

EIGHT STEPS TO FREEDOM
FOLLOWING THE BUDDHA'S EIGHT FOLD PATH IN MODERN LIFE

By Stephen Echard-Musgrave Roshi

It is not possible to write anything concerning spiritual practice that is meaningful unless that which is written comes from one's own experience. Over the last twenty years I have been involved in trying to find a Buddhist practice that adequately relates to living in modern society. A practice which would be in Dogen Zenji's words, an "authentic" practice. There is a temptation to either modernize Buddhist practice to the point it no longer contains adequate discipline, or else accept it, "swallowed whole", complete with all the cultural forms from the past.

In this instant society where we are constantly looking for the latest invention to make life easier, traditional spiritual practice with its rigorous demands seems too old fashioned to be viable. In the new age journals there are ads for "brain wave enhancers that will do for you in twenty minutes what it takes a Zen monk twenty years to attain." I suppose what is attained is the jaded attitude toward spiritual practice which often appears in some Zen monks after twenty years of sectarian rigidity.

Obviously there are many people who believe enlightenment is biomechanical and therefore open to a mechanistic approach. Zen or other Buddhist traditions are just another entree on the buffet table to be sampled. Every person who has ever read a book by Alan Watts is ready to write their own on the Zen of Water Polo, Basket Weaving, or whatever. After all isn't Zen just doing meditation and being one in the moment?

It would be wonderful to say that all western practitioners of Zen and other Buddhist traditions did not share this simple world view, but unfortunately it can be found to one extent or another in many western Buddhists. These are people who are sincere for the most part, but do not have a strong background in Buddhist philosophy, and are more often attracted to the tradition because of an emotional feeling they have for it. Some of these people will be fortunate enough to connect with a strong teacher and sangha that will lead them out of this primitive stage into serious respect and understanding for practice. Other students will give up on Buddhism and return to their western religious roots, convinced that Buddhism failed them. Still, a small number of others will end up in mental hospitals because they lacked the necessary emotional maturity or intellectual understanding to sustain psychic stability through the rigors of meditation.

It is a reality of life that serious spiritual practice has serious ramifications on the psyche of those undergoing it. If this were not the case then there would be no point in doing it. Those of us whose spiritual vocation is involved with the training of others in these practices have to be aware of the reality behind our students enthusiasm. If that enthusiasm is based upon anything other than a realistic understanding of the nature of our discipline then our student is heading for trouble. There is no way for us to lead them out of this trouble unless we have a total commitment to Buddhist life, in the form of our journey on the EIGHT FOLD path. This book, then, is not only a guide to spiritual practice based on Buddhist philosophy, but in a sense a personal memoir of my own spiritual journey.

I had been practicing Zen for about ten years when I decided to help form a Zen Center under the direction of the famous Korean Zen Master, Seung Sahn Sa Nim. At this time in my life I would spend a great deal of time in zazen while I was living by myself. Living with other people at this center became extremely difficult for me. I found my practice disintegrating and my actions inappropriate to right action and compulsive. I seemed to judge everything, hating Korean style and idealizing Japanese tradition. I could not get into Koan practice, at all, as it seemed utterly vapid; a mere game. Never the less, I stayed in the Center until my actions became so poor that Seung Sahn Sa Nim had to eject me from the Temple.

The entire episode was out of character for myself and for others who knew me as a good obedient Zen student. I knew this series of events and my mental state were both an indication of a breakdown in my practice and an opportunity for self examination. I was determined to understand and rectify the problem. From my training in philosophy, I had learned that one should always examine the beginnings of an activity; return to fundamentals and start from there.

At first fundamentals seemed to me to entail doing more zazen since that is the heart and soul of Zen practice. It was not long before it became clear to me that this approach was not working, since I had been sitting for long stretches just prior to going through the crisis at Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center. Also, at that time I had a close personal friendship with a person who was also Buddhist and practiced vigorously but, never the less, was in a perpetual state of self inflicted misery. Since it is always easier to recognize shortcomings in another person, I began to ponder the effectiveness of vigorous meditation in Buddhism as a means of self transformation, particularly as opposed to the path's of Faith, Tantra, and scholarship practiced by other Buddhist traditions.

One day, while looking through my bookshelf, I happened to chance upon an old copy of the Buddhist Bible, a collection of Buddhist texts compiled in the 1930's. It opened with a description of the Noble Four Fold Truths and the EIGHT FOLD Path, the fundamentals of Buddhism. Immediately I was struck by the significance of what was right in front of me: the basic fundamentals of Buddhism, as handed down from its founder, and more personally the answer to the missing parts of my practice, the reason for my inability to integrate meditation with my life.

I began to analyze why it was that I operated with two apparently contradictory world views. It became apparent that while I accepted consciously the doctrine of karma and the interrelationship of karma to spiritual growth, I never the less was still operating in daily life with an unconscious mechanistic view of the universe; a view that saw meditation as a tool to be used to get enlightenment. It was about this time that I was also involved in studying the Avatamsaka Sutra which is the philosophical foundation of Zen and teaches that all things in the universe share an essential unity of being as process and in effect actually interpenetrate each others existence.

Even as slow as I am in grasping spiritual truth, it became apparent to me that here was the solution to my dilemma. My practice failed because it was not authentic. It was not authentic because it was not a whole practice, which must have a

totality of effort and view that is consistent with itself. All the parts of practice which make up the whole were laid out before me in the EIGHT FOLD path. Before my crisis, my western trained mind-set believed that the eight paths were causally related, and since I could not readily discern the connection between them, I assumed that they had a hierarchical relationship, with meditation at the apex capable of correcting any shortcoming in one of the other paths.

I could not see the fundamental interdependence which makes up the unity of practice. From my studies of the Avatamsaka Sutra, I began to connect the underlying wholeness of the path and began to see how each path contained the seeds of all the other paths; each growing together to create a perfect unity. The EIGHT FOLD path becoming a kind of spiritual organism. My commitment to the discipline of this interconnecting spiritual path followed as a natural consequence of my understanding. Faith in this incomparable gift from the Buddha follows naturally the understanding of its perfect unity and drives our practice. It is the unique quality of Buddhist faith that it flows from logic and understanding as the grounds for practice, rather than the opposite which is the case in monotheistic traditions.

Years passed and I practiced sitting with various masters keeping my own Soto style while learning from Rinzai, Tibetan and Chinese teachers. I forgot about attaining enlightenment and was caught up in the practice of the EIGHT FOLD path. Enlightenment came without me looking for it. I began to understand my karma and gave up ten years of celibacy. Almost as soon as I understood my nature, I met my wonderful wife, Rhonda, and we were married. Even though I was a bachelor for over forty years, this transformation was natural. Now we have a beautiful son, Shea, born 8, 8, 1988 at 8:08 am, who is a true being of light. Being a father is natural, too. The beauty of the practice of the eight fold path is that it presents a view and way of being in the world that is dynamic and frees us from fossilization of the ego. Even life long habits and mind-sets dissolve into a new openness and freedom of expression.

Also during this time, my long time friend and teacher Soyu Matsuoka Roshi bestowed upon me the title Roshi or Zen Master. All these things come as they do without special effort. The eight fold path leads us directly to that which is our own karma, waiting to be ripened in the sun of our practice. I am convinced that if any serious student of Buddhism consciously applies themselves to the following of this path, adhering to the meditation and practice of their chosen tradition, they will attain a life and practice which is authentic. This authenticity is nothing less than the life and way of the Buddhas and Patriarchs manifested in the present. There is nothing more that I can wish for anyone than that they experience this authentic way of life for themselves.

The Dharma student in the west is faced with a number of dilemmas. The problem of how to adapt our spiritual practice to this life is not an easy question to answer. As long as we live in modern society, we have to reflect that reality in our lives, and there is so much tradition surrounding Buddhist practice that it is difficult to ascertain what is pertinent to our spiritual growth and what is not.

This problem has to be addressed if we are going to make any progress in our path. The Dharma path fortunately has a systematic nature which allows us to reflect upon each aspect of it independently in order to judge our practice as a whole. No matter to what particular discipline a person belongs, whether it be Zen, Vajrayana, Theravada, or any of the others, there is the constant signpost of the Buddha's eight fold path to give direction.

The essential understanding of the eight fold path and it's application to daily life is the best measuring stick we have for judging the purity and authenticity of our practice. In spite of this, it is little understood and seldom adhered to as a guide for personal action by modern students. So many students seem to be stumbling along, not making much progress in their practice, and wondering why. They invariably cling to meditation as a spiritual panacea, mistaking the practice of meditation for dharma practice itself.

Dharma practice is perfected in meditation as the embodiment of Buddha's spiritual energy, but students have to keep in mind that Dhyana is but on aspect of the eight fold path. Nowhere in the sutras does Buddha claim that success in meditation can substitute for failure to follow the other seven paths. All of the spokes of this wheel have to be in place for the wheel to function.

To some students, mere piety and adherence to the forms of tradition suffice. While few of these people are ill intentioned, they are ill informed. Wearing robes, shaving heads, piety and meditation prowess alone will not lead to enlightenment. Enlightenment is an organic response to reality, and like anything organic, it involves an ecosystem. To understand just how this ecosystem functions we have to understand the interrelationships of the eight fold path.

There have been many fine works on the traditional philosophical significance of the eight fold path, but very little that addresses how the Path relates specifically to contemporary life. Since myself and all my students have to confront this problem daily, this issue is of intimate importance to me, both in my own life, and in my teaching. This work then is a result of twenty plus years of tackling this never ending koan. I hope that the reader will find this book of benefit in confronting this essential issue in their own life.

RIGHT VIEWS

In the beginning there is the idea. The seed from which all else germinates. In spiritual practice, the view we hold of the world is certain to dictate the course of our actions. In Buddhism, the path of right view or right idea begins with a basic understanding of the spiritual laws of existence. The noble four fold truths: 1.) that to be alive is to experience dissatisfaction 2.) that this dissatisfaction is borne of attachment to desire 3.) that these desires can be extinguished 4.) through following the eight fold path.

The first noble truth is usually interpreted as to be alive is to suffer. However, the original Pali word "dukkha" is a little more complicated than simple suffering. It really means a basic underlying unsatisfactoriness with existence, a psychological tension. Buddha never taught that life itself was inherently suffering, but that to be alive with a mundane consciousness was to be in a state of tension with existence. Of course suffering is an experience all living things share, because the nature of life is finite and when we experience the limits of our finiteness, we experience suffering.

Sickness, old age, and death visit every being born in this world. They are the borders of our own mortality. They do not inherently carry with them a measured level of suffering as each person, according to their own karma, experiences a different level of discomfort when confronted with their own mortality.

For instance, two people may break their legs skiing, with an identical level of physical pain and discomfort involved. One person may accept this accident gracefully, being mature enough to realize that when he or she choose to take up skiing, potential injury was part of the package. That person might spend the rest of the trip in the lodge, enjoying some wine and good company and making the most of it. A less mature individual could well be sent into a frenzy of anger at the "injustice" of their accident. This type of person will suffer a psychological hell of their own making and their experience of this hell is much worse than the pain of the injury and discomfort of a cast.

The essential difference in experience of two people sharing an identical misfortune is due to the excessive desire of one, versus the acceptance of the other. The worst part of this scenario for the angry skier is that they are likely to suffer more in the future because of their inability to deal with their situation. They bring this on themselves by arousing the contempt and anger of their companions because of their childish behavior. This in turn makes them bitter, full of self hatred, and more likely to repeat their mistakes in the future.

The source of their problems lie not in their experience, but in the view they hold of the world that made that experience so hellish. It is the natural consequence of being out of touch with reality. The basic idea or view of such a person stripped down to its essentials is that the world should conform to their expectations. This is a world view driven by desire, rather than acceptance.

Many westerners view acceptance as a kind of moral cowardice. In the words of Dylan Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night, but rage; rage against the dying of the light." The

truth is, acceptance is not a passive state as opposed to desire. This is one of the misunderstandings inherent in modern world views. Acceptance is a conscious awareness of the reality of ones situation and does not imply a lack of energy. Acceptance is grounds for action because it deals realistically with the actual. Attachment to desire is a type of frenetic non action in that it ignores actuality in favor of a denatured possibility.

Understanding and acceptance of reality is the beginning of enlightened activity. In order to pursue a goal, we must have a grasp of what the conditions are that will shape the direction of our efforts. If we do not recognize the terrain, we will be unable to follow the map. Knowing this, Buddha systematically delineated the forces that shape life and consciousness. His interest was not in presenting a philosophical system, but in laying out a road map of the terrain of the human condition in order that we might find our own way. His teaching was an expression of his own experience, rather than a philosophical agenda handed down to him from tradition. The power of this teaching arises directly from its unconditioned freedom. This freedom can only be obtained, when one has the courage to pioneer into the self without the aid of a wagon full of philosophical given and theological speculations.

The Buddha's teaching was, and still remains, an intensely personal confrontation with the problem of human suffering and its alleviation. This confrontation with suffering was even more remarkable when we consider that Shakyamuni's profound distress with the human condition was not generated by his own personal suffering so much as his recognition of the suffering of those around him. The prince in his palace was moved by the sickness, old age, and death he saw around him while he himself remained free from these afflictions.

It was not just the knowledge of his own potential suffering that moved him, but the reality of suffering as a given in life that shook him to his foundation. For the truly spiritual, the reality of suffering abides in ones spirit as an enduring flame of compassion. This is a fire that burns away all distinction of self and other. It reduces all lesser considerations to ashes once it is kindled. Therefore, Buddha adamantly refused to answer questions that were purely theological or metaphysical as being inherently irrelevant.

His teaching had only one priority; the alleviation of human suffering. Even a simple person can recognize that there is no way that a human being can avoid these conditions which produce suffering on a physical level. As long as a man exists in a physical form, he has the consequences of that form. To have form one must have limit. For that which is without limit is by nature formless. To move in a world of limits is to experience limit in oneself, and the personal experience of limit is by nature an unsatisfactory experience to one who defines himself by his limits.

In the very beginning of life, physical pain and psychological frustration mark the infant's first confrontation with its limits. It experiences directly the unsatisfactory nature of its limits in its initial movements in the world. The bumped head, the toy just out of reach, reinforces a sense of powerlessness in the infants mind. This inability to have our own way, and the tension that it produces with the world, is

what is meant in Buddhism as the first noble truth; that life is suffering.

The original word Buddha used was dukkha, a Pali term that, as I have said, implies more than the English word suffering. Dukkha refers to a type of underlying tension or dis-ease with existence. It describes the continuous confrontation of the individual with his limits. There is nothing particularly revolutionary about this insight, except for the subtleness of the definition. Buddha, however, then goes on to postulate another truth which begins to mark his radical departure from ordinary perception. Suffering is caused by desire, and this is the second noble truth.

Once again the actual Sanskrit word signifies more than the English word desire. Obviously there are many positive desires which are not productive of suffering, such as the desire to enlightenment, or to aid others, etc. What differentiates negative desires from positive desires is the clinging attachment associated with negativity. This energy is called Klesha or defilement in Pali, signifying an obsessive energy which bonds the individual to a concept of self or situation which will not allow one to confront limit with equanimity or acceptance.

Dukkha and klesha are like two ends of a magnet; dukkha is the energy that repels limit, while klesha energy is constantly drawing limit toward itself and bonding to it. Dukkha is unable to simply be, within the boundaries of personal existence, without pushing away continually from life situations, trying to manipulate its way into a position of power. It does this because the mind is constantly attracted to limit by the energy of klesha's magnetic pull. The clinging desire to be or abide in something of our own choosing, pulls one constantly forward toward various life situations. These are invariably unsatisfactory, in that they cannot appease the energy of desire, and thus we are repelled by them in the moment by the force of dukkha.

The attachments of desire attract us, and the unsatisfactoriness of the experience of our finiteness when we approach the object of desire repels us again. We are thus ceaselessly driven back and forth emotionally in a maelstrom of unhappiness. We can actually become so used to this situation that we learn to accept it, and not even recognize our own existential turmoil. A man who has been in pain since birth, believes he is quite happy until someone comes along and alleviates his pain. Then he recognizes for the first time what it is to be happy. The source of this klesha which causes suffering lies in a basic misunderstanding of the nature of self. This lack of understanding is what the Buddha called ignorance. The man that is ignorant sees himself as an absolute other, and carefully defines his limits, thus activating the energy of the kleshas and the resulting experience of suffering.

According to Buddhist teachings, the fundamental Reality of the Universe, the Buddha Mind, is none other than our own original nature. This nature is hidden from us due to the conditioning of desire and attachment to the process of becoming. This is the point where ignorance, in the form of attachment to self, keeps us from seeing our true nature. We literally are unable to see the forest for all of the trees, and yet there is no forest other than these trees.

The result of practicing the eight fold path is to begin to see each tree or component thing for what it is, a perfect expression of time and space. Every tree in the forest becomes a mirror to the process of becoming, reflecting the forest itself. All of life becomes merged in mutual identity at this subtle level of understanding. This is the result of a change of perspective that allows a perception of reality as a dynamic whole, rather than a set of ontological structures in a linear causal relationship.

For instance, our usual understanding is that a tree is an adaptation of a specific organism to a unique time and space. This is a linear perspective, however, and does not see the tree for what it is. It ignores the tree's interaction with the rest of the environment. A tree is a dynamic process rather than a concrete unit of being. That we perceive it as such is because of the limits imposed upon our senses by their very structure, and the corresponding interpretation by our mind.

In other words, our eyes are able to perceive light reflected from a source within the limits imposed by the visible spectrum.

Although we are aware scientifically of other radiations such as infrared and ultraviolet light, we are unable to perceive them. Though the energy of light is composed of undulating patterns or waves, our perception of change is limited to only rapid transformation. We can see this clearly when we look at a time lapse film of a garden flower.

What appears to our ordinary consciousness as a rose in bloom is actually a rose in process. Through time lapse photography we can see the crest and trough of the energy of the rose bush as it generates buds, blooms, drops flowers, and begins again, all while it continues growing. Along with all the visible manifestations of process, are the myriad aspects of its interaction with the other forces of the garden. The rose interacts with the soil, absorbing nutrients, dropping leaves and flowers, which recycle nutrients, hosting insects, the insects feeding each other, and absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen.

Nothing about the rose is static. In fact, its very being is in interaction. Our consciousness defines it as a thing, however. A unit which is separate from the other units in the minds arena. It is either experienced as foreground or background. When the mind contemplates a garden, it delegates the rose to the role of background, and when it considers the rose itself, the sky or the garden wall becomes background. The reality of rose, however, is in its interaction with its environment. The names rose, garden, sky, and earth are mere tools of the intellect and communication having no real relationship to the reality of the phenomenon itself. This is always a matter of mutual interaction or better put, interpenetration.

The Buddhist term "mutual interpenetration", recognizes the absolute coincidence of being that is an environment. Every aspect of the garden is effecting and being effected by all other aspects simultaneously. The evidence of this reality is recognized in many disciplines from ecology to particle physics.

The essential point for a Buddhist is that his own being is also sharing in this interpenetration. There is no abiding reality of self outside of this interpenetration; no permanent soul, mind, or spirit that is not one with this eternal

interchange.

The process is being, there is nothing else. Ideas about self are irrelevant to the truth. They are mere clouds over the garden, coming into being and dissipating. All the while the constant stream of interaction goes on. As clouds blow where the wind takes them, so the dharma student allows ideas of self-freedom to blow across the sky of this eternal mutual interpenetration.

The forest is the trees and the trees are the forest. The rose is the garden, and the garden the rose. Others are the self, and self is the other. There is nothing other than this, nothing to cling to and nothing to fear. For if all is self, then there is no self which can be threatened by other.

How is it possible, then, for a person to operated effectively in this world of things holding this lofty view of mutual interpenetration? It is possible because each phenomenon, though sharing an essential being with all other phenomena, never the less maintains its own pattern or structure as an expression of this interrelationship. Things do not cease to exist when we become aware of their essential emptiness of self.

If they did, then all existence would vanish with them. The process of this awareness can be found in the Zen saying, "First there is a mountain, then there isn't a mountain, then there is."

When we first see things we see them as absolute concrete realities in themselves. A mountain is a mountain and nothing else. Then we become aware of the mountain's essential emptiness, that it does not exist outside of its interrelationship with the world. Finally, it becomes mountain again when we see it with the enlightened eye as the perfect expression of the universe as mountain. In the final vision, it is no longer other, but participates with us in the mutual being of the moment.

We do not sacrifice anything by attaining this enlightened perspective. We are still able to function in the world of things with the same facility as before. We use reason and discrimination in our daily lives with even more adroitness than we did when we saw each thing as a reality onto itself. Now we understand on a visceral level that there is no action we take that does interact with the whole. Impetuous and stupid actions we would have taken before, thinking them to be in our self interest, are now seen for what they are.

For the first time we can trust our intuition to be a full partner with our reason in determining life's action. This is because there has been a fundamental turning round of consciousness which allows intuition to flow directly from that shared being which is the universal consciousness. Before intuition was crippled by the mind's obstinate adherence to a conception of the world of things separate in being.

We can begin to move through the world with the grace of a virtuoso who, having attained technical mastery of his instrument, can now let his intuitive genius flow into the symphony of life, but with our own unique touch and accent. The old view of self, which we believed gave us a sense of freedom, actually held us back from experiencing the beauty of our life. This beauty is what we call the Buddha Nature; it is the harmony of life of which we are one note. This view of life which

recognizes the Buddha nature and the laws of spiritual reality
is what is called Right View.

Right Resolution

Once a person has attained a view of the world that accurately perceives the nature of spiritual reality, they understand it is necessary to live a life appropriate to this vision. Since no one is possessed of perfect virtue it will be necessary to make a commitment to a course of action that will enable a person to transform themselves according to this new commitment.

Resolution and right view constitute an understanding that in Buddhism parallels the energy and purpose of faith in monotheistic religion. Buddhism, however, is a tradition based upon systematic inquiry rather than theological commitment. Although it has a cosmology and metaphysical framework, elements of tradition do not play an active part in the systematic process of self transformation embodied in the eight fold path. For a Buddhist, cosmology is not something that commands his attention as a fundamental part of practice. His attention is riveted upon the psychological and epistemological factors that govern his state of consciousness and therefore, his spiritual growth.

This is because Buddhism is essentially a spiritual practice rather than a religion. The psychological principles of human existence as delineated by the Buddha, provide a vehicle for self transformation. They are the only fundamental constituents of reality which an individual has some degree of control over, and therefore can provide a potential for practice. A person has no control what so ever over the metaphysical and cosmological nature of the universe; any practice based on these would have to be magical, and therefore based purely on faith. We do have the ability, however, to focus our concentration on a specific object of consciousness, be it an idea or sensory object, thus giving us the ability to manipulate the factors of consciousness. We are powerless to control the metaphysical, cosmological structures of the universe. Were it not for our ability to control our focus of consciousness, we would be unable to bring about self transformation and the idea of right resolution would be meaningless.

Since Buddhism accepts the reality of a will which is both conditioned and capable of choice, a Buddhist is not faced with the dilemma of relying upon an outside agency's metaphysical grace for salvation. The doctrine of mutual identity and co-interdependent origination allows for the possibility of a man bringing about his own salvation through spiritual work.

The problem of free will is really a problem of the concept of freedom. The standard view of freedom can be found in Webster's dictionary definition "not determined by anything beyond its own nature of being." The problem with this understanding is that from the Buddhist perspective, nothing exists that does not share it's being with everything else. This makes the concept of free will a glorification of self that does not hold up to Buddhist philosophical scrutiny.

First of all, freedom has no meaning unless we are speaking of a very relative freedom. Whenever we have a choice, we must have some predicating factor behind the choice which in effect then limits freedom. If there is no ground for choice in the form of some inherent predilection toward a desired end, then the choice

becomes a matter of pure caprice and the concept of volition becomes meaningless. If we keep following our reasons for making choices back far enough, we eventually come to an inherited or conditioned nature that we had no apparent choice in creating. It is these elements which are in effect dictating choice rather than an abstract notion of a self that wills. For a will to have being it has to have a structure, a sense of self; and that self has to consist of elements which are prior to the will. Therefore, the will is by its very nature conditioned.

On the other hand, to speak of a will which has no freedom is also a misunderstanding of both the nature of the will and freedom. It is obvious that we are constantly engaged in making choices for potential courses of action. While our choices are predicated upon preferences which are part of our inherent nature in so far as we are one with that nature, the choices we make will represent our will. Freedom of the will then comes down to a merging of the will with our fundamental Buddha nature. This nature, as we have already seen, participates in the total reality around us and, to the extent we can join our wills to this nature, that is the extent to which we will find the world in agreement with us.

From the perspective of Buddhism, the process of thought can not be separated from the process of will. One is always in contact with the other in mutual interaction. This is important for us to remember because it forces us to recognize how our actions effect our world view. It is a simple process to analyze how our viewpoint effects our actions because in most cases our actions are predicated upon a conscious viewpoint. What we do not see is that whenever we choose to act, that action in turn effects our view of the world. The action we take is registered in our unconscious as memory and then becomes available as reference in future actions.

Every time we face a situation that calls for action, we are required to analyze the situation through the cognitive process and then make a choice, activating the will. In the process, we are accessing our memory, and our memory contains both the memory of our previous actions and our world view as well. This begins a process where the mind searches for continuity or conformity between the past action and world view.

Memory has to link pertinent data together in order to give our conscious mind a pattern of information appropriate to the situation. If our actions are not consistent with our world view, it creates a problem for the unconscious. How does it know what information to provide us with if the natural patterns of consistency are not there?

Our unconscious is left with only two choices; it can ignore our world view and only feed us those memories consistent with our past actions, or relegate views held but not acted upon to a kind of sub directory (to borrow a computer term). The mind, however, does not find this kind of conflict amenable to efficient functioning and invariably reacts to the inherent tension between world view and actions taken which are inconsistent with world view. In other words, every time we take an action that violates what we know to be right, it causes chaos in our unconscious. What eventually develops if this inconsistency continues is either a great deal of emotional turmoil or a duplicitous spiritual character.

From a Buddhist perspective, what I have described is extremely simplified. There are many very subtle descriptions of consciousness as described in the Sutras such as Abhidharma Pitaka. What is important for a contemporary student of the way to understand, is the basic interaction between his or her actions and how this effects their spiritual practice.

The Buddha explained right resolve as being threefold; first a resolve to renunciation, secondly a resolve to good will, and finally a resolve to harmlessness. These three resolutions counter the influence of attachment to desire, ill will, and harmfulness, respectively. Of these three, the hardest for westerners to understand is the principle of renunciation. When we usually think of a renunciate, we have the image of a tonsured monk living in cloister or a celibate anchorite dwelling in some cave. The fact is that such individuals may or may not be renunciates, depending upon the motivation and understanding which drives them to live a life of poverty and chastity. If they are performing their practice with an idea of a goal which is outside the practice, such as enlightenment or holiness, then they are not renunciates. A true renunciate is one who sacrifices his action in the moment to a higher principle. He or she renounces seeking the fruit of action in favor of dedication to the purity of action itself.

Therefore, a businessman with seven children could well be a true renunciate if his actions are driven by a love of the beautiful and the good, without regard for reward. Refusing material or sensual things is not renunciation, merely austerity. A man may practice austerity and still be a slave to desire. There is a simple test that indicates whether one is renouncing something in the spiritual sense, or merely denying themselves.

Real renunciation is based upon a thorough understanding of spiritual principles that allows one to refuse a course of action with equanimity because one realizes intuitively the destructive nature of that action for himself or others. Therefore, there is a naturalness present in such actions that precludes both pride and feelings of having lost anything through renunciation. Among the teachings of Tibet's great sage, Milarepa, there is a list of the Ten Equal Things which mark the path of the true renunciate.

1. For the person sincerely devoted to religious life, it is the same whether they engage in worldly activities or not.
2. For the person who has realized full Enlightenment, it is the same whether they meditate or not.
3. For the person free from attachment to worldly possessions, it is the same whether they practice asceticism or not.
4. For an enlightened man it is the same whether he dwells in solitude or wanders where he will.
5. For the person who has attained mastery of his mind, it is the same whether he partakes of the pleasures of the world or not.
6. For a person of full compassion it is the same whether they dwell in isolated meditation or work for others in society.
7. For a person with real faith in his teacher, it is the same whether he is with him or not.
8. For a person who really understands the spiritual teaching it is the same whether his fortune is good or bad.
9. For a person who has truly renounced worldly views for spiritual truth, it is the same whether he follows worldly convention or not.
10. For a person who has attained Perfect Highest Wisdom, it is the same whether he is

able to manifest miraculous powers or not.

As we can see from these teachings, which came not from a "Channeled Lama" or self proclaimed new age Zen master, but from a saint who's spiritual austerity would have killed most men, there is more to renunciation than austerity. Right intentions should bring with them a spirit of freedom and joy. This is the test of their reality.

Good will is the best medicine to cure the disease of anger and hatred. The medicine of good will is found in the Buddhist term "metta", which has its root in the word for friend. This concept has much in common with the Confucian term "Jen" or human heartedness. Both terms describe a relationship to others that is predicated upon a feeling of genuine sympathy and warmth for an individual, not based on our relationship to him, but through an understanding of the human condition. We cannot rely on spontaneous warmth and love to arise whenever we deal with another human being, as these emotions are too infrequent. This is due to the overlay of conflicting conditioning in the ego.

We have to retrain our mind to do away with aggressive and fearful thinking by meditating on loving kindness. This has to start with a loving acceptance of the reality of ourselves. This does not mean an indulgence in self pity or narcissism. What is required is an analysis of our own person from the point of reference of a third person, viewing the two realities of our conscious and unconscious. The best way to approach this is to look at ourselves with a parental mind; what is called in Japanese "Roshin". A good parent has a sense of compassion for his or her child that does not preclude stern discipline. A person needs to wish themselves spiritual happiness in a genuine spirit of acceptance. Once we begin to feel a love for ourselves based on an understanding of our own nature, much of the anger and hostility that we direct toward others disappears.

This practice then becomes directed outward toward others, starting with someone emotionally close, and eventually expanding to include total strangers. This endeavor is not any different from any other practice. The more you do it, the better you become at doing it. If one practices being neurotic, they become very neurotic and if they practice kindness, they become very kind. Every kind of attitude carries with it its own natural thermodynamic. Kindness produces a response of appreciation, love and well being that reinforces the effort. Our motivation remains free of influence for a desired result while our unconscious records the uniformity of view with will. When this happens, the view of spiritual reality is further verified by concomitant rewards that were not even sought out in the action.

The practice of meditation on loving kindness is effective when we are able to share in the other person's own subjective condition. This is the point where other begins to dissolve in to self. We usually have a simple sense of common being with one group or another. It starts with family identity and then proceeds to take in friends, neighbors, countrymen and so on. The identity process itself is an inclusive identity process.

Inclusive identity shares an understanding of the emotional and subjective common experience of the group and produces a familial warmth in relations. Inclusive identity does not require others as a background upon which it makes definitions of inclusion. It defines those included, simply by an understanding of common nature without regard to any judgments toward others outside the included group.

Exclusive identity on the other hand is based solely on the differentiation of one group from another. It always comes down to a them and us scenario. By nature, this type of identity

process is an extension of the ego, rather than an expression of compassion as is inclusive identity. Exclusive identity is an expression of ill will which right intentions aim to cure.

The next step in developing right intentions is to generate a state of abiding compassion for others. After a person has been able to realize the essential nature of fellow beings as part of himself, and infused that understanding with love, he develops an active compassion. Compassion is the correlate energy of wisdom; compassion is the manifestation of wisdom in action. Compassion carries kindness into action by assuming a stance of harmlessness toward other creatures.

Kindness witnesses love for others but it does not coerce us to initiate action to alleviate their suffering, while compassion does. Compassion is developed by contemplating the suffering of others and recognizing the commonality of that suffering with our own being. This goes beyond merely identifying with others passively and wishing them well, by actively feeling their suffering ourselves. When this occurs, we are energized by compassion to do whatever is necessary to aid them.

The action which is most consistent with compassion is harmlessness. We cannot actively aid every being we come in contact with, but we can make sure that our actions do not increase their sufferings by harming them. This then becomes the first step in compassion; becoming harmless. To be harmless, it is also necessary to be fearless since there are many occasions when deluded persons will strike out at us. Fear and anger are two side of the same coin. Anger is not present unless the self feels threatened, and a threat arouses anger. This is a very difficult part of practice where most students have a tendency to give up. The dharma warrior has to be fearless in order to be perfectly harmless.

Every time we face fear and do not give in to it, we will grow a little stronger. Allowing people to be hostile and not responding to them in kind, gives one a strange sense of power and freedom. This is because, for the first time, we are not giving in to the ego, which tells us that others are something to fear, and have power over us. At this point, we begin to understand how we have bought into this sense of powerlessness and allowed our entire lives to be conditioned by it.

When we experience this new sense of freedom from, and power over, our fear of other people's opinion of us, it generates more compassion for them. This is curious because on the surface it would seem that a sense of power, combined with freedom from concern, could produce a wanton disregard for other people. If this had not occurred as a result of our spiritual efforts of right intentions grounded in loving kindness and mutual identity, then this transformation of attitude would be dangerous.

However, our new attitude toward others is based on a loving acceptance of them. We recognize each person as someone who shares with us a common spiritual identity and a commonality of suffering as part of their human condition. This understanding is too potent to allow us to ignore it by falling into the delusion that others are a threat to us, and therefore require a defensive position on our part. When we are injured by others, we do not wish to retaliate because we feel sorry for those who are so disturbed that they would attack someone who wishes them

only happiness.

All this does not mean that we degenerate into a kind of idiot compassion that allows others to do destructive things when we have the power to stop them. It simply means that whatever action we take towards others is driven by compassion. Now it may very well be that compassionate action can be extremely severe. For instance, if a madman were to walk into a hospital with a gun and start shooting people and the only way he could be stopped was by killing him, then that would be compassionate action. Even such extreme action would be done without anger or regret.

Buddha stated that whatever one consistently reflects upon becomes the natural inclination of the mind. This is something that is easy to understand, yet there is one area of our lives where we fail to take notice, and that is the way we entertain ourselves. The average dharma student in the west works hard at his or her practice and attempts to follow the precepts as best they can. In spite of this, many of them are repeatedly overcome by the passions and delusions that have plagued them all through their practice.

The problem doesn't seem to be their intentions, but how insidious some of the sensory input, that comes to them from living in this society, can be. We are constantly bombarded with stimuli whose sole purpose is either selling us goods or appealing to our basest instincts. The media, specifically commercial television and films, offers a steady diet of world view so poisonous that for a dharma student to watch much of it would be tantamount to him committing spiritual suicide.

The violent destruction of human life is the primary agent of entertainment of this poison, with secondary doses of glorification of wealth, power, and denigration of women and some men as sex objects. It is pitifully lacking in moral judgment, aesthetic taste, and anything that would exhibit spiritual values.

Even those aspects of culture that have been traditionally healthy outlets for recreation and entertainment such as athletics, have been soiled by the dirty hands of Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the television industry.

The average American child watches hundreds of hours of this excreta each month, becoming totally inundated in this inane, salacious, superficial view of the world. Most adults today have also been exposed to countless hours of this drivel which is stored up in their memory like some latent virus, ready to erupt.

Pathetically infantile individuals in sport and entertainment, who ridicule opponents and denigrate common decency, are held up to be heroes. The influence of this negative programming on our unconscious and its effect on spiritual practice can not be underestimated. For a student to make progress in the eight fold path, it is absolutely necessary that they carefully police their own leisure time to ensure that the influences they expose themselves to are consistent with their right resolution and right view.

One has to remember that for the eight fold path to be effective, there has to exist a harmony of influence between all

of its respective elements. This is a consistent view in all of Buddhist teachings, that spiritual life mirror the natural order. There is no separation of creator and creation that requires a leap out of the system for salvation to occur. Salvation must occur as a result of the system itself, and therefore be an inherent part of nature. For the Buddhist, enlightenment is salvation and the enlightened mind we call Buddha nature, is the ground of reality.

This organic world view requires an absolute consistency of effort on the part of the practitioner to be successful. This is why it is of paramount importance for the dharma student not to negate his or her efforts by allowing the insidious effects of the entertainment media's world view to invade their own.

RIGHT SPEECH

The noble path of perfected speech is the doorway to an effective moral behavior, because moral practice begins with the control of ones speech. For a dharma student morality is something which is intrinsic to his way of being in the world. There is no external power, in the form of God, who one has to appease. We act with moral conviction because we understand the connection between moral action and its immediate effect on our well being.

Morality is not a set of laws that is imposed on us, but the effect of living in the world in a balanced and harmonious manner. There is probably no principle in Buddhist thought which has so little parallel in the traditional western world view. In the west, morality has always been seen as a matter of secondary effect. That is to say, the western view is that the effect of morality is a ramification of another process or system, outside ourselves, which then effects us. Either God, or the state reaches out and gives retribution for crimes committed. If you are a western utilitarian, you believe that incorrect behavior is likely to effect either your environment or God's judgment of you, which in turn will effect you.

In Buddhist thought, however, the effects of moral action are primary, since there exists no real differentiation between self and other either in the form of an individual or a system. This idea is not wholly absent in the west. It is expressed in the statement of Saint Paul that, "Sin is punishment". The idea being, that to be out of a state of grace is by its very nature, suffering. This, however, is a theological premise that is latent in western thought and does not occupy the attention of the average moral person in western society. It is, oddly enough, a perfect expression of the Buddhist moral world view.

For a Buddhist, the very fact that one is in delusion means that one is suffering, since suffering is the nature of delusion, just as non suffering is the nature of enlightenment. Speech is the first manifestation of ones enlightenment or ones delusion. It in turn can produce either enlightenment or delusion. Just as we have seen with the interaction of right view and right resolution, right speech is an activity which both effects each of these two, and is effected by them.

Speech either reinforces the energy of right resolution, or dissipates it by corrupting the principles of right view. When we think, we think with words. It is a very important thing to realize that words are the effective means of shaping the structure of thought itself. What we allow to escape our mouths is directly governed by our resolve and expresses that mastery of the second path. Sloppy or incorrect speech is the result of either weak view or weak resolve.

The effect of wrong speech follows the same paradigm of destructive interrelationship to right intentions as does wrong intentions to right view. Its effect is to disrupt the psychic ecosystem by feeding back energy inconsistent with the goals of the conscious mind. If we program the unconscious to accept irrational behavior as normal, the result is an increase in personal suffering.

Right speech is broken down into four categories; 1. truthful speech, 2. non-slandorous speech, 3. gentle or non-harsh

speech, and 4. serious or non-frivolous speech. The first category is fairly clear. We need to speak truthfully to be in accord with the truth. As we have seen earlier, to be out of accord with truth is, for the Buddhist, to be in a state of suffering. One might say, that for the Buddhist, the consequences of untruthful speech are more odious than they are for even religious Westerners.

From the Buddhist perspective, lack of truth of any kind is cutting one self off from enlightenment, just the same as a perverse will in Christian thought is believed to be cutting oneself off from grace. From this dharma perspective, one either is truth as process or is not. There is no real person to receive either grace or punishment, so when we employ lies in our life we are becoming the process of deceit itself. This being the case, our being becomes fundamentally out of sync with the universe.

Compounding this is the fact that since we are part of the spiritual ecosystem, we are polluting the system itself. A society is based on trust, and when lying or misrepresentation becomes a normal occurrence, then society ceases to function effectively. This means the fundamental purpose of society to integrate the lives of its members into a unity of mutual identity, is violated. Society degenerates into a mere organization of individuals ruled by government. No one trusts one another in such an enshrinement and everyone feels constrained to protect themselves by the use of force or litigation. Lawyers and thugs begin to predominate and one relies on either one or the other.

The other aspect of lying, which makes it so deleterious, is that it requires more and more lies to support the original one.

An entire system of lies has to be created that will support a world view which is inconsistent with the world. In the life of an individual this produces a disastrous schism between the real world and themselves. The lies isolate a person from experience, and lays down a veil of deception between the world and oneself.

Lies can be motivated out of greed, malice, or delusion. We can lie because we wish to obtain something, because we wish to hurt someone, or out of compulsion. The first type of lie witnesses a problem with right view, in as much as the liar does not understand that possessions are of no real significance. They view things as more important than harmonious relations with people. To lie for the purpose of hurting someone, exhibits a lack of understanding of our mutual identity with others. This action also violates our commitment to follow the path of harmlessness. A state of delusion will produce the compulsive lie; the lying for entertainment or self aggrandizement. We delude ourselves into thinking that we need to be something we are not, and this delusion requires that we create an imaginary history for ourselves.

In a society that values honesty, it is not too difficult to live a life in accordance with the principle of right speech. However, in this community that pays only lip service to the value of truth, right speech requires an extraordinary commitment to spiritual principles. For instance, if you have an irrational, tyrannical boss who demands more of you than you can possibly produce, you may slip into the lie as a way of putting him off. Or you may be employed as a spokesman in a

business that misrepresents its products. We have seen how men in the highest levels of government treat truth as a convenient tool to be utilized as they wish. Their wanton disregard for the truth as a spiritual principle, and our acceptance of this attitude as a necessary evil of power, says a lot about why this nation is more a government than a true society.

The effects of accepting lies and misrepresentation as necessary evils in ones life is so insidious that it will undermine all the rest of ones' spiritual training. The idea that one can lie for our employer or government and escape personal retribution is deluded. This is the basic delusion which drives men to do evil, and feel justified as long as that evil is dictated by the state. The danger in a person justifying lying, resides in the essential negation of the spiritual process. This is not the same as the Christian sense of sin, which is an act in violation of God's will and can be remedied by repentance and grace. It is more like the ecological effect of poisoning a spring. The effects of the lies cause diverse negative reactions within the spiritual environment which require a clean up of the entire system.

As dangerous as the effects of untruthful language are, there is one thing that can be even more deleterious to spiritual practice and that is slanderous speech. If there is one problem that seems to be endemic to western dharma centers, it is in the use of slanderous speech. Too many students are quite ready to repeat the latest gossip about one of the teachers or his students in order to buttress their own view of their tradition as superior. They readily quote teachers out of context to other teachers or students in order to get a reaction. Strong teachers do not take the bait, however.

An example of this occurred one afternoon at Tahl Ma Sah Zen Center in Los Angeles. The teacher, the great Korean Zen Master, Seung Sahn Sa Nim, was answering questions concerning dharma practice when a visiting student from a Tibetan Center asked him the following, "Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche says that Zen is like black and white and Vajrayana is like Technicolor. What do you think of that?" Seung San Sa Nim smiled and answered, "Which to you prefer?"

This poor fellow had misunderstood the meaning of Trungpa Rinpoche's comment, which was not a judgment about the relative merits of each tradition, (he had a great respect for Zen) but on the respective approach to practice, with Zen being Spartan and direct, while Vajrayana is more elaborate and colorful. This person was more than willing to create discord among the two groups by using slanderous speech. It is said of the Bodhisattva that accord gladdens him, and he seeks to spread harmony and good will. The only way to do this is to avoid this childish competition which seeks to raise one by injuring others.

In order to fulfill our spiritual mission it is necessary to restrain from harsh speech of any kind. Now this is a very difficult thing to do if one is not grounded in a view of self that includes others. As we have stated earlier, right view precludes the notion that we are a real thing which exists independently of other things. Our essential nature is the dynamic interaction of life, pure process, it is not static. Therefore, when someone does something which offends us, we should reflect upon who it is that is offended, and why. This will lead us back to a knowledge of process as being, and short

circuit the anger process.

If we do not do this then we will give in to harsh and angry speech which will injure ourselves and others. We have to keep in mind that every action we take has ramifications beyond ourselves. This extends to acts of self destruction they will effect our environment as well as ourselves. It is necessary to be stern on occasion, particularly when we are in a position of authority and responsible for others well-being. That sternness, however, never requires abusive speech. In fact, when we call someone a name such as idiot, fool, etc., we are indulging in the delusion that their actions are generated out of a static being, rather than a dynamic process.

When we indulge in this we are telling ourselves that our own being is static and we then reinforce this notion on our unconscious. We must then be either a genius, fool, idiot, sage, or whatever sobriquet we choose for ourselves instead of a dynamic process as taught by right view. We then begin to attach enormous emotional significance to our actions, leading to excessive pride or guilt. When we view ourselves as process, then we are able to accept and change the various aspects of our personality as being as temporal as the rest of existence.

When we accomplish this, then we look at others with the same eye that sees a person who is the result of the countless interplay of Karmic forces capable of both sagacity and foolishness. Alarm takes the place of anger in situations where harmful or dangerous elements approach. We cease to make judgments about persons and confine our attention to the quality of their actions. The same is true of our own actions. We do not concern ourselves with whether we are superior or inferior, but whether our actions are inferior or superior.

An example of the difference in speech between corrective speech and harsh speech would be in the following example. You are working in a paint shop and one of your co-workers places a leaky can of paint thinner next to a gas heater. An example of harsh speech would be to yell, "Hey, idiot! Do you want to get us all killed?" Corrective speech would be, "Hey, John, watch the heater with that can. Are you O.K.? You usually are very careful. Is something bothering you?" While the first response will doubtlessly get John's attention, it will not make your relationship with him any easier. The second response, witnessing both the concern for the situation and John as a person, is likely to create a better relationship in the process.

Although this is rather a simple example of common sense, it never the less is the type of situation we face every day and often handle badly. After dealing with many of these occasions, people soon gain a reputation as either a concerned, kind person or a jerk. Another type of harsh speech which is much more subtle, but just as destructive, is the use of sarcasm and acerbic wit. While this is something that most people do not find to be very odious since, in this culture, we place high regard on the clever comeback or put down. As adolescents in America, we held the "chop" or put-down to be high art. Some of our most popular comedians are experts in ridicule. This makes it all seem like good clean fun, but is it?

From the standpoint of spiritual practice, sarcasm, invective, and insult aimed at an individual, is a sign of someone who is not serious in the path. To poke wit at a funny situation

because it exhibits the absurdity of wrong thinking and action is not incorrect, as long as that jibe is not aimed at a particular person or group. When you attack a person or group, you are not attacking wrong thinking, and you are guilty of the delusion of self, which we have already discussed.

The problem is that we get into the habit of teasing one another out of a sense of insecurity which won't allow us to confront problems in a rational manner. This is a problem we witness quite often in marriages, with each spouse joking about the others alleged shortcomings.

This kind of behavior may seem harmless enough, but it is not. It leads to a situation where real problems are never confronted. Instead, they are circumambulated like Buddhist Stupas, with each party chanting out insults in place of mantras. We can become so attached to such behavior that we find it difficult to free ourselves from it. We begin to lose our ability to confront issues without the overlay of humor.

So much of humor in the media is this kind of self deprecating humor, that the put-down has become the joke par excellence for this culture. The type of Chaplinesque humor of pathos has disappeared in favor of Don Rickles or Roseanne Barr. If a person finds this sort of thing funny, then it is a good indication of spiritual pathology. A little self deprecating humor among friends who know each other well can be therapeutic, provided that it is aimed at areas where the other person is comfortably aware of their shortcomings. One should be able to receive some gently poking in return, with the same spirit of humility. The key to the difference in pathological humor and good humor is in the gentleness and corrective nature of one versus the acerbic defamatory nature of the other.

When we talk of the kind of humor one enjoys, we begin to enter another area of speech that can cause a good deal of trouble to our spiritual practice. That is what the Buddha described as frivolous speech. This is speech that does nothing to enhance our understanding of the world, our practice, or our relationships with each other.

This is an area of the problem of right speech that is a good deal subtler than slander, lies, sarcasm, and harsh speech. This is because what may appear as serious speech, because of the subject matter, is in reality frivolous speech and what may appear as frivolous speech may be serious speech in disguise. The difference lies in the intent and spirit of the speech. We all have heard pedants, Buddhist and others, arguing over some esoteric point of doctrine. To a casual observer, this would appear to be serious since it consists of subtle philosophical arguments.

However, this is a perfect example of frivolous speech. This is because its goal is not consistent with practice. There is nothing to be gained by knowing how many Bodhisattvas can dance on the head of a pin or by coming to any other, purely speculative, philosophical conclusion. The sole point of the argument is most likely ego gratification, unless it is part of a formal training in logic. On the other hand, a seemingly trivial conversation with a child, about how to eat ones cereal, may be dharmic. Provided that intent is to help the child better relate to the world.

A Buddhist practitioner must always be able to apply skillful means in his or her dealings with the world. That means a relationship to speech that is grounded in compassion and wisdom. The thing that is stressed the most in our practice is flexibility, not only of action, but mentally as well. This allows us to see the importance in taking our time and talking with someone who might have an interest totally divorced from our own, simply to establish a bond of compassion with him. Skillful means requires that we adapt to situations using our heart and mind and not our ego. We cannot help another or be helped unless we allow ourselves to open to another's reality.

Therefore, no conversation should be avoided if it brings about a potential for bringing harmony into the world. Nor should we engage in any conversation which will separate us from our view and resolve for the good. This means that we have to choose our companions not for their intellect or mutual interests, but for their heart and mutual resolve toward the good.

This may mean that we choose as friends people outside of our own spiritual tradition whose love of the good and right action is stronger than some of our co-religionists. We should choose our associates according to the quality of their lives. After all, no tradition exerts so much control that it forces a person to practice what they preach. There are always going to be some people, in the tradition, whose attitude is less than sincere. While we should try to encourage such people, socializing with them may do us more harm, than it does them good.

Ultimately, the power of right speech will serve as a vehicle for the energy of right view and resolution to carry over into daily action. The practice of correct speech is an essential unifying force in spiritual practice. It is not as the old children's rhyme would have it, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Words, ill chosen, invariably lead to the sticks and stones that injure both ourselves and others. The thoughts we form in our mind are governed by our view. These thoughts are in the form of words, and if we release them it is because we resolve to. The first three noble paths are linked together in such a way as to make it impossible to violate one and leave the others unaffected. This being the case, we do have to be careful that those elements which effect our view and resolve, are wholesome, otherwise wrong speech is a necessary outcome. This makes it incumbent upon spiritual practitioners to limit their environment in accordance with their spiritual practice.

RIGHT ACTION

Right action is the fourth path that ennobles, and is a direct expression of the spiritual energy of the first three paths. As we have seen the first three paths link together to form a symbiotic triad to support one another. The supporting energy then manifests itself in life outside of the mind and speech, in bodily action. If we have properly prepared the groundwork of mental morality in the first three paths then our behavior in the world will follow as a direct result.

In Buddhism, there is a constant reference to the three purifications of the Body, Speech, and Mind. At the initial level of training, the first five paths prepare the way for the final three which is the perfection of these purifications. The Karmic energy which is released by following right view, resolution, speech, behavior and livelihood allow for the attainment of a mental and emotional level of maturity that is the process of enlightenment.

Without a level of understanding that goes beyond an egotistical view of reality, it is not possible to mature to a point where meditation would lead to enlightenment. The purification of our actions refers to the deliberate sacrifice of the trivial view of the world forced upon us by the ego. We view the world and our lives in the light of a more mature understanding, and our actions and behavior in the world reflect the light. This is how the first three paths merge with the fourth to form a single dynamic energy, self consistent and self supporting.

If the component parts of this energy are not in order, there will be a breakdown in the entire process. When this occurs it is not always easy to determine what aspect of our practice has been the mitigating force behind the system failure. The only way to remedy the situation is to systematically review our selves in light of our spiritual path and try to amend all aspects simultaneously. Once again it is helpful to use the image of a polluted ecosystem as a metaphor. We can't simply locate the point of pollution and rectify all damage to the environment at that point. We must follow the poison trail down stream and repair as we go.

It is not sufficient merely to understand the source of a spiritual decay. Action must be taken to rectify it. This is where Buddhist practice differs from some views of contemporary psychoanalysis. We hold that identifying the historical source of a problem will not be sufficient, in and of itself, to make that problem disappear. Although few professional psychologists still hold this view, many lay people still believe identification of the source to be enough.

The next part of our spiritual development begins, after the initial training in correcting our world view, our will, and our speech leads us into our right physical actions in the world. The realm of right action is threefold. Action which preserves life and does not destroy it, action that respects other property and does not misappropriate it, and action that is not sexually inappropriate to the spiritual life.

I have amended the literal interpretation of the Pali, which reads more like not to kill, not to steal, and not to commit sexual misconduct, because we tend to look at spiritual injunctions in the west in terms of the emotional content of

biblical commandments. Buddhist teachings are a dynamic that requires a more flexible understanding than this. To Buddhists, the law of karma takes in to account the motivation behind an act as well as the act itself. As I mentioned earlier, when discussing compassion, it is sometimes necessary to commit to actions which appear to be contradictory to spiritual principles. If it is necessary to kill one person to save many others, then that is not a violation of the injunction against killing, but an expression of the spirit behind the injunction.

Buddhist moral statements are not laws which point to absolute good and bad, but rather expressions of spiritual practice aimed at creating a constructive life energy. For instance, the injunction not to take life should be interpreted as a remedial action to guarantee that the principle of respect for life is not violated. It is not a mere decree as much as an expression of unity with life. Once again, we face the essential difference in a dynamic view of existence rather than a static ontologically based view of reality.

This does not in any way separate man from the consequences of committing a violation of spiritual principle. Far from it. It actually guarantees that he will suffer a retribution for destructive action in direct proportion to that action. There is no leaping out of the system through divine grace. The best that can be hoped for is that an individual is in a state of enlightenment when retribution comes so that he can bear it with equanimity.

A respect for life, as embodied in the directive not to take life, expresses an understanding of the unity of existence and our place in it. It focuses the attention of the practitioner on the fact that all beings share a common love of life and fear of death. This understanding then arouses in one the immense energy of compassion. This compassion is the essential life giving energy in the world. Where it is absent, the energy that resides in its place is the energy of death. For life itself is process and unity which is the recognition that is compassion. When compassion is absent, the mind is left to dwell on things separate in their isolation. This imagined isolation is the very fear of death itself. What is death but ultimate loneliness?

A respect for life, then, is a natural extension of our wisdom derived from our spiritual practice. Since we do not abide in that wisdom perfectly, we require the conceptual reminder of our code of harmlessness. It is not enough for the Bodhisattva to merely refrain from killing to fulfill the spirit of this energy, he or she must put forward an attitude and action that manifests life giving quality. This means we should help, whenever it is possible, to support other beings in the world through our actions.

Now it is obvious that we cannot feed every starving animal or person in the world, but we can support an attitude that promotes society to respect animals and people. We should not lend ourselves to activities that violate the spirit of our intent even if we only participate in them passively. It is not necessary for instance to join an animal rights group to effect a change of attitude toward animals. One can accomplish this by polishing their own spiritual practice to make themselves spiritually attractive enough to others that they will seek to emulate you.

A person may find that it is right action to get politically involved in an organization espousing human or animal rights. They must, however, be certain that in so doing they maintain the spirit of compassion toward others. For instance, to stridently attack a furrier for his lack of compassion is violating the spirit of compassion as well.

Even in my baby Bodhisattva stage of development, after twenty years of practice, anger has begun to give way to sadness and compassion toward individuals who destroy lives, either theirs or others. To the extent that I have been able to convince others of the destructiveness of their actions, it has been a result of the concern I have been able to express for them. I have never once converted anyone to right action through anger or insult. Neither have I ever been moved to change my perspective through other's anger.

It is not easy to control one's speech if a person allows the general loudness of society to permeate their thinking. It is also not possible to be one of the boys during working hours, exchanging quips and swapping tales, and then turn around in the evening to do meditation and be "spiritual". This is not an uncommon way of being in the world for many students, however. To make progress on the path requires a twenty four hour effort, which means that sacrifice of habitual patterns of behavior is necessary.

I strongly suggest that one limit the input they allow into their environment. One should try to make their environment as conducive to spiritual practice as possible. I would not, for instance, watch commercial television news or entertainment and be careful not to read newspapers and periodicals whose slant toward the world is confrontational. It would be a good idea to be wary of becoming too involved with following athletics, since this can lead to an adrenaline addiction and a contentious view of the world.

It is only through such discipline that one can bring their life into accord with the life respecting principle, the foundation of the fourth noble path. Life is a force which consolidates inward motion and outward activity into a unity of being. It is found at its most profound level in activities that express equanimity, the balance between outward and inward. To be moved constantly outward by excitement is injurious to spiritual health. Excitement distracts us from the necessary mindfulness required to successfully follow our spiritual path. Excitement as an aesthetic is simply inappropriate to spiritual practice. It leads one away from a contemplation of reality and into emotional attachment to things. All this accomplishes is to further alienate one from the ongoing process of life. It goes directly back to the primal link between attachment and suffering, and should be avoided.

The problem is that one must create or abide in an aesthetic that will reinforce this love of balance and equanimity. This is made more difficult by the fact that we live in a society whose aesthetic values are dubious. The aesthetic that prevails in the modern western world is one of excitement. We pursue things that are exciting, new and dazzling to the senses. Economic interests promote this aesthetic to merchandise goods and services. It is easier to sell someone something they do not need, or an inferior product, if you can appeal to that

person's emotion rather than his reason.

Advertisers try to equate consumption with basic human emotions in order to confuse our conscious with our unconscious. Automobiles are described as "sexy", as in the "sexy new Ford Probe", in the hope that they will create a sense of confusion in the consumer on a basic level that will make him or her equate their sexual desirability with the car they drive.

We should not confuse enthusiasm, which is an energy of appreciation for the value of worthwhile activity, with excitement. This is generally the case with people who believe they should be excited about things to be properly motivated. Enthusiasm is a natural energy of joy, borne of appreciation for the intrinsic value of something. It differs from excitement in that it does not fade with time, since it is grounded in understanding, not emotion. Excitement becomes exhausted by the common place, while enthusiasm glories in the actuality of the moment.

These sort of distinctions are not merely philosophical, but are made to direct the student's attention toward the subtler levels of understanding which produce spiritual growth. The process of true harmlessness and loving kindness starts with oneself disciplining ones action to produce life giving results.

The next aspect of right behavior which Buddha delineated is respect for others through respect for their property. In simple words, not stealing. I must emphasize that when we respect others property, it is out of respect for them, not the value of the property. A person's property represents his efforts and life energy and therefore has a quality which makes property spiritually important. To violate this principle by stealing is to violate the person. This kind of energy is a life negating energy, in that it does not value life in the form of someone's energy and effort.

To be so attached to things as to not recognize the suffering caused to others by stealing, is to be allied to this death energy. Once again, one has chosen things over process. Static deluded values over enlightenment. Every time someone steals, they practice delusion, getting more mired in the swamp of ignorance. It is not just a matter of the karmic consequences of stealing in regard to the future that is important, but the immediate product of delusion reinforcing itself, which should be feared. To steal is ignorance squared. First you are attached to temporal things; second your attachment to concepts of self and others; third you violate basic morality. This is like scratching a flea bite with a sprig of poison ivy.

The obvious virtue that makes honesty a natural expression of one's being is contentment. To be content, one has to have a view of the world that is broad enough not to become fascinated with things in themselves. If we are given over to the world, then we will be like a large mouth bass that bites at any shiny lure in the lake. In this society there are many people who know just what lures to cast to get our attention if we are so disposed. Glamour, power, sex, and wealth reel in quite a few of the unwary. Not all the fishermen are in business suits either. Some wear the robes of Lamas, Zen Masters and gurus. Spiritual frauds can steal from you more than your property. They can rob you of your spiritual innocence and enthusiasm. Ultimately, a person has to use common sense in dealing with

teachers just the same as he or she would in relating to anyone else. However, if you are attracted to the shiny lures of false values and excitement, you are bound to be hooked.

The last area of moral conduct included under the path of right action is in governing sexual conduct. The traditional vinaya or code of moral conduct for monks precludes all sexual activity. A true monk is required to be abstinent, period. However, in the west almost all Buddhists are lay people or priests, not monks, thus a realistic code of sexual behavior is needed.

The essence of Buddhist attitude toward sexual behavior is that it should not be destructive. Therefore, any activity that endangers the physical or spiritual health of another human being or yourself is prohibited. Sex is not considered either bad or good, it simply is of the nature of things. It becomes good or bad dependent upon how it is used. If it brings intimacy and love to a relationship and does not harm anyone, it is good. If it is motivated solely by desire, driving people to have sex regardless of their respect for the other person or themselves, it is bad.

Promiscuous sexual activity is almost always bad. It witnesses a pathological attraction to the senses that overwhelms the natural instinct of bonding and communication. People who indulge in this type of behavior have a fundamental problem with respect for themselves and others. There are more than a few gurus running around promoting sexual "freedom" as a way of Moksha (liberation). True sexual freedom is not to be possessed by desire. It is to have sexual desire toward one's partner as a result of the love, compassion and intimacy you feel for them.

Once again, we are faced with living in a society that does not share the spiritual values of our path. Sex is a very confusing phenomenon in this culture. Riddled with guilt and worshipped as a god at the same time. If the same peculiar attitudes were applied to such normal aspects of human existence as eating and elimination, people would think it absurd. Yet people are ready to align themselves with the alternate poles of deification or demonification of the sexual function.

Sexual activity is a natural function of human existence. It does not require either glorification or vilification. We have to examine just what are the motivating energies behind these two polar attitudes toward sex in this culture to understand their possible effects upon us.

Much of our problem with sex does come from a reaction to the Judeo-Christian attitude toward the world. This culture is permeated with the traditional perspective of creator creation separation that is intrinsic to Jewish and Christian thought. Since sexuality is an expression of creation par excellence, it stands in counter distinction to the spirit of divinity. Therefore, sexuality must in an essential way be leading one away from God. The only exception to this is when sex is sanctified in marriage. Even then, there is a residue of unholiness left over in the act that colors our attitude toward it.

Those that consciously reject this religious world view are never the less still subject to it through its hold on cultural values. Many functional agnostics adhere to the notion that

they have grown out of the idea of God and his judgment. Whether they have or not consciously, their unconscious still holds the images of what they have been taught. Unless a person has undergone a thorough analysis of themselves through either a psychological or spiritual discipline, they can never be sure exactly what might be motivating them from their unconscious. Very few of us escape the effects of early exposure to church or synagogue. The powerful influences of music and ritual, added to the huge size of the buildings in comparison to our small stature, gives us a feeling of powerlessness. These are powerful images for our young minds to wrestle with and undoubtedly remain with us through out our lives.

To believe that when we no longer feel religion to be viable to us, we have gotten rid of it, is foolish. It remains as part of our personal cultural psychological heritage, whether we like it or not. The question is do we utilize it as a part of our understanding by employing it as a point of reference to our continued spiritual growth. Whenever we come to an understanding of the world that negates some of the basic conditioning of our past, we must consciously reference that conditioning in order to prevent unconscious emotional turmoil.

For instance, if we have reached a point in our practice where our personal idea of divinity is no longer defensible rationally, we must accept a certain amount of psychic discord as a temporary result. The mind has to learn to deal with this new understanding in regard to its images and unconscious content which undoubtedly contains a great deal of early theistic impression.

If we do not do this, then we will be subject to unwanted psychic influences in the form of inconsistencies in our personal actions brought about by conflicts between emotional patterns from the past and intellectual perspective of the present. Our attitude towards sex is a perfect example of this dilemma between past conditioning and present world view. Those of a Judeo-Christian world view cannot help but view sexuality as, at best, an inferior influence on life, and at worst demonic in that it binds man to creation instead of God.

The rest of society that have rejected this view consciously but not reconciled their unconscious to it, have elevated sex to a god in and of itself. In their unconscious, there is still the primal image of God who demands sacrificing the love of creation for the love of him. We become pro-creation (the term itself says it all) as opposed to pro-God whenever we experience our sexuality. This then is primal sin, choosing procreation over God. The unconscious, being a fundamentally natural phenomenon, abhors a vacuum. In the absence of God, sex the primal image of procreation, takes over Gods power in our unconscious.

Sex becomes an ongoing rebellion and expression of personal power aimed at defeating this notion of God and the culture which still holds to him. Sex then becomes antisocial. It then has become a force which is identified to the unconscious as being in opposition to a society which is heavily imbued with the image of the biblical God.

In order to balance oneself in accordance with sexual right action, one must abandon both of these extremes and see sex for the natural energy it is, understanding its potential for affecting our well being. To destroy existing relationships by

our sexual actions; to enslave another person psychologically through sex; to damage or endanger ones physical health through sex; these are examples of sexual misconduct.

The most important fact about sex in regard to right action is in its potential to effect lives, both our own and others. It is not just a matter of consenting adults, but also a matter of those others who may be effected by sexual relationships. A student of the eight fold path should never violate a continuing intimate relationship between two people by becoming a third person. Now this does not mean simply avoiding initiating sexual contact, but avoiding contact whether we initiate it or not.

It is too often the case that people in crisis in a relationship will seek relief from the tension of the crises by having an affair. They may even protest that their relationship is over when it is not, in order to persuade us it is all right. Further, we can give ourselves any number of excuses for going ahead with the liaison. The truth of the matter is simple, we should not get involved unless we are certain that the party we are getting involved with has made a formal separation from their partner, and has announced that intention to them. Even then, one must still analyze the situation and be certain the consequences of involvement are not injurious to others.

Another very destructive sexual relationship is one that preys upon someone else's essential sexual weakness to manipulate them. This means that even a sanctified relationship like marriage can involve sexual misconduct. If by giving sex or denying it, one manipulates another person to do that which they would not have done without this sexual coercion, then this is sexual misconduct.

The final example of sexual misconduct is the voluntary exposure to sexual activity that could endanger either your health or someone else's. Any sexual activity which could spread disease through carelessness is sexual misconduct. The remedy to attraction to sexual misconduct is to develop an attitude toward sex that sees it as an expression of love. If one views the world through this perspective, then they will not have to concern themselves with what is specifically "sexual misconduct". When a person has developed a correct attitude toward the world, based upon wisdom and compassion, all aspects of their life are illuminated in the light of understanding.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

Once we have disciplined our actions in the world to correspond to our new spiritual view and resolution, we will want to assure that the way we earn our living is also consistent with the rest of our practice. This concern expresses itself in the fourth noble path, Right Livelihood. A person's vocation is so much a representation of their own life energy that we often define a man by his profession. John is a policeman, Joan is a fireman, is the way we describe someone. We do not say John is a person who works as a police man. Somehow John's being has become synonymous with his vocational activity.

This is not only important to others, but it also helps us to define ourselves, to the extent that we identify with our actions. From a Buddhist perspective, there are only a few professions which are by nature intrinsically wrong, such as criminal activities. Those are trades that deal with the destruction or denigration of life, (arms dealer, raising or killing animals for profit) and those vocations dealing in intoxicants. There are many professions which may or may not be right livelihood, depending upon how the vocation is carried out. Sales, for instance, is an acceptable vocation provided one is honest in their relationship to customers.

The important thing is not the vocational title, but the energy that vocation has toward the world. For someone on the noble path, it is vital that the energy they put forward in work will resonate with their spiritual life energy. If it does not, it is inconsistent with life itself. A spiritual person participating in an activity which is destructive will rob that individual of their own energy, as well as the collective energy they share with the world.

A person is cut off from their own spiritual resources when they allow themselves to participate in a vocation which they know to be deleterious to other beings. When we choose to accept employment in a vocation we know to be wrong, we set up a tension between our world view and will that produces dukkha, the dis-ease, which is suffering. The spiritual energy of unity with our world is disrupted, and the destructive action itself sets in motion more disruption of the spiritual ecosystem. Eventually the disruption in the system will come full circle and manifest itself in a negative impact on our own life.

Most dharma students are more aware of the moral ramifications of wrong livelihood than is the general population. Many of them are graduates of the environmental and peace movements of the sixties, and while they have abandoned many of the trappings of that period, some of its positive impact still remains. In few of these cases have people changed their values sufficiently to endorse the more destructive vocations. Unfortunately, there are some of the students who have gone to the extreme of determining that almost anything to do with business is wrong. In this case, they are mistaking politics for dharma and have set up a judgmental attitude toward work that is harmful to their practice.

It is the nature of our existence that we have to accept a certain amount of darkness in our life. No profession is without its contact with injurious elements. We can certainly resist participating in the promotion of destructive attitudes, but we cannot escape from encountering them.

There are few jobs in the modern world that do not call for the use of some technology that involves chemicals that potentially dangerous to the environment. There are also few vocations in the world that do not require communication with people that are morally questionable. If we were then to choose not to accept work in any position that involved dealing with destructive people or situations, we would not work at all. An essential part of right livelihood is to promote a correct attitude toward our environment and fellow human beings by being examples ourselves. If we simply leave our job when we are faced with incorrect attitudes toward the world without attempting to influence others in a healthy approach to work, then we are guilty of wrong action.

Of course, any vocation that requires the violation of right speech and right action, is a wrong vocation. There is no way to avoid confronting these issues in one's work, however. The most difficult task is convincing co-workers and superiors to abandon incorrect thinking toward the world. This can rarely be done through a direct confrontational approach. We cannot preach someone into a good conscience, they have to see reality for themselves.

In those rare situations where someone orders us to lie, we will have to stand up for what is right, but in doing so, we should be gentle and conciliatory while remaining firm. We should never adopt a self righteous attitude, for it will do nothing to help the situation. Rather, we should look upon the other person the same way we would a child who insists upon playing with a hornet's nest despite our warnings. It is not you who will take the brunt of the stings, but the person initiating incorrect action. Therefore, there is no reason to be overly angry with them. Instead, we should pity their ignorance and intractability.

To commit to a life of right action always requires a bit of faith in ourselves and our path. There is a unity to life that responds to our spiritual efforts. A resonance of spirit that finds its way into our destiny. This is something that someone has to experience for themselves. I have found in my own life that I have never really lost anything by doing right action. When I have had to sacrifice something for what I knew was right, I have always been given much more in return, than I had given up.

When one continues with this faith in the beautiful and good, allowing it to resonate into all areas of their personal action, they will find a corresponding tone in their environment, and harmony of life begins. Difficult people are no match for a mind grounded in love for the good. It is like trying to strike your shadow with a stick, attacking someone who does not acknowledge the attack.

The biggest danger most of us face in the quest for right livelihood is in confronting the issue of honesty. The term business ethics has almost become a contradiction in terms in the modern world. Truth itself is seen to be a notion of only relative importance; a utilitarian concept of a flexible truth has arisen, giving birth to a new plastic art. People often regard truth as a tool of business, and lying as a complimentary tool. A little truth here, and a little lie there, and we come up with a "nice promotion". Truth actually is an acceptance of

the reality of life and cannot be separated from life. To lie is to separate oneself from the actual, which is life.

Because in Buddhist practice we do not rely on words to contain reality, a deluded student could also get on this band wagon of "there is not right or wrong". This statement, however, is only half true even though right and wrong, as concepts, do not exist as absolutes. In each moment there is nothing but right action and wrong action. To understand this is to understand the other half of the truth.

These seemingly contradictory statements about right and wrong are expressing the same reality, that moral concepts themselves, divorced from the ground of the dynamic flow of existence, have no substance. In action, in the moment, every action embodies an energy which is either pro life, promoting unity, compassion, healing and love, or pro death promoting hatred, anger, delusion, greed, etc. The problem arises when we abstract the concepts right and wrong from the spirit of the moment and render them meaningless.

There is an old Zen saying, "there is no right or wrong, but right is right and wrong is wrong". The spirit of right action requires skillful means; the ability to adapt to a situation and perform miraculous feats of compassion in it. Every time we influence another being to take a look at themselves and the world in the light of wisdom and compassion, one has performed a miraculous feat. It is such feats that eventually form a chain of magical events and transform the world.

We must bring this magic into our life in the work place, with freedom in mind. A mind that only sees possibility for loving action and is not concerned with the polarities of good, bad, right, wrong, acceptance, and rejection miraculously transforms the world into a balance of harmonious action. It is only through a freedom mind that we can approach the problem of right livelihood with the necessary balance to be successful.

Serious students for instance, ask me should they be vegetarian and should we avoid working in places that serve meat. The answer is that it would be better from both the perspective of health and compassion to be vegetarian, not to mention the fact that it makes great economic sense. However, the Buddha allowed even fully ordained monks to eat meat, provided the animal was not killed for them. Does not this seem a bit duplicitous?

Not really when you consider that first of all, many of the animals that we eat would or could not exist without the farmers supporting them. If we stopped eating beef and poultry tomorrow, what would happen to all the animals? Would we keep on feeding them and let them live out their lives? Would we allow them to reproduce undisturbed? Would we turn them loose in the wild to destroy the ecosystem or die from the inability to adapt? It presents quite a dilemma, doesn't it?

That is because farm animals have their own karma, and it is tied up with being eaten by man. I am not encouraging this awful activity by mentioning the reality of the situation. I am just making it clear how complex karma is and how each of us has to reflect upon how we are going to face it in our vocation. Right livelihood can only be approached successfully with an attitude of openness and compassion. Then each person, within each situation will be able to find their path.

It is the nature of spiritual practice that one moves on in life and what was appropriate at one moment may not be so in another.

The more we practice, the more our heart opens up to the suffering of others, human and non-human. There comes a point when the suffering of others becomes so intolerable to us that we are pushed into a corner and we can only emerge from that corner transformed. It is only such a person who has undergone the personal hell and heaven of identifying completely with this world and merging with it beyond both suffering and not suffering, who can fulfill the vocation of Bodhisattva.

RIGHT EFFORT

The first three noble paths deal exclusively with the accumulation of spiritual understanding and the moral restraint that this knowledge engenders. There is nothing in the first five paths that differs radically in approach from the moral teachings of western theologically based religion. The main difference in approach is found in the total emphasis of Buddhism on the process of self transformation as being self generated rather than other generated. Other than this, there is that little separates Buddhist moral teaching from any ethically based system of thought, religious or otherwise.

The radical departure from other religious traditions begins with the sixth noble path, the path of right effort. Right effort, Sama Vayama in Pali, could also be called perfect or right concentration, in as much as it signifies effort with a specific direction. Direction is the first step in turning energy into effort. To have direction, of course, it is necessary to have the groundwork of understanding that comes with following the preceding spiritual paths.

Once again, the indivisible nature of the interdependence of these paths reveals itself. A careful analysis of this spiritual process reveals time and time again that it is an organic system, consisting of respective paths whose mutual integrity is so interconnected as to make it impossible to violate one path, without disrupting the entire process. This is why Buddhist traditions, which have relied too heavily on one aspect of the path to the detriment of the others, produce unbalanced results. Those Zen sects that ignore the importance of strict adherence to moral behavior of the first five paths, while vigorously pursuing the enlightenment experience can produce dubious Zen masters. These masters may have powerful meditation ability, and powers of personality that border on the occult, but are not enlightened in any real Buddhist sense. For real enlightenment can not be divorced from the enlightened way of life, which is the eight fold path.

There are many Buddhist moralists who eschew the practice of meditation as too spiritually difficult. These people rely solely on faith in the Buddha or a magical formula to save them. Such people teach that this age is too dark to produce enlightened beings, so why bother.

Buddhists who hold such notions have forgotten that Buddha taught the middle way as embodied in the eight fold path, and no individual or tradition has been able to surpass this doctrine in sublimity or effectiveness. The Buddha did make allowances for the various temperament of each individual by teaching many ways to approach the path utilizing one's inherent strengths. He never, however, advocated abandoning any of the paths as too difficult or irrelevant. It is important, therefore, that we never lose sight of the essential necessity of perfecting ourselves in each path, even as we focus our attention on a particular path as the center of our practice.

In the same respect, it is equally important that we respect all the various traditions of Buddha dharma and non-Buddhist dharma, not denigrating any of them since they all represent different approaches to the eight fold path according to the spiritual disposition and understanding of the practitioners.

It should be mentioned that there are a couple of quasi Buddhist organizations which pay no heed to the eight fold path at all, simply advocating the chanting of a particular magic formulae for attaining whatever one wishes, as if this was the goal of Buddhism. This sort of spiritual degeneracy exists in all religious traditions at one time or the other, and is easily separated from real spiritual traditions by the superficiality of its doctrine and adherents.

In order to muster the energy necessary to complete the sixth noble path, one must have faith that by their own exertions they can reach the goal. Faith is an element of practice that is not stressed in Buddhism because our practice itself is systematic and if properly done, self supporting. This does not mean, however, that the concept of faith is not relevant to our practice. In fact it is of extreme importance if we are going to have the resiliency necessary to deal with the challenges of the spiritual life.

Although we know that the Buddha and his disciples have attained the way through following the same path as ourselves, we still have no direct experience of the power of their enlightenment before we ourselves are enlightened. The best we can hope for is to find venerable teachers who embody the tradition in their person to such a degree that we are inspired to follow them. There is a problem with this type of faith, however.

First of all, to be a human being is to have karma. This means that everyone is subject to the forces of cause and effect. It is only when one reaches the exalted state of Buddha or advanced Bodhisattva that one can be said to be perfect in the moral sense. Unfortunately, there are very few of these people around to guide us. In their absence, we will have to settle for more mundane examples of Zen Masters, Lamas and the like. A few of these are advanced Bodhisattva, but certainly not all. Even advanced spiritual practitioners are capable of moral error, and thus capable of potentially leading weaker students astray through their actions. There is a good deal of difference between our common garden variety of Buddhist master and a living Buddha. I think it behooves us to examine the difference, with the Zen Master as an example.

What is a Zen Master? This is a term that is used quite loosely in the west. I have often heard any number of advanced Zen practitioners in America referred to as a Zen Master. When the title is used in Japan it signifies a priest who has been given the title Roshi or Zenji. Roshi literally means revered or older priest and is usually only given to senior Zen priests past the age of fifty who are considered to be worthy in the Soto tradition. The term Zenji is used interchangeably with Roshi in Rinzai, while it is only used in Soto by those who receive the title from the Emperor. In the Rinzai tradition, the title Roshi is given to any priest who has been given Inka Shomei. Inka is the seal of transmission certifying that a legitimate Zen Master recognizes the priest as enlightened and worthy of teaching at that level. In Rinzai, this comes when the student has passed through all the various levels of Koans and the teacher feels that he is ready to assume the responsibility inherent in the title. In Soto, the process of certifying transmission of the Zen lineage is done through shiho, a continuous face to face merging of Master and disciple. This is unique to Soto, but parallels the Roshi Koan interchange found in the Rinzai dokusan process.

Dokusan and sanzen are private interviews with the Roshi where the student tests his Zen understanding through Koan work or simply discusses his practice with his teacher. In Korean Zen a priest must receive certification from five Zen Masters before his master will give him transmission. In Korea, a Zen Master title is Sa Nim and a regular monk Su Nim. In China and Vietnam, the process for transmission is no longer consistent because of the disruptions of the lineage due to the Communist takeovers.

In order to understand what a Zen master is, one has to understand the principle of enlightenment. A Zen Master is considered to be Enlightened, which means that he or she has experienced Satori, the direct experience of ones true nature. To be enlightened is not the same as being enlightenment, which means that one abides in the state of enlightenment. If one abides in the state of enlightenment, then one is a Buddha. A Buddha is one who is the manifestation of Bodhi or enlightenment.

To be a Buddha is to have a Karma which is supra mundane, and this is why in Buddhist mythology, a Buddha is said to have the 32 marks of the superman.

Thirty-two refers to the eight fold path multiplied by the four noble truths. In other words, these signs are a symbol for the perfection of the truths of existence in the life of an individual. The Buddha possessing these marks represents the merging of the universal (four noble truths) with its manifestation as his life (the eight fold path). A Buddha is one who no longer creates Karma because the individual will, which is the creator, is no longer present. There is only the continuing reality of the Buddha Mind, which being infinite, cannot have a finite form. Since Karma is the manifestation of individual energy, a Buddha no longer creates it. A Buddha is called Tathagata or one who is suchness in reference to the merging of his personhood with the manifestation of existence.

Suchness is the eternal quality of the present reality as it is.

As we say in Zen, "The flowers are red, the leaves are green". A Zen Master is one who has seen red flowers and green leaves as not separate from himself. One who is red flowers and green leaves. A Zen Master is, however, not a supra mundane being who has put an end to his karma. Since he still has karma, he is still subject to delusion to some degree or another. Therefore, he is capable of making moral error. A Zen Master should be a morally superior person even if he or she is not perfect. The title should reflect not only experience of wisdom, but knowledge of moral law and compassion for other beings. This precludes the possibility of this person making consistent moral errors from which they refuse to repent.

Unfortunately the experience of enlightenment in its weaker manifestations does not coerce people into moral behavior. It can, in some cases, have just the opposite affect. It can give a person a sense of oneness that makes moral considerations seem to be as important as straw in the wind. Real enlightenment transcends oneness and all other mental considerations. One behaves morally because moral behavior is the perfect expression of our compassion for the world. There is no longer the arbitrary boundaries of self and other, even on a subtle level.

Zen Masters and other Buddhist masters being capable of error,

presents a problem for those who look to them as perfect and as the source of faith in their practice. Faith must be grounded in a firm conviction in the reality of the eight fold path as a vehicle for self transformation, and this faith must be complemented by a realistic attitude toward the karma of individuals. One of the best warnings delivered to dharma students of the danger of misplaced faith was given by Tibet's great sage, Milarepa, who wrote a series of warning to his disciples, entitled the Ten False Resemblances. They are as pertinent today as they were in his time.

1. Desire may be mistaken for faith.
2. Attachment may be mistaken for benevolence and compassion.
3. Cessation of thought process may be mistaken for the tranquil enlightened mind.
4. Sense perception and psychic vision may be mistaken for Reality.
5. A mere glimpse of Reality may be mistaken for complete realization.
6. Those who outwardly profess, but do not practice religion may be mistaken for true devotees.
7. Slaves of passion may be mistaken for masters of yoga who have liberated themselves from conventional laws.
8. Self interest may pass for altruism.
9. Deceptive methods may be mistakenly regarded as being prudent.
10. Charlatans may be mistaken for Sages.

As we can see by Milarepa's warnings to his students, faith in teachers as a faith in tradition itself is only justified when one has the necessary common sense to delineate between sages, ordinary men, and charlatans. Faith in teachers should be based primarily on an understanding of a teacher's credentials and their sincerity. To believe that one person represents an entire spiritual tradition is deluded. All traditions contain within them a wide variety of individuals each with different levels of training, intelligence, and spiritual sensitivity. If this were not the case, there would be a very limited and stereotyped level of instruction available. It is the student's job to seek out the teacher and tradition which is most efficacious for his or her spiritual development.

At the point where one chooses their spiritual path, they must make a commitment to following it with their whole heart. This does not require a suspension of the faculty of reason or moral judgment, but an application of those qualities to their practice. Any teacher who would request a person to commit to any action that is inherently destructive or immoral is violating that person's spiritual trust. The student teacher relationship is a sacred trust which requires a total commitment on the part of both parties. The most important commitment is to the practice itself. This is the real practice, not adoration of the teacher, but commitment to putting the teachers instruction into practice.

The beginning of the practice of right effort is in controlling ones mind to avoid destructive or unwholesome states of consciousness. Just as it is with the physical body, the mental body, consciousness, is best kept healthy through preventive medicine. It is a great deal more difficult to rid oneself of deleterious mental conditions than it is to prevent them from arising in the first place.

The Buddha delineated five mental conditions which were hindrances to right effort. These are sensual desire or craving, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, and restlessness and worry. The first hindrance, craving for material things and sensual desire is the strongest of the hindrances. Attachment

to sensual pleasure, position and fame are the most common forms of this complex of desires. This can easily be seen in the predominance of these elements as a lure in advertising. Advertisers have to know what elements of the modern psyche are motivational to be able to market effectively.

In a society in which reason holds an exalted position, people who market goods and services advertise effectively by lucid exposition of their products merits. In this society people market effectively by appealing to sexual appetite, social insecurity and a desire for personal recognition. Therefore, we have automobiles described as sexy, and movie stars and athletes of dubious intellect hawking everything from snacks to socks. Even though it is irrational to equate an automobile with sex, or buy a pair of socks because an actor promotes them, nevertheless, people do act upon such motivations.

What happens when we allow desire to run our lives, is that we are thrown into a perpetual state of confusion. Confusion exists because our mind tells us that when we attain a particular thing, we will be fulfilled. When we do attain it, the satisfaction received is not commensurate with the energy expended in obtaining it. We are then motivated to look for something else to fill the gap in satisfaction and so on, until we become addicted to pursuit and desire to the extent we hardly ever know a moments calm. This, unfortunately, is the way most people live their lives, devoid of insight and peace and driven from one situation to the next, totally at the mercy of their temporal fortunes for their sense of well being.

To a person grounded in the eight fold path, this pitiable state is not possible. One understands that well being is contingent upon a mind that is free of attachment to things and situations, since these are all, by nature, ephemeral and transitory. Reality and pleasure are to be found in the beauty of the moment and its possibility for intelligent and compassionate action. There is no need to pursue an endless chain of things looking for a mythical pot of gold at the rainbows end. A rainbow is a thing of consummate beauty; why search for anything else? Ill will is another crippling attitude that is predominate in society, and our attachment to it is also used by the media to sell their products.

Hatred, resentment, anger, Dirty Harry, Rambo, Death Wish, all born of the same ignorant attitude toward the world. Our streets are full of hostile alienated people. Our roads have become shooting galleries and the media asks, "Why?". Why not, when every hour on the hour our children can be exposed to countless murders, shootings, revenges, beatings, rapes and other forms of television entertainment.

To a person on the path, there is a recognition that since all faces are ones own, it is not possible to take pleasure in revenge or indulge in fits of anger based on the deluded notion of absolute self and absolute other. We recognize all hatred is self hatred, and self hatred is the result of a personality that is not integrated. Therefore, when we experience hatred, we look to ourselves for self correction and not to revenge. We likewise find no entertainment in literature or films that promote vengeance as appropriate. Justice is sometimes swift and deadly, but when it is true justice, the emotional shadow of hate is completely absent. The only appropriate emotion for applying extreme sanctions is sorrow.

Unfortunately, the mind is a clever beast and quite capable of switching tracks from hatred of men to hatred of situations or things. It does this because it has become habituated to certain emotions and when it is deprived of them and the psychosomatic state they represent, it feels ill at ease. The mind and the body are not separate realities for the Buddhist, but manifestations of each other, as is energy and matter. They are correlates of a constituent reality. Mind manifests the body through karma, and the body manifests the mind in its actions. We can not witness the mind outside the movements of the body, and we can not perceive the body outside the mind.

To use the analogy of energy and matter, we can say that all matter is composed of patterns of energy and energy always expresses itself in patterns that are material or material effecting. If this were not the case, we would be unable to recognize energy at all because we would have no reference for it.

It is the same with mind and body. Each effects the other and produces the other interdependently. When one becomes habituated to a particular emotional state such as anger, there exists a matrix of mind and body; the mind effecting the body by eliciting chemicals appropriate to the emotions, like hormone excretions. The body becomes used to these hormone and chemical levels and when deprived of them becomes hypersensitive to any mental reaction which might parallel the original emotion, and thus release the same chemicals. An example of this can be found whenever we have an emotion which is inappropriate to a situation either because of the intensity of the emotion or by the nature of the emotion itself.

For many years I had a friend who had been a badly abused child which resulted in a major problem with feelings of anger and betrayal. This person was a dharma student, and over the years had come to understand that hate toward other persons was inappropriate. However, for years this person had become habituated to anger and the psychosomatic condition of a person in that state. Whenever an occasion arose that did not accord with my friend's aesthetic viewpoint or personal convenience, my friend would go into a blind rage. This rage was not directed at anyone in particular, but the world or life itself. This is not an uncommon occurrence with many people who find political, religious or artistic differences infuriating and depressing.

As disturbing as pollution, corruption, injustice and ignorance is, it is still not an appropriate vehicle for anger on the part of dharma students. Compassion and enthusiasm for work toward remedying these conditions should take the place of anger, resentment and repulsion. Those emotions do absolutely nothing to remedy incorrect situations, they only enhance the probability of them becoming worse.

Negative mental conditions arise because we have allowed our senses to carry us along without direction. It is like being in a canoe with paddles, but not using them, allowing ourselves to drift with the current. Meditation and mindfulness are our oars, allowing us to navigate, using the river of experience to propel us instead of hinder us. We can not get out of the river by shutting off our senses. We must learn to use them and not let them use us. One does this by concentrating on the sense itself, and shutting off the conceptual echo that follows it.

When we see a beautiful object, we enjoy being in its presence, but when we, the walls of ego, echo back, "I want this", we ignore the sound and concentrate on just being in the moment. Our practice of meditation and mindfulness of the seventh and eight paths allows us to quiet our minds and penetrate the beauty of the moment.

Little by little, the ego, which is nothing more than layers upon layers of opinion, begins to disappear like a slowly peeled onion. There is no self left to want anything and yet there is a whole universe to be enjoyed in the moment. This enlightened state will never occur unless we are properly disciplined in restraining the ego dominated mind from linking up with the senses to carry us out of the moment and into a vortex of craving.

The next challenge of the path is to overcome mental sloth in the form of a dull and sleepy mind. There is no possibility of making any mental gains either intellectual or spiritual, if the mind is languishing in torpor. The practice of spiritual concentration requires an alert and motivated mind. Many meditation students complain to me that they have trouble staying alert when they are relaxed. This is the result of an addiction to excitement in daily life that exhausts the mind and body. When the body and mind have a chance for a rest from this constant turmoil, they naturally go in to sleep mode and fall into unconsciousness.

This problem can not be solved merely by applying one meditation technique or another. It can only be remedied by changing the way one relates to their life, so that the mind becomes used to tranquillity and equanimity in the midst of activity. Then when confronted with an opportunity for meditation it will simply come to rest naturally. Meditation must come as a natural part of one's life and be consistent with it. If someone lives a life based on excitement and attachment to the world, then meditation will have no permanent effect on the quality of their life. This would be like going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the morning and the cocktail lounge in the evening.

Mental attitudes as just described are about half the reason students suffer from a dull drowsy mind. The other half is usually due to poor health habits, such as minor eating disorders, lack of exercise, or simply not enough sleep. The mind and body are in constant communication and we make it very difficult for ourselves when we do not take reasonable care of our bodies. The Buddha taught the middle way and this certainly applies to attitudes toward health. We should do our best to eat reasonable, exercise, and be mindful of our body.

On the other hand, fanaticism about health is also to be avoided.

The body is impermanent and no amount of exercise or dieting will keep it alive forever. To spend hours each day exercising and haranguing friends about their health habits is definitely not the sign of an enlightened mind. Surprisingly, quite a few of my students have felt that this behavior is somehow appropriate. I put this down to the result of conditioning in this society which continually markets the idea of eternal youth. I do not encourage them in this delusion, however, for if they spend half the energy in spiritual training they expend on their bodies, they would all be sages.

The final group of hindrances is composed of restlessness and worry. This is one of the easiest of the negative mental sets to control. It requires a firm belief in the efficacy of the teaching and an understanding of spiritual reality found in the first noble path. If one firmly believes in the spiritual laws of cause and effect and dedicates themselves to acting accordingly, a miraculous transformation begins to take place in the psyche. Restlessness which is caused by a combination of fear and addiction to stimulation, sensual or conceptual, is cut off from its roots when the mind becomes grounded in a spiritual world view. To understand that one's very being is no different than the Buddha Mind itself is to realize freedom from fear. We simply have to act in a manner consistent with compassion. The result will be compassion directed back into our lives.

In the final analysis, the effort we exert in our practice is efficacious to the degree we have mastered the lesson of the preceding paths. Students of dharma who find themselves incapable of sustained effort in practice are invariably lacking in diligence in adhering to the first four noble paths. We have become so accustomed in the west to separating functions for the purpose of analysis, that we fail to see the importance of the intrinsic dynamic of interrelationship, which constitutes reality. While all aspects of reality are relative, reality itself is absolute. When this understanding is lost, we lose ourselves in perspective, which is a kind of spiritual sleep.

We become capable of rationalizing away destructive actions because we isolate the effects of those actions to what our perspective illuminates at the moment. The spiritual consequence of this is similar to the effect of using indiscriminate pesticides in farming. To achieve the effect of killing pests, you also pollute the farm, which in the long run is more damaging than the threat of the pests.

To concentrate so much on faith, meditation, or morality, to the point where the whole of spiritual life is eclipsed by singular spiritual obsession is absurd. The perfection of spiritual effort is found in a balanced approach to life that sees each part of the spiritual path is integral. In order to fully energize this spiritual integrity it is necessary to be cognizant of what is required of us in the moment. Without this awareness we have no direction for our effort, and this is why our next path of action is the path of right mindfulness.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the ground in which meditation is rooted. It is the source of realization of all other paths. Right mindfulness draws attention away from the fantasies of the ego, and into the reality of the present. When it is applied, there is no possibility of wrong views, resolution, speech, livelihood or effort. This Buddhist mindfulness sees the world, both objective and subjective, as process and does not lose itself in a sense of false identity. There is no true life of meditation without the application of right mindfulness. Simply sitting and doing meditation is not sufficient to bring one to enlightenment because we cannot abide forever in meditation. We must live and act in the world when we are not in meditation. The essences of meditation are tranquillity, acceptance and equanimity, but these have no meaning if they are not available to us in daily life.

Buddha Nature, or reality itself, is not hidden behind phenomenon nor is it something we have to obtain. Buddha nature is present in all of existence, which includes our own cognitive processes as well as physical reality. Indeed, if there was an essential difference in substance between subjective reality and objective reality, consciousness, as we know it, would be impossible. For instance, when we wake from a dream, the dream is gone because waking and dreaming are contradictory phenomenon. Whenever we experience everyday reality, we are able to experience both our own internal epistemological process, simultaneous with the direct contact of the external world. Consciousness does not require that our mind go into an input, sort, output mode, as does a computer, separating experience from ourselves. Instead, we experience reality as ourselves.

We are able to experience reality because all of existence is an internal dialogue with itself. The quest is the host, the host is the quest. There is no special reality to search for, which is separate from our own nature. We simply are reality. This reality, however, is simple thusness, it is not ideas or concepts, but being itself. In the words of Meister Eckhart, "Existence es Deus"; Existence is God. In Zen, we way the flowers are red, the leaves are green. Mindfulness is the joyful entering into our own spirit, the present. It is abandoning attachment to models of existence in the forms of words and concepts and crashing directly through the ice glass wall of self.

Thoughts and ideas are part of the phenomenon of life, and are to be enjoyed in freedom. This freedom requires that we must be constantly aware, that all ideation is itself void of permanent reality, and nothing more than phenomenon. Thoughts are neither real nor unreal. There is no accepting them, nor rejecting them.

We simply allow them to be. Feeling and perception are experienced as clouds across an azure sky, framing the beauty of the sky, neither detracting nor adding, perfect in their imperfections, limitless in their limit. They are just like this. Black ink on white paper. Mindfulness mind, then, is freedom mind. It is disciplined by joy and action, expressing itself in compassion and energy.

Ordinarily, we think of discipline as an activity that enforces and external code of conduct on a self which resists it.

Mindfulness, however, is a discipline which is intrinsic to our nature, when we are free from our ego domination. That we are unmindful is due to our attachment to our sense of self, which continually references experience, rather than attending to it. Essentially, the ego is nothing more than a constant process of reference that has folded in on itself to the point where immediate experience has become secondary to concepts and personal feeling. When we experience anything, the ego immediately begins to reference the event in terms of its own understanding. This removes our attention from the thing in itself, and directs it toward our feelings about the event. Our experience of reality, while dominated by ego, becomes inextricably linked to personal feelings. The world then takes on a personal aspect that either has a pleasant or unpleasant connotation to it. No longer does our experience remain objective, but it becomes subjective in nature.

Personal feelings are the conceptual apparatus that separates us from the direct experience of reality. Personal feelings are not the same thing as emotions, which are natural responses to primary situations. Personal feelings are secondary responses attached to both a conceptual and emotional framework, which interfere with our self understanding. This construction darkens the path of self understanding, rather than illuminating it. Emotion is primary, as opposed to personal feeling. It involves an instantaneous natural response to stimuli, such as the fear we would experience when suddenly discovering a rattlesnake in our path.

In other words, emotion is an organic response to a particular life event. Personal feeling, on the other hand, is a complex of emotional memory contained within a conceptual framework that does not allow for immediate response to the moment without referencing its own complex matrix. Freeing oneself of personal feeling means that we return to a simpler, more direct emotional relationship with the process of our life. A person is no longer bound by past conditioning to emotive patterns, locked up with a matrix of personal experiences and past emotions. This allows an individual to experience life fully in the present, without carrying with them the burden of a life's history of emotion.

Emotion is no longer interrupted in the present by the patterns of the past. We are free to experience our life in an organic way rather than through the bondage of pathological conditioning.

This does not mean that we cripple our memory. We are still capable of recapturing past emotions. It is simply that these past emotions are no longer able to disrupt our life through creating negative patterns of conditioning.

The only way one can accomplish this liberation is through a systematic unearthing of these emotive patterns. This must be done in a controlled environment which will facilitate the process of separating emotions from the conceptual framework in which they reside. What we are doing is defusing our memory, and we should be as careful as if we were on a bomb squad. Because if we attempt this without the proper preparation and diligence, it will have the same explosive result!

The transformation of the psyche is analogous to the metamorphosis of the caterpillar into butterfly. Our ego with its construct of self is a psychic cocoon from which we will

emerge transformed when our development is complete. It evolves in childhood in order to develop in us a sense of limit necessary for survival. It begins with body consciousness, and awareness of hands, feet, etc. and then evolves into a matrix of relationships connected to this function. For instance, when our hand touches fire, we experience pain and thus a fear or graduated respect is given to the experience of fire. That is, we begin to see fire as a thing which exists in relationship to us. This is unlike the infant who only perceives it as an object of consciousness.

Before the development of the ego, external objects are experienced subjectively as if in a dream. Therefore, the infant's experience of the world is like that of a dream in which all contents of the dream are self. Once a sense of separation begins with the experience of relationship, a correlating emotion begins to attach to experience. Now this is because this energy of emotion can be utilized as a binding element focusing our attention to a particular path of development. The state of consciousness that would ensue without any emotive binding might easily fall into chaos amidst a myriad of sensory input. Emotion, therefore, is a primary binding force that helps keep us centered in childhood.

In the well adjusted adult, emotion expresses a type of unifying energy between the world and the individual. To a child, emotion is, by nature, coercive because a child still dwells in a consciousness that has not yet fully delineated between subjective and objective reality. Since there is no objective reference point to view as a backdrop to emotion, the emotion becomes all inclusive to consciousness. Of course, this renders the child incapable of acting other than expressing simple emotion. That this does not threaten survival is only because of the protection provided by his parents.

A child raised in an emotionally mature home will learn from his parents how to confront the world in a manner that does not seek to relate all phenomena to an emotion. There will develop in the child a sense of self that is relational, but rationally motivated rather than emotionally motivated. Conversely, if the child's experience of his world is in relationship to emotion, he or she will develop an addiction to the energy of emotion itself.

As the sense of self begins to grow it will inappropriately attach emotional content to all areas of its self understanding.

Therefore a child who does not make the baseball team may experience a fear and depression totally inappropriate to the actual objective importance of the experience. The child in this instance has identified certain aspects of his self with a pattern that links directly with a primal ego structure defining survival. Depression is an emotive state not an emotion. It is the psycho physical organism's response to the linking of a primal life threatening emotional response to a continuing phenomenon. The psyche is unable to tolerate this prolonged emotional crisis.

What ensues is the creation of an emotive state which is the reaction of the psyche to an unacceptable pattern of emotion which has become habituated. If the pattern of emotion was left intact, it would exhaust the organism. Depression, for example, is a response to the identification of a continuing non life

threatening pattern of emotion with this ground of primal fear. The psychophysical organism cannot tolerate the sustained stress of such a connection and thus depresses the entire emotional system.

This entire process of emotion becomes pathological because of the ego's insistence on referencing all phenomenon to itself. The ego itself is nothing but this reference, and therefore, the abandonment of attachment to personal feeling is experienced as a threat to life itself. A human being does not need to reference things to himself to either understand, or appreciate them, as consciousness and reason are not predicated upon internal dialogue, but upon systematic process. Internal dialogue is the modus operandi of the ego, while awareness and detached analysis is the reality of mind itself. Emotion is the immediate dialectic of the mind-body toward the world. Therefore, it is a legitimate subject of mindfulness, as is external phenomenon.

Traditionally the Buddha taught that there are four areas of attention for right mindfulness. They are body, personal feelings, states of consciousness, and external phenomena. The first object of mindfulness is the body, which is something that has taken on almost sacred significance in the west. A person's body is that which they are most attached to in terms of identifying self. When a person is asked to describe themselves, they almost invariably start with a description of their physical attributes. I am six foot, blond, blue eyed, etc.

The body is a miraculous phenomenon. A microcosm of the universe itself. Like the universe, it is a whole which does not exist outside of its parts, and its very law of being is inextricably bound up with process and interaction. Just as no object in the universe can exist without change, coming into being and passing away, neither can the body. The very nature of the body exists solely as identical with this process of life and death. The structure of DNA, for example, makes life possible but also guarantees it cannot continue forever and its inherent chemical makeup disallows the infinite self reproduction of cells. That which is eternal is not alive. To be alive, something has to be mortal.

Knowing this, we can direct our mindfulness upon our body and realize in the moment, the body's fluid and transitory nature, freeing ourselves from attachment to it. The body is almost deified in present culture as if it were something of religious importance. Mindfulness tells us that the body is in constant flux. It is an enormous bag of fluids which has no inherent glamour, only blood, bile, urine, puss, saliva, etc. To seek to preserve the body indefinitely is a sign of someone who does not understand the nature of reality. Life is not possible without death. Growth is not possible without transformation. Aging is not only a sigh of decay, but a symbol of transformation as well.

Life has no meaning without transformation. It is identical to it. Death, on the other hand, is the very embodiment of non change. To speak of eternal life for an individual is to speak in contradictions. For a thing to be alive, it has to be mortal.

That which does not change cannot be alive since life is process, and therefore change. Life as process feeds on transformation which means death of individual things and their transformation into other things. Life itself is eternal

because it includes all transformations in it as eternal process. Individual things that have life share eternity in life, but are not eternal in themselves.

The process of mindfulness is analogous to the cultivation of fields by the farmer. In each case, a person is presented with specific space that requires attention. In one case, the space is physical while in the other it is mental or spiritual space. As is the case with anything living, the process of both farming and mindfulness involves interaction of diverse elements, creating a whole. Human personality is not, by nature, either good or bad in regard to its potential for moral action. It is like a field which contains within it a vast supply of nutrients capable of sustaining a wide variety of life. What grows in the field is determined by what is cultivated in it. If it is allowed to lie fallow, then wild grasses and weeds will abound, if cultivated, then crops will be abundant.

Like farming spiritual cultivation is a step by step process. First we attune ourselves to a specific area of concentration such as our emotions or contemplation of our body. Then we adjust our concentration to whatever our life presents to us in the moment as a natural object of concentration. When we eat, we just eat; concentrating fully on chewing, tasting, swallowing. In Theravadin Buddhism, there is a systematic meditational inquiry into each of the objects of right mindfulness. In Zen we allow the moment to present itself to us and take our direction from the flow of this time. Neither path is superior to the other, but the former requires a certain amount of isolation, while Zen mindfulness is more appropriate to application in daily life.

It is a very difficult and demanding task to be in the moment, moment by moment, if we step outside this moment and peer at the future as a countless chain of moments to be grasped. If we are in this moment then there is only THIS. Fear and exultation both disappear into emptiness, there is only reading speaking, eating, walking and so on.

We should not make our life more difficult by adding on expectations, and mistaking desire for direction. To have direction is to work for the future by being in the present, aware that the future is never graspable. The future is a fantasy. When we arrive at it, it transforms itself into a dream from the past.

Direction is necessary if we are to accomplish anything, but it does not require that we attach to a specific result to our actions. To do so ignores the ephemeral and transitory nature of reality in which there are no guarantees. The correct application of right mindfulness in regards to our work is to apply an attitude of sacrifice toward our efforts. We sacrifice the fruit of our efforts to the effort itself, without hope or fear. Without this sacrifice, it is impossible to make the moment the moment, and we will be lost in a maze of our own desires.

Understanding that our feelings provide the doorway to emotional attachment, we must remain mindful in order to police the connection between simple feelings and emotional constructs that they trigger. If we do not apply mindfulness to this process, we will be carried along by the torrents of past conditioning, and this will carry us out of the moment and into the past or

future.

One area of difficulty modern dharma students face is their attachment to their own opinions. Opinions are phenomenon which are, by nature, finite and transitory. This is even the case with spiritual opinions. They are also just as empty as political or any other opinions. Yet students seem to believe they can wander around with a baggage car of opinions and still make progress in the way. They do not like specific teachers or traditions, and often are not too fond of their own coreligionists because they are too conservative or liberal.

Zen Master's opinions are no different from other people's opinions. They have no intrinsic reality to them. While I have no problem sharing my opinions with others, I am not in the slightest concerned with their ultimate validity. They are just opinions! What is the difference then, between spiritual understanding and opinions? The difference is that spiritual understanding, to the extent that it is real, does not concern the ego. Wherever the ego is involved, all views are just opinion. Spiritual understanding has nothing to do with judgment, it has to do with decision. It does not say this is good because that is bad, but this is good because it is good, and that is bad because it is bad.

Spiritual understanding references everything from the moment. The question to be asked is what is skillful means to produce compassionate and wise action in this moment. The mindfulness that is required in spiritual understanding in the moment is rarely complicated if we are diligent students of the eight fold path. Otherwise, if our life is not in tune with itself, we are driven by the ego and opinion and any choice is potentially complicated. Of course, it all starts with right views. One must make sure that these truly are right views, and not right opinions.

Two people can hold identical views and one of them can have understanding while the other merely has opinion. It is not the idea that has reality, but the reality behind the idea that determines whether a perspective is opinion or understanding. If someone actually lives by a certain perspective, totally committed to it, living a life consistent with itself as we have seen in the interpenetration of the eight fold path, then that life has understanding. The hallmark of someone who has understanding, is that while they are rooted in spiritual life, they have flexibility within it. They are not even concerned with their own opinions, much less someone else's.

Even if someone has memorized all the various teachings in the Buddhist sutras, but has not been able to employ them in their life, such a person is a mere bag of opinions. If another person has a simple but basic grasp of the dharma and their life reflects this in their actions, then this person has understanding. The former abides in their opinion while the latter abides in truth.

When I first came to San Diego, I wished to make contact with one of the senior Buddhist teachers in the area. I thought that it would be good to maintain a friendly relationship since we all share the same purpose. Since this person was several years my senior, I naturally respected both their age and extensive experience. My age and own experience reflects a slightly different approach to dharma, and I thought that each of our

groups, while maintaining their own way, could complement each other.

However, it was reported to me that the other teacher felt that I was too young to be a good teacher, and compared me with several other young teachers who had been involved in moral lapses. All this with no contact at all with me, except a five minute phone call! This information does not bother me at all since I can only concern myself with right action in this moment. I do not know if I am a good teacher or a bad teacher, too young or too old. I can only bow with respect to this teacher for reminding me to watch my step!

Opinions are just opinions, there is no reason to cherish them or be afraid of them. The surest indication of whether a dharma teacher is keen eyed or not is in their freedom from opinions while maintaining strict morality. If they are rigid and inflexible judging everyone, or wild and morally loose, then they are the blind leading the blind. Mindfulness requires freedom from opinions, both yours and others, even if those others may lay claim to spiritual titles. Real teaching must integrate with your understanding or it has no value.

Mindfulness requires the abandoning of opinion because of the effect holding onto opinion has on altering our attention from the present moment. The moment we give in to the subjective chain of beliefs that tie us to our ego, we are pulled out of the moment. No one opinion stands isolated from the whole complex of opinion which goes to make up our false sense of self, the ego. There is no one perspective we can hold on to and not cause a chain reaction of subjective bondage that sees the world as self and others. Spiritual understanding, on the other hand, is an activity which unites our consciousness to the present, recognizing that our self is the process of the moment.

To hold strongly to opinions and attempt to practice mindfulness in the moment is simply not possible. Our true nature is dynamic process. Life that transcends life and death, but is not separate from them. The most difficult opinions to rid ourselves of are those that pertain to ourselves. We hold strongly to sets of words that define ourselves in a static way. We are right, kind, good, loyal, honest, and so on. These are mere opinions, for in fact there is only the opportunity to apply kindness, honesty, and other virtues in this moment. A quick analysis of past actions is just as likely to produce a negative set of self definitions, but neither positive nor negative self opinion has any validity in dealing with the present.

The only energy capable of adequately meeting the challenge of mindfulness is the dual energy of wisdom-compassion which sees all events as part of itself, and all creature's interests as the interest of its own heart. The flowering of this energy is found in the practice of meditation, the final noble path of the Buddha way.

RIGHT MEDITATION

The final path of the way of the Buddhas is meditation, the practice of all the Buddhas and patriarchs. While meditation is the most straight forward and simple of the eight paths, meditation is also the most removed from our everyday life. We employ world view, intentions, speech, work at a vocation, choose courses of moral action, and apply some mindfulness in our everyday life whether we are on a spiritual path or not. We do not, however, meditate as a natural part of our normal existence. This is why meditation carries with it an exotic quality in the minds of most non-practitioners. Combined with this are all the fantastic references to magical powers that can be attained through the practice of meditation. One assumes then that since enlightenment itself is the ultimate result of meditation, enlightenment must be some sort of magical state of being, as well.

The truth of reality of meditation is quite the opposite, as any Zen student who has spent years crushing kopak with his or her buttocks can attest. Sitting quietly, confronting the vast panorama of our own ignorance until it exhausts itself, is anything but magical. The best description of good meditation is that it is nothing special at all, just meditation. Right meditation is so boring that boring itself turns in on itself and vanishes. When boredom and excitement both disappear then enlightenment arrives.

Enlightenment itself is boring as long as it is enlightenment. Meditation must become part of that everyday life like eating, sleeping, walking, etc., or else it is not right meditation. Like all the other paths it is an activity which is intrinsic to the life of the practitioner. We do not meditate to attain enlightenment or improve ourselves. We meditate because it is our path to meditate. In other words, the urge to meditate must spring out of the other seven paths beginning with right view through right mindfulness. If it does not follow from the continuous application of the principles of the preceding paths, then it cannot be right meditation.

It is not just the technique of meditation that determines whether meditation is right or not, but the reality of the meditation as part of the ongoing experience of enlightened life that is the eight fold path. There are numerous types of meditation which are traditional and effective provided they are consistent with the practitioners total practice. That practice cannot be separated from life itself. The beginning of meditation is found in the path of right views which directs our attention to the reality which is hidden from us by our ignorance and which can be revealed through meditation. If we do not fully comprehend the importance of understanding the nature of spiritual life, we will not be able to master meditation properly.

Just as was the case with all the other paths, meditation interpenetrates with all aspects of our spiritual life. They in turn are always effecting our meditation efforts. What I am saying, is that two people can meditate using identical techniques, and one can obtain results that reinforce their spiritual life, while the other ends up in a mental hospital. It was not the meditation itself that produced either result, but the life of the individual as it reacted to, and was effected by, the individual's meditation efforts. It is not

necessarily a flow in the way the meditation technique is applied (although the misapplication of meditation is dangerous) which produces disaster, but a life inconsistent with the energy of meditation pouring that energy into itself.

Herein lies the danger in the notion of meditation as a cure all. Right meditation is only "Right", that is effective spiritually, if it is consistent with the rest of our spiritual efforts. Meditation does not cure life problems, it energizes the mind to either deal with those problems or inflate them by giving more power to the ego. This is the reason sometimes powerful meditation masters fall in to grievous states. When life is inconsistent with the eight fold path, meditation prowess can reinforce the ego instead of dissolve it.

The essential danger of meditation, when done as a means to an end, is that it negates the entire process of spiritual life, which is to live one's life devoid of attachment. As we have already discussed, it is a good thing to have direction and goals, but only so long as those goals are viewed as potential. When we view our goals as potential, we do not lose ourselves in desire. We can remain aware of the reality of the dynamic nature of existence which precludes any possibility of our aspirations attaining the static nature of envisioned reality. Envisioned reality is the nature of our view of the future and is fundamentally illusory because it cannot take in the total dynamic of our experience in the moment. The envisioned future will arrive as a present, complete with auditory, visual, olfactory and tactile stimuli appropriate to the moment. As well as sensory input, we also have subtle feelings present in our consciousness. These are based on emotional and mental concepts which operate together with our senses to create our conscious awareness in the moment.

This field of consciousness is our reality, and when we leave it to ponder a future desired result, we are participating in the activity of ignorance which is identical to suffering. Meditation involves the total commitment to the moment. It is both the symbolic and literal manifestation of the nature of our spiritual practice. To sit in meditation is the very essence of the practice. Purposeless awareness that accepts everything and rejects nothing.

Right meditation becomes the energy of our spiritual path, not because it is something extra that we add to our life to give it meaning, but because it is the essence of the practice itself. This point cannot be stressed enough, since the general attitude of most practitioners seems to be that they are sitting to attain something. Unfortunately, this approach to meditation reduces it to mere technique and voids any possibility of it becoming enlightened activity.

Right meditation is enlightened activity in its resting mode, just as compassionate action is enlightened activity in its active mode, but both of these activities are co-interdependent.

The universe is a crest and trough of energy patterns. Form itself, as matter, is nothing more than this dynamic. The Chinese have symbolized this as yin and yang, action and non action, perfectly interwoven and represented in the Tai Chi circle. Dark embracing light and light embracing dark. The western bias toward action sees meditation as a waste of time unless it produces some concrete result such as lower blood pressure. As a result, there has been a strong temptation to

sell the merits of meditation by some teachers.

Meditation for results is all right as long as it is not passed off as Buddhist meditation. Buddhism is not concerned with attaining results, but with living ones life authentically. Buddhist faith holds that living ones life authentically delivers one from suffering and throws ones life into Enlightenment. Buddhist meditation then, is an act of faith which is predicated upon spiritual understanding. If one's practice is authentic, then meditation will merge with it and faith will become inseparable from understanding. This is pure Buddhist faith, the merging of understanding with acceptance and fearlessness. For in a Buddhist sense, faith is fearlessness which is an idea not easily understandable to a westerner who is used to definition of faith being a suspension of reason and the acceptance of religious doctrine without questioning.

Some have said that meditation is the prayer of Buddhism, but I think that is not very accurate. In so far as one defines prayer as being a communion with a higher self, then meditation can be said to be similar. However, meditation in Buddhism is an activity which does not seek affirmation, the essence of prayer as it is usually understood. Mystical prayer as we find it described by Meister Eckhart and other Christian, Jewish and Sufi adepts excepted. The reason being, that in such mystical prayer, separation between God and man disappears.

There is a strong temptation for modern Buddhist teachers to psychologize Buddhism and sell it as a form of ultimate psychotherapy. The intentions of such people are good. They want the public in general to share in the blessings of their practice. Unfortunately, in the process they end up watering down Buddhism to the extent that it is no longer authentic. For instance, there are some Zen practices in America that rarely mention the word Buddha, as if they were afraid to offend their customers. These practices have alters without Buddha images. They often wear robes, but Buddhist vestments are not worn and they chant in English only, while maintaining Japanese Buddhist names and titles for themselves and so on. While I realize that, in so far as we have to make dharma practice American, some of the forms from tradition are going to have to be modified, half baked forms of practice are witness to a kind of mental inconsistency. If you are going to separate yourself from Buddhist religious tradition, then do it all the way; no Buddha, not title Sensei or Roshi, no Buddhist robes, and wear no robes at all. Do not stop there, give up chanting an dokusan; no Buddha no lineage, no need for formality. While such a practice is not my way, I can respect it as real for it is consistent with itself, like the eight fold practice is to Buddhists.

All liturgical devices are essentially art, and as such have peculiar beauty which can be reinforcing to ones practice, as long as one does not become attached to them. Those of us who choose to employ ritual and tradition may do so out of respect for its beauty and religious feeling, or out of pure attachment.

Each teacher has to judge for themselves how they relate to the forms they use in practice. The problem is that the nonreligious form of some Zendos seems to be reactions to the negative experiences of the teachers to tradition rather than natural expressions of feeling. Almost invariably, when I see a practice devoid of any concrete images of traditional Zen, I can be assured that the teacher in charge has been violated in some

way by a traditional teacher who clung to outward tradition, or by the cultural idiosyncrasies of the traditional culture they find offensive, such as sexism or racism. It would be better for such people to confront their feelings of betrayal, forgive, and go on rather than trying to exorcise them at the expense of throwing out the baby with the bath water. No matter how powerful our meditation is, and no matter how eloquently we can expound dharma, if we are carrying a bag of shit called betrayal on our back, our practice is going to stink, even if we are the only ones who can smell it. We must learn from the past and adapt to the present, but also forgive the past. If we do not learn to forgive, then the past will remain eternally present in a most insidious way.

I also have some shocking news for some people. If you cling to the biblical notion of idolatry and are offended by the artistic rendering of Buddha images and cannot feel the heartfelt emotion of gratefulness that is inherent in them, then Zen practice is a waste of time for you. Meditation that is not fundamentally religious is not right meditation. This is a tricky point in Buddhism since spiritual practice does not constitute a religion necessarily. Religion in the sense we understand it in the west is not religious in this sense. Some Buddhist practices have become religions, while other practices have lost religious feeling and both extremes are not genuinely Buddhist in spirit. There is no Zen in motorcycle maintenance, or anything else unless a deep reverence and gratefulness for the lineage in the form of religious feeling is present. I do not teach Buddha-less Zen, I do not advocate Buddha-less Zen, and I do not encourage Buddha-less Zen.

There is nothing wrong with meditation for Christians and authentic Christian practice is a true dharma, but it is not Zen. If one has a true meditation mind, they can find themselves at home in any environment. I doubt that non-Buddhist Zen will last one generation, much less 2500 years, because it cannot be an authentic practice without conformity to the eight fold path. Indeed, most non Buddhist traditions do not meet the criteria of the first path, right views. Reverence for the efforts of all practitioners who have come before is the nature of Buddhist religious feeling. Not a feeling for history, but for ongoing unity of spirit in which the past, present, and future are merged.

It is very difficult for modern people to abandon their love of technique, since technique in the form of the scientific method has produced modern society. The student of the way, however, has to be able to employ technique, while realizing the fundamental emptiness of it. There is the notion that we can remedy anything if we can just find the right technique to apply. Unfortunately, we have found, even in science, that reality outside the laboratory just doesn't respond to techniques without causing all sorts of ramifications. Kill the bad bugs, and you kill the good bugs; kill the bugs, and you kill the birds; kill the birds, and you kill the beasts; kill the beasts, and you kill the soil; kill the soil and you kill the plants, the streams, the oceans, the scientists. Whoops!

A student of the way does not eat to live, does not breathe to live, does not give to others for reward, love others for merit or meditate for enlightenment. To be alive is to eat, breathe and practice the eight fold path. Let birds fly, fish swim and Buddhists meditate. The moment you apply technique and say

birds fly to reach their nests, fish swim to fill their gills with oxygen and dharma students meditate to attain the way, you have separated purpose from Purpose. It is all right to apply purpose to the examination of a particular phenomenon to help understand that immediate connection between one cause and one effect. Where the mistake is made is when this purpose (small p) is confused with Purpose (large P), which is life itself. The finite can be examined, the infinite only experienced.

When Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen, was asked the meaning of his coming to China from India to teach the Way, he replied, "The oak tree in the garden.: The oak tree in the garden is Purpose, is life, is meaning. There is only this tree standing eternally in front of us, manifesting all the change and interaction in the universe in its being. To experience this is to experience why we meditate. We meditate because we are meditators; the oak tree in the garden.

The French existentialist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, looked at a tree once, looking for purpose (small p) and all that he found was nausea. Could he have seen the tree with the eyes of right meditation, he would have seen Purpose itself staring at him. It is only because Purpose itself exists that purpose cannot be found and it is only because we are already Buddhas that we can practice meditation. Likewise, Mr. Sartre could find no exit because he did not recognize that it was identical to the entrance.

If we seek purpose in meditation, instead of living Purpose as meditation, we will surely share Mr. Sartre's nausea. Psychological systems are technique and no matter how effective they may be as technique, they do not share an essential spirit with Buddhist practice. Buddhist practice is grounded in wisdom and compassion, psychology is grounded in scientific knowledge. Wisdom differs from knowledge in that there is no separation between knower and known, while knowledge requires isolation of things into their component parts in order to study interrelationships. No matter how we seek to escape it, Buddhism does have an essential metaphysics behind it. A religious cosmology which sees consciousness, not as an accident of matter, but as the fundamental constituent of Existence. Meditation then, cannot be other than a religious act since it is the absorption of the finite mind into Mind itself. This being the case, life itself must possess the same essential quality as meditation. Without this perspective, it is not possible to have right meditation, or for that matter, right view, intention, speech, action, mindfulness, livelihood or effort.

In order to gain acceptance in the scientific community, there has been a deliberate down playing of the religious aspect of Buddhism in favor of its philosophical and psychological aspects. This is not an entirely false presentation of tradition, since Buddhism, in many ways, does not fit the paradigm we usually recognize as religion. Buddhism is not theologically based and is not predicated upon faith which sets it apart from what we usually understand as religion. It does, however, have all the trappings of traditional religion, a liturgy, scripture, priests, and ritual, not to mention the worship in the Mahayana of a myriad demi-gods and Bodhisattva.

In reality, all of Buddhism's basic religious trappings, many of which are heavily shamanistic in origin, are the result of

Buddhism's syncretistic ability to absorb the cultural traditions of pre-Buddhist religions. In most cases, it has retained its fundamental message of the emptiness of phenomenon and the necessity for spiritual practice according to Buddhist tradition. In some cases, however, it has been absorbed into the Shamanistic culture to the extent that it is no longer Buddhist, but a primitive magical religion with Buddhist trappings, such as the Nichiren Sect in Japan.

The de-religionizing of Buddhism in the west is another example of an attempt of practitioners to adapt Buddhism to the cultural standards of its host nation. The idea behind this is that the forms and rituals of religion are superfluous and inconsistent with modern life. However, to replace these with the forms of pseudo-religion such as psychology, are hardly likely to produce an improvement in the quality of practice. The essential problem with this adaptation is that no matter how crude and superstitious shamanistic traditions may be, they share a fundamental unity of spirit with Buddhism in that they recognize man as an intrinsic part of a whole, who must adapt to the whole to have meaning. Psychology and western scientific thought maintains that man is essentially an accident of parts, a combination of factors that has come together to form a temporary unity isolated from an endless causal string of other temporary unities.

Any meditation practice that arises from such a framework is bound to be mechanistic since that is the thrust of that cultural world view. Meditation then becomes a tool which, of course, reinforces the notion of a static universe that can be approached by technique alone. The consequence of this attitude is that practitioners come to believe that if this approach is valid, then all other aspects of life must also be available to manipulation by technique. In a very short period of time, you have a practice which is grounded in situational ethics, and a completely non-Buddhist world view.

Of course, a non reflective shamanistic approach to practice leads ultimately to an irrational spiritual practice. It is necessary, I think, to strive for a sense of sacredness and religious feeling without being trapped by the forms and artistic representations which symbolize the feeling. We have to be careful not to trade in one inappropriate approach to practice for another, in the mistaken belief that we have now stripped away all superfluous attitudes toward practice.

Because religion in the west has such a non rational and destructive history, certain individuals sometimes over react to the introduction of anything which smells of religious tradition. To this person, whoever, there seems to be two kinds of religious feelings and these are also reflected in two attitudes towards meditation. Religion which is exclusive, and seeks to separate man from his environment and each other, is parallel to the attitude toward meditation as technique. Both attitudes are intrinsically selfish and anti-life. They lead to a lifeless, sterile, and sometimes deadly hostile approach to anything or anyone who would disrupt their program. Religion which is inclusive in nature sees the world and creatures as part of itself and therefore, sacred. This attitude inspires practitioners to maintain a loving relationship to the world. Those who practice meditation because they understand this religious reality, do so to commune with their practice, and the world, as an act of sacrifice. This is sacrifice in the most

religious sense of that word.

We cannot leave the discussion of right meditation without addressing the problem of the teacher student relationship. In the practice of meditation, a solid relationship with a qualified teacher is essential. There are just too many pitfalls the inexperienced meditator can fall into without the guidance of a good instructor. Meditation is an activity which remains entirely subjective until it is put to an objective test such as the quality of ones life. To judge properly the effects our life is producing, we need the objective input of a teacher.

If I might offer some advice for students about to engage in spiritual discipline, it would be in the selection of a teacher.

It is better not to look for a teacher who is extraordinary in their personality, but in their conduct. Look for a person who is centered! A gentle person, humble, open and compassionate with firm self discipline. This person should also not have an excessive attachment to money. The cost of spiritual instruction should never be expensive. On the other hand, a spiritual tradition that has a temple or church requires the support of its members. Therefore, you should invest you finances with the same intelligence as you invest your time and energy in your practice. To put it simply, don't be cheap and don't be stupid either. Another thing to consider is that it is much easier to put on a colored robe and shave your head than it is to change what is inside you. Self transformation is not always self evident and carries with it no requisite external reward sufficient to hold the attention of weaker students.

I always try to remind my students that they should become practitioners not "true believers". True believers tend to get lost in doctrine at the expense of practice. If one spends all day reading the maps, they are never going to have time to take the trip. And if one gets caught up in the infinite realms of potential, they can spend an extraordinary amount of time dealing with fantasy and arcane esoteric doctrines that would take three Buddhas and a Rabbi a millennia to sort our.

The qualities of enlightenment are not the magical powers or psychic sideshow of the fakir. They are the qualities embodied in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount and in the Buddha's Eight Fold Path. Magic should not be denigrated, however, as it can be a signpost of spiritual growth.

The magical is a window between the numinous realm and our practice. In fact, a good definition of magic is the penetration of the phenomenal realm by the numinous that reveals the significance of life. Such experiences have great potential for giving personal spiritual illumination, but if one attaches to external magic (the phantasmagoria itself), one will become lost in it. Spiritual practitioners, after all, will be required to live their own lives in this world and in this time and place. The value of practice is in the here and now, not in ancient Egypt, Tibet, China or Atlantis. Without question, the person we look to for guidance in the spiritual realm should be able to live in this same modern world with us, in freedom and power, without rejecting any of it.

Among the teachings of Tibet's great sage, Milarepa, there is a listing of the ten signs of the Superior Man. I do not think one can find a better guide for selecting a spiritual preceptor than these.

1. To have little pride and envy is the sign of a superior man.
2. To have few desires and satisfaction with simple things is the sign of a superior man.
3. To be lacking in hypocrisy and deceit is the sign of a superior man.
4. To regulate ones conduct in accordance with the law of cause and effect as carefully as one would guard the pupils of their eyes is the sign of a superior man.
5. To be faithful in ones engagements and obligations is the sign of a superior man.
6. To be able to keep alive friendships, while regarding all beings with impartiality is the sign of a superior man.
7. To look with pity and without anger upon those who live evilly, is the sign of a superior man.
8. To allow others the victory, taking on defeat, is the sign of a superior man.
9. To differ from the multitude in every thought and deed is the sign of the superior man.
10. To observe faithfully and without pride ones spiritual vows is the sign of a superior man.

If you can find a teacher with these qualities, then you will have certainly found a rare gem. Polish it brightly by completing your work. Then the coal of your own ego will transform into the diamond of truth, and you and your teacher will become one. Like Zen Master Kokushin, you will be able to say. Sitting Quietly Doing Nothing Spring Comes And the grass grows by itself

Having found this teacher, and entering completely into the life of meditation which is identical to the eight fold path, you will join the ranks of the Bodhisattvas.

The Eightfold Path is the Buddha's prescription for finding enlightenment and entering Nirvana. The Path comprises eight teachings Buddhists follow in their everyday lives. Share. Flipboard. It's also important to understand that these eight areas of practice are not separate steps to master one at a time. The practice of each part of the Path supports the other parts. The Path is divided into three main sections: wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline. Eightfold Path, in Buddhism, an early formulation of the path to enlightenment. The idea of the Eightfold Path appears in what is regarded as the first sermon of the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, which he delivered after his enlightenment. The Eightfold Path receives less discussion in Buddhist literature than do the Four Noble Truths. In later formulations, the eight elements are portrayed not so much as prescriptions for behaviour but as qualities that are present in the mind of a person who has understood nirvana, the state of the cessation of suffering and the goal of Buddhism. According to a more widely used conception, the path to enlightenment consists of a threefold training in ethics, in concentration, and in wisdom.