Bhavana

A guide to classical Buddhist meditation

by
Glenn Wallis

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Bhavana (pronounced *bhaa-va-na*, with the stress on the first *a*) is a Sanskrit word meaning "cultivation." The purpose of this book is to offer ideas for cultivating the qualities that result in a fulfilled life — in a wholehearted life, fully lived. Cultivation, like anything else, requires skill. So, the book also articulates the skills required for successful cultivation. Fortunately, these skills derive from natural human capacities — we all already possess them to some degree. They are: present-moment awareness, direct knowledge of mental-emotional-physical states, energy, delight, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. The instructions in the book are based on the system of meditation developed by one of humanity's most astute observers of human psychology. His name was Siddhattha Gotama (4th century B.C.E.), or, as he is better known, the Buddha. The approach presented here can therefore be termed "classical Buddhist meditation." In this approach, the cultivation of the seven skills is held to allow for optimal human well being. This book thus takes the reader directly into the heart of the Buddhist path to awakening.

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About the author

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I have taught to you the destination and the path leading to the destination. That which should be done out of compassion by a caring teacher who desires the welfare of his students, I have done for you.

There are secluded places. Meditate! Do not be negligent! Do not have regrets later! This is my instruction to you.

—Siddhattha Gotama

PREFACE

The Sanskrit word *bhavana* is commonly translated into English as “meditation.” But that’s too fancy. It really just means “bringing into being,” or even more simply, "cultivation." A farmer performs *bhavana* when he prepares the soil, plants seed, and protects and nourishes the seedling. When the sun shines, when rain falls, and when the temperature remains just so, that, too, helps to nurture the seed. Cultivated in this fashion, the seed becomes a beautiful, vibrant, and health-giving plant. This is *bhavana.*

Bhavana. I imagine that when Gotama, the Buddha, chose this word to talk about meditation, he had in mind the ubiquitous farms and fields of his native India. Unlike our words “meditation” or “contemplation,” Gotama’s term is musty, rich, and verdant. It smells of the earth. The commonness of his chosen term suggests naturalness, everydayness, ordinariness. The term also suggests hope: no matter how fallow it has become, or damaged it may be, a field can always be *cultivated* — endlessly enhanced, enriched, developed — to produce a favorable and nourishing harvest.

This guide approaches Buddhist meditation as a means to cultivation. When you practice meditation, you are like the farmer in the example above. He knows how to work the soil and care for the seed. But he also knows when to get out of the way and allow nature to do its work. So, while it is true that anyone may attempt to cultivate a field, not everyone will succeed. This fact suggests an important point: cultivation requires specific skills. As humans, we possess numerous natural capacities which, when cultivated, yield new skills. For example, imagine becoming fluent in German, mastering a Chopin *nocturne*, or completing a marathon. Could you do it? Each of these is founded on qualities and abilities that you innately possess. You do not *create* the capacity for language acquisition, rhythm, balance, fine motor skill, and so on. Rather, you cultivate — nourish, protect, care for, promote — these natural capacities. That’s *bhavana.*

The task that concerned Gotama, the Buddha, of course, was not the cultivation of fields or foreign languages. His concern was how to nurture the qualities that allow us to live as fully awakened and deeply fulfilled human beings. To this end, he taught the practiced cultivation of deep mental, emotional, and physical calm, and clear insight into the actual nature of our lived experience. It is precisely that practiced cultivation that we call "meditation."

Now, let's get to work.

INTRODUCTION

TO BE ALIVE

To be alive - is Power -
Existence - in itself -
Without a further function -
Omnipotence - Enough –
—Emily Dickinson

You are alive. How wonderful! Between the billions of years that have passed and the billions still to come, here you are, right now — alert, aware, alive. *Now* is the time of your life, now is the time for you to *live*.

Being alive, you experience pleasure and satisfaction — the pleasure of a summer breeze gliding across your face (ahhhh) or of the sweet taste of creamy chocolate lying on your tongue (ummm), the satisfaction of accomplishment (yes!) or of seeing a smile on your child's teary face (ohhhh). "I find ecstasy in living — the mere sense of living is joy enough," Emily Dickinson once told a visitor to her Amherst home. Gotama, the man we call the Buddha, also found that there was a gushing spring of joy available in the mere act of *being* itself. He called this condition, *nirvana*, the quality of existence that allows you to *be* quenched, at peace, and deeply, deeply refreshed.

In this guide, I take to heart the teachings of both the poet and the buddha. One reason that I do so is that their exuberance for life was so refreshingly clear-eyed. They instructed in the realities of this world, in the realities of our lives. What they proclaimed as life's joy and ecstasy and power was not the dreamy utopias conjured up by otherworldly mystics and pious religionists. The difference, I feel, lies in their relentless recognition, their determined non-denial, of a tremendous fact. The starkness of this fact is matched only by its undesirability. This fact constitutes the beginning premise of Gotama's

entire edifice of teaching, and it flows like water through Emily Dickinson's poetry. The fact is this: *life brings pain.* And pain, you know, comes in many varieties and registers: illness, disease, disappointment, frustration, tension, worry, anxiety, irritation, dissatisfaction, anguish, aggravation, and on and on. Gotama thought that this prevalence of pain in our lives was so significant that he tagged it as the "first preeminent reality" with which we must come to grips. Its preeminence, however, involves a paradox: it stands out so prominently as to be undeniable and yet we construct our lives to avoid and deny it. And it is this fact — this actuality — that causes so much of the tension and dis-ease of our lives.

Like Gotama, though, Emily Dickinson saw that it was, by nature, persistent and inevitable:

Pain has an element of blank;
It cannot recollect
When it began, or if there were
A day when it was not.

It has no future but itself,
Its infinite realms contain
Its past, enlightened to perceive
New periods of pain.

This book begins with the same premise as the poet as the buddha. That is, like them, I imagine that you share at least this one thing in common with virtually everyone in the world: you are affected by the stress, tension, and uneasiness of daily life. You may well have even experienced much more serious, far-reaching sadness, trauma, worry, or pain. Surely you have noticed that the reality of such everyday tension and long term pain has detrimental effects on your body and emotions.

I also imagine that even though there is some degree of pleasure and happiness in your life, there is also a persistent, if often indiscernible, disquiet, a general lack of abiding satisfaction, in your life. Have you ever wondered about the source of this disquiet?

For some of us, discontent is a vague, indeterminate feeling. We can't really say just what it is that is gnawing at us. We can't really name what it is that prevents us from persistently experiencing a full, rich sense of meaning and fulfillment. For some of us, though, there is something nameable behind our discontent — there is that particular event in the past, the behavior of this person, my family, my relationship, not having what I want, having what I don't want, this pain in my back, the damp weather. What are your reasons?

Contrary to our usual way of locating the cause of our discontent, Gotama felt that the actual source of human dissatisfaction and pain is not to be located in some past event or present state of external affairs, but in the mind itself. His own investigation of the nature of human disquiet taught him that the mind stands at *the first instance* of our lived experience. He once said:

> Preceded by mind
> are phenomena,
> led by mind,
> formed by mind.
> If with mind polluted
> you speak or act,
> then pain follows you,
> as a wheel follows
> the draught ox's foot.
>
> Preceded by mind
> are phenomena,
> led by mind,
> formed by mind.
> If with mind pure
> you speak or act,
> then ease follows you as

an ever present shadow.

If you think about it, what, within the range of your actual lived experience, could possibly precede your mind? Objects or situations may lie "out there," in the world, but isn't it your mind that produces the specific fashioning or appearance that makes up your experience of life? This fact is what accounts for the myriad different viewpoints that people inevitably bring to the shared experience of a given event, or, to be more specific, to their shared observation of anything seen, heard, smelled, tasted, felt, or thought. So, because of the importance of the mind in giving shape to what lies before our sense faculties, Gotama asks us to consider the quality of our very mind. How is it with your mind right now? Is it doubtful? critical? open? hopeful? Is it cloudy? Is it clear? What word would you apply? To underscore the importance of attending to the quality of your mind, Gotama said:

> No other thing do I know that brings so much harm as a mind that is untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and uncontrolled. Such a mind truly brings harm.
>
> No other thing do I know that brings so much benefit as a mind that is tamed, guarded, protected, and controlled. Such a mind truly brings great benefit.

Have you ever wondered about the role that your own mind plays in giving rise to your experience of pain, tension, and disquiet? If you have, you have probably also wondered what you can do about it. Some of us discover solutions that bring temporary relief, such as sports, entertainment, new relationships, TV, or alcohol. Gotama recommended a solution that he felt would go right to the heart of the matter.

> Meditation, when developed and cultivated, is peaceful and sublime, an ambrosial pleasant dwelling. It dispenses and quells, right on the spot, detrimental states of mind whenever they arise.

Meditation is a practice that will allow you to discover just *how much is enough for you*. What do you need to experience genuine fulfillment? What stands between you and the satisfaction you seek? What is essential to contentment, what is superfluous to it, and how can you tell the difference? If you are wondering, then you are ready to meditate.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

In the simplest terms, meditation is way of knowing ourselves directly. By “directly,” I mean without the usual mediating modes of concept and identity. A basic premise of Buddhist psychology is that such self-understanding is essential to genuine well-being. Through the practice of meditation, mental qualities that are beneficial to this knowledge, and hence, well-being, are cultivated — naturally developed and increased — while those that are detrimental are weakened and dissolved. What makes this process *natural* is that it unfolds without our usual strategies of contrivance and manipulation.

Based on the premise that our lives – our emotions, perceptions, moods and feelings, reactions to external and internal stimuli, thoughts, words, and actions – are the direct result of our mental state at any given moment, meditation can be seen as a practice that operates at the most fundamental level of our being. A mind that is clear, calm, and at ease engenders a life that is clear, calm, and at ease. To sit in meditation is literally to *realize* this manner of being.

The English term "meditation" does not really capture the sense of Gotama’s own term: *bhavana*. *Bhavana* comes from the verbal root *bhu*, which means "to be, to become." In the causative form, *bhavana* literally means “causing to become,” which in turn gives rise to the sense "development, application, cultivation." You might be asking, if meditation is a form of cultivation, what is it that is being cultivated? The quick answer is, first of all, *a vibrant, fully embodied, present moment awareness of whatever arises in your body, mind, feelings, and emotions*. Gotama used a simple term to express this same thing: *sati*. Literally, *sati* means "to remember." But, paradoxically, what is “remembered” is always in the present rather than the past. So, a good translation might also be the somewhat counter-intuitive: “memory-in-and-of-the-present.” The

term points to the mental qualities of watchfulness, remembrance, recognition, presence of mind, intentness of mind, wakefulness, lucidity, attentiveness, self-possession, non-discursive consciousness. And that sort of awareness is always here and now.

It is crucial to keep in mind that meditation does not create or somehow manufacture this awareness. Present-moment awareness is, by definition, always already present. It is the elemental awareness attending all instances of your perception and cognition. So, really, it is somewhat paradoxical to speak of cultivation. Speaking like that is something like saying that water cultivates transparency. Being concomitant, how can one be said to engender the other? But what if the water's transparency were obscured by cloudy sedimentation? In such a case, would it be accurate to assert *the water is transparent*? Not exactly. Yet, when the sedimentation settles or is removed, transparency results as a matter of course. That is, it *naturally* results. Transparency ensues on its own accord: no one and no thing created it; certainly not the water. So, was the water transparent all along? It would of course be pointless actually to answer this question. Rather, it is something to examine as it applies to present-moment awareness as an indigenous quality of your own experience.

CHAPTER TWO

WHY MEDITATE? A FEW GOOD REASONS

One reason

Meditation is extremely simple; and meditation is extremely difficult. Anyone who has ever tried it knows that these two statements about meditation are not at all contradictory. What, after all, could be easier than sitting quietly and still, simply resting your attention on the natural flow of breath, and simply being with whatever feelings, sounds, thoughts, and so on, arise? "Being with" is the opposite of reacting to, or doing, or ruminating over. What could be simpler than just being? The answer, of course, is "nothing." But we are not good at nothing; or maybe we just don't like nothing. We always want something, and then something on top of that something. It seems like too much is never really enough for many of us. Now, this human capacity for acquisition is certainly not a bad thing. Just look at the wonderful ways we have enriched and enhanced life with technology, medicine, art, architecture, literature, cuisine, fashion, sports, entertainment. All of human culture is fueled by our apparently deep-seated drive for more and better and different. Gotama referred to this seemingly interminable cycle of want *samsara* — a raging roiling whirlpool, a vortex of insatiable want.

Is there an end to it? When? Doesn't there have to be a time of day when activity, agitation, wanting, planning, thinking, talking, working, driving, instant-messaging, text-messaging, e-mailing, complaining, gossiping, doing, doing, doing, come to an end? Maybe you're wondering, "isn't that end called *sleep*?" But sleeping is just another, albeit unconscious and stupor-like, mode of doing. Just think of all of the mental and physical activity we engage in while sleeping: thinking, worrying, dreaming, tossing and turning, getting up to use the bathroom, fitfully trying to fall back asleep. I read somewhere that our brains are more active when sleeping than while watching TV!

If peace, clarity, and joy, or whatever qualities of well-being that you seek, are not to be found in either extremes of doing — activity and sleep — then, where are they to be found? Gotama's answer is: somewhere between activity and non-activity, somewhere between habituated or structured agitation and the dull stupor of inattentiveness.

Maybe you're wondering, "where is that middle? how do I get there?" The meditation instructions in this book are a step by step guide to just this matter. But, in the end, those instructions are just words. I read somewhere of an old Christian monk who was asked by the monastery abbot to offer some edifying words to a visiting scholar. The monk replied, "if he has not been edified by my silence, then he will surely not be edified by my words."

Well, I have also heard that a Chinese Taoist master, or maybe it was a wine-soaked poet, once said, "take me to a man who has gone beyond all words; I'd like to have a word with him." Where is that middle that the words in the instructions can't really touch or address? Here are two wonderfully edifying expressions somewhere, perhaps, between or beyond silence and speech. Maybe you will find them helpful.

> The old pond.
> A frog jumps in.
> Plop!
>
> —Basho

> In lovely blue the steeple blossoms with its metal roof. Around which drift swallow cries, around which lies most loving blue. The sun, high overhead, tints the roof tin. But up in the wind, silent, the weathercock crows. When someone takes the stairs down from the belfry, it is a still life, with the figure thus detached, the sculpted shape of a person comes forth. The windows the bells ring through are as gates to beauty.
>
> — Friedrich Holderlin

Three more reasons

Maybe none of those words were very helpful to you. So, let's approach the same matter from another direction: Why should you take the time and trouble to begin a serious practice of meditation? I know of three other good reasons: peace, health, and fulfillment.

Peace. Perhaps the best reason to practice meditation is that it can give you peace. I am not speaking of the peace of isolation or non-involvement. A basic presupposition of Buddhist meditation is that our minds have been conditioned over time to be contrived, tense, unbalanced, and ill at ease. They have been conditioned, in other words, not to be at peace. Another presupposition is that this state of unease is adventitious – it is not intrinsic to the mind, but is a quality that is, so to speak, added to our composition through social formation, stressful living and working environments, disappointment, lack of fulfillment, and so on. Think of these adventitious qualities as being like the turbulence on the surface of a pond. When the pond is allowed to settle, it *naturally* becomes transparent, clear, and tranquil. Meditation similarly is a means through which we allow the turbulence of our thoughts and emotions to subside. The natural result of this gentle allowance, this letting be, is calm and ease.

A corollary to this calming effect of meditation is what is known as *insight* and *wisdom*. Once the mind becomes calmed, insight into the workings of the habituated tendencies ruling our thoughts, emotions, speech, and actions arises. In other words, we start to discern patterns and recurrences. Again, this result is uncontrived: when your mind is lucid, spacious, and refreshed, seeing into its nature and workings is wholly natural. A basic assumption about this type of seeing or insight is that it affords us the opportunity to gain some relief from the relentless pounding of our habitual tendency toward reactivity. To the person experiencing it, this relief feels likes freedom or liberation. Such insight, moreover, constitutes wisdom. It is knowing what needs to be known about this state of affairs we, as living, sentient human beings, find ourselves in.

Health. As is clear from the above comments, a basic premise of Gotama's meditation practice is that much of the unease that we experience in our daily lives originates in the mind. Because of the close relationship between our mental and physical lives, many health problems are caused or, at least, aggravated by this state of persistent unease.

Unlike in Gotama's day, modern science confirms many of the claims and reports of meditators. Scientists became curious about the effects of meditation as early as the 1930s. Since then, there have been thousands of scientific studies conducted at hundreds of universities and institutions around the world. Studies have been published in leading scientific journals documenting the physiological, psychological, sociological, and even ecological benefits of meditation. Some of the findings of these studies suggest that meditation may:

- enhance deep rest, as measured by decreased metabolic rate, lower heart rate, and reduced work load of the heart.
- lower levels of cortisol and lactate — two chemicals associated with stress.
- reduce free radicals, i.e., unstable oxygen molecules that can cause tissue damage.
- decrease high blood pressure.
- enhance higher skin resistance (low skin resistance is correlated with higher stress and anxiety levels)
- enhance drops in cholesterol levels (high cholesterol is associated with cardiovascular disease).
- improve flow of air to the lungs resulting in easier breathing.
- slow and decreases the ageing process.
- increase brain wave coherence

Although promising data for the following health results have been gathered in lab experiments, they hardly require scientific verification. In my experience both as a meditator and a facilitator of

meditation groups, they seem to follow more or less as a matter of course. Meditation, namely, enhances:

- creativity
- decreased anxiety
- decreased irritability and moodiness
- learning ability
- memory
- self-confidence
- vitality
- emotional stability
- sense of humor

Fulfillment. Here are some predictions: After just a short period of consistent meditation practice, you will experience a calm, spacious feeling arising in your mind. You will find that many of your problems will simply fall away – because they will cease to be, or be seen, as *problems*. (What's the difference between a "problem" and a "situation" or a "fact"?) Difficult situations will become easier to handle. Facts will be accepted as facts. You will feel increased warmth toward other people; and your relationships will gradually improve. You will develop a clearer awareness of your own needs and desires, and have firmer confidence in pursuing these. This will lead to a deeper sense of engagement with life. You will simply feel better. Life will be more pleasant. It will be sweeter, more enjoyable. Real fulfillment will start to seem possible after all.

A reason that goes to the heart of the matter

Here is one last reason to practice meditation.. I suspect that deep down, below all of my conscious reasons for meditating, there are other reasons that I rarely acknowledge. These reasons have something to do with the barely discernible anxiety that I have concerning life, death, love, and loss. They have something to do with the fear that sneaks up late at night when I become acutely aware of the very fact that I exist within this awesome, mind-boggling (and sometimes unsettling) immensity of space that we call the universe. Certainly, my practice has something to do with my life-long reflection on my imminent death.

I often recite this paraphrased version of a comment made by Shunryu Suzuki to re-establish my motivation before (and sometimes during!) meditation:

> The most important matter in life and death is to find out what the most important matter in life and death is.

So, why meditate? To find out what really matters to us. Until we reduce some of the complexity that we generate for ourselves moment by moment, how will we know what is necessary for our well being and what is not? Then, when your friend asks you, as friends sometimes do, "what's the matter," you'll really have something to say!

Another powerful motivator for developing a serious meditation practice is given by the thirteenth century Japanese teacher, Dogen. When I first read these words, I could almost feel the earth shift. What about you? (Pretend that someone you greatly admire is saying this directly to you.)

> You have gained
> the pivotal opportunity
> of human form.
> Please do not pass
> your days and nights in vain.
> Who would take wasteful delight
> in the spark from a flint stone?
>
> Besides, form and substance

are like the dew on the grass,
the fortunes of life
like a dart of lightening,
emptied in an instance,
vanished in a flash.

Please,
devote your energies
to the way
that points directly
to the heart of the matter.

— Dogen

What is that — the heart of the matter?

These are really just somewhat fancy, poetic ways of expressing what Charlotte Beck says more directly about Zen. Since "Zen" literally means "meditation," I change it here to better see the relevance of her words for our purposes.

> [Meditation] is about an active life, an involved life. When we know our minds well and the emotions that our thinking creates, we tend to see better what our lives are about and what needs to be done, which is generally just the next task under our nose. [Meditation] is about a life of action, not a life of passively doing nothing. But our action must be based in reality.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT MEDITATION CULTIVATES

What is the alternative to basing our actions on reality? Wouldn't that be basing them on the endless varieties of delusion, illusion, fantasy, and wishful thinking with which we are, apparently, so adept? Gotama's approach to living in accordance with reality requires that we *arouse, cultivate, and fulfill* particular qualities. Another way of saying it is that we stimulate natural capacities (arouse), increasingly embody these qualities in daily life (cultivate), until, finally, they become second nature, like an accomplished skill (fulfill).

In dialogue after dialogue, discourse after discourse, Gotama refers, either directly or indirectly, to the specific qualities that the practitioner is to cultivate. He speaks, furthermore, of these qualities as being "skillful." But he means this in a special sense. They are skillful qualities because they constitute the dispositions, abilities, habits, aptitudes — in short, the way of life — of an "awakened" person, a *buddha.*

This skillful employment of the qualities is, moreover, through and through *bodily*. It is primarily for this reason that Gotama emphatically rejects the numerous premises informing the term "spirituality." That is, the notion of a skill points to deeply embodied, naturalized *human* ways of acting, speaking, and thinking. Talal Asad, a scholar of Catholicism, puts it like this: "the inability to enter into communion with God is a function of untaught bodies." Asad is saying that the Christian virtues are not ghostly that somehow come to inhabit the soul of the practitioner. They are, rather, dispositional qualities that are literally *embodied* though imitation, trial and error, ritualized performance, scriptural study, and repetition, repetition, repetition. In Gotama's terms, Asad's

statement might be rendered: “the ability to cultivate the skills that constitute awakening is a function of a well trained *body*.”

I discuss the specific training of the body in Chapter Seven. Here, we can look at Gotama’s answer to the question, “what does meditation cultivate?”

Awareness, Awareness, Awareness

The most succinct answer to this question is: awareness. That is, the practitioner cultivates the ability to be present and attentive, moment after precious moment. There is a well known story from the Zen tradition that makes this point. A master was lying on her death bed, her students gathered sorrowfully at her side. They had come to receive from the master the final expression of her wisdom. One of the master’s senior students requested this teaching, saying, “master, please give us your final teaching.” All the students pulled close, and concentrated intensely in order to fully absorb every word of what was sure to be a long, complex discourse culminating the great master’s long years of arduous practice. But the master merely replied, “awareness!” The students looked at one another, perplexed. The senior student, said, “master, please give us at least a capping verse that expresses your vast wisdom.” To this request, the master responded, “awareness! awareness!” Still not satisfied, the senior student said, “please, master, please give us at least a short death poem expressing your final instructions.” The master vigorously replied: “awareness! awareness! awareness!” then died.

In this view, then, the overarching quality that you cultivate in meditation, to the point of its being a skill that you possess, is *awareness, attentiveness,* an acute ability to be *present* right here, right now. Awareness, of course, is always already present. It stands, so to speak, perpetually at the beginning. It is given in our very sentience. Yet, paradoxically, how little awareness there is in the world! How seldom we and others are present to our precise situation! Why is that? Awareness, apparently, is a *capacity* that requires filling. So, how is this somewhat nebulous quality filled? How is it aroused, cultivated, and fulfilled?

Calmness

First, someone who is skilled in meditation is adept in cultivating the quality of calmness. The practitioner is able to come to a state of physical, emotional, mental tranquility with increasing ease. During seated meditation, this is "accomplished" (though, as we will see, this word is misleading) by bringing the awareness to the breathing process. Imagine if all people were taught as children to be skilled in calmness! Imagining so is really not so difficult. Consider how skilled we are at the reactive qualities driving behaviors such as anger, boredom, and worry. According to Buddhist psychology, *all* qualities, regardless of their value, are *aroused, cultivated, and fulfilled*. As a meditator, you become adept at arousing, cultivating, and fulfilling calmness. And you can do so at will. You can, so to speak, self-calm, self-tranquilize. Calmness, like your mother tongue, is always at hand.

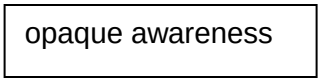
Clarity

Second, when you are deeply calmed within the mind-body-emotional continuum, the natural capacity for clarity is opened up. As Gotama says, psycho-physical being is like a pond: when the water is stirred up, it is cloudy, unsettled, agitated; but once it is allowed to settle — by simply leaving it alone! — the water attains its original state of stillness and clarity. Or, sometimes Gotama uses sky similes. The mind is like the clear, vast sky; yet it is covered by clouds. When the clouds disperse, the sky appears just as it has always been: clear, open, vast, unhindered. Another way that Gotama expressed this idea is found in the *Anguttaranikaya*: "awareness is luminous, but it is clouded by adventitious defilements." So, the second skill you will develop in meditation practice is clarity. You will become adept in allowing your sensorium (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind) to manifest unhindered, and to see clearly into the *process* of whatever appears. You will be more able to see clearly and spontaneously (without strained effort) that all phenomena arise, temporarily persist, dissolve, and

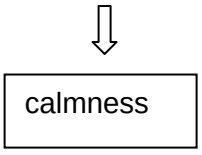
disappear. You will also spontaneously begin to realize the *nature* of phenomena as being impermanent, insubstantial, and unreliable.

So far, the basic foundation looks like this diagram:

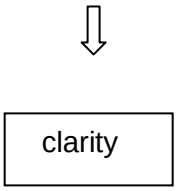
We start out with a degree of blindness regarding our ancient patterns, habits, moods, dispositions, automatic reactivity, and so on. We begin, in short, with



We then set out to explore a seated meditation practice. This practice initially focuses on the breathing process. This practice leads to



As our bodies and minds become calm, as we become more settled emotionally, relaxed, and at ease, we find ourselves becoming less and less reactive to whatever appears. Or, in more positive terms, we become more open and receptive to bodily aches and pains, mental discursiveness, memories, plans, complaints, and so on. We see what is there, and we can leave it alone, we can allow it to be present and open to view. This receptivity constitutes



Our opaque awareness has become

translucent awareness

You may experience this quality of awareness as being like a mirror and like a glass. That is, like a mirror, it simply reflects what apprears before it, without attempting to enhance, eliminate or otherwise alter it. Imagine if a mirror judged and manipulated the objects appearing to it — that would be straight out of a horror movie! But that is precisely what our minds are prone to do, isn't it? With the cultivation of present-moment, translucent, awareness you are liberated from the compulsion to contrive and manipulate. This awareness is glass-like because you will begin to see the transparent nature of what appears. A thought or memory, for instance, will appear empty of substance, like a mirage. You will literally see through it. You can certainly imagine the liberating effects of such a perspective. So, translucent awareness is glass-like in that it both reflects the object (a pain in the shoulder, a pang of anxiety, a memory, a sound) and renders it transparent.

The Seven Skills

But that is just the beginning! We can now be even more specific. Gotama repeatedly mentions seven specific qualities that constitute human awakening. Like calmness and clarity, these qualities are cultivated both during seated meditation and in daily life. Gotama sometimes called these qualities "wings to awakening." As this term implies, a person who possesses these qualities is able to negotiate his or her life with the openness and ease of a bird gliding through space.

Again, it is important to bear in mind that each of these qualities is *aroused, cultivated, and fulfilled* through the meditation practice that follows this chapter.

1. **Present-moment awareness** (the Pali term is *sati*). This word that has gained widespread usage in its translation as "mindfulness." I explained it above as "translucent awareness." This is our capacity to be non-intrusively aware, to be cognizant with minimal or no conceptual adornment. Present-moment awareness is an openness towards whatever appears within our sensorium (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, tactile feeling, thinking). It is a non-conceptual, non-discursive attentiveness to whatever arises in our sense fields. It is mirror-like in that it merely reflects what appears, without grasping, rejecting or coloring the arising phenomenon. When, for instance, anger arises, *sati* is merely aware of the bare process unfolding in the mind-body continuum. Although this process is normally labeled "anger," present-moment awareness, being non-conceptual, does not name it. Neither does it express nor represses the anger: it simply remains present and open to it. The practitioner who is cultivating this skill rapidly learns that being aware of a given sensorial phenomenon tends to decrease the force, or gravitational pull, of that phenomenon. Thus, present-moment awareness engenders a less reactive, habituated way of being. During seated meditation, present-moment awareness is cultivated initially by placing and sustaining attention on the breathing process. It is important to note that present-moment awareness is not meant as an interminable stand-in for other mental functions. In everyday life, of course, we must name, label, differentiate, judge, accept, reject, plan, ruminate, and so on. Cultivating present-moment awareness will, however, make us more conscious that we are doing so. And with consciousness of this kind comes freedom from habituated responses. We find that we can pause, and make choices.

2. **Investigation of qualities** (*dhammavicaya*). With fluid, moment to moment awareness, comes a fuller, more spontaneous knowledge of whatever bodily, mental, and emotional qualities we may be experiencing. Simply put, we develop a heightened sensitivity to how we feel. When anger is present, I know that anger is present. This "knowing" constitutes investigation in that it brings the quality out of the darkness of conditioned reflexivity and into the light of consciousness awareness. "Investigation,"

however, involves something more. When anger has arisen, the practitioner spontaneously knows that it is marked by three characteristics: impermanence, insubstantiality, and unsatisfactoriness. Gotama calls these characteristics "the three marks of existence." They are, in other words, properties of all phenomena — material objects, moods, emotions, thoughts. Knowing in this manner, the gravitational pull of, say anger, is weakened, and, with it, destructiveness.

3. **Energy/Effort** (*viriya*). As its English cognate, *virile*, makes clear, *viriya* signifies virility, vitality, vibrancy, and vigor. During meditation, persisting in present-moment awareness and spontaneous investigation requires concerted effort. When the necessary effort is applied, an internal energy emerges in the body and mind. Like a feedback loop, effort-energy nourishes awareness, which nourishes effort and energy, and so on.

4. **Delight** (*piti*). Gotama proposes that wherever this kind of effort-energy is fulfilled, a sense of bubbly, perhaps even ecstatic, delight is *naturally* aroused. Gotama sometimes refers to this natural form of delight as "fleshless." That is, it differs from ordinary, "fleshy" or contrived, delight in that it is not produced by sensory stimulation. When we sit in the alert stillness and silence engendered by the previous three qualities, delight, or joyousness, naturally results.

5. **Tranquility** (*passaddhi*). Delight settles into tranquility. Similar to delight, tranquility ensues naturally when the other qualities are present. That is to say, the meditator does not actually *do* anything to arouse tranquility. Rather, he or she *discovers* its presence in the midst of a sort of non-doing — in still, silent, watchful sitting. The felt experience, the *feeling*, of calmness or tranquility must be related, in part, to a reduction of mental, physical, and emotional activity. So, perhaps tranquility includes the calming of these bio-systems.

6. **Concentration** (*samadhi*). The word *samadhi* is a major Buddhist technical term, sometimes even translated as "meditation" itself. As one of the seven skills, it refers to bodily-mental-emotional stability. The term literally means to be "collected firmly together." In this sense, it is similar to our colloquial notion of "pulling oneself together," "getting it together," or "being centered." Unlike our common usage of "concentration," *samadhi* does not imply a purposeful, effort-filled mental state. Rather, it indicates the ability to remain non-diffuse, undistracted, and as present as possible to whatever the object of attention is. As any experienced meditator can attest, awareness is like a radio tower with multiple antennae: it is never completely one-pointed — too much peripheral data enters through our sense organs. Concentration, therefore, implies being in an optimal condition of compact attentiveness, whereby the *bulk* of awareness is on, say, the breath. It may be helpful to put that the other way around, too. Concentration is when the breath *permeates* a great expanse of present-moment awareness.

7. **Equanimity** (*upekka*). Really, you are arousing and cultivating equanimity at every step of the way. Equanimity means calm awareness in the face of whatever is present. You would not be able to persist in sitting without some degree of equipoise. Remaining calmly present, rather than reactive, to a painful memory, for example, requires composure. This moment to moment composure gradually develops in the skill of equanimity. This skill is, furthermore, crucial for maintaining composure in the face of life's harshest realities. One of the results of long-term meditation practice is an increasing sensitivity to the ephemeral nature of everything we hold dear— friends, family, pets, possessions, status, reputation, our health and very existence. For most of us, the clear-eyed and abiding knowledge of this fact can be profoundly unsettling. A person who practices meditation is, of course, not immune from life's vicissitudes. It is, in fact, my experience that meditation forges a deeper intimacy between the practitioner and life. The world can begin to appear quite precarious; and this can make us terribly

vulnerable. A person skilled in equanimity is more able to remain clear and present in the face of life's inevitable problems, frustrations, disappointments, and losses. Such a person proceeds evenly. He or she dwells in a condition of emotional, physical, and mental equipoise.

CHAPTER FOUR

BREATH MAKES A POINT

So, how do we get there? How do we go about arousing, cultivating, and fulfilling these natural qualities? How do we begin the process of becoming skilled in awakening? Well, believe it or not, it starts with something so subtle, automatic, and taken-for-granted to be hardly worth troubling about: the breath. But not everyone would agree with me on this point. To explain, here's a story.

This is a story about an epic argument. As arguments go, this one began casually enough. Mind was simply stating the obvious — right? — when it declared to its colleagues, the five other Senses, "as your superior, I request that you refrain from further activity." It was past midnight. Apparitional Agent was trying to fall asleep, shifting and twisting in bed, pounding the pillow, turning this way, now that. It seems, however, that the Senses were not yet prepared to cease from the activity that would permit Agent's settling down. Ears insisted on auditing the swoosh of each and every vehicle that hurried past the bedroom window. Nose remained alert in order to, as it said, "detect potentially dangerous effluvia emanating from the kitchen." Body was tired, yet overly sensitive to the numerous aches and pains accrued throughout the stressful day (hence, the irritating contortions of Apparitional Agent). Eyes were closed, yet they marveled nonetheless at the vivid images from the day's events that incessantly flashed before them. And Tongue was still simulated from the spicy pork vindaloo it was privileged to savor at dinnertime. Well, all of this added up to a cacophony of agitation. Hence, Mind's somewhat stern comment, "as your superior…"

… and with that — "What!" bellowed Nose. "What did you just say?" demanded the others — a long discussion ensued. Each Sense made its case for being the primary function of the Apparitional Agent, whom we'll call "S." (as in Self) and, hence, master of the others.

Eyes began. “We enable easy movement through the dangerous world of objects. Great pleasures attend our vision: an autumn sunset, a finely executed work of art, the beauty of a face.”

Ears came next. “What greater pleasure is there than the rustling of wind through a tree, a Mozart symphony, the sweet sounds of a child at play? And think of what would happen if S were unable to hear the sound of, say, a bus barreling down the road.”

“Well,” said Nose, “that is just why I am situated near the mouth — as a line of defense. I could smell the filthy fumes of the bus, and lead S. to safety. I know, too, the smell of rotten eggs or of an unripe melon. And pleasure? You cannot imagine the delightful aroma of coffee roasting in the early morning, the scent of an apple pie baking in the oven, the fragrance of a flower wafting in the air.”

Tongue felt that Nose was overstating his case with the former comments. “Well, hold on! How often have I had to spit out some particularly noxious food because of your lassitude? Leader, indeed! As for pleasures, do you have any idea how it feels to savor a choice morsel of scallops l'orange followed by a sip of grand Cru Chablis? Unimaginable! *I,* Tongue, produce those pleasures for S.”

Body finally spoke up. “Well, aren’t you all forgetting something? What, indeed where, would any of you be if not for me? I am primary, I am your leader. *You are my appendages*! And you want to speak of pleasure? The loving caress of a loved one, a warm bath on a winter’s night, the sublime ecstasy of an orgasm. Top that!”

Mind, listened to all of this with slight amusement, and a good deal of annoyance. “First of all, when Eyes receive a visual image, and Ears accept a sound, and Nose, a scent, and so on, who do you think coordinates all of the information for S.? *I do*! Without my leadership, there would be absolute chaos. This is why I am ever-vigilant. Even when all of you are asleep, I am busy analyzing the day’s events, turning over and over what so-and-so said to our revered S., storing useful data and memories and banishing harmful ones. *I do not rest, ever*! And when I am not churning and ruminating and cogitating and speculating and remembering and planning and worrying and on and on and on, then do

I provide for S. unspeakable pleasures. All of you, tied as you are to what lies immediately before you, how can I possibly convey the pleasures of a grandiose fantasy, a daydream on a languid summer afternoon, a happy memory of a pleasure long spent? Second of all, you could not possibly conceive that anticipation of desire and satisfaction deferred are more fulfilling than the thing itself possessed. Why could you not conceive of such matters? *Because you cannot conceive of anything at all!* That is my job. Because of me, Paris, the pyramids, the iphone were conceived and created. Long before he put oil to canvass, Picasso imagined, thought about, conceptualized "Guernica." In fact, every single item that each of you mentioned was first thought up by me, by Mind. So, as I was saying, as your superior, I request that you now refrain from any further activity. S. must fall asleep."

Now, as the Senses were stating their cases for superiority, there was one Candidate that, try as he might, could not make himself heard. "If by "superior" you mean first, foremost, chief, well, that's me." His speech was fragile and tenuous, like a shy child in a dinner table conversation with six blustery adults. "Hello. Hello. Please pay attention for a moment. Hello." No one paid attention. So, this Candidate, quite against his better nature, decided to make a point. He walked slowly away. As he did, Eyes' vision dimmed, sound became inaudible to Ears, Body slumped. Even Mind became hazy to the point of unconsciousness. Senses were, in fact, on the verge of extinction. Suddenly, Apparitional Agent, in a frightening start, jolted up, stared wide-eyed and panic-stricken out the window into the night sky and breathed in Breath, breathed in, it seemed, the entire universe.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEVELOPING STABILITY

Why not begin this relationship with your breath right now? Yes, right now! The practice presented in this chapter is crucial to meditation for two reasons. First, it will prepare you to do the investigations that constitute the *Anapanasati Sutta*, given in chapter seven. There, you will be asked to observe experiential processes unfolding in your body, feelings, mind, and sensory environment. These processes can, at turns, be incredibly volatile and mercurial or torporous and intransigent. It is thus essential that you to develop the degree of mental, physical, and emotional stability required for engaging in the practice. The practice presented in this chapter will help with that. Second, this practice is the default mode of classical Buddhist meditation. That is, Gotama's instructions for meditation require that we *apply* attention to the breath and *sustain* it there.

So, right now, sitting just where you are, being just as you are, let's begin:

1. Sit comfortably, hold your body still. In the beginning stage of practice, you may want to close your eyes. But after you have calmed down some, open them, and cast your gaze down at about a forty-five degree angle. We want to cultivate our practice with everything — eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind — fully open to the world.

2. Take a few deep, fully conscious, breaths; allow your abdomen, lungs and upper chest to expand, then just let the breath go, and begin to breathe naturally.

3. Now, on the inhalation, bring your awareness to the area around the nose where you feel the breath. You may feel the air on or in the nostrils or around the upper lip, or perhaps in all of these areas. Remember, you want to attend to the immediate, felt sensation of the breath, not a secondary sensation or movement, such as the rise and fall of the abdomen, caused by the breathing. Attend to the qualities of the breath: temperature, duration, texture, force.

4. Silently (in your head) count *one* as you breathe in. If you are having trouble focusing, it will be helpful to extend the count for the full duration of the inhalation; so, breathing in — *ooonnneee*. Eventually, your mind will stay with the breath without the need for counting. But initially, getting the mind involved in the practice is, I think you will discover, essential to calming and stabilizing. So, as you become more concentrated and at ease, you may drop the counting altogether. That kind of concentration, however, takes a while to develop. Thoughts, bodily sensations, memories, worries, etc., and simply too volatile; we spin off into them too rapidly — and unconsciously — for our own good. So, use the counting; but be sure to keep it unobtrusive. The attention must be on the felt breath.

5. On the exhalation, keep your attention on that small, perhaps a half square inch, area around the upper lip and nostrils where the actual breath is felt. Many people have difficulty feeling the breath on the exhalation. And it can, indeed, be quite subtle. That is not a problem; it just requires even closer and more careful attention. Since there is air passing through your body, there is a sensation. Take your time to discover it. Be patient and gentle with yourself.

6. Repeat, counting up to at least twenty-five for this first attempt. (Remember: one breath consists of an inhalation and an exhalation.) I recommend that you initially make your practice one hundred breaths once, but preferably twice, a day.

7. With each breath, relax, release, yield, let go, allow, and simply attend to this subtle sensation.

8. When your mind wanders off to some distraction (a sound, a thought, a bodily sensation, etc.) just lead it gently and non-judgmentally back to the point of contact. Chances are, you will roughly recall the number when you wandered off. If not, take a guess.

9. What should you do if you are extremely unfocused, which may well be the case in the early period of meditation practice? Simple: repeat this cycle of wandering and returning a hundred billion times, if necessary. Each instance when you realize that you have spun away from the breath, or catch yourself from wandering, you are strengthening your concentration. So, don’t worry or become

discouraged.

Take your time with this practice. You are stabilizing a mind that has been allowed to roam at will for decades. Gotama says that this practice "goes against the flow." What he means is that, normally, when we have an itch, we scratch it. Or when we have a thought, we ruminate on it. Here, on the contrary, we are allowing things to take their natural course: arising, persisting, dissolving, and disappearing. We do not interfere. In the beginning, this way of being can feel utterly unnatural. So, be easy on yourself. Be kind to yourself. You will see tremendous results: more stability, calmness, equanimity, clarity, mental control.

When you feel stuck, remember these two cardinal points: *feel the breath*, and *keep it simple.* Feeling the actual sensation of the breath will keep you grounded in your body. The counting should be in the background; the tactile sensation of air in or on the nose or on the upper lip is in the forefront. You want to pay close attention to that sensation. Investigate it carefully. Notice that each breath has temperature, texture, duration, force. Notice, too, that no two breaths are alike. So, really take great interest in your breath. Treat each and every one with the care it deserves (it's keeping you alive, after all!).

One of the greatest features of this practice is it radical simplicity. In fact, I can think of no simpler practice than this one. It reduces our complex existence to its bare elements. What are those elements?

(1) *There is space and time*. This is a given. No need to speculate on why or wherefrom.

(2) *There is your body* in space and time. Not an insignificant fact!

(3) *There is this breath* in your body in space and time. Otherwise, you'd be a corpse.

(4) *There is awareness* of this breath in your body in space and time. Unlike a person in a coma or a drunken stupor, you are fully present, responsive, and alive to your environment.

In this practice, the presence of anything other than these elements is superfluous. Begin to recognize them as such. Thinking: I need a quiet room — that's extra! Thinking: let me light a candle — that's an adornment! Believing: I need ___ (fill in the blank) — that's embellishment! It's all trimming! Experiment with this general rule: if it was not mentioned in the instructions above, and if it is not one of the bare elements, then it is unnecessary.

A basic premise of classical Buddhist meditation is that we need to be able to settle ourselves down before we can begin the project of discerning how our lives unfold. In the next section, we will take our first steps into that more thorough self-investigation. As I mentioned, the method presented here will prove to be helpful toward that end, and beyond. Think of it as being your very own sanctuary of stillness, silence, and peace. It is your refuge. And it is always available, here and now, right under your nose!

CHAPTER SIX

SIXTEEN STEPS TO AWAKENING

Once, when Gotama was emerging from three months' seclusion, he made a comment that seems to me to be of real significance for our understanding of classical Buddhist meditation. I suspect that some of Gotama's followers had been wondering just what he was doing for all of that time deep in the cool forest. Perhaps, followers of other teachers had been inquiring into the matter. In any case, Gotama's followers apparently wanted to know what they should say to others when they inquired about Gotama's activities. Gotama's response was: "tell them that I dwell in present-moment awareness of the breath."

What? I can imagine someone responding. *That's it? Gotama became the Buddha just by watching his breath?! How is that possible?* In the text that follows, called the *Anapanasati Sutta* (*Present-moment Awareness with Breathing*), Gotama says that it is indeed possible. How? Well, to begin with, the text guides you through a careful examination of your life. It starts with the assumption, however, that the concept "life" is too large and vague a category to be of real value in this kind of investigation. If I want to "change my life," I make changes in specific areas — relationships, my job, eating habits, and so on. Similarly, the basic premise of Gotama's meditation blueprint — which is a good way to characterize the *Anapanasati Sutta* — is that effective work can be done on our lives only once we have reduced the categories of observation to actual, discernible, processes. Thus, the text structures our exploration of lived experience according to the four areas where our lives actually unfold moment by moment. In terms of practice, then, these areas are something like frames of reference. They are: the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. (Each of the four frames contains four practices, hence sixteen in all.) At each step along the way, the text is asking us to attend closely to these four areas. If I want to know why the quality of my lived experience is as it is — generally tense, say, or depressed, or

anxious, and so on — then I have to slow down, be still and silent, clear and present, and take a good hard look. A loud sound arises as I sit — the *vrroomm* of a motor. Well, what happens next? Does my body stiffen up or jump? How does that bodily reaction to the sound affect my mood? Does it shift from calm to agitated? A fundamental premise of Buddhist psychology is that the self-knowledge that we gain in observing in this manner is crucial to our well being and fulfillment.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE *ANAPANASATI SUTTA*

Cultivating present-moment awareness with breathing

(NOTE: The text in bold is my translation of the *sutta*. The rest is my commentary.)

Place and posture

Gotama says: **Present-moment awareness with breathing, when persistently practiced and cultivated, is rich in results and of great benefit.**

How is that so? There is, of course, only one way to find out: persistent practice and cultivation. Please take the time necessary to discover for yourself the rich results and great benefits that naturally flow from this practice. Maybe you will find these words of Gotama encouraging.

> *From practice springs*
> *expansive understanding;*
> *from lack of practice, its loss.*
> *Being aware of this divided pathway*
> *to cultivation and decline,*
> *conduct yourself so that*
> *understanding increases.*
> —*Dhammapada* verse 282

The instructions continue.

First, go to a clean, quiet place, sit down in a firm yet comfortable position and straighten your body. Establishing present-moment awareness right where you are, breathe in, simply aware, then breathe out, simply aware.

- To reduce sensory stimulation, it helps to sit facing the wall.
- Let your posture be as stable as a stone, yet as soft as a reed in the wind. Remain as still as possible, but allow yourself to gently make any adjustments that are necessary to maintain your posture.
- Let your posture engender self control, concentration, diligence, dignity, and discipline.
- And let your posture engender acceptance, watchfulness, gentleness, and ease.
- Take a few deep breaths. As you do so, feel your breath precisely at that point where it meets your body. On the inhalation, this is typically on the nostrils. On the exhalation, the upper lip. You may need patience to discover this breath-body sensation. Take your time. Explore with care.
- As you breathe, take a moment to feel your body and feel your feelings or emotions.
- Breathe, allowing body, breath, emotions, and mind to come into alignment.
- Breathe in, gathering yourself together.
- Breathe out, simply allowing yourself to settle.
- Breathe in, engendering a full-bodied sense of presence.
- Breathe out, just letting go.
- Soften.
- Release.
- Let go.
- Be at ease.

- You are settling into the zero point of your existence. Is there anything more fundamental to your physical being than breath? Is there anything more fundamental to your perceptual being than awareness? To answer, just have a look! Meditation is precisely this direct looking into the basis of your existence.

BODY

Breathing in long, know directly *I am breathing in long*. Breathing out long, know directly *I am breathing out long.* (1)

- Inhale slowly, smoothly, long, and deeply.
- Exhale slowly, smoothly, long, and thoroughly.
- Breathe in, filling up your abdomen, lungs, and upper chest with air.
- Breathe out, pushing the air out by gently collapsing your abdomen, lungs, and upper chest.
- Use your muscles to do so. But be gentle. Do this three times or so. You are reestablishing the breath in the body. Allow it to become expansive. Free it from the day's tensions.
- Now, just breathe naturally.
- When you feel yourself settling down, then bring your full awareness to the breathing process.
- So, breathe in, simply, directly, fully aware of just that breathing in.
- Now, breathe out, simply, directly, fully aware of just that breathing out.
- Notice the course that the breath takes. Notice where it touches your body: nostrils, throat, front and back of head, chest.
- Allow your breath to become deeply embodied.
- Allow your body to become fully *inspired*; then fully *expired* — nothing remaining!
- Breathe in.

- Breathe out.
- Aware of just that.
- Aware, in, of, and through the body.

The old pond.

A frog jumps in.

Plop!

— Basho

Breathing in short, know directly *I am breathing in short*. Breathing out short, know directly *I am breathing out short.* (2)

- You are allowing the body and the breath to become reconnected.
- You are doing so simply by leaving body and breath alone.
- Doing so, a deep, quiet calm and an uninterrupted, flowing awareness naturally emerge.
- One sign of this development is that your breath becomes more subtle.
- Just let that be; but maintain your awareness of the breath, however soft or shallow it is.
- Remember: attend to the actual felt sensation of the air touching your body (nose, upper lip)
- Breathe in, knowing just that inhalation.
- Breathe out, attending to just that exhalation.
- Nothing more to do.
- When you notice that your attention has wandered from the breath, be clear about this fact, perhaps noting the wandering gently to yourself, and then return to the breath.
- Be aware, let go, come alive.

- Just this breath, feeling as it does.

Rest right there, at ease, yet vibrantly awake.

Continue to train yourself: *I breathe in, sensitive to the entire body. I breathe out, sensitive to the entire body.* (3)

- Can you become aware of the entire body?
- With this inhalation, notice how you cannot really discern where the breath ends and the body begins. With this exhalation, notice that you cannot discern where the boundary between awareness and breath is located, or where body separates itself from breath.
- Breathing in, breathing out, there is just awareness-breathing-body, awareness-breathing-breathbody, body-breathing-awareness, breathing-awareness-body, breathbodyawareness — each combination is the same thing: no separation. Just look!
- Now, notice how each aspect of this singular reality-process conditions the others, as well as the whole: the deep breath conditions your body, making it more relaxed; your relaxed body conditions your breath, allowing it to flow more easily; bodybreath at ease, awareness becomes brighter, clearer, engendering a more settled body, an easier breath.
- The instructions ask you to *know directly*. This means to know in a non-conceptual, non-discursive way. This knowing is non-dualistic. It is not a case of *you* standing over and apart from some thing — *breathing* or *the breath* or *the body*. When knowing directly, how can you distinguish between knower, knowing, and known?
- So, just breathe in, fully embodied, warmhearted, completely present to just that breathing in.
- Just breathe out, releasing, softening, letting go …

I breathe in, quieting the bodily formation. I breathe out, quieting everything that constitutes the body. **(4)**

- … releasing, softening, letting go.
- Breathing in, simply allow your entire body to be quiet, calm, and at ease.
- Breathing out, simply allow your entire body to be quiet, calm, and at ease.
- Breathing in, just leave everything as it is.
- No doing.
- No undoing.
- No fixing.
- No manipulation.
- No contrivance.
- Breathing out, leave everything just as it is.
- Quiet the body, breathing in.
- Calm the body, breathing out.
- At peace.

> *Please do not revive the past*
> *nor on the future build your hopes.*
> *For the past is gone*
> *and the future has not arrived.*
> *Instead, with insight, please just see*
> *each presently arisen state.*
> *Please know that state, and be certain of it.*
> *Invincibly, unshakably.*
> *Right now the effort must be made.*
> *Tomorrow, death may come — who knows*?
> *If you can but dwell ardently,*
> *relentlessly, day and night,*
> *then it will be said of you:*
> *that one has lived excellently.* —Gotama

FEELINGS

Continue to train as follows:

I breathe in, sensitive to delight. I breathe out, sensitive to delight. (5)

- Within this very calm body, you will notice a bubbly, exuberant quality of being.
- Breathing in and out, simply rest your attention on this feeling of delight.
- Remember that you are becoming sensitive to feeling tones here. How does it feel?
- (If you have trouble recognizing this feeling of delight, go back to the quieting practice of point 4. When your entire body is calm and quiet, you will naturally know this delight.)
- Breathing in, sweet delight — just feel it.
- Breathing out, sweet delight — simply feel it.
- Aligning this feeling with the breath-body-awareness, continue to breathe with it.

> *Energy is pure delight.*
>
> —William Blake

I breathe in, sensitive to ease. I breathe out, sensitive to ease. **(6)**

- Now, breathing in, notice that within this bubbly, delightful feeling there is a quality of genuine pleasure and contentment.
- Breathing out, know directly this feeling of being deeply at ease.

- Body quiet, breath gentle and flowing, awareness clear and bright — what ease!
- Breathing in, how does it feel?
- Breathing out, how does ease feel?
-

***I breathe in, sensitive to feelings. I breathe out, sensitive to feelings.* (7)**

- Now, breathing in, simply *feel* whatever feeling is present.
- As you breathe out, remember to soften and yield so that you can really be sensitive to *whatever* feeling is present.
- There is no need to identify or name feeling; just feel it.
- Breathe in, sensitive to just how you feel.
- Breathe out, sensitive to just how you feel.
- Allow the feeling to be as it is.
- There is no need to push it away, grasp at it, or otherwise manipulate it.
- Notice what happens at the confluence of feeling and thought, feeling and perception.
- As you breathe in, remember to keep body, breath, awareness, and feeling aligned.
- With every breath, you are developing sensitivity to the feeling tone of this continuum.
- Take your time. Feelings are our inner weather. So, please take your time.
- There is nothing to rush *from* or *to*.
- There is no escape from feeling.
- So, breathing in, how do you feel?

- Now, breathing out, how do you feel?
- Even “boredom” and “dullness” are just words for feeling tones. How does boredom feel? How does dullness feel?
- How do you feel?
- Take your time.
- The “how” isn’t just asking about felt qualities; it also asks about the manner in which you feel: did you just react to that feeling? how? are you resting comfortably with this feeling? how?
- How do you feel?
- Just breathe in, feeling whatever feeling is *there*.
- Just breathe out, feeling whatever feeling there *is*.

> *Caretake this moment.*
> *Immerse yourself in its particulars.*
> *Respond to this person,*
> *this challenge,*
> *this situation.*
> *Quit the evasions.*
> *Stop giving yourself needless trouble.*
> *It is time to really live!*
> *It is time to inhabit fully the moment you happen to be in:* now.
> —Epictetus

I breathe in, calming feelings. I breathe out, calming feelings. (8)

- Breathing in and out in this manner, feelings will naturally lose some of their gravitational pull on our thoughts and perceptions; and the entire breath-body-awareness-feeling continuum will begin to settle down.
- So, breathe in, simply allowing this settling to occur on its own accord.

- Breathe out, calming, calming, calming … yet fully aware and vibrantly watchful.

Imagine that in autumn, when massive rain is falling, a water bubble appears on the surface of a puddle, and then dissolves. A person with good vision would look at it, reflect on it, and carefully examine it. Looking in that manner, it would appear as empty, hollow, and insubstantial. For, what substance could there be in a water bubble? In the same way, whatever feeling there may be, whether in the past, present, or future, internal or external, subtle or massive, inconsequential or exalted, close at hand or in the distance, you should look at it, reflect on it, and carefully examine it. Looking in that manner, it will appear as empty, hollow, and insubstantial. For, what substance could there be in a feeling?

— Gotama, the Buddha

MIND

You should train as follows:

I breathe in, sensitive to the mind. I breathe out, sensitive to the mind. **(9)**

- Now, breathe in, turning that calm, vibrant awareness to your thoughts.
- Can you watch a discursive thought as it moves through your mind?
- Breathing in and out, take your time to observe.
- There is no need to do anything with the thought.
- Can you leave that thought alone?
- How? Just let it take its natural course.
- Breathing in, breathing out, carefully watch:

  a thought arises;

  it persists for a moment … changing as it does;

  it slowly dissolves;

  and it finally fades away.

- We are masters of manipulating thought. This mastery is called "thinking."
- It is the very function of the mind to generate thoughts.
- But who or what does the thinking?
- Breathing in, can you allow thoughts to take their course without thinking them?
- Breathing out, just put down the burden of thinking, thinking, this endless entanglement in thought?
- How? Just leave it all alone.

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I breathe in, gladdening the mind. I breathe out, gladdening the mind. **(10)**

- So, breathe in, leaving it all alone.
- Then breathe out, leaving it all alone.
- In the very act of leaving it all alone, a sense of gladness, of deep appreciation and gratitude naturally arises and fills the mind.
- Just breathe with, in, through this gladness.
- How does it feel?
- You are discovering that you have control over the inner weather, over states of mind.
- You are discovering that the mind is malleable — it can be acted on and influenced.
- Mind can be cultivated.
- And, seeing directly the mutually influencing nature of the mind-feeling-body-breath-awareness continuum, you realize the absolute importance of attending to this inner weather, to the mind.
- As you breathe in, become sensitive to a mind that is glad, pleased, thankful, grateful.
- As you breathe out, allow that feeling to permeate the mind.
- Breathing in and out, allow that feeling to permeate the breath-body-awareness-feeling-mind continuum.
- Breathing in, breathing out, remember to maintain the alignment of the breath-body-awareness-feeling-mind continuum.

I breathe in, composing the mind. I breathe out, composing the mind. **(11)**

- Breathing in, notice for a moment that your mind has become gathered together, collected, whole.

- Breathing out, just rest in this perfectly composed mind.
- Breathing in, allow the natural, integral alignment of breath-body-awareness-feeling-mind.
- Breathing out with a mind that is whole, complete, firm and brilliant as a precious gem.

Profound and tranquil,
free from complexity,
uncompounded luminous clarity,
beyond the mind of conceptual ideas;
this is the depth of mind.
Here, there is not a thing to be removed,
nor anything that needs to be added.

I breathe in, releasing the mind. I breathe out, releasing the mind. **(12)**

- Breathing in, firm and collected, what can possibly stick to such a mind?
- Sounds, scents, tastes, forms, tactile sensation, and thoughts — they all arise as usual (how could it be otherwise?), passing through the mind.
- But how can they possibly abide?
- Breathing in and breathing out, notice this process.
- Breathe in, be patient.
- Breathe out, be careful.
- Breathing in, full-bodied.
- Breathing out, warm-hearted.
- Whenever a phenomenon appears within your awareness, just allow it to take its natural course: arising, persisting, dissolving, and disappearing.
- With the disappearance of that particular sound, thought, scent, and so on, comes the disappearance of the hearingmind, thinkingmind, smellingmind.

The wind in the pines plays
a subtle song
of which I have become effortlessly aware.
I did not compose it,
I do not perform it;
yet it simply is as it is.
I do not strain to be aware of it.
It just is as it has always been.
The music, strangely, is as bright as my self-lit interior.

If I tried to compose it or perform it, I could not do so.

If I strained to become aware of it,
it would surely die
and fade away.

— author unknown

PHENOMENA

You should train as follows:

I breathe in, observing impermanence. I breathe out, observing impermanence. **(13)**

- As mind becomes calm and settled, you can more clearly, and with greater sensitivity, observe what has really been evident all along: everything that appears is impermanent.
- Perhaps earlier, you were breathing in with some bodily discomfort.
- Reflect: where is that discomfort now?
- Recall an earlier thought or emotion.
- Reflect: where is that particular thought or emotion now?
- When sights, sounds, scents, tastes, tactile feelings, and thoughts appear, don't they seem to insist that we attend to them? They seem to have a certain
- gravitational pull. Yet, observing impermanence, we see that all phenomena are in fact transparent. There is nothing really *there* at all. Yet, there is not nothing. Look!
- Breathing in and breathing out, observe the impermanent nature of this very breath —
- — now this one, now this …
- Breathing in, turn your attention to a sound.
- Breathing out, observe its impermanence.
- Look directly into the nature of these incessantly arising transparent phenomena, and taste impermanence directly.

All things want to float
and we go around like burdens

settling ourselves on everything,
ravishing them with our weight.

What deadly teachers we are
When things, in fact,
have the gift of forever being children.
—Rainer Maria Rilke

I breathe in, observing dissolution. I breathe out, observing dissolution. **(14)**

- Breathe in, observing the breath closely.
- As you exhale, carefully watch how that very breath gradually dissolves.
- Breathe in again, and notice that the breath slowly dissolves, in fact, *just as* it arises.
- Can you discern any stability whatsoever at any given point in the process?
- Breathe out, observing the gradual dissolution of that very breath.
- Moment by moment — and within the countless sub-moments therein — no substance is to be found. Look!
- Only dissolution.
- Observe this reality in a full-bodied manner and with a warm heart.

This dewdrop of a world is but a dewdrop of a world, and yet, and yet …
(Issa)

I breathe in, observing cessation. I breathe out, observing cessation. **(15)**

- The natural course of a phenomenon continues past dissolution.
- Breathing in, just watch how each instant of the arising breath actually ceases.
- Breathe out to the bottom of the breath, and observe the eventual and ultimate cessation of that breath.

Fiddling with shadows, toiling with forms. It is not understood that forms are the basis for shadows. Raising your voice to quiet an echo. It is not realized that the voice is the root of the echo. You don't drive your car to look for your car. That's using a wedge to remove the very wedge. Isn't it? Now, how can you avoid this error?

— author unknown

I breathe in, observing relinquishment. I breathe out, observing relinquishment. **(16)**

- Breathing in, breathing out, you are looking directly at the very nature of reality.
- You are seeing, breath by breath, the way of the world; you are directly apprehending the great display called life, reality, world: the incessant arising, lingering, dissolving, and disappearing of sights, sounds, scents, tastes, tactile feelings, and thoughts.
- Breathing in, see this thusness, this facticity, this things-as-they-are, this reality, this world just as it is.
- Seeing in this manner, what is there to hold on to?
- Seeing in this manner, relinquishment is the natural response.
- Relinquishment is now your responsibility.
- Before you saw directly into the nature of phenomena, you were unable to respond appropriately.
- Now, you are able to respond according to the natural function: you have become response-able.

So, how will you respond?

Appendix 1

Meditation basics: overview and recommendations

There are numerous forms of Buddhist meditation available to the North American seeker. To get an overview of the possibilities in your area, I recommend consulting one of the three main Buddhist magazines: *Buddhadharma: the Practitioner's Quarterly*; *Shambhala Sun*; and *Tricycle*. There are also numerous online resources. You might want to begin with the World Buddhist Directory at: http://www.buddhanet.info/wbd.

As you surely gathered from my presentation in this book, I recommend a radically simple practice. When it comes to meditation, we can do no better than to follow Henry David Thoreau's advice to "simplify, simplify, simplify." In fact, let's take to heart his motivation for going into the woods. To paraphrase what he said to suit our aims here:

> I practice meditation because I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I cannot learn what it has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I had not lived …I want to know what it is to live deep and suck out all of the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that is not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and to reduce it to its lowest terms.
>
> -—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*.

I hope you will be able to find a group or community — often called a *sangha* in Buddhist circles — that keeps it simple. It will serve you well, I think, to develop an eye for adornments. Buddhist groups are as prone to adornment as any other ones. By adornment, I mean elaborate rituals, devotional practices, iconography, special clothing, dharma names, and so on. There are also more subtle forms of adornment, though, being promulgated as Buddhist practice. These include speculative supernatural beliefs, the incorporation of movement exercises into meditation, excessive dependence on a "realized" teacher, and that sort of thing. Being aware in this fashion, you can then examine for yourself whether

those adornments are really necessary. They can, indeed, be lovely and enriching, and there is certainly nothing wrong with that. But aesthetic pleasure is peripheral to meditation practice. The point here is not to make you wary. It is just a recommendation to keep practice utterly simple.

In any case, I do recommend that you find a group to practice with. When you do, you will receive instruction on the basics of practice. Until then, or if you cannot avoid practicing alone, the following recommendations should be helpful in preparing you to sit with most Buddhist-oriented meditation groups. If these seem too instructions strike you as overly complicated, follow those in chapter five. And please keep in mind that these are only recommendations. You should experiment with whatever variations serve you best.

Space It is helpful, though certainly not essential, to have a special space for your meditation sitting. This space should be orderly and sparse. It can be as simple as a corner of a room. You do not need any paraphernalia. Set up your seat about three feet from the wall. Facing the wall helps to reduce stimuli (eyes are open; see below).

Posture You my sit on a cushion, chair, or bench. There are many online stores where you can purchase what you need. There is nothing magical about the cushions, though. The important point is to have a healthy posture while you sit. Here is a site with some valuable tips on meditation postures: http://www.zafu.net/whichcush.html. Some Zen-oriented recommendations can be found here: http://www.mro.org/zmm/teachings/meditation.php. Sitting on your cushion facing the wall, check your posture. Bring body, breath, and mind together into a unitary experience of concentration, diligence, dignity, and ease.

Legs If you would like to try sitting in a traditional posture, sit on the front third of your cushion or pillow, shifting your body forward slightly. Cross your legs loosely with your feet and knees resting on the floor. It may take a while before the knees are flexible enough to rest on the ground. Don't force it.

Arms Place you hands just below your navel, palms up with the left hand resting on the right. Now, lift your thumbs up, forming an oval. Let the tips of your thumbs barely touch one another. Check this hand position occasionally. Let it serve as a gauge of proper posture. If this feels to strenuous, simply rest your hands, palms down, on your thighs.

Back Keep your back straight, as if the vertebrae were blocks stacked on top of one another. But also allow for the natural curvature of the lower back to occur. This allows the diaphragm to move freely. One side effect of a meditation practice is that your breathing becomes deeper and more conscious. You will begin to allow your abdomen to fill with air and, like a great bellows, push it more deeply into your body, purifying and energizing everything that it touches. So, notice for a moment your belly rising and falling. Notice the air circulating throughout your body. . . An erect, yet not stiff, back enables this kind of alert yet relaxed breathing.

Head and Shoulders Look directly in front of you. Imagine that there is a string attached to the top of your head, and that someone is pulling on it from above. Now, drop your neck into a 45% angle (90% is looking straight ahead; 0% is looking straight down; 45% is right in between). Your shoulders should be pushed back slightly. Maintain that position, checking yourself occasionally, making corrections and adjustments.

Eyes There are two positions. Close your eyes gently, avoiding squeezing them shut. Just place your eyelids together with no muscle strain. When you have become somewhat calm and settled, open your eyes, resting them on the space in front of you. Your eyes will come to rest on the wall. But you are not really looking at the wall. Neither are you looking in front of you. Just cast your gaze gently in front of you and leave it at that.

Mouth Relax the jaw with your teeth slightly parted; mouth closed.

Tongue You may find it helpful sometimes to place your tongue on the upper palate. This will reduce the production of saliva and the subsequent need to swallow.

Motivation Briefly note to yourself your reasons for sitting in meditation. You may, for instance, reflect on the medicinal-like benefits of the practice, or on your need for peace of mind. Generate a determination to devote yourself to the practice for whatever length of time you'll be sitting.

Breathing In meditation, the breath is used as the vehicle for creating a deep, quiet calm and an uninterrupted, flowing concentration. Begin each meditation session by reconnecting with your breath. Be sure to fill up your upper chest, lungs, and abdomen with the breath; and be sure to expel the breath from the same places. Use your muscles to do so. Regarding where to place your attention when meditating, I would like to share a passage from an ancient Buddhist text called the *Patisambhidamagga*, The Path to Discrimination. When I first read this passage, I was struck by the fact that it recommends an approach to meditation that differs significantly from the commonplace contemporary direction to "follow the breath." Instead, it recommends fixing your attention on an actual felt sensation: the feeling of the air on the nose. The text's acknowledgement of awareness of peripheral breath is an example of the phenomenological bent of the work, and it will ring true to anyone who has carefully observed the meditative process.

> It's as if someone were to saw a tree trunk that was lying down on level ground. The person's establishment of present-moment awareness is by virtue of the contact between the saw's teeth and the tree trunk. It is not the case that he fixes his attention on the back and forth motion of the saw's teeth. But neither is it the case that the back and forth motion of the saw's teeth goes unrecognized by him, for he does manifest effort and accomplish the preliminary practice. The tree trunk lain on level ground corresponds to the tactile mark as an anchoring. The teeth of the saw correspond to the inhalation and exhalation. The person's establishment of present-moment awareness by virtue of the contact between the saw's teeth and the tree trunk [and so forth, as above, to "preliminary practice"], corresponds to the practitioner's sitting down and establishing present-moment awareness at the tip of his nose or upper lip. He does not fix his attention on the inhalation and exhalation, although these do not go unrecognized by him, for he does manifest effort, execute the task, and achieve the distinctive effect.

What I refer to here as “tactile mark” is the precise point where the saw’s teeth make contact with the wood. It is at that point that the woodcutter places his attention. Similarly, in meditation practice, the point where the breath makes a palpable impression on the nose/upper lip marks the spot where attention is to placed; hence, “tactile mark.” This area is typically about a half square inch,

Counting Having said that, you may find that it is sometimes helpful to silently count each breath. Breathing in, “one.” Breathing out, “one.” Inhale again, “two.” Exhale, “two.” Count in this manner up to your predetermined number. Keep your full attention on the breath. When you noticed that your attention has wandered from the breath, just be clear about this fact, noting the wandering gently to yourself, and then begin counting again. Place your attention on each breath. Breath by breath, breathe, be aware, let go, come alive.

Contact When you perceive a deepening of calm and concentration, place your attention on the point where the breath touches your nose. Simply be aware of the sensations as the breath moves in and out. (It may be that on the exhalation you feel the breath on the upper lip instead of the nostril.) When your attention wanders, simply bring it back to this single point.

Awareness Eventually, as you become more tranquil and settled, you may naturally withdraw your attention from this point of contact, and simply be aware of the breathing process. Breathing in, be aware of just this breathing; breathing out, be aware of just this breathing.

Openness When you have attained a deep and steady calm, open up to the phenomena arising continually within your sensorium (hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking/emoting). When a sound arises before the ear, attend to the very process of hearing. Do not label the object of hearing (car, airplane, person talking), do not make determinations, judgments, or decisions concerning the sound/object (want, don’t want; like, dislike; good, bad; distracting, annoying, etc. ad nauseum), do not attempt to manipulate the sound (make it go away, allow it to linger): simple be aware of the very

process of being aware of hearing. Apply the same method to the rest of the sensorium. Maintain a light, soft awareness of the breathing process throughout this opening process.

Appendix 2

Good advice: the precepts

In traditional Buddhist settings, ethics or morality are emphasized much more than in American ones. The basic idea is quite commonsensical: if your life is a self-created mess, how will you ever make progress in meditation? Imagine spending an hour fighting with your wife, and then sitting down on the cushion. How will you concentrate? Won't you be pre-occupied with the fight?

So, another way of looking at ethics is as an answer to the all-important question posed by Henry David Thoreau: How can we live deliberately? How, that is, can we live no longer enslaved by unconscious tendencies? How can we strip away the superfluous, tasting life itself, rather than the counterfeit pleasures that count as joy? What Thoreau refers to as the "Spartan-like" sturdiness points to an important aspect of our own practice; namely the necessity of establishing a degree of stability in our lives.

The traditional Buddhist structure for creating this stability within daily activity is known as "the five precepts." A meaning of the Latin term *præcipere* is "prior advice;" so, we can call it "good advice." In the language of the oldest Buddhist literature, the Pali term is *sikkhapada*, "training instructions." This term can also be translated as "way to discipline." (Remember the Buddhist saying: first comes discipline; then comes freedom.)

You might look at these instructions as a pathway pointing to a way of living that is less destabilizing and destructive than otherwise. Being so, the training instructions offer us a way to protect ourselves from deeply entrenched, perhaps even unconscious, tendencies of thought, speech, and conduct. The training instructions protect us by establishing basic parameters for living which exclude destabilizing and destructive actions. This protection, of course, requires the practitioner to make a firm determination to uphold the training instruction. (It is often helpful, though certainly not necessary, to make this determination publicly, in a formal, ritualized setting. Many meditation groups perform some

kind of "taking of the vows" ceremony periodically.) When you are protected in this manner, those with whom you interact — from loved ones, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, to strangers and even enemies — are protected as well.

The five training instructions are least effective when applied rigidly as rules to be followed, or as moral precepts leading to purity or righteousness. The premise behind the training instructions is that they are valuable not because they are "good" or "right," but because they are beneficial to a life of calm, clarity, insight, and wisdom.

Like every other aspect of our practice, the five training instructions are most effective when undertaken in a spirit of exploration and discovery. Why not experiment with them for a short period of time, just to see what happens?

Below, I give the basic instruction as stated by the Buddha, then the reformulated instruction by the contemporary teacher Thich Nhat Hahn. He has written extended commentaries on each instruction. You can find these at http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com. I have added some of my own brief commentary here (this is in italic and signed GW). I hope, however, that you will give thought to what each instruction might mean to you.

THE FIVE TRAINING INSTRUCTIONS

1. I undertake the training instruction to abstain from the taking of life.

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I undertake to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life. (Thich Nhat Hahn)

Most of us would probably deny that this is a real issue for us. After all, who among us is involved in overt acts of killing? Well, looking deeper than the overt macro surface, all of us are involved in killing. At the micro level of existence every step, every breath, that we take entails killing. Indirectly, we participate in cultures of killing when we buy certain clothes or foods. So, is it even possible to abstain from the taking of life? Perhaps in the very fact that it, apparently, is not possible to live without taking life, we can see the crucial need to become more conscious of this matter. (GW)

2. I undertake the training instruction to abstain from taking what is not given.

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I undertake to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I undertake to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth. (TNH)

What does it mean to "steal." Again, since few of us are bandits, shoplifters, or burglars, we don't need a training instruction for overt theft. So, to what might this instruction be pointing? What other ways do we take what is not given? Are we engaged in more subtle forms of exploitation, either directly, involving those around us, or indirectly, involving products that we consume? In what ways might forms of mistreatment, manipulation, or taking advantage of others be understood as "taking what is not given"? (GW)

3. I undertake the training instruction to abstain from sexual misconduct.

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I undertake to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. (TNH)

Little needs to be said about the destructive and destabilizing nature of sexual misconduct. How many families have been destroyed because of infidelity? How many children suffer because of the broken homes that ensue from infidelity? Again, the point here is not to become puritanical regarding sex. A healthy sex-life, like a healthy diet, engenders well being and pleasure. So, enjoy! But enjoy within the bounds of your commitments. You know what those are. Also, the Buddhist notion of sexual misconduct makes no judgments about homosexuality, or about what is otherwise "normal" or deviant. (GW)

4. I undertake the training instruction to abstain from false speech.

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small. (TNH)

False speech is not only lying, is it? Think of the many ways that we speak falsely. Easy examples of false speech include gossip, dissembling, mockery, facetiousness and sarcasm, derision. But even when we are speaking "truly," how much of our speech is merely formulaic? Speaking in formulas and clichés is not really speaking at all, is it? Isn't it more like mimicry? Formulaic speech lacks genuineness and honesty. Another common example of false speech is nervous rambling. That is, how often do we speak just to fill the awkward silence, or to avoid or prevent something? Can such speech be considered "false"? The Buddha said that speech should have the following five characteristics. It should be: timely (know when to speak and when to listen); gentle; truthful (according to the case); beneficial (to the recipient); and spoken with a friendly heart. (GW)

5. I undertake the training instruction to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking and consuming. I vow to 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. (TNH)

How many toxins do you consume on a daily basis? Another way of asking this question is: how toxic is your life? Since the effects of toxins are cumulative, and we consume relatively minute amounts daily, we are largely unaware of the effects of the particular toxins in our lives. Once we refrain from consumption of those toxins, of course, we begin to discern their effects. So, this training instruction can be used as a strategy for, first, becoming more fully conscious of the flow of toxins in our lives, and second, eliminating unnecessary toxin and reducing the effects of others. What counts as a toxin in your life? The easy examples are food, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, coffee, refined sugar, and so on. But what else might be considered toxic? How about five visits a day to the internet? What about daily gorging on the news? What about habitual negativity concerning yourself (say body image), others, or life in general? Might habitual thinking patterns have toxic effects? What about seemingly innocuous habits, such as eating late at night, or biting your nails? Again, the point is not to become puritanical. The point is actually to begin to enjoy our lives, to derive joy from being open and clear, not from the effects of toxicity. Really, like the first training instruction, this instruction serves to point out the ubiquity of toxins (food itself is toxic). That being the case how can you reduce your toxic intake? (GW)

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