Readings: Religions of China and Japan

Rel 202 * Dale Lugenbehl * Spring 2010

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Believing As Thinking

by Deborah Tannen

"The doubting game" is the name English professor Peter Elbow gives to what educators are trained to do. In playing the doubting game, you approach other's work by looking for what is wrong, much as the press corps follows the president hoping to catch him stumble or an attorney pores over an opposing witness's deposition looking for inconsistencies that can be challenged on the stand. It is an attorney's job to discredit opposing witnesses, but is it a scholar's job to approach colleagues [and ideas, or written works] like an opposing attorney?

Elbow recommends learning to approach new ideas, and ideas different from your own, in a different spirit--what he calls a "believing game." This does not mean accepting everything anyone says or writes in an unthinking way. That would be just as superficial as rejecting everything without thinking deeply about it. The believing game is still a game. It simply asks you to give it a whirl: Read as if you believed, and see where it takes you. Then you can go back and ask whether you want to accept or reject elements in... the idea. Elbow is not recommending that we stop doubting altogether. He is telling us to stop doubting exclusively. We need a systematic and respected way to detect and expose strengths, just as we have a systematic and respected way of detecting faults.

Americans need little encouragement to play the doubting game because we regard it as synonymous with intellectual inquiry, a sign of intelligence. In Elbow's words, "We tend to assume that the ability to

criticize a claim we disagree with counts as more serious intellectual work than the ability to enter into it and temporarily assent." It is the believing game that needs to be encouraged and recognized as an equally serious intellectual pursuit.

Although criticizing is surely part of thinking, it is not synonymous with it. Again, limiting critical response to critique means not doing the other kinds of critical thinking that could be helpful: looking for new insights, new perspectives, new ways of thinking, new knowledge. Critiquing relieves you of the responsibility of doing integrative thinking. It also has the... [effect] of making the critics feel smart, smarter than the ill-fated author whose work is being picked apart like carrion... [In addition, it] has the disadvantage of making them less likely to learn from the author's work.

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Excerpted from *The Argument Culture,* by Deborah Tannen, Ballentine Books, 1999, pages 273-4.

Receptivity to Truth

By Thich Nhat Hanh

When we hear a Dharma talk or study a sutra, our only job is to remain open. Usually, when we hear or read something new, we just compare it to our own ideas. If it is the same, we accept it and say that it is correct. If it is not, we say it is incorrect. In either case, we learn nothing. If we read or listen with an open mind and an open heart, the rain of the Dharma will penetrate the soil of our consciousness.

The gentle spring rain permeates the soil of my soul.
A seed that has lain deeply in the earth for many
years just smiles. (1)

While reading or listening, do not work too hard. Be like the earth. When the rain comes, the earth only has to open herself up to the rain. Allow the rain of the Dharma to come in and penetrate the seeds that are buried deep in your consciousness. A teacher cannot give you the truth. The truth is already in you. You only need to open yourself. If you let the words enter you, the soil and the seeds will do the rest of the work.

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**The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching,* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Broadway Books, 1998, pp. 12-13. (1) From Thich Nhat Hanh, "Cuckoo Telephone," in *Call Me By My True Names,* p. 76.

The Golden Mean

by Dale Lugenbehl

I. Introduction and Historical Background

Confucius was born around 550 BC in China and died in 479 BC. Confucius believed in living by what he called the "doctrine of the mean" or "golden mean" (chung yung or "constant middle"). For every action there are two extremes which must be avoided: the extreme of excess and the extreme of deficiency. What lies the proper distance between these extremes is virtue, and the right way to act. In a similar way in India, the Buddha (approximately 560-480 BC) taught that the right course is the "middle way."

Aristotle lived in Greece (384-322 BC). In his book *Nicomachaean Ethics,* he outlines what he also calls "the doctrine of the mean." What he has to say here is very similar in many ways to the views of Confucius, and he develops at length how this doctrine applies to determining what course of action is right in a number of different situations.

In more modern times, advocates of voluntary simplicity have advocated finding the right level of consumption and "stuff" (property, possessions). If we are truly living in poverty, as are many people in developing nations and the homeless in this country, we are sick, and miserable and dying because we don't have enough to eat and don't have shelter from the weather. When people have this little, they are unhappy

and they do very destructive things to the environment because they are desperate and will do anything to stay alive--they destroy rain forests, burn old tires for heat and cooking, etc. At the other extreme, when people consume and possess at a very high level, they often are not happy--they kill themselves with an overabundance of rich food and stress from working so many hours to pay for all their possessions. When people live at such a level of excess wealth and consumption, like the poor, they do a tremendous amount of environmental damage--they destroy forests to build 3,000 square foot homes and use mountains of paper, produce huge amounts of pollution from burning fossil fuels, and..... Writers such as Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Duane Elgin, and Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez maintain that the right way to live is by finding a satisfactory point between the two destructive extremes of consumption. This satisfactory midpoint is called "enough."

II. The Principle of the Golden Mean

According to the doctrine of the mean, the correct or right course of action is always some middle point between the two extremes of excess (too much) and deficiency (too little). Take for example the question of working at paid employment. If I work too little, I won't have enough money to buy food and shelter and clothing for myself. I would then fall into the vice of not being self supporting. On the other hand, if I become obsessed with my job and work 75 hours a week and am exhausted, stressed out, and don't have time for friends, family, and other activities, I am guilty of the vice of being a "workaholic."

Another example of finding the golden mean might be exercise. Exercise too little or not at all and I don't have much energy, become weak and unfit, and increase my chances of having heart disease, poor digestion, and even depression. Suppose I then become convinced that exercise is a good thing and I start an exercise program. I start feeling better and looking better so I keep adding more exercise each week--I conclude that if exercise is a good thing, then "more is better." Pretty soon I am running 30 miles a week, lifting weights 5 days a week, and playing basketball 3 days a week. At some point I notice that I'm feeling tired all the time, I am starting to have joint pain in my knees, and I'm not sleeping well. The problem? Too much exercise! I've committed the "sin of overtraining." Somewhere between the extremes of underexercise and overexercise is the right amount to produce health and happiness.

Telling the truth is another good example. If your friend, who is about to step on stage to give a speech asks you "How do I look?" and you think she looks terrible, what do you say? If you say "Frankly, you look like hell," Confucius would say that your truth telling is excessive and therefore wrong! It would be better to not lie, but say something positive like "Don't worry about your looks--you've got a great speech!" Someone who always disregards the truth and lies to people, telling them what they want to hear suffers from a deficiency in the truth telling area. This would also violate the golden mean and be wrong.

The following table shows how the doctrine of the mean might be applied to a number of different activities.

Activity	Excess(vice)	Virtue(mean)	Deficit(vice)
Facing danger	Fool hardiness, rashness	Courage (know what to fear)	Coward (paralyzed by unreasonable fears)
Gift giving	Show off	Good gift giver	Stingy, cheap
Telling truth	Blunt, unkind	Sensitively honest	Liar, deceiver
Eating	Compulsive over eater	Healthy eater	Anorexic
Working	Workaholic	Conscientious, self supporting	Bum, loafer
Receiving honors	Bragging	Self respect	Self abasement
Socializing	Pushy, overbearing	Friendly	Timid, retiring

It should be noted that the proper point between the two extremes is not necessarily exactly half way. If 4 pounds of food a day is too much and 1 pound is too little, the proper point between the two extremes is not necessarily 2.5 pounds (4 + 1 divided by two). It is also important to remember that what is the proper midpoint for one person may not be the proper midpoint for another. Again, food is a good example here, and so is sleep or social interaction. What is the proper "middle path" for you in regard to social activity may not be the proper middle for me.

What would be the excess, deficiency, and proper midpoint for the following behaviors: studying, watching television, reading (not for school), partying, working for money, sleeping? How does your ACTUAL behavior compare with what you think is your proper midpoint?

III. Some Applications of the Theory

Killing is an interesting and difficult example to use in connection with the golden mean. Could we say that Hitler, Ted Bundy, and Charles Manson killed too much? Could we say that the reason they behaved badly is that killing people simply because they are Jewish or because they are female and have long hair is killing in excess? Is there a "right amount" of killing? Could someone behave wrongly because they did not kill ENOUGH? Is there such a thing as behaving wrongly because one's killing is deficient?

What might a case of "deficient killing" look like? If the only way I can prevent an extremely violent person from killing me and my family is to kill them, would it be wrong of me NOT to kill and as a consequence allow the preventable deaths of innocent people? Would this be a wrongful act because it was "too little" in the way of killing on my part? Other examples might be euthanasia for a hopelessly ill person in extreme pain, using dynamite to save 19 people suffocating in a cave but killing the 20th person stuck in the mouth of the cave (who would suffocate anyway) , pulling up a plant (thus killing it) and eating it when it is the only food available, killing termites when it is the only way to prevent them from destroying your house.... According to the doctrine of the mean, our behavior in regard to killing in these cases might be viewed as deficient (too little) and thus to NOT kill under these circumstances might well be wrong.

Additional cases on the side of "excess killing" might be killing cows, pigs, and chickens for food in our culture when we could be just as well nourished without killing them, and our killing them for food in this way causes them great suffering and does great damage to the environment. Something similar might be said of killing nonhuman animals for sport, or for clothing when we could easily meet our clothing and entertainment needs without killing.

The killing that happens during an abortion is a difficult case for this doctrine. Could the golden mean be used to make a determination in cases of abortion?

Consumption (buying, using, having) is also an interesting example of behavior to explore using the golden mean. How much in the way of possessions and wealth is "enough?"

Closely related to consumption is the issue of working at a job in order to make money. If I am unemployed and can't pay my basic living expenses, my working is deficient. But many people work 40, 50, 60, and 70+ hours per week to pay for fancier cars, houses, clothing, and vacations, and their working so much introduces high levels of stress into their lives and leaves little time for anything else. How much work is really enough?

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*Written for *Concepts in Ethics,* edited by Dale Lugenbehl, copyright 2000.

Is It "Only Words?"

Donald Mannison

It might be objected by some that I am speaking only (or "merely") of words, and, consequently, do not have my face turned toward the world. [But] to attend with some care to what one would or wouldn't say respecting some piece of human behavior is to attend to the behavior about which we are speaking. ...I end this brief excursus ...with a remark of John Austin's:

> "When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not merely at words (or "meanings," whatever they may

be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as a final arbiter of, the phenomena." (John Austin, "A Plea For Excuses")

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Donald Manison, "Remarks On Justice in American Society," *The Personalist,* Spring 1971, p. 236.

Two Views of Nature

Dale Lugenbehl (1994)

Traditional Western View

Humans are separate from and above nature and other species; humans are not subject to the same laws as other species.

There is no connection between an individual species and its habitat.

Human can and should conquer and dominate nature and other species.

All other species are here for humans to use and exploit; other species are to be viewed as commodities, things, property, and natural resources that are here to serve our interests (in the same way that we see iron ore or crude oil as resources).

More is better; bigger is better; faster is better.

"There is always more where that came from." Nature is inexhaustible.

Growth = progress = good

We can and do own the earth and other species that inhabit it.

Nature is chaotic and dangerous and must be tamed.

Nature is arranged in a hierarchy from top to bottom with humans at the top, then more complex mammals, then "simpler" animals, then plants, then microorganisms, then dirt, rocks, water, air. Humans are a higher form of life than anything else on earth; nothing else is as good as humans.

It makes sense to try to bend nature to our will by the application of power: a building that overpowers the elements by bigger air conditioning units, heaters, ventilation fans, etc. makes more sense than a building that tries to go with nature by using natural lighting, passive solar heating and cooling, and natural ventilation.

NonWestern View*

Humans are part of nature; we are part of the web of life; what we do to the earth we do to ourselves.

Humans are custodians/guardians of the earth; we do not own nature, it is entrusted to us to take care of and pass on (like a book checked out from the library).

We should live in harmony with nature by trying to understand how it operates.

Each species has its own excellences and makes its own contribution to the balance and well being of the planet.

Nature is orderly; we must understand that order to survive and thrive.

Everything in nature is interconnected and interdependent; what we do to other species and habitats effects us.

We should seek to work with the balance of nature: A surfer does not control or dominate the wave he or she is riding, but by understanding the forces at play the surfer can go with the wave and enjoy it and be in a position to enhance his or her life. The

surfer is using a renewable resource in a way that leaves just as much for others who come along later and does not throw the environment out of balance or damage it with pollution. Contrast this with the person who roars around in the desert on a gas powered all terrain vehicle or uses a speed boat on a lake.

We should not completely discount the welfare of other life forms simply because they are not members of our species or do not look like us or behave like us.

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*This view is characteristic of many native cultures, including Native Americans, and is also exemplified in eastern traditions such as Taoism and Buddhism. Elements of it can also be found in the stoic philosophy of Epictetus.

The Parable of the Arrow

Buddha

"Consider, Malunkyaputta, this story of a man wounded by a poisoned arrow. His friends, relatives, and well-wishers gather around him and a surgeon is called. But the wounded man says, 'Before he takes out this arrow, I want to know if the man who shot me was a Kshatriya, a Brahmin, a merchant, or an untouchable.'

"Or he says, 'I won't let this arrow be removed until I know the name and tribe of the man who shot me.'

"Or: 'Was he tall, short, or of medium height?'

"Or: 'Was he black, brown, or yellow-skinned?'

"What do you think would happen to such a man, Malunkyaputta? Let me tell you. He will die.

"And that is what happens when a man comes to me and says, 'I will not follow the Dhamma until the Buddha tells me whether the world is eternal or not eternal, whether the world is finite or infinite, whether the soul and the body are the same or different, whether the liberated person exists or does not exist after death, whether he neither exists nor does not exist after death.' He will die, Malunkyaputta, before I get a chance to make everything clear to him.

"Being religious and following Dhamma has nothing to do with the dogma that the world is eternal; and it has nothing to do with the dogma that the world is not eternal. For whether the world is eternal or otherwise, birth, old age, death, sorrow, pain, misery, grief, and despair exist. I am concerned with the extinction of these.

"Therefore, consider carefully, Malunkyaputta, the things that I have taught and the things I have not taught. What are the things I have not taught?

"I have not taught that the world is eternal. I have not taught that the world is not eternal. I have not taught that the world is finite. I have not taught that the world is infinite. I have not taught that the soul and the body are the same. I have not taught that the soul and the body are different. I have not taught that the liberated person exists after death. I have not taught that he does not exist after death. I have not taught that he both exists and does not exist after death; that he neither exists nor does not exist after death.

"Why, Malunkyaputta, have I not taught all this? Because all this is useless, it has nothing to do with real Dhamma, it does not lead to cessation of passion [grasping and agitation], to peace, to supreme wisdom, and the holy life, to Nirvana. That is why I have not taught all this.

"And what have I taught, Malunkyaputta? I have taught that suffering exists, that suffering has an origin, that suffering can be ended, that there is a way to end suffering.

"Why, Malunkyaputta, have I taught this? Because this is useful, it has to do with real Dhamma, it leads to the cessation of passion [grasping and agitation], it brings peace, supreme wisdom, the holy life, and Nirvana. This is why I have taught all this.

"Therefore, Malunkyaputta, consider carefully what I have taught and what I have not taught."

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*From *The Dhammapada,* The Noonday Press, 1967, p. 18-20. Translated from Pali by P. Lal.

Right Association

By Huston Smith

[The method for self-transformation prescribed by the Buddha is made up of eight components.] …They are preceded, however, by a preliminary… This preliminary is right association. No one recognized more clearly than the Buddha the extent to which we are social animals, influenced at every turn by the "companioned example" of our associates, whose attitudes and values affect us profoundly. Asked how one attains illumination, the Buddha began: "An arouser of faith appears in the world. One associates oneself with such a person." Other injunctions follow, but right association is so basic that it warrants another paragraph.

When a wild elephant is to be tamed and trained, the best way to begin is by yoking it to one that has already been through the process. By contact, the wild one comes to see that the condition it is being led toward is not wholly incompatible with being an elephant—that what is expected of it does not contradict its nature categorically and heralds a condition that, though startlingly different, is viable. The constant, immediate, and contagious example of its yoke-fellow can teach it as nothing else can. Training for the life of the spirit is not different. The transformation facing the untrained is neither smaller than the elephant's nor less demanding. Without visible evidence that success is possible, without a continuous transfusion of courage, discouragement is bound to set in. If (as scientific studies have now shown) anxieties are absorbed from one's associates, may not persistence be assimilated equally? Robert Ingersoll once remarked that had he been God he would have made health contagious instead of disease; to which an Indian contemporary responded: "When shall we come to recognize that health *is* as contagious as disease, virtue as contagious as vice, cheerfulness as contagious as moroseness?" One of the three things for which we should give thanks every day, according to Shankara, is the company of the holy; for as bees cannot make honey unless together, human beings cannot make progress on the Way unless they are supported by a field of confidence and concern that Truthwinners generate. The Buddha agrees. We should associate with Truthwinners, converse with them, serve them, observe their ways, and imbibe by osmosis their spirit of love and compassion.

With this preliminary step in place we may proceed to the Path's eight steps proper.

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Excerpted from *The World's Religions,* by Huston Smith, Harper Publishing, 1991, pp. 104 – 5.

Personal Attachment to Beliefs

Dale Lugenbehl

Our tendency to become personally attached to our beliefs is a significant contributing factor to our remaining in debate mode. What do I mean by being personally attached to beliefs?

Frequently in philosophy discussions we talk in terms of "your view" and "my view" or "your position" and "my position;"_ we identify with or attach ourselves personally to beliefs.

I like to use the analogy of packages (presents) with little name tags attached to the packages with strings. Over here is a package with a string attaching it to a paper tag that says "John's view" and over here is another package with a string attaching it to a tag that is labeled "Ann's view" and so on for each package. I like to ask people to now imagine pulling out a pair of scissors and cutting all the strings and throwing the name tags away. Now we can just examine the packages and not concern ourselves with whether they "belong to" this particular person or that. Now there is no "your view" and "my view," there is only "the view that we are examining right now." When we are able to do this it makes it much easier to change one's mind, avoid defensiveness, and avoid feeling that one has to "dig in" and defend a personal

position.

However, this is often not easy to do initially, and it helps to have a deeper understanding of how attachment to beliefs works.

There are at least two possible levels of attachment. At the first level, we can attach to beliefs at the level of thinking that we own certain beliefs--they belong to us and are extensions of our selves. People often do this with physical objects as well, and talk about "my car," "my shirt," "my house" and so on. When this happens and someone says something questioning about one of our extensions of self, we may feel that we have been attacked personally and feel we need to defend our car, our shirt, or our belief. This makes it much more difficult to hear what is being said and really consider it and learn from it, and often leads to taking a competitive stance toward discussion where the emphasis is on winning and defeating another person, or at least not being defeated oneself. This is a very serious obstacle to worthwhile discussion and progress in learning.

A second, and even deeper, level of attachment can occur when we see our beliefs as part of our identity--our beliefs are who we are. "My beliefs are *me*." This is a difficult idea to get people to question because it seems very natural to many people to think of their beliefs as a very core part of who they are. However, once again, when this happens any questioning or criticizing of one's belief on an issue is likely to be perceived as an attack on the person holding the belief, who will then tend to adopt a competitive stance and the perception that there is a need to somehow defend one's personal honor; one must dig in and defend one's self.

Since this is such a deeply rooted unconscious assumption, it is necessary to spend some time working with it. First, it is important to notice how our beliefs change over time. Clearly, none of us have all the same beliefs that we had 15 years ago, 10 years ago, 5 years ago, before last school term, or even last week (or even a few minutes ago in this particular discussion). And yet, in some sense, we are the same person throughout all this. Beliefs come and go; they don't have to be viewed as who we are.

Secondly, it is beneficial to have a different model for belief. Consider the following story. Imagine that we are going for a hike in the Three Sisters Wilderness area. It would be wise to take a map with us so we don't get lost, so you have brought one with you to consult from time to time. The map shows trails, streams, mountain peaks, places where we can get drinking water, and so on, as well as distances between various geographical features. While we are consulting the map you have brought, I notice and point out to you an error in the map; the map shows the spring where we can get drinking water as being three miles west of our present location, rather than its actual location which is three miles east. Because I have an aerial photo of the area, and hiked this trail last year, I have excellent reason to know that the map is in error. When I help you to see the error, do you get upset with me? Do you feel you must "defend your map" as being correct? Probably not, because you recognize that the map is not you--it is only a useful and important tool that helps us find our way around and make good decisions. If the map is inaccurate, we may make some bad decisions that will hurt us and/or others. Having someone help correct errors in the map we are using is something to be grateful for.

In the same way, beliefs can be viewed as reality maps. When someone points out an error in the map I am using, I can simply make the correction on the "reality map" and thank them for helping to produce a more accurate description of reality. Beliefs do not have to be viewed as who we are, we can see them as only a map, which can and should be continually revised in the interests of making it more accurate.

Sometimes people have a hard time understanding the idea of attachment because we live in a society in which virtually everything is owned by someone, so it is hard to think of something as not belonging to anyone. Let's look at a conversation that may shed some additional light on the idea of personal attachment and nonattachment to beliefs.

> Instructor: "Who does that backpack on the floor belong to?"
> Student: "Me."
> Instructor: "And who does the belief that "Debate is the best way to carry out a discussion" belong to?"
> Student: "Me."
> Instructor: "Now let's imagine you are at the beach and see a shell at your feet. Who does that shell belong to?"
> Student: "No one."
> Instructor: "Yes! Now suppose you pick the shell up and look at it closely? Whose shell is it? At this point you have a choice. You could say it is "your shell," or you could say

> it is nobody's shell in particular, it is just a shell we are presently looking at. It might even be useful to us as a tool for scraping tar off our feet. But we don't have to see the shell as belonging to anyone. Suppose you left the beach, went across the street and bought a shell in a gift shop. What if someone later said that the shell was ugly? Would you defend it? In this case, the tendency would be to think of the shell as "yours," something that is attached to you and must be protected and defended."

We can choose to do essentially the same thing in regard to beliefs as we can shells. They do not have to be viewed as belonging to anyone in particular. They are simply descriptions of reality. If they are accurate descriptions they will be useful to us. But they do not have to be viewed as "your description" or "my description."

This can be of enormous help in moving the discussion away from worrying about "Who is right?" to being concerned with "What is right?" Beliefs do not have to be seen as attached to specific people--once you have said or written something you can let it go; it is no longer "yours," it is simply a belief, an attempt at drawing part of a map, if you will, that we can all look at and work with and try to make as accurate as possible. At this point our efforts can more easily become collaborative rather than competitive. It can be you and I together working to find the truth and make a better map, rather than you against me competing to determine who will "win" and best the other in some sort of personal contest.

Buddhist Precepts on Right Livelihood and Protecting Life

by Thich Nhat Hanh

THE ELEVENTH PRECEPT: RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

> Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to live. Select a vocation that helps realize your ideal of compassion.

Right livelihood is a branch of the Noble Eightfold Path. It implies practicing a profession that harms neither humans nor nature, physically or morally. Practicing mindfulness at work helps us discover whether our livelihood is right or not. We live in a society where jobs are hard to find and it is difficult to practice right livelihood. Still, if it happens that our work entails harming life, we should try our best to find another job. We should not drown in forgetfulness. Our vocation can nourish our understanding and compassion, or it can erode them. Therefore, our work has much to do with our practice of the Way.

Many modern industries, even food manufacturing, are harmful to humans and nature. Most current farming practices are distant from right livelihood. The chemical poisons used by modern farmers harm the environment. Practicing right livelihood has become a difficult task for farmers. If they do not use chemical pesticides, it may be difficult to compete commercially. Not many farmers have the courage to practice organic farming. Right livelihood has ceased to be a purely personal matter. It is our collective karma.

Suppose I am a school teacher and I believe that nurturing love and understanding in children is a beautiful occupation, an example of right livelihood. I would object if someone asked me to stop teaching and become, for example, a butcher. However, if I meditate on the interrelatedness of all things, I will see that the butcher is not solely responsible for killing animals. He kills them for all of us who buy pieces of raw meat, cleanly wrapped and displayed at our local supermarket. The act of killing is a collective one. In forgetfulness, we may separate ourselves from the butcher, thinking his livelihood is wrong, while ours is right. However, if we didn't eat meat, the butcher wouldn't kill it or would kill less. This is why right livelihood is a collective matter. The livelihood of each person affects all of us, and vice versa. The butcher's children may benefit from my teaching, while my children, because they eat meat, share some responsibility for the butcher's livelihood of killing.

Millions of people make a living off the arms industry, manufacturing "conventional" and nuclear weapons. These so-called conventional weapons are sold to Third World countries, most of them underdeveloped. People in these countries need food, not guns, tanks, or bombs. The United States, Russia, France, Britain, and China are the primary suppliers of these weapons. Manufacturing and selling weapons is certainly not right livelihood, but the responsibility for this situation does not lie solely with the workers

in the arms industry. All of us--politicians, economists, and consumers--share the responsibility for the death and destruction caused by these weapons. We do not see clearly enough, we do not speak out, and we do not organize enough national debates on this huge problem. If we could discuss these issues globally, solutions could be found. New jobs must be created so that we do not have to live on the profits of weapons manufacturing.

If we are able to work in a profession that helps us realize our ideal of compassion, we should be very grateful. Every day, we should help create proper jobs for ourselves and others by living correctly, simply and sanely. To awaken ourselves and others and to help ourselves and others are the essence of Mahayana Buddhism. Individual karma cannot be separated from collective karma. If you have the opportunity, please use your energy to improve both. This is the realization of the first of the Four Great Vows.

THE TWELFTH PRECEPT: PROTECTING LIFE

> Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.

In every country in the world, killing human beings is condemned. The Buddhist precept of non-killing extends even further, to include all living beings. However, no one, not even a buddha or a bodhisattva, can observe this precept to perfection. When we take a step or boil a cup of water, we kill many tiny living beings. The essence of this precept is to make every effort to respect and protect life, to continuously move in the direction of non-killing. We can try our best, even if we cannot succeed one hundred percent.

This precept is closely linked with the eleventh. Our patterns of livelihood and consuming have very much to do with the lives and security of humans and other living beings. There are many causes of war. War can be caused by fanaticism and narrowness, or by the will to gain political influence or economic power. Or it can be the exploitation of one society by another that is technologically or politically stronger. We can oppose wars once they have started, but it is better to also do our best to prevent wars from breaking out. The way to prevent war is to make peace. We accomplish this first in our daily life by combating fanaticism and attachment to views, and working for social justice. We have to work vigorously against the political and economic ambitions of any country, including our own. If important issues like these are not debated on national and international levels, we will never be able to prevent war.

We begin by studying and observing this precept of no killing in our daily lives, and then we can work to bring out the real issues of war and peace to the whole nation. If we do not live our daily lives mindfully, we ourselves are responsible, to some extent, for the structure of war. The amount of grain used in Western countries to make liquor and feed cattle, for example, is enormous. Professor Francois Peroux, director of the Institute of Applied Mathematics and Economics in Paris, has suggested that by reducing meat and alcohol consumption in the West by fifty percent, the grains that would become available would be enough to solve all hunger and malnutrition problems in the Third World. Deaths caused by automobile accidents and cardiovascular illnesses would also be reduced in the West if the consumption of liquor and meat would decrease.

Defense budgets in Western countries continue to be mammoth, even after the post-Cold War spending cuts. Studies show that if we could stop or significantly slow down the manufacture of weapons, we would have more than enough money to erase poverty, hunger, many diseases, and ignorance from the world. In our busy daily lives, do we have enough time to look deeply into this precept of non-killing? How many among us can honestly say that we are doing enough to observe this precept?

"Please Call Me By My True Names"

In Plum Village in France, we receive many letters from the refugee camps in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, hundreds each week. It is very painful to read them, but we have to do it, we have to be in contact. We try our best to help, but the suffering is enormous, and sometimes we are discouraged. It is said that half the boat people die in the ocean; only half arrive at the shores in Southeast Asia.

There are many young girls, boat people, who are raped by sea pirates. Even though the United nations and many countries try to help the government of Thailand prevent that kind of piracy, sea pirates continue to inflict much suffering on the refugees. One day we received a letter telling us about a young

girl on a small boat who was raped by a Thai pirate. She was only twelve, and she jumped into the ocean and drowned herself.

When you first learn of something like that, you get angry at the pirate. You naturally take the side of the girl. As you look more deeply you will see it differently. If you take the side of the little girl, then it is easy. You only have to take a gun and shoot the pirate. But we cannot do that. In my meditation I saw that if I had been born in the village of the pirate and raised in the same conditions as he was, I am now the pirate. There is a great likelihood that I would become a pirate. I cannot condemn myself so easily. In my meditation, I saw that many babies are born along the Gulf of Siam, hundreds every day, and if we educators, social workers, politicians, and others do not do something about the situation, in 25 years a number of them will become sea pirates. That is certain. If you or I were born today in those fishing villages, we might become sea pirates in 25 years. If you take a gun and shoot the pirate, you shoot all of us, because all of us are to some extent responsible for this state of affairs.

After a long meditation, I wrote this poem. In it, there are three people: the twelve-year-old girl, the pirate, and me. Can we look at each other and recognize ourselves in each other? The title of the poem is "Please Call Me By My True Names," because I have so many names. When I hear one of these names, I have to say, "Yes."

Do not say that I'll depart tomorrow
because even today I still arrive.

Look deeply: I arrive in every second
to be a bud on a spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with wings still fragile, learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry, in order to fear and to hope,
the rhythm of my heart is the birth and death of all that are alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the surface of the river,
and I am the bird which, when spring comes, arrives in time to eat the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily in the clear water of a pond
and I am also the grass-snake who, approaching in silence, feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones, my legs as thin as bamboo sticks,
and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

I am the 12 year old girl, refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate,
and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.

In am a member of the politburo, with plenty of power in my hands,
and I am the man who has to pay his "debt of blood" to my people
dying slowly in a forced labor camp.

My joy is like spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom in all walks of life.
My pain is like a river of tears, so full it fills up the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and my laughs at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up,
and so the door of my heart can be left open
the door of compassion.

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*The Eleventh Precept and The Twelfth Precept are excerpted from *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism,* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1993, pp. 39-43. The selection "Please Call Me By My True Names" is from *Being Peace,* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1987, pp. 61-64.

Terrorism and Peace

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Two days after the events of September 11th, I spoke to 4,000 people in Berkeley, California. I said that our emotions are very strong right now, and we should calm ourselves down. With lucidity and calm we would know what to do and what not to do in order not to make the situation worse. I said that the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center must have been very angry. They must have hated America a lot. They must have thought of America as having tried to destroy them as individual people, as a religion, as a nation, and as a culture. I said that we had to find out why they did such a thing to America.

America's political leaders can ask the question, calmly and with clarity: "What have we done that has made you suffer so much?" America's political leaders can say, "We want to know about your suffering and why you hate us. We may have said something or done something that gave you the impression that we wanted to destroy you. But that is not the case. We are confused, and that is why we want you to help us understand why you have done such a thing to us."

We call this loving or gentle speech. If we are honest and sincere, they will tell us how they feel. Then we will recognize the wrong perceptions they have about themselves and about us. We can try to help them to remove their wrong perceptions. All these acts of terrorism and violence come from wrong perceptions. Wrong perceptions are the ground for anger, violence and hate. You cannot remove wrong perceptions with a gun.

When we listen deeply to another person, we not only recognize their wrong perceptions, but we also identify our own wrong perceptions about ourselves and about the other person. That is why mindful dialogue and mindful communication is crucial to removing anger and violence.

It is my deepest hope that our political leaders can make use of such instruments to bring peace to the world. I believe that using force and violence can only make the situation worse. Since September 11th, America has not been able to decrease the level of hate and violence on the part of the terrorists. In fact, the level of hate and violence has increased. It is time for us to go back to the situation, to look deeply and to find another less costly way to bring peace to us and to them. Violence cannot remove violence--everyone knows that. Only with the practice of deep listening and gentle communication can we help remove wrong perceptions that are at the foundation of violence.

American has a lot of difficulty in Iraq. I think that America is caught in Iraq the same way that America was caught in Vietnam. We have the idea that we have to go and destroy the enemy. That idea will never give us a chance to do the right thing to end violence. During the Vietnam War, America thought that it had to go to North Vietnam to bomb. The more America bombed, the more communists they created. I am afraid that the same thing is happening in Iraq. I think that it is very difficult for America to withdraw now from Iraq. Even if they want to leave, it is very difficult.

The only way for America to free itself from the situation is to help build the United Nations into a real body of peace so that the United Nations will take over the problem of Iraq and of the Middle East. America is powerful enough to make this happen. America should allow other nations to contribute positively to building the United Nations into a true organization for peace with enough authority to do its job. To me, that is the only way out of our current situation.

We have to wake up to the fact that everything is connected to everything else. Our safety and well-being cannot be individual matters anymore. If they are not safe, there is no way we can be safe. Taking care of other people's safety is taking care of our own safety. To take care of their well-being is take car of our own well-being. It is the mind of discrimination and separation that is at the foundation of all violence and hate.

My right hand has written all the poems that I have composed. My left hand has not written a single poem. But my right hand does not think, "Left Hand, you are good for nothing." My right hand does not have a superiority complex. That is why it is very happy. My left hand does not have any complex at all. In my two hands there is the kind of wisdom called the wisdom of nondiscrimination. One day I was hammering a nail and my right hand was not very accurate and instead of pounding on the nail it pounded on my finger. It put the hammer down and took care of the left hand in a very tender way, as if it were taking care of itself. It did not say, "Left Hand, you have to remember that I have taken good care of you and you have to pay me back in the future." There was no such thinking. And my left hand did not say, "Right Hand, you have done me a lot of harm; give me that hammer, I want justice." My two hands know that they are members of one body; they are in each other.

I think that if Israelis and Palestinians knew that they were brothers and sisters--that they were like my two hands--they would not try to punish each other anymore. The world community has not helped them to see that. If Israelis and Palestinians, and Muslims and Hindus, knew that discrimination was at the base of our suffering, they would know how to touch the seed of nondiscrimination in themselves. That kind of awakening--that kind of deep understanding--brings about reconciliation and well-being.

I believe that that in America there are many people who are awakened to the fact that violence cannot remove violence. They realize there is no way to peace: peace itself is the way. Those people must come together and voice their concern strongly and offer their collective wisdom to the nation so the nation can get out of this current situation. Every one of us has the duty to bring together that collective insight. With that insight, compassion will make us strong and courageous enough to bring about a solution for the world.

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Excerpted from "There Is No Path to Peace; The Path Is Peace," by Thich Nhat Hanh, *Shambhala Sun,* Volume 12, Number 6, July 2004, pp.43-68.

Mindful Consumption

by Thich Nhat Hanh

> *Aware that true happiness is rooted in peace, solidity, freedom, and compassion, and not in wealth or fame, we are determined not to take as the aim of our life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure, nor to accumulate wealth while millions are hungry and dying. We are committed to living simply and sharing our time, energy, and material resources with those in need. We will practice mindful consuming, not using alcohol, drugs, or any other products that bring toxins into our own and the collective body and consciousness.*

...The aim of Buddhist life is to realize insight and to help people, not to gain fame, power, or wealth. How can we have time to live the Buddhist ideal if we are constantly pursuing wealth or fame? If we do not live simply, we have to work all the time to pay our bills, and there is little time left for practice [of the path]. The Sutra of the Eight Realizations of the Great Beings says, "The human mind is always searching for possessions and never feels fulfilled. This causes impure actions ever to increase. Bodhisattvas, however, always remember the principle of having few desires. They live a simple life in peace in order to practice the Way, and consider the realization of perfect understanding as their only career."

In the context of modern society, simple living also means to remain as free as possible from the destructive momentum of social and economic pressures, to avoid modern diseases such as stress, depression, high blood pressure, and heart disease. We must resolve to oppose the type of modern life filled with pressures and anxieties that so many people now live. The only way out is to consume less, to be content with fewer possessions. We must discuss this with others who share our concern for finding better ways to live simply and happily together. Once we are able to live simply and happily, we are better able to help others. We have more time and energy to share. Sharing is difficult if you are wealthy. Bodhisattvas who practice the *paramita* of living a simple life are able to give both their time and their energy to others. [Pages 32-33]

> *Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by*

practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society. [Page 71]

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Excerpted from *Interbeing, 3rd Edition,* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1998.

Blaming Never Helps

Thich Nhat Hanh

When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you do not blame the lettuce. You look into the reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce. Yet if we have problems with our friends or our family, we blame the other person. But if we know how to take care of them, they will grow well, like lettuce. Blaming has no positive effect at all, nor does trying to persuade using reason and arguments. That is my experience. No blame, no reasoning, no argument, just understanding. If you understand, and you show that you understand, you can love, and the situation will change.

One day in Paris, I gave a lecture about not blaming the lettuce. After the talk, I was doing walking meditation by myself, and when I turned the corner of a building, I overheard an eight-year-old girl telling her mother, "Mommy, remember to water me. I am your lettuce." I was so pleased that she had understood my point completely. Then I heard her mother reply, "Yes, my daughter, and I am your lettuce also. So please do not forget to water me too." Mother and daughter practicing together, it was very beautiful.

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Excerpted from *Peace Is Every Step,* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Bantam Books, 1991, pp. 78-79.

Working for True Peace

Thich Nhat Hanh

Millions of people follow sports. If you love to watch soccer, you probably root for one team and identify with them. You watch the games with despair and elation. Perhaps you give a little kick to help the ball along. If you do not take sides, the fun is missing. In wars we pick sides, usually the side which is being threatened. Peace movements are born of this feeling. We get angry, we shout, but rarely do we rise above all this to look at a conflict the way a mother would who is watching her two children fighting. She seeks only their reconciliation. Real efforts for reconciliation must arise from this heart of compassion which arises from meditating on the nature of interbeing and interpenetration of all beings.

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Excerpted from *The Sun My Heart,* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1988, p. 74

Peace Can Exist When...

Thich Nhat Hanh

Peace can exist only in the present moment. It is ridiculous to say, "Wait until I finish this, then I will be free to live in peace." What is "this?" A diploma, a job, a house, the payment of a debt? If you think

that way, peace will never come. There is always another "this" that will follow the present one. If you are not living in peace at this moment, you will never be able to. If you truly want to be at peace, you must be at peace right now. Otherwise, there is only "the hope of peace someday."

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Excerpted from *The Sun My Heart,* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1988, p. 125.

Grass Cutting Story

By 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. On the way, 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 could not 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.

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Excerpted from *Only Don't Know; The Teaching Letters of Zen Master Seung Sahn,* Four Seasons Foundation, San Francisco, 1982, p. 79.

The Causes of Suffering: A Buddhist Analysis

Jack Kornfield

Grasping and Wanting

Grasping and wanting are two names for the most painful aspects of desire. Because our language uses the word desire in so many ways, it is helpful to sort them out. There are beneficial desires such as the desire for the well-being of others, the desire for enlightenment, the creative desires that express the positive aspects of passion and beauty. There are painful aspects of desire--the desires of addiction, greed, blind ambition, or unending internal hunger. Through meditative awareness we can bring an attention that can sort out and know the many forms of desire...

In beginning to name the demons, we can especially look for the difficult sides of desire, the grasping and wanting mind. When the wanting mind first arises we may not recognize it as a demon because we are often lost in its allure. Wanting is characterized as a Hungry Ghost, a ghost with an enormous belly and tiny pinhole mouth, who can never eat enough to satisfy his endless need. When this demon or difficulty arises, simply name it as "wanting" or "grasping" and begin to study its power in your life. When we look at wanting, we experience the part of ourselves that is never content, that always says, "If only I had something more, THAT would make me happy ...some other relationship, some other job, some more comfortable meditation cushion, less noise, cooler temperature, warmer temperature, more money, a little more sleep last night... then I would be fulfilled." In meditation the voice of wanting calls to us and says, "If only I had something to eat now, I'd eat, then I'd be satisfied, and then I could get enlightened." The desire of wanting is the unconscious voice that can see an attractive meditator sitting nearby and imagine a whole romance fulfilled, a relationship, marriage, and divorce, and only half an hour later remember that we are meditating. For the voice of wanting, what is here now is never enough.

Naming the Wanting Mind

As we work to observe the wanting and grasping without condemning it, we can learn to be aware of this aspect of our nature without being caught up in it. When it arises we can feel it fully, naming our experience "hunger," "wanting," "longing," or whatever it is. Name it softly the whole time it is present, repeating the name every few seconds, five, ten, twenty times until it ends. As you note it, be conscious of what happens: How long does this kind of desire last? Does it intensify first or just fade away? How does it feel in the body? What parts of the body are affected by it--the gut, the breath, the eyes? What does it feel like in the heart, in the mind? When it is present, are you happy or agitated, open or closed?

...When we look, we see that wanting creates tension, that it is actually painful. We see how it arises out of our sense of longing and incompleteness, a feeling that we are separate and not whole. Observing more closely we notice that it is also fleeting, without essence. This aspect of desire is actually a form of imagination and accompanying feeling that comes and goes in our body and mind. Of course, at other times it seems very real...

Do not confuse desire with pleasure. There is nothing wrong with enjoying pleasant experiences. Given the many difficulties we often face in life, enjoyment is wonderful to have. However, the wanting mind grasps at the pleasure. We are taught in this culture that if we can grasp enough pleasurable experiences quickly one after another, our life will be happy. By following a good game of tennis with a delicious dinner, a fine movie, then wonderful sex and sleep, and a good morning jog, a fine hour of meditation, an excellent breakfast, and off to an exciting morning of work, happiness will last. Our society is masterful at perpetuating this ruse. But will this satisfy the heart?

What happens when we do fulfill wanting? It often brings on more wanting. The whole process can become very tiring and empty. " What am I going to do next? Well, I'll just get some more." George Bernard Shaw said, " There are two great disappointments in life. Not getting what you want and getting it." The process of such unskillful desire is endless, because peace comes not from fulfilling our wants but from the moment that dissatisfaction ends. When wanting is filled, there comes a moment of satisfaction, not from the pleasure, but from stopping of the grasping.

As you name the wanting mind and feel it carefully, notice what happens just after it ends, and notice what states then follow. The issue of wanting and desire is a profound one. You will see how often our desires are misplaced. An obvious example is when we use food to replace the love we long for. To explain this, one Buddhist teacher, Geneen Roth, who works with eating disorders, wrote a book called *Feeding the Hungry Heart.* Through the practice of naming, we can sense how much of our surface desire arises from some deeper wanting in our being, from an underlying loneliness or fear or emptiness...

When we study Buddhist psychology, we discover that desire is divided into many categories. Most fundamentally these desires are then separated into painful desire and skillful desire, both aspects stemming from a neutral energy called the Will to Do. Painful desire involves greed, grasping, inadequacy, and longing. Skillful desire is born of this same Will to Do but directed by love, vitality, compassion, creativity, and wisdom. With the development of awareness, we begin to distinguish unhealthy desire from skillful motivation. We can sense which states are free from unskillful desire and enjoy a more spontaneous and natural way of being without struggle or ambition...

...One old teacher of mine said, " The problem with desire is that you do not desire deeply enough! ...You do not like what you have and want what you do not have. Simply reverse this. Want what you have and do not want what you do not have. Here you will find true fulfillment..."

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Excerpted from *A Path With Heart,* by Jack Kornfield, Bantam Books, 1993, pp. 85-88.

Transiency

Shunryu Suzuki

The basic teaching of Buddhism is the teaching of transiency, or change. That everything changes is the basic truth for each existence. No one can deny this truth… Wherever we go this teaching is true. This teaching is also understood as the teaching of selflessness. Because each existence is in constant change, there is no abiding self. In fact, the self-nature of each existence is nothing but change itself, the self-nature of all existence. There is no special, separate self-nature for each existence…

Without accepting the fact that everything changes, we cannot find perfect composure. But unfortunately, although it is true, it is difficult for us to accept it. Because we do not accept the truth of transiency, we suffer. So the cause of suffering is our non-acceptance of this truth… But whether we feel good or bad about it, this truth exists…

Without realizing how to accept this truth you cannot live in this world. Even though you try to escape from it, your effort will be in vain. If you think there is some other way to accept the eternal truth that everything changes, that is your delusion. This is the basic teaching of how to live in this world. Whatever you may feel about it, you have to accept it. You have to make this kind of effort.

…Actually, if you become honest enough, or straightforward enough, it is not so difficult to accept this truth. You can change your way of thinking a little bit. It is difficult, but this difficulty will not always be the same. Sometimes it will be difficult, and sometimes it will not be so difficult. If you are suffering, you will have some pleasure in the teaching that everything changes. When you are in trouble, it is quite easy to accept the teaching. So why not accept it at other times? It is the same thing.

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Excerpted from *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind,* by Shunryu Suzuki, Weatherhill, 1994 (first published 1970), pp. 102-4.

Buddhist Concept of Self

by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman

If we imagine that our mind is like the blue sky, and that across it pass thoughts as clouds, we can get a feel for that part of it which is other than our thoughts. The sky is always present; it contains the clouds and yet is not contained by them. So with our awareness. It is present and encompasses all our thoughts, feelings, and sensations; yet it is not the same as them. To recognize and acknowledge this awareness, with its spacious, peaceful quality, is to find a very useful resource within. We see that we need not identify with each thought just because it happens to occur. We can remain quiet and choose which thought we wish to attend to. And we can remain aware behind all these thoughts, in a state that offers an entirely new level of openness and insight.

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Excerpted from *How Can I Help; Stories and Reflections on Service,* by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, p. 102. Excerpt title was not part of original text.

The Nature of Selflessness

Jack Kornfield

When the Buddha confronted the question of identity on the night of his enlightenment, he came to the radical discovery that we do not exist as separate beings. He saw into the human tendency to identify with a limited sense of existence and discovered that this belief in an individual small self is a root illusion that causes suffering and removes us from the freedom and mystery of life. He described this as interdependent arising, the cyclical process of consciousness creating identity by entering form, responding to contact of the senses, then attaching to certain forms, feelings, desires, images, and actions to create a sense of self.

In teaching, the Buddha never spoke of humans as persons existing in some fixed or static way. Instead, he described us as a collection of perceptions, of responses, and of the flow of consciousness that experiences them all. Our sense of self arises whenever we grasp at or identify with these patterns. The process of identification, of selecting patterns to call " I," "me," " myself," is subtle and usually hidden from our awareness. We can identify with our body, feelings, or thoughts; we can identify with images, patterns, roles, and archetypes. Thus, in our culture, we might fix and identify with the role of being a woman or a man, a parent or a child. We might take our family history, our genetics, and our heredity to be who we are. Sometimes we identify with our desires: sexual, aesthetic, or spiritual. In the same way we can focus on our intellect or take our astrological sign as an identity. We can choose the archetype of hero, lover, mother, never-do-well, adventurer, clown, or thief as our identity and live a year or a whole lifetime based on that. To the extent that we grasp these false identities, we continually have to protect and defend ourselves, strive to fulfill what is limited or deficient in them, to fear their loss.

Yet these are not our true identity. One master with whom I studied used to laugh at how easily and commonly we would grasp at new identities. As for himself, he would say," I am none of that. I am not this body, so I was never born and will never die. I am nothing and I am everything. Your identities make all your problems. Discover what is beyond them, the delight of the timeless, the deathless."

Because the question of identity and selflessness is subject to confusion and misunderstanding, let us go into it more carefully. When Buddhists speak of emptiness and no self, what do they mean? Emptiness does not mean that things do not exist, nor does " no self" mean that we do not exist. Emptiness refers to the underlying nonseparation of life and the fertile ground of energy that gives rise to all forms of life. Our world and sense of self is a play of patterns. Any identity we can grasp is transient, tentative. This is difficult to understand from words such as selflessness or emptiness of self. However, the experience of selflessness in practice can bring us to great freedom.

In the chapter on dissolving the self, we saw how deep meditation can untangle the sense of identity. There are, in fact, many ways in which we realize the emptiness of self. When we are silent and attentive, we can sense directly how nothing in the world can be truly possessed by us. Clearly we do not possess outer things; we are in some relationship with our cars, our home, our family, our jobs, but whatever that relationship is, it is " ours" only for a short time. In the end, things, people, or tasks die or change or we lose them. Nothing is exempt.

When we bring attention to any moment of experience, we discover that we do not possess it either. As we look, we find that we neither invite our thoughts nor own them. We might even wish them to stop, but our thoughts seem to think themselves, arising and passing according to their nature.

The same is true of our feelings. How many of us believe we control our feelings? As we pay attention, we see that they are more like the weather--moods and feelings change according to certain conditions, and are neither possessed nor directed by our consciousness or desires. Do we order happiness, sadness, irritation, excitement, or restlessness to come? Feelings arise by themselves, as the breath breathes itself, as sounds sound themselves.

Our body, too, follows its own laws. The body which we carry is a bag of bones and fluid that cannot be possessed. It ages, gets sick, or changes in ways we might not wish it to, all according to its own nature. The more we look, in fact, the more deeply we see that we possess nothing within or without.

We encounter another aspect of the emptiness of self when we notice how everything arises out of nothing, comes out of the void, returns to the void, goes back to nothing. All our words of the past day have disappeared. Similarly, where has the past week or the past month, or our childhood gone? They arose, did a little dance, and now they are vanished, along with the 1960ís, the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries, the ancient Romans and Greeks, the Pharohs, and so forth. All experience arises in the present, does its dance, and disappears. Experience comes into being only tentatively, for a little time in a certain form; then that form ends and a new form replaces it moment by moment.

Excerpted from *A Path With Heart,* by Jack Kornfield, Bantam Books, 1993, pp. 199-201.

Everything is Interrelated

Thich Nhat Hanh

Meditation is not to get out of society, to escape from society, but to prepare for a reentry into society. We call this "engaged Buddhism." When we go to a meditation center, we may have the impression that we leave everything behind--family, society, and all the complications involved in them--and come as an individual in order to practice and to search for peace. This is already an illusion, because in Buddhism there is no such thing as an individual.

Just as a piece of paper is the fruit, the combination of many elements that can be called nonpaper elements, the individual is made of nonindividual elements. If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud there will be no water; without water, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, you cannot make paper. So the cloud is in here. The existence of this page is dependent on the existence of a cloud. Paper and cloud are so close. Let us think of other things, like sunshine. Sunshine is very important because the forest cannot grow without sunshine, and we humans cannot grow without sunshine. So the logger needs sunshine in order to cut the tree, and the tree needs sunshine in order to be a tree. Therefore you can see sunshine in this sheet of paper. And if you look more deeply, with the eyes of a bodhisattva, with the eyes of those who are awake, you see not only the cloud and the sunshine in it, but that everything is here: the wheat that became the bread for the logger to eat, the logger's father--everything is in this sheet of paper.

The Avatamsaka Sutra tells us that you cannot point to one thing that does not have a relationship with this sheet of paper. So we say, "A sheet of paper is made of nonpaper elements." A cloud is a nonpaper element. The forest is a nonpaper element. Sunshine is a nonpaper element. The paper is made of all the nonpaper elements to the extent that if we return the nonpaper elements to their sources, the cloud to the sky, the sunshine to the sun, the logger to his father, the paper is empty. Empty of what? Empty of a separate self. It has been made by all the nonself elements, nonpaper elements, and if all these nonpaper elements are taken out, it is truly empty, empty of an independent self. Empty, in this sense, means that the paper is full of everything, the entire cosmos. The presence of this tiny sheet of paper proves the presence of the whole cosmos.

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Excerpted from *Being Peace,* by Thich Nhatt Hanh, Parallax Press, 1987, pp. 45-7.

Buddhist Concepts

Thich Nhat Hanh

Not-Self

In order to understand not-self, the concept of impermanence (anitya) in Buddhism must also be considered. All is impermanent. Everything is in a state of perpetual change. Nothing remains the same for two consecutive ksanas (the shortest imaginable periods of time). It is because things transform themselves ceaselessly that they cannot maintain their identity, even during two consecutive ksanas. Not being able to fix their identity, they are not-self; that is to say, devoid of absolute identity. Not having a fixed identity, A is no longer the A of the preceding ksana; this is why one says that A is not A. Impermanence is another name for not-self. In time, things are impermanent; in space they are devoid of a fixed identity. Not only are physical phenomena impermanent and without a separate self, but the same is true of physiological phenomena, for example our body, mental phenomena, and feelings.

Many people think that anatman and anitya are the basis for a pessimistic moral doctrine. They say, "If all things are impermanent and devoid of a fixed identity, why bother to struggle so hard to obtain them?" This is a misunderstanding of the Buddha's teaching. Buddhism aims at liberation through understanding. It is therefore necessary to examine the teachings of the Buddha from the point of view of understanding, and not to take his words too literally without understanding their meaning. Impermanence and not-self are important principles that lead to deep understanding.

Things and Concepts

The principle of not-self brings to light the gap between things themselves and the concepts we have of them. Things are dynamic and alive, while our concepts are static. Look, for example, at a table. We have the impression that the table itself and our concept of it are identical. In reality, what we believe to be a table is only our concept. The table itself is quite different. Some notions--wood, brown, hard, three feet high, old, etc.--give rise to a concept of table in us. The table itself is always more than that. For example, a nuclear physicist will tell us that the table is a multitude of atoms whose electrons are moving like a swarm of bees, and that if we could put these atoms next to each other, the mass of matter would be smaller than one finger. This table, in reality, is always in transformation; in time as well as in space it is made only of non-table elements. It depends on these elements so much that if we were to remove them from the table, there would be nothing left.

The forest, the tree, the saw, the hammer, and the cabinetmaker are non-table elements, as are the parents of the cabinetmaker, the bread that they eat, the blacksmith who makes the hammer, and so on. If we know how to look deeply at the table, we can see the presence of all these non-table elements in it. The existence of the table demonstrates the existence of all non-table elements, in fact, of the entire universe. This idea is expressed in the Avatamsaka system of Buddhism by the notion of interbeing.

The Interbeing of Things

Genesis in Buddhism is called interbeing. The birth, growth, and decline of things depend upon multiple causes and conditions and not just a single one. The presence of one thing (dharma) implies the presence of all other things. The enlightened man or woman sees each thing not as a separate entity but as a complete manifestation of reality. The twelfth-century Vietnamese Zen monk, Dao Hanh, said, "If one

thing exists, everything exists, even a speck of dust. If one thing is empty, everything is empty, even the whole universe."

The doctrine of not-self aims at bringing to light the interbeing nature of things, and, at the same time, demonstrates to us that the concepts we have of things do not reflect and cannot convey reality. The world of concepts is not the world of reality. Conceptual knowledge is not the perfect instrument for studying truth. Words are inadequate to express the truth of ultimate reality.

The Vanity of Metaphysics

These preliminary remarks are the point of departure of Zen Buddhism. If concepts do not represent reality, then conceptual knowledge of reality can be considered erroneous. That is demonstrated many times in Buddhism. The Buddha always told his disciples not to waste their time and energy in metaphysical speculation. Whenever he was asked a metaphysical question, he remained silent. Instead, he directed his disciples toward practical efforts. Questioned one day about the problem of the infinity of the world, the Buddha said, "Whether the world is finite or infinite, limited or unlimited, the problem of your liberation remains the same." Another time he said, "Suppose a man is struck by a poisoned arrow and the doctor wishes to take out the arrow immediately. Suppose the man does not want the arrow removed until he knows who shot it, his age, his parents, and why he shot it. What would happen if he were to wait until all these questions have been answered, the man might die first." Life is so short. It must not be spent in endless metaphysical speculation that does not bring us any closer to the truth.

But if conceptual knowledge is fallible, what other instrument should we use to grasp reality? According to Buddhism, we only reach reality through direct experience. Study and speculation are based on concepts. In conceptualizing we cut reality into small pieces that seem to be independent of one another. This manner of conceiving things is called imaginative and discriminative knowledge (vikalpa) according to the Vijnanavadin school of Buddhism. The faculty that directly experiences reality without passing through concepts is called non-discriminative and non-imaginative wisdom (nirvikalpajuana). This wisdom is the fruit of meditation. It is a direct and perfect knowledge of reality, a form of understanding in which one does not distinguish between subject and object. It cannot be conceived by the intellect nor expressed by language.

Experience Itself

Suppose I invite you to join me for a cup of tea. You receive your cup, taste the tea, and then drink a little more. You seem to be enjoying it. Then you put your cup on the table and we have a conversation.

Now, suppose I ask you to describe the tea. You use your memory, your concepts, and your vocabulary to describe the sensations. You may say, "It is very good tea, the best Tich Kuan Ying tea, manufactured in Taipei. I can still taste it in my mouth. It is very refreshing." You could express your sensation in many other ways. But these concepts and these words describe your direct experience of the tea; they are not the experience itself. Indeed, in the direct experience of the tea, you do not make the distinction that you are the subject of the experience and that the tea is its object; you do not think that the tea is the best, or the worst, of the Tieh Kuan Ying of Taipei. There is no concept or word that can frame this pure sensation resulting from experience. You can offer as many descriptions as you like, but only you have had a direct experience of the tea. When someone listens to you, she can recreate for herself certain sensations, based on experiences that she might have had, but that is all. And you yourself, when you are describing the experience, are already no longer in it. In the experience, you were one with the tea. There was no distinction between subject and object, no evaluation, and no discrimination. That pure sensation is an example of nondiscriminative wisdom, which introduces us to the heart of reality.

The Moment of Awakening

To reach truth is not to accumulate knowledge, but to awaken to the heart of reality. Reality reveals itself complete and whole at the moment of awakening. In the light of awakening, nothing is added and nothing is lost. Emotions based on concepts no longer affect us. If Bodhidharma is an ideal person, it is because he has broken the chains of illusion that bind us to the world of concepts. The hammer used to break these chains is the practice of Zen. The moment of awakening may be marked by an outburst of laughter, but this is not the laughter of someone who has won the lottery or some kind of victory. It is the laughter of one who, after searching for something for a long time, suddenly finds it in the pocket of his coat.

One day the Buddha was standing in front of the assembly at Vulture Peak. Everyone was waiting for him to begin his Dharma talk, but he remained silent. After a long time, he held up a flower, still not uttering a single word. Everyone in the assembly looked at him, but they did not understand at all. Then one monk looked at the Buddha with sparkling eyes and smiled. The Buddha said, "I have the treasure of the vision of the perfect Dharma, the marvelous spirit of nirvana, the reality without impurity, and I have transmitted them to Mahakasyapa." The monk who smiled was, indeed, Mahakasyapa, one of the great disciples of the Buddha.

Mahakasyapa reached the moment of awakening when Buddha raised his flower. He truly saw the flower, and he received the "mind seal" of the Buddha, to use the Zen terminology. Buddha had transmitted his deep understanding from mind to mind. He had taken the seal of his mind and imprinted it on the mind of Mahakasyapa. The smile of Mahakasyapa was not a great outburst, but it was of the exact same nature and quality as the outbursts of laughter of the great Zen masters. Mahakasyapa arrived at awakening thanks to the flower and to his deep looking. Some Zen masters have attained awakening through a shout, a cry, or even a kick.

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Excerpted from *Zen Keys,* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Doublday, 1995 (originally published in 1974), pp. 39-45.

Central Buddhist Teachings

By Satish Kumar

Nandini did not feel that she herself was a potential Buddha, but she very much liked the idea of the Buddha as her friend. Although everyone revered him as a great guru, an enlightened master, an illustrious incarnation, and so on, these high-sounding attributes created a barrier of formality and a sense of distance; they produced hierarchy and expectation. So when the Buddha presented himself as a friend, it put Nandini at her ease, and she felt encouraged to seek some very personal advice. She said, "I try to follow your teachings on meditation, but find it hard to focus. It is difficult to be detached from desires, from likes and dislikes, from attractions and aversions. My mind keeps jumping around like a monkey. Tell me, my friend, should I be putting great effort into concentrating the mind or just let it wander?"

"Neither, Nandini," said the Buddha. "You are a musician, you play sitar. How do you tune it?"

"I tune it carefully so the strings are neither too loose nor too tight. Only then will the sitar sound sweet."

"So it is with the mind, Nandini. Allow it to be in balance. Avoid extremes: the middle way is better. Neither force the mind too hard into concentration nor let it wander aimlessly. Meditation is to pay attention, to be aware of your breathing, your posture, your feelings, your perceptions, your thoughts and all that passes through your mind and the mind itself; whatever is going on within you and between you and the universe. Meditation is not just sitting for an hour here or an hour there; meditation is a way of life. It is practiced all the time. There is no separation between meditation and everyday living. When you have ceased to be bound by the past or by the future, when you are fully present in the here and now, then it is meditation."

"This all sounds so simple, Enlightened One, but my memories, my dreams, my doubts, my anxieties dominate me. I wonder whether there is any purpose to this life, I wonder if the universe has a purpose—or does everything exist by chance? I even wonder whether the world was created—or is it without beginning? I wonder whether the world will come to an end—or will it continue forever? I wonder and wonder constantly, and so I find it impossible to live in the present moment."

In the tranquil surrounding of the Jeta Grove, Nandini was pouring out her problems. She was pleased to find the Buddha on his own, at peace, giving total attention to her. He smiled at Nandini and said, "All your wonderings are metaphysical speculation. What does it matter if the world had a beginning or not? Whether it will last for eternity or come to an end tomorrow? If an arrow hit your driver, would you ask who shot this arrow? Where it came from? In which foundry was it made? Who was the maker? Whether the arrowhead was made from iron or copper? Would you waste your time deliberating on these intellectual questions, or would you focus on pulling out the arrow from the body of the driver and find ways of healing the wound?"

"I would certainly be quick to remove the arrow."

"Then, noble Nandini, why are you wasting your time in pondering irrelevant metaphysical questions when you and your fellow beings are afflicted by suffering that is caused by ego and attachment? Isn't it urgent to look at your suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the ways to end suffering?"

Buddha was speaking with clarity. Nandini could feel the force of his convictions, but her intellect was resisting.

"Nevertheless, I want to find the truth," said Nandini, "the truth about the arrow. How can I rest without knowing the truth? Isn't it essential to find the truth and establish the facts?"

"Truth is only one virtue among many, and it is an elusive virtue at that," explained the Buddha. "Truth has to sit within the family of virtues. Seeking truth is not enough—especially not at the expense of addressing the pain of the present moment. Seeking compassion, love, generosity, friendship, and happiness is important, too. Moreover, these virtues are more helpful in ending suffering than the pursuit of truth."

"I do see your point," nodded Nandini, "but the problems of everyday life are not that simple." After a brief pause she said, "I believe you to be a wise man, so I will try to follow your teachings."

But the Buddha wished to take no such responsibility. He said, "Nandini, don't just follow me. Don't just accept this because I say so: try it for yourself, test it in your life. If you find that what I say resonates with your experience and with your own truth, only then accept it. If I tell you about the sweetness, the softness, and the fragrance of a mango fruit, it won't mean much. When you try it, taste it, and experience it for yourself, only then will you know what a mango is. Wisdom cannot be communicated in words or concepts or theories; it has to be discovered and experienced by yourself. My teaching to you is like pointing a finger to the moon. My finger is not the moon. Forget my finger and look at the moon. I say this to you because I have direct knowledge of suffering and I have direct knowledge of the end of suffering through the Noble Eightfold Path. This Eightfold Path of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration leads to peace, harmony, wholeness, and enlightenment."

"You speak of right view and right action, but how is one to know what is right and what is wrong?" asked Nandini.

"Whatever lessens suffering in yourself and others, that is right. Whatever increases suffering, that is wrong. The answer is within you. When you are free of pride and prejudice, when you are calm and attentive, a light will shine within you. Through meditation and through being mindful you will find your own knowledge of rightness. You will be your own light. Just be true to yourself, Nandini, just be yourself."

After a few moments, the Buddha continued, "I can point out the moon, but you will have to see the moon with your own eyes, and you will see it when you look up."

There was nothing more for Nandini to argue with. The Buddha had given her profound insights: much to meditate upon, and to practice.

Nandini took a walk to the lotus pond, and while she reflected upon the simple and restrained life-style of the Buddha, a deep sense of despondency overwhelmed her like a dark cloud. "The Buddha has only three robes," she thought. "One for the day, one for the night, and one to change into after bathing. His robes are a patchwork of many pieces of old cloth sewn together. He has just one blanket to sleep on and just one bowl for his food. He eats only once a day. Is he the same Siddhartha, who was the prince of many possessions? Now he is practicing utter restraint, whereas I am possessed by my possessions. My life is cluttered with so many objects—no wonder that my mind is cluttered. The Enlightened One is the master of his life, and therefore he is the master of the world. I am a mere manager of my goods and chattels. And yet I love my creature comforts—my saris of silk, my shawls of soft wool, my soft bed, my saffron rice, my servants, and my groom—I can't imagine shaving my head and possessing only three robes. How can I reconcile my longing for liberation and my attachment to the world? I am comfortable, but I am not happy. I want to be happy as well as comfortable. The Buddha doesn't seem bothered, but I am."

Once again, many doubts descended upon her. Sad and perplexed, Nandini sat by the pond holding her head in her hands.

The Buddha saw her from a distance. He realized that all was not well with Nandini, so he walked slowly down to the pond.

"Has the Buddha's discourse disturbed you, Nandini? You look worried."

"I am infected by doubts and dilemmas. You live a life of great restraint. You are happy with so little, but this is beyond me."

"Nandini, do not be so concerned with external forms, with appearances. You can practice loving-kindness wherever you are. What you consider the frugality of our life in Jeta Grove is not imposed or contrived; it arises naturally. Simplicity of material possessions is only one aspect of spiritual practice; what is more important is to simplify your inner life. Empty yourself of ambitions, likes, and dislikes." The Buddha spoke in a consoling voice.

"What do you mean by inner simplicity?" asked Nandini.

"More than our external burdens, we are burdened by the internal confusion of identity. Be free of such confusion, Nandini. Be empty of the idea of a separate self, a separate I. What does 'I' consist of? Am I my legs or my arms? Am I my intellect or my feelings? Am I my perceptions? Am I Siddhartha, a prince born in the Sakya clan? Who am I? What is my identity? I am no one thing. I am everything. I am not an isolated, autonomous, separate self. There is nothing to hold on to. Nothing to be attached to. I am a microcosm of the macrocosm. I am the universe itself. Life is a flow of energy: it takes a form and then dissolves. All forms are waves on the surface of the sea of life. They rise and they fall; there is no point in being attached to a changing form. Be the wave, and know that you are part of the great ocean of existence. That is the ultimate simplicity."

"But I am Nandini. I am this person with my own individual personality, with my own soul."

"You are and you are not. If you look beyond, you will see the big picture. What is left of you if the food you eat, the water you drink, the air you breathe is taken away from your body? What you call your 'individual personality' or your particular soul did not drop from the sky. Take away your father and your mother, take away all the ancestral influences you have inherited, take away all the culture, language, and the perceptions you have acquired: then what will be left of you? In this big picture, you carry within you the entire history of evolution as well as millions of years of the future to come, the entire network of

relationships, the continuous dance of life; you are much much more than this small individual soul imprisoned in this flesh and blood personality. You are infinitely flowing energy, you are indivisible; and that is what makes you individual."

"I see," said Nandidni. "I seem to have got into the habit of clinging to my separate self, but now I understand that the entire existence including myself is a dance of energy which moves without boundaries: from earth to humans and back to the earth and everything in between."

"Exactly so, Nandini," said the Buddha. "All life and everything besides flow into each other."

Nandini bowed to the Buddha. She felt calmer, and made her way home.

Excerpted from *The Buddha and the Terrorist*, by Satish Kumar, Algonquin Books, 2004, pp. 63-75.

Whirlpools and Stagnant Waters

By Charlotte Beck

We are rather like whirlpools in the river of life. In flowing forward, a river or stream may hit rocks, branches, or irregularities in the ground, causing whirlpools to spring up spontaneously here and there. Water entering one whirlpool quickly passes through and rejoins the river, eventually joining another whirlpool and moving on. Though for short periods it seems to be distinguishable as a separate event, the water in the whirlpools is just the river itself. The stability of a whirlpool is only temporary. The energy of the river of life forms living things—a human being, a cat or dog, trees and plants—then what held the whirlpool in place is itself altered, and the whirlpool is swept away, reentering the larger flow. The energy that was a particular whirlpool fades out and the water passes on, perhaps to be caught again and turned for a moment into another whirlpool.

We'd rather not think of our lives in this way, however. We don't want to see ourselves as simply a temporary formation, a whirlpool in the river of life. The fact is, we take form for a while; then when conditions are appropriate, we fade out; it's a natural part of the process. However, we want to think that this little whirlpool that we are isn't part of the stream. We want to see ourselves as permanent and stable. Our whole energy goes into trying to protect our supposed separateness. To protect the separateness, we set up artificial, fixed boundaries; as a consequence, we accumulate excess baggage, stuff that slips into our whirlpool and can't flow out again. So things clog up our whirlpool and the process gets messy. The stream needs to flow naturally and freely. If our particular whirlpool is all bogged down, we also impair the energy of the stream itself. It can't go anywhere. Neighboring whirlpools may get less water because of our frantic holding on. What we can best do for ourselves and for life is to keep the water in our whirlpool rushing and clear so that it is just flowing in and flowing out. When it gets all clogged up, we create troubles—mental, physical, spiritual.

We serve other whirlpools best if the water that enters ours is free to rush through and move on easily and quickly to whatever else needs to be stirred. The energy of life seeks rapid transformation. If we can see life this way and not cling to anything, life simply comes and goes. When debris flows into our little whirlpool, if the flow is even and strong, the debris rushes around for a while and then goes on its way. Yet that's not how we live our lives. Not seeing that we are simply a whirlpool in the river of the universe, we view ourselves as separate entities, needing to protect our boundaries. The very judgment "I feel hurt" establishes a boundary, by naming an "I" that demands to be protected. Whatever trash floats into our whirlpool, we make great efforts to avoid it, to expel it, or to somehow control it.

Ninety percent of a typical human life is spent trying to put boundaries around the whirlpool. We're constantly on guard: "He might hurt me." "This might go wrong." "I don't like him anyway." This is a complete misuse of our life function; yet we all do it to some degree.

Financial worries reflect our struggle to maintain fixed boundaries. "What if my investment doesn't work out? I might lose all of my money." We don't want anything to threaten our money supply. We all think that would be a terrible thing. By being protective and anxious, clinging to our assets, we clog up our lives. Water that should be rushing in and out, so it can serve, becomes stagnant. A whirlpool that puts up a dam around itself and shuts itself off from the river becomes stagnant and loses vitality. Practice is about no longer being caught in the particular, and instead seeing it for what it is—a part of the whole. Yet we spend most of our energies creating stagnant water. That's what living in fear will do. The fear exists because the whirlpool doesn't understand what it is—none other than the steam itself. Until we get an inkling of that truth, all of our energies go in the wrong direction. We create many stagnant pools, which breed contamination and disease. Pools seeking to dam themselves for protection begin to contend with one another. "You're smelly. I don't like you." Stagnant pools cause a lot of trouble. The freshness of life is gone.

Zen practice helps us to see how we have created stagnation in our lives. "Have I always been so angry, and just never noticed it?" So our first discovery in practice is to recognize our own stagnation, created by our self-centered thoughts. The biggest problems are created by attitudes we cannot see in ourselves. Unacknowledged depression, fear, and anger create rigidity. When we recognize the rigidity and stagnation, the water begins to flow again, bit by bit. So the most vital part of practice is to be willing to be life itself—which is simply the incoming sensations--that which creates our whirlpool.

Over the years we have trained ourselves to do the opposite: to create stagnant pools. This is our false accomplishment. Out of this ongoing effort come all of our troubles and our separation from life. We don't know how to be intimate, to be the stream of life. A stagnant whirlpool with defended boundaries isn't close to anything. Caught in a self-centered dream, we suffer, as one of our daily Zen Center vows states. Practice is the slow reversal of that… The change is often painful, especially at first. When we are used to the rigidity and controlled stiffness of a defended life, we don't want to allow fresh currents into awareness, however refreshing they may truly be.

…It takes a long time before we can see our defensiveness and manipulation of life in our daily activities. Practice helps us to see these maneuvers more clearly… it's essential that we see what we are doing. The longer we practice, the more readily we can recognize our defensive patterns…

What we do get out of practice is being more awake. Being more alive. Knowing our mischievous tendencies so well that we don't need to visit them on others. We learn that it's never okay to yell at somebody just because we feel upset. Practice helps us to realize where our life is stagnant. Unlike rushing mountain streams, with wonderful water flowing in and flowing out, we may be brought to a dead halt by "I don't like it…He really hurt my feelings," or "I have such a hard life." In truth, there is only the ongoing rush of the water. What we call our life is nothing but a little detour, a whirlpool that springs up, then fades away. Sometimes the detours are tiny and very brief: life swirls for a year or two in one place, then is wiped away. People wonder why some babies die when they are young. Who knows? We don't know why. It is part of this endless rushing of energy. When we can join this, we're at peace. When all of our efforts go in the opposite direction, we are not at peace.

STUDENT: In our individual lives, is it a good idea to choose some specific direction and set our sights on that, or is it better just to take things as they come? Setting up specific goals can block the flow of life, right?

BECK: The problem lies not in having goals, but in how we relate to them. We need to have some goals. For example, parents typically set certain goals for themselves, such as planning ahead to provide for their

children's education. People with natural talents have the goal of developing them. Nothing wrong with that. Having goals is part of being human. It's the way we do it that creates the trouble.

STUDENT: The best way is to have goals but not cling to the end result?

BECK: That's right. One simply does what is required to reach the goal. Anyone who seeks an educational degree needs to register in an educational program and take the courses, for example. The point is to promote the goal by accomplishing it in the present: doing this, doing that, doing this, as it becomes necessary, right here, right now. At some point, we get the degree or whatever. On the other hand, if we only dream of the goal and neglect to pay attention to the present, we will probably fail to get on with our lives—and become stagnant.

Whatever choice we make, the outcome will provide us with a lesson. If we are attentive and aware, we will learn what we need to do next. In this sense, there is no wrong decision. The minute we make a decision, we are confronted with our next teacher. We may make decisions that make us very uncomfortable. We may be sorry that we did what we did—and we learn from that. There is, for example, no ideal person to marry or ideal way to live one's life. The minute we marry somebody, we have a fresh set of opportunities for learning, fuel for practice. That's true not only of marriage, but of any relationship. Insofar as we practice with what comes up, the outcome will nearly always be rewarding and worthwhile…

STUDENT: In terms of the analogy of the whirlpools and the river, what is the difference between life and death?

BECK: A whirlpool is a vortex, with a center around which the water spins. As one's life goes on, the center gradually gets weaker and weaker. When it weakens enough, it flattens out and the water simply becomes part of the river again.

STUDENT: From that point of view, wouldn't it be better to always be just part of the river?

BECK: We are always part of the river, whether or not we are a whirlpool. We can't avoid being part of the river. We don't know that, however, because we have a distinct form and do not see beyond it.

STUDENT: So it's a delusion that life is different from death?

BECK: That's true in an absolute sense, though from our human point of view they are distinct. On different levels, each is true: there is no life and death *and* there is life and death. When we know only the latter, we cling to life and fear death. When we see both, the sting of death is largely mitigated.

Excerpted from *Nothing Special: Living Zen*, by Charlotte Beck, Harper Collins Publishers, 1993, pages 3-8. This excerpt was edited by Dale Lugenbehl, January 2010.

Karma

By Joseph Goldstein

Obvious Karma

It is easy for us to understand the role of physical laws, such as the law of gravity or the laws of thermodynamics. The Buddha saw that there is a natural moral law at work as well, influencing the experiences of life. He called it the law of karma, which is just this understanding that actions bring results. The principle is found in many spiritual traditions. Perhaps the most commonly recognized

example for us in the West is the biblical saying that we reap what we sow...

...Greed, hatred, and delusion are unwholesome qualities that produce fruits of suffering; generosity, love, and wisdom are wholesome factors that bear fruits of happiness.

...In addition to the feelings themselves, the mind states often bring about speech and action. And actions create reaction. What is likely to happen if you kick a sleeping grizzly? That would be the law of karma at work. What responses are we likely to get if we treat people with kindness, clarity, and honesty? Or if we treat them with rudeness, blaming, deception? In such simple, obvious ways every day our mind states affect what we say and do and bring us quick karmic results.

...As we experience the pain or the happiness that derives from present mind states or past actions, we see that no mental event or outward action ends in itself; it leaves an impact or imprint in the mind. Those consequences demonstrate the law of karma. This is not the whole picture, but still we begin to see that cause and effect is not just a spiritual concept; to a large extent, it is what we are...

Subtleties of Karma

But there are many subtleties in understanding the law of karma and many ways in which it can be misunderstood. Sometimes people feel that this law of moral cause and effect is deterministic or fatalistic, as if we were bound and powerless in a completely mechanistic system. This is not an accurate understanding, because our actions do not bring about predetermined results. Rather, each action is a seed, and the seed will bear some fruit, but what that particular fruit will be depends on many different conditions interacting in extraordinarily subtle and complex ways.

For example, one of the conditions that determine the karmic result of a past action is the present state of our mind and its on-going, habituated states. When our mind is generally free from greed, hatred, and ignorance, then unwholesome actions of the past have less opportunity to come to fruition. We are, as it were, protected by the energy field of present wholesomeness; the purity of our mind blocks or modifies those unwholesome karmic results. Likewise, if anger, hatred, fear, greed, or delusion fill our mind habitually, those qualities create the field for past unwholesome actions to bear fruit, and they block or modify the fruits of past wholesome actions.

Ignorance, the Root of Harming

When harm is done, who or what is ultimately responsible?

A teacher of a friend of mine was a Hindu sadhu, or renunciate, a beautiful man. Years ago he visited America and said something that has stuck with me ever since. He said that when he looks at the world, he does not see cruelty, he does not see war, and he does not see hatred. What he sees is ignorance.

That is what is really happening. All of the harmful actions that people do, all of the things that cause suffering--where are they rooted? They are rooted in deep ignorance, in not understanding the suffering being caused, and not understanding the karmic fruits being created for themselves in doing such actions.

A person walking toward a fire is doing the very thing that will cause the person to be burned. Because of the universal and unavoidable law of karma, when someone does something harmful, if we can see past the action to its root cause in ignorance, then instead of our more usual reaction of anger we can respond with compassion. That person is walking toward the fire of some kind of suffering, the sure result of his or her action.

It does not make sense to feel hatred for ignorance. It neither helps the ignorance nor alleviates the suffering; it only compounds harm with more harm. What helps ignorance is bringing wisdom and compassion to bear on the situation. Brian Keenan, a British hostage released from Lebanon after more than four years in captivity, expressed this basic wisdom. He said that he had no desire for vengeance because vengeance is self-maiming, and he did not intend to maim himself.

Excerpted from *Insight Meditation: The Practice of Freedom,* by Joseph Goldstein, Shambhala Press, 1993, pp. 124-130. Edited by Dale Lugenbehl.

The Law of Karma

By Eknath Easwaran

…every act or thought has consequences…

Literally, the Sanskrit [word] karma means something that is done. Often it can be translated as "deed" or "action." The law of Karma states simply that every event is both a cause and an effect. Every

act has consequences of a similar kind, which in turn have further consequences and so on… This refers not only to physical action but to mental activity as well. …There is an essential relationship between mental and physical activity. Given appropriate conditions to develop further, thoughts breed actions of the same kind, as a seed can grow only into one particular kind of tree.

Baldly put, the law of karma says that whatever you do will come back to you. If Joe hits Bob, and later Ralph hits Joe, that is Joe's karma coming back to him. This sounds occult because we do not see all the connections; but the connections are there, and the law of karma is no more occult than the law of gravitation. It states that the blow has to have consequences; it cannot end with Bob getting a black eye. It makes an impression on Bob's consciousness--predictably, he gets furious and it makes an impression on Joe's consciousness as well.

Let us trace it through Bob. He might take revenge on Joe then and there, simply by hitting him back: that is "cash karma," where you do something and pay for it immediately. In these times, however, it is more likely that Bob will suppress his feelings, so that the consequences of Joe's blow do not show up until later, probably in ways that seem to have nothing to do with Joe or his fist. Karma is rarely so simple as this illustration, but in any case it should be clear that Bob's anger at Joe will have repercussions throughout his relationships. Those repercussions will have repercussions; say, Bob goes home and explodes at his wife, and his wife gets angry at Ralph's wife, who takes it out on Ralph, who works with Joe; and the next time Joe irritates Ralph, Ralph lets him have it. Poor Joe, rubbing his chin, can not have the slightest idea that he is being repaid for hitting Bob. All he feels is anger at Ralph: and so the chain of consequences continues, and Joe's karmic comeuppance becomes the seed of a new harvest.

Most people have no idea how many others are affected by their behavior and example. It gives some idea of how complex the web of karma actually is. No one, of course, has the omniscience to see this picture fully. But the idea of a network of such connections, far from being occult, is natural and plausible. The law of karma states unequivocally that though we cannot see the connections, we can be sure that everything that happens to us, good and bad, originated once in something we did or thought… It follows that we can change what happens to us by changing ourselves; we can take our destiny into our own hands.

The physical side of karma, however, hitting and hitting back, only touches the surface of life. To get an inkling of how karma really works, we have to consider the mind. Everything we do produces karma in the mind. In fact, it is in the mind rather than the world that karma's seeds are planted. When Joe hits Bob, I said, there are effects on Bob's face and consciousness. But there are also effects on Joe's consciousness. For one, by indulging a hot temper, Joe has made it more likely that he will indulge that temper again. He is a little different because of his action; he has made himself an angrier person. Over the years, if he keeps giving in to his moods, he will grow more belligerent. He may find himself swinging his fists more and more often; and by some quirk of human nature, he will find himself in situations that cry out for fists to be swung. Sooner or later he will get into a fight where he is repaid in kind; that is one way in which his karma with Bob might be reaped.

The Buddha says that we are not punished for our anger; we are punished by our anger. Anger is its own karma. Joe may think he feels better for having hit Bob, but a physician would observe what happens while Joe is getting heated up--watch his blood pressure soar and his heart race, measure the adrenaline and other hormones dumped into his body, and so on and conclude that his is putting himself under serious physiological stress. Even if Ralph never gets to hit him, Joe is hitting himself from inside. If his anger becomes chronic, he will live in a world of constant stress, predisposing him to heart disease, ulcer, migraine, and other physiological problems. These too are routes by which the karma of anger can be reaped.

Further, Joe's aggressiveness and irritability make him harder to live with. His relationships deteriorate. Perhaps his friends start to avoid him; perhaps his co-workers respond to him with increasing resentment. All of this is likely to provoke him even more. Life in such circumstances can be miserable, and Joe might find himself drinking or smoking heavily or seeking escape in high-risk activities like skydiving or stock car racing, all of which provide more ways in which karma can be reaped. The analysis could go on; these are only illustrations.

One more fascinating point about karma: even if Joe does not actually strike anybody, the karma of anger is still generated in the mind and body. To the extent he gets angry, his blood pressure will still shoot up, his stomach get tense, his heart race, and so on. Thoughts have concrete consequences: they shape the way we see life, which in turn affects our health, our behavior, our choice of work and friends, in short, everything we do.

Aptly, Indian philosophy compares a thought to a seed: very tiny, but it can grow into a huge, deep-rooted, wide-spreading tree. I have seen places where a seed in a crack in a pavement grew into a tree that tore up the sidewalk. It is difficult to remove such a tree, and terribly difficult to undo the effects of a lifetime of negative thinking, which can extend into many other people's lives. But it can be done_

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The Bhagavad Gita: Translated With A General Introduction, by Eknath Easwaran, Nilgiri Press, 1985, pages 16-19.

Karma: Heaven & Hell

By 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."

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From *Comfortable With Uncertainty,* by Pema Chodron, pages 61-2