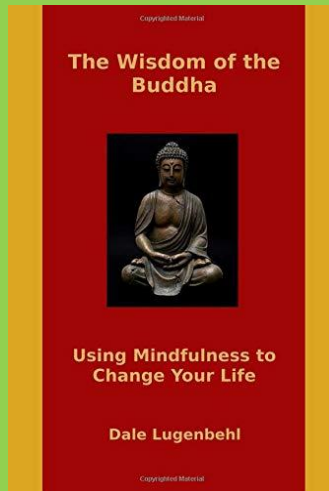


Dale Lugenbehl's ground-breaking recently published first book:

The Wisdom of the Buddha: Using Mindfulness to Change Your Life

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The *Wisdom of the Buddha* combines an in-depth introduction to Buddhism with the practicality of a spiritual self- help book. The first five chapters provide clear and insightful explanations of the foundation teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, mindfulness meditation, and the nature of suffering and happiness.

The next ten chapters bring Buddhist teachings to bear on transforming our lives: how to break the grip of habits, end arguments and power struggles, deal with difficult emotions and strong desires, see the essential nature of all addictions, deal with anxiety and depression, become more accepting, and cultivate compassion and reverence for all life. The final two chapters provide much needed insight into the Buddha's most difficult and liberating teachings of all: the true nature of

the self(the teachings on "no self"), relative and absolute truth, nirvana ("we are not separate"), impermanence, and our mistaken understandings of death which cause great suffering.

Simple and accessible language, practical techniques, numerous guided meditations, personal stories, and numerous quotations from master teachers are used to present an inspiring path toward deep personal transformation. *The Wisdom of the Buddha* is available from Amazon as a paperback and as a Kindle book at https://www.amazon.com/Wisdom-Buddha-Using-Mindfulness-Change/dp/109680588X/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=dale+lugenbehl&qid=1564108225&s=gateway&sr=8-1

Dale is available to answer questions at thewisdomofthebuddha@gmail.com

Things to know:

- Book chapters will be e-mailed free upon request from ahimsaacres@gmail.com
- New Chapter available soon by request: "Dealing with Despair in a Troubled World"
- Dale also has a new book in progress: *A Practical Guide to Buddhism for Beginners: Finding Peace and Happiness in a Troubled World*. Book chapters will be available in electronic form. Inquire at ahimsaacres@gmail.com

About the Author. Dale Lugenbehl has for 16 years been the Principal Teacher for Ahimsa Acres Sangha, an affiliate of the Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation. He has taught both Eastern and Western Philosophy classes for 40 years in public colleges and universities, including 7 years of teaching Buddhist Meditation Traditions at Lane Community College—the first college credit Buddhist meditation class ever offered in Oregon. He is also the Eugene, OR Chapter Leader for Dharma Voices for Animals, Environmental Editor for American Vegan magazine, Director of Ahimsa Acres Education Center, and the author of more than 50 published articles.

Praise for *The Wisdom of the Buddha*.

This is a life-changing book! *The Wisdom of the Buddha* begins with the story of the Buddha's life and a detailed overview of his central teachings. These teachings are then applied to the realities of our daily life using clear analysis and step-by-step methods along with guided meditation practices. As a psychotherapist, I believe that Buddhist teachings and practices presented in this book have the clarity and power to produce genuine and positive change.

---Joyce LeMieux Cameron, MS, MFCC

Dale Lugenbehl has written an accessible, personal, and eloquent introduction to Buddhism and mindfulness, useful not only for its scholarship but for language that translates Buddhist teachings into intelligible suggestions for practice. I would not hesitate to use this wonderful book in my classes, both academic and for interfaith adult education.

---Jonathan Seidel, Ph. D., Professor in Religious Studies and in Judaic Studies, has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford, and the University of Oregon, among other institutions. He is a rabbi and the Spiritual Leader of Or haGan in Eugene, Oregon.

Those in the West often view Buddhism as a foreign, esoteric religion with incomprehensible teachings. In *The Wisdom of the Buddha*, Dale Lugenbehl reveals the Buddha's teachings to be an intuitive, practical self-help philosophy which helps us live happier lives, be more compassionate and experience the world as it truly is. Chock full of concrete illustrations and examples, this book walks the reader through the core teachings of the Buddha, clears up common misconceptions in easy-to-understand terms, always with an eye toward personal application. Useful meditation exercises are offered throughout. Readers dealing with depression, anxiety, or addiction will find the chapters devoted to those problems especially helpful. In the last section of the book, the author demystifies some of the more profound teachings of Buddhism about "no self," death and the "oneness" of everything. This book is ideal both as a guide for personal growth and as a college textbook.

---Jeffrey Borrowdale, Professor of Philosophy and Philosophy Program Director, Lane Community College.

"I have so enjoyed reading this book. I was almost afraid to read it due to my Faith in the Lord Jesus. But it has only added to my strength. From the first chapter, I felt I was reading something that was going to have an impact on my life."

---Five Star review on Amazon from Papillon Mom.

The Wisdom of the Buddha: Using Mindfulness to Change Your Life

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Introduction

The Wisdom of the Buddha is the book I wish had been available when I first became interested in Buddhism.

When I first encountered Buddhist teachings some 25 years ago I found them extremely intriguing but also frequently quite baffling. What could possibly be meant by “no self,” or the idea that death is an illusion, or the teaching that suffering is created by the mind? My Western university education and previous years of college teaching in philosophy had not prepared me to comprehend something so radically different and alien. But still, there was something very appealing about the teachings and also about the manner of engaging life that I witnessed in people who actually did understand what was taught. They seemed to have a totally different way of engaging life and it had a magnetic appeal to me.

Over the years, through the help of many teachers, readings, dharma talks, and meditation retreats, I made progress in understanding what was being taught. The teachings, though a bit alien from the ideas we have absorbed from our society, turned out to be actually quite simple! Once understood and made use of with consistency, I discovered that these teachings had the power to totally transform my life.

The Buddha’s teachings are really about suffering. The Buddha said that he only taught two things: the nature of suffering, and freedom from suffering. He said that each one of us has the ability to free ourselves from suffering, both the suffering that we cause ourselves and the suffering we cause out in the world around us. Mindfulness—seeing what is really happening in each moment—is the central tool needed for this job.

The Wisdom of the Buddha is fundamentally intended as a practical guide to understanding the teachings of the Buddha and applying those teachings in our own lives to reduce suffering.

In making use of any such practical guide, it is essential to begin seeing the teachings as a system of methods, rather than as a collection of theories or doctrines. For a long time I did not fully understand this. Western philosophy has the intention of accurately *describing* reality. The Buddha, on the other hand, wanted to develop methods to enable us to *directly experience* reality. It is this clear seeing of our situation that makes it possible to change ourselves radically and thereby reduce our creation of suffering. The words that are used in Buddhist teachings only point to the experience—they direct our attention and help us know how and where to look. The Buddha’s teachings are like ladders that, when we climb them, provide a new vantage point from which we can clearly and directly see for ourselves both the external world and our own internal world of thoughts and feelings. Wrapping ourselves up in studying the ladders is missing the point. The ladders—the teachings—are intended to be used as tools for reaching a better view of things. The Buddha’s focus everywhere and always was on the practical.

Because Buddhism is a collection of methods to see reality more clearly and change ourselves, it is not at all necessary to become a Buddhist in order to benefit greatly from what the Buddha taught. In the history of the world, there have been many Buddhas—some of them were Buddhists and some were not. What is important is not our chosen path to enlightenment, but our becoming more enlightened. And there can be more than one useful path to the same destination.

My own teachers have been many: Thich Nhat Hanh, Charlotte Beck, Eckhart Tolle, Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Pema Chodron, Alan Watts, Phap De, Lama Dorje, and many more. Some of these teachers I have known personally, and many I have known only through their books and recorded dharma talks. And of course the greatest teacher of all has been my own moment-to-moment experience in applying the teachings to my own life, and in helping others to learn through sangha work and through the teaching of Buddhist meditation to others. The central intention in writing *The Wisdom of the Buddha* is to pass along what was given to me and help people transform their suffering into joy the way that my teachers helped me.

The *Wisdom of the Buddha* combines an in-depth introduction to Buddhism with the practicality of a spiritual self-help book. The first five chapters explain and give insight into the foundation teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, mindfulness meditation, and the nature of suffering and happiness.

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The final two chapters provide much needed insight into the Buddha's most difficult and freeing teachings of all: the true nature of the self (the teachings on "no self"), relative and absolute truth, nirvana, impermanence, and our mistaken understandings of death.

In the beginning, some of what the Buddha taught can be mystifying, so I have tried to present the teachings using simple and accessible language, practical techniques, eight guided meditations, personal stories, and numerous quotations from master teachers to provide inspiration along the path toward deep personal transformation. Nonetheless, many Buddhist teachings will require prolonged study and practice to be fully understood. May this book serve as an aid to that process.

CHAPTER 5

The Nature of Happiness and Suffering

Let's begin our examination of the Buddha's approach to understanding suffering by looking at a story from Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn.

In Korea, people use grass cuttings to make compost. Cutting the grass with a sickle was a job for children. When I was eight years old I liked the job, so one day my friends and I went out and I cut a lot of grass. Then we gathered it all in a bag, and we all went to school together...very happy... I had already walked half a mile [when]... one of my friends said to me, "You cut your leg!" Then I looked at my leg and saw the blood. I was bleeding very badly, and blood was making squishing sounds in my rubber shoe as I walked. As soon as I saw this, I fell to the ground in great pain and couldn't

move. The other students all came around to see what had happened, and they ran to get my mother and helped me to the hospital. (1)

This is a good example of someone who is really suffering. Let's ask ourselves a question: "Why is eight year old Seung Sahn suffering?" We all *know* the answer: he has cut his leg with a sickle, he is bleeding badly and is in a lot of pain, and he cannot move and must be helped to the hospital.

But are we *sure* that this explanation of Seung Sahn's suffering is really accurate? Go back and read the story again, very carefully this time, and see if we aren't missing something hugely important. What is it?

How Suffering Is Created

If we look closely, we will notice that even though he has a cut leg, he has managed to walk a half mile without any suffering at all—he is not in pain, he is able to walk normally, and he is enjoying the company of his friends. It is only *after* being told he is cut and seeing the blood and noticing it squishing in his shoe, *only then* does he fall to the ground in great pain and unable to move. As Seung Sahn goes on to point out, the real source of his suffering is not what has *actually happened* to him, it is caused by his *mental response* to what has happened to him. Once an injury such as this occurs, our minds are likely to instantly produce upsetting thoughts such as: "I'm very badly injured, this is horrible, I might not be able to play in my soccer game tomorrow, maybe they'll have to amputate my foot, maybe I'll bleed to death..."

So when we look closely, we discover that there really are *two* things present: the first one is Seung Sahn's *actual situation*. He is walking to school, his leg is cut and bleeding, and he is having a good time with his friends. These are all *facts*. It is also a fact that his cut leg needs medical attention. But, as we have seen, *all of this can be true without any suffering being present*. The second thing that is also present is a *mental story* that the mind is producing about how awful things are and what the future holds. None of this is factual or real. Nonetheless, it is this mind-created fictional story that is the *real source* of all his suffering.

The mind is constantly interpreting and adding on to events in our lives. However, we typically do not see what is going on because we are not yet skilled in observing how the mind works. Furthermore, we very regularly see the contents of the mental story *as facts*. Let's look at another example. Suppose my friend John, shortly after arriving at work, says to me "Is that everything you did this morning?" I instantly become angry and lash out at John: "Listen, I work harder around here than you ever have the whole time you have worked here!" If someone were to ask me what the anger is all about, I quite likely would say "John made me angry when he accused me of being a shirker." And I would view what I just said as *a statement of fact*.

This is pretty much how things seem to go most of the time when we become angry. The simple event described above is a good example of getting angry in a conditioned and reactive way with no element of mindfulness. Some event happens, anger arises, and then *all of my attention goes out into the external world*: John did this, John did that, he made me angry, he is to blame for this. The mind is focused entirely on the *external triggering event* for the anger: John's statement. But what if I make the revolutionary choice to *turn my attention inward* to look at my own anger process as it unfolds? What may I see when that happens?

With more mindfulness, it is possible to slow down the process and take a closer look at the

chain of events going on inside me that I normally just don't see at all. The sequence of events typically looks something like this.

Anatomy of Reactive and Mindful Anger Responses

First, there is some actual event that takes place. In this case John has said to me: "Is that everything you did this morning?" This is the external triggering event.

Second, and happening very quickly, there is some sort of thought or perception or interpretation that arises such as: "He thinks I don't do enough," "He is criticizing me," "He is attacking me," "I need to defend myself." With some training in meditation, it becomes possible to be consciously aware of this thought stream.

Third, anger arises. *When I am mindful*, I know that anger is present and I am in touch with it in the body: heat in my face, pounding sensation in my chest, rapid breathing, and tense posture. I am aware of the tone of my own voice as I verbally react to what John said. Many times, however, there is *no conscious awareness* of the presence of anger and I do not really become aware of it until later when I look back on my behavior.

Fourth, because I do not yet know how to skillfully recognize and experience anger, my anger takes me over and I lose my ability to choose how to respond: I act unskillfully and lash out at John: "You're the one who is really lazy and trying to get me to do your work for you!" I blame my anger on John.

Fifth, at some point later on I may find myself judging my reaction harshly: "I behaved terribly."

Sixth, I may then move on to *globalize* my behavior—that is, I make it into something larger than just this *specific* episode of angry behavior. My thoughts become "I *always* get mad when someone says something that sounds like a criticism."

Seventh, things may go even further off the rails and I may make what has happened into a *personal identity*: "I'm just an angry hostile *person*. I'm such a jerk." I make my reaction into a *definition* of who I am. Obviously, if I think this behavior is who I am as a person, this is going to make it much harder for me to change than it would be if I simply viewed it as how I behaved in this particular situation.

The mind is almost always functioning in this way, but typically we do not *see* it. Mindfulness allows us to *see* the whole process and recognize that it is our *unskillful response* to what is happening that is causing all the suffering. Just in seeing what we are doing, the process of change has already begun. When we see this process clearly enough times, at some point we simply don't *want* to go there anymore—and we realize we don't *have* to go there anymore. Life can be much simpler and less painful. The question "Is that everything you did this morning?" can be answered with a simple "Yes." No problem—done! How much easier that is!

We can learn to simply feel the anger fully, notice the mental stories we are running that keep it going ("She did this and she did that, she always does... It's all her fault") and allow the anger to simply be there and then wash through. We begin to see that the mental stories are what set the whole process of suffering in motion and provide the fuel to keep it going. We can also learn that there is no need to *believe* a story in our mind just because it is there.

Each step in the evolution of becoming angry and lashing out provides a place to see what is happening and *put a halt to the process*. I can notice that I am making the anger that is present into a definition of self and choose not to do that, which reduces my suffering. I may become mindful and in touch a little sooner in the anger process and consciously notice the heat and other sensations arising in the body, know that I am angry and have an *impulse* to lash out, and then *choose not to act* on that impulse, thereby reducing even more of my suffering (and John's suffering as well). If I am being very mindful, I may notice that my mind is interpreting John's statement as a personal attack when it is not, and therefore cut off the process right at the start before it really gets rolling. When mindfulness is well established, the strong habit of my attention going straight to—and solely to—the external triggering event has been replaced by what is now a natural inclination to look inward at my own internal response instead. At this point, life is getting much, much easier and less fraught with difficulty and suffering.

We can learn to *be there with* the anger (mindfulness) but not let it “hijack the car” and take us over so that the anger is now in the driver's seat and we are just along for the (very rough) ride. When we don't know that we are angry it can take us over. When we *know* we are angry and know how to deal with it mindfully, we can consciously *choose* how to respond and create less suffering. Furthermore, the anger itself at the time I am feeling it does not have to create suffering—it is just a sort of vibration in the body and some accompanying thoughts that we can learn to experience fully but not have the feeling sweep us away. In a later chapter we will look at some practices that will help us learn *how to* relate to anger and other difficult emotions in a more positive way.

Remembering what was investigated in Chapter 2, we know that there will always be pain and difficulty in life. But suffering is different from this. Suffering is an extra and unnecessary layer of discomfort that is added on by how we respond to the events of life. Even our attempts to find happiness often create suffering for us.

Our Ideas About Happiness Often Create Unhappiness

Indeed, it is often *our very idea* of happiness which *prevents us* from being happy. This happens because we put conditions on our happiness and say “I'll be happy when I graduate from college,” or “I'll be happy when I become a partner in the law firm.” Sometimes in Buddhism this is called “if-only mind.” It can be very basic. I'm sitting in meditation at a retreat center and the mind says “If only I had a donut I'd be happy.” But basic or not, there always seems to be something that we do not have that must be in place *before* we can be happy: lose ten pounds, look “just right,” win our lawsuit, find the ideal life partner, start a family, get the kids out of the house and on their own, get divorced, reach retirement. It is literally endless.

Some of us may look at this and think, what's wrong with striving for things to make us happy? The problem is that we are putting *conditions* on our happiness. We believe that only certain conditions will make us happy. We are essentially saying that certain conditions must be fulfilled *before* we can be happy. The upshot of this way of operating is that it virtually guarantees that we will *not* be happy during the time those conditions are *not* fulfilled. *This limits our ability to be happy with what is here right now.*

If we are paying attention, we will notice that actually the conditions for happiness are *always* present. There is no need to wait to be happy. It is not wisdom for me to say “I will be happy when I finish writing this book,” because that prevents me from enjoying the way my mind is working while I'm

writing, from enjoying the white clouds when I look out the window, and the feeling of the cool breeze in my hair and the warm sun on my face when I go outside and walk to take a break from writing. If I say, “I will be happy when I finish this book,” I make the present moment a mere stepping stone to the future, something to be finished with as quickly as possible and not something to be savored and enjoyed. We can enjoy *both* the destination—if we actually arrive there—and also always enjoy the moment-to-moment journey of getting there, even if the journey is sometimes hard. And if we don’t arrive at the destination—or don’t find it satisfying—then all there was to enjoy was the journey. Why throw away the opportunity for happiness now when there is no need to?

I have seen many of my students over the years do this precise thing. Perhaps a student wants to become a medical doctor. However, they hate the pre-med science courses they are taking and have to force themselves to study in order to get good grades so they will be accepted into medical school. They then go through the same process in medical school—finding what they are doing uninteresting and boring, but enduring the work and “getting it over with,” so they can move on to their internship where they must also force themselves to “get it over with,” so that they can finally get to the end destination of being a doctor. Literally years of “putting up with” and “getting through” the present moment are spent in hopes that somehow becoming a doctor will give them happiness. I actually had a 43 year old student in one of my philosophy classes who had been a doctor for 15 years and quit. He finally realized that he *never* liked studying medicine and that he *never* liked working as a doctor, either. He quit and went back to school to study Spanish literature because that was what he had always wanted to do and he was finally doing it and loving it.

The Unhappiness Gap

Most of us grow up with a huge blind spot in regard to where our suffering originates. Try asking almost anyone who is unhappy what it is they are unhappy about. They will say they are unhappy because they don’t have enough money in the bank, their apartment is too small, or their boss at work doesn’t appreciate them enough. Or they may say that their best friend moved away, they lost their job, or that they live in a city where it rains half the days of the year. What do these examples all have in common? In each case, someone is seeing *the cause of their suffering as residing in their external circumstances*—it is always something *outside themselves* that is making them unhappy. Though this *seems* an obvious truth, it is an illusion.

Two thousand years ago Epictetus, a Greek philosopher who had no knowledge of the Buddha’s existence, came to the same realization about suffering that the Buddha had five hundred years before him. Epictetus, who was born a slave and then achieved freedom and became a teacher, clearly stated that our external circumstances do not, by themselves, cause anyone to suffer. He said that our suffering is caused by a *gap* between what we *expect or want*, and what we *actually have*. So far, this sounds like something we already know: when we don’t *have* what we *want*, we are unhappy.

But what we typically *miss* here is that in any situation where we are unhappy, there are actually *two* things in play. First, suppose it is a *fact* that I live in a city that gets 45 inches of rain a year. This is my *external* situation, it is *what I have*. Second, there is my *wanting or expecting* that it should not rain this much. This is my internal situation. So my unhappiness is simply the gap between “What I actually have” and “What I expect or want.”

Our social conditioning, of course, tells us that the way to *close* this gap and become happy is to try to *change the external world* and make it *conform to what we want or expect*. We try to try to *get*

what we want in order to be happy, and virtually every message we have received about happiness reinforces this perception. In some cases we can do this and it makes sense to do this. In the example above, I *could* change my external situation by moving from Seattle to San Diego, though undoubtedly this could easily create new dissatisfactions for me: housing is more expensive, weather is monotonous, and so on. What we almost *never see*, however, is that there is something else going on here besides our external circumstances and that *always* trying to *get what we want* is not our only option. It is simply not possible for this gap, between wanting and having, to exist without the internal component. Instead of always seeing our suffering as coming from external circumstances, we can learn to *turn our attention inward* and recognize that a huge part of our suffering is generated in our own minds: our beliefs and expectations about what we *should* have.

I was angry with and resented my parents for many years because I believed they were bad parents: they were very poor listeners, controlling, never admitted mistakes or apologized, my father angered easily, and they didn't seem to want to know who I really was. I was very angry and unhappy about this. After many years, I finally realized that I was comparing my parents to some *idea of perfect parents* that my mind had created. So there was a gap between what I expected or wanted from my parents and the reality of what they were able to do. And at that time, the only way I saw to remove this gap was to try to *make* my parents conform to my mental idea of how they *should* behave. This simply did not work. However, my failed attempts to make them bend to my ideas of how they *should* behave certainly did cause a lot of extra suffering for myself and for them.

At some point, I saw the foolishness of what my mind was doing. I realized that they were human beings with their own issues and insecurities and gaps in their knowledge, and that my unrealistic expectations were simply causing suffering. Yes, they were deeply flawed in their parenting and as human beings. Instead of insisting that they change, I changed my expectations of them to something that they were actually able to do. When I also started to see that their previous "failures" were coming out of their own pain and confusion, my suffering ended, and I could be more compassionate toward them. Our relationship then became much better. I had been expecting something of them that they did not understand, found frightening, and that they were incapable of doing. The gap between my mental parenting ideal and my actual parents had been eliminated.

In some cases of course, the behavior of the parents is so objectionable that the only satisfactory option is to leave the relationship entirely. But even in this case, suffering can be greatly reduced by dropping the mental story line that life should always be fair.

We often rail against something as uncontrollable as the weather and get upset because it is cloudy and cold for our July picnic. We do not easily see that our desire for the world to bend to our mental idea of what the weather *should be* is the real cause of our suffering, rather than the weather itself. We do essentially the same thing when we suffer horribly over all the injustice in the world. This does not mean that we should not do the things we can do to reduce injustice, but if we *expect* injustice not to ever happen, we will suffer as a result of this choice. And this additional unnecessary suffering on our part will not help one bit to correct a single injustice in the world.

Some of our unhappiness "gaps" are astounding: "I've done everything right to take care of my health and now I have cancer—this is totally unfair; I feel so angry and totally betrayed!" It's as though we believe we have entered into a *contract* with the universe and the universe is in breach of it. We seem to think we have agreed that "I will do such-and-such and the universe promises to do this-and-that in exchange." But being entitled to good health is something that exists only in the mind—and the

“contract with the universe” is something that the universe never signed. Clearly, there is a huge mind-created gap between what I expect and what I actually have, and my suffering is greatly increased because of it. Having cancer is bad enough—why add the suffering of having been “betrayed” to it?

We also suffer due to our desire that things never change. One morning I came to work at the college where I teach and found a new computer on my desk; this seemed to happen every two or three years. I was happy with the old computer, and now I had to learn how to use the new one with its new software. I could either become upset and curse the college and suffer, or *turn my attention* inward and notice that my unhappiness gap is best addressed by seeing that I have an unwise desire that things should always stay the same. In this case, the external reality is that everything changes. The impermanence of all things was a central teaching of the Buddha.

Our difficulty with impermanence and change is widespread. We seem to unconsciously want jobs, friendships, a house, a favorite piece of land, or season of the year, to go on without change indefinitely. This simply results in our suffering more severely than necessary when things eventually and inevitably change or end. As the Buddha would point out, the central problem with most of the situations we have looked at here is that they involve *wanting* permanence in a world that is *in fact* impermanent. It is not the fact of impermanence that causes us to suffer, but rather our desire for permanence in an impermanent world. The Greek philosopher Epictetus grasped this idea very well.

In everything which pleases the soul, or supplies a want, or is loved, remember to add this: What is its nature? If you love an earthen vessel, say it is an earthen vessel which you love; when it has been broken, you will not be [so] disturbed... take care of it [any blessing in your life] as a thing which belongs to another, as travelers do with their inn... [or as you would do with a fine book on loan to you from the library]. (2)

Being Careful Not to Misunderstand

The idea of creating our own suffering is an alien and tricky one for many people. I have seen students in classes react to the idea that we create our own suffering by saying: “Life is even worse than I thought. Not only am I suffering but it’s *all my fault*—I’m being *blamed* for my own misery. Now I’m *really* unhappy.” But to react this way is to misunderstand the teaching. If suffering just dropped on us from the sky at random intervals, or if it were caused by external factors over which we have no control—now that really *would* be disheartening. But the real message here is that “Yes, I’m suffering but since I am the one creating it, I can do something about it—I can stop doing the things that are creating suffering for myself and others.” This is hugely *empowering*, and truly good news for us.

I like to think of it this way. Suppose I am taking a long hike in the mountains and at some point I take my backpack off to find something to eat. While I am rummaging in the pack, I am stunned to find a ten pound rock: “How in the world did that get in there?” I toss the stone out, have something to eat, and resume hiking: “What a relief to have that rock off my back! This feels so much lighter and better!” Discovering the various ways in which we create suffering in our lives is very much like this. We become more mindful about what is going on in our lives and start really looking into what is present in the mind—our mental backpack, so to speak. We are often surprised at what we find: “No wonder life was so hard! I had no idea that there was such a huge boulder in my mental backpack. What a relief to discover it was there and get rid of it!” At some point, finding and removing these mental boulders

becomes enormously exciting, and we get motivated to really spend some time using our newly found mindfulness to look for what else might be in there.

Happiness Is Bigger Than Pleasure

It is important to recognize that pain is not the same thing as suffering, and pleasure is not the same thing as happiness. We tend to think that happiness consists of banishing pain and difficulty and having one pleasurable experience after another: an enjoyable dinner accompanied by pleasant conversation, a great night's sleep followed by a wonderful run through the woods on a springy layer of decomposed bark, followed by... But life is not like that all the time, and might perhaps be boring if it were. Doing something very difficult, even painful, can be extremely meaningful and satisfying—for example, running five miles to get medical help for an injured hiker you came across on the trail. And endless rounds of entertainment and wonderful meals can, as the Buddha as a young man discovered, end up feeling hollow and unsatisfying. Happiness is bigger than both pleasure and pain. Jack Kornfield put it this way.

Happiness is a profound sense of well-being, which includes both being connected with ourselves and the world. That's different from pleasure. Pleasure comes and goes. You can have a good meal and it's great—but then it's over. Pain and difficulties also will come and go. Happiness—true happiness—is a quality of well-being in the midst of pleasure and pain and gain and loss... Happiness is the capacity to open the heart and eyes and spirit and be where we are and find happiness in the midst of it. (3)

Another contemporary teacher, Lorne Ladner, has pointed out how trapped we often are in some rather narrow ideas regarding what makes for a good, happy, and meaningful life. As Westerners, we typically see happiness in one of three ways. Some see a happy and good life as being determined by external accomplishments such as business success, comfort, status, popularity, or lots of sensory pleasure. Others see a happy life as having deeply satisfying personal relationships. And still others believe that what is essential is making some significant contribution to make the world a better place. But Ladner points out that there is another way of seeing the question of what makes for a happy life.

It's extremely rare for anyone...to answer this question *psychologically*. The Buddhist response to this question is deeply psychological: Buddhism asserts that a good, happy life is determined not by anything external but rather by the quality of our minds and hearts in each moment of life... Regardless of what we do or don't do externally. (4)

This is a radically different perspective from what we are used to. No matter what I might possess or might have done, *what does my life actually feel like* moment-to-moment? We are often so busy trying to obtain the things we have been taught will make us happy that we rarely ever take the time to actually get in touch with how this life we have actually *feels*. In this very moment, what is the state of my mind? Is my mind agitated and racing out of control? Is it full of thoughts of revenge, harsh criticism of self and others, or plans to get more for myself at the expense of others? On the other hand, perhaps my mind is focused and calm, with thoughts about helping a friend through a crisis or connecting with family later in the day, or thinking about how I can best honor my commitment to being there for my students.

And in this very moment, what kinds of *emotions* are in my *heart*? Am I angry, tense, anxious, or fearful? Perhaps I am full of guilt and shame, or maybe I am feeling conflicted and torn? No matter what successes I may have achieved in life, how can I be truly happy in such circumstances? Contrast this with the condition of another person's

heart that is full of contentment, gratitude, love, and a feeling of joy because someone else is doing well in life. To have such a heart is essential to happiness, and it is possible to have it no matter what someone has or does not have in other areas of life.

What Comes Next?

Much of what robs our lives of happiness is the suffering created by our own minds. And typically, we have not yet realized that it is ourselves who are causing our suffering. Fortunately, with improved mindfulness we can get better and better at spotting, and interrupting, the multitude of ways the mind tricks us and causes suffering. In the chapters of *Part II: Nuts and Bolts*, we will examine a number of the major ways that the mind's response to what happens in life causes suffering and what can be done to change this. This suffering is created in many ways. It happens when we are swept away by strong emotions such as anger or fear, or anxiety. It also happens when we are in the grips of some false definition of self, or when we are overpowered by some very strong habit. We will examine how these causes of suffering, and many others, can be reduced or even eliminated. As we shall see, even the suffering caused by our discomfort with death can be transformed by seeing through the mind's delusions in regard to death. A fitting end for this chapter is a short Zen story from Pema Chodron.

A big, burly samurai comes to a Zen Master and says, "Tell me the nature of heaven and hell." The Zen master looks him in the face and says, "Why should I tell a scruffy, disgusting, miserable slob like you? A worm like you, do you think I should tell you anything?"

Consumed by rage, the samurai draws his sword and raises it to cut off the master's head. The Zen master says, "That's hell."

Instantly, the samurai understands that he has just created his own hell—black and hot, filled with hatred, self-protection, anger, and resentment. He sees that he was so deep in hell that he was ready to kill someone. Tears fill his eyes as he puts his palms together to bow in gratitude for this insight.

The Zen master says, "That's heaven." (5)

Notes for Chapter 5

1. Sahn, Seung, *Only Don't Know, The Teaching Letters of Zen Master Seung Sahn*, San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1982, p. 79.
2. Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991, translated by George Long, Sections 3 and 11.
3. Kornfield, Jack, "Finding My Religion," an interview with David Ian Miller, November 28, 2005, published at SFGate.com.
4. Ladner, Lorne, *The Lost Art of Compassion*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004, page 8.)

5. Pema Chodron, Pema, *Comfortable With Uncertainty: 108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion*, Boston: Shambhala, 2003, pages 61-2.)