity. The benefits or detriments we bring to our mental and physical states are largely determined by the way we habitually use these three spheres of our activity. Telling lies, insulting others, vulgar language, slander and gossip do not tend to promote peace and harmony with others nor within our own mind. Therefore, it is important to guard our speech to see that we do not use language to hurt or manipulate others, or in a way which harms and causes us to feel other than we please. Spiritually, responsibility is always one's own and inattention to speech leads to many difficulties that could easily be avoided. Opportunities can be lost by inappropriate or inadvertent speech just as they can be gained by the skillful manipulation of words and ideas that can be articulated when the mind is clear and calm.

An important part of daily spiritual practice should be the detached observation of our speech, refraining from improper speech, and the conscious intention to use proper speech in our interactions with others. Slowing the speed at which we talk will make it easier to follow the intention and can keep the mind more thoughtful, more controlled, and lead to a peaceful state even while engaged in conversation. Limiting the amount of time we spend talking can also help in developing peaceful states of mind. The activity of speaking disturbs the mind by giving rise to thoughts that often outlast the conversation and reinforce the tendency to engage in internal dialogues. While it is natural to think and speak, it is also important when engaged in the practice of meditation to limit the amount of disturbance to the mind.

Practicing silence or limiting speech to just what is essential can lead to a peaceful mental state particularly when combined with meditation. Some may even find it essential to develop the high degree of concentration needed for the advanced levels of meditation such as the absorptions. It is important to remember that all practices can be done for limited periods during one's life and usually are. Permanent vows of silence are rare and were not advocated by the Buddha who sought to avoid all extremes.

PROPER ACTIONS

As with thought and speech, our actions have a powerful influence on the experience and direction of our lives. Actions which are the result of compassionate and benevolent intentions and which lead to more developed states of being are what are termed Proper Actions (*samma-kammanta*). We cannot discern all the intentions behind a given action because they are often buried very deep in the mind. When beginning a practice of mental cultivation, it will be enough to try to refrain from obvious harmful actions like killing, stealing, lying, adultery and drunkenness. These are dealt with under the section on the precepts and it is for the suffering they can occasion that they are to be avoided. A moral injunction has no force of its own to apply and must be backed by forces present in society. The teaching of karma is understood as an impersonal force of nature derived from both the psychological operations involved in progressions of consciousness and the penalties for antisocial actions that may be enforced against anyone transgressing the bounds of local social tolerance.

Actions reinforce both positive and negative patterns of thought and behaviour. Refraining from negative actions is extremely important for the proper cultivation of the mind. Virtue is the foundation upon which we can build a new attitude and awareness of life enhanced by positive mentation and emotion. In thought, speech, and actions the same principle is clear: virtue leads to peace and joy; actions based on malice to anger and frustration. Much of our behaviour is compulsive or unconsciously motivated. The direct influence we can have upon habitual actions may currently be limited but can be increased. This is not done directly but is accomplished by first attempting to refrain

from obvious harmful actions. It is crucial to be aware of actions and the unwholesome results they lead to even if we cannot as yet refrain from them. Mindfulness leading to increased awareness will in turn lead to a stronger ability to alter behaviour patterns.

Before we engage in any activity there is an intention to do so. Proper intentions are those that are based on benevolence, sympathy and compassion. Unwholesome intentions have the qualities of malice, jealousy, spite, greed or anger. Intentions such as these lead to actions that disturb the mind or cause suffering in the world. This can inhibit the arising of pleasant and beneficial mind states, impede the development of *nibbana*, and occasion suffering and social disharmony. To develop proper intentions, it is necessary to become more aware of intention as a preliminary to action. By noting the intention, the consequent effects and the resulting mental state, we can begin to distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome intentions and thus gauge the suitability of an action before it begins. This is important for maintaining other aspects of the Path like proper speech and efforts since these all arise in response to our thoughts and intentions.

PROPER LIVELIHOOD (*samma-jjiva*)

Most people spend a large percentage of their time either directly or indirectly earning money to support themselves or their dependents. There is not only the work that is done but also the preparation for work and the travel time involved. Because so much time and even our personal view of our identity are tied up in work it is very beneficial for our mental and physical health that work does not involve thoughts, speech or actions known to have unwholesome repercussions. Traditionally, work that involved the slaughter of animals or making and selling weapons were considered inappropriate for the practitioner of mental cultivation. In our own era however, there are many occupations which do not appear to harm other beings but upon close inspection can be seen to inflict hardship on others, particularly those in the Third World. The Third World of course, is actually our one world and the term seems to me an attempt to misdirect the mind from an obvious and painful reality. The First World's pleasure is often had at the Third World's expense.

In this era, this section might be better termed proper lifestyle. This heading would include the way we spend our leisure time as well as our occupation. Our leisure time is important because it often involves the products of a consumer society that is quickly destroying what is left of the natural world. For achieving the best results from meditation, it can be important to cultivate the attitude of a non-consumer. This does not mean that we have to grow our own food and never purchase anything. It does mean we have to take responsibility for the products we utilize and the effects that producing these goods has on the world. Most consumer products are not in any way essential for a life of quality. The act of accumulating material possessions is itself a form of craving leading to attachment, further craving and suffering. Refraining from the acquisition of material possessions will aid in not creating this kind of suffering. The practitioner need not live as a pauper, a monk or nun without possessions, although this does have many advantages which is why it is a common traditional practice in the major religions.

Simplicity is another principle inherent in the process of mind development. It is easier to maintain mindfulness when there are not too many distractions and needs and decisions are kept to a minimum. The practice of mind development is really very simple and need not be cluttered by trying to practice several different techniques, possibly from different traditions. A simple lifestyle may diminish or even extinguish the need for periodic retreats. With the clarity and peacefulness of mind that results from having few and simple demands, equanimity, tranquility, and concentration are more easily acquired and maintained. It may not be possible or desirable for all practitioners to keep life simple but for many this principle itself may lead to a joy and contentment previously unattainable.

In addition to this principle of simplicity there is another element I have termed rusticity. This will not likely be possible outside of retreats unless one happens to live in the mountains away from amenities. The human species did not evolve in an environment anything like the modern technological world. The practice of meditation is in part, an attempt to view the essential nature of the human condition. This condition is more easily discernable when we are in simple natural surroundings that are akin to those of our distant ancestors. That is, without the magic of electricity that turns night into day, without

flush toilets that prevent the full experience of relieving bodily wastes in the most natural manner, and without the luxury of central heating and the comfort of warm, heavily padded beds. Even if this type of practice is done only occasionally when camping or hiking it can still be valuable for exploring the essence of our human condition, our reactions to it, and our methods for coping with it.

PROPER EFFORT

Proper effort (*samai-vayama*) specifically refers to the four efforts. This means to prevent the arising of unwholesome mental and physical states and to learning how to end these states if they have risen. It is also cultivating the ability to engender beneficial states of body and mind and learning to maintain them. Effort is applied to promote mental cultivation and harmony within one's self and peaceful relations with others. This can also refer to the effort that is needed to engage in a systematic practice of mental development through meditation. It actually requires a great deal of effort to push oneself to practice through the almost inevitable boredom, fatigue, emotional turmoil, and physical pain that typically accompanies the practice of intensive meditation and other spiritual techniques.

PROPER MINDFULNESS AND CONCENTRATION

Proper Mindfulness (*samma-sati*) is being attentive to what is presently occurring. It is the faculty that maintains presence. Proper Concentration (*samma-samadhi*) means both tranquility meditation leading to the absorptions, states of peaceful rapture or concentrated attention, and also insight meditation that culminates in wisdom. Mindfulness attends to what is present in the sphere of awareness on a moment to moment basis. It is sometimes called *bare attention* because it adds nothing to what is perceived. It can be held on a single object of attention as in tranquility meditation or can attend different objects of perception as they arise into consciousness as in insight meditation. The term "object" is used throughout this book to mean the focal point or item upon which attention is fixed (i.e. the breath, mantra, a colored disk, etc.) and not the objective or purpose of meditation. When used for insight practice, mindfulness perceives

the successive rise and fall of sensory stimuli, mood states, thoughts, and bodily sensations without judgment or interpretation as they occur and pass away in the moment. Mental and physical experiences arising in the mind/body are the only proper objects for insight development. Attention must be directed to the rising and falling aspects of these phenomena (thought, emotion, sensation) as they occur. This means to be aware of each mental or physical experience as it becomes conscious and is then replaced by another thought, emotion or sensation. However, when first beginning the practice of mindfulness, attention is usually placed on a single aspect of consciousness such as bodily sensations or the feeling of the mind in response to a stimulus.

For Insight meditation, the objects of mindfulness are divided into four categories:

The Body (*kaya*) – the physical body, the breath and the mind.

Feeling (*vedana*) – the sensation or perception that arises in response to a sense stimulus (light, sound, etc.) that is experienced as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. It will be noted that the term “feeling” does not refer to emotions, but to the sense of whether or not a particular experience is perceived as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Mind states (*citta*) – the condition of the mind, mind with and without anger/aversion, attachment/craving or delusion/ignorance. Mindfulness of mind states means viewing the condition of the mind in a particular moment of consciousness.

Mental contents (*dhamma*) are thoughts, emotions, sensations, and sense perceptions. Mental contents are the objects of which consciousness is aware. When practicing mindfulness of the body there are four basic postures to be aware of. These are standing, walking, sitting, and lying. Observing the mind in all of these postures facilitates the development of mindfulness outside of formal practice and allows formal practice to continue for prolonged periods since several postures may be used successively to minimize discomfort. A basic knowledge of the manner in which the mind can be cultivated, the “objects” of mindfulness and an understanding of how the senses function will aid in maintaining and developing the practice of mindfulness. An in-depth study and

understanding of psychology and philosophy is not necessary for everyone although many may find it beneficial.

Knowledge obtained by reading books, hearing other people speak, logical deduction, faith or interpretations of experience are not insight. “Intuitive insight born of discriminating wisdom” means insight into the impermanent, inherently dissatisfying, and “empty” nature of all mental and physical phenomena, particularly the empty nature of “self.” Whole books are devoted to trying to explain emptiness and I will not try to do the same here. Emptiness can be an intellectual understanding, but more importantly, it is an intuitive insight into the true nature of phenomena. It can be an extremely profound experience and is not simply a matter of Buddhist doctrine. Christian mystics and theologians use a similar term to describe the experience of the Godhead: “absolute emptiness.” Insight arises with the subsiding of the rational discursive mind, the mind that clings to desire, aversion and delusion and to ego self-identity. It is intuitive in its essential nature and the opposite of conceptualized interpretations of reality.

Mindfulness has the qualities of detachment and remembering. It is mindfulness that returns the mind again and again to the object of meditation when it is noticed that the mind has wandered away from its concentration object. Mindfulness remains detached from the objects that are being perceived. It is mindfulness that is necessary for meditation and meditation is required for high levels of concentration that lead to mental and physical tranquility. This high degree of concentration leads to one-pointedness of mind or absorption (*jhana*), which is a temporary state of mind lasting from a few moments to several days. These states are characterized by high levels of joy, happiness, tranquility and equanimity. They also result in unconscious processes being stimulated that in turn affect normal conscious functioning.

There are two general divisions of meditation in the Theravadin system, three in Tibetan Buddhism. These are tranquility meditation (*samatha*, *samadhi* or *jhana*) and insight meditation (*vipassana*). The Mahayana tradition has developed the Vajrayana, or Diamond Vehicle, the practice of tantra. Buddhism divides into two main divisions (although some scholars describe Chinese Buddhism as a third major division). Hinayana is a Mahayana term sometimes used disparaging-

ly for Theravada Buddhism that means the Small, or Lesser Vehicle. This is because of the priority Theravada gives to reaching one's own enlightenment. Mahayana, practiced extensively in China, Tibet, Mongolia, Japan and other northern countries means the Great Vehicle and receives this title because of its emphasis on cultivating compassion and gaining liberation to aid other beings. The difference between tranquility and insight is the quality and type of concentration used, the object (focus) of attention (excluding meditation on the breath which can be used for both types) and the resulting mental states produced. Focusing attention on a single object to the exclusion of all other sensory perceptions is used for tranquility meditation. Concentration that is not fixed on a single object is required for insight meditation. For insight, awareness must perceive the moment-to-moment rise and fall of mental and physical phenomena as they occur.

Both tranquility and insight can be important and it is up to the individual to decide which type to begin with. Traditionally, tranquility was the first to be developed, but in the recent past insight has gained in importance as it is the attainment of genuine insight that gives rise to wisdom and few people seem to have the amount of free time needed to induce absorption states. To some degree tranquility meditation is optional and need not be specifically cultivated but can be helpful for stabilizing the mind. Some people who have spent much time with tranquility practice find it difficult or impossible to switch to insight. This problem can occur but should not prevent us from working to develop both types. An accomplished teacher will be very useful for helping a person to overcome difficulties in practice and technique. As insight is necessary for wisdom, tranquility is necessary to have the peace of mind to utilize that wisdom. Mindfulness itself is the beginning and end of this Path.

Insight directly confronts long cherished beliefs and may not be suitable for people who have suffered severe emotional trauma without proper supervision or guidance. If undertaking a practice of insight meditation with such a background, it is highly recommended that the practitioner remains in contact with a teacher of advanced experience. The potential for mental breakdown exists in our daily life when we do not live in harmony with our true nature or that of reality. The cultivation of the mind also contains this potential but should not of itself keep us from meditating. It is something we should be

aware of and so take precautions against. If the mind is already unstable it may be better to engage in some basic psychotherapy or to develop a level of tranquility before engaging in insight practice. For people primarily interested in relaxation, the reduction of stress and its physical manifestations, or who are not particularly interested in the attainment of enlightenment, tranquility meditation is advised.

The quality of mindfulness itself should not become an object of attachment. Try not to become frustrated by the inability to stop thoughts from occurring or by not being able to hold the meditation object for prolonged periods. It is the nature of the mind to be both still and active. Since we have spent years cultivating the active aspect it will take time to learn to be still. Knowledge of the nature of mind and reality is gained by quiet observation and will rise of its own accord when the mind is calm and quiet, free of attachments, aversions and preconceived ideas. Through mindfulness the wholesome and unwholesome aspects of our behaviour and their consequences can be viewed. These unwholesome aspects can eventually be limited even to the point of extinction. When you practice, just observe yourself. Try not to cling to anything. Try not to let idle thoughts lead you astray. It is thoughts that lead to desire and aversion and all the suffering that comes of these.

Try not to bring ideas into meditation. That it should be like this or like that. Try not to puff yourself up with pride thinking, "Now I'm meditating, living the holy life, being spiritual." Just sit. Leave all your opinions about life and truth and God behind. If you must, take them up again later. As your practice develops they will, in time, fall away. Learn to see the mind as it moves but know the true nature of the mind by watching when it is still. No need to study and explain everything. Just sit, watch, and all you need to know will come to you. Concentration, tranquility and insight are all one. No need to be attached to words and concepts. Just learn to be still. Attachment to tranquility occasions suffering because it cannot last. Whatever the mind gives rise to, it is a transitory, conditioned phenomenon. Just let it go. Nothing will be lost. Mind itself is empty, unconditioned, unborn, shining, resplendent. Emptiness does not rise or perish with mental or physical phenomena. When it contacts something we call good it does not become good, when it encounters something perceived as bad it does not become bad. The pure mind can view these without delusion.

The purpose of mindfulness is clarity and the development of awareness, understanding and concentration. The purpose of meditation is to raise things up, observe them and understand their essence. Follow in your mind what the results of grasping after pleasure or allowing yourself to indulge in hatred or anger are. Meditation is really an auxiliary practice to mindfulness. Mindfulness is the single most important aspect of mental cultivation. While the rewards of an intensive meditation retreat are manifold, it must be understood that the purpose of a retreat is to develop a high degree of mindfulness through the prolonged and undisturbed practice of meditation and other disciplines.

Meditation, often understood as sitting cross-legged and concentrating on the breath, a physical object or mantra, is in the final analysis simply being aware. It is a practice by which the mind becomes more skilled at being mindfully aware throughout conscious existence. If one is ever mindful, ever fully aware each moment, there is quite likely no need to meditate. As often as possible, the mind should be centered throughout the day by taking a moment to focus on the breath, speech, thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, sense objects, or initial contact (the moment a sense contacts a sense object). Simply view in a non-judgmental manner what is in the field of awareness with bare attention. That is, attention that adds nothing by way of conceptual interpretation or value judgments to awareness. Throughout the day there are numerous activities by which mindfulness may be cultivated. Any simple activity such as bathing, washing dishes, sweeping the floor, riding in an elevator, walking or jogging, etc. can easily be made into a meditation by staying focused on the moment to moment awareness of the experience in progress.

The entire range of our knowledge and experience comes through what are called the sense doors or the six gates. These are the five senses of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, seeing and the mind sense which experiences the emotions, intuition, rational thought, and influences from the unconscious. These gates allow information of specific types into the field of awareness. The eye sense perceives light that the mind then interprets to produce an image. This is typically based as much on previous experience as it is on what is actually being perceived at the time of perception. It is filtered through previous experience (memories), religious and philosophical

belief systems, the emotions and rational, semirational or irrational thought. Because we do not know anything directly, but only through the mind's interpretation of sensory data, the practice of insight is developed by concentration on the six gates. No objects other than these six senses, the five senses and the mind, which includes the perception of the body, are suitable for the practice of insight meditation. The Buddha taught that the whole world was contained in this one body. Nothing outside of this is the cause of our enlightenment. These six doors or gates are defined as our entire world. The phenomenal world is experienced through the physical senses that the mind then interprets. These six doors then are our field of investigation.

Mindfulness is often placed on the physical body, consciousness or a physical object. For insight development, it is beneficial to learn to observe the sense doors and to understand their method of operation as well as the habitual mental responses produced with contact by various sensory objects or situations. The Buddha's teaching of dependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*) is concerned with this particular aspect and shows the psychological process of events from sense impression to the experience of suffering and illustrates the method for interrupting this process so suffering does not ensue from improper responses to sense stimuli. When consciousness is focused on one of the senses it produces a feeling in the mind. This feeling is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. The object being perceived does not have the ability to produce this effect itself. It is outside of our actual experience and it is the mind that produces the feeling based on passed association, intellectual interpretation, etc. Wrong reflection allows unwholesome or extreme attitudes to enter the mind. Sometimes these are noticed and at other times we become caught up in the states produced without our awareness of it. Repetition of emotional response to a particular type of sense stimulus can establish a habitual pattern of thought and behaviour. Mindfulness of sense contact is a means to understand and prevent the arising of unskillful or unwholesome mind states; states that occasion suffering. The developed insight meditator may end suffering at this point, although this takes lots of practice.

We spend much of our mental time interpreting and classifying sensory data. It is the rapidity of the mind's sensory switching and the continuous arising of new thought-moments that, according to

Buddhism, some mystics and Western psychologists, produces the illusion of continuity or self. Intensive insight practice develops the ability to closely observe mind and body processes. We cannot catch every sense impression but with practice we can begin to see stronger impressions the moment they arise in consciousness. We need not concern ourselves with the object of the senses contacted but only with the sense perception itself. This is seeing, hearing, etc. in the present moment. Only the present moment, the continuous now-moment, is proper for genuine insight practice.

By the practice of noting the moment the mind contacts a sense object we can learn to curtail dissatisfaction (stress, pain, frustration) by being mindful of initial contact. Initial contact is when a sense function first comes into contact with a sense object, i.e.; when the eye perceives light. When sensory awareness of an object becomes conscious it is termed a “birth.” We are, of course, not talking about reincarnation or birth from the womb. There are many ways in which Buddhism uses the term birth. There is also the birth of the ego that occurs when the mind makes reference to itself with thoughts of “I,” “me” and “mine.” Inattention to contact allows ignorance a foothold. Sense contact with an object produces a feeling of pleasure, displeasure, or indifference towards the object. There is then a clinging or grasping of the pleasant feeling and a desire to escape from the unpleasant feeling. A neutral feeling may be ignored or it may cause a disturbance in the mind when the mind tries to place it in either the pleasant or unpleasant category, having to judge whether it is good or bad. When attempting to investigate initial contact, it will be noted how difficult it is to separate bare initial contact from the habitual response patterns and judgments which seem to arise with the impressions of sense contacts. With continued practice, it will be possible to decrease the interference of these responses and value judgments and to view the mind as it becomes aware of a given sense object and as different types of sensory awareness become conscious. This could be the focus of the mind’s awareness moving from hearing to seeing, for example.

Far from being an auxiliary practice, this ability to view the process of contact is central to the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness itself is perhaps the single most important practice in the development of the perception known as enlightenment. Initial contact is also the

method by which the teaching of dependent origination can be investigated and directly perceived. Often mindfulness is directed to the rise and fall of all types of thoughts, feelings, sensations and mind states, as they arise in the moment. With these is also the overlay of response, judgment and associated thoughts about what has been perceived. Refining this practice means to perceive the moment a sense is activated or drawn to an object of perception. It should be noted that the attention of the mind is particularly drawn to things that have a significant meaning for it.

When the mind becomes very still it can be observed that thought is independent of language. Thus, a thought arises complete in a single moment which the mind then habitually puts into a mental-verbal expression. In the practice of walking meditation outlined in this manuscript there is great importance attached to noting the intention to begin walking, to stopping, and to turning around. In sitting practice, before making adjustments to our position, scratching, getting up or any other activity we should closely note the intention before commencing the activity. It is at the point of noting intention that with insight and wisdom we can determine whether the thought, speech or action is wholesome and whether it is proper for the present circumstances. This allows us to interrupt habitual thought patterns and behaviour that in time will lead to mental control and to a greater freedom of being.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

Refrain from:

- Killing
- Stealing
- Lying
- Alcohol
- Sexual Misconduct

A precept is a rule or moral injunction with a psychological or social base. These five precepts constitute the basic support practices for meditation and for living in social harmony. Buddhist lay people commonly accept these five precepts to help guide their development

in meditation. Precepts are not the same as commandments. They are training rules that have been found conducive to mental serenity, community harmony, and the cultivation of meditative states, and are followed to achieve a good “rebirth” and enlightenment. Because these kinds of activities disturb the mind by occasioning negative emotions and have the potential to create problems with others they are viewed as being inimical to mental cultivation. A monastic establishment needs rules in order to function and to maintain the respect and support of the lay community. These rules are themselves founded upon certain principles. It is these principles which will need to be understood for the practitioner to be able to know what is appropriate to each unique situation because what is proper varies depending on people, place, and cultural customs. This understanding will grow out of one’s practice but the principles are essentially concerned with preventing needless suffering for oneself and others. In terms of passing through the visionary states that occur prior to, and/or after reaching the mystic states, these practices help condition the mind so it is not overwhelmed by negative emotions that can cause what would have been an enjoyable experience to appear instead as a disturbing one. It is important to prepare the mind to embark upon its psychological journey so that the experience can be safely comprehended and assimilated. Our destination is the farthest reaches of Mind, the citadel on an island at the top of the mountain, but the vessel that will take us there is the mind and we will return from our journey or flounder depending on its condition. Legends tell us many make the journey, few find the way, and some that get that far, never make it back! The best way to prepare for this journey, whether deliberate or spontaneous, is to cultivate the positive, wholesome qualities of mind.

Mystic practices have long been held to hold some inherent dangers. A story from the Talmud is illustrative of this particular aspect. It concerns four rabbis that are visited by an angel and taken up to Paradise. Upon their return, one rabbi is overcome by the splendour and loses his mind, wandering insantly the rest of his life. The second rabbi who was extremely cynical believed he had dreamed the event and gave it no credence as a genuine experience of the Divine. The third rabbi got carried away with what he had seen. He was obsessed by the vision and would lecture endlessly about it, going on and on about what it meant. It is said that in this way he went astray and

betrayed his faith. The fourth rabbi was a poet, he sat near the window writing songs praising the things of his life: the evening dove, his daughter in her cradle, the stars in the sky. He is said to have lived his life better than before.

In the Talmudic version of this story, *The Four Who Entered Paradise*, they enter Paradise to study the heavenly mysteries and three of the four do not properly assimilate the experience when they gaze upon the *Shekhinah* — the ancient female Deity. The first rabbi goes insane in a way anyone could understand by looking at him. The second rabbi is too cynical, an attitude not conducive to progress on a mystic path. The third rabbi displays a result that seems to be fairly common but that also does much damage to the science of mysticism as a legitimate field of study. The person is carried away by the experience, obsesses over it, and contrives explanations for it that are at variance with establish faith or are in excess of what they actually gained from the event. Only the last rabbi is viewed as having properly assimilated the experience and from the description, it would seem that no one observing him would necessarily realize he had had any unusual experience of a Divine nature.

Contemplate the five actions referred to in the precepts and consider the possible consequences for yourself, others, the community, and the world. The effects they produce are direct and indirect. Direct is how they condition the subsequent thoughts, emotions and behaviours of our mental states; and indirect as in the karma (volitional cause-effect) they create which may have to be endured. That karma might include death, imprisonment, loss of trust, respect or reputation, the end of a relationship, physical and emotional harm and falling away from the practice of mental cultivation.

The precepts are flexible in the way or degree to which we decide to keep them. The first precept is not to kill sentient beings. That is, beings which have awareness. This does not refer only to people but at its most basic interpretation it does ask us to refrain from killing human beings. Most practitioners try to refine this practice to eventually include other living beings. Also, precepts may be undertaken for a stated period of time. This may be an evening, the duration of a religious ceremony or meditation retreat, or a person may make an effort to keep them over the whole of their life. Use your own discretion. If you break a precept try to understand why, particularly if you

felt compelled, as in, “the devil made me do it.” Have compassion for yourself, consider the tenacity of habitual thought and behaviour patterns. Many of us have spent years conditioning our present behaviour so it should not surprise us that certain behaviours may be difficult to terminate.

Not killing or stealing are pretty easy to keep for most people. For a monk, however, the precept against stealing is not to take what is not freely given and thus includes actions that would not be regarded as stealing by lay people. Some people include the idea of vegetarianism with not killing but this is not an original Buddhist teaching. While the motive might be to not support the killing of animals for food and is quite justified on some grounds, it really is not so simple. Agriculture is responsible for a great deal of environmental destruction and the mass poisoning of wildlife. Use your own discretion but try to avoid the temptation to perceive it as a kind of moral superiority if you do choose to refrain from eating meat. There is something of a paradox in this aspect of practice. It is helpful to use the practice of vegetarianism to cultivate a “spiritual” attitude of higher being or harmony with life, the universe, or God. What is not sought is a form of egotistical pride or perceived superiority over others. Many aspects of practice have this dual nature; we can be filled with the spirit or filled with spiritual pride, its opposite.

Not lying also includes not using harsh speech or engaging in malicious gossip. This is a practice of mindfulness of speaking. The ego’s defense mechanisms may habitually use speech to manipulate others through rhetoric, lies, harsh speech or gossip. These can be very destructive. Become aware of the power of speech. The power of silence should also be known. Much of the mind’s disturbance is the result of the excessive use of the speech function. A week of silence itself can be quite a revelation. Being attentive to speech is a very powerful way of beginning to effect changes in relationships with others. It is also a key to understanding the generation of habitual thought, behaviour and emotional patterns.

The scriptural precept on refraining from intoxicants specifically refers to fermented drinks, which means alcohol. The mind in an intoxicated state has difficulty maintaining mindful clarity. When mindfulness is lost so may be proper judgment. This can result in the other precepts being broken or in accidents and injury. Cutting loose

to enjoy some revelry has its place but can disrupt the positive energy accumulated through a sustained practice of meditation. While some people include all drugs or those that are deemed illegal or socially unacceptable, this precept actually refers only to alcohol. The point of this precept is the loss of mindfulness that results in disturbing one's self and others. Various mystic and tribal traditions have made use of many natural substances to explore the mind and reality. Shamans have been using drugs to induce trance states for millennia. People who do not have access to a competent guide in the use of plant substances should exercise caution. A shotgun approach to mystic states is not the safest method to take. A foundation is laid for these kinds of experiences by the proper cultivation of qualities and understanding that allow for its experience and assimilation. Drugs can work but they can be haphazard and may do great damage. It is best not to have to rely on them and there are few people available who are competent to lead a person on a spiritual quest by utilizing them. The advantage to using "dry" spiritual techniques is that they circumvent the need for a drug as the catalyst for a change of consciousness and prepare a foundation for retaining the effects of mystical experiences. The use of drugs for attaining mystical consciousness can be difficult when performed outside its native cultural context. After completing the experience, the subject may simply revert to their prior conditioned mental state and might completely forget the insights gained from the experience.

Sexual misconduct varies greatly within a culture and in different cultures and so must be interpreted by the practitioner according to their own mores and personal comfort. Depending on your relationship status, single, involved or married, and the boundaries that have been set, the term misconduct will be applied differently. In its original sense, this precept refers to adultery and to using people without regard to their feelings. The potential for suffering is the reason. Passion can be a wondrous flight of joy and pleasure, but can also be very dangerous too. Consider murder, divorce and the broken families unrestrained passions can create, children with single parents and separations due to infidelity. In some cultures, adultery is still punishable by death although in other cultures it is accepted by both men and women. This precept is practical for avoiding difficulties rather than prudish about sex. As always, you must judge for yourself

what constitutes misconduct. The principles of Buddhist ethics are about avoiding physical pain and mental anguish and not creating them for others. This view can be used to determine the suitability of your thought, speech and behaviour. With regard to sexuality, the precept is not to use others for your pleasure in a way that causes harm to you or your partners.

In addition to these five precepts for lay people, a *pah kow* (ordination prior to a novice monk) would include: not eating after noon; refraining from wearing garlands, jewelry, perfume, or cosmetics; refraining from dancing, singing and going to see entertainments; and using a high bed. A novice monk would add not having or using money (gold and silver). A *bhikkhu*, a fully ordained Theravadin monk has a total of 227 precepts. Of these only the breaking of four of them will result in the expulsion of the monk from the *sangha*. These are killing or causing a human being to be killed, stealing in excess of a stated amount, committing sexual intercourse, and lying about having attained a supra-mundane level of consciousness.

It is helpful to remember these rules were developed gradually in ancient India and are bound to the culture. Cosmetics and jewelry were for beautification as was eating a lot to make the body larger and more affluent in appearance. Garlands and a high bed were signs of status and so not appropriate for a renunciate. Going to entertainments was viewed as a distraction not compatible with mental development, but also because it affected how monks were perceived by lay Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Many of the rules in the *Vinaya Pitaka* were created to promote harmony with other religious sects. The custom of the rains retreat was established when people came to the Buddha and complained that unlike the other religious sects, Buddhist monks continued to travel during the rainy season when going on pilgrimages and seeking alms. In doing so they were leaving deep tracks through the muddy fields and making more work for the farmers when all the holes had to be filled before planting. So, it was determined that for three months of the monsoon season the monks would remain in one place and dedicate themselves to a retreat. In Thailand, a monk counts his seniority by the number of rains retreats he has done.

KARMA: VOLITIONAL CAUSE-EFFECT

Through the daily practice of mindful attention and meditation know how thought, speech and actions condition the mind. Know volitional cause-effect, karma, in the present moment through attention and experience. Do not substitute theories about past lifetimes or fate for the direct perception of the mental cause-effect relationship, the lessons of karma. The teaching of the Buddha is neither theoretical nor dogmatic. It is for each practitioner to experience truth in this moment in this life. For that clarity, it is necessary to view the moment directly as it is and not filtered through theories or beliefs. Speculation is not practice. Virtuous conduct is a prerequisite of meditation practice because of its effects on the mind's ability to concentrate and the emotions it gives rise to. Learn to see the consequences of karma by noting the way different actions, speech, food, etc., inhibit or enhance concentration. The causal connection between behaviour and subsequent mental states will in time be clearly perceived.

Explanations of karma are usually derived from either the Buddhist or the Hindu traditions. There are differences between these teachings although many students of Buddhism do not appear to have studied karma in detail. The perception and understanding of karma will aid in deepening the commitment to both practice and to the cultivation of virtuous conduct based on insight and wisdom. Until wisdom is developed, precepts will aid in the practice of virtue. With wisdom comes a greater flexibility to be spontaneous and creative in determining how to respond to a situation. Attachment to precepts without insight or an understanding of the principles behind them can hinder the development of wisdom. Buddhism recognizes five components to karma. These are ignorance, formations, craving, clinging and volition.

It should be understood that the teaching of karma as commonly accepted might not be correct. Karma is not simply a cause and effect relationship where everything that happens is the result of previous actions or lives. This way of viewing karma ignores the responsibility and freedom we have in the present moment to determine the course of our future. It is not the teaching of karma as expounded by the Buddha. Some people place the blame for any accident or unfortunate circumstance on karma but this is not correct in Buddhist teachings.

Karma is not an invisible agency of justice. It is the physical and mental effects derived from a person's thought, speech, or actions and can be linked to the wholesome or unwholesome intent with which the actions were engaged upon. Positive intentions do not always produce the effects we would like. There is no way to guarantee what effects may occur from any act. Wholesome intentions often lead to unintentional suffering when not performed wisely. The Tibetans refer to the tendency to create suffering through unskillfully trying to help others as "idiot compassion." Compassion is present but it is not balanced by wisdom and so is misguided or egotistically based. Tibetans have also developed the idea of "wrathful compassion." It is the deliberate manifestation of wrath used for another's benefit.

The sources of good karma or merit are engaging in wholesome thoughts, speech and deeds. The immediate or long-term result is physical and mental happiness, peacefulness and the purification and development of the mind. The causes of bad karma are engaging in unwholesome thoughts, speech and deeds. Mental and physical suffering with a mind that is heavy and difficult to calm is the result. There are different kinds of merit or good karma that are sought through different kinds of activity. Merit based on charity frees one from selfishness and greed and leads to compassion, loving-kindness and sacrifice. There is merit based on virtuous conduct as in following the precepts. Precepts prevent the mind from being overpowered by unwholesome thoughts which lead to words and actions creating bad karma and perpetuating the negative state. They keep one grounded in the process of mind development. Precepts promote peace and harmony with others and lead to a more positive view of oneself and life. Last is merit based on mind-development. Mind development is the cultivation of the absorptions and insight which strengthens the mind, leads to wisdom, peacefulness, happiness, freedom from suffering, and to the extinction of the mental "taints" (*asava*) that prevent enlightenment. These taints are sense-desire (*kamasava*), desire for eternal existence (*bhavasava*), wrong views (*ditthasava*), and ignorance (*avijjasava*).

SAMSARA

The teaching of suffering is taught in conjunction with the nature of the phenomenal and the psychological world. It is often referred to as *cyclic existence* when understood as the place we reincarnate into if we have not yet become enlightened when we die. It refers to our inner and outer world and yet it is said that *samsara* is *nibbana*. The one is found in the other. The teaching of *samsara* can be divorced from that of reincarnation by understanding more clearly the nature of these teachings. It is believed by some monks that the teaching of reincarnation is a Hindu corruption and was not a teaching of the Buddha. In terms of psychological states, it is recorded both in Buddhism and in Western psychology that there is a state known as *past life recall* but its true nature remains a mystery. Some monks and psychologists maintain it is a symbolic state of mind where others maintain genuine memories are recalled. Research in this field has shown that some people may be cured of physical and mental ailments through past life hypnotic regression regardless of the objective truth of the memories. Other evidence has sometimes demonstrated an access to historical knowledge not previously known to the person experiencing a past life. Though often connected with the idea of reincarnation, *samsara* need not include it in order to be understood in its essentials.

There are unpleasant but inescapable facts of mental and physical existence and the dynamics of the psyche common to everyone. Everything we come to experience in life is impermanent, transient, and cannot last. We age; we grow old, sicken, suffer and die through one cause or another with varying degrees of physical and mental torment. Our lives are a progression of mental-emotional-feeling states with each dependent on prior operations that subtly condition the states that follow. Peril is inherent in our condition as humans, as physical beings. Disease, war, starvation, torture, violence, abuse by relatives, natural mental and physical deterioration are nothing new to the world; they are older than civilization.

The teaching of *samsara* is an uncompromising look at the world, the dynamics of the psyche, its interaction with the world, and the way that personal mentality, philosophy, and conduct manifest as the psycho-social reality. It describes the food and pleasure-chain that

governs the flow of goods and services which sustain the needs and wants of the world population. *Samsara* ignores the myths of borders and states because they are viewed as constructs of the mind. Political states lead to the suppression of liberties, control of resources, taxation, the threat of punishment and the right to determine what constitutes sanity by an elite that is one of the greatest threats to people other than illness, accident and random violence. *Samsara* is the occurrence, activity and play of all beings, and they are very much free to do what they please. The teaching points out that there are always consequences. The Buddha taught we should not ignore this point. We have no choice but to inherit the karma we have sown. We face the randomness of all that might befall us and we reap the results of our own actions.

In the food chain of life, we are all potential prey and many of our pleasures are in some way tied to the suffering of lower or just unfortunate links in that chain. The Buddha's response to this was his injunction to lead a simple and virtuous life. Understand the results of actions both wholesome and unwholesome and use this knowledge to guide yourself and others safely through life to *nibbana*, the cessation of suffering, passion and turmoil. It was the *bhikkhu*, the monk, that embodied this ideal. Living at the simplest level with just the food collected each morning from silent begging and with the minimum in clothing and shelter, the *bhikkhu*'s task is to free himself from the illusions which prevent clear perception and occasion suffering and to impart that knowledge to others. The life of a *bhikkhu* is simple and not troubled with much that obsesses others. Cultivating mental stability, virtue, compassion, presence, and clarity of awareness, the *bhikkhu* represents a role model for the principles that underlie the Eight-Fold Path. It is a low-impact lifestyle where the monk functions as a teacher, counselor, healer, psychotherapist, philosopher, ethicist or even a shamanic guide, teaching both by example and discourse.

Samsara is the physical realm and all the joys and sufferings of life. It is the emotions, the body, the mind, and everything in life that we encounter. It is the brutality, misery, war, and exploitation that results from sustaining life and the hysterical need for constant stimulation, pleasure, control, security, revenge, and lust that is so readily accepted as a sign of normality the world over. This is to the advantage of various people and power groups, the people who

control the electronic blips (money), weapons, and policies of state as well as the vast middle classes. Absolutely everyone is a part of the relentless dynamic of *samsara*. They are caught up in the same reality and unable to effect a change in the total progression of things. Wealth or poverty makes no difference in our susceptibility to suffering. But this is both true and an illusion. True in the larger sense but in no way true of the world in the realm of personal encounters where we can have a considerable effect that may far exceed whatever we might consciously have considered. This principle is nicely stated in the “butterfly effect” of Chaos theory. It refers to the ability of a butterfly’s wings to cause a disturbance of air that effects the weather throughout the global system.

As long as people do not eradicate the obstructions to clearly perceiving the reality of their own participation in the dynamic of *samsara*, the suffering of war, poverty, and the mass destruction of plant and animal species, the degradation of environmental quality will continue to the inevitable conclusion. War, disease, misery, poisoned air, water and food are really nothing new; it is just a matter of type. Poor sanitation has been killing people ever since the first cities were created and probably before that too. War and the stupidity of greed and politics have accompanied humanity at least since we invented the first city-states. In any event, death is absolute in so far as it cannot be avoided, though not necessarily as an end, as that fact remains a rational mystery. Yet, the Buddhist sees him or herself as participating in an infinite ocean of Awareness-Beings; an ocean of Beings popping in and out of Being and Emptiness; the Being and its world arising and passing together in the beginningless and endless primordial Mind, in the ever-present dance of form and formlessness. The greed, aggression and stupidity that fuel the economy, the collective measure of need and greed, are said to be the result of wrong view (*micchii-magga*). This is the basis of the pursuit of Right Livelihood in the Buddha’s Noble Eight-fold Path. We pursue a path that is in harmony with the way things are, not at a surface level but in the deepest sense, a way also known as the Tao. We know the repercussions of karma that result from our thought, speech and mental activity within ourselves as the quality and type of awareness we have and in the consequences that occur to people because of them.

THE REALMS

Loka is the Pali term for world and it refers to three spheres of existence. There is the world of the five senses or sensuous world (*kama-loka*); the fine-material world of the four *rupa jhana*, absorption states sought through tranquility meditation (*rupa-loka*); and the immaterial world of the four immaterial *jhanas* (*arupaloka*). The sensuous realms can be understood as neurotic states of consciousness, psychological states we may inhabit for periods of time, the world we perceive, and as other worlds perceptible to some people such as shamans describe. The actual reality of what is perceived in these states is not required for the perception of them since they can be produced by mind's natural cognitive abilities. These realms may arise in the form of hallucinations, in states of transient psychoses, or as an *active image state* when consciousness remains clear and there is no delusion about the mental origin of the visions or voices. It is enlightenment that leads one out of the realms manifesting in a neurotic fashion, not through complete transcendence, but by learning to skillfully inhabit any state that arises. The realms can be seen as psychological states with each one corresponding to a particular type of mental state. There are six realms: the hells (*niraya*), hungry ghost realm (*peta-loka*), animal (*tiracchana-yoni*) and human (*manussa-loka*), the demon world (*asura-nikaya*), and the heavenly beings of the six lower celestial worlds (*deva*), also known as the realm of the jealous gods. The *deva* realm is seen as less than *nibbana*, not as refined as enlightenment, and so while better than the other states as regards the absence of suffering, it is not outside the miseries of *samsara* because it cannot be sustained. Two higher levels of *deva* realms exist in the material and immaterial absorption states.

The psychological animal realm is the instinctual gratification of the biological drives of hunger and sexuality with the distinctive characteristic of stupidity. Sexuality needs to be properly integrated when developing spiritual practice. It is not viewed as inimical to spiritual insight only potentially disruptive when not guided by understanding. Working directly with basic energies is an important aspect of mental development and the desire for sexual intimacy and oral gratification through eating are powerful means of cultivating greater detachment.

Hell, as a psychological state is primarily suffering from anger and fear. It belongs to the state wherein everything perceived through the

senses is seen as repulsive and a source of misery. Paranoid schizophrenia, aspects of bipolar disorders, and perinatal experiences could be placed in this category. Life contains physical, mental, emotional and circumstantial states ranging from mildly painful to severely agonizing. Hell refers to conditions being experienced in life. There are natural and man-made hells. Institutions, governments, corporations and individuals create hells for people as well as other living beings. They may also create a hell that they must endure. Avoiding these miseries is one of the advantages of keeping the precepts and engaging in mental cultivation and the use of a guiding philosophy of principles and ethics.

Hungry ghosts are people who are suffering from excessive desire, from greed and craving, from unfulfilled needs. Some Western psychotherapists see this state as encompassing the feelings of self-loathing and low self-esteem. They are also the people who get left behind or left out of the world and its wealth, the starving, the expendable, and the poor. Hungry ghosts and animals are said to suffer greatly and have a lesser ability to comfort themselves and each other than humans do

People in the human realm experience suffering too, but also have the possibility to become enlightened. This is seen as the only realm that allows for stabilizing the practices and attaining the benefits of mental development. In the teachings of higher realms such as the buddha realms, an advanced adept might continue their path to enlightenment after having been reborn there. This idea is expressed in the Pure Land sect. This is a version of Buddhism that seeks rebirth in the pure land of the Buddha Amitabha. Chanting and visualization techniques characterize this method where devotees seek a higher birth rather than enlightenment through meditation and mental training. D.T. Susuki has stated his belief that more people became enlightened through Pure Land than with Zen practice. The objective reality of the Buddha realms is not needed for the belief system to serve as a vehicle for enlightenment. Myths too, have great power.

In the *deva* realm, there is a pleasurable or indifferent feeling derived from meditative absorption or deep insight. These realms may also refer to the archetypal energies that form part of the psyche and which are released through various practices. The mind can spontaneously produce visions of deities and these do not require personal

exposure to religious motifs and symbolism. The deities may not be images from the religion of one's birth either. Buddhism views these images as being mind-created and does not dwell on their importance as they are left behind as practice continues. In Buddhist mythology, *devas* are not gods but higher beings. They are not enlightened but some are said to take an interest in human affairs. They are sometimes referred to as the jealous gods. Angels and guardian spirits could possibly be put in this category. Again, the reality is the perception itself and it does not really matter if others can or cannot confirm it. These beings embody the aggressive strivings of the ego. They represent the energy needed to overcome obstacles and experience the god or heaven realm as their reward.

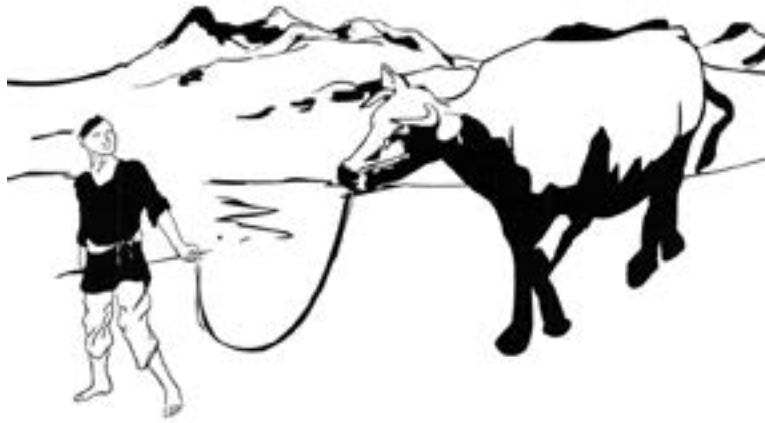
Heaven or the god realm is refined sensual and mental pleasure principally of an uncommon nature. Heaven belongs to the state wherein everything is perceived as delightful and a source of pleasure. The spectrum of consciousness involves both extremes of bliss and agony. Illumination, ecstatic bliss and rapture, the absorptions, kundalini awakening and unconditional love, oneness and emptiness are states of heavenly light, joy and love. Both physically and mentally the person is aglow. This category might also include the positive side of manic depression and other manic states.

Another perspective of this teaching could view it as a social commentary on the dynamic of societies and economies that have prevailed for millennia. The jealous *devas* fight the heavenly beings to try to gain control. Kings and governments, families, corporations and organizations; all have people vying for power and status. There is the great mass of humans like a general middle class, the long suffering animals and the starving poor (the hungry ghosts) who are left out of the feast but who often pay the price for it. A hell realm is made by people or nature. Torture is an old art; it is practiced today just as in ancient times. The Buddhist picture of hell contains hot and cold hells (the natural hells) and tortures inflicted by other beings or persons (man-made hells). All the realms are seen as impermanent and are said to end when the karma producing them is exhausted. This teaching embodies a social commentary with a guide to understanding shamanic type states of consciousness, and the transient psychological states of joy (heaven), anger (hell), craving (hungry ghost), and ignorance (animal realm), etc.

CHAPTER V

NATURE OF MIND

Tending the ox



THE THREE POISONS

In the language of *citta bhavana*, or mind development, we speak of impurities, defilements, hindrances, taints or negative energies, etc. These should be understood in the proper context, not as value judgments about the rightness or wrongness of particular aspects of consciousness, but as elements of consciousness that interfere with the development we seek. Thus, if my goal is to cultivate a greater degree of compassion, anger, whether arising through physical or emotional trauma, as a defense mechanism, unmet desire, or grounded in some misconception of reality, must in some way be sublimated or extinguished. All these impurities of mind about which Buddhism speaks are said to derive from the three poisons. These are attachment, aversion and ignorance. Both attachment and aversion are said to result from ignorance which is also translated as delusion.

Delusion or ignorance as used here refers to mind's self-perplexity. This could be defined as a fundamental lack of comprehension

regarding the manifestation of one's occurrence as a function of cognitive processes. More simply stated it is a lack of self-knowledge and sometimes referred to as bewilderment. This leads to attachment and aversion arising in response to impermanent elements occurring within the mind's field of perception. Mind is alternately attracted and repelled, euphoric and depressed by what it perceives. The mind in this state cannot maintain detachment and serene equanimity. Overcoming this basic ignorance is the primary purpose of practice since it is this ignorance that leads to unnecessary self-created mental anguish.

Mind is at least the totality of its perceptive field. With equanimity strongly developed the mind is no longer swayed by the various elements of its perceptive field, nor by any feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness that might accompany those sensory elements. This allows the mind to delight in its pure and total presence, the totality of its perceptive field. The term "greed," has a particular meaning in English, this makes it not really an adequate translation for what Buddhists mean by *moha*, desire or attachment. We are here referring to the energy in the mind that manifests as mind's movement towards an object within its sensory field whereupon there arises pleasantness with regard to that object (be it visual, auditory, etc.) and the resultant attachment or desire to cling to the pleasant experience. This is basically a habit of mind developed through repetitive conditioning. As a conditioned habit, it can be deconditioned. This does not mean we lose the ability to enjoy the elements of our sensory field. We are creating a new relationship to that field so that we are not unnecessarily disturbed by ever-changing circumstances. We practice contemplation of feelings by noting pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings as they arise in awareness upon perceiving some sensory object.

Aversion is the opposite of attachment but is basically the same energy. Mind moves away rather than towards elements of perception. Anger is viewed as intense aversion and that is why the poison of aversion is often translated into English as anger or hatred. With detachment, the mind neither clings nor flees the objects of its perception. These three, attachment, aversion and bewilderment are the root causes for the five hindrances (*nivarana*) to meditation and the root causes of suffering and the absence of enlightened perception.

THE FIVE AGGREGATES – *Khandha*

The aggregates are those components that, when taken together as a group, comprise what is termed a person. The analogy often used is that of a chariot. It is comprised of a number of parts which, when viewed in isolation are not a chariot; but are wheels, spokes, a harness, reins, etc. Only when brought together in a functional way do these items come to be called a chariot. In a similar fashion, no person is said to exist unless all five aggregates are present and functioning. Although it is stated that these aggregates comprise a person, this does not imply an independent self. It is used to illuminate the psychological aspects that lie behind our perceived experience without reference to a self to which experiences occur. The term person is used only for the purpose of communication. Do not get too stuck on this point. Your practice of meditation will bring an intuitive understanding of what is meant by nonself or *anatta*. While the aggregates are often linked with speculations on what Buddhists mean by *anatta*, it is more helpful to understand them as fields or aspects of cognition which are scrutinized through introspection because of their roles in the dynamic process that culminates in the perception of awareness, self, suffering and conceptualized reality.

THE BODY – *Rupa*

The body, prey to illness and pain, is of course, something we all have in common. When it does not accord with our wishes we have grief and sorrow. Intellectually we may know we will grow old and die but few people accept this as “just so.” This body is the occasion for much suffering. The bodies of others as well as our own may attract or repel us. Both create suffering through attachment and aversion. The body also represents contact, that is sense contact, when the physical sense-base, the organ of sense, the eye or tongue, etc., comes in contact with the mind that causes the sense perception of light or flavour, etc. This begins a process of awareness that will continue through the other aggregates.

The Mystic Quest

FEELING – *Vedana*

Upon sense contact, there is the feeling of pleasantness, neutrality or unpleasantness. Identifying with these feelings prevents clear comprehension with attachment and aversion as the result.

MEMORIES AND PERCEPTIONS – *Sanna*

This is the inspection and interpretation of sense contact. At this point we may no longer be dealing directly with the present sense experience but may instead be viewing our memory or interpretation of the object. Present sense experience is compared with past memories and impressions.

VOLITION AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF MIND – *Sankhara*

Bundles of different states arise. If these states are liked, desire arises; if disliked, aversion, the desire to avoid arises. Because we do not view these states as impermanent, inherently unsatisfactory and as not-self: not me or mine, we cling to them becoming enmeshed in the emotions they give rise to.

CONSCIOUSNESS – *Vinnana*

We grasp that which knows the other aggregates. We think, “I know,” “I am,” “I feel.” Because there is wrong understanding regarding these ideas we continue to engage in unwholesome thought, speech and behaviour perpetuating our delusions and consequent suffering. All these elements come and go according to their nature. They will not stop but when we learn their true nature we can learn to let them go; not grasping and clinging to their arising. Simply watch them, let them linger awhile and observe them pass away. Viewing the mind without reference to a self or person allows clear comprehension of mental processes to arise.

INVESTIGATING THE AGGREGATES

Train your endurance and courage. Develop the Middle Path. When attachment, aversion and bewilderment arise do not give in to them. Do not be discouraged. Time and proper practice will bring visible results. Be mindful and resolved. We must investigate both joy and suffering with equal patience. Do not remain addicted to pleasure thinking you can cheat out suffering. Do not just deal with suffering, put an end to it. Where it is that suffering arises, there too is where it can be ended. No place, no refuge, no teacher, can give you this freedom. It must be self-realized.

See impermanence, inherent dissatisfaction and selflessness in all mental and physical states. Enlightenment is not a mental or physical state in conventional terms. Mental and physical states are mundane; enlightenment is said to be supra-mundane. Begin practice by opposing the defilements, not feeding old habits. Where friction and difficulty arise, that is the place to work. You must know the dangers of this Path. People who think they have no problems continually feed their defilements. Do not be surprised or alarmed at the difficulties encountered when the defilements are not given in to. They are strong and firmly entrenched through having been well fed for so long.

For detectable progress to be made there has to be a change in habitual ways of thinking and feeling. As awareness deepens, one can begin to see those activities which, habitually engaged in, disturb the mind and cause it to be restless, agitated, or which leave a guilty feeling, etc. These habits may be let go of when they are recognized and understood. Habits that calm the mind, that make it light and pliable can be reinforced. Develop wholesome thought, speech and actions and unwholesome tendencies will diminish from lack of energy. If confronted directly, they can often go underground into the unconscious where they may remain unseen but will continue to have an influence upon the mind. They may even grow stronger as a result.

DEPENDENT ORIGATION – *Paticcasamuppada*

This is a very important teaching in Buddhism. It is the process that the mind goes through each time it creates suffering. What follows is a basic outline to introduce the subject. The chain of dependent origination begins with ignorance. With ignorance as an existing con-

dition there begins a process of cognitive events which culminate in *dukkha*, suffering. It is the suffering that arises because of wrong understanding of the relation between awareness and the senses. Mindfulness needs to be present when the senses make contact with an object in order to control feelings and not allow attachment and craving to arise. Buddhist teaching divides into two truths: relative and absolute. The teaching of morality is relative because it varies with culture; the teaching of dependent origination is absolute because it is a psychological process inherent to our nature.

Dependent origination does not teach how to become happy. It shows instead the way leading to the cessation of suffering which in relative terms could be called happiness since it is an absence of suffering. There is no need to postulate a self or other abiding entity. Events arise momentarily and condition the arising of subsequent events. The consciousness involved is that of the six sense bases, the five senses and the mind. In this teaching, karma is not viewed as good or evil. Karma is a process that we judge good, evil or neutral. Dependent origination is a process that does not rely on an existing self or entity to operate. Extinction of dissatisfaction can occur when attachment to karma perceived as good, bad and neutral is discontinued.

This teaching need not be explained as covering three lives, which is often the way it is taught. Buddhism is concerned with the here and now, the present state. All truth in Buddhism is found within, in this body, in this moment. The entire process of dependent origination can last only a moment and occurs many times each day. "Birth" refers to a single revolution of the chain of events known as dependent origination and this occurs in the daily life of ordinary people. When mindful attention is not directed towards sense contact, attachment, craving and dissatisfaction are able to arise.

When desire, aversion or delusion arise in the mind, a "self" is created and this "self" experiences one "lifetime." This is the momentary existence of an illusionary self. It is grounded in thoughts of "I," "me" and "mine." It is these thoughts which are the birth of ego. Dependent origination is not or should not be merely philosophy. It is the establishment of attentive awareness upon the six sense gates that preclude the arising of ignorance, desire for pleasurable sense contact, desire to avoid what is unpleasant and desire for existence

or non-existence. Once a defilement (attachment, aversion or bewilderment) arises in the mind there is one “turning of the wheel” of dependent origination.

The description of dependent origination is a detailed view of the manner in which suffering arises. It shows the interdependence of causative factors in the arising of dissatisfaction. It demonstrates factors in a state of flux that occur without postulating an independent, discreet self. The self is shown to be a conditioned, transitory event; its arising dependent on other conditioned events. As a conditioned event, it is not independent, self-existing or eternal, but dependent for its arising on a series of other conditioned events and exists momentarily in accordance with the law of causation: because there is this, that arises. Analysis of the mental events illustrates the process that leads to the experience of suffering. Understanding of, and mindful attention to this process can enable the practitioner to interrupt the sequence of mental events to prevent the arising of suffering.

FROM IGNORANCE TO SUFFERING

Because there is ignorance, volitional formations arise.

Volitional formations lead to mentality-materiality.

Mentality-materiality leads to the six sense bases, the organs of sense.

The six sense bases allow for sense contact to occur.

Contact creates feeling; the pleasurable or not pleasurable categorizing of sense perception. Feeling which is seen as good or bad causes desire or aversion; craving to have or to avoid. Craving leads to attachment.

Attachment to becoming. Becoming to birth.

Birth to old age and illness.

This ends in suffering and death.

If the arising of craving is noted, it may allow one to detach from the desire and thus, prevent the full arising of dissatisfaction through the extinction of craving. By noting the process and by becoming skillful at manipulating our consciousness we interrupt it at the point where craving first arises. This is its value and purpose. Dependent

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origination is also associated with the teachings regarding death and the last thoughts a person has before they die. These last thoughts are considered extremely important in determining the forth-coming process of dying, death and any future life. This emphasis on the importance of one's last thoughts is also a feature of other traditions such as the Christian faith with its last rites.

THE SEVEN FACTORS OF ENLIGHTENMENT – *Bojjhanga*

In order to provide aspirants with a more concise understanding of the qualities which need to be developed in order to reach the awareness of enlightenment, seven factors were distinguished as being particularly important. These are:

mindfulness – *sati-sambojjhanga*

investigation of phenomena – *dhamma-vicaya*

energy – *viriya*

rapture – *piti*

tranquility – *passaddhi*

concentration – *samadhi*

equanimity – *uppekkha*

The Tibetan system designates the six perfections for developing the attitude conducive to enlightenment. This involves higher ethics, higher thoughts, and deeper understanding. The six perfections according to sGampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* are the perfections of:

liberality

ethics and manners

patience

strenuousness

meditative concentration

awareness

ATTHA KUSALA AND THE FOUR DIVINE ABODES

Attha kusala is the state wherein the four mental qualities of the divine abodes (*brahma vihara*) which are benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity have reached perfection. That is, they occur as natural qualities of consciousness when negative tendencies and influences have been eliminated. This is different than the practice of these qualities in that there is no longer any effort required. This is the natural, developed state of the mind when it is not disturbed by defilements.

There are many kinds of truth. Two types are termed in the Pali language *sammuthi saccha* (relative truth) and *paramattha saccha* (absolute truth). *Sammuthi saccha* is the truth in conformity with accepted moral and cultural standards. *Paramattha saccha* is the truth of the inner mental nature that transcends worldly views. It is this second kind of truth, psychological in nature, that is referred to in the teachings of *attha kusala* and the *brahma vihara*.

THE FOUR DIVINE ABODES:

karuna – Benevolence: often referred to as loving-kindness or universal loving-kindness.

metta – Compassion: the active desire to relieve the suffering of others.

mudita – Sympathetic joy: the joy that arises in response to the joy perceived in others.

uppekha – Equanimity: mental balance or unperturbedness.

Mental energy has a bi-polar quality to it. Each mental energy manifesting as one of these four qualities has an opposite energy which must be understood because of the potential for the increase or release of these negative tendencies while trying to cultivate the positive aspect. The opposite energies to the *brahma vihara* are:

LOVING KINDNESS – SEXUAL AND SENSUAL DESIRE

The purpose of this practice is to develop a general love and kindness for everyone and everything. Becoming aroused is not the point and

falling in love with someone through this practice may prove very distressing for both of you. An increase or other changes in sexual activity often accompany meditation and kundalini awakening.

COMPASSION – MORBID DEPRESSION

Suffering is pervasive and universal. No amount of personal agonizing will change it. While contemplating suffering we may become overwhelmed by the suffering we perceive around us. The world needs more happy and content people to show others how to be happy. Try not to add needless misery to your own life and that of other people by becoming emotionally caught up in what you cannot change. Allow your feelings to motivate you to do what you can to help but remember your own joy can be a source for others to find theirs. Christian saints speak of the dark night of the soul when all seems lost and hopeless, a severe kind of depression that can last years. It is by no means uncommon in spiritual practice to be at times overwhelmed both within and without. Though it may persist for some time, the state is temporary but can be disturbing enough to dissuade people from continuing their spiritual practice. Saint Francis of Assisi speaks quite eloquently about this state and Evelyn Underhill devotes an entire chapter to the dark night in her book, *Mysticism*.

SYMPATHETIC JOY – FRIVOLOUS MIRTH

Mirth is a wonderful experience full of gaiety and humour but is disruptive to the energy that leads to more refined states of joy, rapture and insight. The temptation to have fun can be very strong. Keep a suitable vigil on your energy and know when it is appropriate to let go and have some fun and when to maintain the restraint of pleasant indulgences in order to continue to deepen practice. Remember too that unless there is the intent to become or remain a monk or nun when the goal is reached, it is good to have an understanding about how to skillfully manifest and utilize the newfound joy. When there are comparatively fewer restrictions on what constitutes appropriate behavior, it is easy to appear ungrounded or perhaps even mentally unstable. This is not necessarily bad in all cases as can be seen in the high regard Tibetans have for the “crazy yogi.” Their craziness,

the fact that they do not conform to religious and social norms and expectations of behaviour is a mark of their spiritual perfection. The unusual behaviour can be explained as a profound understanding grounded in enlightenment rather than in preconceived notions of right, wrong, or what is traditionally proper or stereotypically expected of a realized being.

EQUANIMITY – INDIFFERENCE

Equanimity is balanced detachment that can view things dispassionately and utilize wisdom and compassion in making decisions. Indifference is simply not caring. Having no concern through indifference means there are no qualities of love, empathy, or compassion. Although it may free one from the pain of perceiving the suffering of others, it is not a state deliberately sought by earnest practitioners.

PRACTICING THE DIVINE ABODES

These are visualization practices using images of people, mantras (repeated statement or sentiment) and the recollection of emotions to promote the qualities that comprise the state of *attha kusala*. Any formulation of a suitable mantra could be used. After adopting the desired meditation posture try to recall the experience of the feeling or quality that is being cultivated and associate it with the image of a person or at most two people who are pictured in the mind. Recite the mantra you have chosen slowly and mindfully. When appropriate for the duration of practice change the category of persons you are using. Practice usually starts with oneself or all beings. The compassion, loving-kindness, and sympathetic joy practices can take the aspirant as far as the third absorption of form. The practice of equanimity will lead to the fourth absorption of form. In addition to the meditations, it is stated that *Attha Kusala* requires the skillful practice of these factors:

Uprightness of action or will power.

Power that withstands internal mental factors of defilement.

Practice compliance, obedience and discipline.

Cultivate a soft and yielding nature that accepts things lightly and

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does not attach or reject.

Freedom from habitual evaluation and being non-judgmental; wisdom does not view things as desirable or undesirable. Happiness arises not by external things but by mind's conditioning through thought, speech and behavior.

COMPASSION: *Metta Bhavana*

Metta bhavana is the practice of compassion in thought, speech and behavior. The preliminary is to develop virtuous conduct and practices. When beginning this practice some teachers have suggested that it is best (for psychological reasons) not to begin the practice using these four types of persons: a person who is not dear, one who is very dear, one regarded with indifference, or an enemy. Also, these practices of the *brahma vihara* do not involve the dead or the opposite sex. *Metta* should be extended to yourself, parents, mentors, friends and all beings to begin with. *Metta bhavana* is considered a very potent practice and I have met monks that use this as their principle form of meditation.

LOVING KINDNESS: *Karuna Bhavana*

The recommendation for this practice is not to begin with beloved ones, neutral persons or enemies. The purpose is to develop the emotion of kindness and pity. Reflect upon the evils of unkindness and the benefits of kindness when seeing people suffering from illnesses or who are disabled. The practice of kindness is in thoughts, speech and behavior. Kindness is extended to yourself, a friend, a person in misery, and eventually an enemy and to the whole world or universe. This extension is mental while engaged in meditation and actualized in personal relations.

SYMPATHETIC JOY: *Mudita Bhavana*

Start with a friend. On hearing or seeing a beloved person living happily, express the sympathy, "how wonderful it is that this person is living happily." This practice is for the elimination of envy and jealousy. This also helps to cut the root of egotism and engenders

gladness and sympathetic joy. It uses four types of persons: a friend, a dear friend, an enemy, and a miserable person.

EQUANIMITY: *Upekkha Bhavana*

Having attained the third absorption and become familiar with it, the practitioner should strive to infuse the mind with the quality of equanimity. Love, compassion and sympathetic joy are seen as being psychologically related to attachment. The lower absorptions are not free from the possibility of being disrupted by a type of joy that will prevent further development. The mental image of a person to whom the meditator is normally indifferent should be taken up as the object of meditation. Next, a person who is dear should be envisioned, then an intimate friend, and last an enemy. The attainment of equanimity leaves the meditator with a well-balanced mind undisturbed by joy, sorrow, happiness or misery. Equanimity is known as a buddha-making quality because a balanced, dispassionate, detached mind is pivotal in defeating the tendency to experience suffering because of the unskillful use of cognition and habitual speech and behaviour patterns resulting from a lack of clarity and mindfulness.

THE INDICATIONS OF *Attha Kusala* ARE:

Ecstasy—joy or bliss arising from the termination of mental impurities.

Ease of sustainability—life is simple because only what is necessary is required.

Directed action—thoughts and actions are easily directed to mental development and the benefit of others.

Moderation in all things comes easily.

Collectedness—non-agitated, relaxed, disciplined state of the sense organs when reacting to the world.

Presence of mind—thought uninfluenced by bias which leads to wise judgments.

Non-attachment.

THE TIBETAN BARDOS

This is a brief outline of the Tibetan teachings on the after-death state related by the *Bardo Thodrol Chenmo*, the *Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*, known as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Different Buddhist traditions deal with the question of death in different ways. When asked a question about what happens after death a Zen master might simply say, "I'm not dead yet, how would I know?" A renowned Theravadin monk I heard give a lecture said that if there is a process after death it would be unconscious and would occur regardless of whether we understood it or not. A Tibetan might say we have all died before so it is possible to remember the process even though we have not yet died in this lifetime.

When the Buddha was asked questions about death, he maintained a "noble silence." He did not answer questions about what happens after death and when queried about why he kept silent stated that the question was not productive for eliminating the causative factors of suffering or for progressing on the path to enlightenment. In the *Pali Canon* there are listed ten "intermediates" (*avyakatani*), or points not determined. In the *Potthapada Sutta*, a wandering mendicant named *Potthapada* asks the Buddha whether the world is eternal or not; infinite or not; if the soul is the same as the body or distinct from it; and whether a man who has attained to the Truth exists or not, and whether they exist in any way after death. To each question the Buddha makes the same reply: "That *Potthapada*, is a matter on which I have expressed no opinion." When asked why, the Buddha replies the question is not calculated to profit, it is not concerned with the Norm (Dharma), it does not redound even to the elements of right conduct, nor to detachment, nor to purification from lusts, nor to quietude, nor to tranquillization of heart, nor to real knowledge, nor to the insight (of the higher stages of the Path), nor to Nirvana. Therefore, he expressed no opinion upon it.

But people are ever curious and can derive great benefits from religious myths if they hold strong beliefs about reincarnation, going to heaven, uniting with God or the Goddess, or finding enlightenment on the after-death plane. The Tibetans have created detailed teachings on the nature of the after-death state known as the *bardo*.

When a person is dying, or has died, a lama will read from the *Bardo Thodrol* in order to guide the deceased through the *bardo* to enlightenment or a new life.

This is an extremely complex and profound teaching and this outline provides only a basic understanding of it. Many teachings are symbolic and critical reasoning should never be suspended when trying to understand the psychological relevance of any particular religious myth or teaching. The Tibetans say there are five ways to attain enlightenment without meditation. These are seeing a great master or sacred object and wearing mandalas that have been specially blessed with sacred mantras (symbolic sounds, words or phrases). Mandalas are symbolic patterns, often geometric and typically based on a quaternary. They are both constructs of the unconscious as well as purposely designed patterns and paintings for meditation and teaching. In times of psychic stress, the mind can spontaneously produce a vision of a mandala which has the effect of pacifying the mind. The last three means of enlightenment are tasting sacred nectars consecrated by masters through intensive practice, remembering the transference of consciousness at the moment of death (*phowa*) and through hearing certain profound teachings such as the *Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*. *Bardo* is a Tibetan word meaning a transition or gap. The four *bardo* states listed here are cited by Sogyal Rinpoche in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*: the natural *bardo* of life, the painful *bardo* of dying, the luminous *bardo* of *Dharmata* (the Clear Light) and the *bardo* of becoming (rebirth). In another version there are six *bardos* listed:

“state of uncertainty” (of place of birth or while in the womb), the *Skye-gnas Bardo*

“state of uncertainty” (dream state), *Rmi-lam Bardo*

experience of meditation samadhi, *Ting-nge-hzin Bsam-giam Bardo*

moment of dying in the *Chikhai Bardo*

experience of Reality in the *Conyid Bardo*

seeking rebirth in the *Sidpa Bardo*

THE *BARDO* OF LIFE

This refers to the span between birth and death. This is a *bardo*, a transitional stage before the next one that begins with the process of dying. Viewed in relation to the whole of time a human lifetime is very short. This human lifetime is seen as the best opportunity to prepare for the next transition (death) by becoming familiar with the Buddha's teachings and by stabilizing the practice of meditation.

THE *BARDO* OF DYING

This lasts from the beginning of the process of dying, to the end of the "inner respiration." This leads to the "Ground Luminosity," the dawning of the nature of Mind at the moment of death. This death is not identical with physiological death as it is known in the West. It will be noted that here, as in the rest of this book, that "Mind" has been capitalized to distinguish the totality of Mind (that dawns in the *bardo* of *Dharmata* and in enlightenment) from the typical concept of mind in its limited personal sense.

THE *BARDO* OF DHARMATA

The luminous *bardo* is the after-death experience of the "Clear Light," which manifests as sound, light and color. This is the principle topic of the *Bardo Thodrol Chenmo*. These sounds, colors and lights are the radiance of Mind. That means they are produced by Mind and do not occur from an outer cause.

THE *BARDO* OF BECOMING

This is the karmic *bardo* that lasts until birth and is where the future life begins to shape itself. Where the future parents are seen and sex is determined. These *bardos* are seen as different states of consciousness and each contains the potential to be used as a means of further development on the path to the total comprehension of reality. Spiritual practices, meditation in particular, can move consciousness through functional states that fit the description of the after-death *bardos*. The *bardos* may be the result of the structure of the psyche

and are viewed as non-dependent on beliefs just as dreams occur through a natural mechanism and are not conceived by personal volition. The *bardos* are also related to present life experiences. Sleeping is viewed as similar to the *bardo* of dying; the thought processes dissolve and there is the experience of *rigpa*, the “Ground Luminosity.” Tibetans even have a special practice for learning how to maintain conscious awareness as the body enters sleep in order to experience this perception. It is said by Tibetans to be the clearest state of consciousness before death.

Dreaming is like the *bardo* of becoming. There is a type of mental body that has many experiences just as in a dream. The *bardo* of *Dharmata*, the experience of the “Clear Light,” is said to be had by everyone, but few people notice it and even fewer experience its completeness. This is the Void, Emptiness, the “Inexpressible Reality,” or in the Pali language, *sunyata*. This is like the time between falling asleep and dreaming. While these states are similar they are not considered to be as deep and powerful as the actual *bardo* states of dying, death and becoming since they all occur in the *bardo* of life. Tibetans also have a practice called dream yoga. This involves lucid dreaming, becoming fully conscious while still maintaining the dream process with the body remaining inert. If you have never heard of this or experienced it you might like to check out the book, *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*, by Stephen LaBerge, Ph.D.

Lucid dreaming, or more precisely, the systematic practice and development of dream yoga, may aid in controlling the mind during mystical or psychotic states. In spiritual practice these states are not viewed as psychoses but rather as cathartic experiences enhancing growth. Bear in mind that psychosis is a term people invented to describe a particular phenomenon. The positivity or negativity of the experience may be dependent on many factors. Certainly the beliefs the person holds about the experience must be significant and in some way contribute to the overall effect that this kind of occurrence has. Our understanding may also be crucial to our capacity to accept, interpret and to positively assimilate these types of experiences. Negative social pressure from individuals and the social tenets and stigma related to insanity or comparable behaviour are other potential problems facing people who have unusual experiences or those termed mystical within various religious traditions.

The teachings of the *bardo* can be thought of as metaphorical, symbolic, mythological or literal. They might also be understood as the experience of psychosis, manic depression, schizophrenia, or delirium. These terms have specific meanings and their pathology different causes; but they also have similarities in the effects they have on consciousness. From the perspective of the person having the experience it may make little difference. The bardos in Tibetan teachings are certainly about the process of dying. In poor countries people routinely die without any medical intervention that would disturb the process itself. Delirium, and the delusional mental state, voices and visions that accompany it may be a common feature of the death experience. This is what the Tibetans believe. It is also what I believe though I know of no way a person could actually prove it, although near-death experiences and studies of people in the dying process are suggestive. Death is a one-time thing for each of us in this life. While we may possibly have another life, death and dying will always be a new experience if there is no memory of a previous death.

People have been around a long time and these things are nothing new so there is no reason to suppose that ancient people could not have developed a sophisticated method to relate them to their understanding of life. It is important to keep in mind as well that Buddhism claims to take the mind beyond the traumatic aspects of death and dying. This is a stupendous claim! An incredible claim, if one truly considers the reality of one's own process of dying. Though the end may come in an instant so we do not experience the physical process of dying, death cannot be avoided. We die. Western psychology generally views mystical states as being pathological and seeks to treat them in a variety of ways. Tibetan Buddhist teachings use these states to wake the mind up to its true nature. The unconscious is "liberated" and that release of unconscious contents becomes the basis of the experience. Rather than viewing them as pathological, Tibetans try to create the experience by a tremendous variety of ritualistic, contemplative, scholastic, ascetic and physical disciplines. These states, whether or not they are identical to dementia, manic-depression, renewal through a return to the center, kundalini, shamanic illness, etc. are extremely significant for a proper understanding of Mahayana Buddhism in

particular, and Buddhist meditation in general. In my opinion, anyone wishing to understand religions should gain some knowledge about the permutations of consciousness before trying to interpret the validity of a religious myth or system of practice. Joseph Campbell, well-known and respected scholar of religion and mythology has stated his belief that the difference between a schizophrenic and a mystic is that while the schizophrenic drowns in the flood of unconscious contents, the mystic swims. This reflects a common perception that these states are identical; but although they may have similar features, it does not mean they stem from the same causes or have the same outcome.

THE *CHIKHAI* BARDO – THE ULTIMATE OR CAUSAL REALM

The *bardo* is divided into three stages, the *chikhai*, the *chonyid*, and the *sidpa bardo*. At death, all beings are said to enter the *chikhai bardo* regardless of the form they have had (human, animal, etc.) and the karma they have generated. This first stage is the state of the immaculate and luminous *Dharmakaya*, the ultimate consciousness or the unity of Brahman-Atman in Hinduism. The soul and God joined in complete and undifferentiated oneness, although of course, Buddhism does not postulate a soul nor an external entity called God. This state is also called the “Clear Light of Reality.”

From the *Bardo Thodrol* we read:

O nobly-born (so-and-so), listen. Now thou art experiencing the Radiance of the Clear Light of Pure Reality. Recognize it. O nobly-born, thy present intellect, in real nature void, not formed into anything as regards characteristics or colour, naturally void, is the very Reality, the All-Good.

Thine own intellect, which is now voidness, yet not to be regarded as of the voidness of nothingness, but as being the intellect itself, unobstructed, shining, thrilling, and blissful, is the very consciousness, the All-Good Buddha.

Thine own consciousness, not formed into anything, in reality void, and the intellect, shining and blissful, — these two — are inseparable.

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The union of them is the *Dharma-Kaya* state of Perfect Enlightenment.

Thine own consciousness, shining, void, and inseparable from the Great Body of Radiance, hath no birth, nor death, and is the Immutable Light — *Buddha Amitaba*.

Knowing this is sufficient. Recognizing the voidness of thine own intellect to be Buddhahood, and looking upon it as being thine own consciousness, is to keep thyself in the divine mind of the Buddha.

The mentality of a person momentarily rests in a condition of balance or perfect equilibrium and Oneness. Owing to unfamiliarity with such a state, which is an ecstatic state of non-ego, the average person lacks the power to function in it. Karmic propensities becloud consciousness with thoughts of personality, of individualized being, of dualism. Losing equilibrium, the consciousness falls away from the Clear Light. Awareness contracts away from the perfect intensity of the Dharmakaya and turns to forms of seeking, desire, grasping and karma, searching for a stable state of equilibrium. The “soul” thus begins its downward journey into multiplicity, into less intense and less real states of being. The simile is that of a bouncing ball which takes its highest bounce the first time. Some basic tendency of grasping begins to develop in the state of Luminosity. Energy builds up blindly and falls down into different levels of diluted energy. The act of seeking requires both a subject to search and an object to be sought, hence what was One becomes two.

THE CHONYID BARDO – THE SUBTLE REALM

This is the after-death stage at which the peaceful and wrathful deities appear. The peaceful deities appear first and if they are resisted and denied they turn into their wrathful manifestation. Because the Clear Light is resisted the reality is transformed into the deity display. Through seven successive substages there appear various forms of buddhas, *dakinis* and god-like beings. These are accompanied by dazzling, brilliant colors and awe inspiring sounds. These cascade through awareness without effort, freely and completely in almost painful intensity and brilliance. The crucial point is how the person handles these visions. Each divine scenario is accompanied by a much less intense vision, by a region of relative dullness and blunted

illuminations. These are the first glimmerings of *samsara*. The *Bardo Thodrol* states that most people simply recoil from the illuminations, contracting into less intense and more manageable forms of experience. Some are not simply recoiled by the visions but are attracted to lower realms of being. They are attracted to the “impure lights,” to worlds without bliss and illumination. A Christian phrase that contains this idea is, “The flames of hell are God’s love denied.”

FROM THE *BARDO THODROL*:

Thereupon, because of the power of bad *karma*, the glorious blue light which is the Wisdom of the *Dharma-Dhatu* will produce in thee fear and terror, and thou wilt flee from it. Thou wilt beget a fondness for the dull white light of the *devas*.

At this stage, thou must not be awed by the divine blue light that will appear shinning, dazzling, and glorious; and be not startled by it. That is the light of the *Tathagata* called the Light of the Wisdom of the *Dharma-Dhatu*...

Be not fond of the dull white light of the *devas*. Be not attracted; be not weak. If thou be attached to it, thou wilt wander into the abodes of the *devas* and be drawn into the whirl of the six *Lokas*. That is an interruption to obstruct thee on the Path of Liberation. (The *lokas* are the worlds or realms of humans, animals, ghosts, *devas*, and the demon and hell realms.)

The six realms are full of samsaric miseries. The individual must re-unite the subjective self with the objective divine display of illuminations which are cascading “in front” of it. Recognize the objective phenomena to be emanations of one’s own consciousness and Buddhahood will be obtained. In life, evolution continues as long as one is able to accept the death of the lower level unity so that a higher-level unity can arise in its place. In the *bardo*, involution occurs as long as the individual cannot accept a higher level and is still attracted to the lower level unities. There is still the possibility of enlightenment if consciousness can accept the death and transcendence of the separate self. With acceptance, it can return to at-one-ment in the Clear Light of the Dharmakaya. The consciousness-principle’s flight from death and sacrifice transforms the peaceful deities into the wrath-

ful deities of which there are fifty-eight. God and the visions of the peaceful and wrathful deities are here used to mean the Absolute and not any particular theological concept or concepts. The terror of the unrecognized peaceful deities that now appear wrathful causes the mind to swoon or black out and the whole process of subtle, peaceful and wrathful perceptions is repressed and made unconscious.

THE *SIDPA BARDO* – THE GROSS REALM

O nobly born, at this time thou wilt see visions of males and females in union. If you are to be born male, the feeling of being a male dawnith upon the knower, and a feeling of intense hatred towards the father and of jealousy and attraction towards the mother is begotten.

If consciousness tries to separate the man and woman it winds up with those people as its parents. It literally comes between them. Terrified by the impending crisis, consciousness again swoons, passing out and repressing the *Sidpa* realm, emerging from the mother's womb in physical birth. In the *bardo* state after physical death the "soul" will involve as far as it has evolved. A highly-developed being will escape involution altogether thus attaining enlightenment on the after-death plane unless enlightenment has already been achieved.

This whole process is said to occur each and every moment, from ultimate to causal to gross. The duty of consciousness is to remember. To "see" with the mind's eye and know this occurrence so that it may thus transcend it so as not to suffer the misery and torment of the samsaric realms which substitute for true Reality. Ego-consciousness is the limited perspective of the conditioned mind that has its origin in the Ground of Being which is Mind. From Mind, all things arise and pass away in awareness. Any concept of Mind, created by mind, is merely a reflection of some quality of Mind. This is because mind cannot know Mind. Only Mind can know Mind because Mind is itself the primordial state of knowing.

Death is a subject that in one way or another touches everyone. No sanctuary can be found which will protect us completely. The emotional impact of facing personal mortality is likely the result of many different factors. Buddhism certainly recognizes the effect of belief and philosophy but stresses the actual energetic nature of the process.

There are several means used in Buddhism to short-circuit the ego-based, emotionally traumatic effect produced by the realization of death's immanence and possibly physiological variables as well. Buddhist monks practiced corpse meditations and reflection on death to prepare for transforming realizations and to cultivate detachment and a realistic understanding. Experiencing the psychological process of dying through the *bardo*, possibly a state of transient psychosis, being re-born or born again is a dangerous but effective method. Some fortunate people have a natural near-death experience but to deliberately occasion such an event is a very dangerous procedure and that type of short-circuiting is best left to fate because of the very real possibility of not returning from the journey. Glimpsing the "flash" (Clear Light), or the numinous, and high level formless absorptions are other attainments that are said to lessen psychological resistance to death because they fundamentally alter the perception of Self and its relation to Reality and counter fictitious ego-formation. Physical pain is also a major factor in the death experience. One of the many purposes for mind training is to be able to hold the mind to different types of consciousness thereby excluding the sensation of physical pain. Ancient shamanic techniques often employed physical tortures to aid in developing and testing one's abilities regarding transcendence, as did practices by Christian monks involving mortification of the flesh.

These methods present us with valuable tools to use to prepare for what we cannot avoid. There is a path to the Deathless, that state of being that the Buddha spoke so frequently about. Immortality is a perceptive state attainable within this lifetime by those who put forth the effort or who have the good fortune to experience the range of Mind's nature beyond the ordinary. Christ said, "Seek and ye shall find." The Buddha's words were, "Hurry, strive to become wise. Death approaches and provisions for your journey you have none." Yogic teachings also include positions that are said to be best for dying as well as special breathing techniques. These may be simple or complex practices but are best learned from a competent master who can properly guide and supervise their development.

Death, and its acceptance, is an important aspect of Buddhist thought. As a psychological teaching dealing with the fundamental nature of phenomenal existence, it deals with the very issues that are

viewed as some of the most important aspects of existential psychotherapy. Irvin Yalom cites a number of breakthroughs with patients as a result of their confronting their death-anxiety which resulted in a greater capacity for authentic living. He informs us:

“Death is only one component of the human being’s existential situation, and a consideration of death awareness illuminates only one facet of existential therapy. To arrive at a fully balanced therapeutic approach, we must examine the therapeutic implications of each of the other ultimate concerns. Death helps us understand anxiety, offers a dynamic structure upon which to base interpretation, and serves as a boundary experience that is capable of instigating a massive shift in perspective. Each of the other ultimate concerns ... contributes another segment of a comprehensive psychotherapy system: *freedom* helps us understand responsibility assumption, commitment to change, decision and action; *isolation* illuminates the role of relationship; whereas *meaninglessness* turns our attention to the principle of engagement.”

Buddhist teachings do not hide from death. It is a recommended daily reflection and Buddhism states quite clearly in the sutras that no matter what our attainment, we shall perish in the end just as the Buddha and all his disciples did. Buddhist practice works directly with death anxiety through meditation and contemplation, it works with freedom and its consequent responsibility through its teachings of directly observable karmic connections. Isolation is addressed by pointing out that the individual is both alone and part of a community, and in the experience of emptiness, the inescapable unity of one-self with all things in the Ground of Being further dissipates the sense of isolation, while meaninglessness is countered by the pursuit of the goal and its sharing with others. The attainment of the goal addresses all these issues in a way that is not simply a rationalization, but that wells out of the deepest aspects of mind. Death is countered by the perception of a state the Buddha called “the Deathless.” Freedom is countered by a realistic appraisal of the inherent limitations of being human and all the attendant responsibilities for one’s life that come with it. Isolation is countered by the loss of the limited self-identity that sees itself as apart from the unity of total reality and by the love that is cultivated or more importantly, found in the depths of one’s being. Meaninglessness is lost in the quest, in the role of a teacher

to others and through an inherent meaning to one's own life that is most importantly found from within, as well as being imparted by a particular philosophy.

The buddha dharma comes from the anthropological perspective of understanding all religious death mythology as a means of coping with death anxiety and the knowledge and terror of what befalls people all around us. Buddhist mythologies vary everywhere but there is inherent in dharma the knowledge that the fairy-tale we spin about what happens, who we are, where we are, and what we are doing conditions how we experience life, dying, and death. The beauty of the mystic quest is in the multilevel nature wherein death is intellectually, emotionally, and psycho-physiologically dealt with in death-rebirth type experiences, thus granting experiential awareness grafting onto deeper mythological constructions. A point is reached where even as these constructions are still operative, they can be sufficiently seen through by remaining mindful of Mind's nature to play. With cultivated wisdom, we can actively work to construct our own myths to better deal with and enjoy life, meeting our own fate with as much fortitude and equanimity as possible. Perhaps we may even die in bliss like so many of the great mystics were reported to have done. In such an endeavor, active mythological construction, whether conscious or unconscious can be invaluable.

Encounters with death have great potential for radical transformations of consciousness, both positive and negative. When dealing with death in the spiritual sense we typically deal with it as a reality we will face and as one which faces our loved ones and everyone else. Death comes upon us. But another aspect of death is that we can be the ones to bring it to others. People who have served in combat, police forces, and animal slaughter sometimes realize too late that killing can be addictive. There is generally tremendous psychological resistance to killing another person. People forced to kill or faced with the immanent need to kill or die, enter psychological states of extreme stress, euphoria, hysteria, honor, and regret, with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) typically lasting many years to life. Lt. Col. Dave Grossman in his book titled *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (1995) gives a detailed look at the human psychological process of interspecies conflicts. In his view, the 'flight or fight' response, the state of perception that one

must either fight or run away, also incorporates posturing and submission displays. People will do just about anything to avoid deadly force, including shooting to miss in combat despite the likelihood that they or their team members may die as a result.

Most casualties in war are from automated weapons like machine guns and artillery and are highest when one side has been routed. Remote kills are the easiest to deal with psychologically due to distance from the victim, working in a group, and mechanization of the process; these aspects aid the denial of responsibility. While it is of course, highly recommended we do not kill another human being, properly dealt with, it may still be possible to reach the goal of enlightenment. Application of various practices including tantra could prove useful for regaining mental balance while fully utilizing the disruption is contingent upon having entered what Vietnam vets refer to as “the zone.” Prior to the outbreak of war there is an important shift in the collective consciousness which takes place. It is readily apparent in the rhetoric used by governments attempting to gain public support for aggression. This shift in perception runs from our more typical perceptions of truth being white, black, and shades of grey, a sensory based perception, to a mythological base with a firm black and white dichotomy of good and evil that exist with mythic aspects becoming dominant: references to God and the dawning of a “New World Order,” etc. Used properly, a similar shift to the mytho-poetic realm in pursuit of the Absolute can aid in leaving behind ordinary sensory awareness while avoiding the obvious negative elements of war and the psychological states needed to prosecute one.

LUCID DREAMING: THE ART OF TIBETAN DREAM YOGA

The quest we embark upon has many aspects relevant for the purposes we aim to fulfill. There are many different practices, types of meditation, mental development and control, and many interpretations of a great variety of conscious states. Some studies suggest that there are fundamental differences between the states of mind that are sought in shamanism, Buddhism, Hindu yoga, Western mystic traditions or had in mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, mania and other psychotic states. In some cases, it may be that the aims of the practices are different and so lead to different states;

in other cases, there may be a different interpretation for a particular state that makes it appear that a different phenomenon is being discussed. Because perception is due in part to previous experience and ideas or concepts used to understand reality, we may at times be at the mercy of our preconceived perception. In terms of the Buddhist quest, learning to see the world and ourselves in a new way is both the beginning and the end of the path. Like many other traditions, the Tibetans have included in their methods a practice that works directly with the dream state to alter our notions of reality. Though it is not a method taught by the Buddha according to the *Pali Canon*, it is a relevant technique for the exploration of consciousness that many may find useful as well as enjoyable.

This practice involves becoming conscious while maintaining the body's sleep state and actively participating in the dream to effect changes in waking consciousness. For example, a person with a phobia of snakes could experiment with them in a dream where they could not be hurt and learn to overcome their aversion or fear by handling the snakes in the dream. Becoming lucid is the first step. The yogi then learns how to remain in that state and how to manipulate objects, the sense of self, and situations. Learning to control dream states may also be applicable to some of the unusual states that may occur as a result of various practices. In the practice of *chod*, where states of mind dealt with in the section on the after-life *bardos* can occur, it may be profoundly helpful to clearly know the dream state in order to safely navigate the *bardo*. Thus, one may readily incorporate the new experience into an understanding of reality that includes the phenomenon of consciousness in its totality of potential operation. The phenomenon of transient psychosis can be understood as a state that seems (from the perspective of the participant) to be a mixture of genuine sensory experience coupled with an overlay of dream-type imagery that may be beautiful or terrifying, but that does seem to be related to other factors of consciousness. These might include the structure of the psyche, previous physical and/or psychological trauma, psychological conflicts, existential concerns and prior beliefs regarding reality. Lucid dreaming might also prove useful for teaching people to better cope with hallucinations diagnosed as stemming from a mental illness in place of drug therapy with its attendant risks of side-effects and its suppression of what may be a cathartic experience or process.

Perhaps the best work for learning the practice of lucid dreaming is *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming* by Stephen LaBerge, Ph.D. He has done over two decades of clinical research on the subject and has detailed far more information than might be presented here. What is of greatest interest to me is the potential to benefit through this practice and safely pass through difficult or dangerous episodes of unusual consciousness. Relating lucid dream techniques to transpersonal psychological events could prove fertile ground for understanding an ancient form of preparing for, and passing through, these states of highly altered perception. Working with frightful images deliberately produced in a lucid dream after having learned to manipulate the dream imagery should prove highly effective for maintaining a calm center and not succumbing to similar images produced in a psychotic state. In addition to lucid dreaming, the Tibetans, as well as other traditions, have practices designed to allow the yogi to maintain consciousness as the body passes into sleep before dreaming commences. This has been said by some Tibetans to be the clearest state of consciousness available to the mind before a person dies. Lucid dreaming can be learned from a book but the genuine practice in the form of Tibetan dream yoga, which includes maintaining consciousness through the entire sleep cycle, may require an actual teacher so adjustments can be made to one's practice as needed.

The first basic step is to begin by developing the habit of Critical State Testing. Throughout the day, we test ourselves to see if we are dreaming. A journal of dreams can be kept to familiarize yourself with your typical dream imagery so you can use them as cues for when to do a test. Or you can test yourself at specific times or just randomly throughout your waking day. One test is to read something then read it again. In a dream, it will never say the same thing twice. Another test is to see if you can fly. Hop and try to remain in the air. The point of this test is to engender the habit of testing so you eventually do it in the dream state. With the realization that you are in a dream state you will experience lucidity and have a most incredible opportunity to explore a world you literally dream of. Preventing the body waking at this point is the first obstacle to overcome. One method used is to focus on the hands; another way is to imagine yourself spinning. For some reason, imagining the body spinning keeps the body asleep. As you progress you can learn how to manipulate images, your body

sense and whether to have a body or not. Some people are able to enter the lucid dream state at will and even program themselves for what they want to do. This practice is not only useful for spiritual development and insight but is also just a whole lot of fun.

VISIONS AND OTHER PHANTASMAGORIA

In Buddhism there are a large variety of unusual mental phenomena that may accompany the cultivation of mindfulness and concentration. These include hearing voices, having visions, psychic phenomena, past-life recall, and experiences of intense emotional activity, changes in metabolism, synchronistic events, and trance states. Of course, all these can and do occur outside the practice of meditation. There are likely many different triggers that cause the mind to alter its typical functioning. Visionary phenomena are viewed as being of two types in Buddhism, self-generated and non-self-generated. A self-generated vision is created by one's mind. Imaginary, like a dream, it is conditioned by the habitual thought patterns and tendencies of the individual. While potentially valuable for self-analysis, they are not particularly sought nor should they be held on to as they are only creations of ego conditioned consciousness.

In meditation practice, a self-generated experience can often occur when the mind begins to become one-pointed. That is, attention is concentrated and is able to remain fixed to the object of meditation for increasing periods of time. This stage is called access concentration (*upacara samadhi*). At this level concentration is still a bit shaky. The mental hindrances (*nivarana*) have subsided but the state is not yet really one-pointed. The mind is tranquil, perhaps blissful and while this is not a state of absorption it is qualitatively different from sensual delight and happiness. About this stage, owing to the concentration being developed, the mind may begin to produce a kind of light. In the practice of *anapanasati* (mindfulness of the breath), this often appears as a white light (possibly rotating) and this meditational after-image is called a *nimitta*. This light, should it appear, can be made the object of attention. If, at this stage, mindfulness should be lost, the light begins to manifest as a variety of types of visions. These can be related to the person's temperament or their habitual thought and behavior patterns. Mind is simply utilizing its capacity

to play with its imaging system just as it creates a visual dream world by the production of light images during sleep. These visions may be within the mind or superimposed upon the sensory background perceived through the eyes.

Practitioners strongly influenced by faith or religious devotion may experience visions of deities, angels, saints, churches, pagodas, temples or scenes of the faithful life. A person moved by desire may see beautiful scenes of mountains, gardens, lakes, people, objects or heaven realms. Anger as a conditioner may produce terrifying visions of ghosts, demons, fierce beasts, or people suffering torture and the hell realms. Mindfulness must be strengthened and the mind held to the breath (or other object) to prevent the mind being distracted by its play. Tantric practice uses many visualization techniques and the practitioner can become quite skilled at producing visions.

A non-self-generated experience is not created by the mind but is perceived by it. There are subtle differences between these two and first-hand experience is required to appreciate them. Sometimes referred to as the outer vision, this would include what are often called psychic phenomena as well as an extension of the normal perceptive range of the senses. This can arise when the mind enters the absorption stage and is termed *abhinna* (super-knowledge). Buddhist teachings class these into five types. They are psychic feats, clairaudience, telepathy, the recollection of past lives, and clairvoyance. Compare them with the more comprehensive detailing in the section on psychic phenomena and Grof's transpersonal stages in Chapter Three.

These events are not viewed as anything really strange in many cultures. Should you experience any of these, that is fine and if not, that is fine too. While practices have been developed to cultivate these different abilities, they are not seen as being essential to mental training. Whatever comes, just let it go. As the mind "purifies" itself, the phantasmagoria will subside. Enjoy the play of mind's radiance, its luminosity, and the range of its perceptive field.

More important than the imagery of visionary activity is what is referred to as the Void, Emptiness, *sunyata*, the numinous in psychology or "the flash" of the Tibetans. This is the experience of the Godhead in Christian theology. *Mysticism*, by Evelyn Underhill contains some beautiful descriptions of this state and the effect it produces on people fortunate enough to perceive it. There is a vast array of poten-

tial phenomena that we may encounter through the process of meditation, but the *flash*, the moment of emptiness, lasts only a moment but consciousness may be strongly affected in many ways for a week or more with some aspects potentially being altered permanently. Some monks believe that the *flash* is always accompanied by a touch of madness. During this time consciousness can be accompanied by visual and auditory hallucinations, disorganized and/or very clear thinking, illuminations, the surfacing of hitherto unconscious mental contents, synchronistic events, behavioral and physiological changes, and emotional releases.

The flash is the initial experience of the Ground of Being that transforms wrong view to right view and this state is said to be like the multitude of flashes that produce a movie. Each flash of light illuminates a picture and the rapidity of the flashes and changing images creates the illusion of continuous or unbroken action. Through the cultivation of Mind we seek to experience this flash. It is an image of a single “frame” of reality without the background distortion of sensory perception and linguistic ruminations. In my travels in Thailand, I once met a monk living on a secluded beach. He was the only English speaking monk in Thailand I ever met who seemed to know what I was talking about when I mentioned this state. With a knowing smile he said simply, “That experience is always accompanied by a bit of madness.” The destabilized state, or “madness” following the *flash* may last for a week or so but is not unworkable in a suitable setting and can be a wonderful experience in itself leading to many new insights.

Theravada Buddhism cites six “higher powers” (*abhinna*) or supernormal knowledges. Five of these powers derive from the highest perfection of mental concentration (*samadhi*) and one from penetrating insight (*vipassana*). These powers are said to come with the realization of the state of an *arahat*.

Psychic powers (*iddhi-vidha*) are the powers of Determination (*adhitthan’ iddhi*), i.e. power of becoming manifold; power of Transformation (*vikubbana*), i.e. ability to adopt another form; Spiritual Creation (*manomaya*), creating another mentally produced body from this one; Penetrating Knowledge (*nana-vipphara*), i.e. the power of inherent insight to remain unhurt in danger; and Penetrating Concentration (*samadhivipphara*). These five derive from concentra-

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tion. Noble Power (*ariya-iddhi*) derived from insight is the ability to control thoughts such that what is found to appear repulsive can be perceived as not repulsive or the reverse in order to maintain at all times imperturbable with equanimity.

“Divine Ear” or clairaudience (*dibba-sota*)

Telepathy (*ceto-pariya-nana*)

“Divine Eye” or clairvoyance (*dibba-cakkhu*)

Remembrance of former lives (*pubbe-nivasanussati*)

Extinction of the Cankers (*asavakkhaya*); “cankers” or “taints” (*asava*) are sense desire (*kamasava*); desiring eternal existence (*bhavasava*); wrong views (*ditthasava*); and ignorance (*aviJjasava*).

CHAPTER VI

Meditation Techniques

Riding the Ox



Many Western studies on meditation have focused on the physiological, metabolic, and psychological effects of practice divorced from the religious context; focusing on effects of short-term practice or assessing meditators of varied development without scrutiny of the long-term processes of meditation and spiritual practice. It has been suggested that for a psychological perspective on spirituality to be valid, it must proceed systematically to amass research and develop concepts for psychology and psychotherapy. The field of spirituality encompasses a great variety of experiences that need to be understood both in terms of phenomenology and their effects on subsequent mental life. The experience of emptiness is central to Buddhist philosophy and psychology. Orenstein (1971, cited by Shapiro, 1994) has commented that a person having the experience of emptiness in a laboratory setting will interpret the experience very differently from that of a person having the same experience in a spiritual context. It is thus important for a proper analysis of the effects such

experiences have upon the mind to assess those effects within the spiritual context. The effects of meditation as a stress-regulation strategy has been the primary aim of most of the studies so far conducted, with fewer studies examining meditation as a self-exploration strategy to enhance psychological health and effect changes in behavior. As more psychologists and psychiatrists come to incorporate Buddhism into therapeutic practice, it becomes important to clearly understand the overall process of Buddhist spiritual practice and the effects it can engender. Religious beliefs are one of the areas least addressed by modern psychology despite the critical role they have in life for many people. Numerous benefits have been positively correlated between spiritual or religious beliefs and physical and mental health including the incidence of substance abuse, marital satisfaction, and in regard to suicide, anxiety, and depression. A study conducted by Emavardhana & Tori (1997) assessed changes in self-concept, ego-defense mechanisms, and religiosity during a seven-day Buddhist *vipassanii* (insight) meditation retreat in Thailand that showed positive gains in all areas of self-representation relative to controls. Meditators in the study displayed significant changes in ego defense mechanisms ($p < 0.0001$) with coping characterized by heightened maturity and greater tolerance of common stressors. Retreatants increased scores in self-esteem, benevolence, feelings of worth, and self-acceptance. Emavardhana & Tori found retreatants less likely to use displacement, regression, and projection to defend the ego and were less affected by external stimuli and sexual impulses than the control group.

There has been noted a similarity between the practice of Buddhist mindfulness (the foundation of *vipassanii* meditation), and free association and self-analysis. The ego, through the practice of insight meditation, takes itself as the object of observation. Over time, the focus of this attention gradually changes from intrapsychic content to focus exclusively on intrapsychic process, the emphasis being placed upon the insubstantiality of thought. Buddhism has a different view of mind than that traditionally held in the West, but there are people who hold views that do accord with the Buddhist perspective of the appearance of a self arising as a result of cognitive processes. It has been suggested that control of cognition emerges from an interaction between preconscious cognitive modules functioning autonomously, asynchronously, and in parallel. No particular module has

responsibility for control; it is passed among modules as momentary conditions determine. The system has the appearance of being controlled by a central agency, but it is the orderly flow of cognition, i.e. conscious experience, which gives this false impression. This is not a new proposition however; about a century ago William James concluded that a multiplicity of thought and agency give rise to the unitary flow of experience. Eastern spiritual traditions largely based on phenomenological models have similar views and have been used to understand conscious experience for millennia.

Many aspects of meditation have already been studied but these results come from a variety of meditation techniques and have not been conducted in spiritual settings or exclusively with unusually committed practitioners such as monks, priests, and nuns. Perez-e-Albeniz & Holmes (2000) reviewed 75 articles in the field of meditation citing numerous studies showing psychological, physiological, and metabolic effects. The authors state that meditation, from the psychophysiological perspective, is an intentional self-regulation of attention and is similar to an interpersonal therapeutic encounter. Psychological effects cited include the integration of subjective experience, increased acceptance and tolerance of affect and increased self-awareness; optimizing the process of memory; increased vigor; greater happiness, positive thinking, increased self-confidence, and better problem-solving skills.

Enhanced compassion and tolerance of self and others, more relaxation, resilience, and an enhanced ability to control feelings were also cited by Perez-De-Albeniz & Holmes. Physiological effects listed included increased cardiac output and slower heart rate; decreased renal and hepatic blood flow, decreased respiratory frequency, increased cerebral flow, apparent cessation of CO generation by muscle; increased skin galvanic resistance, decreased spontaneous electrodermal response, EEG synchrony with increased intensity of slow alpha in central and frontal regions, and an increase in theta waves in frontal areas of the brain along with increased alpha and beta coherence.

Another point of interest with regard to the deliberate inducement of transformational experiences through spiritual practice is a change in the activity of the amygdala-temporal lobe. Heightened or abnormal activation of this area is associated with experiences of hallucinations; fear being the most common reaction due to feature-de-

tecting neurons being activated and coupled with associated limbic emotions. This type of amygdaloidal activity may be crucial in engendering mystical experiences such as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, perceived as a highly profound experience wherein is found a mystery so frightening, it causes one to tremble, yet is so fascinating, it draws one toward it. It can occur as a result of an ongoing close encounter with death and is an emotional mix of terror and euphoria. Such experiences are central to ideas of developed religious experience in many traditions and as such, constitute an important aspect for understanding the dynamics of personality transformation through religious practice.

The structures of the limbic system also appear to generate the feelings of rapture and euphoria, states commonly sought through spiritual practice. Buddhism acknowledges mental states of heaven and hell as delusional states that often accompany progress on the path of mental “purification.” The amygdala can process sensory and emotional stimuli simultaneously with many single amygdaloidal neurons multimodally responsive. Usually much of these data are filtered and suppressed preventing the visualization of sound or the tasting of colours. Forms of deprivation and isolation are used in Buddhist practice in conjunction with meditation and other disciplines. These events can produce stresses resulting in depletion of serotonin and other neurotransmitters that typically inhibit sensory reception within the amygdala. The limbic system stressed in this way, or denied normal modes of input, may become hyperactive so that stimuli that are normally subject to sensory filtering are instead perceived. According to Joseph (2001), limbic sensory acuity will be increased, and he states that what is perceived need not be an hallucination, but may represent a perception of overlapping sensory qualities normally filtered out. Differences in the phenomenological nature of the beginning stages of meditation between Western and Eastern practitioners have been pointed out. Westerners frequently experience a worsening of emotional symptoms with the perception of inner agitation. However, in the context of Buddhist meditation, this is not perceived as a problem, but as part of a larger overall process of development.

40 SUBJECTS OF MEDITATION

These are the traditional meditation practices used in the *Theravadin* tradition and constitute a variety of methods for elevating consciousness to different levels of organization and functioning which conduct the practitioner through the process of enlightenment. Not all of these practices need to be engaged in. Typically, a monk or yogi will do several but few will seek or need to develop all of them. There are of course, many kinds of meditation that have been developed and far more than can be reasonably listed. Many variations exist in each particular practice as well. All of the techniques listed here work with tranquility meditation but only *anapanasati* (mindfulness of breathing) extends to the development of insight as well. These meditations may take a lot of concentrated practice to fully develop. Many people involved in Theravadin meditation currently prefer insight practice as it is the form of meditation said to have been developed and used by the Buddha to gain enlightenment.

10 KASINA BHAVANA – COLOUR AND ELEMENT DISKS

A *kasina* is a material object used for the focus of attention. The colour *kasinas* might be made of cloth and dyed or painted, or composed of groups of appropriately coloured flowers. The meditational colours are yellow, blue, red and white. The elements are earth, water, fire and air. Limited-space and light are the last two objects used in *kasina bhavana*. A bowl of water is used for the water *kasina*. A small circular disk of reddish clay is used for the earth *kasina*. Fire uses a small screen to block out all but the solid orange part of a single flame. The air *kasina* is perceived by sight or touch; the sway of leaves or the feeling of a breeze on the skin. Light is viewed as it enters a space through a window, or as a bright patch on a wall. Limited-Space is seen as a crevice in a wall, a window opening or a small hole in the earth may be formed. Practice with a *kasina* eventually gives rise to a *nimitta*, the sign or light, similar to an afterimage, that is then used in place of the actual *kasina* as the new meditation object. From this level the meditator can progress into the attainment stage (*appana*) of the practice.

10 ASUBHA BHAVANA – THE CORPSE MEDITATIONS

Corpse meditation might seem a bit maudlin but it does have a very practical utility in dealing directly with issues of personal mortality. A human corpse is used as it is necessary to engender a deeper level of identification with the body. This necessary identification will not arise if an animal corpse is being used. While it can still be a meditation on death, it will not bring the mind to the levels of access and attainment sought through this practice. Places where one can view the dead were common in ancient times. Monks would often go to stay at such places to cultivate their detachment and overcome their fear of death. The sutras list nine types of corpses and a skeleton for the practice of reflecting upon death. The types of corpses are: swollen, dismembered, discoloured, cut and dismembered, festering, bleeding, fissured, worm-infested and mangled. Each type of corpse is related to particular kinds of attachment. For example, a swollen corpse was considered suitable for one who lusts after beauty and form. The skeleton, the tenth type of meditation in this category, is probably the most common form of this practice now used.

10 ANNUSATI – THE SIX RECOLLECTIONS AND FOUR PRACTICES OF MINDFULNESS

These are contemplations of the qualities of the subject being meditated upon and can be used as analytical meditation. Analytical meditation is meditation in the Christian sense of thinking about a subject in great depth. The six recollections are the Buddha, the Dharma, the *Sangha*, and the higher beings or *devas*, morality and liberality. The four practices of mindfulness are breathing, death, mindfulness of the body and tranquility.

4 BRAHMA VIHARA – THE DIVINE ABODES OR EXCELLENT QUALITIES

The four *brahma vihara* are qualities of the mind when it has been liberated from negative elements and complexes. They are classified as loving-kindness or benevolence, sympathetic joy, compassion and equanimity. The practice of cultivating these qualities can be used to enter the absorptions of form (*rupa jhana*). For a more detailed description see the section on *attha kusala* and the four *brahma vihara*.

4 ARUPAS – THE FORMLESS ABSORPTIONS

A formless absorption is a state of consciousness divorced from sensory perception where awareness remains but no external perception of reality commands attention. The subject can appear unconscious, catatonic, or seem to be in a trance. These formless absorptions are infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness and the most refined state called the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception.

AHARE PATIKKULA SANNA – LOATHSOMENESS OF FOOD

This means cultivating detachment from food or from needing pleasant food, and where necessary, balancing over-attachment by utilizing its opposite, repulsion.

CATUDHATU-VAVATHANA – ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR PHYSICAL ELEMENTS: AIR, WATER, FIRE, EARTH

Contemplation by analysis and through meditation on the appropriate elemental *kasina*.

CHOICE OF SUBJECT BY BEFITTING CHARACTERISTICS

When the Buddha taught people to practice meditation he would assess their temperament before deciding which technique or object to use. For people with a desirous nature he recommended the ten corpses and mindfulness of the body. Those with a hateful or angry nature were told to use the four colour *kasinas* and to cultivate the *brahma viharas* of benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. A dull or agitated temperament requires mindfulness of breathing, *anapanasati*. A faithful or religious disposition would be told to recollect the Buddha, Dharma and *Sangha* (the monastic order), and the other recollections of higher beings, morality and liberality. The intellectually minded should practice mindfulness of death and tranquility, loathsomeness of food, and the analysis of the physical elements. For people of what is called “mixed nature,” the Buddha suggested the six *kasinas* of earth, water, fire, air, limited-space and light, and the four form-

less absorptions of space, consciousness, nothingness and neither perception nor non-perception.

In addition to characteristics as a means of determining a technique or meditation object there is the manner of deciding by way of concentration. The two states sought in tranquility practice are access concentration (*upacara*) and attainment concentration (*appana*). Of the forty subjects, ten lead only to access concentration. These are the six recollections, mindfulness of death and tranquility, the meditation on the loathsomeness of food, and contemplation of the four elements (air, water, fire and earth). The remaining thirty subjects lead to varying stages of attainment concentration. Eleven subjects induce all the absorptions of form and the states of absorption or attainment. These are the ten *kasinas* and mindfulness of breathing. Eleven subjects induce only the first absorption. These are the corpse meditations and mindfulness of the body. Three of the four *brahma viharas* will take you to the third absorption: compassion, sympathetic joy and loving-kindness. The fourth *brahma vihara* of equanimity will lead to the fourth absorption. The four formless absorptions (*arupa jhanas*) can be gained by their respective formless meditations.

FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS – SATIPATTHANA

“The one and only path, bhikkus leading to the perfection of Beings, to the passing far beyond grief and lamentation, to the dying out of suffering and misery, to the attainment of right method, to the realization of nibbana, is the four-fold setting up of mindfulness.”

— The Buddha, Dighanikaya, Satipatthana Sutta

The Four Foundations are the same divisions as in breathing meditation where mind is turned to the body, then to feelings, mind and mind-objects. What follows is a more detailed look at the specific meditation and contemplation techniques which aid in developing mindfulness within each specific area.

KAYANUPASSANA – CONTEMPLATION OF THE BODY

Mindfulness of the Breath.

Considering the four postures: standing, sitting, lying and walking.

Mindfulness and Clarity of Consciousness.

Impurity of the 32 parts of the body and corpse meditations. Analysis of the four elements.

Cemetery meditations (similar to the corpse practice).

VEDANANUPASSANA – CONTEMPLATION OF FEELING

Agreeable and disagreeable feeling of body and mind. Sensual and super-sensual feeling of body and mind. Indifferent feeling.

CITTANUPASSANA – CONTEMPLATION OF MIND

Clearly perceiving and understanding any state of consciousness or mind, i.e. greedy or not, deluded or not, distracted, undeveloped, concentrated or unconcentrated, liberated or not liberated.

DHAMMANUPASSANA – CONTEMPLATION OF MIND-OBJECTS

Knowing the five hindrances (desire, anger, torpor, distraction and doubt) to be present or not, how they arise, are overcome and how in future they arise no more. Knows the nature of the five khandhas (groups), how they arise and how they are dissolved. Knows the twelve bases of all mental activity (ayatana), the seven factors of enlightenment and the four noble truths.

THE KHANDHAS: THE CORPOREALITY GROUP

Four elements and their qualities: earth/solidity, water/liquid, fire/heat and air/motion. There are twenty-four secondary phenomena: They are the physical sense organs of: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and bodily sensation; the physical sense objects of sight, sound, odor, taste, tactile sensations; femininity and masculinity, physical

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agility, virility, physical elasticity, the physical base of the mind, physical adaptability, bodily expression, physical growth, verbal expression, physical continuity, physical life, decay, the space element, impermanence and nutriment.

THE FEELING GROUP

This is comprised of agreeable or disagreeable feelings of the body, and mentally agreeable, disagreeable, or indifferent feelings.

THE PERCEPTION GROUP

This is the perception of form, sound, odor, taste, mental and bodily impressions.

GROUP OF MENTAL FORMATIONS

This is comprised of fifty mental phenomena, eleven general psychological elements, 25 “lofty” qualities and 14 karmically unwholesome qualities.

CONSCIOUSNESS GROUP

The six types of consciousness related to the sense bases: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. *Ayatana* refers to the sense bases and the objects of the particular sense bases. The seven factors of enlightenment are mindfulness, investigation of the laws governing mental and physical phenomena, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration and equanimity.

TRANQUILITY AND INSIGHT MEDITATION

There are two main divisions or types of meditation practiced in the Theravadin tradition. The differences between the two are briefly outlined below. *Samattha* is the Pali name for the type of meditation that leads to profound states of tranquility and has been termed tranquility meditation. Vipassana refers to a meditation system used to develop intuitive insight into the nature of reality. It has been termed insight meditation.

Insight meditation is said to be necessary for the attainment of wisdom while tranquility meditation cultivates the peaceful states of mind that are necessary to utilize that wisdom. In the development of either type of meditation there will be times when one or the other is purposely or inadvertently practiced. In the beginning stages of practice, it is difficult to practice one to the complete exclusion of the other. The Buddha taught that it was the practice of insight that led to his enlightenment but in his old age, it was his ability to enter the absorptions of tranquility meditation that afforded him his only respite from the physical pain he experienced daily. In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha, speaking to the venerable Ananda states:

“I too, O Ananda, am grown old, and full of years, my journey is drawing to its close, I have reached my sum of days, I am turning eighty years of age; and just as a worn out cart, Ananda, can be kept going only with the help of thongs, so, methinks, the body of the Tathagata can only be kept going by bandaging it up. It is only, Ananda, when the Tathagata, by ceasing to attend to any outward thing, becomes plunged by the cessation of any separate sensation in that concentration of heart which is concerned with no material object—it is only then that the body of the Tathagata is at ease.”

TRANQUILITY MEDITATION

The nature of *samathā* is concentration or *samādhi*. The object on which the mind fixes is termed conventional reality. It uses material objects such as a coloured disk, etc. Its characteristic is no restlessness. Its purpose is to eliminate the five hindrances of ill will, doubt, sloth, and restlessness and lessen sensual desire or craving. The result of this practice is one-pointedness of mind and the effect is a mind that is free of the desire for sense-pleasure. It abides in the contentment of *samādhi*. The benefit is the entry into the absorptions and freedom from craving and aversion. *Samathā* uses one object and two senses such as the eye and mind with a visual object or sensation and the mind when using the breath. This practice uses various means to elevate the mind to different levels of concentration. To reach the level

known as access meditation (*upacara samadhi*), these practices are recommended: the six recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, morality, liberality and *devas*, mindfulness of death, mindfulness of tranquility, the loathsomeness of food and analysis of the four elements. Of the forty traditional meditation subjects only mindfulness of the breathing can also be used for insight meditation. An important feature of tranquility meditation to be aware of is the state known by some as “bliss-out.” The emotional high gained through the meditation can be followed by a depression when it subsides. Attachment to states of tranquility is viewed as a potential danger in this practice.

ACCESS LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS:

Upacara literally means, “approaching near.” Concentration is just beginning to become intense but is still not as refined as it will be once it enters the attainment level. It is divorced from the five mental hindrances of desire, anger, doubt, irritation and torpor. The five constituents of absorption, the qualities that define it, reasoning, investigation, zest, mental happiness, and one-pointedness, do not stand out yet. The state is not yet really one-pointed. Mind is tranquil, blissful and though not yet a state of absorption, it is qualitatively different from ordinary sensual delight and happiness. It is considered identical with absorption when it is associated with the recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, etc. *Upacara* is induced by all 40 different types of *Theravada* meditation.

ATTAINMENT LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS:

Appana is the level that is unshakeable, secure and one-pointed. It is beyond the distracting power of the hindrances. There are five constituents; initiative thought, sustained thought, joy, bliss and one-pointedness. These are clear and prominent. Reaching this level allows the practitioner to be absorbed in this state for hours or days without need to attend to hunger, thirst or waste disposal. Many different types of consciousness can occur within the absorption state prior to gaining mastery of it. A period of about a week is viewed as the upper end of the length of time absorption may last. A person in this state might appear to be catatonic but awareness, though it may at times be sporadic and moving in and out of consciousness, is still operating. People not

familiar with *jhana* or not able to sustain awareness in *jhana* can appear to exit this state to deal with interruptions but there may be only a tenuous connection to normal rational functioning. The state may resume even against the person's will when their mind no longer has any particular stimulus to distract it. Some evidence suggests that Western people have more difficulty with these states than people raised in cultures that accept these states as normal. Being natural states of mind, it should not be surprising that people may spontaneously enter such states without requiring meditation as a trigger.

THE ABSORPTIONS

The eight absorptions or *jhanas* are the special types of consciousness sought in tranquility practice that are developed by creating high levels of concentration with meditation objects suited to the individual and the level of absorption they wish to enter. There are four absorptions of form and four formless absorptions. The formless absorptions occur when the mind is wholly withdrawn into its own self and the sense functions (as normally experienced) cease to operate.

FIRST ABSORPTION

To reach the first and second absorptions the ten corpse meditations and mindfulness of the breath and body can be used. These create a separation from the sense desires and the student must practice averting, entering, establishing, rising and reflecting. Hindrances are the near enemy to this absorption. They stir up initial and sustained application of thought and cause negligence of body and disturbance of mind. Concentration thus becomes coarse and incapable of producing higher knowledge. This absorption is characterized by bliss or joyous rapture.

SECOND ABSORPTION

Mind separates from the first absorption taking a *kasina* sign as object. Mind is dissociated from the initial and sustained application of thought and at ease in happiness born of concentration. Internal tranquility is the predominant state of mind. Faith is strengthened and the faculty of grief is removed. Being accompanied by contentment, this

jhana is coarse. There is attachment to happiness so higher meditation cannot proceed.

THIRD ABSORPTION

To reach the third absorption the three *brahma vihara* of compassion, benevolence and sympathetic joy can be used. The faculty of bliss is removed. There is an absence of the desire for joy. Mind abides in equanimity. Mindful and completely conscious, there is the bliss of equanimity. Coarse meditation factors are stilled. Concentration becomes fine and then bliss is removed.

FOURTH ABSORPTION

The fourth absorption can be gained through the colour and element *kasinas*, mindfulness of breathing and the fourth *brahma vihara* of equanimity. It leaves behind or abandons pleasure, pain, joy and grief; it is perfect equanimity.

THE FORMLESS ABSORPTIONS

These are the formless absorptions (*arupa jhana*) and while people do try to describe them, it really is impossible to convey the beauty, profundity and manner in which they alter consciousness and the view of life and death. Sensory stimuli are form, these formless states are characterized by a trance-like state wherein there is no perception of sight, sound, tactile sensations, smell or taste, hence no form. Cognition occurs but it is not comprised of linguistic based thoughts. A person having been raised in a culture dominated by an idea of God might identify an experience of absorption as an experience of God, Allah, Brahma, Jesus, etc. Absorptions transcend ordinary language and with the resumption of normal consciousness a person must express themselves in accord with their socio-cultural conditioning, linguistic education, personal beliefs and prior experience. These states are sought in meditation but exist as states of consciousness that can occur without engaging in a particular practice and may come about through natural stimuli including prolonged physical and mental stress. After the Buddha had attained the eighth level of absorption

he found that he still experienced negative emotions. This led him to develop insight meditation which was purportedly the method he used to achieve final enlightenment.

The absorption states are viewed as suppressing negative emotions but not eliminating them permanently. Insight practice was created to eradicate the root causes of negative emotionality. Absorption states do lead to insights into reality and consciousness and have the potential to produce lasting transformational effects on beliefs, attitudes, behavior and character that may include a new found faith in God, or a conformation of faith in the religion to which the subject has been exposed to or adopted.

THE SPHERE OF INFINITE SPACE

The *Path of Purification* by Buddhaghosa states that the person who wants to develop the base consisting of the sphere of infinite or boundless space must learn to see danger in physical matter. The physical world is a place of violence and illness, a place of heat, cold, hunger, and thirst. In contrast, the immaterial world of the formless absorption state does not contain any of these. Having attained the fourth level of absorption the practitioner is ready to proceed. The task is to surmount the *kasina* that led to the arising of the fourth *jhana* since it is a counterpart to the fine-material state of absorption. The removal by non-attention of the limited-space *kasina* leaves boundless space in its place. Do not allow aversion to arise with regard to the *kasina*. Simply free your attention from it but do not take it away forcefully.

THE SPHERE OF INFINITE CONSCIOUSNESS

This *jhana* uses infinite space as a base. The consciousness that filled the mind with space as the object, which beheld the absorption attained, becomes the new object of the practice. It is a further refining of consciousness.

THE SPHERE OF NOTHINGNESS

Consciousness is viewed as not being as peaceful as nothingness. It views itself as being void, empty, as *sunyata*. Nothingness is defined

as the state of non-owning. It is not a loss of consciousness but rather a particular type of consciousness.

THE SPHERE OF NEITHER PERCEPTION NOR NON-PERCEPTION

Mind is incapable of performing decisive functions but remains in a subtle state. Perception is seen as a cause of suffering and is left behind by viewing the base of neither perception nor non-perception as being peaceful. While commentaries always run the absorptions in sequence, personal experience and reports by other practitioners attest to the fact that the absorptions may occur in any order. A Western monk I met in Thailand explained how he had gone directly into the *fourth jhana* when he commenced an in-depth meditation practice. Formless absorption states can occur even if the practitioner is not practicing to attain them. The practice on mindfulness of breathing while doing insight meditation has also been known to occasion formless states.

INSIGHT MEDITATION

The nature of insight meditation is intuitive insight which is wisdom, the balance of knowledge and compassion derived by the penetration of impermanence, dissatisfaction, and emptiness. The object is ultimate reality and it uses the four foundations of mindfulness; body, feeling, mind and mind-objects to cultivate insight. Its characteristic is wisdom that illuminates the true nature of Self and reality. The purpose is to eliminate ignorance. The result is right-view regarding reality. The effect is *samadhi* that has mindfulness as its object. The benefit is the extinction of the mental qualities that are the cause of suffering. There are six senses involved and no particular object. Vipassana sees the impermanent, dissatisfactory and insubstantial nature of all mental and physical phenomena. It gains *nibbana*, or enlightenment, through penetrating one of these three characteristics of existence.

INCORRECT OBJECTS FOR INSIGHT

Mindfulness on material objects including colours, shapes and parts of the body are not used for insight development. Contemplation on the thirty-two parts of the body is a meditation that does promote mindfulness of the body, detachment, and can decrease sexual tendencies but is not used for formal insight training. Colours, shapes, and other material forms are concentration objects for the development of tranquility and meditative absorption. The repetition of mantras, concentrating on the meaning of words such as lifting, pushing, rising, falling, etc., counting the breaths, and physical images or mental visualizations are not used. Prolonged focus on the words “rise,” “fall,” “in,” “out,” or “lifting,” “pushing” and “dropping” are techniques for beginners to aid the development of mindfulness and should be discontinued when the mind becomes more focused or used sparingly to refocus concentration on the object when the mind wanders.

Trying to co-ordinate the walking with the breath during walking meditation will not result in one pointedness of mind since the mind will not view the two things simultaneously but will flick quickly between them. Refine the mind’s attention over time. Watching or thinking about the object of mindfulness without noting the rising and falling aspect in the present moment is also incorrect. Noting the rise and fall of phenomena after their completion or trying to catch events in the mind are incorrect practices. The mind functions at a speed that is too fast to catch and mindfulness is not then directed to the object in the present moment but to a forthcoming event and noting after the completion of rising and falling is viewing a past event.

ATTAINMENTS OF THE NOBLE ONES

While trying to develop the practice of meditation it can be helpful to understand something about the long-range goal of practice as well as the things that may hamper our development. There are ten qualities or energies that the practice of Buddhist mind training is designed to eliminate. Corresponding to the elimination of particular qualities are the levels of “sainthood” recognized in the Theravadin tradition. These are the “Noble Ones” or *ariya* who are the subjects of many of

the Buddha's discourses. The fetters to enlightenment are a false view of Self (beliefs grounded in fictional concepts), skeptical doubt about the process or method of enlightenment, and a belief in the efficacy of rites and rituals for achieving enlightenment. A person who has lost these three qualities is called a *sotapanna* or stream-winner. It is said of this person that the most distressing states of existence are closed to them. That means they cannot be "reborn" in the lowest hells. Buddhist folklore states they will become enlightened in no more than seven lifetimes and that no matter what they do, even if it looks like it takes them away from spiritual practice, it will be a cause for their enlightenment. At this stage, there seems to be some kind of fundamental shift in the mind's energy such that it begins to clarify itself even without conscious effort.

Desire for pleasant sensory experience and anger are the fourth and fifth fetters. A substantial lessening of these energetic tendencies marks the second level of development and this person is termed *sakadagami*, or the once-returner, because in popular folklore they are said to have at most, one more life before enlightenment. In this state, even if a person feels angry, the anger will be short lived and owing to the natural compassion that accompanies this kind of mental development there is no need or compulsion to act upon it. The extinction of desire and anger marks the third level of the Noble Ones, the *anagami*, or non-returner. To better understand this point, it should be remembered or understood that Buddhism and the ideas that surround it arise out of a culture dominated by the idea of reincarnation and the endless cycle of suffering that it perpetuates and aims at not having to be reborn. The remaining five energetic qualities that are lost are desire for fine material or immaterial existence, pride, restlessness, fear and ignorance. These mark the last level, the *arahat*.

The extinction of these ten is *nibbana*, some say enlightenment although according to the Mahayana tradition, less than full buddhahood. This aspect of Buddhist teaching shows very clearly that the nature of the techniques used is to counter negative energies of mind and not the acceptance of a particular religious or philosophical view. Buddhist philosophy and psychology are based on the experience of meditative states as well as ordinary consciousness. Each level of practice is divided into the realization and fruition stages.

CHAPTER VII

ANAPANASATI BHAVANA

Forgetting the Ox



CULTIVATION OF MINDFULNESS USING THE IN-BREATH AND OUT-BREATH

This method of meditation was used by the Buddha to achieve his enlightenment. Of the forty traditional meditation subjects used in Theravadin Buddhist practice, it is the only one that can be used to cultivate both tranquility and insight. Tranquility (*samatha*) practices lead to refined states of serenity known as *jhana* or absorption that occurs when the negative energies of the mind subside. This was the practice the Buddha recommended for “happy living in the world.” Insight or *vipassana* practice develops understanding about the nature of the mind and the relationships that exist between its various functions as well as the nature of our interaction with the physical world and its characteristics. A Tibetan saying goes, “Insight meditation is for attaining wisdom and tranquility meditation is for having the peace of mind to use it.” Insight meditation is viewed as the special contribution of the Buddha to the world’s collection of spiritual practices.

Anapanasati bhavana is suitable for most people and is especially recommended for imaginative types or those who are particularly disturbed by the emotions related to sensory perception. Although one of the simplest types of meditation, it comprises a complete path to enlightenment and the extinction of the causative mental factors which perpetuate self-created suffering. In the *Patisambhida-magga sutta* we read, "To him who practices *anapanasati samadhi*, which consists of sixteen bases or divisions, there arise two hundred kinds of wisdom and more." Meditation is an act of directed attention. In the practice of *breathing* attention is directed to the sensation of breathing. This is the first step of practice. The purpose is to develop mindfulness. Mindfulness or *sati*, is the quality of attention we need in order to develop a high degree of concentration. Concentration in turn leads to bliss as a result of the subsidence of negative influences of mind.

The practice of *mindfulness of breathing* is divided into four sections with four stages in each section making a total of sixteen stages. For the purpose of cultivating tranquility states only the first four stages need to be developed. Generally, we begin by first using the breath in the state it happens to be in when we begin our meditation session. As we become more concentrated we can begin to lengthen the breath. There is a counting method that can be used for this purpose. This is described in the section on counting. Study the qualities of the breath, its length, texture and influence on the body and mind. Is it light or coarse, natural or forced, deep or shallow? How does the body move or respond to the breath? The breath is like a secret key for dealing with emotions. Emotions all have a characteristic breath and can be regulated to some degree by deliberate manipulation of the breath. This knowledge is of great value for dealing with difficult emotional states. Breath can also induce altered states and this knowledge can be useful for a variety of healing applications.

SIXTEEN STAGES OF ANAPANASATI

KAYANUPASSANA—MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND BREATH BODIES

Practice begins with mindfulness of the body. For the attainment of the tranquility absorptions this stage remains the principle practice. After attainment of the fourth absorption, development of insight should begin. The aim of this stage is to know the different breaths, their type and effect on the body and mind. Begin using the natural breath. This is the breath in whatever condition it happens to be in when we begin our session. The body, breath and mind are all referred to as bodies (*kaya*).

BREATHING IN AND OUT – THE LONG BREATH

Use the counting method to lengthen the breath. Study the qualities of the long breath. What type of calm and happiness does it bring? Is it pleasant, strained or natural? Find its qualities, properties, influence and flavor. Investigate how it affects the body, mind and feelings. What parts of the body move in conjunction with the breath?

BREATHING IN AND OUT – THE SHORT BREATH

This is the same as the long breath practice. The short breath leads to agitation where the long breath will calm the body and mind. See this with your own experience.

THOROUGHLY EXPERIENCING ALL BODIES

Understand more clearly the three bodies: the physical body, breath and mind, and the manner in which they interact. Each *kaya* is a conditioner for the other two. They are constantly interacting with one another. A sudden sharp pain in the leg will condition the operation of the mind creating thoughts and emotions, and the breath, possibly initiating a quick gasp of air and a different quality to breathing. The *kayas* are the cause that is the conditioner, the result of the action of conditioning, and the process or activity of conditioning. Contemplate the physical body as the thing conditioned by

the breath, the breath as conditioner and the activity of conditioning which always exists between them.

CALMING THE BODY-CONDITIONER (BREATH)

There are five methods for calming the breath. Following the breath from the nose or mouth to the chest and then to the abdomen is sometimes called three-point practice. Guarding the breath at just the tip of the nose or feeling the rise and fall of the abdomen means fixing attention to one specific spot and holding it there. This is like a guard checking people as they walk through a gate. See them at the gate but do not follow them. Feel the breath at the tip of the nose and forget where it comes from or where it goes. Using an imaginary image, a *nimitta*, at the guarding point (nose or abdomen) and manipulating these images to learn to control them are two more methods. Selecting one of the images and contemplating it until you reach one-pointedness of mind is the fifth technique.

VEDANANUPASSANA—THE FEELING TONE

THOROUGHLY EXPERIENCING JOY (EXCITED RAPTURE OR HAPPINESS)

When the body-conditioner (the breath) is calmed, joy and contentment arise. If the body-conditioner is calmed to absorption, joy and contentment will be full and complete. Joy arises as a result of attaining a particular type of concentration in previous stages of practice. This type of concentration is known as *samadhi*. Observe that joy is not peaceful and has different levels of feeling, contentment, satisfaction and rapture. There is an excitement or disturbance to the feeling of joy. Study the flavor of joy. How does it make you feel? Is it coarse, heavy or fine? Know it completely. Most important is to know the power of joy upon the mind. Joy causes the mind to tremble.

THOROUGHLY EXPERIENCING CONTENTMENT (HAPPINESS)

Focus on contentment as a result arising out of joy. When joy loses the power to influence the mind it calms down and becomes contentment. Contentment does not stimulate or excite the mind or body; it calms and soothes. Note the effects on the breath, body and mind. With joy the breath is coarse, the body agitated and the mind is excited. With contentment the breath is fine and the body and mind are calm. Joy may interfere with contentment and is initially more powerful.

THOROUGHLY EXPERIENCING THE MIND-CONDITIONER (BREATH)

Understand that feelings condition the mind. If joy is strong one may feel the need to dance or shout. Learn the differences between joy and contentment. Subtle thought is impossible with joy. It is important to be able to control joy so contentment can arise. The two are dependent on each other. Joy opposes insight, contentment gives rise to it. They go together even though they oppose each other.

CALMING THE MIND-CONDITIONER

There are two ways to calm feeling. These are through concentration and wisdom or clear comprehension. By concentration is meant the third or fourth absorption.

CITTANUPASSANA—MIND

At this stage the practitioner clearly perceives and understands any state of mind that arises. Knowing it to be greedy or not, deluded or not, angry, distracted, developed or not, concentrated or not, and liberated or not. The four tasks to complete are:

THOROUGHLY EXPERIENCING MIND

Experience the mind in all its variety with complete clarity.

GLADDENING MIND

Practice making the mind happy and cheerful through concentration and insight. Through concentration, the two *jhanas* where happiness is present are cultivated. Insight knows the gladness of *jhana* to be impermanent and makes the happiness found in the absorption the object of meditation.

CONCENTRATING MIND

This means putting the mind on its object (of concentration) by means of the *first jhana*, etc. Having emerged from the *jhana*, comprehend with insight the consciousness associated with the *jhana* as being impermanent, empty, and non-satisfactory.

LIBERATING MIND

This means liberating the mind from the hindrances with the first *jhana*, from applied and sustained thought with the second, from happiness with the third, and from pleasure and pain with the fourth *jhana*.

DHAMMANUPASSANA – MIND-OBJECTS

Here the practitioner knows if any of the five hindrances are present and how they arise, are overcome, and how they can be prevented from arising in the future. This practice leads to insight knowledge.

CONTEMPLATING IMPERMANENCE

This is contemplation of materiality and the impermanence (rise, fall, and change) of the five aggregates.

CONTEMPLATING FADING AWAY

There are two kinds of fading away: fading away as destruction and absolute fading away. Fading away as destruction is the momentary dissolution of formations whereas absolute fading away is nibbana.

CONTEMPLATING CESSATION

Contemplate the ending of things as in the contemplation of fading away.

CONTEMPLATING TOSSING BACK

There are two kinds of tossing back or relinquishment: giving up and entering into. Through the substitution of opposite qualities, insight gives up the defilements (and the karma they produce); by seeing the “wretchedness” of what is formed, mind enters into nibbana by being inclined towards it.

THE NATURAL BREATH

There are types of meditation which involve the manipulation of the breath in various ways. These may be to affect the internal organs, to observe the breath in a particular condition or to develop a certain type of energy such as the Chinese concept of chi or Indian *prana*. While all these types of practice may be beneficial, they need not be used in meditation on the breath for the purpose of developing insight into the fundamental characteristics of being: impermanence, dissatisfaction and the empty nature of self and other phenomena. Rather than engage in manipulation of the breath to achieve certain ends, the breath is viewed in a non-judgmental way, as it is, in whatever condition that is present.

Mindfulness of the breath can be used for both tranquility meditation and insight meditation. The difference is in the degree and manner of concentration. To enter into the absorptions, it is necessary to hold the mind to a single object to the exclusion of all else, becoming absorbed in the fixed awareness of the object (in this case the breath). This may take a great deal of practice. For the development of insight, a lighter, more fluid type of concentration is used. It not only perceives the breath but also takes note of other physical and mental events as they occur in the moment. Insight practice is a moment to moment awareness of the dynamic rise and fall of mental-physical phenomena leading to intuitive insight into the nature of impermanence, dissatisfaction, and the empty nature of self and phenomena.

Use the breath in its natural condition; in whatever state it happens to be in when beginning meditation. There is no need to control it in any way. Examine closely the way the body feels in conjunction with the breath. If your practice includes *pranayama* (yogic breathing) or breathing methods for chi kung (tai chi, kung-fu, etc.), do them separately from this practice unless they have become habitual and need not distract the mind from its object (the breath itself) or interfere as desire to attain a particular ability.

Follow the breath as it strikes the nostrils or upper lip, then as it enters the chest and moves down to the abdomen. Follow the breath completely feeling it strike the upper lip, feel the chest begin to tighten and then feel the lower abdomen as it expands. There will be a short pause at this point that may or may not be noticed but it will become clear as practice progresses. The process is then reversed so the abdomen is felt to fall, the chest loosens up and there is the pressure of the breath against the upper lip. This is called three-point practice and is used principally by beginners. When a suitable level of concentration has been developed single-point practice may be started.

For single-point practice focus only on the feeling of the breath on the nostrils or upper lip or just on the rise and fall of the abdomen. Follow the entire breath as it enters and passes this point then as it is exhaled. Also note the pause before and after each breath. The eyes may be open or closed as deemed appropriate. Do not force the eyes to remain open if a feeling of strain develops. If the eyes are kept open they should be fixed on a point in space a few feet in front of them on a downward angle and the eyes should be allowed to go out of focus. This is to prevent the mind being distracted by visual stimuli. Sitting in front of a wall is sometimes helpful. The eyelids can be half closed to shield out excess light and to prevent eye fatigue. Keeping the vision slightly downward will also aid in limiting eye fatigue. Some teachers consider practice with the eyes open to be superior to keeping them closed as it develops a greater degree of concentration. It will also help prevent drowsiness.

RISE AND FALL OF THE ABDOMEN

An alternative to feeling the breath at the nostril-chest-abdomen is to focus on the abdomen with the rising and falling motion as the breath is drawn in and then expelled. Note also the pause between inhaling and exhaling. Some teachers prefer this method because it is easier for some individuals to follow. In meditation on the breath, the breath can become so fine that it is lost which can create problems for the practitioner. Other teachers suggest that the abdomen is too large an area to provide for a high degree of one-pointedness. As with most other practices, the individual is advised to experiment and find what seems suitable to their nature.

MINDFULNESS OF THE BODY

Awareness is focused on the sensations of the body, each in turn as they arise, dominate attention and then pass away as a new sensation arises. Watch and observe the nature of the body, the way the mind is conditioned by feelings in the body. Note the way the feelings in the mind condition the body and the manner in which the breath conditions and is conditioned by the feelings of both the body and mind. Actions are also conditioned by these feelings in the body. Examples are scratching, discomfort resulting in bodily movement, hunger, and sexual and excretory functions. Practice in the four postures: sitting, standing, lying, and walking. This practice may be used in conjunction with the breath or abdomen as object.

If used with the breath or abdomen as object, attention is periodically directed to the body itself. This practice is often refined to scanning and means the act of sweeping awareness through the different points of the body. Start with the head and work systematically down through the body. Attention is directed to points of the body such as the ankle, where it is in contact with the floor or cushion, points where the weight of the body exerts pressure such as the knees, thighs, hips, lower back, shoulders, neck and hands, etc.

An alternative to this is to focus only on points that arise in consciousness of their own accord. In this case, move attention about the body as the feelings rise and pass away. Resist the temptation to adjust the body when sensations of pain or discomfort arise. If move-

ment is necessary, be fully aware of why it is necessary and fully conscious of the act of adjusting the body as it is moved. Sensations need not be judged as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral in the beginning. Simply note them. After achieving some degree of proficiency at this, one can note whether the sensations are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

Utilizing pain and other discomforts as aids to the meditative perception of conscious experience has many benefits both for the development of penetrative insight, for tranquil meditative absorption, and for dealing with the physical suffering inherent in this human condition. Viewing directly how the sensory experience we term pain manifests can be a remarkable and, for those with chronic pain, a liberating event. It is the mind's aversion to pain that makes it seem as though pain were unbearable and keeps us ignorant of the mind's ability to detach itself from the thoughts relating to pain. It will also be a continuous hindrance to the development of practice as the mind will be unable to sustain prolonged periods of training. Use this opportunity to see the true nature of the body-sense perception. When pain becomes a distraction by overcoming the ability of the mind to focus on its usual object of meditation the mind should be directed to the area experiencing the pain. See this sensation without adding value judgments. Just note what is there, do not add anything. It is neither good nor bad. It simply is. Remember that this is an exercise in awareness. Pain for its own sake is not the point. Do not injure the body in the attempt to be detached. View dispassionately the experience until it seems prudent to change position or otherwise decrease the discomfort.

BUDDHO AS OBJECT

Use of the mantra "buddho" is common in the Buddhist temples of eastern Thailand. It can be used in conjunction with walking meditation as well as meditation on the breath. While sitting, instead of following closely the breath, mentally verbalize "bud" on the in-breath and "dho" on the out-breath. If you wish to use this mantra during walking meditation, use buddho instead of following the rise and fall of the feet. As one foot is pushed forward, "bud" is mentally verbalized and with the second foot, "dho." In both sitting and walk-

ing practice, concentration should be on the mantra itself. In time, it may become synchronized with the breathing or walking without deliberate intent. This practice may be used to settle the mind and then discontinued or it may be the sole object of concentration for the duration of practice.

When beginning meditation practice this mental recitation of *buddho* will help cut through the mental dialogue that is typically present within the mind. If suitable to the individual, discontinue the mantra and focus on the breath exclusively when concentration can be held on the breath alone for several seconds. At this point there should be a level of calm reached through one's practice and the mantra will be naturally timed to the breath. It may now be used when first beginning the daily meditation or only on occasions when the mind is especially active. The term *buddho* means, "that which is aware." It does not refer to a mind, self, consciousness or any other conceptual idea, but to that which is found to abide beyond rational thoughts, emotions, sensations and all mind habitually regards as itself. It is that which is found when thought has given way to mental quietude. *Buddho* can also be used for contemplation when not being used as a meditation object.

COUNTING THE BREATHS

Attention should be fixed at the tip of the nose with awareness of inhalation and exhalation. There are two types of counting, slow and quick. These methods are used when beginning the practice of meditation to develop a level of concentration suitable for following the breath without excessive distraction. Do not rush through the steps. Days or weeks may be spent on each step before proceeding to the next one.

COUNTING TO BE ATTENTIVE

STEP 1:

Inhale, count 1 – Exhale, count 1

Inhale, count 2 – Exhale, count 2

Inhale, count 3 – Exhale, count 3

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Inhale, count 4 – Exhale, count 4

Inhale, count 5 – Exhale, count 5

After a count of five has been reached the process should be reversed.

Inhale, count 5 – Exhale, count 5

Inhale, count 4 – Exhale, count 4, etc

STEP 2:

Inhale and exhale up to a count of six then reverse from six to one

STEP 3:

Count to seven then reverse.

STEP 4:

Count to eight then reverse

STEP 5:

Count to nine then reverse

STEP 6:

Count to ten then reverse

When able to complete a step without making a mistake or being distracted, proceed to the next step. When all steps have been completed, repeat the process from the beginning. When the entire series can be done without fault a level of concentration has been developed that will allow the practitioner to proceed to quick counting or directly to mindfulness of the in-breath and out-breath.

COUNTING TO MANIPULATE DURATION

STEP 1:

Inhale, count 1,2,3,4,5

Exhale, count 1,2,3,4,5

STEP 2:

Inhale, count 1,2,3,4,5,6

Exhale, count 1,2,3,4,5,6

STEP 3:

Inhale, count 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

Exhale, count 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

STEPS 4–6:

Count to 8, then up to 9 and finally to 10.

Repeat each step several times before beginning the next one. Do not count lower than five or higher than ten. Unlike the mantra *bud-dho*, this technique provides a method that clearly shows when the mind has drifted away from its object as the count will be lost or one cannot recall if they are counting up or down. The counts are circular: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 1, 2, 3, etc. This technique can be used in a single session or done over time, slowly increasing the count to be longer.

THE FOUR POSTURES OF MEDITATION

The four main postures used in meditation practice are sitting, walking, standing, and lying. These four postures have numerous variations and ultimately comprise all the normal positions the body can maintain. In order to promote mindfulness of the body, attention can be directed to the posture itself. This fosters an awareness that can be practiced anywhere under any conditions. It will be noted that there are other objects used in conjunction with the various postures. This need not confuse the practitioner. Sometimes mindfulness is directed to the body posture itself and at other times to some other type of meditation object.

Different body types and the responses they have to the different postures used in meditation will vary. Through practice and observation find those postures which develop a high degree of concentration and tranquility. Walking or lying meditation may prove more effective for practitioners with physical problems or disabilities that prevent or limit the duration and frequency of sitting or walking practice. Different postures can also be used successively to prolong a session of practice. In addition to the postures mentioned, other meditation traditions have developed a number of variations in the manner of sitting, walking, standing or lying. Research other traditions if necessary. Working with the different postures will aid in developing mindfulness that can be applied in any position and will foster greater awareness of the body.

SITTING MEDITATION

There are many sitting postures used in meditation ranging from using whatever position the body happens to be in to very precise postures designed to channel the breath and kundalini energies in a specific way. A full lotus position has both feet resting on the thighs. Most Westerners will not be able to enter this position. A half lotus has one foot on the floor and the other on the opposite thigh. It is easier than a full lotus but not essential for good practice. Other positions have the legs crossed at the ankles or both legs bent, ankle resting flat on the floor with one foot in front of the other. Those unable to use any of these methods may wish to use a chair. When using a chair try to avoid relying on the backrest for support. When sitting on the floor it may be desirable to use a cushion for support. Experiment with cushions, meditation stools, benches, chairs, etc. These should prevent injury arising from prolonged sessions of practice but need not be overly comfortable or uncomfortable. Too comfortable a seat can cause drowsiness and an uncomfortable arrangement will be a constant distraction. Some Tibetans use a cloth that wraps around the lower back and knees to add support.

The cross-legged position is a stable posture that is comfortable to maintain for prolonged periods (with practice) and provides a good opportunity to use the posture itself as a means of checking mindfulness. The full lotus position is said to be useful in a meditative trance because the posture itself will hold up the meditator. Periodically, attention can be directed to the back and chest. Is the back straight? Is the chest drooping? If so, correct the posture by using the chest muscles to keep the back straight and the chest up. As well as aiding mindfulness, this will help clear the chest for unobstructed breathing and can lead to increased awareness of posture. Bad posture can be a factor in back pain and other health problems.

The hands can be folded in the lap, one on top of the other with the thumbs touching or in some form of mudra. A mudra is a position in which the hands are held that has a symbolic meaning attached to it. The hands can also be rested on the knees palms up or down. It really makes little difference except to the comfort of the individual. What is happening in the mind, on what and how the mind is focused is of far greater importance than what position the body is in. Many practition-

ers create problems for themselves by attaching too much importance to the position of the body. Some teachers suggest the tongue should be placed at the top of the mouth when meditating. This will help clear the nasal passages if they are obstructed, it promotes breathing through the nose, and is said to aid in the proper circulation of the body's energy. Many practitioners include cleanliness as a requisite to good meditation. Some teachers also recommend not wearing jewelry.

Loose comfortable clothing will allow unrestricted circulation preventing numbness and distraction arising from uncomfortable sense impressions caused by clothing pinching the skin, overheating the body, or chaffing during walking meditation. Sitting in a cross-legged position is also facilitated. The body will have a great many sensations that are related to its own nature that must be investigated. Clothing, not being part of the body, should be unobtrusive to allow the sense of the body to be fully perceived. Clothing may also have psychological associations that enhance or inhibit training. A monk wears robes for several reasons not the least of which is his own perception of himself. Find attire that is psychologically compatible with the qualities you wish to develop.

Stretching the legs before beginning sitting practice can help loosen the leg muscles making it easier to enter and maintain a comfortable sitting posture. This is also a feature of the physical training that is helpful in caring for the body. It will probably be found that any posture maintained for long periods of time will create some particular form of physical discomfort. These types of aches can be treated through proper physical activity and manipulation. Some pains however, are mental in origin, manifesting psychological conflicts in physical symptoms which can be apparent only to one's own perception or they may be found in actual physical form. Both arise by virtue of the mind and it follows that their cure lies ultimately with the elimination of the psychological factors that caused them.

WALKING MEDITATION

The purpose of walking meditation is not to analyze the process of walking. It is done for the cultivation of mindfulness and can be an important meditation on the body. At times, walking can be viewed analytically but this is not necessary for everyone. It is not necessary

to divide each step into a complicated series of movements in accordance with how the body actually moves. Different teachers divide each step into one, three or more individual phases. Single point contact is focusing on the sensation that arises when the foot makes contact with the floor. Usually people will start with three-point practice. This means focusing on the lifting, pushing forward, and dropping of each step. Some advocate very slow walking and some a normal pace and never artificially slow.

For the best results, each practitioner should experiment with the pace to find what is suitable for them to center the mind. This is in accord with the Buddha's teaching that each aspect of meditation should be investigated to determine the optimum conditions for the individual's practice. This facet of practice is important to understand because many teachers are very rigid in their instructions and do not make allowances for the needs of the individual. To some degree this is necessary in order to teach a particular method, to encourage discipline, and because the beginning student cannot readily make an accurate self-assessment before gaining more experience. When learning a practice from a teacher, try to follow all directions and give each technique a chance to work. When the retreat or course is finished other techniques can be tried if necessary. It should be noted that there are different methods of walking meditation. Some involve walking in a circle, often with many other practitioners. Some might be akin to going for a walk, there being no established walking path. The practice here described is that commonly found in the Theravadin tradition and is practiced extensively in Southeast Asia. This practice is done by pacing back and forth on an established path. The path can be any open space twenty to forty feet in length and two or three feet wide. The path should be free of obstacles that might distract the mind.

There are two methods of fixing the mind to the sensation of walking listed here. The first is using three phases and the second uses one. Using three phases for each step seems to be the most common method. This method observes the lifting, pushing forward, and stepping down or dropping of each foot. It is simple to follow and allows for a wide variety of walking speeds. In my own practice, I have found three different speeds that are useful for a variety of mental conditions. These are slow, very slow, and fast. Slow walking I use as

my normal pace. It is used when the mind is neither particularly calm nor agitated. The very slow pace is used when the mind is especially calm, clear and fully awake. This pace often comes about as a result of first using the normal pace. It can arise naturally when awareness becomes extremely mindful, calm and focused. The fast pace is used only when being overcome by fatigue or when restlessness or agitation prevents proper attention with the normal pace. Experiment with a variety of speeds to find which are most suitable for focusing the mind when it is especially calm, in its normal state, or restless.

Begin the meditation by standing upright, feet together with the hands clasped together in front or behind. This is to prevent the swinging of the arms from distracting the mind. It may be noted that changing the position of the arms from front to back can help cool or heat the body. Explore both positions to find out how each affects the body and mind. Observe the feeling of the body standing. Move the focus of attention up the body from the feet to the top of the head. Walking meditation often begins as a standing meditation. Then:

- When ready to begin walking, notice the intention to walk.
- With the mind fully focused on the sensation of the foot lifting, begin walking slowly.
- Mindfully lift the foot, push it forward and drop it down. Feel lifting... pushing... dropping.
- Lift the other foot and follow it through the three phases continuing in this way slowly to the end of the path.
- Try to notice the intention to stop just before taking the last step. It may take some time before the mind will be focused strongly enough to notice the intention to stop on the last step only.
- Stop. Observe the standing position as before if you like.
- Notice the intention to turn around.
- Turn around slowly and with complete mindfulness of the act as it occurs. Observe the standing position again.
- Notice the intention to begin walking.
- Begin walking.

In the beginning it may be helpful to somewhat exaggerate each part of the step slightly and to reduce the length of the step from what would be normal to about half the usual distance. This is only

to assist in the development of concentrated mindfulness and may be discontinued when felt appropriate. Reviewing the standing position need not take long. It can last from a few moments to several minutes. The pace of walking, as well as the length of the walking path, should be experimented with to determine what is most suitable to the individual. Too long a path will make it difficult for the mind to remain attentive to each phase of each step all the way to the end of the path. Too short a path will prevent strong concentration from being developed because of the frequent stopping and turning. Try to get all the way to the end with complete mindfulness of each part of each step. Firmly resolve to be mindful each time before beginning to walk.

When it is noticed that the mind is distracted one may be able to bring the mind back to its object with the mental verbalization of “walking, walking,” or “lifting,” “pushing,” “dropping,” “standing” or “turning.” As practice develops the practitioner will be able to discontinue the use of words to bring the mind back to its object. Do not think about walking. Feel walking in the moment with mindfulness. Mindfulness is focused on the sensation of walking, standing, turning, and the feeling of the intention to walk, stop, and turn. Keep the eyes focused around six to ten feet ahead. Do not look at the feet or gaze about because the visual impression (sight-consciousness) will interfere with the perception of movement (sensation-consciousness).

Single point walking meditation focuses only on each foot as it makes contact with the surface of the path. There are times when the mind is drowsy or very restless. At these times a very fast pace with the single point method can be used. The fast pace provides the restless mind with a quick succession of objects to focus on. If the mind becomes overwhelmed by drowsiness it will become energized by the brisk pace of walking and the effort of following the rapidly changing objects (left foot, right foot). Once the mind has become settled, or aroused in the case of drowsiness, the normal pace of walking may be resumed. When walking very fast it is not necessary to fully stop at the end of the path. Note the intention to turn then turn in a single motion standing briefly, then continue walking to the other end. The single point method also lends itself well to ordinary walking. It can be done with any walking pace and allows us to use travel time for

meditation. Intention can be noted when changing directions, crossing a street or going up or down curbs or stairs, etc. One of the reasons for practice is to become more mindful throughout our daily experience. This ability will be greatly enhanced if we utilize our normal activities for practicing mindfulness. The three-point method is usually done at a slower than normal pace, often with a shorter and more exaggerated step and will probably not be suitable for normal walking. There is no need to be conspicuous with the practice and privacy will aid in lessening distractions.

By “intention” is meant the feeling that arises prior to engaging in any consciously motivated activity. Some of our activity is completely unconscious and some reflexive. A reflex is automatic; it is not dependent on conscious volition. What is of concern is a particular sensation that arises just prior to volitionally motivated thought, speech or action. Before scratching, adjusting the body to stop sensations perceived as unpleasant, getting up, beginning to speak, or embarking on a particular train of thought, we can, with practiced mindfulness, take note of the intention that arises before we actually start the action.

It is important to notice this aspect of the mind because it is at this point of intention that we have the opportunity to establish whether the thought, speech or action about to begin is appropriate and beneficial, detrimental, or neutral in its impact on others and ourselves. Through the attainment of intuitive insight, wisdom arises. This wisdom is applied to intention and determines the suitability of any act it is aware of. Intentions may be habitual responses or based on the mental defilements such as attachment, greed, anger, or deluded concepts of self and reality, or upon wholesome elements of mind that will engender beneficial mental states. Intention is the factor in the law of karma that ultimately determines whether the karma is beneficial or not. Karma is a psychological reality. No doctrines of reincarnation, rebirth or deities sitting in judgment need to be postulated in order to understand or explain this teaching of a mental cause giving rise to a mental effect within the field of perception and in the physical world.

LYING MEDITATION

The practice of meditating in a reclining position is a good way to rest the body while still maintaining a vigilance of mind. Unless it is the intention of the meditator to be mindful till overcome by sleep it is not recommended that practice be done in bed or when tired. Use the floor or some other surface that is not painfully uncomfortable, but that is also not too comfortable and which does not, of itself, promote deep relaxation.

Lay down on either side of the body, legs and body straight. One leg is on top of the other leg. If lying on the right side of the body the left arm would rest straight down the left side of the body with the head resting on the right palm. A pillow may be used to protect the neck from strain if needed. The eyes should be left open to help prevent sleep and drowsiness. The focus of attention can be the rise and fall of the abdomen, the breath, a mantra, bodily sensations, the posture, or other meditation objects used for tranquility practice. This is the same meditation as sitting except for the position. To avoid falling asleep, this practice is best done when the mind is fully awake or agitated, not relaxed. It is best not to practice right after eating as this tends to cause drowsiness. Sleeping after eating may deplete more energy than the meal provides leaving the meditator with a feeling of dullness or fatigue. Maintaining the straight body position will also aid in keeping the mind alert. Some prefer to lay on the back but this position may make it more difficult to maintain mindfulness. Some types of meditation involve working with the mind as the body enters and dwells in the sleep or dream stages. Those interested in pursuing these techniques will find some information available in books but may also want to seek out a competent instructor.

STANDING MEDITATION

This practice is often done in conjunction with walking meditation although it may be practiced separately. Do not lock the knees but keep them just slightly bent. That is, just short of the point where they would lock. Perceive the sensation of standing. Mindfulness may be placed on the breath, abdomen, a mantra, bodily sensations, feelings, or other objects. Sweeping awareness up and down the body is another option.

The hands may be clasped together or left hanging. Some practitioners prefer to face a wall that is a few feet away. This prevents visual distraction and can be used with any of the meditation postures.

LABELLING

A technique commonly used in meditation is to label all thoughts, sensations, perceptions, etc. as thought or thinking. This clarifies the activity of mind as it wanders and is brought back to the meditation object. In the practice of Zen, a student will simply say “No!” to everything that arises thus, immediately cutting off all distractions and returning to empty mind. This is a practice useful to gain a better understanding of mind’s habitual activity. Use it sparingly to gently train the mind. When the mind becomes more settled, just focus on the meditation object.

THE FIVE HINDRANCES

The five hindrances are derived from the three poisons of attachment, aversion, or bewilderment. They are Desire or Sensual Delight, Anger, Torpor or Drowsiness, Distraction or Irritation, and Skeptical Doubt. Desire derives from attachment, anger comes from aversion, and the remaining three, torpor, distraction and doubt, come from delusion.

SENSUAL DELIGHT – VISION OF BEAUTY – *KAMACCHANDA*

This hindrance (*nivarana*) is sometimes termed lust but that has a particular connotation in English. This hindrance does not refer to just sexuality. Here we are speaking of attachment as described in the section on the three poisons of attachment (greed/desire), aversion (anger), and bewilderment (delusion or ignorance). This is mind’s tendency to be enchanted by what it finds pleasant in thoughts, images, sounds, tastes, fragrances, and physical sensations. As a hindrance to meditation, this results from allowing the mind to be carried away by what it finds pleasant. The practices for dealing with this impediment are the contemplations of the repulsiveness of food, the body and parts of the body, a corpse, and the contemplation of the three characteristics of conditioned existence. Conditioned exist-

ence is the samsaric mind, the mind conditioned by defilements and wrong views. Knowing the three characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction and emptiness, or the insubstantiality of things and the lack of an abiding, independent self-entity (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*) are the means of attaining the wisdom sought through insight meditation. Enjoying the bounty of life's gifts is difficult when we are compelled beyond reason to seek or acquire that which we do not need and which may even do us harm.

ANGER – ATTACHMENT TO IRRITATION – VYAPADA

Like attachment, aversion prevents the mind from attaining a state of true peacefulness. The simple unpleasantness perceived in association with a thought, person, thing, mood, emotion, or sensation can develop into anger or hatred if it is not checked by clear comprehension. The mind in Buddhist teachings is often compared to a pool of water. A still pool will allow the silt to settle on the bottom. The pool becomes clear and we can see into its depths. Anger is said to be like waves. It not only distorts our view by rippling the surface but also clouds the water by stirring up the silt. Practices to reduce anger include the cultivation of benevolence and compassion (*brahma viharas*), contemplation of suffering and emptiness, dedication of merits, prostrations (bowing and other devotional acts), living alone in the forest and avoiding people and situations which give rise to anger. Some may think the last practice is escapist, but it is one thing to have to find ways to deal with people we cannot avoid and another to perpetuate frustration by maintaining contact with people and situations that needlessly impede our ability to realize fulfilment and contentment.

TORPOR OR DROWSINESS – THINA-MIDDHA

Torpor is the state of lacking energy. Lack of energy and general fatigue can often occur together and can be a serious hindrance to practice. Causes for this include displeasure, laziness, fatigue from over-reaching one's self, "food-drunkenness" from over-eating and a depressed mind. Practice patience, changing postures can help, splashing cold water on the face, taking a cold show-

er, a tea break, looking at the sky on a bright day or taking a walk outside are some other ways to pick up your energy. More physical activity may be required so perhaps engage in some stretching exercises prior to meditation. Also, recollections of the Buddha, *dhamma*, *sangha*, *devas*, and reading about the lives of other practitioners, saints, great teachers, etc. may help cultivate more resolve. Eating before meditation tends to make the mind and body drowsy and is best avoided for the formal practice of sitting. If you do eat prior to practice it is generally better to do walking meditation afterwards.

**DISTRACTION AND IRRITATION – MENTAL RESTLESSNESS –
*UDDHACCAKUKKUCCA***

These two can arise together but often distraction will come by itself. The cause is mental restlessness so the remedy is to cultivate the one-pointedness of mind through tranquility meditation. Learn to hold the mind to the object upon which it is placed, then it cannot wander and thoughts will begin to subside.

SKEPTICAL DOUBT – UNWISE THOUGHT – *VICIKICCHA*

This refers to doubts about the practice and teachings of meditation and mind development. The cause for this is lack of knowledge and/or preconceived ideas and opinions. The remedy is to practice and develop faith and confidence through the experience of meditation. Studying the scriptures and having discussions with knowledgeable practitioners will also be useful. It should be stated here that there is another kind of doubt that is essential for practice because it keeps the mind active in its search for reality. It is important to test Buddhist teachings and to critically apply skeptical doubt rather than surrendering to a blind faith that does not scrutinize reality afresh in each situation and setting.

CONTEMPLATION OF THE HINDRANCES

When desire is present, know it is present. When absent, know it is absent. When desire arises, know how it arises and when desire has risen, know how it is abandoned. These four aspects of knowing if a hindrance is present or absent, how it arises and how it is abandoned are used for the purpose of understanding the nature of the hindrances and for learning how to effectively deal with them.

CHAPTER VIII

AUXILIARY PRACTICES TO MEDITATION

Forgetting the Ox and One's Self



Meditation is often performed without making use of the numerous practices that were created to augment and sustain the practice. Perhaps the most important and universal auxiliary practice is the cultivation of virtue. Any number of the following practices may be used in conjunction with meditation. Some are to create a state of mind conducive to the development of meditative insight and tranquility while others are used to form a basic attitude or character socially desirable or that is suitable for experiencing and assimilating deep states of insight or mystic-type experiences in a safe and beneficial way. The various practices deal with many aspects of being and have manifold effects on consciousness when applied over time.

CONTEMPLATION OF HUMAN BIRTH, IMPERMANENCE, DEATH, KARMA AND SUFFERING

These contemplations are very important for a realistic perspective of our life experience. It is easier to not become caught up in meaningless activity when we are fully aware of the preciousness of this life, its limited duration and the uncertainty of its length. These contemplations give impetus to our practice and search for the meaning of life. The contemplations of suffering and death are not morbid, brooding kinds of negative thinking but the type that looks clearly and directly at the subject without prejudice or preconception. In the Tibetan tradition these contemplations form essential preliminary practices called *ngondro*, which are done before one is taught the tantric meditations. For many people, these kinds of thoughts are what eventually drive them to seek a means of spiritual development. As these aspects of our nature cannot be overcome we can only learn to deal effectively with them when we fully accept them as part of our true nature. One that need not be viewed negatively but which, properly viewed, gives more meaning, more purpose and more need for useful action in the present moment.

TAKING REFUGE IN THE TRIPLE GEM

This refers to a simple ceremony often taken by people when they are going to become Buddhist or by Buddhists about to begin a ceremony or meditation retreat. It is commonly done with a monk or nun but may be done in the company of anyone or alone. The Three Gems are the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. The Buddha is not just the historical person but also the faculty of awareness common to all sentient beings. The Dharma is both the teaching of the Buddha and Truth as a principle of reality that is constant. The Sangha is the monastic order and the people that support it as well as lay practitioners. Ceremonies do not need to have a magical property assigned to them that cannot be explained by simple psychology although in shamanic traditions like Tantra there is widespread belief in magical qualities dependent on the attainments of the lama performing them. All spiritual traditions record the occurrence of miracles. Not surprising since they cannot do more than record the experiences

and views of the people who consciously or unconsciously created them. A ceremony has many potential effects and can help to sustain our commitment to practice. The mind's entrenched proclivities will weigh against the efforts applied to restraining it. Ceremonies can serve as symbolic teachings that form an oral transmission unavailable to non-initiates. This need not be the result of enforced secrecy although it often is. In any field or endeavor one must acquaint oneself with the terms, theories, skills and experience necessary for their successful application.

Taking refuge does not mean that we look to something outside ourselves for support, salvation or redemption. It does not mean that we must start praying to Buddha and his disciples. It is just the opposite of this attitude. It is a conscious decision to be responsible for ourselves. We take full responsibility for ourselves and our actions knowing, or at least believing, that we are the source and origin for our own suffering and joy. That it is within our ability to both positively and negatively affect the state of our mind and that because our actions affect others as well, we have an ethical responsibility to govern our behavior so as not to create hardships for others. The Buddha is the wisdom faculty or "that which is aware," that part of ourselves which is beyond all mere mental phenomena, concepts or systems of belief. The Dharma is Truth in all its mystery and not "Buddhist" truth and the sangha are those individuals of all places, times and peoples who have sought truth and not only those in the Buddhist monastic system. As fellow travelers on the path we can all benefit from the experiences and knowledge of those who have gone before us. The sangha can also be thought of as our commitment to the precepts or the vinaya, the rules of the monastic order or to our practice vows.

DEDICATION OF MERIT

This refers to the dedication of the merits of one's actions. Similar to a prayer, it is a mental or verbal declaration of the intent to give to other beings the positive karma derived from mental cultivation, spiritual practice and good deeds. It is commonly done at the beginning or end of meditation and sometimes both. It may be offered to all beings or to individuals. Dedication of merit can be performed

with any wholesome act. It makes manifest in actions what might otherwise remain only potential in thought. In other words, rather than simply understanding the practice as being beneficial to us we make a conscious declaration to make the practice beneficial to other beings. This brings wholesome intention into our practice that creates positive karma of which we will inevitably benefit.

The developing stage of practice is a time when it is very easy for the mind to become self-engrossed. Some degree of introspective absorption is needed because it is our task to be introspective and attentive. There is the danger that introspection will lead to a state of self-centeredness that is not balanced by compassion or an understanding of the inter-relatedness of all beings and things. Offering merit brings a selfless quality to practice, affirms our inter-relatedness to all beings and things and cultivates sympathy and compassion for others.

There is a special type of energy produced when the dedication of merit is spoken aloud and with conviction. For this reason, it may prove beneficial to find or create a dedication that is meaningful to the practitioner on a personal level. It makes no difference whether merit is actually transferred or not. It is the mental state the practice produces which is important. Listed are a couple of traditional dedications of merit:

May all beings, without limit or end, have a share in the merit just now made, and in whatever other merit I have made. Those who are dear and kind to me, beginning with my mother and father, whom I have seen or never seen, and others, neutral or hostile, beings established in the cosmos, the three realms, the four modes of birth, with five, one or four aggregates, wandering on from realm to realm: If they know of my dedication of merit, may they themselves rejoice. And if they do not know, may the devas inform them. By reason of their rejoicing in my gift of merit, may all beings always live happily, free from animosity. May they attain the Serene State, and their radiant hopes be fulfilled.

Whatever wholesome karma or worthy action done by me with body, speech or mind, leading to a good destination in the heaven of the thirty-three: May all the percipient beings there are, and all the unpercipient, share in the merit I have made. To those who know

well what I have done, I give the fruit of my merit. And as for those who do not know, may the devas inform them. May all the beings in the world that live by means of nutriment all receive delightful food through the power of my merit. May all living beings always live happily, free from animosity. May all share in the fruit of the merit I have made.

This is a chant pervading the world with the Divine Abidings: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

All beings may they be free from animosity, free from ill-treatment, free from trouble, may they care for themselves with ease. All beings, may they be free from suffering. All beings, may they not be parted from the good fortune they have gained. All beings, are owners of their karma, heirs to their karma, born of their karma, related to their karma, supported by their karma. Whatever karma they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.

PROSTRATIONS

The act of bowing is an interesting and useful form of practice. While a bow or series of bows can be directed to a god-image, a buddha or teacher, etc., it does not require their presence. One may bow to the universe, nature, truth, or to oneself, one's inherent nature, or to others. Bowing is a psychological exercise and does not require material objects or conceptual ideas of an ultimately real nature to receive the bow, although they may be used. Prostrations may be done in conjunction with the dedication of merit or offerings or done simply as a practice of mindfulness. A ngondro (preliminary) practice used in the Tibetan tradition involves doing over 100,000 prostrations. This practice can take many months to complete. Bowing can be done for long periods of time and some monks and nuns have made it their main method of practice.

Many people do not like the idea of bowing which may reflect their attitudes of independence and equality or superiority. The practice of bowing deals with the cultivation of humility, faith and mindfulness. We humble ourselves before the awesome powers of life, nature and the mind. In doing so we directly confront the ego and its conceit. We

also gain the potential to make manifest those powers that, though part of our nature, seem separated by our fixation to the ego. Thus we can utilize energy that might appear to come from outside ourselves, from “God,” our higher self or the universe. From the standpoint of practice, it makes no difference whether these powers are derived from ourselves or a source outside ourselves. Prostrations can also help develop a feeling of reverence for life. This is valuable in refining the four Divine Abodes of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. Equanimity means detachment not indifference. As in the practice of making offerings, this method can often seem mechanical but can still occasionally produce profound emotional experiences.

CHANTING OR PRAYERS

Chanting is another form of practice that can be used as a form of contemplation, as a technique for developing mindfulness or as a channel for the emotions. The voice and hearing can have a strong impact upon the emotions. Chanting is often done with a monotone rhythmic voice that can be very relaxing both to those doing it and for those hearing it. Often chants are in a language unfamiliar to the practitioners. In the Theravadin tradition chants are in the Pali language and few monks or nuns actually understand what the words mean although they may understand the gist of the chant. For the purposes of relaxation, mindfulness and channeling the emotions this makes little difference. It may even help since the content or meaning does not then distract from the act of chanting which can be very soothing.

Most Theravadin chants consist of teachings found in the sutras or are praises to the Buddha and his disciples. Using chants as contemplations necessitates either an understanding of the language the chant is in or a translation. If the translation is properly understood the chant can still be done in its original language. One need not understand each word but should know in general what teaching is being conveyed. There are practitioners that use chanting as a form of prayer. In effect, beseeching the Buddha and other “deities” in a way that cannot really be ascribed to the Buddha’s teachings. He never taught people to pray to him and was always conscientious about not being equated with a god or prophet. Some people make chanting the

foundation of their practice but meditation is more common although many Buddhists do not do either. For some, their practice of Buddhism is mostly about the cultivation of virtue. While chanting can have many benefits it is doubtful that it can produce the full range of attainment states that are characteristic of meditation. No chants are here listed as there exist far too many and each person should find chants in whatever language, on whatever subject and with whatever rhythm they feel suitable.

PERSONAL OR CULTURAL RELIGIOUS RITUALS

Rituals, among other possible definitions, are actions that are the physical manifestation of religious principles, teachings or beliefs. Some rituals seek divine intervention in human affairs or to magically empower, protect or cure or to summon or appease ghosts, gods, demons or ancestors. There are also rituals used by people for the sole purpose of controlling others. Rituals such as these need not be performed in mindfulness training. One of the principles of the Buddha's teaching is that enlightenment cannot be found through any ritual nor magically given by another. The Buddha is not a god and cannot answer prayers nor did he teach that any other god would do so. It may be objected that there are countless rituals performed in the numerous traditions of Buddhism. This clearly demonstrates the effectiveness that ritual practices have in conditioning and training the mind but in Buddhist teaching they do not cause enlightenment. Enlightenment is a complex transformation of consciousness that cannot be forced to be simply by performing ritual activities.

In the training of mindfulness, we ourselves are the only power to beseech. Rituals, understood as a means of focusing energy and awareness, can still be used to enhance practice. Any ritual, whether traditional or created by the aspirants themselves which is found to be useful in summoning up energy, faith and devotion or which serves to give expression to the emotions may be utilized. The psychological effect of rituals can be realized through continued practice. It is well to note there can be very strong effects produced by traditional rituals involving many people. Different aspects of the mind's energy are tapped into in group settings but personal and private rituals are also effective.

IMAGE VENERATION

The use of images and statues as objects of worship is a very old and widespread aspect of religious practice. Buddha images as well as other images of various deities are common recipients of veneration and are sometimes misunderstood as idols that are worshiped through ignorance. Some practitioners view images as idols but properly understood they serve as mnemonic devices and a focal point for expressing emotional ideas and aspirations and to create something around which rituals of various kinds can be conducted. Originally, there were no representations of the Buddha in human form. When the Buddha was portrayed in a painting or carving an empty chair or the “wheel of Dharma” symbolized him. This wheel can be seen on the modern flag of India. The crucifix is another common image used to represent an ideal and the story and teachings it is linked to. The pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses contains countless images and leads many people to think Hinduism is polytheistic. I have never met a sadhu, a Hindu holy man, that did not understand that all the different gods are just facets of one god. Their diverse forms are understood as suiting the needs and temperaments of different people.

The use of images in religion has a long history because the practice of veneration acts as a conditioner for many kinds of thought and behavior and can develop into a spontaneous outpouring of personal and collective emotion. Just as prayer can work on a simple psychological level and does not require the existence of a god, veneration towards an image such as a buddha statue can cultivate very strong and beneficial emotional states that are an important part of the quest for wholeness, emotional catharsis and mystical experience without necessitating a presence to receive the veneration. It is the giving of it on the part of the aspirant that is psychologically relevant to their development. Veneration can be expressed in many ways. Sitting quietly and allowing the feelings of love, respect, devotion and trust to rise or making offerings, chants, hymns, prayer, prostrations or meditating before an image can all play a part in moving the mind into a serene state that aids in giving meaning to the practice, serves as a reward to the yogi or yogini for their efforts and heightens the potential to experience revelations and insights that pave the way to wisdom. There is a profound stillness and grandeur in the images of

deities and this lets even ordinary people experience something of the transcendent state as they sit in a reflective state before the likeness of their god, prophet or savior. This practice can be used to strengthen resolve and motivation and the qualities of self-sacrifice that are needed to sustain the quest.

A QUIET SECLUDED PLACE

When meditation is subject to interruption it will be difficult to reach deep levels of concentration. A quiet secluded place free from excessive noise will greatly benefit most practitioners. Similar to the practice of isolation, it differs in that it is only seeking a quiet place for the duration of a meditation session. The ability to practice in a place that is not quiet will grow as concentration develops. For tranquility meditation seclusion is particularly important because noise is the greatest hindrance. A secluded place need not imply the absence of people. Meditating with a group of people can be very helpful in developing motivation. A secluded place may be a place away from home such as a park, the beach, a cemetery or a quiet room at home. It is virtually impossible to find a place completely free of all noise. Should such a place be found the mind will eventually begin to produce the illusion of sound. The important thing is to minimize disturbances. When sounds do occur and the mind is distracted, note the manner in which the mind reaches out to the sounds and tries to identify them then bring the mind back to its object. In time it will be helpful to try to note just the sound without identifying what caused it. Train the mind to hold on to its object. As mindfulness strengthens it will be less affected by sense contacts. A quiet place is especially important for most beginners but be wary of using noise as an excuse not to meditate. Train the mind to focus where you put it. Noise can aid you in that practice.

A NATURAL SETTING

Sound that is created by human activity can be very distracting and disturbing while natural sounds like wind, water, birds and insects can induce peaceful states of mind. These peaceful states are important because the mind is more given to deep introspection when the

mind is calm and can then clearly perceive its own functioning. The visual impression of natural settings can also produce a variety of emotions that may aid practice. The variety of natural settings may be explored in order to determine what type of climate, geography, flora and fauna best suit the individual.

The workings of Nature reveal before us the truth of the insights gained through our practice. That is, truths found through introspection can be verified by nature. Becoming close to nature brings us closer to ourselves and each other. Also, a simple lifestyle is easily attainable outside the artificial environments created by people. Natural settings do not offer the range of distractions (entertainments) and temptations that are a feature of human developments. Throughout most of human history we have been surrounded by the natural world. Returning to that world after having lived most of our lives almost constantly surrounded by people can reveal aspects of ourselves we have not encountered before. David Abram, in his book titled *The Spell of the Sensuous*, discusses the relations between language, perception and our experience of the natural world. In studying shamans in Nepal and Bali he found that they were intimately connected to the natural world around them. This had a marked effect on their perceptions of reality and the style of language with which it was expressed.

Abram traces the roots of language and the alphabets to perceptions of nature. Letters were originally pictograms connected to living things and sensed perceptions. They have changed their form and are no longer associated with the image that gave rise to them. The letter "A" is now an up-side down version of the head of a bull, its identity not noticed and long forgotten. Returning to nature is not only peaceful, but can re-establish a vital connection to nature which fundamentally changes our perceptions and brings us out of our heads and into the vast sensorial world which we so easily lose when caught up in worldly concerns. For those seeking to embark on a shamanic type quest, this return to the natural world and the insights it brings may be essential if the quest is to be fulfilled in more than a superficial way. My own experience of this phenomenon as a wandering ascetic was one of the most profound aspects of being a Buddhist monk. It was like coming home, but it was a home I had never known before which made it all the more delightful to be there at last.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISOLATION

Seclusion has always been a favoured means for enhancing contemplation and meditation. For centuries many Christian monasteries were constructed in isolated locations that were often difficult to access. Practicing meditation in caves and remote settings in the forest or secluded beaches are common techniques used in Asia. Going into a cave cuts off distractions such as light and noise that can hinder the attainment of deep insight and the absorptions. Even for limited periods while doing a retreat, this element to practice can be employed to make the most out of the time available. Sitting directly in front of a wall while meditating is a common practice. There are two types of isolation: perceptual isolation where sensory stimuli are limited and social isolation where interaction with others is limited or eliminated. They have slightly different effects and both can be useful as aids to meditation.

In Tibet, a practice known as a dark retreat is used to bring the mind to a critical point where all kinds of mental phenomena can be experienced. The meditator is locked into a dark room or cave and food and other requirements are brought by an assistant and passed through a small opening. The intense sensory deprivation quickly gives rise to hallucinatory lights, visions and voices that the practitioner works with while in a relatively safe environment not exposed to other people. It is, however, a dangerous practice for any but advanced practitioners and I would not advise this technique to anyone who is not being lead through it by a competent instructor. The principle is still applicable to ordinary practice and even a short time in a sensory-deprivation tank can give some insight into the mind's propensity to create the illusion of sensory experience in the absence of real sensory stimulation. Survivors trapped on desert islands have been known to go insane just from being alone. Solitude allows for no escape from one's own thoughts and can greatly augment our drive to alter our process of thinking and the manner of our habitual being. It can also precipitate the process even against our wishes if we are forced into seclusion. Solitary confinement is considered the most severe form of prison sentence because of the effects it has on people. Undertaken deliberately, it can be a most enlightening experience.

Another Tibetan practice is the sky retreat. In this form of seclusion, the yogi is housed in a room or apartment they cannot leave but there is a window that looks out to the sky. The blue sky devoid of clouds is used as the meditation object. The colour blue has a naturally tranquilizing effect and the sky is viewed as being like the mind. It is the background upon which the play of clouds is seen just as the mind is the formless ground upon which thoughts and perceptions arise and pass away. Mind is seen as larger than the sky since the sky is contained in Mind. Viewing the sky as containing mind is seeing reality only in a physical, materialistic way. But all that is knowable, perceptible, hence experiential is known by the mind and resides in the mind. This does not mean there is no material world but does reflect a psychological truth and one that is very important for understanding Buddhism. The last type of Tibetan seclusion I will mention is just being confined to an ordinary room or apartment and not leaving it for a specified duration of time. The Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, one of Tibet's four main schools, employs three-year retreats in the training of new lamas. They are housed in a walled compound and not allowed to leave with only the lamas and support staff allowed in.

Seeking or being forced into isolation is a common feature of native vision quests as well as the mainstream religious traditions. These often include some form of fasting. Perhaps one of the greatest dangers of this practice is the lack of supervision a person has. When enraptured or just freaked out we can create accidents for ourselves by not realizing what is happening around us or even by neglecting the needs of the body. In Thailand there are stories of monks that have gone into retreat in isolated caves and found their enlightenment but in the state of bliss that can last many days or in absorptions that can last a week they fail to drink enough in the tropical heat and have died. Whether true or not they are cautionary tales warning of potential risks. When coming out of a week-long absorption make sure to take food and drink whether you feel like it or not.

LOCATION AND TYPE OF HOME

The setting in which a person lives has been traditionally listed as one of the factors of a successful practice. It may be very helpful to try to create an atmosphere in the home that is conducive to the cul-

tivation of the mind. No real guidelines can be offered for this task. It is the responsibility of the individual to discover their own needs and affinities and to see that they are provided for. This may necessitate moving to a new location, renovating one's present dwelling or simply cleaning up a spare room. Both for mental well-being and as a factor influencing the way we spend much of our time, the home environment is an extremely important aspect of life and our quest.

OCCUPATION

Some types of work are not conducive to practice. Work that involves the slaughter of animals, sale or manufacture of weapons, destruction of the environment or the exploitation of others may create difficulties if we are trying to cultivate the positive qualities of being like kindness and compassion. Examine the effects of your actions. What are the consequences for yourself and others? If working in an area that does harm to others carefully consider the rational for continuing to do so. Are there really no alternatives? A job that allows you to experience joy in performing it will do a lot to keep up your spirits. As Joseph Campbell has said, "...follow your bliss."

DIET AND EXERCISE

Physical health is an important aspect of practice. It is sometimes devalued as a consequence of misunderstanding the practices of detachment and the contemplations of the "repulsiveness of the body." If practice is not balanced by compassion for our own self, it is possible to become nihilistic or escapist. Having a positive philosophy can aid in curbing such extremes. Some spiritual practitioners mortify the body in their efforts to achieve enlightenment or union with God. The Buddha rejected those techniques. Viewing the body as nothing is not a balanced view. The Buddha taught that it was wrong to believe in one's existence but more wrong to believe that one did not exist. Psychological studies have been conducted which show exercise can be a valuable aid in treating depression and anxiety and effecting changes in mood and personality. Valuable on the mystic quest. Traditional health practices like yoga, tai chi, kung-fu, ayurvedic diets, etc. aid the mind in functioning at its optimum level. Yoga or other exercis-

es done prior to meditation help the body relax into the meditation postures and tasks. They awaken the mind and body and can be an object of meditation themselves. Tai chi is known as walking meditation to the Chinese. Once the moves are well known the mind is free to just go with the flow. The mind benefits through doing meditation and exercise simultaneously. Tai chi is called a soft-style martial art because first comes developing energy and then application. In hard-style systems like kung-fu and karate, practical application comes first and slowly one learns to properly channel and focus energy to maximum effect.

There are many training practices in the martial arts which lend themselves to mental development. Properly practicing a technique requires full concentration and effort on the activity as it occurs. The body becomes well-conditioned physically, discipline is cultivated which is extremely important in mind development and alertness and attention are strengthened. In addition to these, during the practice of sparring the student needs to become detached from emotions like anger that will inhibit reflexes, cloud the mind with thoughts and prevent the student from being fully present in the moment. Thus detachment, an awareness of the debilitating nature of anger and the experience of being fully in the present moment outside the normal experience of time are cultivated. Sparring also brings other insights into the nature of the practitioner's personality and the manner in which they behave under duress.

The martial arts can also give the student more confidence, patience, stamina, spontaneity and tolerance. It may lead to insights into the nature of anger and aggression and can help in understanding the reconciliation of the opposites of peace and violence. As an art, there are many levels on which practice may be conducted. It need not be practiced with the intent to use it as anything other than a form of exercise or as an art similar to dance. Not all martial artists train for actual fighting but the martial arts are an excellent form of aerobic exercise that strengthens the heart and lungs. Aerobic exercises have been found useful in treating depression and anxiety. Exercising often changes the way we eat; diet can be an important factor in the quality of consciousness that we are able to develop as well as the body's health. The Buddha taught we should explore our diet for the purpose of general health and its effects on consciousness rather

than just for beautification of the body (a larger body being associated with affluence), mere sensory pleasure or praise from others. As this is something you must do for yourself I will make no recommendations about what is suitable.

There is a story in the Pali Canon about a woman on the path to enlightenment that is providing support for several monks as part of her practice. She gains psychic abilities as a result of her attainments and with it she looks at the monks she is supporting to see why they have not yet become enlightened. They are diligent and skilled meditators, dedicated to practicing the path of the Buddha but have not yet reached the goal. With her psychic abilities she notes they have everything they need and are practicing properly but lack one thing: a proper diet suitable to each individual. Tailoring a diet specifically for each one, they soon became enlightened as a result. This story clearly illustrates the importance the early Buddhists placed on a proper diet to facilitate enlightenment while also clearly stating the individual nature of that diet.

LIMITING EXTERNAL STIMULI

External stimuli refer to such things as television, movies, newspapers and other reading materials, needless conversations and frivolous activities. Refraining from these types of activities keeps the mind focused on the task of self-observation. Boredom is often a motivating factor governing our actions and the relief of boredom is a major economic market and we may have the idea that boredom is unacceptable and unnecessary. Boredom may be thought of as the complimentary energy to the desire for excitement and euphoria that we easily become conditioned to. With practice, basically sitting through boredom until it dissipates, boredom can be transmuted into an experience of joy because the mind no longer craves excitement and is struck with wonder at the world and consciousness perceived without the filter of boredom. It is much like the perception of children who see the world afresh each day as they encounter new things. What is this state of boredom? Why do we seek to free ourselves from this particular feeling? What is it we find unacceptable? Boredom is a state of mind frequently experienced which many people are unable to deal with in a constructive manner. As such, it is very important

to know and come to terms with this feeling. Also, much of the work of establishing mindfulness and concentration leading to absorptions and insights is very boring! An inability to deal with it may make it difficult to persist in intensive practice. The ability to be comfortable with boredom will facilitate the arising of detachment, tranquility and equanimity. Strictly limiting external stimuli is a practice usually reserved for retreats but can be applied to daily living to whatever degree seems suitable. Proper practice results in the extinction of boredom.

TEACHERS AND SPIRITUAL FRIENDS

In the teachings passed down through the Tipitaka, the Theravadin Buddhist scriptures, also known as the Pali Canon, the Buddha uses the term “spiritual friend” to refer to those people having knowledge of the Path that are able to guide others. In reality these may be lay or ordained individuals and need not be Buddhist. Working with people who understand and are sympathetic to the process in which one is involved can ensure a gradual development of practice by their example and support. When difficulties arise they may provide information essential for overcoming obstacles. It has always been recommended that the yogi avoid excessive contact with “worldly” people who interfere or try to dissuade them from continuing practice. Seek out a spiritual friend or competent teacher to guide development. If no worthy guide can be found the path should be tread alone. Do not allow others to dissuade you from practice. In the beginning, try not to spend too much time with people who have low moral standards and who might tempt you to engage in activities that will violate the spirit of the precepts or your personal ethics.

There are some guidelines offered for choosing a spiritual guide and it is wise to be careful because many who promote themselves are not as knowledgeable as they might appear. In Gampopa’s *A Precious Garland of the Supreme Path*, there is a collection of twenty-eight lists containing various points of advice for practitioners. A list of the eleven signs of a holy man is detailed in the treatise. While possibly aiding in identifying potentially holy people (for finding teachers, role models, etc.), Khenpo Karther Rinpoche points out that the teachings

real strength lies in self-assessment, identifying the qualities believed to make a buddha “great,” the nature of the Path and what is happening while treading the Path.

THE ELEVEN MARKS

- Little jealousy and pride
- Little desire and contentment with meager possessions
- Without haughtiness, vanity and arrogance
- Without deception and pretense
- They examine any action with the mind alert and perform the action with mindfulness
- They attend to results of actions as carefully as we protect our own eyes
- Without pretense regarding vows and *samaya*
- Without preference and infatuation toward sentient beings
- Has patience and is not angered by other people's wrongdoing
- Gives all victory to others and accepts all defeats
- Is unlike worldly people in all their thoughts and conduct

The manner of a monk or nun is a learned behavior as are the topics of which they speak. Be careful not to project undue reverence on others who may only appear to be holy. This can be very disappointing and disillusioning if a person has invested a great deal with that teacher. It is better to treat everyone as if they were enlightened than to hold only one person as special, more deserving of reverence than any other unless engaged in a form of guru yoga. It is easy for practitioners to look for someone to place the burden of practice on but it is the practitioner who must be responsible for their own development. Be aware of the desire to find a teacher that meets with one's stereotype of how an enlightened teacher might be. It is easy to play a role dictated and upheld by society and a long tradition. Many authentic teachers are very unconventional, sometimes even appearing crazy to others. Some are what the Tibetans refer to as “crazy yogis.” Others are people who appear no different than anyone else. A teacher that does not put the onus of responsibility for the practice back on the student, one who seeks to convert the practitioner to their system or faith or who clearly seeks monetary gain or adoration may not be a

suitable teacher. Assessing suitability can be difficult if the teacher happens to be a lama. Tibetan lamas are not always monks or nuns and they are well known for having unusual ways of imparting direct realizations to their pupils. These can be by many means including some which in no way spare the feelings of the student. Tibetans call a lama a “dangerous friend” because of where they can potentially lead one through some sudden word, gesture or act.

Few people seem to realize how easy it is to appear to be enlightened simply by exhibiting the speech and manner that form the basis of cultural stereotypes. The quality of happiness that an individual displays, is also no indication of their level of attainment. The search for a genuine teacher may take a long time. They may never be found, but this should not prevent the aspirant from seeking one and continuing to practice even if one is not found. Any teacher can only teach in accord with the experiences they have had and even if they are highly developed they may be severely limited by their cultural perspective. Some teachers suffer a kind of narcissistic ego-inflation as what is termed spiritual conceit becomes ever more refined as development proceeds. This conceit is said to be one of the last impediments to be lost before gaining the level of *arahat*. The Buddha was said to be self-enlightened and taught that everyone must enlighten themselves although he too had a number of teachers which aided him in gaining the levels of mental development that prepared him for enlightenment. Have faith in yourself and persevere despite the hardships.

Another facet of practice to be aware of and guard for is called “false enlightenment.” This is a mistaken belief that one is enlightened because of insights or unusual experiences which are not actual enlightenment. This state can sometimes be discerned by noting a lack of humility, their belief that they are always correct, have finished with the practice and the Path and possess knowledge not had by others. Ego-inflation may be subtle but it can be noticed if proper attention is paid to the person’s speech and manner of social interaction. The best remedy for not falling into this trap is to clearly note what qualities of mind are related to enlightenment. In the East, people will spend some years getting to know a lama or guru before accepting them as their teacher. In the West, people more typically do not do that and this can be a serious handicap to one’s practice if there is a mistake made in assessing the value of the potential teacher. Really

everyone can be used as a teacher. They can teach what to do and to not do to attain and maintain happiness. Choosing a teacher is a matter for contemplation with clear discernment.

SETTING A TIME AND MINIMUM LENGTH OF TIME FOR EACH SESSION

Setting a time for meditation makes it easier for the novice to practice consistently and to acquire the habit of practice. A time is found that is conducive to meditation for its lack of distractions and the individual's alert state of mind. Early morning and late evening are typically the quietest times. Morning meditation has some advantages because the mind is relaxed from sleep and is not processing a full day of events. Throughout the day the ability of the mind to fully concentrate waxes and wanes. Take note of the times of maximum alertness. The ability of the mind to become focused and concentrated will also vary from day to day. If it is the habit of the beginning meditator to only practice when the mind is naturally concentrated, development will be inhibited. There will be times when mindfulness will not be established for ten, fifteen, thirty or more minutes. Somedays real concentration may not be possible. If the meditator gives up too soon feeling concentration is not attainable, frustration will grow leading to other difficulties and possibly to the discontinuation of practice.

A minimum time can be established that is felt to be comfortably within one's ability. Have a manner of checking time that does not involve distracting, unnecessary movement. Do not use an alarm clock as it may startle one out of a peaceful or concentrated state that might have developed. The length of time it takes an incense stick to burn is one way to create an unobtrusive measurement of time; a simple glance is enough to see if the stick is out and time is up. Continue to practice until your minimum time has been reached. Congratulations on reaching your goal. Practice may then be terminated or continued. Do not be concerned if concentration has not been established. Note the state of the mind. Is it focused or not? What activities recently engaged in have contributed to the present state of mind? What was the mind distracted by? If aversion to practice begins to arise because of repeated failures to reach the time limit it should be reduced or one can try to practice on a daily basis for whatever period seems ap-

appropriate and comfortable. There is a need for continued effort to be brought to practice but this must also have a degree of balance to it.

Be honest with yourself about your abilities and limitations. Practice when possible in a natural way that does not become compulsive or that gives rise to guilt when unable to practice. Too much effort before the mind is sufficiently developed can lead to unnecessary stress, aversion to the practice of mind development, conceit, hallucinations and mental breakdowns. Meditation gives to us an understanding of the nature of the mind. This understanding grows in many ways. A sitting in which mindfulness is not established is not a failed attempt at meditation. It is an opportunity to view the nature of the mind directly and to know its dynamic flux and the manner of its conditioning. Because meditation practice builds upon itself and much of what happens occurs on a subconscious level, it may be difficult or impossible for the average person to accurately assess aspects of their own development. Having a minimum time limit will help assure that development continues.

A GRADUAL INCREASE IN THE LENGTH AND/OR NUMBER OF SESSIONS

When the ability to meditate for the full duration of the session has become consistent it may be useful to begin to slowly increase the length of time or to add another session. There may be limitations of lifestyle that prevent this in normal circumstances. This may remain an option used only when on retreats. Meditation builds upon itself. When the time of a session is doubled it more than doubles the effectiveness of that session provided the quality of concentration is not diminished. Adding another session to the day may prove equally effective. Meditating for twenty or thirty minutes a day should lead to some degree of peacefulness but could be insufficient to produce high levels of meditative concentration which are needed for the absorptions and deep insight. For insight meditation up to five hours per day is recommended. Absorption practice has no maximum time restrictions. Through this practice of gradually increasing the duration of sessions the optimum period of time for the individual's meditation can be found. There is no need to compare or compete with others. Find your own balance.

ALTERNATING POSTURES TO INCREASE THE LENGTH OF MEDITATION

Many people have a great deal of difficulty sitting for long periods of time and may greatly benefit from combining walking, standing, lying and sitting practices. With mindfulness of the breath, mantras or counting the breaths, the same object of meditation can be used regardless of the posture. In walking meditation and meditation on the breath, mindfulness is directed to the bodily sensation of walking or breathing (sensation consciousness) so using both still maintains a continuity of practice. Walking slowly for extended periods can produce lower back fatigue that may be alleviated by sitting or lying. Stretching and other exercises can be used to help condition the muscles used in these practices. Prolonged sitting is often accompanied by pain in the knees and ankles that can be worked out by walking and stretching. Each type of meditation posture can be practiced until it is felt necessary to change posture to prevent strain or injury. Alternating postures will allow the practitioner to increase a meditative session considerably as well as gradually conditioning the body to prevent unnecessary injury while developing the ability to hold postures for longer durations of time.

USING CHORES FOR MINDFULNESS

Any simple chore can be used to augment our mindfulness training. Sweeping, washing dishes, bathing, etc. involve simple movements that are easy to follow. Monks use their daily chores this way thus engaging in practice even when they do not appear to be. Focus on things like the feeling of doing the work, the sensation in the hands, the body posture or the repetitious movement of the hands. Since it is the goal of mindfulness training to be mindful all the time, using daily chores keeps the mind focused and augments regular meditation practice.

FASTING OR EATING ONLY BEFORE MIDDAY

For those who are able, it is recommended that meals not be taken after midday when doing serious practice such as a retreat. While some Buddhist monks eat only once a day the actual rules for monks let

them eat between dawn and noon. There are several reasons for this. Eating more than is required to be healthy (thus for pleasure, etc.) does not promote detachment from the senses nor does it decrease the desire for pleasant taste consciousness. Food is also a common means of suppressing neurotic pain and conflicts. These energies are then not fully felt and feeling them completely is necessary for proper mental healing and the resolution of inner conflicts. This practice is important because it is working directly with a very strong desire and conditioner of behavior. Over-eating leads to mental and physical fatigue that can make meditation practice difficult; when the needs of the body are met by midday the body is able to rest from the process of digestion. This is an important benefit of reducing the time frame of eating. Monks in temples stop eating at noon but I found in my own practice that breakfast at dawn and dinner about 1:00 p.m. worked well.

Because the body is not continuously in the process of digesting it is able to fully rest. This is beneficial to the internal organs as well as the ability of the body to relax and the mind to concentrate deeply. This practice also enhances the ability to examine the effects of various foods on the mind and body and the corresponding ability to achieve meditative concentration. The total daily calorie intake need not be reduced, only the period of time in which eating occurs. Evening hunger may be felt and must be endured for about a week as the body adjusts to its new schedule. The experience of this hunger can also be a valuable aid to insight. In the practice of mind development, the repercussions of our actions cannot be ignored. As consumers, everything we consume is intertwined with the world economy and the resulting destruction of wildlife, forests and cultures. Whether guilt and other emotions are conscious or subconscious, whether justified or not, they will still affect the attitude and feeling-tone of the mind. Moderation in all things is a basic principle of practice.

Prolonged fasting can be beneficial but must be undertaken with great care to prevent illness or accidental death. In some cases, particularly an extended fast, medical advice should be sought before it is begun. When terminating a long fast (ten days or more) it is important to slowly accustom the body to solid foods again. Eating too much or the wrong type of foods when breaking a fast can lead to sickness and death. The practitioner is strongly advised to research the practice of fasting for long periods before engaging in it. Fasting as penance or

mortification of the body is not a practice of mindfulness training. The habit of not eating past midday will make it much easier to include periodic daily fasts into practice. Since the fast lasts only a single day there is less chance of encountering any difficulties when eating resumes but some of the benefits of fasting can still be realized.

PERIODIC RETREATS

The benefits of periodic retreats almost cannot be overstated. It is unlikely that most individuals will be able to practice without distraction while maintaining their livelihood. The constant demands of earning a living and taking care of dependents will be a source of distraction to most practitioners. In time, and with the development of concentration, these daily distractions may become an important part of our mindfulness training exercises. But first, a solid foundation of mindfulness is needed so the mind is not overcome by these distractions and the feelings they produce. Retreats allow us to focus our attention on the cultivation of the mind to the exclusion of all else. Short retreats can be the equivalent of months of ordinary daily practice. Having the time to practice many hours, and because meditation builds upon itself, we are able to reach levels of concentration and mental quietude that are, or may be, elusive in normal daily sessions. It can be helpful for beginners to go on retreats with experienced teachers and other practitioners. As meditation is strengthened solitary retreats may become more beneficial.

A retreat can be done at home or at a meditation center, campground, etc. Going to a place away from home has advantages because it brings us out of our habitual patterns of thought and behavior. Retreat centers are set up to provide the necessities for meditators. However, there may be other factors that cancel out the advantages. The people who have organized and operate the center can themselves be a hindrance to practice. Many centers unfortunately insist you only practice their style of meditation or worse, pressure you to adopt their "faith." Investigate the center if possible before committing to a long retreat.

When the retreat is finished it may be found that daily practice has been enhanced and concentration is more easily attained, the mind remains less disturbed during stressful situations and has a quality

of peacefulness that is often noticeable by others. In an organized retreat with many individuals there is usually a schedule that will be followed. It will list times of group and private meditation, meals, exercise, instruction, etc. A schedule is usually beneficial for the novice practitioner to follow as it can be difficult for the beginner to maintain the motivation to practice alone or to keep on a schedule. More advanced practitioners may wish to do solitary retreats where they can set their own schedule or be more flexible and simply do what seems appropriate at the time. A thing not typically allowed in a center. A schedule for an intensive retreat could be as follows:

4:30 am	Wake Up
4:45	2-Hour Group Meditation
6:45	Breakfast with Food Reflection
	Free Time
8:00	1-Hour Group Meditation
9:00	1-Hour Exercise
10:00	1-Hour Private Meditation
	Free Time
12:00	Lunch with Food Reflection
2:00	1-Hour Instruction and Discussion
	Free Time
5:00	1-Hour Group Meditation
6:00	Light Evening Meal or Drink
7:00	2-Hour Group Meditation

Free time is for washing clothes, bathing, resting the body and mind, private practice and reflection, etc. Insight meditation is not recommended for more than five hours per day. There are no limits to tranquility meditation. When preparing for a retreat, try to get all your affairs in order which might arise during the retreat and which could lead to anxiety or termination of the retreat. Anxiety about business, possessions, friends or relatives will prevent the mind from attaining tranquility. Some practices can involve purposely stirring up emotions in order to view the mind in that state. When beginning a practice, it is more important just to try and maintain concentration or mindfulness first before attempting to closely scrutinize the mind or attempting to promote powerful emotional releases.

FOOD REFLECTION

Mindfulness is focused on the entire experience of eating, particularly on the rise and fall of taste-consciousness. Take time to reflect on why it is necessary to eat, the feelings that arise with hunger and the visual and olfactory stimulation of the food. The ramifications of overindulging in food consumption for oneself and the world, the desire for pleasant taste experience and the aversion to unpleasant taste experience should be contemplated. Pay particular attention to the arising of greed for pleasant taste experiences. This technique can be used to develop mindfulness or used in conjunction with a view of food as repulsive to balance attitudes towards food if practicing contemplation of the repulsiveness of nutriment (*ahare patikkula sanna*).

Begin eating and note taste-consciousness as it arises. Note flavor and texture and in what ways the body and mind are stimulated. Swallow each mouthful before taking another. Refraining from making excessive noise by scraping the plate can aid in keeping mindfulness and the pace of eating slow enough that the mind can focus on the complete experience of eating. When finished with the meal take note of how the mind and body have changed. Note any difference in attitude towards the food. Does it taste as good as when the meal was begun? Is the visual experience of the food still as pleasing to sight-consciousness? Does the body feel light, heavy, drowsy, or excessively full, etc.? Now that the desire for food has been relieved what new desire has arisen? Maintaining silence throughout the meal will help keep the mind attentive and strengthen mindfulness. This can be a valuable practice for health as well as mindfulness. Mindfulness of eating can lead to a healthier diet more conducive to meditation and of more moderate portions as the effects food has on practice, the body and its level of energy becomes clear. Limiting food intake to two meals eaten by midday is recommended for serious practitioners. This will prevent drowsiness and general fatigue produced by overeating and will aid the mind in freeing itself from material attachments and the strong desire for physical comforts and pleasure. Not eating after noon is a mandatory practice for Theravadin monks and nuns.

Another feature of this practice is that the work being done deals with one of the most powerful drives; the need to feed the body. Be-

cause it is a central need and desire as well as a powerful conditioner of thought and behavior we can use this practice to gain more control over these and other strong desires. Food can also have psychological associations. It can symbolize security, affluence, status or their opposites. The mind is flicking between sight, hearing and its tactile and thought impressions for most of our conscious lives. Consciousness of taste and smell arise only in response to a stimulus and will provide an opportunity to closely examine the mind as it makes contact with another form of sensory input. Desire for pleasant taste-consciousness occurs several times each day and is thus an excellent device for developing our awareness. Working with and developing restraint in regard to such a basic requirement of existence will greatly enhance our ability to deal with people, objects and events in a detached, mindful and wise manner.

COMPLETE OR NOBLE SILENCE

Silence, or refraining from speech is an excellent way to quiet the internal dialogue that the mind habitually engages in. For some, it can be a difficult practice but it is another feature of many of the world's spiritual traditions. Complete silence can be undertaken for part of a day or for many days, months or years. One or two weeks are usually sufficient to gain an appreciation of the many benefits to be found through this method. Noble silence means speaking only when necessary with full mindfulness of speech about appropriate subjects. These may be related to the theory or practice of mental cultivation or with other aspects of practice. At times, responsibilities or compassion may require interaction with others for limited periods. Topics not related to practice and those that do not communicate helpful information should be avoided. When engaged in speech the mind is directed outwards. This can be thought of as an outward flow of energy that keeps the mind focused on what is outside itself. Much speech is simply unnecessary gossip, egotistically centered or an attempt to escape boredom. By refraining from speech the mind is drawn inwards and becomes more introspective. As there is no engagement with others the ego can become less involved in the thoughts perceived. Because there is no interaction with others there is not as much information to be processed by the

mind; thus no consequent dwelling upon discussions that have taken place. This promotes a calm, peaceful state of mind even without meditation.

STUDY OF SCRIPTURES

There are a great number of writings dealing with meditation and the insights that are gained through its development, as well as theories about the process involved. Some give examples of how other practitioners trained, overcame obstacles and lived their lives. Some are scholastic in nature while others speak more like poetry. All this literature can be useful in providing intellectual and emotional insights and for illuminating the proper methods of meditation and mind development. Still, it is essential not to rely exclusively on this material. Personal experience is the real goal and living teachers can convey knowledge directly relevant to our needs. There is no substitute for genuine insight. The world's collective spiritual literature is a treasure trove of knowledge that can aid the practitioner in understanding how to assimilate experiences into positive changes of attitude and behavior. In addition to recognized religious scripture there is an incredible wealth of wisdom contained in the traditional stories and fairy tales from around the world. They may contain archetypal motifs, principles of conduct, strategies for overcoming difficulties and ways to assimilate disparate aspects of consciousness. They are also a pleasure to read.

MEDITATION IN A CEMETERY AND CONTEMPLATION OF BODY PARTS

In ancient times and still today there are a number of meditations that are performed with corpses in various states of decomposition. In the West, in this modern age, it is unlikely that these meditations can be performed. Still, it is important to bring a keen perception of death into the practice, both to induce greater awareness of the natural condition and to motivate the pursuit of mental development. Death need not be something to fear. It is part of the natural unfolding of life and is a mystery that can be met with openness and awareness. While some may find this practice morbid or obscene, it is really for

clearly understanding the nature of the body and for transforming negative emotions like the fear of death into a more useful and practical attitude of acceptance.

Cemeteries and charnel grounds were places where the meditations on a corpse could be practiced. Typically, cemeteries are very quiet, tranquil places that have far less distractions than a local park. There is a poignant sense of the ever-present closeness of death; that it happens to all and cannot be avoided, only met. Those wishing to utilize this type of meditation may find it beneficial to seek out a quiet cemetery in which they can engage in the contemplation of mortality.

There is also a traditional practice of contemplating the “repulsiveness” of the body and of dividing the body into its parts. There are thirty-two parts used in this contemplation. These are:

Body Hair	Sinews	Heart	Stomach	Pus	Saliva
Head Hair	Bones	Liver	Intestine Tract	Blood	Mucus
Nails	Marrow	Pleura	Excrement	Sweat	Joint Fluid
Teeth Skin	Food	Spleen Lungs	Brain	Fat	Urine
Flesh	(not digested) Kidneys	Intestines	Bile Phlegm	Tears Grease	

The practice of viewing the body as repulsive is for decreasing wrong view and attachment based on an unbalanced view of the body. It helps to diminish excessive sexual desire, vanity and attachment to the body and is recommended for people who have a lustful nature and wish to engage in tranquility practice.

LIVING IN A FOREIGN LAND OR CULTURE

There are many advantages to living in a foreign country. From the beginning of our lives we have been conditioned by our cultural setting. This conditioning is so ingrained, so much a part of our being, that it is very difficult for us to even perceive it and our task is not merely its perception, but its extinction as a compulsive conditioner and motivation for behavior. Because other cultures make different assumptions and have other ways of solving problems, we can begin to see the ways in which we have been conditioned. Because we are no longer in our habitual setting, it becomes somewhat easier to work with our habitual behavior patterns. Friends, family, and culture no

longer reinforce our behavior. Much of our conditioning is the result of attempting to fit into other people's ideas of what is proper and acceptable. In a different culture our own cultural conditioning is often improper. This provides not only the opportunity to see in what ways we have been conditioned, but also provides an impetus to change. Once having undergone this transforming experience (sometimes known as culture shock) people often remain more capable of distinguishing their own cultural conditioning and are more able to accept or reject those aspects of conditioning which are found to be useful or harmful. It can be a very helpful and wonderful experience to engage in a spiritual discipline in a country where that practice has a long tradition. Learning centers, teachers, and support facilities can be found that may not be available in one's home country. This also allows a view and understanding of the practice that is very difficult to observe outside of the tradition's cultural context.

DEPERSONALIZATION OF PEOPLE THAT INTRUDE ON MEDITATION

There are times when practice may be conducted in a setting that does not allow for complete privacy. A place where people do not know or respect the practice of meditation can be very disturbing when people intrude into the area. A feeling of self-consciousness, superiority or other thoughts may arise. To limit this type of disturbance, the people may be viewed as something other than people. For example, in a natural setting there are many types of animals that might come into the area and see us practicing but we are unconcerned about their thoughts. Yet, it is often not the case with people. Immediately, there may arise thoughts related to them. By noting their presence but not their humanness we can minimize the disturbance and with practice, not be disturbed at all. Note: a bird, lizard, butterfly, etc. It is best to use animals that do not debase people. If there is a strong revulsion to snakes it would not be suitable to use it as an image because it would not promote the arising of peace, compassion and joy. Using plants or flowers is also acceptable. The presence of people need not prevent meditation and can be useful for training the mind to hold its object despite the distractions. It is probably best for beginners to

avoid excessive distractions at first in order to develop the ability to achieve a state of concentration strong enough that it will not collapse when distractions do occur.

RENUNCIATION

In the struggle for meditative attainment there is a need for “letting go” of all the impermanent contents of our minds. While practicing meditation it is important not to cling to states of mind that arise or to the thoughts, emotions or flashes of intuition. We consciously, with attention and effort, bring the mind gently back to the meditation object. This is a small form of renunciation necessary for deep concentration to arise.

There is another type of renunciation that encompasses the entirety of our life-experience. It is a change of center, of purpose, that is taken by those who make a decision to base their lives on the quest for enlightenment. A Buddhist monk has made a vow of renunciation but it is not necessary to become a monk or nun to practice this form of mental and material austerity. The cornerstone of this attitude is that life is no longer for the purpose of self-gratification through the pursuit of pleasant experiences. It implies giving up all things, physical and mental, that impede progress on the Path.

A monk begins by letting go of physical objects and some types of activity. This prepares him for the challenges of letting go of his judgements, opinions, and beliefs about reality. The epitome of this development is when the ego itself can be let go of. It is at this point that the aspirant truly begins what the Buddha called “the Holy Life.” Strictly speaking it does not of itself imply that one must give everything up and become a mendicant, although some do and a great many benefit from it. It is the attitude with which life is approached, the manner of interaction and perception that must fundamentally change. The Buddha’s teaching was that it was easier to let go of everything in order to acquire meditative attainments but not essential for everyone. There are numerous instances recorded in the sutras where lay people became enlightened and continued to work, care for their families or rule the state.

Anyone engaged in a practice of meditation while trying to maintain a standard of living or with the responsibility of a family to care

for will appreciate the idea of completely freeing oneself from all the distractions. For those in this position for whom it is not at this time practical to practice renunciation in full it is recommended that in addition to some daily practice an effort is made to periodically set aside time for a one week to ten-day retreat as often as possible. During the retreat the student can gain some appreciation for the feeling of renunciation.

CELIBACY

Celibacy need not be permanent or viewed as a judgement against sexuality. All in life is our gift and our joy. But in order to fully appreciate these gifts we need understanding and detachment. While in the process of developing a high degree of mental concentration it is important not to allow the mind to become distracted by tendencies and activities that bring it out of its close introspection. There are also teachings passed down from antiquity that suggest there are benefits to not dissipating the physical energy built up by engaging in sexual activities. These are similar to the Hindu notion that a vegetarian diet and fasting lead the mind to think beyond its limited self and to open to God-consciousness. Celibacy is generally required for any Buddhist meditation retreat. It is not a practice for everyone but its benefits can be manifold for those committed to the attainment of the Path. Sexual energy is a mental energy that causes many people suffering. Learning to guide and respect this type of biological drive is very helpful in avoiding troubling emotional and sexual entanglements.

Literature regarding kundalini suggests there may be important reasons somehow related to biochemistry for preventing male ejaculation while trying to raise the serpent power of kundalini. Celibacy, however, is not strictly necessary to achieve abstinence of sexual emissions. Taoist monks taught techniques that allow a man to reach orgasm but not ejaculate. This is said to prevent the loss of energy, the toll on physical health repeated loss of semen is believed to occasion and can also be used to experience multiple orgasms. A very different practice from strict celibacy but one that may still produce some of the results desired. This type of Taoist technique is also used in some forms of tantric sex, although all of the Tibetan monks I have spoken to on this matter have stated that in their tantric practice, they

are merely using a form of linguistic symbolism and do not engage in actual sexual intercourse. This Taoist practice has the physiological benefits of celibacy without the abstinence and is credited with enhancing the pleasure and duration of sexual intercourse. It may not, however, convey the psychological effects, which are important if the practice is being used to augment the development of meditative insight or absorption.

ASCETIC PRACTICES

These thirteen practices are from the Theravadin monastic teachings and do not represent a comprehensive list of ascetic disciplines. It is important to note that Buddhism does not include the mortification of the flesh as it is practiced in some other religious traditions. These practices are for mental training, not penance. Many ascetic practices are concerned with differentiating between needs and wants. Abstaining from what is superfluous is a basic tenet. By losing the need for what is not required we gain freedom of choice rather than the illusory freedom of conditioned behavior causing us to chase our desires endlessly. Life becomes easy to sustain and there is no unnecessary burden placed on others or the planet. Buddhist monks are called *bhikkhus* in Pali, meaning beggars. It was fitting that people who depended on the generosity of others should learn to live in a simple manner. More important though was the de-conditioning effect of this practice. By starting first with material things the yogi is preparing to lose deeper aspects that are being held to such as the concept of self and the beliefs that come with it. The practice of being a monk works with the energy of craving and sensuous desire. Living in the forest and other dwelling practices are to extinguish anger to promote serenity through seclusion. Charnel grounds are for working with fear and feelings about death.

Refuse-Rag-Wearer – This refers to clothing, cloth and rags that have been discarded and so are termed refuse. This was the way that Buddhist monks originally obtained most of the material to make their robes. The pattern that can be seen to this day on Theravadin style robes is laid out the way the Buddha said to stitch them so that they resemble cultivated fields.

Triple-Robe-Wearer – The triple-robe is the title for the Theravadin Buddhist set of robes. This is the practice of being a monk, a wearer of the triple robe. A monk is of course an ascetic by practice and a contemplative, priest, and beggar by vocation.

Alms-Food-Eater – Another monastic practice, but not confined to monks, this refers to getting one's dietary needs only through begging for food. Monks were forbidden to have money but in many traditions now that rule has been relaxed as a practical necessity.

House-to-House Seeker – This is the practice of not skipping houses when walking to collect alms. An alms route is similar to a paper route. It can be a more or less established walk that follows a set route to people's homes that have a desire to give to the *sangha*. This practice means going to all the houses in a village and not just to specific ones.

One Sessioner – Eating only one meal per day which is completed in a single sitting.

Bowl-Food-Eater – Monks carry an alms bowl and some adopt the practice of eating only out of this bowl. This means the food tends to get mixed up together and becomes less appetizing and aesthetically pleasing. It is a practice of detachment and simplicity.

Later-Food-Refuser – Refusing food at a later time after one has already eaten and expressed satisfaction.

Forest-Dweller – Living in the forest means living a distance from the nearest habitation. A distance measured as five hundred bow lengths.

Tree-Root-Dweller – Not taking any shelter other than that offered by the branches of a tree and dwelling at the foot of that tree.

Open-Air-Dweller – Not staying under any kind of shelter. Staying in the open with the sky as one's only roof.

Charnel-Ground-Dweller – Living in a cemetery or place where bodies are disposed of through burial, burning, or by being left for scavengers.

Any-Bed-User – Being content with whatever sleeping accommodation is offered.

Sitter – Not lying down to rest or sleep but maintaining the sitting posture even during sleep. Tibetans use this practice for dream yoga

and the other forms of sleep meditation as it promotes mindfulness during sleep. Sitting is also a means of generating energy.

DETACHMENT

Of utmost importance is the quality of detachment. Although perhaps more a developed attainment than a practice, it is of such importance that it is here noted. Detachment is often confused with not caring which is actually its direct opposite. To detach is to step away from the physical and mental phenomena experienced; to not be caught up in these impressions (thoughts, emotions and sensations) as if they were a concrete reality in themselves and necessitated action. This practice of stepping back to view the mental/physical phenomena of consciousness is required to bring the scrutiny of full awareness and wisdom to rising thoughts and intentions which lead to other thoughts, speech, and actions of a wholesome, unwholesome, or neutral character. It is with this awareness that the ability to govern the quality and content of the mind is achieved.

ARISING DISCIPLINE

Most people will notice that during sleep they awaken once or perhaps several times each night. Each of these awakenings can be an opportunity to continue the practice of mental cultivation. This practice means using these occasions to meditate for a period of time that is determined by the ability to stay awake. When drowsiness takes over one may retire or continue to sit or walk for a short while and try to fully observe the mind as it is overcome by sleep. Many practitioners habitually over-sleep because they are conditioned to seem to need more than their body actually requires. When engaged in the practice of arising, it may be found that the mind actually functions better with less sleep than what was formerly considered necessary. The body may also have more energy than normal. This is in part due to the mind and body getting the right amount of sleep for the individual and also the benefits of increased amounts of meditation. Having awoken of its own accord, the body may be communicating that at this time it does not need to sleep. Adding an hour of practice at different intervals through the night can add thirty hours of meditation experience each month. This

adds days of conscious life each year with a healthier body and clearer mind. It is common when doing more intensive meditation practice that the body needs significantly less sleep than usual.

This practice allows one to utilize the quietest part of the day and forcing oneself out of the comfort of bed builds discipline and breaks habitual behavior patterns. It is also helpful in experiencing the nature of sleep and fatigue. When doing sitting practice, one may be able to enter the pre-sleep, or hypnogogic stage for brief periods without losing full consciousness. Some practitioners may be interested in learning some of the Tibetan dream yogas or in developing the ability to have lucid dreams where the mind is fully conscious of being in the dream state. Some meditators may want to use this technique only during retreats to increase their formal meditation time.

DREAM INTERPRETATION

Keeping a dream diary and working to understand and analyse the dream life can be a valuable tool in the quest for self-knowledge. There are many good works on the subject of dreams and their interpretation. No part of being need be neglected in the search for greater awareness. There are many methods for working with dreams so research is a must.

MEDITATION DIARY

Keeping track of one's progress and experiences by noting them in a journal can aid in developing an awareness of how the practice has been unfolding for you personally. This can be helpful for your own understanding as well as for helping others to comprehend the process consciousness moves through as a result of practicing meditation. It can be compared with the accounts of various mystics, saints, and other practitioners to gain an understanding of the stage of development reached.

MANTRAS AND AFFIRMATIONS

Words, syllables, short phrases, meaningless sounds, and the names of buddhas and deities are examples of mantras. These include Je-sus, bud-dho, su -fi, om, aum, om mani padme hum, Mary mother of God have mercy on me. This practice is called

mantra yoga, the meditation of constant remembrance. This is for suppressing the mind's tendency to wander. Generally, they declare some truth of higher being, an attribute that one seeks to cultivate, beseeching for assistance or reminding one of a moral quality to be developed. The use of the rosary in Christian practice is an example of mantra yoga. The Tibetans also use rosaries like many other peoples. Returning the mind again and again to the mantra eventually clears the mind of superfluous thoughts and allows it to rest in a clear state.

There are three types of mantra: musical, meaningful and meaningless. Musical mantras create a kind of hypnotic effect through the use of a certain type of monotone chanting. Many of the Buddhist chants use this kind of monotone vocalization. Gregorian chants are a good example of this practice in its musical form. Meaningful mantras should be said slowly to absorb and reflect on the meaning. Meaningless mantras create a mental vacuum that cuts through the finite intellect to reach the clear expanse of mind's ground of being. Try using the mantra aah-ooo-mmm for a while. It makes no sense but then it does not have to.

The first effect of this practice is to arouse thought then to still it. Constant repetition lulls the senses and thoughts into a state of semi-activity allowing the attention to turn inward and to induce the contemplative mood. This will begin to induce greater degrees of concentration of the sort that is required for insight and wisdom. Restlessness should decrease and there should become established a stronger connection to the unconscious or higher self. Purification of character is also one of its aims.

There are three stages to this practice. Chanting out loud, whispering, and mental recitation. It can be developed over the course of a few weeks or months. There is no hurry. Mind is returned again and again to the mantra throughout the day while engaged in all kinds of activities. Basically, one thought is used to transcend all thought. Affirmations use a statement or verse of not more than ten words to direct the mind to the idea expressed. This will influence the mind if it is continued. Affirmations should be stated as a present reality rather than as something yet to obtain or realize. God is, I am That, I am Love, I and my Father are one, etc. Denials are useful for negating our identification to negative elements of being. Affirm your

positive qualities and deny the negative ones. Done properly without misunderstanding, it will increase the positive aspects you desire and decrease the negative ones.

TUDONG: HOMELESS WANDERING

Tudong is a practice common with monks in Thailand. This odyssey of travel consists of simple travel with no fixed address or final destination. It is an adventure in itself and allows attachment for places and people to dissipate and also facilitates contemplation while walking or in other ways going to a new location. Travelling with the bare necessities brings us closer to the simple requisites of life and we constantly meet new people and have new experiences with which we can seek a correspondence with our understanding of life or Dharma. Obviously, this is not a practice for most people who have families and careers to tend to, but it is a valuable practice and has its parallel in Western traditions in the form of the holy pilgrimage. Wandering and the practices of mindfulness, meditation and the cultivation of virtuous intent have been the most fruitful techniques I used in my own path to altering the nature of my perception and character. I cannot convey the incredible freedom to be had walking alone and free in a world larger than I could ever hope to explore completely.

Some countries are especially conducive to spiritual wandering. India has a great many places that exist to benefit spiritual seekers. The temples in Thailand often provide free accommodation to interested people and there are Tibetan temples in Nepal that also cater to people who want to practice. In Thailand there are thousands of temples. Many welcome foreigners but the best and most isolated may require some ability with the Thai language to ask permission to stay. In other countries it may be more difficult to find temples that will take care of practitioners, but that should not discourage travel through them. Picking a country that suits the needs of your heart and soul is more important than just picking a location that has a place where you can easily stay, but that may not speak to your inner self. It is the travel that is the important element in this practice and long-term stays are not really the point. There is a unique kind of awareness that dawns upon the seeker as they wan-

der through the forests and cities, towns and villages, deserts and mountain highlands. The ordeals and challenges of the journey are a constant aid to development and seem to be an endless source of inspiration.

This practice can be done in the company of others but I believe it is best done alone. The quiet seclusion of solitary travel leaves the time needed for contemplation and the freedom to bend with the winds of need, interest, and fate. Meetings with people along the way become especially enjoyable as their company provides a healthy respite from the solitude yet does not really detract from it. The practice need not be a long one but it can take a few months to really begin to settle into the rhythm of wandering. Having no obligations or time restrictions can also aid in this practice since their absence leaves the mind feeling lighter. Journeying through foreign lands and cultures is a great way to broaden the scope of our understanding and serves many useful purposes including learning about the nature of the many facets of life. There are risks, especially for women, and in Thailand I faced poisonous snakes, rabid dogs, disease, and times of hardship and loneliness, but even these kinds of dangers can facilitate our quest. When the Buddha sat down at the base of the Bodhi tree it is said that he resolved to either find enlightenment or die. This kind of total commitment, being on the edge of life and death, is believed by many people to be essential for attaining the rare state of full enlightenment. It may not really be required but it certainly doesn't hurt to have the mind focused in that way.

LETTING GO

Although this may sound simple at first, it constitutes one of the most important aspects of continuous practice and is equal to mindfulness in importance. Letting go is letting go as much as possible of absolutely everything. Everything is allowed to go its way, to be as it is, just so. This practice extends to our relationship with our mental state and contents, their arising and passing. It refers to the way we allow people to be themselves, honoring them as they are, but being mindful that at times, to maintain our own peace, we may have to let go of the situation and move on rather than subject ourselves to what is occurring that causes us disturbance. Let go of all that arises in

meditation, in contemplation, in ecstasy. What naturally adheres to you is you. You will not lose it by letting go. Mind will simply be free to roam its own wilderness, discovering treasures unimaginable. The way to inner peace comes very much through proper understanding of how to relate and interact with the world and all its creatures. See with the distant eye the arising and passing of all compounded things. Let them all go. There is nothing else to do. Of course, this in no way implies that we need not or cannot work to improve the lot of ourselves and others. Should we do so, as in karma yoga, we are better served by letting go the fruits of our actions so we are not disappointed or disillusioned by the difficulties we inevitably encounter.

The Mystic Quest

CHAPTER IX

16 STAGES OF INSIGHT

Return to the Original Place



This is a description of the process that the mind goes through on its way to *nibbana*. This can be useful for understanding the changes that occur while engaged in the practice of insight. The following information has been paraphrased from Achan Sabin's book *Insight Meditation*, information which he has gathered from the *Visuddi Magga*, (*Path of Purification*) and his own long experience as an instructor. Some or all of the symptoms in each stage of insight may occur to the meditator. This is really just a general guide. It is very difficult to know for sure exactly which stage you might be in. This section is primarily intended as a reference guide for people beginning, or already embarked upon, a practice of insight meditation. It does however, clearly illustrate the psychological nature of this technique and shows the Buddhist ideal of enlightenment as a real achievement grounded in a process of mental development. In this description of the stages the rise and fall of the abdomen is being used as the meditation object.

THE 16 STAGES:

Distinction Between Mental and Physical States

Cause-Effect Relationship Between Mental and Physical States

Mental and Physical Processes as Impermanent, Dissatisfying and Not-Self

Arising and Passing Away

Dissolution of Formations

Fearful Nature of Mental and Physical States

Mental and Physical States as Dissatisfying Disenchantment

Desire to Abandon the Worldly State

Investigation of the Path that Leads to the Decision to Practice to Completion Regarding Mental and Physical States with Dispassion

Conforming to the Four Noble Truths, Preparation for Path Entry and Approach to Nibbana

Deliverance from the Worldly Condition Abandoning Defilements

Realizing the Fruit with Nibbana as Object

Reviewing Remaining Defilements

1. DISTINCTION BETWEEN MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATES

When distinguishing between mental and physical processes, the rising and falling of the abdomen is known as “form” (*rupa*), the acknowledgment of the movement is mind-known (*nama*). In walking meditation, the movement of the feet is form and the acknowledgment of the movement is mind-known. Knowing is the observing consciousness. Its only meaning in *vipassana* is being aware of mental and physical objects as they arise and pass away each moment. In distinguishing mentality and materiality when seeing a form, the eyes and colour are form; consciousness of seeing is known by mind. With sound, sound and hearing are form; consciousness of thinking is known by mind. For the sense of smelling, odor and the nose

are form, consciousness of smelling is known by mind. Taste and tongue are form; consciousness of tasting is known by mind. When touching, the object contacted is form and consciousness of contact is known by mind. Thinking has the idea contacted as form and consciousness of thinking is known by mind. When sitting, standing, walking or reclining, the body is form; awareness of these postures is known by mind.

2. CAUSE-EFFECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATES

Form is sometimes the casual condition and the mental condition is the result, e.g. when the abdomen rises first and the mind's acknowledgment follows immediately. At other times, the mind is the cause and form is the result; volitional activity precedes the physical action. The intention to move is the cause; the body starting to move is the result. In this stage, the abdomen may rise but fails to fall immediately. Other possible signs of this stage might include the abdomen falling deeply and remaining in that position for an extended period of time. Rising-and-falling may seem to disappear. The hand may be placed on the abdomen to feel the movement. At times, meditators may feel disturbed, endangered, or ill at ease. Hallucinations may cause distractions. The rising-and-falling of the abdomen can occur together with its acknowledgment. The body may suddenly jump as though frightened and might fall forwards or backwards. The meditator realizes that existence in this life exists only as mental and physical processes and a continual round of cause-effect relationships. The rising of the abdomen is divided into two stages: the beginning of rising and ending of rising.

3. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PROCESSES AS IMPERMANENT, DISSATISFYING AND NOT-SELF

The meditator considers mind-body processes through the five senses as having the three characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction and emptiness. The abdominal movement on rising and falling consists of three sections: originating, continuing and disappearing. Many disturbances appear in consciousness. These mental images (*nimit-*

ta) disappear slowly and gently. The rising and falling movements of the abdomen may appear to cease for either a long or short interval. The breathing may be fast, slow, smooth, irregular or obstructed. The mind may be confused or distracted. This condition demonstrates the three characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction and emptiness. Also, the hands or feet may flick, clench, or twist. About this stage, it is said that the imperfections to insight will likely occur.

TEN IMPERFECTIONS OF INSIGHT

These ten imperfections must be overcome for progress on the Path to continue. The meditator will not likely experience all the phenomena from each type of imperfection, nor all those listed in each of the stages of insight. The ten imperfections are as follows:

Light or Illumination

Rapturous Joy and Interest

Tranquility of Mental Factors and Consciousness

Bliss or Happiness

Confidence, Determination and Zeal

Exertion and Energy

Strong Mindfulness

Knowledge

Equanimity and Indifference

Gratification and Delight

LIGHT OR ILLUMINATION

Light appears to the meditator similar to the brightness of a firefly, a flashlight, car, or locomotive head light. The whole room might seem to be lit up enabling the person to see. Light is defused, shining everywhere, as though the room had no walls. Light arises, as though seeing various places before one's eyes. A bright light appears to the meditator. The eyes may open to see what caused the light. A kind of

brightness occurs, as though seeing an aura around brilliantly coloured flowers. The person may seem to peer out over several miles of sea. Rays of light seem to issue from the head and heart areas. Hallucinations arise, such as seeing frightful images.

RAPTUROUS JOY AND INTEREST

There are five categories of joy. These types of joy disturb the mind in that the mind cannot relinquish clinging nor maintain mindfulness. Each type of joy has qualities that should be noted.

Minor Rapture—The meditator is aware of white colour. There is a sensation of coolness, heaviness, or dizziness. Hair on the body stands on end or tears flow and there may be the feeling that the scalp creeps.

Momentary Rapture—Flashes of light may be seen in the eyes. Sparks fly in the eyes, as if struck from flint. Nervous twitching arises. Stiffness appears in the body. A feeling occurs as though ants are climbing on the body. Heat or energy pulsations occur all over the body. This may be the stirring of kundalini activity. The meditator experiences heart palpitations. The meditator can see various red colours. The hair stands on end frequently but is not accompanied by an intense sensation.

Showering Happiness—The body may rock, clench, shake or tremble and the face, hands and feet may twitch. The meditator may experience shaking up and down. Nausea may appear and at times, vomiting. A feeling appears similar to waves beating against the shore. A sensation occurs as though being touched by ripples or energy streams. One's body may tremble as a stick that is fixed in a flowing stream. Sometimes the meditator may see a light yellow colour.

Uplifting Joy—So powerful is this rapture that one's body moves upwards, feels light, and may seem to float in the air. A feeling arises as though bugs are climbing on the face and body. Diarrhea may occur. The body may bend forewards or backwards. At this time, energy is stronger than rapture. Numbness occurs in different parts of the body when sitting or walking. The meditator feels as if their head were being twisted backwards and forewards. The mouth chews, opens and

closes or the lips purse. The body sways like a tree being blown by the wind, it bends downwards and may fall down, or it may experience jumping movements. The arms and legs may fidget or be raised and twitch. The body may thrust itself forewords or backwards or may recline. A silvery -grey colour may appear.

Pervading or Rapturous Happiness – A sensation of coolness spreads throughout the body. Peace sets in from time to time. Itchy feelings occur over the body. Drowsiness appears; there is no wish to open the eyes. One has no desire to move the body. A chilling or flushing sensation appears from head to toe or vice-versa. The body is cool, as though taking a bath or touching ice. One sees a blue or emerald-green colour. An itchy feeling occurs, as though ants are crawling on the face. The presence of any of these phenomena may surprise or completely upset the meditator causing mindfulness to weaken or vanish. Some meditators may even leave practice at this point.

TRANQUILITY OF MENTAL FACTORS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

A state of peace and quiet prevails similar to the realization of insight. There is no annoyance or restlessness in the mind. Acknowledgment of objects is convenient and smooth. The body is comfortably cool. There is no desire to fidget. Satisfaction arises with the activity of acknowledgment. The meditator's feeling subsides similar to falling asleep. Calmness can be a source of defilement because the mind is too relaxed. A meditator may be content with peacefulness and wish to remain in that state. All actions are light and seem correct. Walking mindfulness is soft and gentle. Concentration is keen and there is no forgetfulness. Thoughts are quite clear. One who has a harsh and angry temperament will realize the Dharma is profound. They resolve to replace bad actions with good deeds and will try to abandon heedless conduct.

BLISS OR HAPPINESS

One feels very comfortable. Enjoyment and pleasure appear in the practice. The wish arises to meditate for a long time. Subtle forms of clinging appear at this time. Desire appears to speak of results that

RETURN TO THE ORIGINAL PLACE

appear to have been gained. Conceit and pride arise in the practice. One cannot suppress a feeling of gladness. The meditator will say they have never known such bliss. A meditator's strong emotions lead to a weakening of mindfulness resulting in an inability to focus on phenomena appearing in the present moment. The meditator often thinks of the virtue of one's teacher and is grateful. One feels that the teacher is ready to help at all times.

CONFIDENCE, DETERMINATION AND ZEAL

Confidence in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is exaggerated. The meditator wishes to encourage others to enter insight practice. One desires to remain at a meditation center for a long time. The meditator wishes to repay the kindness of the meditation center or to proceed quickly and deepen practice. The meditator desires to perform meritorious deeds, make donations, assist in building meditation centers, etc. One thinks of the virtues of the person who may have persuaded the meditator to enter practice. The desire arises to offer gifts to the teacher or one may wish to ordain in a monastic order. The meditator may make the decision to practice to completion. One wishes to go to a secluded place. The meditator wishes to make only intensive efforts in training that are not appropriate at this time. Restraint must be applied to continue the practice.

EXERTION AND ENERGY

Meditation may expend more effort than needed to do the work of just knowing, i.e. watching objects rise and fall. Intense effort causes clinging and impedes progress and the development of wisdom. One has the intention to practice sincerely and devotedly even unto death. The meditator's practice is charged with excess energy.

STRONG MINDFULNESS

Excess mindfulness causes the meditator to abandon acknowledgment of the present and to think of the past and future. The meditator clearly remembers and is overly concerned with incidents which occurred in the past. One seems to be able to recall past lives. Mind-

fulness is strong now but is linked with defilement. No wisdom is present since mindfulness has not arisen with insight knowledge. The seeing of past lives may not really be true; it may be a kind of thinking with images. The Buddha saw past lives with wisdom; he did not cling to them.

KNOWLEDGE

Theoretical knowledge is confused with actual practice. If a misunderstanding occurs, the person maintains only their views are correct. A tendency predominates to display one's learning and to dispute with the teacher. Meditators cling to their own opinions at this stage. No mindfulness occurs due to excessive thinking. A meditator may divide the object, saying: rising of the abdomen is arising; falling of the abdomen is ceasing. The meditator considers principles previously studied about religion, philosophy, etc. The meditator is busy thinking and believes some aspect of wisdom has been realized. Awareness of the present moment is abandoned. The meditator constructs knowledge based on the thought process. Insight knowledge is not based on thinking or on thinking about insight.

EQUANIMITY AND INDIFFERENCE

The meditator's mind is silent and is neither pleased nor displeased. Awareness of the rising and falling of phenomena is indistinct and sometimes imperceptible. One is forgetful. Equanimity is too strong and wisdom cannot arise. Even though disinterest is present, the meditator can acknowledge objects occasionally, but precision is vague. At times, one is absent-minded and is unable to think of anything in particular. The mind is just peaceful and not curious about objects. The meditator is indifferent to pursuing practice and does not seek the progress of insight. The mind is peaceful and undisturbed. Equanimity is too concentrated. A belief may arise that one has reached realization or finished the training. The meditator pays no attention to bodily needs. Consciousness is unaffected when observing so called "good" and "bad" mental objects. Mindful awareness is discarded and more attention is focused on external objects. Mindfulness is weak. Indifference is stronger and covers the mind.

GRATIFICATION AND DELIGHT

There is satisfaction in acknowledging various objects. Deep delight occurs about “knowing.” Excess calmness appears and mindfulness does not remain in the present. The meditator is satisfied with the appearance of rapture, happiness, confidence, exertion, knowledge and equanimity. The occurrence of deep satisfaction concerning the arising of various mental states is often times the basis for clinging. It is a great danger to the meditation. Delight appearing in training, which runs unchecked, can indefinitely halt a meditator’s progress. One is satisfied with the appearance of mental images or signs occurring in consciousness. A meditator may experience a certain type of internal fire or mental warmth associated with satisfaction concerning practice. The external appearance is calm and placid but there is heat inside.

STAGES CONTINUED:

4. ARISING AND PASSING AWAY

After overcoming the imperfections of insight, there is the fourth stage of insight-knowledge and the beginning of genuine insight practice. Concentration and mindfulness fluctuate back and forth until reaching this plateau. This is the first time mindfulness has enough strength to observe the rise and fall of mentality and materiality clearly. The insight practitioner can focus well on objects. It is similar to looking at clear white paper and seeing it as clearly white, white-white, and not dimly white. The rising and passing away of movements disappears by stages. One is able to accurately separate phenomena appearing and disappearing. A movement is very clear and noting objects is natural. Mindfulness stays in the present moment.

Various disturbances disappear after two or three acknowledgments. As a natural condition, mindfulness is precise now. Awareness of objects rising and falling in consciousness is balanced. Acknowledging objects is clear and comfortable. No excessive effort is needed to focus attention. Mental images disappear after two or three acknowledgments, such as

“seeing, seeing.” A clear bright light appears similar to electric light. It is stronger than a candle and is not an hallucination. The beginning and ending of the movements are clearly perceived. While sitting, the body may bend forwards or backwards as though falling asleep. Some meditators droop heavily or lightly depending on the level of concentration. One seems tired, but in fact, concentration is good. This is called the breaking of continuity of the groups of existence having the characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction and emptiness. They occur in the following patterns: The rising and falling of the movement becomes quick and comes to a stop. This is the “mark of impermanence”; dissatisfaction and emptiness continue. The rising and falling movements become light and even and come to a stop. This is the “mark of emptiness”; impermanence and dissatisfaction continue. The rising and falling movements become stiff and obstructed and come to a stop. This is the “mark of dissatisfaction”; impermanence and emptiness continue. Those with good concentration will experience ceasing at frequent intervals as though falling into an abyss. The body remains still.

5. DISSOLUTION OF FORMATIONS

The end of rising and the end of falling are clear. Insight sees the passing away or dying of phenomena clearly. Until this type of insight-knowledge arises, the average person does not know there is an extinction of physical and mental processes all the time, in the present moment. This realization may make the meditator depressed, but eventually the depression fades if the condition is not clung to. At this stage, the meditator begins to deeply understand the Buddhist teaching of cessation of phenomena. The quality of practice and the background of the person determine when this type of knowledge arises. Awareness of rising and falling is vague. Attention weakens since these feelings are stronger than mindfulness. Knowledge regarding cessation is painful to the mind and makes objects unclear. The mind may become very silent now. Rising and falling disappear when acknowledging them precisely. Attention is centered precisely on the moment. There is total focusing. It is similar to watching heavy rain falling from a roof and noting the drops immediately disappearing in the dirt. It appears that one is not acknowledging anything. This aspect of clarity varies with each meditator depending on how fast or

slow mindfulness focuses on objects.

When observing rising and falling, the mind of the knower seems to disappear, which may be frightening to some people. The meditator notes that form disappears first followed by the waning of mental states. When the mind vanishes first, the mind follows as acknowledgment of its disappearance. The rising and falling away of phenomena may seem distant and faint. Mindfulness is so sharp now that the person may feel that awareness emanates from the past due to the swift accuracy of noting the flux of mind-matter. A feeling of tightness is pronounced. One is unable to see the continuity of rising and falling. Acknowledgment is indistinct. Mental and physical objects seem magnified in strength. Sometimes the mind may try to shake mindfulness by making phenomena appear to be very strong. At times, only rising and falling occurs and the meditator's "self" seems to disappear. Since there is no clinging to objects rising and passing away, the self cannot be found. When mind disappears there is momentary emptiness. What knows emptiness? Insight knows emptiness. Why does not insight disappear? This insight is a special understanding that arises enabling the meditator to know the flux of objects in consciousness. A feeling of warmth passes over the body; warmth or heat flow from the exertion of mind like fire burning away defilements. Insensitivity occurs as though covered by a net. The phenomenal world is like a net that covers defilements. The mind and its objects seem to disappear together. When mindfulness becomes keener the mind objects appear and disappear in quick succession. At first, form vanished while the mind remained. Now, the object disappears and consciousness disappears as well. Mind is clinging but when the object disappears the mind cannot remain alone so mind also disappears.

A meditator may find that rising and falling cease for a brief span of time or as long as four days until boredom occurs. The teacher must awaken the mind of the meditator by suggesting more physical activity. Mindfulness does not wish to see objects disappearing all the time. At this stage, mindfulness is joined with concentration to control feelings. No other feelings can arise until boredom appears. When training continues, the meditator may see this aspect of practice precisely for a number of days. Then practice takes on the characteristic of boredom. At this stage, the meditator should not sit for

extended periods of time but rather, be more active to lose an excess of concentration as well as the emotion of boredom. Boredom is not helpful at this time and skillful means should be found to correct the situation. If just noting boredom, boredom does not dissipate and the meditator should either walk more often or perform another appropriate activity. Awareness of coming into being, peaking and ceasing moments are all present but interest is not focused. The meditator observes only the ceasing of mental-physical processes. It is important for the meditator to be more aware of the waning or ceasing moments rather than the arising and peaking of phenomenal events. This aspect demonstrates the truths of impermanence, dissatisfaction and emptiness. Mindfulness of internal objects (rise and fall of the abdomen) is unclear. Awareness of external objects such as standing, sitting, gazing at trees, etc., all seem to vibrate. External objects are relatively simple to acknowledge. Objects of the mind are deep, difficult and subtle to observe. The mind, together with form, can sometimes see objects vibrating. The meditator sees all objects as though looking at a field in foggy weather. Everything is vague and obscure. If looking at the sky it seems that the air vibrates. Rising and falling away vanish then suddenly reappear.

6. FEARFUL NATURE OF MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATES

Initially, there is acknowledgment of objects but now awareness vanishes together with consciousness. When attention is given to objects rising and falling, the mind remains in the present. When one object disappears, consciousness falls away immediately. When mind rises again, consciousness is, in a sense, surprised. The meditator experiences fear for no one wishes to see mental and physical phenomena rising and vanishing continuously. The self-concept desires protection and wishes to continue hence, fear is born in the mind of the meditator. Fear is present but it is unlike fear connected with supernatural occurrences. A peculiar type of fear rises in insight training. The meditator is fearful when continually observing mental and physical states disappearing and fading into nothingness. The meditator may experience neuralgic pains. Even while walking or standing still, pain appears in the body. When

fear arises in consciousness, mindfulness cannot swiftly focus on the flux of phenomena. Some meditators think of their friends and relatives and weep. The meditator feels totally alone in the world and clings to the thought of friends, parents, etc. The meditator may experience a peculiar fear projected onto whatever is seen, even a cup or table. The meditator feels that no person or situation in the world can be of any help. When the mind experiences this type of fear the meditator is afraid of everything in the world no matter how harmless in appearance. The senses take on a fearful aspect as well. The meditator formally thought certain mental/physical states were desirable. Now one realizes that body and mind processes are insubstantial and unreliable. This is a natural development in this practice. The meditator cannot find enjoyment in any physical or mental state. The meditator realizes he is afraid but feels it is not real fear and so is not controlled by the emotion.

7. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATES AS DISSATISFYING

The rising and falling abdominal movements disappear by stages. Their appearance is unclear and the movements gradually vanish. The mind can actually see itself being born and also dying, moment to moment. A vague sense of boredom sets in. One feels tired and uneasy. Mindfulness sees that, indeed, there is reason to be afraid. More often than not, defilements control the mind and are constantly being born. Life seems bad, ugly and tiresome. The meditator experiences irritable feelings. Mental and physical states appear quickly to the mind and acknowledgment is keen. Mindfulness suddenly increases now and focusing is quite clear. This stage is similar to seeing water falling into a pond, drop by drop the bubbles breaking, again and again. The bubbles are empty and break into nothingness. This demonstrates the truths of impermanence and emptiness. There seems to be nothing but bad life situations. Everything in the world seems dark and generates pain due to the incessant rise-and-fall of phenomena. In contrast to the earlier days of practice, one cannot acknowledge well what is perceived by way of ear, eye, nose, tongue, body and mind. The meditator is thoroughly bored and becomes lazy in acknowledging objects. Only dryness and a deep sense of the insipid nature of life prevails.

8. DISENCHANTMENT

All objects are wearisome and unattractive. The meditator experiences dryness, as though lazy, but the ability to acknowledge well is still present. The feeling of boredom is very intense. It seems that all events in the world end in disappointment due to the relentless rise-and-fall of phenomena. The meditator becomes dull and does not wish to continue practice. When awareness of mental and physical phenomena arises however, mindfulness is clear. The meditator is joyless, feels bored and is sorrowful as though separated from loved ones and every desirable experience. There is no clinging at this stage. One waits for the feeling to wane but it does not disappear. Previously the practitioner heard people complain about ordinary boredom. Now, one knows another kind of overwhelming boredom through direct, personal experience. Feeling, talking or thinking about ordinary boredom is an entirely different matter from experiencing this intense boredom. This is a special type of boredom that rises during insight practice.

Formerly one may have thought only hell was sorrowful and that heaven and the human worlds were desirable. At this stage, the meditator only wishes to escape from birth and death thinking nibbana is the total release. When boredom intensifies, the meditator does not think about heaven or hell. Nothing can make the mind feel pleasant at this stage. The mind begins to bend toward the search for freedom. There is acknowledgment that mental and bodily states are unpleasant and undesirable. The meditator feels that every situation in the world is oppressive and no true enjoyment is to be found anywhere. The meditator may wish to go to an isolated place and continue practice. There is the realization, however, that wherever one goes the five senses and the mind will follow. The person does not wish to meet or speak with anyone but only desires to remain in one's room. This is a subtle form of clinging. There is no real boredom now, only quietude. A sense of utter desolation sets in. The meditator feels lonely, dejected and apathetic. Some meditators realize that fame and fortune, which formerly were viewed as desirable, have neither real stability nor true joy. Nothing in the world is lasting and should be grasped. One becomes bored and does not seek happiness where there is birth, old age, sickness and death. Thus deep and intense boredom arises along with non-attachment. The mind is bent on the search for the total freedom of *nibbana*.

9. DESIRE TO ABANDON THE WORLDLY STATE

The body itches as though being bitten all over by ants. It seems that small creatures are climbing up one's face and body. The mind is playing tricks again. When the meditator is bored it is relatively easy to be patient. When the body itches, however, then impatience occurs. The meditator may wish to curtail practice thinking a better meditation center exists at another location. It is similar to an animal fleeing from place to place thinking that somewhere else will be a better place to rest. The meditator is impatient and rushes to complete every activity. Acknowledgment while standing, sitting, lying down or walking is vague. Restlessness increases now and mindfulness is low. The mind wants to leave this unhappy situation but now is not the time. One cannot acknowledge even small actions. It may appear to the meditator that mindfulness is weak but actually it is a sign of progress in insight. The mind is uneasy, restless and bored. The meditator wishes to escape and leave meditation practice. Dissatisfaction is more acute at this time. A strong urge to retreat from noticing objects is present. This type of frustration is sharper and deeper than boredom. The meditator may think of returning home believing that one has meager abilities for meditation practice. In earlier times, this was called the "rolling the mat" stage. Pondering the situation and thereby lowering mindfulness of the present moment, one plans for the future but is still indecisive.

10. INVESTIGATION OF THE PATH THAT LEADS TO THE DECISION TO PRACTICE TO COMPLETION

The meditator experiences a jabbing sensation throughout the body as though splinters were piercing the skin. The meditator may experience sensations of intense pain as though slashed with a knife. Many disturbing sensations arise but disappear after two or three acknowledgments. The meditator feels drowsy. Sleepiness will disappear if mindfulness has ability and enough power. The body may become stiff (similar to entering a state of absorption). The mind is still active and hearing continues to function. A tingling, heavy feeling arises as though a stone were placed on top of the body. The mind feels that the "five groups of clinging" (form, sensation, perception, men-

tal formations and consciousness) are heavy. The body is too heavy to move and the mind wants to throw the body away. The meditator feels heat spreading throughout the body. These afflictions are like fire. Desire to abandon these impurities is strong. The meditator may feel very uncomfortable.

11. REGARDING MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATES WITH DISPASSION

The meditator is not frightened or glad but indifference is present. Phenomenal existence is experienced as merely a continuous round of rising-and-falling. Abdominal movements are considered merely as mental and physical processes. Mindfulness is focused naturally and no anxiety or need to hurry arises. If the meditator practices to this level, the perfection of character cultivated in the past will assist the practice at this stage. Similar to preparing to jump an obstacle in a contest, the meditator is gathering enough confidence, strength and power to make the leap to freedom. The meditator is neither happy nor sad. Mindfulness is present and consciousness is clear in acknowledging mind-body processes. The meditator realizes that immature ideas of happiness are gone. Life appears quite ordinary now and no special excitement is present. Phenomena simply rise and fall away. There is no clinging to past occurrences. Memory is clear and acknowledgment occurs without difficulty. Mindfulness, which no longer needs to be followed step by step, is sharp. The meditator can still be mindful and quite relaxed. There is no sense of practice.

Mindfulness will be kept naturally now, following the flow of phenomena. Good concentration arises and mindfulness remains peaceful and smooth for a long time. The meditator feels satisfied and may forget time. Concentration becomes extremely refined. There is no uneasiness of mind. Sights and sounds, etc. do not disturb the meditator. Various pains and diseases may be healed, such as certain kinds of paralysis or nervous disorders. The meditator notes all phenomena as continuously disappearing. The desire for happiness and suffering are gone. Only equanimity is present. Mindfulness is now strong and precise. Even when mindfulness focuses on a pleasant feeling, the mind does not cling. When mind focuses on frustration or pain, no grasping arises and therefore, mental disturbance is not

born. This stage of insight-knowledge is joined with equanimity at all times. During this stage of practice, the meditator feels at ease and acknowledgment is easy. Feeling satisfied, the meditator might forget the passage of time. Planning to sit for a half-hour, one may sit for a full hour. Duration of this condition depends on the strength of moment-to-moment concentration. If the meditator has had previous training in concentration it is possible to sit up to twenty hours.

12. CONFORMING TO THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS, PREPARATION FOR PATH ENTRY AND APPROACH TO *NIBBANA*

Arrival at this stage of insight-knowledge means that realization appears in progressive stages. Progression follows the earlier levels of insight beginning with the fourth stage until the twelfth stage is reached. Until this level is realized, insight meditation practice is like the flight of birds flying sometimes higher or lower. At this stage, it is difficult for the meditator to focus accurately on the appearing and vanishing aspects of phenomena. One may feel lazy or just bad. The meditator must know clearly, must be absolutely certain of their experience and must be clearly aware if happiness or unhappiness is or is not present. When the mind is sure of its experience, there is no craving, clinging or anxiety about any situation in the world.

13. DELIVERANCE FROM THE WORLDLY CONDITION

This is the first stage of insight-wisdom that separates one from the worldly condition. Mental and physical states, together with the mind perceiving them, become peaceful and quiet. One comes into the vicinity of *nibbana* and takes *nibbana* as object. This state is said to be between mundane and supra mundane existence. When feeling begins to break off, this stage of insight has been experienced. A profound realization has occurred. Though one does not realize *nibbana* yet, the meditator sees *nibbana* as object. The mind actually glimpses *nibbana*.

The desire to abandon defilements arises and the mind is primed to accomplish this step. The proper direction is known but one cannot completely abandon the defilements. This is the knowledge covering the appearance of arising. The meditator has no doubts about this realization. It does not depend on the senses or rationalization. It

is intuitive knowledge of the mind. Knowledge covers the continuance of mental-physical states. Everything is clear but one is as yet not completely free. Knowledge covers external mental-physical phenomena. The meditator knows the conditional nature of the external world along with its potentiality for suffering. Knowing suffering as inherent in all existence, compassion arises for all sentient beings. No matter what is experienced as seeing, hearing, etc., personal mental suffering does not arise for those who have attained this stage. Knowledge moves towards cessation. The person can correct wrong view concerning mental- physical phenomena. Some defilements are abandoned for two or three seconds. These follow the meditator to the border of the “Other Shore”. Knowledge approaches discontinuity or cessation (*nibbana*). The mental impurities are what keep us from realizing *nibbana*. Wisdom covers arising and then approaches non-arising. No grasping or arising of defilements occurs at this stage.

14. ABANDONING DEFILEMENTS

The moment that exists immediately following the breaking off of sensation is the arising of clear and complete knowledge of the Path to *nibbana*. It is the arising of the Path of Self Awareness of the stream of *nibbana* that lasts for a moment. Certain defilements are overcome by destruction. It constitutes a cleansing and preparation for the destruction of remaining mental taints. The defilements destroyed are as follows: first, the belief in the existence of a permanent unchanging self; second, skeptical doubt about the Buddha, the dharma, the enlightened sangha, what is and is not the Path, “heaven and hell,” the results of the Path, and *nibbana*. Last is the misunderstanding of rites, rituals and disciplines as a means, in themselves, of achieving purification. It is known that these are not means of achieving enlightenment.

This stage has *nibbana* as its object, which can be reached in this life. This is wisdom. There is deep knowledge of Dharma that is necessary to lead one to enlightenment. Profound wisdom is born enabling the meditator to uproot defilements. The person experiences a feeling of surprise. One is completely happy and at ease. No condition of worldly happiness can compare with this realization. The abandonment of defilements is like a flash of lightning and then the thunder.

The practitioner has “entered the stream” and become a *sotapanna*, a person deemed by the Buddha to be a Noble One, a Buddhist saint.

15. REALIZING THE FRUIT OF THE PATH WITH *NIBBANA* AS OBJECT

This stage is the Fruit of the Path immediately following upon the moment in which the Path is discovered. The mind has realized what has occurred and *nibbana* is the object for two or three moments. There is no interim state. Supra-mundane knowledge continues to appear at this level of insight-wisdom. The mind receives knowledge about defilements that have been destroyed and sees *knowing* as the object for two or three moments.

SUMMARY OF STAGES LEADING TO CESSATION OF DEFILEMENTS:

The first ending of sensation occurs in the thirteenth stage and has *nibbana* as its object. It is between mundane and super-mundane existence. The midway ending of sensation is the fourteenth stage and has *nibbana* as object. The first three defilements have been broken off. It is super-mundane existence. At this point, certain defilements are eradicated for the stream-winner, once-returner and nonreturner. For an *arahat* there is no reflection on the remaining defilements as they are free of them all. The final cessation is the fifteenth stage and it has *nibbana* as object. It is super-mundane knowledge. It is the complete eradication of defilements for the *arahat*. In this stage, mental taints are prevented from recurring. This process may be compared to extinguishing a fire. Defilements possess such power that it becomes necessary to purge them again during the fifteenth stage to finally put out the fire of mental impurities. The person returns to normal consciousness for retrospection only. Everything is now in the past. At the same time, one knows intuitively what has occurred in the mind.

16. REVIEWING REMAINING DEFILEMENTS

At this stage, there is contemplation of the Path, the “fruit” of practice and *nibbana*. This insight knowledge consists of the consideration of those defilements still remaining in the mind. There is contempla-

tion of having followed the Path and the fact that a result has been obtained. There is knowledge of the defilements which have been eradicated and which remain. *Nibbana*, which is an exceptional state of awareness, has been glimpsed and experienced. While the meditator is acknowledging rising-and-falling, they come upon the Path, the Fruit and *nibbana*. At that moment, three conditions occur: impermanence, selflessness and dissatisfaction, *anicca, anatta, dukkha*. When the meditator is noting the rise and fall of abdominal movements, they are aware of the total cessation of the rising and falling. After cessation, awareness resumes and the person contemplates what has happened. After this moment, one continues to acknowledge rising and falling movements but they seem much clearer than normal.

CONCLUSION

The meditator may wish to see the results of the Path that have just been realized. There arises the wish to make the mind peaceful and quiet and not have to feel the body for periods of time lasting from minutes up to seven days. Depending upon the level of concentration, a meditator may remain in this state for a long or short period of time.

SUMMARY

The truth of *anicca*, impermanence, is characterized by quick breathing; the truth of *dukkha*, dissatisfaction, by heavy obstructed breathing. The truth of *anatta*, of not-self or emptiness by smooth, even breathing. Passage between the twelfth and sixteenth stages of insight arise concurrently with no separation. The meditator will only have awareness of the twelfth and sixteenth levels but not those between them. There is no awareness of the thirteenth to the fifteenth levels because of the ending of sensation. The meditator is quiet, finished. Consciousness resumes at the sixteenth stage.

CHAPTER X

IN CONCLUSION

Entering the Marketplace



A Path through life is what we take and we are prone to all that can befall us as we traverse it. While a great deal of what befalls us is not in our control, there is a great deal that is. The central thrust of the Buddha's teachings are that we determine, by our conscious choice or failure to make a choice, how we condition the mind to perceive, interpret and respond to our inner life and our environment, thus conditioning our feelings of joy, contentment and suffering. It also conditions the type of behaviour we manifest and thus, how others see us and treat us. Over the course of writing this book, I have had numerous people suggest that I include my own experiences of mystic states. But I have chosen not to do so because I am not the point of this work. Whatever I may have experienced, it would be too easily misconstrued were I to attempt to encapsulate it in language. I have tried to share something of the journey I took and what to me, were useful things to know while wandering the path simply by acknowledging that the time

honored tradition of the spiritual quest still continues to bring people a sense of peace and fulfilment in an ever more baffling world. The grandeur of this pursuit lies partly in the inability to express just what is experienced; a view of the world's spiritual traditions from the inside. The realms of the shamans, the ecstatic states, meditative absorptions, psychic phenomena, possession states, can all be intertwined in the unfolding of your inner life. Magic and miracles occur in ways never dreamed of and whether "real" or "imagined," constitute an immense reservoir of inner riches that can be used to sustain one through life's joys and vicissitudes.

In my life, I divide my experiences of altered states of consciousness into two basic divisions. Some of the experiences are prominent in religious traditions and some are more closely associated with the psychological literature on mood disorders or other conditions. Spiritual traditions did not seek to classify mental "conditions" the way Western psychology has done so it is not surprising that many types of mental phenomena are not considered important as markers on the quest. But, all these experiences have positively aided me in my personal unfolding of life and the "myth" I use to guide it. I divide these experiences simply as subjectively positive and negative, or pleasant and unpleasant in the feeling of their perception. This is not to imply that there is any difference between them in terms of the causes that have elicited them or in regard to their overall worth for gaining greater personal insight and for developing a first-hand understanding of the phenomena of religious experiences. Coming from the West, with its particular cultural paradigms, possibly makes it inevitable to experience some degree of conflict and discomfort when the realities intuited through unusual states are so drastically at odds with the dominate cultural views and thus with personal conditioning. It is unfortunate that there does not appear to be the same acceptance of unusual states of consciousness as in many other cultures. Those seriously endeavoring to realize a spiritual quest that includes accessing the full range of cognitive states need to prepare for those states by accepting from the outset that they may not be well received by oneself, their family and friends, and authorities of various kinds that may view any aberration of consciousness as indicative of mental illness.

Mystical experiences may occur with either positive or negative psychological consequences. The term “mystical experience” refers to a large variety of states of consciousness that have a wide range of acceptance and interpretation amongst various peoples. Throughout the history of Western philosophy and religion, there have been a number of different levels of acceptance or persecution towards people claiming mystical experiences. With the advent of the early psychological theories, virtually all unusual types of consciousness were deemed pathological. This paradigm of mystic states as mental illness is not universal, nor is it recognized by all members of Western medical and religious establishments. There are problems of differential diagnosis in Western psychology where a person may be diagnosed as having had a psychotic experience with mystical features or a mystical experience with psychotic features. Mystical experiences also contain the potential for psychological consequences largely dependent on the subject’s religious or philosophical world-view and prior knowledge of mystical phenomena or lack thereof.

The shifting views of mystical states of consciousness in various cultures and throughout history, their perceived place and value for the individual and society shows a clear pattern of social acceptance creating a condition that assists the individual to productively assimilate the experiences into positive psychological transformations. In an accepting culture, mystical experiences are seen as coming from God, part of the process of maturing, a gift or call from the spirits, connection to mystical forces or a quality of enlightenment and are seen as being worthy of pursuit. These experiences occurring in an intolerant culture can be viewed as the work of the Devil, ghosts, evil spirits, a type of heresy or as mental illness. In such cultures, people having these experiences show a higher incidence of anxiety, depression and suicide derived from social stigma and/or the personal belief that they have a mental illness. They are also liable to many kinds of physical, mental and emotional persecution; a fact well documented in mystic literature where many of the great Christian and Muslim mystics were killed by their contemporaries. Social acceptance is an extremely important psychological factor for a healthy life perceived as productive and fulfilling. To achieve personal fulfilment and have one’s experience denounced as heresy or illness has adverse effects on the unfortunate individuals having

natural healing experiences in cultures ignorant of the personal and social benefits gained by allowing them to occur.

The reality is that there can be different interpretations of phenomena that occur with both spiritual and pathological mental experience. In any case, no matter what achievements we might accomplish in terms of spiritual practice, we remain subject to the body/mind's nature and the social realities of our environment. Subject to life, illness, aging and death, we always face the potential to experience the opposites of the states we typically seek. The distinction I make between states is based only on the nature of the states and their correlation to spiritual and psychological literature. Emotionally positive states have taught me the beauty of life's potential and the wonder of states of mind I could never have imagined. Emotionally negative states have aided in healing from past trauma, resolved inner conflicts and have shown me the pervasive reality of suffering and the value and place of compassion. People often equate positive experiences with spirituality and see negative states as a problem or sign of illness. Both positive and negative states are features of mood disorders as well as the experiences of mystic states. The initiation of a shaman is often fraught with physical and mental torment. The Christian saint's "dark night of the soul" is another example of a decent before the ascent. The practice of Buddhist spirituality is simply meant to help us alleviate the suffering we experience and cause others. Suffering is the first of the Buddha's four noble truths. We experience it. Buddhist practice can be summed up as the attempt to be mindfully aware and a decent human being leading to peace within oneself and with others. Different schools emphasize having unusual experiences or not having them depending on the schools' philosophy. Individuals must really decide for themselves how to interpret altered states of consciousness. People, cultures, religions, teachers, doctors, priests, and mental healthcare workers will all have different views. The Buddha left interpretations of enlightenment to the individuals and concerned himself principally with teaching the methodology of gaining liberation.

It has been noted by psychologists that people have a natural tendency to try to order their perception of the world in a way that causes them to create models of other people. These are attempts to understand and to prepare for dealing with other people and if you challenge the "new" model a person is revealing it can be very dis-

ruptive... to them! The Quest is very much about change, fundamental and often quite dramatic change and you should know in advance that it may not be well received by people who want you to remain how they have come to see you. Beginning with my journey overseas, I started a practice I refer to as “pruning the friendship tree.” People who would constrain me, use me in a way I do not wish, react with negativity should I exhibit a “change,” or for whatever other reason I choose, are simply left behind. This is not done with animosity. It is a simple act of letting go. Being with people that do not support the quest makes no sense unless I am in a situation where I cannot do anything else except deal with them. When that is the case then wisdom can be applied, but it is not wise, generally speaking, to deal with unnecessary problems for no reason. The Thai people have a saying regarding my thoughts along these lines. They say: “It is easy to find a friend to eat with, but very hard to find a friend to die with.” While some teachers advocate having at least one negative kind of person around to aid in development, I find enough people fill that task without my seeking any as friends. Have the courage to cut people out of your life, including immediate family and relatives if they hamper your efforts to gain true freedom.

There is no substitute for the immediacy of life. Spiritual maturity can be found in our relationships, endeavors, our patience, humor, and compassion. The development of these simple qualities is more important than any unusual experience as they connect us to what is essentially human. Spiritual life is here in the present moment and we do not necessarily need to attain rarefied mental states. Those states can occur and they may prove beneficial or harmful depending on how we respond to them but the main lessons are in the simple humanity we learn. In Plato’s *Phaedo* there is a passage where Simmias is speaking to Socrates summing up the search for truth:

“It is our duty to do one of two things: either to ascertain the facts, whether by seeking instruction or by personal discovery; or, if this is impossible, to select the best and most dependable theory that human intelligence can supply, and use it as a raft to ride the seas of life—that is, assuming that we cannot make our journey with greater confidence and security by the surer means of a divine revelation.”

Virtue, patience, tolerance, compassion, etc. need not be given any ultimately positive or “moral” designation. On the surface, Buddhism may appear to have a moral foundation, but morality is really part of the practice and is not the view arising from insight. From that place we can deal directly with physical/mental energy rather than social conventions, traditions and beliefs. Unfortunately, the Buddha, through the written discourses that remain of his teachings, does not speak directly to us. He cannot answer questions regarding his position on certain points. But from his purported stance on the Dharma and its purpose of alleviating suffering, we may understand ourselves as being shown a choice. We can for ourselves decide what type of character, attitude and outlook we prefer based on simple psychological principles open to direct self-observations. No culturally constructed morality need interfere with the freedom of our choice. Peace or anger, joy or anxiety, course happiness or sublime serenity, chasing endless desires (with the joys of sometimes catching them or the fun of trying) or relaxed in simple contentment; what do we prefer? Once we know what we want, how do we achieve what we wish to embody? Buddhism provides a means of understanding and leaves us free to choose based upon our own realization.

What I refer to as Mysticism, divorced from ideology, philosophy, and theories of reality, is the process operating beyond the level of operational or surface consciousness as well as in it, which occasions a natural maturing of the mind, bringing to light the natural qualities of a healthy mind, rather than conforming to cultural stereotypes of spirituality. It is the natural mind, in Buddhism, that is seen as compassionate, joyous, loving, and balanced. Stereotypes can become infused into the reality found through mysticism but can also be left behind. This is an area largely dependent on the individual, their environment, and the influence of teachers and significant others.

As a practice moving us towards truth, Buddhism can be practiced in conjunction with other faiths and psychotherapy since it really makes no dogmatic claims on anything. Once, in a moment of inspiration gained through intensive meditation while doing a rains retreat in Thailand, I went to my Preceptor, the man that ordained me as a monk and said, “The Buddha never taught there is no God, he just taught there is no God-concept.” My Preceptor said, “Yes, that’s

right.” Contrary to many people’s ideas, including many Buddhist teachers, the term God can be applied to reality or the Absolute as long as there is no concrete conception of what that God is. So be at peace with the mystery. Such a state is precious and not always attainable. It is wise to take advantage of the natural means for helping one through the vicissitudes of life but there are formulated means as well. With this in mind, I have tried to present this volume and have tried to refrain from tying everything to any one perspective. Be free with your mind and explore the range of potentiality. Truth is both perceptible and livable although it is not always easy to live it in a world where many do not hold to the ideals that truth presents. May your own path through life be filled with Life’s Blessings.

The search for ultimate truth is something of a perilous journey. Truth can be likened to a double edged sword; it cuts both ways. Once gained, truth can be impossible to get rid of. One edge of the sword is the light, positive, life-enhancing side, the side of balance or “good.” The other is the dark, negative, death-affirming side, the side of imbalance or “evil.” But ultimate truth rests at the point where both sides come together in the inseparable union of opposites. It is the union of yin and yang joined eternally in the Tao. Finding that point that lies beyond words joins the light and dark sides into a whole so profound that mystics have always used myth, metaphor, and poetry to convey it. For me, truth is like water. The different sects of Buddhism and the different religions of the world have constructed a variety of vessels with different shapes and sizes and a multitude of decorations with which to hold it. The vessel is not the important part; the truth it contains is what really matters. The Buddha likened the Dharma to a raft. It was to be used to cross to the “Other Shore.” Once there it could be left behind or used to ferry others across. Truth is like a sword, religion is like a vessel, and life... is like a Christmas present. We can spend our entire life playing with the present’s wrapping, delighting in its appearance, fondling its pretty bow and fiddling with the idea of what might be inside if we realize there might be something hidden within. Life is our gift; just as there is a mystery in a gift lovingly concealed in beautiful paper, hidden to make its discovery even more enjoyable, so too is there love hidden in the gift of the mystery of life. If it pleases you, take the time to unwrap the gift of your “present.” The beauty you will find within is beyond the

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imagination's ability to follow. No one can tell you just what you will find as you penetrate to its core. Our gifts are like Chinese puzzle boxes, a gift within a gift within a gift. As Lao Tzu said, "Mystery upon mystery, therein lie the Gates of Heaven." Some may know the ultimate surprise, but its particular unfolding is a personal matter, something you will have to find for yourself.

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About the Author

Anonymous Monkey first ordained in Thailand where he was teaching English. Later, he travelled to India where he spent time amongst the *Hindu Sadhus* and met with Tibetan monks in Dharmasala.



They spoke to the *Dalai Lama* and he received his permission to become a fully ordained Tibetan monk with the Dalai Lama officiating at the ceremony on the condition that he return to Thailand to continue practice. He then spent a number of years as a lama and wandering ascetic, living in caves and temples in Southeast Asia. After returning to the West he met a monk from Sri Lanka and was invited to go to Sri Lanka and take ordination there. He returned to the West and practiced as a Buddhist Monk for a time before disrobing to follow a more practical routine as a lama (Tibetan Priest, usually a lay person). The difficulties involved following customs designed by a different culture made it impossible to remain a monk. He disrobed again to resume the practice of a lama, which is easy to fit into any culture. In addition to private teaching, A. Monkey has taught meditation classes in libraries, wellness and community centers, a mental health clinic, a hospice facility, and a college. The *Mystic Quest* was initially handouts and his course outline for college. After he finished teaching he had much of a book already completed and decided to develop the work into a manual for spiritual aspirants. He is currently retired and living in seclusion.

