



tricycle

TRICYCLE TEACHINGS

Working  
with  
Emotions

A TRICYCLE E-BOOK

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TAMING DESTRUCTIVE  
EMOTIONS

Can meditation change the brain?

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL GOLEMAN

**In your book, *Destructive Emotions*, you write that “recognizing and transforming destructive emotions is the heart of spiritual practice.” Can you tell us what you mean by “destructive emotions”?** There are two perspectives, one from the East and the other from the West. The Western view of destructive emotions—the modern philosophical and scientific view—is that they are emotions that result in harm to oneself or to others. And “harm” here is meant in the most obvious sense: physical harm, affective harm, social harm. The view from the East is subtler. The Buddhist view, as it emerged in conversations with the Dalai Lama at the Mind and Life conference in March 2000, is that destructive emotions are those that disturb one’s internal equilibrium, while healthy ones foster equilibrium of the mind. In this sense, “harmful” emotions are essentially what Buddhists call the *kleshas*, or defilements, which are enumerated in the classical texts. The *kleshas* operate on a gross level—in the form of hatred, craving, jealousy, and so on—and also more subtly, mingling with our thoughts to disturb equilibrium internally.

**Buddhist teachings tell us that meditation can train the mind to replace destructive emotions with positive states, like equanimity. How does this hold up to scientific scrutiny?** As I report in *Destructive Emotions*, we now have extremely compelling evidence showing that yes, dharma practice does alleviate destructive emotions and that it does so by profoundly altering the way the brain functions. The work of Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has been key in discovering this. Davidson has been involved in research on meditation on and off for thirty years.

When he and I were graduate students at Harvard together in the 1970s, we both did research on meditation. He looked at the attentional training effects; I looked at the stress-alleviation effects. But the methodologies back then were so primitive compared to what we have now that we didn't get very far. Now he is working in a field called "affective neuroscience," which looks at emotions and the brain, and he has come back to the study of meditation with state-of-the-art methods that are yielding quite compelling results on meditation's benefits.

**Can you say something about those results?** Yes, but first some background: Davidson's research has found that when people are in the grip of a strong disturbing emotion—anger, paralyzing fear, depression—there's an unusually high amount of activity in the amygdala, an almond-shaped structure deep in the emotional centers of the brain. Along with this heightened activity, there's an unusually high level of activity in the right prefrontal cortex, the brain's executive center, situated just behind the forehead. It seems that the amygdala is driving this area of the prefrontal cortex when we're in the grip of destructive emotional states. When destructive emotions take over, our thoughts, our memories, and our perceptions are skewed accordingly, and they have a

cascading effect. For instance, when we're angry, we more easily remember things that make us angry. In other words, anger feeds itself, and we are more likely to act in a way that expresses that anger. That's a description, then, of the brain caught in a destructive emotion. By contrast, when the opposite range manifests—positive states like optimism, hope, buoyancy—the amygdala and the right side are quiet, whereas the area on the left in the prefrontal area is active.

As we go through our day, each of us has a distinct ratio of prefrontal activity on the right and the left. Surprisingly, Davidson has found that that ratio will predict the typical range of our moods day-to-day. So people who tend to have much more *right* prefrontal activity are much more prone to bad moods. People who have much more *left* prefrontal activity are more likely to experience very good moods, and if they get a very bad mood, it won't be very strong or it won't last very long.

**Can meditation change this ratio for the better?** What you're asking is whether the brain is plastic—that is, can it be shaped and changed? And the good news is, the brain is extremely plastic *if* we undergo systematic, repeated experiences. The problem is, we almost never try to train the brain unless we are in the course of acquiring a skill. If you learn to play the piano, for instance, you are reshaping the cortical area that controls fine finger movements, and further developing parts of the auditory cortex. If you start to drive a cab in London, within six months the part of your brain that is operating when you are interpreting a map—in other words, your visual-spatial memory—starts to expand and become stronger. This has been demonstrated using functional MRIs, the gold standard now for assessing brain function. The good news for practitioners is that meditation practice seems to be one of those systematic trainings of the brain that yields quite beneficial effects, even from the

beginning.

Davidson and Jon Kabat-Zinn—who's been so important in bringing mindfulness into the mainstream of medicine and culture—teamed up to do a study to appear in a scientific journal, in which they taught stressed-out research scientists at a biotech firm to do mindfulness meditation. The subjects practiced about three hours a week for eight weeks. Davidson did brain assessments both before and after, and he found that in the before state, these guys—and they were mostly men—tended to have a right prefrontal tilt: they felt hassled, pressured, stressed-out, didn't enjoy their work anymore. But after the mindfulness training, Davidson found there was a significant shift from right prefrontal activity to the left. The subjects started to love their work again; they felt it was a challenge instead of a hassle; their moods were much, much better. It's clear that simply beginning meditation can bring about a significant shift in the brain.

Now, the question is, how far can you push it? Davidson has just started to answer that question. One of the first practitioners he studied is the head of a monastery in Southern India. They brought him into the lab and tried to get his baseline for right-left ratio. The right-left ratio, by the way, is a bell curve. Most people tend to be in the middle, with very few people far to the right or left. This particular subject had the highest value for a leftward tilt that had ever been seen in his lab. Davidson has also found—and this I find quite significant—that when he asked another highly experienced practitioner to do a meditation on compassion, his brain went into an extreme value toward the left, too, again in the highest range seen thus far. These and other early results are so compelling that Davidson, along with other scientists, has begun an ongoing program to study very highly experienced practitioners, people who have done three years or more of intensive retreat.

What does this suggest? If these findings remain consistent as Davidson progresses with more studies, this suggests that in terms of neuroplasticity, dharma practice may push the brain toward the upper registers of positivity in moods. If you look at classical Abhidharma—the Buddhist psychology—and the traditional texts, it says that the more you practice, the less you should experience the kleshas, or destructive emotions, and the more you should experience the positive ones. Lo and behold, 2,500 years later science is saying, *Hey, it looks like that's what happens!*

**In your book, Davidson refers to what he calls “altered traits of consciousness.” What does he mean?** Well, an altered *trait* of consciousness is in contrast to an altered *state*. In meditation practice, with time, you may have occasional experiences of bliss or of rapture or have visions; all kinds of pleasant things can happen. Those are temporary altered states, and they fade; virtually every tradition in Buddhism refers to them as epiphenomena rather than goals in themselves. The standard advice is, just do the practice, don't make a big deal of it. One of the biggest confusions of Western culture has been to misinterpret such temporary states—to mistake momentary bliss experiences for actual realization. But realization has to do with stabilizing the underlying abilities of insight that generate those experiences—not the blissful states themselves. In such stabilization, you are altering your mind—or “brain,” as we in the West would say. To achieve some stability would be to acquire what Davidson calls an “altered trait”—in other words, something that endures. Long-term meditation, science is now discovering, moves us toward enduring changes in brain activity.

**Given the fact that the negative emotions seem to have been built into us over millennia of evolutionary development, does that set up**

**a rather bleak picture for countering them with meditation practice?**

I think that recent discoveries pointing in favor of neuroplasticity offer great hope. I've been a strong advocate of what's called social-emotional learning programs in school for kids. Because if we can help kids acquire the everyday skills, like self-awareness, self-control, and empathy, that allow you to manage anger, fear, and depression—and these skills can be taught more easily to children—then we will help them shape their brains in a more optimal way for the rest of their lives. But as adults we need a little remedial work. And it looks like meditation is good for that task.

**Have you studied the effects of meditation in children?**

No. But we know that meditation shapes the brain, and you can conjecture that it gives people quite an advantage if they do it earlier in life, when the brain is being formed, rather than later. That's the case, for instance, with *tulkus*, or for people who have been monks or nuns as children. What the effect of that is we don't know because we've never studied it, but you can see that it might give children a great advantage through life in how, for example, they relate to their negative emotions. It may be that they have much stronger neural circuitry from childhood onward in, say, inhibiting negative emotions, because they've had the right kind of mental training. It makes you wonder about what's happening to the brain of someone who does a three-year retreat from the age of twelve or thirteen.

**What implications does all of this have for the field of psychology?**

The deep assumptions that underlie psychology look rather culture-bound now, particularly when it comes to what the upper limits of human potential might be. Freud said that the best psychoanalysis can do is bring people from neurosis to ordinary unhappiness. It's only been within the last five years or so that psychologists have started to think

about a *positive* psychology, that is, the positive range of moods. Most of the studies have focused on the negative range of emotion. Now there are psychologists who are looking at optimism and equanimity and happiness as areas in which people can develop. But what the upper limits of happiness might be is still relatively circumscribed; there's nothing in psychology, for example, to approximate the Buddhist idea of *sukkha*, of a happiness beyond circumstances, beyond conditions of life, of an ongoing internal state wherein one is replete no matter what else might be going on. That's just not in the vision of modern psychology.

**Were any of the results of your collective studies particularly surprising?** One unexpected discovery was that meditation training may make you a keener observer of other people's emotional states—I found it surprising, as did the Dalai Lama, when he heard about it. Paul Ekman, another of the scientists involved in the Mind and Life discussions, is a world expert on the facial expression of emotion. He discovered what are called “microexpressions,” fleeting facial expressions that last a twentieth of a second or less. They're completely automatic and unconscious, revealing your true feelings at a particular moment. Ekman has developed a test of people's ability to detect microexpressions accurately. Curiously, he's found that most people who might want to be good at it, like judges or police or psychotherapists, aren't any better than the average person. I think the group that tested best were secret service agents. But when Ekman brought in seasoned practitioners, he discovered that they had an accuracy rating in the ninety-ninth percentile for many of the emotions—but not for all of them. Interestingly, exactly which emotions they were so good at detecting, differed from one person to another. But Ekman had virtually never seen such accuracy. And this was an unanticipated benefit of meditation. It may be because of a general perceptual

sharpening, or because of some kind of enhanced empathy. A central tenet of Buddhism is compassion, and although it would be unscientific to draw any conclusion at this point, Ekman's findings are certainly consistent with cultivating compassion. In fact, I think empathy is a prerequisite for compassion, so in that sense it's completely in accord with the Buddhist teachings.

**In your book, the Dalai Lama is very clear about the fact that concentration by itself is not spiritual practice, it merely sharpens the brain's ability to focus.** That's a key point. Not all meditation that changes the brain is necessarily spiritually beneficial. Meditative abilities such as simply strengthening one's ability to concentrate can be quite worldly in and of themselves. Meditative states start to have spiritual benefits when they're used for developing insight and compassion. So if you strengthen your concentration and then use it in support of cultivating insight—for looking into the mind—that's good, and if you use it as a support for cultivating compassion, that has genuine spiritual benefit, too. But if you use it just to become a better martial arts practitioner, I don't think it has any particular spiritual benefits. In other words, it can be used to any human end, bad or good, but without the spiritual element of cultivating insight and compassion, it's a different goal altogether.

**Can science aid in the process of overcoming afflictive emotions?** I don't think that science can come up with some gadget that gives us a new way of practicing; I'm skeptical of that. I think that ultimately each of us has to do that work ourselves, internally. But I think that in our culture science can be of enormous help in establishing that the methodologies we've been using in dharma practice for millennia actually are effective on scientific grounds. The scientific findings that establish

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the efficacy of dharma practice in helping to alleviate disturbing emotions might remove some doubts that get in the way of a commitment to practice the dharma. And they might motivate and inspire people to work harder in their practice. So in that sense, science can be of aid to dharma practice. And it can do more than alleviate dharma practitioners' doubts; it can interest people who haven't been practitioners in starting meditation practice.

I think one of the most significant developments is that very high-level scientists in the West are now using state-of-the-art measures with highly experienced dharma practitioners. This has become a major research focus in itself; so much so that in September, those scientists will be presenting their results and reflections at a public conference at MIT. In a related research effort, Paul Ekman, at the University of California at San Francisco, is testing a combination of Buddhist meditation and Western methods that will be offered in a secular context to help anyone who might benefit. Both of these developments are the direct result of the Dalai Lama's explicit urging.

**So what is the bottom line on the mind's potential for transformation and liberation from afflictive emotions?** Well, it's beginning to look like the Buddha just might have had it right.

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FEEDING YOUR DEMONS

Five steps to transforming your obstacles  
into tranquility and wisdom

TSULTRIM ALLIONE

Demons are not bloodthirsty ghouls waiting for us in dark places; they are within us, the forces that we find inside ourselves, the core of which is ego-clinging. Demons are our obsessions and fears, feelings of insecurity, chronic illnesses, or common problems like depression, anxiety, and addiction. Feeding our demons rather than fighting them may seem to contradict the conventional approach of attacking and attempting to eliminate that which assails us, but it turns out to be a remarkable alternative and an effective path to liberation from all dichotomies.

In my own process of learning and applying the practice of Chöd, which was originated by the eleventh-century Tibetan yogini Machig Lapdrön, I realized that demons—or maras as they are called in Buddhism—are not exotic beings like those seen in Asian scroll paintings. They are our present fears and obsessions, the issues and emotional reactivity of our own lives. Our demons, all stemming from the root demon of ego-clinging, but manifesting in an infinite variety of ways, might come from the conflicts we have with our lover, anxiety we feel when we fly, or the discomfort we feel when we look at ourselves in the mirror. We might have a demon that makes us fear abandonment or a demon that

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causes us to hurt the ones we love.

Demons are ultimately generated by the mind and, as such, have no independent existence. Nonetheless, we engage with them as though they were real, and we believe in their existence—ask anyone who has fought an addiction or anxiety attacks. Demons show up in our lives whether we provoke them or not, whether we want them or not. Even common parlance refers to demons, such as a veteran who is home “battling his demons” of post-traumatic stress from the war in Iraq. I recently heard a woman say she was fighting her “jealousy demon.” Unfortunately, the habit of fighting our demons only gives them strength. By feeding, not fighting, our demons, we are integrating these energies, rather than rejecting them and attempting to distance ourselves from disowned parts of ourselves, or projecting them onto others.

### THE PRACTICE OF THE FIVE STEPS OF FEEDING YOUR DEMONS

When I began to teach the Chöd practice in the West twenty-five years ago, I developed an exercise of visualizing and feeding “personal” demons so that the idea of demons would be relevant and applicable for Westerners. This exercise evolved into a five-step process, which began to be used independently of the Tibetan Chöd practice. My students told me that this method helped them greatly with chronic emotional and physical issues such as anxiety, compulsive eating, panic attacks, and illness. When they told me the five-step process also helped in dealing with upheavals such as the end of a relationship, the stress of losing a job, the death of a loved one, and interpersonal problems at work and at home, I realized that this exercise had a life of its own outside of teaching the traditional Chöd practice.

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When we obsess about weight issues or become drained by a relationship or crave a cigarette, we give our demons strength, because we aren't really *paying attention* to the demon. When we understand how to feed the demon's real need with fearless generosity, the energy tied up in our demon will tend to dissolve and become an ally, like the demons that attacked Machig and subsequently became her aides.

Feeding a demon will take about half an hour. Choose a quiet place where you feel safe and comfortable. Arrange a time when you won't be interrupted. Set up two chairs or two cushions opposite each other: one for you and one for the demon and ally. Once you're set up you will want to keep your eyes closed until the end of the fifth step, so put the two seats (chairs or cushions) close enough to each other that you can feel the one in front of you with your eyes closed. Keeping your eyes closed will help you stay focused and present as you imagine this encounter with your demon. However, until you know the steps by heart, you may need to glance at the instructions.

Begin by generating the motivation to do the practice for the benefit of all beings. Then take nine deep abdominal breaths, which means breathing in deeply until you can feel your abdomen expand. Place your hands on your stomach and notice it rise and fall. As you inhale during the first three breaths, imagine your breath traveling to any physical tension you are holding in your body and then imagine the exhalation carrying this tension away. During the next three breaths release any emotional tension you might be carrying with the exhalation and in the last three breaths release any mental tension such as worries or concepts that are blocking you. Now you are ready for the five steps.

### STEP ONE: FIND THE DEMON

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In the first step you will find where in your body you hold the demon. Your demon might be an illness, an addiction, a phobia, perfectionism, anger, depression, or anything that is dragging you down, draining your energy. So first decide what you will work with. Finding the demon in your body takes you out of your head into a direct somatic experience. Think about the issue or demon you've decided to work with and let your awareness scan your body from head to toe, without any judgments, simply being aware of the sensations that are present. Locate where you are holding this energy by noticing where your attention goes in your body when you think about this issue. Once you find the feeling, intensify it, exaggerate it. Here are some questions to ask yourself: What color is it? What shape does it have? Does it have a texture? What is its temperature? If it emitted a sound, what would it be? If it had a smell, what would it be?

### STEP TWO: PERSONIFY THE DEMON AND ASK IT WHAT IT NEEDS

In the second step you invite the demon to move from being simply a collection of sensations, colors, and textures that you've identified inside your body to becoming a living entity sitting right in front of you. As a personified form appears, a figure or a monster, notice its color, size, expression and especially the look in its eyes. Don't try to control or decide what it will look like; let your unconscious mind produce the image. If something comes up that seems silly, like a cliché or a cartoon character, don't dismiss it or try to change it. Work with whatever form shows up without editing it. Then ask three questions aloud in the following order: What do you want from me? What do you need from me? How will you feel if you get what you need? Once you have asked these questions,

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immediately change places with the demon. You need to become the demon to know the answers.

### STEP THREE: BECOME THE DEMON

In the third step, you will discover what the demon needs by putting yourself in the demon's place, actually changing places and allowing yourself to see things from the demon's point of view. With your eyes still closed, move to the seat you have set up in front of you, facing your original seat, and imagine yourself as the demon. Take a deep breath or two and feel yourself becoming this demon. Vividly recall the being that was personified in front of you and imagine you are "in the demon's shoes." Take a moment to adjust to your new identity before answering the three questions.

Then answer the three questions aloud in the first person, looking at an imagined form of your ordinary self in front of you, like this: "What I want from you is . . . What I need from you is . . . When my need is met, I will feel . . ."

It's very important that these questions make the distinction between wants and needs, because many demons will want your life force, or everything good in your life, or to control you, but that's not what they *need*. Often what they need is hidden beneath what they say they want, which is why we ask the second question, probing a little deeper. The demon of alcoholism might want alcohol but need something quite different, like safety or relaxation. Until we get to the need underlying the craving, the craving will continue.

In response to the question "What do you need?" the stress demon might respond: "What I actually need is to feel secure."

Having learned that beneath the stress demon's desire to hurry and

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do more lies a need to feel secure, you still must find out how the demon will feel if it gets what it needs. This will tell you what to feed the demon. Thus, having been asked “How will you feel if you get what you need?” the stress demon might answer: “I will feel like I can let go and finally relax.” Now you know to feed this demon relaxation. By feeding the demon the emotional feeling that underlies the desire for the substance, we address the core issue instead of just the symptoms.

### STEP FOUR: FEED THE DEMON AND MEET THE ALLY

Now we’ve reached the crucial moment when we actually feed the demon. Return to your original position and face the demon. Take a moment to settle back into your own body before you envision the demon in front of you again.

Begin by imagining that your consciousness is separating from your body so that it is as if your consciousness is outside your body and just an observer of this process. Then imagine your body melting into nectar that consists of whatever the demon has told you it ultimately will *feel* if it gets what it needs, so the nectar consists of the answer to the third question in step three. For example, the demon might have said it will *feel* powerful, or loved, or accepted when it gets what it needs. So the nectar should be just that: You offer nectar of the feeling of power, love, or acceptance.

Now feed the demon this nectar, give free rein to your imagination in seeing how the nectar will be absorbed by the demon. See the demon drinking in your offering of nectar through its mouth or through the pores of its skin, or taking it in some other way. Continue imagining the nectar flowing into the demon; imagine that there is an infinite supply

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of this nectar, and that you are offering it with a feeling of limitless generosity. While you feed your demon, watch it carefully, as it is likely to begin to change. Does it look different in any way? Does it morph into a new being altogether?

At the moment of total satiation, its appearance usually changes significantly. It may become something completely new or disappear into smoke or mist. What happens when the demon is completely satisfied? There's nothing it's "supposed" to do, so just observe what happens; let the process unfold without trying to create a certain outcome. Whatever develops will arise spontaneously when the demon is fed to its complete satisfaction. It is important that the demon be fed to complete satisfaction. If your demon seems insatiable, just imagine how it would look if it were completely satisfied; this bypasses our tendency to hold on to our demons.

The next part of step four is the appearance of an ally. A satisfied demon may transform directly into a benevolent figure, which may be the ally. The ally could be an animal, a bird, a human, a mythic god or bodhisattva, a child, or a familiar person. Ask this figure if it is the ally. If it replies it is not, then invite an ally to appear. Or the demon may have disappeared, leaving no figure behind. If so, you can still meet the ally by inviting an ally to appear in front of you. Once you clearly see the ally, ask it the following questions: How will you serve me? What pledge or commitment will you make to me? How will you protect me? How can I gain access to you?

Then change places and become the ally, just as you became the demon in step three. Having become the ally, take a moment to fully inhabit this body. Notice how it feels to be the protective guardian. Then, speaking as the ally, answer the questions above. Try to be as specific as possible in your answers.

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Once the ally has articulated how it will serve and protect you, and how you can summon it, return to your original place. Take a moment to settle back into yourself, seeing the ally in front of you. Then imagine you are receiving the help and the commitment the ally has pledged. Feel this supportive energy enter you and take effect.

Finally, imagine the ally itself melting into you and feel its deeply nurturing essence integrating with you. Notice how you feel when the ally has dissolved into you. Realize that the ally is actually an inseparable part of you, and then allow yourself to dissolve into emptiness, which will naturally take you to the fifth and final step.

### STEP FIVE: REST IN AWARENESS

When you have finished feeding the demon to complete satisfaction and the ally has been integrated, you and the ally dissolve into emptiness. Then you just rest. When the thinking mind takes a break for even a few seconds, a kind of relaxed awareness replaces the usual stream of thoughts. We need to encourage this and not fill this space with anything else; just let it be. Some people describe the fifth step as peace, others as freedom, and yet others as a great vastness. I like calling it “the gap,” or the space between thoughts. Usually when we experience the gap we have a tendency to want to fill it up immediately; we are uncomfortable with empty space. In the fifth step, rather than filling this space, rest there. Even if this open awareness only occurs for a moment, it’s the beginning of knowing your true nature.

Although the method of personifying a fear or neurosis is not unfamiliar in Western psychology, the value of the five-step practice of feeding your demons is quite different, beginning with the generation of an altruistic motivation, followed by the body offering (which works

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directly with ego-clinging) and finally the experience of nondual meditative awareness in the final step of the process. This state of relaxed awareness, free from our usual fixation of “self” versus “other,” takes us beyond the place where normal psychotherapeutic methods end.

### DIRECT LIBERATION OF DEMONS

Once we have practiced feeding the demons for some time, we begin to become aware of demons as they form. We learn to see them coming: “Ah, here comes my self-hatred demon.” This makes it possible—with some practice—to liberate demons as they arise without going through the five steps, by using what is called “direct liberation.” This most immediate and simple route to liberating demons takes you straight to the fifth step, but it is also the most difficult to do effectively.

Direct liberation is deceptively simple. It involves noticing the arising energy or thoughts and then turning your awareness directly toward it without giving it form as we do in the five steps. This is the energetic equivalent of turning a boat directly *into* the wind when sailing; the boat travels because of its resistance to the wind and stops when its power source has been neutralized. Similarly, if you turn your awareness directly *into* an emotion it stops developing. This doesn’t mean you are analyzing it or thinking about it but rather turning toward it with clear awareness. At this point, if you are able to do it correctly, the demon will instantly be liberated and vanish on the spot. The technique of direct liberation is comparable to being afraid of a monster in the dark and then turning on the light. When the light goes on we see that there never was a monster in the first place, that it was just a projection of our own mind.

Let’s take the example of a demon of jealousy. I notice, “Ah, I’m get-

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ting jealous, my heart rate is increasing. My body is tensing.” If at that moment I turn toward the energy of jealousy and bring my full awareness to it, the jealousy will pop like a balloon. When we feed a demon using the five steps, by the time you get to the fifth step both you and the demon have dissolved into emptiness and there is just vast awareness. Here we are short-circuiting the demon as it arises by meeting its energy consciously as soon as it surfaces, going directly to the fifth step.

Another example of a situation in which you might practice direct liberation would be an interaction with other people. You might be sitting with your lover, for instance, when you discover that something he committed to doing has not even been started. You feel irritation welling up. But then if you turn your awareness to this sensation of irritation, looking right at it, it disappears.

One way I explain direct liberation at my retreats is through an experiment. You might try it. Consciously generate a strong emotion—anger, sadness, disappointment, or desire. When you get this feeling, intensify it, and then turn your awareness directly to that emotion and rest in the experience that follows. Liberation of the demon can be so simple and instantaneous that you will distrust the result, but check back on it, and, if you have done it correctly, the emotion will have dissolved.

With considerable practice the next stage becomes possible: Here immediate awareness, clear and unmodified, is already stable, not something you just glimpse periodically. At this stage, you don't have to “do” anything; awareness simply meets emotions as they arise so that they are naturally liberated. Emptiness, clarity, and awareness are spontaneously present. Emotions don't get hold of you; they arise and are liberated simultaneously. This is called instant liberation. An emotion arises but finds no foothold and dissolves. At this point we have no need for feeding demons, because we are governed by awareness, rather than by

our emotions.

The process of acknowledging our collective demons begins with our personal demons—universal fears, paranoia, prejudices, arrogance, and other weaknesses. Families, groups, nations, and even society as a whole can create demons that are the sum of unresolved individual demons. If we do not acknowledge these personal demons, our weaknesses and fears can join those of others to become something monstrous.

Through shifting our perspective away from attacking our enemies and defending our territory to feeding our demons, we can learn to stay in dialogue with the enemy and find peaceful solutions. In this way we begin a quiet revolution. Drawing on the inspiration of the teachings of an eleventh-century yogini, we can change our world.

## THE STORY OF CHÖD PRACTICE

The great eleventh-century Tibetan yogini Machig Labdrön (1055–1145) received empowerment from her teacher, Kyotön Sonam Lama, with several other women practitioners. At the key moment when the wisdom beings descended, Machig magically rose up from where she was sitting, passed through the wall of the temple, and flew into a tree above a pond.

This pond was the residence of a powerful *naga*, or water spirit. These capricious beings can cause disruption and disease but can also act as treasure holders or protectors. This particular *naga* was so terrifying that the local people did not even dare to look at the pond, never mind approach it. But Machig landed in the tree above the pond and stayed there in a state of profound, unshakable meditation.

Young Machig's arrival in this lone tree above the pond was a direct confrontation for the water spirit. He approached her threateningly, but she remained in meditation, unafraid. This infuriated him, so he gath-

ered a huge army of *nagas* from the region in an attempt to intimidate her. They approached her as a mass of terrifying magical apparitions. When she saw them coming, Machig instantly transformed her body into a food offering, and, as her biography states, “They could not devour her because she was egoless.”

Not only did the aggression of the *nagas* evaporate but also they developed faith in her and offered her their “life essence,” committing not to harm other beings and vowing to protect her. By meeting the demons without fear, compassionately offering her body as food rather than fighting against them, Machig turned the demons into allies.

There is a story, also about a water creature, in Western mythology that stands in stark contrast to the story of Machig Labdrön and the *naga*. The myth of Hercules exemplifies the heroic quest in Western culture. Accompanied by his nephew Iolaus, Hercules goes to the lake of Lerna, where the Hydra, a nine-headed water serpent, has been attacking innocent passersby. Hercules and Iolaus fire flaming arrows at the beast to draw it from its lair. After it emerges, Hercules discovers that every time he destroys one of the Hydra’s heads, two more grow back in its place.

Iolaus uses a burning branch to cauterize the necks at the base of the heads as Hercules lops them off, successfully preventing the Hydra from growing more. Eventually only one head remains. This head is immortal, but Hercules cuts through the mortal neck that supports it. The head lies before him, hissing. Finally, he buries the immortal head under a large boulder, considering the monster vanquished.

But what kind of victory has Hercules achieved? Has he actually eliminated the enemy, or merely suppressed it? The Hydra’s immortal head, the governing force of its energy, is still seething under the boulder and could reemerge if circumstances permitted. What does this say

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about the monster-slaying heroic mentality that so enthralls and permeates our society?

Although the positive aspects of the myth can lead to important battles against hatred, disease, and poverty, it also poses terrible and largely unacknowledged dangers. Among these is the ego inflation of those who identify themselves with the role of the dragon-slaying warrior hero. Another is projecting evil onto our opponents, demonizing them, and justifying their murder, while we claim to be wholly identified with good. The tendency to kill—rather than engage—the monster prevents us from knowing our own monsters and transforming them into allies.

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3

THE THREE THINGS  
WE FEAR MOST

By truly knowing our fears, we can break their spell

EZRA BAYDA

When things upset us, we often think that something is wrong. Perhaps the one time this is truest is when we experience fear. In fact, as human beings, we expend a huge portion of our energy dealing with anxiety and fear. This has certainly been apparent in the present economic upheavals and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We live with an everyday reality that is tinged with personal and cultural anxiety. Our fears are not just the product of global events, however—they go to our very core. On a day-to-day level, fear often motivates how we act and react, and sometimes even how we dress or stand or talk. But fear makes our life narrow and dark. It is at the root of all conflict, underlying much of our sorrow. Fear also blocks intimacy and love and, more than anything, disconnects us from the lovingkindness that is our true nature.

Even considering how prevalent fear is in our lives, it nonetheless remains one of the murkiest areas to deal with, in daily life as well as in practice. This may sound bleak, but what is really the worst thing about fear? Though it is hard to admit, especially if we see ourselves as deeply

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spiritual, the main reason we have an aversion to fear is that it is physically and emotionally uncomfortable. Woody Allen put this quite well when he said, “I don’t like to be afraid—it scares me.” We simply don’t want to feel this discomfort and will do almost anything to avoid it. But whenever we give in to fear, we make it more solid, and our life becomes smaller, more limited, more contracted. In a way, every time we give in to fear, we cease to truly live.

We’re often not aware of the extent to which fear plays a part in our lives, which means that the first stage of practicing with fear requires acknowledging its presence. This can prove to be difficult, because many fears may not be readily apparent, such as the fear driving our ambition, the fear underlying our depression, or, perhaps most of all, the fear beneath our anger. But the fact is, once we look beyond our surface emotional reaction, we will see that almost every negative emotion, every drama, comes down to one or more of the three most basic fears: the fear of losing safety and control, the fear of aloneness and disconnection, and the fear of unworthiness.

The first most basic fear is that of losing safety. Because safety is fundamental to our survival, this fear will instinctually be triggered at the first sign of danger or insecurity; the old brain, or limbic system, is inherently wired that way. This particular fear will also be triggered when we experience pain or discomfort. But in most cases, there is no real danger to us; in fact, our fears are largely imaginary— that the plane will crash, that we will be criticized, that we’re doing it wrong. Yet until we see this dimension of fear with clarity, we will continue to live with a sense of constriction that can seem daunting.

A central component of spiritual life is recognizing that practice is not about ensuring that we feel secure or comfortable. It’s not that we won’t feel these things when we practice; rather, it’s that we are also

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bound to sometimes feel very uncomfortable and insecure, particularly when exploring and working with our darker emotions and unhealed pain. Still, there is also a deep security developed over the course of a practice life that isn't likely to resemble the immediate comfort we usually crave. This fundamental security develops instead out of the willingness to stay with and truly experience our fears. Isn't it ironic that the path to real security comes from residing in the fear of insecurity itself?

Insecurity can also manifest as the fear of helplessness, often surfacing as the fear of losing control, the fear of being controlled, the fear of chaos, or even the fear of the unfamiliar. For example, nearly all of us have experienced the emotion of rage, which is like being swept into a mushroom cloud explosion. Think of the kind of day when nothing seems to go your way, or even just the last time your TV remote stopped working and no matter what buttons you pushed, you couldn't get it to do what you wanted. The urge to throw the remote against the wall can feel like angry rage, but as we bring awareness to this experience, we can discover that the feeling of rage is often just an outer explosion covering over the quieter inner implosion of feeling powerless. Rage may give us a feeling of power and control, but how often is it an evasion of the sense of powerlessness that feels so much worse?

We all dread the helplessness of losing control, and yet real freedom lies in recognizing the futility of demanding that life be within our control. Instead, we must learn the willingness to feel—to say yes to—the experience of helplessness itself. This is one of the hidden gifts of serious illness or loss. It pushes us right to our edge, where we may have the good fortune to realize that our only real option is to surrender to our experience and let it just be.

During a three-year period in the early 1990s when I was seriously ill with no indication that I would ever get better, I watched my life as I

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had known it begin to fall apart. I not only lost my ability to work and engage in physical activities, I also experienced a dismantling of my basic identities. At first, it was disorienting and frightening not to have the props of seeing myself as a Zen practitioner, a carpenter and contractor (my livelihood), a husband and a father. But as I stayed with the fears, and particularly as I was able to bring the quality of lovingkindness to the experience, there came a dramatic shift.

As the illusory self-images were stripped away, I experienced the freedom of not needing to be anyone at all. By truly surrendering to the experience of helplessness, by letting everything I clung to just fall apart, I found that what remained was more than enough. As we learn to breathe fear into the center of the chest, the heart feels more and more spacious. I'm not talking about the heart as a muscle in our chest, but rather the heart that is our true nature. This heart is more spacious than the mind can ever imagine.

The second basic fear is that of aloneness and disconnection, which we also can feel as the fear of abandonment, loss, or death. Our fundamental aloneness, which is a basic human experience, ultimately must be faced directly, or it will continue to dictate how we feel and live.

It's interesting that one of life's most vital lessons is something we are never taught in school: how to be at home with ourselves. When I first began going to meditation retreats, where there was no talking or social contact for days on end, I would sit facing the wall hour after hour, and invariably an anxious quiver rose up inside me. Sometimes it was so strong that I literally wanted to jump out of my skin. But just sitting there, doing nothing, brought me face to face with myself, with my fear of aloneness.

Most people will almost instinctively try to avoid this fear. Many enter into relationships or engage in affairs. In fact, the extent to which

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people have affairs is often proportional to the urgency of needing to avoid feeling alone. However, the only way to transcend loneliness is to stop avoiding it, to be willing to face it—by truly residing in it. Further, if we wish to develop genuine intimacy in our relationships with others, it is crucial that we first face our own neediness and fear of aloneness. How can we expect to truly love or be intimate with another if we're still relating to them from our fear-based needs?

Naturally, we still want and expect other people to take away these fears; we think that if we're with someone who will pay attention to us, our loneliness will disappear. But if this particular deep-seated fear is part of our makeup, the mere act of our partner being engrossed in a book when we're expecting attention will be enough to make us feel abandoned. We may try to deal with this by demanding or attempting to attract his or her attention, but even if that demand is met, our fear is unlikely to be assuaged for long.

Furthermore, getting the attention we desire does not necessarily mean we will experience intimacy. True intimacy comes instead when we're willing to acknowledge the uncomfortable feelings of anxiety and fear that are part of our own conditioning; it comes when we can say yes to them, which means we're willing to finally feel them. It may be uncomfortable to feel the fear of loneliness, but breathing that aching fear into the center of the chest and surrendering to it allows us to take responsibility for our own feelings. We no longer ask that others protect us from feeling these fears we had previously turned away from. We can discover that the more we face our own fear of aloneness, the more we experience true connection, and the more we can open to love.

The basic fear of aloneness may also include a related anxiety that is not usually recognized: the fear of disconnection— from others as well as from our own heart. This fear penetrates more deeply than loneliness

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and often manifests as a knotted quiver in the chest or abdomen. Remember, at bottom, the heart that seeks to awaken, to live genuinely, is more real than anything. It is the nameless drive that calls us to be who we most truly are. When we are not in touch with this, we may feel the existential anxiety of disconnection.

In a way, much of spiritual practice is geared toward helping us address our feeling of basic separation. How does this occur? First, we acknowledge our fear and see it clearly for what it is. We need to remember that the fear is, in fact, our path itself, our direct route to experiencing the lovingkindness at our core.

Then we must face the fear directly, saying yes to it. Essentially, this means we are willing to experience it—to sit with anxiety in the center of the chest and truly feel—rather than run away from it. When fear arises, in order to replace our usual dread with a genuine curiosity, we might ask, “Here it is again, how will it be this time?” As we breathe the sensations of anxiety into the heart, our familiar thought-based stories begin to dissolve. As we get out of our heads, we can experience the spaciousness of the nonconceptual: the healing power of the heart. No longer caught in fear or our sense of separateness, we are free to experience connectedness, which is our basic birthright and comes forth naturally on its own.

The third basic fear is that of unworthiness. This fear takes many forms, such as the fear that I don’t count, the fear of general inadequacy, of being unworthy of love, of being nothing or stupid, and so on. The basic fear that we’ll never measure up dictates much of our behavior; for example, for some, it impels us to continuously and forcefully prove ourselves, while for others, it might prompt us to cease trying. In either case, isn’t our motivation the same: to avoid facing the basic fear of unworthiness? We may fear the feeling of unworthiness more than anything.

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In fact, we are often merciless in these self-judgments of unworthiness—not just when we're upset at ourselves, but as an ongoing frame of mind. Even if they're not glaringly obvious, our self-judgments are always lurking under the surface, waiting to arise. For example, those who have stage fright, including the anxiety of public speaking, may feel the constant underground dread of having to deal with it. There's a joke that people can fear public speaking so intensely that at a funeral they would rather be in the casket than give the eulogy. I can attest to the lurking dread of stage fright, as I had to face this particular fear for years. And yet ultimately giving public talks has been a very fruitful path.

Fear of public speaking triggers the dread and shame of public failure and humiliation. But what is really being threatened? Isn't it just our self-image of appearing strong, calm, insightful, or whatever our own particular narrow view is of who we're supposed to be? We certainly fear appearing weak or not on top of it. Why? Because that would confirm our own negative beliefs of unworthiness. Even though there is no real danger, isn't it true that the fear of failing often feels fatal? Yet ironically, our very attempt to fight the fear is most often what increases it and may even result in panic.

There is a better alternative: We must learn to let it in willingly, to breathe the sensations of fear directly into the center of the chest. In other words, to say yes to the fear.

At one point in my life, when I was struggling with my fear of giving public talks, I joined Toastmasters, a group designed to help develop skills in public speaking. But I didn't join to learn to give better talks, or even with the goal of overcoming my fear. I joined so that I could have a laboratory, a place to invite the fear in and go to its roots. In a way, I actually began to look forward to the fear arising so I could breathe it right into the heart, entering into it fully. Paradoxically, the willingness to

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be with the fear completely is what changes the experience of fear altogether. It's not that fear will no longer arise; it's that we no longer fear it.

Eventually, we all need to be willing to face the deepest, darkest beliefs we have about ourselves. Only in this way can we come to know that they are only beliefs, and not the truth about who we are. By entering into this process willingly, by seeing through the fiction of who we believe ourselves to be, we can connect with our true nature. As Nietzsche put it, "One must have chaos in oneself to give birth to a dancing star." Love is the dancing star, the fruit of saying yes, of consciously and willingly facing our fears.

When we can feel fear within the spaciousness of the breath and heart, we may even come to see it more as an adventure than a nightmare. To see it as an adventure means being willing to take the ride with curiosity, even with its inevitable ups and downs. Over the years, because I had to speak in public quite frequently, this situation provided an opportunity to tap into what was really important to me—to remember that my aspiration is to learn to live from the awakened heart. Whenever I remembered this right before giving a talk, it was no longer an issue of whether or not I felt the discomfort of fear. This allowed me to say yes to it and to willingly breathe the fear right in. In other words, when we connect with a larger sense of what life is, negative beliefs such as "I'll never measure up" may still come up, but they no longer dictate who we are. Instead, we begin to use the fear as our actual path to learning to live from lovingkindness.

Remember, it's a given that we don't want to feel the fear of unworthiness, but at some point we have to understand that it's more painful to try to suppress our fears and self-judgments, thus solidifying them, than it is to actually feel them. This is part of what it means to bring lovingkindness to our practice, because we are no longer viewing our

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fear as proof that we're defective. Without cultivating love for ourselves, regardless of how much discipline we have, regardless of how serious we are about practice, we will still stay stuck in the subtle mercilessness of the mind, listening to the voice that tells us we are basically and fundamentally unworthy. We should never underestimate the need for lovingkindness on the long and sometimes daunting path of learning to awaken.

Please note that these three basic fears—insecurity and helplessness, aloneness and disconnection, and unworthiness— are not just mental. Scientists tell us that fear is written into the cellular memory of the body, particularly into a small part of the brain called the amygdala. That is why simply knowing about our fears intellectually will not free us from their domination. Every time they are triggered, we slide into an established groove in the brain. So until we can see our fears clearly, we will not be able to practice with them directly.

When I was a child, my father told me repeatedly, “The only thing to fear is fear itself.” Although his intentions were good, what I actually heard was that I should be afraid of fear! Fear thus became the enemy. We have to remember that fear is neither an enemy nor an obstacle; it is not a real monster. When we feel fear, we need to remind ourselves that it is our path; and when we truly understand this, we can welcome it into the spaciousness of the heart.

Interestingly, it is this nonconceptual experiencing of our fears that allows the grooves in the brain, which are preprogrammed to react to fear, to slowly be filled in. How this works is a mystery; it is no mystery, however, that unless we can clearly see our individual fears for what they are, it is unlikely we will overcome our habitual and instinctive aversions to them. The bright side of this is that once we are able to face our fears, once we willingly let them in, they become a portal to reality.

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4

ANGER AND PATIENCE

Let your heavy thoughts go with the setting sun.

GELEK RIMPOCHE

*“There is no error greater than hatred,  
And nothing mightier than patience.  
So I strive in every way to learn patience.”  
—Shakyamuni Buddha*

Think of anger. Anger is the mind that wishes to harm and hurt. Patience is the mind that holds back from harming or hurting. Anger is most difficult to deal with; patience is most difficult to develop. Patience is the only thing that defeats anger. Don't be disappointed if you can't do it right away. Even after years of practice you may find that you're still losing your temper. It's all right. But you will also notice that the power of anger has weakened, that it doesn't last as long, and does not as easily turn into hatred.

If patience comes easily to you, wonderful. If not, how do you go from anger to patience?

When negative emotions are strong they tend to overpower you; you could never take suggestions, never be able to apply an antidote. You need time and space. First, find out if you're willing to see whether your anger is valid or not valid. If you are not willing to see that, then take a

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break. Walk outside. Go to a nice place where there's a beautiful view. Divert your attention through something neutral, like nature. In Tibet, many of my teachers liked to go up on a high mountain overlooking the valley, the river, the mountains. They let their disturbing thoughts fly away—if they had them at all—and took in the fresh air. Certain traditions even recommend that you watch the sunset from a slightly high vantage point, stand lightly, bouncing gently on your toes. Breathe out gently three, nine, or twenty-one times, using breath as a vehicle to carry your thoughts away. Let your heavy thoughts go with the setting sun and bid them goodbye.

When a thought of violence pops up very strongly and you divert your attention to a neutral level, by doing so, the force that was pushing you to do the wrong thing is weakened. Once it has been weakened, there's the opportunity to do something else. Also, give yourself ample time to dwell in the feeling of the nice cool breeze ... long enough so that any disturbing impulse cools, not physically, but mentally—only don't catch cold.

**Gelek Rimpoche** is a Tibetan Buddhist lama and the founder of the Jewel Heart, a organization that translates the wisdom of the Tibetan Buddhism into contemporary life. This article was adapted from *Good Life, Good Death: Tibetan Wisdom on Reincarnation* by Gelek Rimpoche (Riverhead Books, 2001).

5

WHAT IS TRUE  
HAPPINESS?

*Tricycle* speaks with scholar B. Alan Wallace  
about the quintessential pursuit.

For more than three decades, scholar and contemplative B. Alan Wallace has considered the perennial question *What is happiness?* from the dual perspectives of modern science and traditional Buddhist meditation practice. These two disciplines are at the heart of the Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies, launched by Wallace a year ago to conduct rigorous scientific study of contemplative methods in collaboration with established investigators in psychology and the neurosciences. Initial research co-sponsored by the Institute includes the Shamatha Project, a long-term study of the effects of intensive *shamatha*—tranquility—practice on cognition and emotion, and the UCLA Mindful Attention Program (MAP), which is evaluating mindfulness training as treatment for Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Cultivating Emotional Balance, a program now in clinical trials, combines techniques from Buddhist tradition and Western psychology, with widespread potential applications for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. All this furthers the Institute’s mission to identify and cultivate the mind states associated with optimal happiness and well-being. So far, the research seems to confirm what Wallace and other Buddhist practitioners

have discovered empirically over the past twenty-five hundred years: that meditation can not only counter destructive emotions that get in the way of happiness but also foster the positive factors that give rise to it. True happiness, as Wallace emphasizes in his book, *Genuine Happiness* (Wiley, 2005), is the fruit not of worldly trappings and ambitions but of a focused mind and an open heart.

*Tricycle* Editor James Shaheen visited Wallace at his California home, near the Santa Barbara Institute, to discuss what Buddhism—and meditation—have to offer us in the pursuit of happiness.

**What is genuine happiness?** I prefer the term “human flourishing,” which is a translation of the Greek word *eudaimonia*. The usual translation is “genuine happiness,” but “flourishing” is more accurate. Like the Buddhist notion of *sukkha*, and *ananda*—bliss, joy in the Hindu tradition—flourishing is a sense of happiness that’s beyond the momentary vicissitudes of our emotional state.

**And what would that happiness entail?** A meaningful life.

**What makes for a meaningful life?** I consider each day, not just the life as a whole. I look at four ingredients. First, was it a day of virtue? I’m talking about basic Buddhist ethics—avoiding harmful behavior of body, speech, and mind; devoting ourselves to wholesome behavior and to qualities like awareness and compassion. Second, I’d like to feel happy rather than miserable. The realized beings I’ve known exemplify extraordinary states of well-being, and it shows in their demeanor, their way of dealing with adversity, with life, with other people. And third, pursuit of the truth—seeking to understand the nature of life, of reality, of interpersonal relationships, or the nature of mind. But you could do all that

sitting quietly in a room. None of us exists in isolation, however, so there is a fourth ingredient: a meaningful life must also answer the question, “What have I brought to the world?” If I can look at a day and see that virtue, happiness, truth, and living an altruistic life are prominent elements, I can say, “You know, I’m a happy camper.” Pursuing happiness does not depend on my checkbook, or the behavior of my spouse, or my job, or my salary. I can live a meaningful life even if I only have ten minutes left.

**So physical health is not a necessary ingredient?** Not at all. One of my former students has a very rare disease, and every day he goes to the hospital for dialysis and drug treatment, and will for the rest of his life. You could say, “Well, that’s a tragedy, a dismal situation.” But the last time I spoke with him, he said, “Alan, I’m flourishing.” And he was. He was finding a way within the very limited parameters of what was available to him. His mind is clear. He’s reading, he’s growing, he’s meditating, he’s teaching meditation to other terminally ill patients in his hospital. He’s living a very meaningful life in which he can honestly say that he’s flourishing.

**What’s his secret?** He’s not looking for happiness outside himself. When we rely on things like a job, a spouse, or money to fulfill us, we’re in an unhappy situation, because we’re banking on something external. Furthermore, other people are competing for the same pot, and it’s not an infinite pot. That’s the bad news.

**And the good?** The good news is that genuine happiness is not out there in the marketplace to be purchased or acquired from the best teacher around. One of the best-kept secrets is that the happiness we’re striving for so desperately in the perfect spouse, the great kids, the fine job, security, excellent health, and good looks has always

been within and is just waiting to be unveiled. Knowing that what we are seeking comes from within changes everything. It doesn't mean you won't have a spouse, or a car, or a satisfying job, but if you're flourishing, your happiness won't depend so much on external events, people, and situations, which are all beyond your control.

**Everyone's heard that wealth does not buy happiness, but few of us live as if it were true.** On a deeper level we doubt it and try again and again to take control of our external environment and to extract from it the things we think will make us happy—status, sex, financial and emotional security. I think a lot of people in our society have given up on the pursuit of genuine happiness. They've given up hope of finding happiness, fulfillment, and joy in life. They think, "Well, genuine happiness just doesn't seem to be available, so I'll settle for a better stereo." Or they're just getting by: "Forget about pleasure. I'll just try to make it through the day." That's pretty tragic.

**That sounds like depression.** It's a state in which the space of the mind compresses and we lose vision. I think of lovingkindness—the first of the Four Immeasurables, or Four Divine Abidings—as a vision quest. In traditional maitri [Sanskrit for lovingkindness] practice, you start with lovingkindness for yourself. That doesn't mean "What kind of a good job could I get? How much money could I possibly have?" but "How can I flourish? How can I live in a way that I find truly fulfilling, happy, joyful, meaningful?" And as you envision that for yourself, you extend it out: "How can other people who are suffering find genuine happiness?"

Shantideva said, "Those deciding to escape from suffering hasten right toward suffering. With the very desire for happiness, out of delusion they destroy their own happiness as if it were the enemy." Why is

this so? Why wouldn't we adopt a life of virtue if it brings the genuine happiness we so want? It comes back to the idea that we're clueless as to what would really bring us the happiness we seek. It may take us a very long time before we even notice what's happening, because we've become so fixated on the symbol, the image, the ideal, the mental construct: "If I only had this type of spouse, this type of job, this amount of money; if only people respected me to this degree; if I only looked like this...." It's delusion. We all know people who are in good health, have love and fame and wealth, and they're miserable. Those people are some of our greatest teachers. They show us that you can win the lottery and lose the lottery of life, in terms of the pursuit of genuine happiness.

If one approaches the path of Buddhist practice with a strong emphasis on the *via negativa* and the idea that nirvana is just being free of stuff, then at first glance, nirvana can look pretty boring. But nirvana is not just getting up to neutral, or Freud's "ordinary level of unhappiness." It's a lot more than that. And this is where we tap into this issue that our habitual state is *dukkha*, being dissatisfied, anxious. But the Buddhist premise, which is enormously inspiring, is that what's truly "habitual" is your natural state of awareness, the ground state of awareness. This is a source of bliss and can be uncovered, beginning with the meditative practices like *shamatha*, the refinement of attention, and becoming aware of how things really are. The whole point of Buddha-dharma is that liberation comes not by believing in the right set of tenets or of dogmatic assertions, or even necessarily by behaving in the right way. It's insight, it's wisdom, it's knowing the nature of reality. It is only truth that will make us free.

**When you say "genuine happiness," the implication is that there's another kind.** Yes. We mistake what Buddhists call the Eight Mundane Concerns for the true pursuit of happiness: acquisition of wealth and

not losing it; acquisition of stimulus-driven pleasures and avoiding pain; praise and avoiding abuse or ridicule; and desire for a good reputation and fearing contempt or rejection. The point to mention is that there's nothing wrong with the ones on the positive side. Take having: would you be a better person if you didn't have that sweater you're wearing? No. There's nothing wrong with acquisitions, but there's something wrong with thinking they'll bring you happiness.

Genuine happiness is simply tapping into the true causes of happiness as opposed to things that may or may not catalyze it. And that's basically the difference between pursuing the dharma and pursuing the Eight Mundane Concerns. Some people actually meditate to serve the Eight Mundane Concerns—solely for the sake of acquiring the pleasure that they get in meditation. They're taking meditation like a cup of coffee, or jogging, or massage. That's not bad or wrong, but it's very limited. Meditation can do something that a good massage can't do. It can actually heal the mind.

**In *Genuine Happiness*, you write, “When we’re experiencing dissatisfaction or depression without any clear external cause for it, no bad health, disintegrating marriage, or other personal crisis, could this be a symptom or message to us coming from a deeper level than biological survival? How should we respond?** Antidepressants essentially tell such feelings, ‘Shut up, I want to pretend you don't exist.’ But what is the feeling telling us?” Can you comment? What we're talking about here is dukkha—not as in “I feel miserable because I lost something that was dear to me, or I didn't get something I passionately wanted,” but this deeper stratum of dukkha that is nonreferential and not stimulus-driven. There are times when, in the absence of unpleasant stimuli, you still have a sense of unease, of depression, of restlessness—something's not right but you can't quite identify what it is. This is one of the most

valuable symptoms we have of the underlying dysfunction of our minds. Once you sense that you're tapping into that, you may say, "I don't like this feeling, and I'm going to cover it up. I'm going to get lost in work, entertainment, booze, drugs." This society is the most ingenious in history in suppressing that basic sense of unease. We go into chemical overdrive. Here is a symptom of a life that is not working very well, of a mind that is prone to imbalances and afflictions, and instead of taking that as a welcome symptom, we basically shoot the messenger. The drug industry says that if you feel anxious, depressed, unhappy, or angry it's because of a chemical imbalance in your brain. "Take our prescription drug, and this is going to make you happy." The downside of these drugs is that many people think that bad experiences have primarily a material basis—that a chemical imbalance is the root cause. In other words, the Second Noble Truth, the cause of suffering, is chemical imbalance in the brain. And therefore the cessation of suffering means getting numbed out. What this is doing is veiling our engagement with reality rather than getting to the roots of depression and anxiety. What you're experiencing is the First Noble Truth. And the Buddha says, "Don't just make it shut up, but recognize it, understand it." This is the beginning of the path to happiness.

The existentialists understood that we pursued happiness in vain. How does the Buddhist take differ? In Buddhism, pursuing happiness is not just a moving away from one thing—the acquisition of external objects—but moving toward another, dharma practice. It's extricating yourself from the actual sources of dukkha, which are internal, and moving toward greater freedom, greater mental well-being, greater balance, greater meaning. In existentialist philosophy, this is referred to as "living authentically." Moving away from the true sources of dukkha toward the true sources of happiness—that is basically the whole Buddhist

psychology right there.

We have a misperception that if we can get everything to work right, we'll find the happiness we're seeking. Then there comes a point when you say, "I see. This has never worked. It's not working now, and it will never work in the future." That's what a lot of the existential philosophers recognized. Camus, Sartre—they refer to the vanity, the futility, the fundamental meaninglessness. Buddhism, like the existentialists, sees the vanity, the futility, the emptiness of the Eight Mundane Concerns. But it doesn't just say, "Here's a problem and there's nothing we can do about it." It says, "Those are the mundane concerns, and then there's the dharma. Having some faith would be helpful, but if nothing else, you still have the practice."

**You argue that practice keeps us in the world, and that's a great challenge. For instance, many of us follow the news, and it's easy to get pretty depressed. How can we stay in the game without being brought down by it?** The first thing is to recognize that the news is not all the news that's fit to print or to broadcast. It's taking place in a one hundred percent commercial context. They're broadcasting the news because they're paid for it by their advertisers. And they are giving us the news that sells, that they feel that people would want to watch. It's a very selective slice of what's going on. This is not to say that there are no people in the media who are trying to perform a public service, but the system itself is commercially oriented.

In Buddhism, we say yes, there is an ocean of suffering. So it's not bad to show that there's anger, hatred, delusion, and greed in the world. In a way, the media are presenting some very important facts. Given that, we can look for different emotional responses in ourselves. We can get out of the rut of our cynicism, depression, anger, and apathy by cultivating the Four Immeasurables. When we see suffering and the causes

of suffering, then it's time for compassion. When we see people striving diligently to find happiness, that's a time for lovingkindness. That rare coverage where they show something wonderful that has happened is a time for *mudita*—for empathic joy, for rejoicing in other people's happiness and in virtue. And then there are circumstances like natural disasters. When we see there are responsible people and institutions doing their best to alleviate the suffering, we can decide to maintain equanimity and then do the practice of *tonglen*—taking in the suffering of the world and offering back joy and the causes of joy. The Four Immeasurables are extraordinarily powerful ways of engaging with reality. And they balance each other. They're like the Four Musketeers: when any one goes astray, the other ones leap in and say, "I can help you."

**So if you're feeling indifference instead of equanimity, then compassion will balance that?** Precisely. Or if you're really hunkered down into attachment and anxiety, that's a time for equanimity.

**This alternative route to happiness seems to require a leap of faith, and that can be scary. If I let go of all the externals, what will become of me?** We don't need to jump into the deep end. The Tibetans call that "hairy renunciation." It's like suddenly getting an infatuation and saying, "Oh, the whole of society is a pit of blazing fire. I can't stand it. I'm going to go off to the bliss of practicing Buddhism." It's called hairy because I'd better shave my head to show I'm serious. Then, of course, in a day or two or a couple of weeks, you say, "Oh, this is not so much fun, and where is that girlfriend I left behind, anyway?" It's like a fling.

So what's required is not a sudden, abrupt, and total abandonment of the eight worldly dharmas—the Eight Mundane Concerns—and practicing only the sublime dharma. It's like taking a child into the wa-

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ter to teach him how to swim: you don't fling the kid into the deep end and see what happens. You take him from the first step into the shallow end. So have a trial period. Try meditation for a session in the morning and a session in the evening. See how that impacts the rest of your day. Then, as you start to get a taste of dharma, you may say, "Well, this is actually tapping into my inner resources. This feels good. And it's not just good, it's also virtuous, and what's more, I'm engaging with reality more clearly than I have in the past. If I want to bring something good to the world, I'm in a better position to do so." It is a gradual shift in priorities until eventually your primary desire, your highest value, is living a meaningful life, devoting yourself to dharma. The Eight Mundane Concerns—they'll come and go. In fact, when they're there, they can even support you in your life. As grist for the mill? They're not necessarily grist for the mill, but adversity does provide us with an opportunity if there is a wise engagement with it. For instance, one of the greatest obstacles to a meaningful life is arrogance. Well, it's really hard to be arrogant when you're encountering great adversity. Then there's that unease we've spoken of. If we view that with wisdom, it can arouse our curiosity or maybe even be a very powerful incentive for transformation, for uprooting the underlying causes giving rise to such distress. If you've gone through terrible interpersonal strife, or a loss, or a financial crisis, for example, you could look at it and say, "How did that happen? What did I contribute to it? And why am I suffering so much now?" These are messages—symptoms of an underlying discord, a disengagement from reality, coming out of delusion, hatred, and craving. I think the Three Poisons are as important for understanding the human situation as the three laws of Newton are for understanding the physical universe. And when you see how important dharma is in the face of adversity, then it becomes a priority. You let it saturate your life. That's when dharma really takes on

its power—when it's not confined to a meditation session here or there.

**Which brings me to your view that the culmination of the Buddha's practice was not enlightenment under the Bodhi tree but service to others.** I believe the Buddha achieved something utterly extraordinary under the Bodhi tree, but he recognized that if this event was to be as meaningful as possible, it had to be shared with others. Enlightenment isn't something just for yourself: "Now I've got the good stuff, and therefore I'm finished." Entire civilizations were transformed by this one man's presence, but it wasn't just the forty-nine days sitting under the Bodhi tree that did it. It was the next forty-five years, engaging with courtesans and beggars and kings and warriors—the whole range of human society—and having something to offer to everyone. So if we go back to the four aspects of a meaningful life, what happened under the Bodhi tree is clearly the culmination of virtue, happiness, and truth. And for the next forty-five years he was out there, bringing something good to the world. So I would say the Buddha is the paradigm of a meaningful life.

6

THE PLEASURE PARADOX

Why we aren't as happy as we think we should be.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL GILBERT

Why we persist in pursuing the very things that fail to bring us happiness—a core issue in Buddhism—is also of great interest to researchers like Daniel Gilbert, professor of psychology at Harvard University. Gilbert, author of *Stumbling on Happiness*, took time out on the eve of his wedding to talk with *Tricycle* contributing editor Joan Duncan Oliver about “miswanting” and how it hampers our efforts to be happy.

**How do you define happiness?** The simplest definition is “that general positive feeling one gets from all the things that can possibly generate it.” I don't think the happiness one gets from, say, helping a little old lady cross the street is qualitatively different from the happiness one gets from eating a banana cream pie. They're the same emotion. If what we call happiness consisted of very different experiences, then they should have very different signatures in the brain. They don't. The feeling you get from sending a gift to your aunt on her birthday seems to activate the same brain areas as an orgasm or a snootful of cocaine—the midbrain dopamine structures associated with pleasure. That doesn't mean these experiences are identical. It means they share a basic feeling.

**Are we “hardwired” to seek happiness?** We don’t know if these tendencies are written into the DNA or they’re some aspect of our early socialization. But we do know that when the brain interprets the events we call everyday experience—marriage, divorce, a promotion, sickness, a victory, a football game—it looks for the meaning that will bring the most pleasure, peace, enjoyment, contentment.

**Your research suggests that we’re not very good at predicting how we’ll feel about future events. But we manage to learn from our experience in some areas—not touching a hot stove, for example—so why do we keep making errors about what will make us happy?** To learn from experience requires that you remember it. One of the things we know about memories of emotional experiences is that they are biased in exactly the same way that forecasts of emotional experiences are biased. We published a study in which we looked at people’s predictions of, experiences of, and memories of the 2000 Presidential election. Before the election, pro-Gore voters thought they would be absolutely devastated if Bush won, and pro-Bush voters thought they would be on Cloud Nine. When we measured the actual experience of these people after the election, the difference between them was not nearly as big as these people had predicted. Some months later, all of these voters were contacted again and asked to remember their experience. What they remembered was that they were devastated or elated—exactly as they had predicted they would be, but not as they had actually felt. We have the same illusions whether we look forward or backward in time, and they reinforce each other.

**How does mispredicting or misremembering our feelings lead to “miswanting”—making bad choices?** Our culture, like our own expe-

rience, can perpetuate untruths about the sources of happiness. Take the economy. The only way our economy can perpetuate itself is if lots of people believe what Adam Smith called “a deception”—that constant consumption will bring happiness. Economies are an engine, and constant production and consumption are the fuel. So if everybody realized one day that constant consumption and production aren’t a source of happiness—that all they really do is keep the economy going—how many of us would get up in the morning and say, “I know it’s not going to make me happy, but I want to keep the economy going”? We don’t do that. We get up in the morning and say, “What will make me happy?” So the only way we are efficient fuel for an economic engine is if we subscribe to the big cultural myth that stuff makes us happy. We get on our treadmill, metaphorically speaking, and earn money. It doesn’t bring us the happiness we thought it would, so we assume we haven’t earned enough. We probably need to earn more. The Porsche didn’t do it; it must be a Ferrari that will. The old wife isn’t good enough; we’ll get a new one. We keep assuming that because things aren’t bringing us happiness, they’re the wrong things, rather than recognizing that the pursuit itself is futile—that regardless of what we achieve in the pursuit of stuff, it’s never going to bring about an enduring state of happiness.

**So if we don’t want the right things to make us happy, what accounts for the fact that most people say they are happy? Are we just deluded?** Most of our research is on misprediction of reactions to *negative* events. The biggest error people make is thinking that they will be sad, devastated, annoyed, embarrassed, or frustrated for long periods of time, when it turns out they aren’t. Our research does not say that bad things don’t hurt. It says that however much they hurt, it’s not as much as people predicted. Adaptation—or habituation—is one of the major reasons. Every

organism habituates to repeated exposure to the same stimulus.

**But why is it hard to override our feelings of the moment in making decisions about the future?** Imagination requires the same areas of the brain that sensory experience is already using. If somebody says, “Hey, how does that song go?” and there’s something on the radio, you have to cover your ears, because the parts of your brain that can imagine a song are already listening to a real song. When people are shown a picture and later asked to close their eyes and remember it, you actually see reactivation of the visual cortex, the very part of the brain that was looking at the picture in the first place. Memory, imagination, and perception are like three different software processes. They all run on the same platform, but only one can run at a time. That’s why it’s hard to imagine being happy when you’re sad.

**Another problem is something you call “the pleasure paradox.”** **What’s that?** Human beings have two basic motives that conflict with each other: to understand everything and to be happy. The mind tends to mull over things it hasn’t fully understood or digested, so part of what makes a positive experience continue to give us positive feelings is that we continue to bring it to mind. If a dozen roses appeared at your door with no card, can you imagine how many years of joy you would get out of those roses? For the rest of your life you would be saying, “And then there was that time...” We’ve done studies in which all the participants have the same experience but in one case they can explain it, in the other they can’t. We find they’re much happier much longer when they can’t explain it. But here’s the rub. If you ask people, “Would you like to have the experience explained to you?” one hundred percent of the time they say yes.

**Is that some inherent perversity—we want to kill the very thing that makes us happy?** It's because we don't realize it's the thing making us happy. Part of the reason we try to understand the causes of our experience is that we believe we can make these experiences happen again. The problem is, understanding also makes the experience less valuable, because we adapt to it. It's surprising things, uncertain things, things we don't fully comprehend that seem to bring us the greatest and longest-lasting happiness.

**So is happiness all about the pursuit?** That's too strong, but I would say there are many experiences in which almost all the joy is in memory and anticipation and very little is in the experience itself. George Loewenstein, another happiness researcher, is a mountaineer. A point he makes about mountaineering is that you look forward to it for months and talk about it later for years, but the fact is, while you're doing it, it's hot and sweaty and uncomfortable.

7

UPROOTING THE SEEDS  
OF ANGER

Anger has something to teach us. Can we listen?

JULES SHUZEN HARRIS, SENSEI

We operate under a common illusion that the things that make us angry lie outside of ourselves, that they are external to us. Something out there is in opposition to our need for safety and security; it threatens our comfort or position. We feel a need to defend our vulnerable selves. Anger limits us. But if we have the courage to look at our anger and its causes and to learn from it, we can develop an open heart—a heart of genuine compassion.

My own journey in dealing with anger has included work with several systems of martial arts. Initially I studied the martial arts to learn how to defend against the enemy outside myself, which I thought was the reason for my anger. After some time, I was drawn to *iaido*, the art of drawing, cutting with, and sheathing a Samurai sword. Loosely translated, the term *iaido* means being able to fit into any situation harmoniously. Unlike many other martial art forms, *iaido* is noncombative, which was key: to create a harmonious relationship with myself, I had to confront the enemy within—and the enemy was my own anger.

I have often observed that while we each experience anger in our own way, a more general sense of anger pervades our society. That is,

as a culture, we are angry. Our sense of humor is very sarcastic. A lot of what we find entertaining involves putting someone down. We have slapstick comedy: people running around doing mean, spiteful things that we are supposed to find funny. Whether it is a television show or a new viral Internet video, we find humor in words that mock or put others down, or insults that allow us to watch from the outside as someone else is subjected to some form of humiliation. We might ask ourselves, “What’s funny about that?” Not much. Laughing at others’ misfortune is a kind of expression of our own anger.

Have we ever said to someone, “You’re lazy,” or “You’re a bitch” or “You’re an insufferable bastard”? Of course. We’ve all done that in one way or another. Or maybe we have said, “If it weren’t for you, I would be better off,” or “It’s because of you that I am suffering.” It is as if we believe that by putting others down, by placing the blame or responsibility for our unhappiness on others, we can make ourselves better or relieve our own feelings of inadequacy. But anger doesn’t make us feel better. As Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche said, “You cannot really eliminate pain through aggression. The more you kill, the more you strengthen the killer who will create new things to be killed. The aggression grows until finally there is no space; the whole environment has been solidified.”

Among the Three Poisons we find the Pali term *dosa*, “anger.” The Three Poisons of anger, greed, and delusion keep us in bondage and control us—they overwhelm our best intentions and cause us to do harm to others. We may even cause the greatest hurt to the people we most care about. We don’t want to hurt them, or ourselves, but we are driven by our anger. Many times we find that a feeling that arises in us is the outward manifestation of a deeper underlying emotion or experience. We might explore this possibility by asking ourselves about where our anger really comes from. What is the other side of anger? Fear. We can’t free

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ourselves until we work through both our anger and our fear. And what is the cause of fear? Ultimately, it is the fear of nonexistence, death, the fear of losing ourselves and being forgotten. But a fear of death translates into a fear of living, because impermanence is itself a fundamental condition of our lives. In this fear lie the seeds of anger.

How do we break the cycle of anger? We all know anger from experience, but when we are asked to pause and consider, “What is this anger?” it’s not always so easy to see what it is. Yet when we approach our feelings of anger with awareness, with mindfulness, it becomes a productive part of our practice. We find, after all, that anger has something to teach us.

Anger is what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “habit energy.” Like most habits, it takes just one particular event or word or incident to trigger us, as quick as a snap of the finger. Just because we have a *kensho* experience and see into our true nature and maybe for a second or two experience some sense of bliss, that doesn’t mean that we won’t return to habit energy five minutes or an hour later. If someone does something that irritates you, ask yourself the question, “Who is it that is ticked off? Who is it that’s angry?” We’ll find that there is no self to get angry or to defend.

And yet there may be something that sets us off again and again, as reliably as an alarm clock. Maybe we know what some of those things are. Often other people can tell us what brings out our flashes of anger even if we are not ourselves aware of them. But these habitual flash-points offer us an opportunity to see ourselves more deeply, with a fuller understanding and with greater compassion, to look at what incited our angry reaction, and to follow the thread within ourselves. All we need is the space between trigger and reaction to mindfully look within.

So where do we find this space to separate ourselves from our anger? Many Buddhist traditions teach that all things are insubstantial.

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When we see this, we see that the support for anger and hate is eroded and eventually destroyed. This speaks to one of the three marks of existence—impermanence. We have all found ourselves in situations that illustrate the transitory nature of events. Something happens to us that makes us angry; perhaps we get into an argument at home with a partner at the very start of the day. A couple of hours later, we're at work and we're still thinking about the incident. More time goes by, and we continue to stew over it at lunchtime, and by the time we get home, we're still holding onto it. But where is it? Where is the incident? It's like last night's supper—it doesn't exist.

Over and over again, I tell students dealing with anger, “This practice is about being mindful!” While that may sound simple, it is in fact a very, very difficult practice because it goes against a lot of what we hold sacred. Many of us have a particular group of gods that we worship. It's not God, Jesus, or Buddha. We worship pleasure, comfort, and security. Despite knowing that everything is impermanent, we still hold onto objects that we think will bring us security. We cling to what we believe will spare us from discomfort, and when these things slip out of our grasp, fear and anger arise. Part of mindfulness is looking at our reactions and perceptions—if we are all truly one body, why are we cutting off the relationship with our partner, our coworker, or our friend? If my hand is in pain, do I cut it off? Of course not. I take care of it. I take some Tylenol. I look more carefully into what might be causing the pain—maybe it's an injury, or it could be that I'm developing arthritis and need to think of some therapies. But when it comes to anger, we cut ourselves off because we have an investment in maintaining who we think we are. Anger limits our expression of seeing our whole self. As a divisive force, it prevents us from living a fully rich life of connectedness. Instead of experiencing the one body that pervades everywhere, anger isolates us

and reinforces the sense of a separate self, preventing us from identifying with and feeling compassion for others.

Mindfulness is cultivated through meditation practice. That is one of the reasons why I like the focused practice period of *sesshin*, several days of intensive sitting. It is amazing how much stuff surfaces in *sesshin*. In my first few years practicing Zen, I thought of myself as a pretty laid-back, easygoing guy. But then during these intensive meditation periods, I couldn't believe the amount of anger and rage that came up. I was ready to kill the teacher, kill the monks, and burn down the monastery! It stood in stark contrast to my ideas of who I thought I was. My anger was exacerbated by having the duty of scrubbing the toilets with a toothbrush. But all along the way, I continued meditating. And at some point, scrubbing the toilet with a toothbrush became a practice of mindfulness for me.

When we work with anger in Buddhist practice, we work with it a little differently than you would in psychotherapy. We don't ask you to beat a pillow, open the window, and scream. When I was a psychotherapist, I had a Bozo the Clown bop bag in my office; you could hit it and it would just bounce back. And I would say, "Just keep pounding it, get it all out!" But that's not our approach. In Buddhism, we work to illuminate the fundamental truth of our self-nature. When anger arises, it is pointing to something. Our anger is a clue to our underlying beliefs about ourselves. It can help to reveal our constructed sense of self-identity.

Today many psychotherapists embrace Buddhist practice as a way of looking at ourselves in relationship to others. The Identity System developed by Stanley Block, M.D., involves two processes called "mind-body mapping" and "bridging." Mind-body mapping as a part of Buddhist practice requires an openness to adapting the dharma for a particular

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time, place, and person—in this case for the Western psyche. You begin mind-body mapping by paying attention to a particular thought that is on your mind, perhaps one that is connected to strong feelings. Then, using this first thought as a focal point, you trace the paths of further thoughts and ideas that are generated out of the initial thought. At the same time, we give attention to how our thoughts feel in relationship to the body. We all have personal requirements, thoughts, or rules about how we—and the world—should be. While they may remain hidden from our conscious awareness, we can recognize them by our anger, which arises when our requirements are broken. By deepening our ability to be fully present, we have a better chance of seeing our requirements and letting them go, uprooting the seeds that sprout into anger.

This exploration, together with an approach called “bridging,” has proven to be a valuable tool. Bridging is akin to mindfulness. When you are washing the dishes, you are focused on touch, the place, the water on your hands, the feel of the sponge; or when you are driving your car, you listen to the hum of the engine, the vibration of your hands on the steering wheel. Bridging and mind-body mapping help us deal with the shadow beliefs we carry with us—“I’m not good enough,” “I’m undeserving”—which create negative story lines. Our anger can be seen as a defense against these vulnerable feelings and negative self-beliefs. The deep-seated fear and anger we harbor has to do with our feelings of a damaged self. Mind-body mapping and bridging enable practitioners to see how they create their suffering in relationship to the body rather than a situation outside themselves. From a Buddhist perspective, we are trying to reach the place where there is no separation, no subject, no object. Bringing our mind back again and again to a place of present-moment awareness, we create a space where we let go of our habitual reaction patterns and our recurring negative feelings. We then open the

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opportunity to view ourselves—and others—with real compassion.

Our meditation practice is also a place where we can work directly with our experience of anger by becoming the anger. To “become the anger” does not mean to act it out. It means we stop separating ourselves from it; we experience it fully so that we can understand what’s behind it. In sitting *zazen*, we can encourage the anger to come up. We become intimate with anger, and in doing so, we watch it dissipate. We have to look deeply into the cause of our suffering. Our anger not only creates suffering for others, but it also creates more suffering for us. We might take a mind-body perspective that what we think affects every cell in our body. Neuroscientists suggest that our neurons are affected by our immediate environment. If we are in a hostile, argumentative, negative environment, then that affects our neural networks and neurochemistry, and our nervous system becomes conditioned to react every time we go into that environment. So we could say that very environment becomes toxic. We’ve all had the experience of walking into a certain space and feeling at home, and going into a different space and becoming very agitated or depressed, because of the subtle energy or our unconscious relationship to the place.

We must remember that we create our own anger. No one makes it for us. If we move from a particular event directly to our reaction, we are skipping a crucial awareness, a higher perspective on our own reactivity. What is that middle step, that deeper awareness? It is mindfulness about our own beliefs, our attitude, our understanding or lack of understanding about what has really happened. We notice that a given situation reliably provokes our anger, and yet somebody else can be exposed to the very same situation and not react angrily. Why is that? No one can tell us: we each have to find the answer ourselves, and to do that, we need to give ourselves the space to reflect mindfully.

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We're going to keep getting angry. It's going to come up. It has come up in our lives before, and it will come up again. This practice is about becoming more mindful, becoming aware of how we are getting stuck. With care and work, we find ways to get unstuck. But we also know that the moment we get unstuck, we're going to get stuck again. That's why it is called a practice—we never arrive. So when you find yourself upset or angry, use the moment as a part of your practice, as an opportunity to notice and uproot the seeds of anger and move into the heart of genuine compassion.

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## 8

## A PERFECT BALANCE

Cultivating equanimity

GILS FRONSDAL AND SAYADAW U PANDITA

Equanimity, one of the most sublime emotions of Buddhist practice, is the ground for wisdom and freedom and the protector of compassion and love. While some may think of equanimity as dry neutrality or cool aloofness, mature equanimity produces a radiance and warmth of being. The Buddha described a mind filled with equanimity as “abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill-will.”

The English word “equanimity” translates two separate Pali words used by the Buddha, *upekkha* and *tatramajjhata*. *Upekkha*, the more common term, means “to look over” and refers to the equanimity that arises from the power of observation—the ability to see without being caught by what we see. When well developed, such power gives rise to a great sense of peace.

*Upekkha* can also refer to the spaciousness that comes from seeing a bigger picture. Colloquially, in India the word was sometimes used to mean “to see with patience.” We might understand this as “seeing with understanding.” For example, when we know not to take offensive words personally, we are less likely to react to what was said. And by not reacting there is greater possibility to respond from wisdom and compassion. This form of equanimity is sometimes compared to grandmotherly

love. The grandmother clearly loves her grandchildren but, thanks to her experience with her own children, is less likely to be caught up in the drama of the grandchildren's lives.

Still more qualities of equanimity are revealed by the term *tatramajjhata*, a long compound made of simple Pali words. *Tatra*, meaning "there," sometimes refers to "all these things." *Majjha* means "middle," and *tata* means "to stand or to pose." Put together, the word becomes "to stand in the middle of all this." As a form of equanimity, this "being in the middle" refers to balance, to remaining centered in the middle of whatever is happening. This form of balance comes from some inner strength or stability. The strong presence of inner calm, well-being, confidence, vitality, or integrity can keep us upright, like ballast keeps a ship upright in strong winds (see "Seven Supports for Equanimity,"). As inner strength develops, for example, from the accumulation of mindfulness in the ordinary moments of life, equanimity follows.

Equanimity is a protection from what are called the Eight Worldly Winds: praise and blame, success and failure, pleasure and pain, fame and disrepute. Becoming attached to or excessively elated with success, praise, fame, or pleasure can be a setup for suffering when the winds of change shift. For example, success can be wonderful, but if it leads to arrogance, we have more to lose in future challenges. Becoming personally invested in praise can tend toward conceit. Identifying with failure, we may feel incompetent or inadequate. Reacting to pain, we may become discouraged. If we understand or feel that our sense of inner well-being is independent of the Eight Winds, we are more likely to remain on an even keel in their midst.

A simple definition of "equanimity," considering the various Pali roots, is the capacity to not be caught up with what happens to us. We can practice with equanimity by studying the ways that we get caught.

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Instead of pursuing the ideal of balance and nonreactivity directly, we can give careful attention to how balance is lost and how reactivity is triggered. Trying to fit into some idealistic model of what being equanimous is supposed to look like can all too easily produce such threats to equanimity as indifference, aloofness, rigidity, or complacency. But when the obstacles are understood and removed, then the resulting equanimity can be the foundation for caring, presence, flexibility and diligence.

—Gil Fronsdal

### U PANDITA ON DEVELOPING EQUANIMITY

According to the Buddha, the way to bring about equanimity is wise attention: to be continually mindful from moment to moment, without a break, based on the intention to develop equanimity. One moment of equanimity causes a succeeding moment of equanimity to arise. Once equanimity is activated, it will be the cause for equanimity to continue and to deepen. It can bring one to deep levels of practice beyond the insight into the arising and passing away of phenomena.

Equanimity does not arise easily in the minds of beginning yogis. Though these yogis may be diligent in trying to be mindful from moment to moment, equanimity comes and goes. The mind will be well-balanced for a little while and then it will go off again. Step by step, equanimity is strengthened. The intervals when it is present grow more prolonged and frequent. Eventually, equanimity becomes strong enough to qualify as a factor of enlightenment. Along with this practice of wise attention, here are five more ways to develop equanimity:

#### 1. BALANCED EMOTION TOWARD ALL LIVING THINGS

The first and foremost is to have an equanimous attitude toward all liv-

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ing beings. These are your loved ones, including animals. We have a lot of attachment and desire associated with people we love, and also with our pets. Sometimes we can be what we call “crazy” about someone. This experience does not contribute to equanimity, which is a state of balance.

To prepare the ground for equanimity to arise, one should try to cultivate an attitude of nonattachment and equanimity toward the people and animals we love. As worldly people, it may be necessary to have a certain amount of attachment in relationships, but excessive attachment is destructive to us as well as to loved ones. We begin to worry too much over their welfare. Especially in retreat, we should try to put aside such excessive concern and worry for the welfare of our friends.

One reflection that can develop nonattachment is to regard all beings as the heirs of their own karma. People reap the rewards of good karma and suffer the consequences of unwholesome acts. They created this karma under their own volition, and no one can prevent their experiencing the consequences. On the ultimate level, there is nothing you or anybody else can do to save them. If you think in this way, you may worry less about your loved ones.

You can also gain equanimity about beings by reflecting on ultimate reality. Perhaps you can tell yourself that, ultimately speaking, there is only mind and matter. Where is that person you are so wildly in love with? There is only nama and rupa, mind and body, arising and passing away from moment to moment. Which moment are you in love with? You may be able to drive some sense into your heart this way.

One might worry that reflections like this could turn into unfeeling indifference and lead us to abandon a mate or a dear person. This is© Amy Ruppel not the case. Equanimity is not insensitivity, indifference, or apathy. It is simply nonpreferential. Under its influence, one does not

## TRICYCLE TEACHINGS: EMOTIONS

push aside the things one dislikes or grasp at the things one prefers. The mind rests in an attitude of balance and acceptance of things as they are. When equanimity, this factor of enlightenment, is present, one abandons both attachment to beings and dislike for them. The texts tell us that equanimity is the cause for the cleansing and purification of one who has deep tendencies toward lust or desire, which is the opposite of equanimity.

### 2. BALANCED EMOTION TOWARD INANIMATE THINGS

The second way of developing this factor of enlightenment is to adopt an attitude of balance toward inanimate things: property, clothing, the latest fad on the market. Clothing, for example, will be ripped and stained someday. It will decay and perish because it is impermanent, like everything else. Furthermore, we do not even own it, not in the ultimate sense. Everything is non-self; there is no one to own anything. To develop balance and to cut down attachment, it is helpful to look at material things as transient. You might say to yourself, "I'm going to make use of this for a short time. It's not going to last forever."

People who get caught up in fads may be compelled to buy each new product that appears on the market. Once this gadget has been bought, another more sophisticated model will soon appear. Such persons throw away the old one and buy a new one. This behavior does not reflect equanimity.

### 3. AVOIDING PEOPLE WHO "GO CRAZY"

The third method for developing equanimity as an enlightenment factor is avoiding the company of people who tend to be crazy about people and things. These people have a deep possessiveness. They cling to what

they think belongs to them, both people and things. Some people find it difficult to see another person enjoying or using their property.

There is a case of an elder who had a great attachment to pets. It seems that in his monastery he bred a lot of dogs and cats. One day this elder came to my center in Rangoon to do a retreat. When he was meditating, he was practicing under favorable circumstances, but his practice was not very deep. Finally I had an idea and asked him if he had any pets in his monastery. He brightened up and said, "Oh yes, I have so many dogs and cats. Ever since I came here I've been thinking about whether they have enough food to eat and how they're doing." I asked him to forget about the animals and concentrate on meditation, and quite soon he was making good progress.

Please do not allow overattachment to loved ones, or even pets, to prevent you from attending meditation retreats that will allow you to deepen your practice and to develop equanimity as a factor of enlightenment.

#### 4. CHOOSING FRIENDS WHO STAY COOL

As a fourth method of arousing upekkha, you should choose friends who have no great attachment to beings or possessions. This method of developing equanimity is simply the converse of the preceding one. In choosing such a friend, if you happen to pick the elder I described just now, it could be a bit of a problem.

#### 5. INCLINING THE MIND TOWARD BALANCE

The fifth and last cause for this factor of enlightenment to arise is constantly to incline your mind toward the cultivation of equanimity. When your mind is inclined in this way, it will not wander off to thoughts of your dogs and cats at home, or of your loved ones. It will only become more balanced and harmonious.

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Equanimity is of tremendous importance both in the practice and in everyday life. Generally we get either swept away by pleasant and enticing objects, or worked up into a great state of agitation when confronted by unpleasant, undesirable objects. This wild alternation of contraries is nearly universal among human beings. When we lack the ability to stay balanced and unfaltering, we are easily swept into extremes of craving or aversion.

The scriptures say that when the mind indulges in sensual objects, it becomes agitated. This is the usual state of affairs in the world, as we can observe. In their quest for happiness, people mistake excitement of the mind for real happiness. They never have the chance to experience greater joy that comes with peace and tranquility.

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### SEVEN SUPPORTS FOR EQUANIMITY FROM GIL FRONSDAL

One approach to developing equanimity is to cultivate the qualities of mind that support it. Here are seven supports for equanimity:

#### 1. INTEGRITY

When we live and act with integrity or virtue, we feel confident about our actions and words, which results in the equanimity of blamelessness. The ancient Buddhist texts speak of being able to go into any assembly of people and feel blameless.

## 2. FAITH

While any kind of faith can provide equanimity, faith grounded in wisdom is especially powerful. The Pali word for faith, *saddha*, is also translated as “conviction” or confidence. If we have confidence, for example, in our ability to engage in a spiritual practice, then we are more likely to meet its challenges with equanimity.

## 3. A WELL-DEVELOPED MIND

Much as we might develop physical strength, balance, and stability of the body in a gym, so too can we develop strength, balance, and stability of the mind. This is done through practices that cultivate calm, concentration, and mindfulness. When the mind is calm, we are less likely to be blown about by the worldly winds.

## 4. WELL-BEING

In Buddhism, it’s considered appropriate and helpful to cultivate and enhance our well-being. It is all too easy to overlook the well-being that is easily available in daily life. Even taking time to enjoy one’s tea or the sunset can be a training in letting in well-being.

## 5. WISDOM

Wisdom can teach us to separate people’s actions from who they are. We can agree or disagree with their actions, but remain balanced in our relationship with a person. Or we can understand that our own thoughts and impulses are the result of impersonal conditions. By not taking them so personally, we are more likely to stay at ease with their arising.

One of the most powerful ways to use wisdom to facilitate equa-

## TRICYCLE TEACHINGS: EMOTIONS

nimity is to be mindful of when equanimity is absent. Honest awareness of what makes us imbalanced helps us to learn how to find balance. Wisdom can also be an important factor in learning to have an accepting awareness, to be present without the mind or heart contracting or resisting.

### 6. INSIGHT

Insight is a deep seeing into the nature of things as they are. One of the primary insights is the nature of impermanence. In the deepest forms of insight, we see that things change so quickly that we can't hold onto anything, and eventually the mind lets go of clinging. Letting go brings equanimity; the greater the letting go, the deeper the equanimity.

### 7. FREEDOM

Freedom comes when we begin to let go of our reactive tendencies. We can get a taste of what this means by noticing areas in which we were once reactive but are no longer so. For example, some issues that upset us when we were teenagers prompt no reaction at all now that we are adults. In Buddhist practice, we work to expand the range of life experiences in which we are free.

#### **The Buddha on Equanimity**

As a solid mass of rock  
Is not stirred by the wind,  
So a sage is not moved  
By praise and blame.  
As a deep lake

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Is clear and undisturbed,  
So a sage becomes clear  
Upon hearing the Dharma.  
Virtuous people always let go.  
They don't prattle about pleasures and desires.  
Touched by happiness and then by suffering,  
The sage shows no sign of being elated or depressed.  
—Dhammapada 81-83

When a practitioner has discerned formations by attributing the three characteristics [non-self, impermanence, and suffering] to them and seeing them as empty in this way, he abandons both terror and delight, and becomes indifferent to them and neutral. The practitioner neither takes them as “I” nor as “mine” and is like a person who has divorced a spouse [and in so doing become unaffected by the doings of the ex-spouse].

—Visuddhimagga 21.61

Equanimity is characterized as promoting neutrality toward all beings. Its function is to see equality in beings. It is manifested as the quieting of resentment and approval. Its proximate cause is seeing ownership of deeds [karma] thus:

“Beings are owners of their deeds. Whose [if not theirs] is the choice by which they will become happy, or will get free from suffering, or will not fall away from the success they have reached?” It succeeds when it makes resentment and approval subside, and it fails when it produces the equanimity of unknowing.

—Visuddhimagga 9.96

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Rahula, develop meditation that is like the earth, for then agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions will not take charge of your mind. Just as when people throw what is clean and unclean on the earth—feces, urine, saliva, pus, or blood—the earth is not horrified, humiliated, or disgusted by it; in the same way, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions will not take charge of your mind when you develop meditation like the earth.

—Majjhima-nikaya 62

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9

ENDURING THE FIRES

From anger to patience

H.H. THE DALAI LAMA

Last August [1991 - *eds.*], in a vast tent pitched in a meadow in the Valley of the Vizere in the Dordogne region of France, His Holiness the Dalai Lama expounded the dharma to an audience of five thousand. The week-long teaching took the form of a commentary on the *Bodhicaryavatara* (*The Way of the Bodhisattva*), the celebrated text written by the eighth-century Indian adept, scholar, and poet Shantideva.

The work of preparing the book of His Holiness' teachings was entrusted to the Padmakara Translation Group. The transcript was published in French by Albin Michel, under the title *Comme un éclair déchire la nuit*—"like a flash of lightning cutting through the night," a reference to Shantideva's simile for the rarity of altruistic intentions. Recently, it was selected by one of the book clubs as "Major Book of the Month," an exceptional event for a book with a spiritual theme. Shambhala Publications will issue an English edition next year. The following excerpts on the practice of the *paramita* of patience come from the third chapter.

Patience is one of the vital elements in the bodhisattva's training. This third chapter of the *Bodhicaryavatara*, which deals with patience, and the eighth chapter, which deals with meditation, together explain the key points of *bodhicitta*.

## TRICYCLE TEACHINGS: EMOTIONS

1. Good works gathered in a thousand ages,  
Such as deeds of generosity  
Or offerings to the Blissful Ones: A single flash of anger shatters them.

2. No evil is there similar to hatred,  
Nor austerity to be compared with patience.  
Steep yourself, therefore, in patience  
In all ways, urgently, with zeal

As a destructive force there is nothing as strong as anger. An instant of anger can destroy all the positive action accumulated over thousands of *kalpas* through generosity, making offerings to the buddhas, keeping discipline, and so on. So we can say that there is no fault as serious as anger.

Patience, on the other hand, as a discipline which neutralizes anger, which prevents us from succumbing to it, and which appeases the suffering we endure from the heat of the negative emotions, is quite unrivaled. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we resolve to practice patience, and a lot of inspiration can be gained by reflecting on what is wrong with anger and on the advantages of patience.

Positive actions are difficult and infrequent. It is hard to have positive thoughts when our minds are influenced by emotions and confused by adverse circumstances. Negative thoughts arise by themselves, and it is rare that we do a positive action whose motivation, execution, and conclusion are perfectly pure. If our stock of hard-won positive actions is rendered powerless in an instant of anger, the loss is immeasurably more serious than that of some more abundant resource.

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3. Those tormented by the pain of anger,  
Will never know tranquility of mind,  
Strangers to every joy and pleasure;  
Sleep deserts them, they will never rest.

Anger chases all happiness away, and makes even the most peaceful features turn livid and ugly. It upsets our physical equilibrium, disturbs our rest, destroys our appetite, and makes us age prematurely. Happiness, peace, and sleep evade us, and we can no longer appreciate people who have helped us and deserve our trust and gratitude. Under the influence of anger, someone of normally good character changes completely and can no longer be counted on. Anger leads both oneself and others to ruin. But anyone who puts his energy into destroying anger will be happy in this life and in lives to come.

7. Getting what I do not want,  
And that which hinders my desire:  
There my mind finds fuel for misery,  
Anger springs from it and beats me down.

8. Therefore I utterly destroy  
The sustenance of this my enemy,  
My foe, whose sole intention is  
To bring me sorrow.

Whenever we think about someone who has wronged us, or someone who is doing (or might do) something we or our friends don't want—preventing us from having what we do want—our mind, at peace before, suddenly begins to feel slightly unsettled. This state of mind fuels our

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negative thoughts about that person. “What a nasty fellow he is!” we think, and our hatred grows stronger and stronger. It is this first stage, this unsettled feeling which kindles our hatred, that we should try to get rid of.

9. Come what may, then, I will never harm  
My cheerful happiness of mind.  
Depression never brings me what I want;  
My virtue will be warped and marred by it.

10. If there is a cure when trouble comes,  
What need is there for being sad?  
And if no cure is to be found,  
What use is there in sorrow?

We must make an effort to remain in a relaxed state of mind. If we cannot get rid of that unsettled feeling, it will feed our hatred, increase it, and eventually destroy us.

Hatred is far worse than any ordinary enemy. Of course, ordinary enemies harm us: that is why we call them enemies. But the harm they do is not just in order to make us unhappy; it is also meant to be of some help to themselves or their friends. Hatred, the inner enemy, however, has no other function but to destroy our positive actions and make us unhappy. That is why Shantideva calls it “My foe, whose sole intention is to bring me sorrow.” From the moment it first appears, it exists for the sole purpose of harming us. So we should confront it with all the means we have, maintain a peaceful state of mind, and avoid getting upset.

What disconcerts us in the first place is that our wishes are not ful-

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filled. But remaining upset does nothing to help fulfill those wishes. So we neither fulfill our wishes, nor regain our cheerfulness! This disconcerted state, from which anger can grow, is most dangerous. We should try never to let our happiness be disturbed. Whether we are suffering at present or have suffered in the past, there is no reason to be unhappy. If we can remedy it, then why be unhappy? And if we cannot, there's no use in being unhappy about it—it's just one more thing to be unhappy about, which serves no purpose at all.

It is only natural that we don't like suffering. But if we can develop the willpower to bear difficulties, then we will grow more and more tolerant. There is nothing that does not get easier with practice. If we are very forbearing, then something we would normally consider very painful does not appear so bad after all. If we can develop our patience, we will be able to endure even major difficulties that befall us. But without such patient endurance, even the smallest thing becomes unbearable. A lot has to do with our attitude. All of us have some altruistic thoughts, limited though they may be. To develop such thoughts until our wish to help others becomes limitless is what we call *bodhicitta*. The main obstructions to this development are the wish to harm others, resentment, and anger.

As the antidote to these, therefore, it is essential to meditate on patience. The more deeply we practice patience, the less chance there will be for anger to arise. Practicing patience is the best way to avoid getting angry.

Now, let's talk about love. In my opinion, all beings, starting with humans, appreciate love. Valuing love is a spontaneous feeling. Even animals like the people who are kind to them. When someone looks at you with a loving expression, it makes you feel happy, does it not? Love is a quality that is esteemed throughout all humanity, in all religions. Every

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religion, including Buddhism, describes its founder above all in terms of his capacity to love. Religions that talk about a Creator refer to his mercy. And the main quality of the Buddhist refuge is love.

When we describe a Pure Land filled with the presence of love, people feel like going there. But were we to describe those Pure Lands as places of warfare and fighting, people would no longer feel any desire to be reborn in such a place. People naturally value love and dislike harmful feelings and actions such as resentment, anger, fighting, stealing, coveting others' possessions, and wishing to harm others. So if love is something that all human beings like, it is certainly something that we can develop if we make the effort.

Many people think that to be patient and to bear loss is a sign of weakness. I think that is wrong. It is anger which is a sign of weakness, and patience a sign of strength. For example, a person arguing a point based on sound reasoning remains confident and may even smile while proving his cause. On the other hand, if his reasons are unsound and he is about to lose face, he gets angry, loses control, and starts talking nonsense. People rarely get angry if they are confident in what they are doing. Anger arises much more easily at moments of confusion.

22. I am not angry with my bile and other humors,  
A fertile source of pain and suffering;  
Why then be wroth with living beings,  
Victims too of such conditions?

Suffering can result from both animate and inanimate causes. We may curse inanimate things like the weather, but it is with animate beings that we most often get angry. If we further analyze these animate

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causes that make us unhappy, we find that they are themselves influenced by other conditions. They are not making us angry simply because they want to. In this respect, because they are influenced by other conditions they are in fact powerless; so there is no need to get angry with them.

24. Never thinking: 'Now I will be angry,'  
People are impulsively caught up in anger;  
Irritation, likewise, comes  
Though never plans to be experienced!

25. Every injury whatever,  
The whole variety of evil deeds:  
All arise induced by circumstances,  
None are independent and autonomous

26. Yet these causes have no thought  
Of bringing something into being;  
And that which is produced thereby,  
Being mindless, has no thought of being so.

47. Those who harm me come against me:  
Summoned by my evil karma.  
They will be the ones who go to hell,  
Am I not therefore the one to injure them?

When others harm us, it is the result of our own past actions, which in fact have instigated them—for, in future, they will suffer because of the harmful act we ourselves have instigated.

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When others harm us, that gives us the chance to practice patience, and thus to purify numerous negative actions and accumulate much merit.

Since it is our enemies who give us this great opportunity, in reality they are helping us. But because we are the cause of the negative actions they commit, we are actually harming them. So if there is anyone to get angry with, it should be ourselves. We should never be angry with our enemies, regardless of their attitude, since they are so useful to us.

One might therefore wonder whether, by thus causing our enemies to accumulate negative actions, we accumulate negative actions ourselves; and whether our enemies in so helping us to practice patience have accumulated positive actions. But this is not the case. Although we were the cause for their negative actions, by our practicing patience we actually accumulate merit and will not take rebirth in the lower realms. As it is we who have been patient, that does not help our enemies. On the other hand, if we cannot stay patient when we are harmed, then the harm done by our enemies will not help anyone at all. Moreover, by losing patience and getting angry we transgress our vow to follow the discipline of a bodhisattva.

If, for example, a person condemned to death were to have his life spared in exchange for having his hands cut off, he would feel very happy. Similarly, when we have the chance to purify a great suffering by enduring a slight injury, we should accept it. If, unable to bear insults, we get angry, we are only creating worse suffering for the future. Difficult though it may be, we should try instead to think openly, on a vaster perspective, and not retaliate.

74. For the sake of my desired aims,  
A thousand times I have endured the fires

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And other pains of hell,  
Achieving nothing for myself and others.

75. The present pains are nothing to compare with those,  
And yet great benefits accrue from them.  
These afflictions which dispel the troubles of all wandering beings:  
I should only delight in them.

So far we have been, and are still, going through endless suffering, without this suffering doing us any good whatsoever. Now that we have promised to be good-hearted, we should try not to get angry when others insult us. Being patient may not be easy. It requires considerable concentration. But the result we achieve by enduring these difficulties will be sublime. That is something to be happy about!

90. The rigamarole of praise and reputation  
Serves not to increase merit nor the span of life,  
Bestowing neither health nor strength of body,  
It contributes nothing to the body's ease.

98. Praise and compliments disturb me,  
And soften my revulsion with samsara:  
I begin to covet others' qualities and  
Every excellence is thereby spoiled.

Praise, if you think about it, is actually a distraction. For example, in the beginning one may be a simple, humble monk, content with little. Later on people may start to praise one, saying, "He's a lama," and one begins to feel a bit more proud and to be more self-conscious in how one

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feels and behaves. Then the eight worldly considerations become stronger, do they not, and the praise we receive distracts us, destroying our renunciation.

Again, at first when we have little to compare ourselves with, we do not feel jealous of others. But later we begin to “grow some hair,” and as our status increases so does our rivalry with others in important positions. We feel jealous of anyone with good qualities, and in the end this destroys our own good qualities. Being praised is not really a good thing—it can be the source of negative actions.

99. Those who stay close by me, then,  
To ruin my good name and cut me down to size,  
Are they not my guardians saving me  
From falling into realms of sorrow?

As our real goal is enlightenment, we should not be angry with our enemies, who in fact dispel all the obstacles to our attaining enlightenment.

101. They, like Buddha’s very blessing,  
Bar my way, determined as I am  
To plunge myself in suffering:  
How could I be angry with them?

102. We should not be angry, saying,  
‘They are an obstacle to virtue,’  
Patience is the peerless austerity,  
And is this not my chosen path?

It is no use saying that our enemies are preventing us from prac-

ticing, and that is why we get angry. For if we truly want to practice, there is no practice more important than patience. We cannot pretend to practice without patience.

If we cannot bear the harm our enemies do to us, and get angry instead, we are obstructing our own achievement of an immensely positive action. Nothing can exist without a cause, and the practice of patience could not exist without there being people who do us harm. How, then, can we call such people obstacles to our practice of patience, which is one of the fundamental practices of a Mahayana practitioner? We can hardly call a beggar an obstacle to generosity.

There are so many charitable causes, such as beggars, in the world; whereas those who make us angry and test our patience are very few—especially if we avoid harming others. So when we encounter these rare enemies, we should appreciate them.

107. Like a treasure found at home,  
Enriching me without fatigue,  
Enemies are helpers in the bodhisattva life,  
I should take delight in them.

When we have been patient toward an enemy, we should dedicate the fruit of this practice of patience to him, because he is the cause of the practice. He has been very kind to us. We might think, why does he deserve this dedication when he had no intention to make us practice patience? But if objects need have an intention before they deserve our respect, then in that case the dharma itself, which points out the cessation of suffering and is the cause of happiness, yet has no intention of helping us, should not be worthy of respect.

We might then think that our enemy is undeserving because, un-

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like the dharma, he actually wishes to harm us. But if everyone was as kind and wellintentioned as a doctor, how could we ever practice patience? And when a doctor, intending to cure us, hurts us by amputating a limb, cutting us open, or pricking us with needles, we do not think of him as an enemy and get angry with him, so we do not practice patience toward him. But enemies are those who intend to harm us, and it is because of that that we are able to practice patience toward them.

If we really take refuge in the buddhas, then we should respect their wishes. After all, in ordinary life it is normal to adapt in some way to one's friends and respect their wishes. The ability to do so is considered a good quality. If, on the one hand, we say that we have heartfelt devotion and take refuge in the Buddha, dharma, and sangha, but on the other hand, in our actual actions, we take no notice of what displeases them, and just walk over them, that is truly sad. We are prepared to conform to the standards of ordinary people but not to those of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. How miserable! If, for example, a Christian truly loves God, then he should practice love toward all his fellow human beings. Otherwise, he is failing to practice his religion: his words and deeds contradict each other.

In general, it is the notion of enemies that is the main obstacle to *bodhicitta*. If we can transform an enemy into someone toward whom we feel respect and gratitude, then our practice will naturally progress, like water following a downhill course.

To be patient means not to get angry with those who harm us and to have compassion. That is not to say that we should let them do what they like. For example, we Tibetans have undergone great difficulties at the hands of others. But we are not angry with them, since if we get angry we can only lose. This is why we are practicing patience. But we are not going to let injustice and oppression go unnoticed.

10

STAY WITH YOUR  
BROKEN HEART

Forming bad habits is hard work.

P E M A C H Ö D R Ö N

When anyone asks me how I got involved in Buddhism, I always say it was because I was so angry with my husband. The truth is that he saved my life. When that marriage fell apart, I tried hard—very, very hard—to go back to some kind of comfort, some kind of security, some kind of familiar resting place. Fortunately for me, I could never pull it off. Instinctively I knew that annihilation of my old dependent, clinging self was the only way to go. . . .

Life is a good teacher and a good friend. Things are always in transition, if we could only realize it. Nothing ever sums itself up in the way that we like to dream about. The off-center, in-between state is an ideal situation, a situation in which we don't get caught and we can open our hearts and minds beyond limit. It's a very tender, nonaggressive, open-ended state of affairs.

To stay with that shakiness—to stay with a broken heart, with a rumbling stomach, with the feeling of hopelessness and wanting to get revenge—that is the path of true awakening. Sticking with that uncertainty, getting the knack of relaxing in the midst of chaos, learning not

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to panic—this is the spiritual path. Getting the knack of catching ourselves, of gently and compassionately catching ourselves, is the path of the warrior. We catch ourselves one zillion times as once again, whether we like it or not, we harden into resentment, bitterness, righteous indignation—harden in any way, even into a sense of relief, a sense of inspiration.

Every day we could think about the aggression in the world, in New York, Los Angeles, Halifax, Taiwan, Beirut, Kuwait, Somalia, Iraq, everywhere. All over the world, everybody always strikes out at the enemy, and the pain escalates forever. Every day we could reflect on this and ask ourselves, “Am I going to add to the aggression in the world?” Every day, at the moment when things get edgy, we can just ask ourselves, “Am I going to practice peace, or am I going to war?”

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11

FINDING TRUE REFUGE

A mindfulness tool that offers support for working with difficult emotions

TARA BRACH

Imagine you just found out that your child was suspended from school. Imagine your boss just told you to “start over” on a report you’ve worked on for a month. Imagine you just realized you’ve been on Facebook for three hours and have finished off a box of cookies in the process. Imagine your partner just confessed to an affair.

It’s hard to hang out with the truth of what we’re feeling. We may sincerely intend to pause and be mindful whenever a crisis arises or whenever we feel stuck and confused, but our conditioning to react, escape, or become possessed by emotion is very strong.

Yes, there are times when being present feels out of reach or too much to bear. There are times when a false refuge can relieve stress, give us a breather, and help lift our mood. But when we’re not connected to the clarity and kindness of presence, we’re all too likely to fall into more misunderstanding, more conflict, and more distance from others and from our own heart.

About 12 years ago, a number of Buddhist teachers began to share a new mindfulness tool that offered in-the-trenches support for working with intense and difficult emotions. The tool is called RAIN (an acro-

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nym for the four steps of the process), and it can be accessed in almost any place or situation. RAIN directs our attention in a clear, systematic way that cuts through confusion and stress. The steps give us somewhere to turn in a painful moment, and as we call on them more regularly, they strengthen our capacity to come home to our deepest truth. Like the clear sky and clean air after a cooling rain, this mindfulness practice brings a new openness and calm to our daily lives.

I have taught RAIN to thousands of students, clients, and mental health professionals. I've also made it a core practice in my own life. Here are the four steps of RAIN, presented in the way I've found most helpful:

R

Recognize what is happening

A

Allow life to be just as it is

I

Investigate with kindness

N

Non-identification

RAIN directly deconditions the habitual ways in which you resist your moment-to-moment experience. It doesn't matter whether you resist "what is" by lashing out in anger, by having a cigarette, or by getting immersed in obsessive thinking. Your attempt to control the life within and around you actually cuts you off from your own heart and from this living world. RAIN begins to undo these unconscious patterns as soon as we take the first step.

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### RECOGNIZE WHAT IS HAPPENING

Recognition is seeing what is true in your inner life. It starts the minute you focus your attention on whatever thoughts, emotions, feelings, or sensations are arising right here and now. As your attention settles and opens, you will discover that some parts of your experience are easier to connect with than others. For example, you might recognize anxiety right away, but if you focus on your worried thoughts, you might not notice the actual sensations of squeezing, pressure, or tightness arising in the body. On the other hand, if your body is gripped by jittery nervousness, you might not recognize that this physical response is being triggered by your underlying belief that you are about to fail. You can awaken recognition simply by asking yourself: “What is happening inside me right now?” Call on your natural curiosity as you focus inward. Try to let go of any preconceived ideas and instead listen in a kind, receptive way to your body and heart.

### ALLOW LIFE TO BE JUST AS IT IS

Allowing means “letting be” the thoughts, emotions, feelings, or sensations you discover. You may feel a natural sense of aversion, of wishing that unpleasant feelings would go away, but as you become more willing to be present with “what is,” a different quality of attention will emerge. Allowing is intrinsic to healing, and realizing this can give rise to a conscious intention to “let be.”

Many students I work with support their resolve to “let be” by mentally whispering an encouraging word or phrase. For instance, you might feel the grip of fear and whisper “yes” or experience the swelling of deep grief and whisper “yes.” You might use the words “this too” or

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“I consent.” At first you might feel you’re just “putting up” with unpleasant emotions or sensations. Or you might say “yes” to shame and hope that it will magically disappear. In reality, we have to consent again and again. Yet even the first gesture of allowing, simply whispering a phrase like “yes” or “I consent” begins to soften the harsh edges of your pain. Your entire being is not so rallied in resistance. Offer the phrase gently and patiently, and in time your defenses will relax, and you may feel a physical sense of yielding or opening to waves of experience.

## INVESTIGATE WITH KINDNESS

At times, simply working through the first two steps of RAIN is enough to provide relief and reconnect you with presence. In other cases, however, the simple intention to recognize and allow is not enough. For instance, if you are in the thick of a divorce, about to lose a job, or dealing with a life-threatening illness, you may be easily overwhelmed by intense feelings. Because these feelings are triggered over and over again—you get a phone call from your soon-to-be ex, your bank statement comes, you wake up to pain in the morning—your reactions can become very entrenched. In such situations, you may need to further awaken and strengthen mindful awareness with this step, the *I* of RAIN.

Investigation means calling on your natural interest—the desire to know truth—and directing a more focused attention to your present experience. Simply pausing to ask, “What is happening inside me?” might initiate recognition, but with investigation you engage in a more active and pointed kind of inquiry. You might ask yourself: “What most wants attention?” “How am I experiencing this in my body?” or “What am I believing?” or “What does this feeling want from me?” You might contact sensations of hollowness or shakiness, and then find a sense of un-

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worthiness and shame buried in these feelings. Unless they are brought into consciousness, these beliefs and emotions will control your experience and perpetuate your identification with a limited, deficient self.

When I first shared the RAIN acronym with students, many of them had problems with the investigation step. Some said things like “When fear arises, my investigation just takes me into thinking about what is causing it and how to feel better.” Others reported, “I can’t stay in my body long enough to investigate where an emotion lives in me.” For many, investigation triggered judgment: “I know I’m supposed to be investigating this shame, but I hate it. . . and I hate myself for having it.”

All these responses reflect our natural resistance to feeling uncomfortable and unsafe: thoughts swarm in our head, we leave our body, we judge what is happening. What my students were telling me was that RAIN was missing a key ingredient. In order for investigation to be healing and freeing, we need to approach our experience with an intimate quality of attention. We need to offer a gentle welcome to whatever surfaces. This is why I use the phrase “Investigate with kindness.” Without this heart energy, investigation cannot penetrate; there is not enough safety and openness for real contact.

Imagine that your child comes home in tears after being bullied at school. In order to find out what happened and how your child is feeling, you have to offer a kind, receptive, gentle attention. Bringing that same kindness to your inner life makes inquiry, and ultimately healing, possible.

## REALIZE NON-IDENTIFICATION

The lucid, open, and kind presence evoked in the *R*, *A*, and *I* of RAIN leads to the *N*: the freedom of Non-identification, and the realization

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of what I call natural awareness or natural presence. Non-identification means that your sense of who you are is not fused with or defined by any limited set of emotions, sensations, or stories. When identification with the small self is loosened, we begin to intuit and live from the openness and love that express our natural awareness. The first three steps of RAIN require some intentional activity. In contrast, the *N* of RAIN expresses the result: a liberating realization of your natural awareness. There's nothing to do for this last part of RAIN—realization arises spontaneously, on its own. We simply rest in natural awareness.

### GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICING WITH RAIN

You can practice the steps of RAIN during a formal meditation whenever a difficult emotion arises, or you can call on it in the midst of daily life. Either way, the key is to be conscious and purposeful as you initiate the practice, knowing that you are offering a committed presence to what is true, here and now. Here are some more specific suggestions that have emerged as I've taught RAIN:

#### PAUSE

Before you begin RAIN, take the time to pause. The pause might be in the form of a physical “time-out” that removes you from immediate external triggers. More importantly, it is an internal “time-out” from the reactive tumble of thoughts. In a pause, you intentionally create a space in which you set aside distractions and pay attention. This willingness to deliberately interrupt habitual activity and dedicate time to being present will lend increased focus and clarity to your practice.

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### GIVE YOURSELF THE SUPPORT OF A REGULAR MEDITATION PRACTICE

A regular meditation practice directly awakens the key ingredients in RAIN—mindfulness, openheartedness, and inquiry. During my evening walk, the skills developed through past meditation training served me in several key ways. My practice in being mindful of thinking helped me to be aware of my thoughts without getting lost in them. Similarly, my practice in bringing presence to unpleasant experience allowed me to open to the raw feelings and sensations in my body. Maybe most important, my practice with awakening self-compassion, a key element in my own meditative path and in my teachings, enabled me to bring a warm, intimate attention to the onslaught of judgment and blame.

### CULTIVATE FLEXIBILITY

You have a unique body and mind, with a particular history and conditioning. No one can offer you a formula for navigating all situations and all states of mind. Only by listening inwardly in a fresh and open way will you discern at any given time what most serves your healing and freedom.

As you practice RAIN, keep in mind that the sequence I've suggested is neither rigid nor necessarily linear; you may need to adapt the order as you attend to your inner experience. You might find, for instance, that as soon as you feel rising anxiety, you recognize it as a familiar inner weather pattern that happens to you and most everyone you know, and hence does not feel so "personal." In moments like these you have already arrived at the N of RAIN; so rather than any continued "doing" such as investigating with kindness, you might simply rest in natural

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presence. Similarly, you might end your RAIN practice before formally moving through all the steps, or you might cycle through the process again if you encounter something unexpected.

As you listen inwardly to what is needed, you may also feel drawn to weave other forms of meditation into your practice of RAIN. To ground yourself, you might begin with a body-based reflection, yoga, or a walking meditation. If strong feelings arise in the midst of RAIN, you might take some time to simply focus on your breath. Or you might find that a few minutes of lovingkindness practice help you to bring a gentler and more compassionate attention to investigation. This kind of inner listening and adaptability can help you transform what at first might seem to be a mechanical technique into a creative and vibrant means of awakening on your spiritual path.

### PRACTICE WITH THE “SMALL STUFF.”

The 6th-century Buddhist master Shantideva suggested that by staying present “with little cares, we train ourselves to work with great adversity.” Each time you bring RAIN to a situation that usually causes you to react, you strengthen your capacity to awaken from trance. You might identify in advance what, to you, is chronic “small stuff”—the annoyance that comes up when someone repeats themselves, the restlessness when you are waiting in line, the frustration when you’ve forgotten to pick up something on your shopping list—and commit to pausing and practicing a “light” version of RAIN. By pausing many times throughout the day and bringing an interest and presence to your habitual ways of reacting, your life will become increasingly spontaneous and free.

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### SEEK HELP

Practicing RAIN can intensify your emotional experience. If you are concerned that you might become overwhelmed by your feelings, postpone practicing RAIN alone and seek help. Particularly if you are working with post-traumatic stress, it can be important, and even necessary, to have the support of a therapist or a psychologically attuned meditation teacher. The presence of a trusted and experienced person can help you feel safe enough to connect with inner vulnerability and also help you to find relief if what arises feels like “too much.”

### LET YOUR SENSES BE A GATEWAY TO PRESENCE

The practice of RAIN comes alive as you learn to step out of your thoughts and connect with your body’s experience. Many people move through daily life obsessed with thoughts and, to varying degrees, dissociated from the felt sense in the body. Strong emotional trauma or wounding makes dissociation from bodily awareness particularly likely. Whether you are working through deep fear and shame or a less acute emotional reaction, your inner freedom will arise from bringing attention to how the experience is expressed in your body. On my evening walk, the pivotal moment came when I could directly feel how layers of judgment, assumed unworthiness, and grief were squeezing my heart.

### BE MINDFUL OF DOUBT

Doubt acts as a main impediment to RAIN and more broadly, to any gateway of true refuge. The Buddha considered doubt (along with clinging and aversion) to be a universal “hindrance” to spiritual freedom.

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When you are stuck in beliefs like “I’m never going to change,” “I’m not cut out for spiritual practice,” or “Healing and freedom aren’t really possible,” you get stopped in your tracks.

Needless to say, some doubt is healthy, as in “I’m no longer certain this job is in line with my values,” or “Maybe I’ve been the one who is avoiding intimacy,” or “I wonder whether I can trust a spiritual teacher who speaks disrespectfully of other teachers.” Like investigation, healthy doubt arises from the urge to know what is true—it challenges assumptions or the status quo in service of healing and freedom. In contrast, unhealthy doubt arises from fear and aversion, and it questions one’s own basic potential or worth, or the value of another.

When unhealthy doubt arises, let it be the subject of RAIN. It helps to say to yourself, “This is doubt,” consciously acknowledging its presence in your mind. By recognizing and naming doubt when it arises but not judging it, you immediately enlarge your perspective and loosen the bind of trance. If the doubt is persistent, you can deepen presence by regarding it with kindness. Rather than being controlled and perhaps paralyzed by doubt, let it be a call for clear, mindful presence.

## BE PATIENT

Patience gives you joy in the process of awakening. Without patience, you may find yourself at war with your own forgetfulness or reactivity. Long-term meditators or therapy clients often complain, “I’ve been dealing with this same issue for decades.” They are troubled by their “regressions” into old feelings of being worthless or rejected, unsafe or ashamed. Such bouts of trance can be accompanied by desperation and the fear that there will be no end to the cycling of unhealthy patterns of feelings and behaviors. While RAIN reduces the grip of trance, it is rare-

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ly a one-shot experience. You may need to go through numerous rounds of RAIN, again and again meeting entrenched patterns of suffering with attention and kindness.

The belief and feeling that “something is wrong with me” was a key theme in my first book, *Radical Acceptance*, and this feeling continues to be part of my life. But my many rounds of meeting it with presence have had an effect: the trance is much more transparent, short-lived, and suffering-free. Often it makes a brief appearance, and then there’s recognition, “Ah, this again...” and a letting go. It’s not that “I” am letting go, but rather the old false sense of self just dissolves when it is seen. What remains is an invigorated realization of the heart-space that holds this life, and a trust in the tender awareness that lives beyond the trance.

Each time you meet an old emotional pattern with presence, your awakening to truth can deepen. There’s less identification with the self in the story and more ability to rest in the awareness that is witnessing what’s happening. You become more able to abide in compassion, to remember and trust your true home. Rather than cycling repetitively through old conditioning, you are actually spiraling toward freedom.

## BE SINCERE

An attitude of sincerity in approaching spiritual practices like RAIN orients your heart and mind toward freedom. Let yourself recall again and again what for you is “the most important thing.” Perhaps you long to realize the truth of who you are, to love well, to touch peace, or to live more from presence. Whatever you most care about, let this tenderness of heart energize your meditation. The sincerity of your longing will carry you home.

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MINDFULNESS AND  
DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

It's never too late to apply the skills of awareness

SHARON SALZBERG

I've heard some wonderful explanations of mindfulness. The writer and teacher Sylvia Boorstein calls it “awake attention to what is happening inside and outside so we can respond from a place of wisdom.” The Vietnamese Zen teacher and poet Thich Nhat Hanh says, “I like to define mindfulness as the energy that helps us to be there 100 percent. It is the energy of your true presence.” But my favorite definition comes from a fifth grader at Piedmont Avenue Elementary School in Oakland, California.

In 2007, the school launched a pilot program that offered kids five weeks of mindfulness training from a coach who visited classrooms twice a week, leading 15-minute sessions on how to have “gentle breaths and still bodies.” The students trained their attention by focusing on their breath and noting the emotions that arose. The coach also asked them to cultivate compassion by reflecting—“taking a moment”—before lashing out at someone on the playground. “I was losing at baseball and I was about to throw a bat,” one boy told his class, according to *The New*

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*York Times*. “The mindfulness really helped.”

The reporter asked another boy participating in the program to describe mindfulness. It’s “not hitting someone in the mouth,” he said.

His answer is wise, wide, and deep. It illustrates one of the most important uses of mindfulness: helping us deal with difficult emotions. It suggests the possibility of finding the gap between a trigger event and our usual conditioned response to it, and using that pause to collect ourselves and change our response. And it demonstrates that we can learn to make better choices.

“He doesn’t know what to do with his energy,” the student’s mother said at a parents’ meeting. He was, she explained, usually quick to strike out when he was confused or frustrated. But mindfulness training was changing that pattern. “One day after school he told me, ‘I’m taking a moment.’”

This is just what the practice of mindfulness helps us remember. Working with emotions during our meditation sessions sharpens our ability to recognize a feeling just as it begins, not 15 consequential actions later. We can then go on to develop a more balanced relationship with it—neither letting it overwhelm us so we lash out rashly nor ignoring it because we’re afraid or ashamed of it.

We learn a lot in that middle, mindful place. We begin to discover that, like the Oakland schoolboy, we can always take a moment—to re-center ourselves in our bodies, acknowledge what we’re feeling, spot our habitual reactions (whether that means erupting when we’re frustrated or silently sulking when we feel criticized), and perhaps decide on a different course of action.

When I first began my meditative practice I was only 18, and although I knew I was deeply unhappy, I wasn’t aware of the separate

strands of grief, anger, and fear roiling inside me. All I felt was a single, seemingly solid bank of sadness. Then, through meditation, I began to look within more clearly and detect the various components of my sorrow. What I saw unsettled me so much that I marched up to my teacher, S. N. Goenka, and said accusingly, “I never used to be an angry person before I began meditating!” Of course I was hugely angry: my mother had died; I barely knew my father; I barely knew myself. When I blamed Mr. Goenka, he simply laughed—then reminded me of the tools I now had to deal with the difficult feelings I used to keep hidden. I could begin to forge a different relationship with my emotions—to find the middle place between denying them and giving over to them—because I had acknowledged them.

Mindfulness practice isn’t meant to eliminate thinking but aims rather to help us know what we’re thinking when we’re thinking it, just as we want to know what we’re feeling when we’re feeling it.

Mindfulness allows us to watch our thoughts, see how one thought leads to the next, decide if we’re heading toward an unhealthy path, and if so, let go and change directions. It allows us to see that who we are is much more than a fearful or envious or angry thought. We can rest in the awareness of the thought, in the compassion we extend to ourselves if the thought makes us uncomfortable, and in the balance and good sense we summon as we decide whether and how to act on the thought.

Meditation is like going into an old attic room and turning on the light. In that light we see everything—the beautiful treasures we’re grateful to have unearthed; the dusty, neglected corners that inspire us to say, “I’d better clean that up”; the unfortunate relics of the past that we thought we had gotten rid of years ago. We acknowledge them all, with an open, spacious, and loving awareness.

It’s never too late to turn on the light. Your ability to break an un-

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healthy habit or turn off an old tape doesn't depend on how long it's been running; a shift in perspective doesn't depend on how long you've held the old view. When you flip the switch in that attic, it doesn't matter whether it's been dark for 10 minutes, 10 years, or 10 decades. The light still illuminates the room and banishes the murkiness, letting you see things you couldn't see before. It's never too late to take a moment to look.

### MEDITATION ON CALLING UP DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

Sit comfortably or lie down, with your eyes closed or open. Center your attention on the feeling of the breath, wherever it's easiest for you—just normal, natural breath. If it helps, use the mental note in, out or rising, falling.

After a few moments of following your breath, consciously bring to mind a difficult or troubling feeling or situation from the recent or distant past, a scenario that holds intense emotion for you—sadness, fear, shame, or anger. Take a moment to fully recall the situation. Doing that isn't likely to feel comfortable, but stick with it. At any point, you can return to following your breath for respite.

What bodily sensations accompany the emotions this scenario calls up? see if you can tell where in your body you feel these emotions. When you observe the emotion that has arisen, does your mouth go dry? are you breathing shallowly? are you clenching your teeth? is there a lump in your throat? whatever is happening in your body, note it. If you can feel the emotion in the body (and we can't always do that), it gives you a concrete way to disengage from the story and observe the emotion's changing nature.

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Bring your focus to the part of the body where those sensations are the strongest. You don't have to do anything about them except be aware of them. Once your attention has moved to the bodily sensations, perhaps say to yourself, it's okay; whatever it is, *it's okay; I can feel this without pushing it away or getting caught up in it.* Stay with the awareness of the feelings in your body and your relationship to them, accepting them, letting them be, softening and opening to them. As you sit with them awhile, do the sensations change? How?

Remember that often what we are feeling is not just one emotion; grief may include moments of sorrow, moments of fear, of powerlessness, maybe even of relief, anticipation, or curiosity. See if you can break down the emotion into its component parts. Notice all the different things you feel. Are there any positive mind states mixed in with the mostly negative? Any negative mind states flavoring the positive? Staying with the feeling and untangling the various strands may lead you to realize that what you thought was a thick wall of misery is a constantly shifting combination of emotions. The perception alone makes the feelings more manageable.

You may notice yourself resisting these difficult emotions and the bodily sensations that accompany them—pushing them away and feeling ashamed of them. Or perhaps you find yourself getting pulled into them—replaying an argument, or reliving feelings of rage, helplessness, or humiliation.

Perhaps the emotions that the thought or situation call up are so upsetting that you start to cry. If you do, that's okay; it's part of your experience. You can become aware of how you're relating to the tears—how your body reacts, what blend of emotions accompanies the crying, what stories you tell yourself about crying.

If you feel overwhelmed by emotions, use awareness of your breath

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to anchor your attention in your body. This helps you return to the present moment. If you find yourself thinking *I will always feel this way, or If I were stronger/more patient/smarter/kinder I wouldn't feel this way*, return to the simple truth of the moment—sitting and being aware of your breath. See if you can recognize that the emotion is a temporary state, not your total self.

And when you are ready, open your eyes. Take a deep breath and relax.

During the day, if a difficult emotion arises, see if you can apply these skills of awareness to it.

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FREE FROM FEAR

When we are not fully present, we are not really living

THICH NHAT HANH

Our greatest fear is that when we die, we will become nothing. Many of us believe our entire existence is limited to a particular period, our “lifespan.” We believe it begins when we are born—when, out of being nothing, we become something—and it ends when we die and become nothing again. So we are filled with a fear of annihilation.

But if we look deeply, we can have a very different understanding of our existence. We can see that birth and death are just notions; they’re not real. The Buddha taught that there is no birth and no death. Our belief that these ideas about birth and death are real creates a powerful illusion that causes us a great deal of suffering. When we understand that we can’t be destroyed, we’re liberated from fear. It’s a huge relief. We can enjoy life and appreciate it in a new way.

When I lost my mother, I suffered a lot. The day she died, I wrote in my journal, “The greatest misfortune of my life has happened.” I grieved her death for more than a year. Then one night, I was sleeping in my hermitage—a hut that lay behind a temple, halfway up a hill covered with tea plants in the highlands of Vietnam. I had a dream about my mother. I saw myself sitting with her, and we were having a wonder-

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ful talk. She looked young and beautiful, with her hair flowing down around her shoulders. It was so pleasant to sit and talk to her as if she had never died.

When I woke up, I had a very strong feeling that I had never lost my mother. The sense that my mother was still with me was very clear. I understood then that the idea of having lost my mother was just that: an idea. It was obvious in that moment that my mother was still alive in me and always would be.

I opened the door and went outside. The entire hillside was bathed in moonlight. Walking slowly in that soft light through the rows of tea plants, I observed that my mother was indeed still with me. My mother was the moonlight caressing me as she had so often done, very gentle, very sweet. Every time my feet touched the earth, I knew my mother was there with me. I knew this body was not mine alone but a living continuation of my mother and father, my grandparents and great-grandparents, and of all my ancestors. These feet I saw as “my” feet were actually “our” feet. Together my mother and I were leaving footprints in the damp soil.

From that moment on, the idea that I had lost my mother no longer existed. All I had to do was look at the palm of my hand, or feel the breeze on my face or the earth under my feet, to remember that my mother is always with me, available at any time.

When you lose a loved one, you suffer. But if you know how to look deeply, you have a chance to realize that his or her nature is truly the nature of no-birth, no-death. There is manifestation, and there is the cessation of manifestation in order to have another manifestation. You have to be alert to recognize the new manifestations of one person. But with practice and effort, you can do it. Pay attention to the world around you, to the leaves and the flowers, to the birds and the rain. If you can stop and look deeply, you will recognize your beloved manifesting again

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and again in many forms. You will release your fear and pain, and again embrace the joy of life.

### THE PRESENT IS FREE FROM FEAR

When we are not fully present, we are not really living. We're not really there, either for our loved ones or for ourselves. If we're not there, then where are we? We are running, running, running, even during our sleep. We run because we're trying to escape from our fear.

We cannot enjoy life if we spend our time and energy worrying about what happened yesterday and what will happen tomorrow. If we're afraid all the time, we miss out on the wonderful fact that we're alive and can be happy right now. In everyday life, we tend to believe that happiness is only possible in the future. We're always looking for the "right" conditions that we don't yet have to make us happy. We ignore what is happening right in front of us. We look for something that will make us feel more solid, safer, more secure. But we're afraid all the time of what the future will bring—afraid we'll lose our jobs, our possessions, the people around us whom we love. So we wait and hope for that magical moment—always sometime in the future—when everything will be as we want it to be. We forget that life is available only in the present moment. The Buddha said, "It is possible to live happily in the present moment. It is the only moment we have."

### THE HERE AND NOW

*I have arrived, I am home*

*In the here, in the now*

*I am solid, I am free*

## TRICYCLE TEACHINGS: EMOTIONS

### *In the ultimate I dwell*

When we come back to the here and now, we recognize the many conditions of happiness that already exist. The practice of mindfulness is the practice of coming back to the here and now to be deeply in touch with ourselves and with life. We have to train ourselves to do this. Even if we're very intelligent and grasp the principle right away, we still have to train ourselves to really live this way. We have to train ourselves to recognize the many conditions for happiness that are already here.

You can recite the poem above as you breathe in and out. You can practice this poem when you drive to your office. You may not have arrived at your office, but even while driving you have already arrived at your true home, the present moment. When you arrive at your office, this is also your true home. In your office, you are also in the here and now. Just practicing the first line of the poem, "I have arrived, I am home," can make you very happy. Whether you are sitting, walking, watering the vegetable garden, or feeding your child, it is always possible to practice "I have arrived, I am home." I have run all my life; I am not going to run anymore; now I am determined to stop and really live my life.

When we practice breathing in and we say, "I have arrived," and we really arrive, that is success. To be fully present, 100 percent alive, is a real achievement. The present moment has become our true home. When we breathe out and say, "I am home" and we really feel at home, we no longer have to be afraid. We really don't need to run anymore.

We repeat this mantra, "I have arrived, I am home," until it feels real. We repeat breathing in and out and taking steps until we are firmly established in the here and now. The words should not be an obstacle—the words only help you concentrate and keep your insight alive. It is the insight that keeps you home, not the words.

THE TWO DIMENSIONS OF REALITY

If you have succeeded in arriving at home, truly dwelling in the here and now, you already have the solidity and freedom that are the foundation of your happiness. Then you are able to see the two dimensions of reality, the historical and the ultimate.

To represent the two dimensions of reality, we use the images of the wave and water. Looking at the dimension of the wave, the historical dimension, we see that the wave seems to have a beginning and an end. The wave can be high or low compared with other waves. The wave might be more or less beautiful than other waves. The wave might be there or not there; it might be there now but later not there. All these notions are there when we first touch the historical dimension: birth and death, being and nonbeing, high and low, coming and going, and so on. But we know that when we touch the wave more deeply, we touch water. The water is the other dimension of the wave. It represents the ultimate dimension.

In the historical dimension we talk in terms of life, death, being, nonbeing, high, low, coming, going, but in the ultimate dimension, all these notions are removed. If the wave is capable of touching the water within herself, if the wave can live the life of water at the same time, then she will not be afraid of all these notions: beginning and ending, birth and death, being or non-being; non-fear will bring her solidity and joy. Her true nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death, no beginning and no end. That is the nature of water.

All of us are like that wave. We have our historical dimension. We speak in terms of beginning to be at a certain point in time, and ceasing to be at another point in time. We believe that we are now existing and

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that before our birth we did not exist. We get caught in these notions, and that is why we have fear, we have jealousy, we have craving, we have all these conflicts and afflictions within us. Now if we are capable of arriving, of being more solid and free, it will be possible for us to touch our true nature, the ultimate dimension of ourselves. In touching that ultimate dimension, we break free from all these notions that have made us suffer.

When fear loses some of its power, we can look deeply into its origin from the perspective of the ultimate dimension. In the historical dimension, we see birth, death, and old age, but in the ultimate dimension birth and death are not the true nature of things. The true nature of things is free from birth and death. The first step is to practice in the historical dimension, and the second step is to practice in the ultimate dimension. In the first step we accept that birth and death are happening, but in the second step, because we're in touch with the ultimate dimension, we realize that birth and death come from our own conceptual minds and not from any true reality. By being in contact with the ultimate dimension we are able to be in touch with the reality of all things, which is birthless and deathless.

Practicing in the historical dimension is very important for our success practicing in the ultimate dimension. Practice in the ultimate dimension means being in touch with our no-birth, no-death nature, like a wave being in touch with its true nature of water. We can ask metaphorically, "Where does the wave come from, and where will it go?" And we can answer in the same manner, "The wave comes from water and will return to water." In reality, there is no coming and going. The wave is always water; it doesn't "come from" water, and it doesn't go anywhere. It is always water; coming and going are just mental constructions. The wave has never left the water, so to say the wave "comes from" the water

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is not really correct. As it is always water, we cannot say it “returns to” water. Right at the moment when the wave is a wave, it is already water. Birth and death, coming and going are just concepts. When we are in touch with our no-birth, no-death nature, we have no fear.

### NO COMING, NO GOING

For many of us, the notions of birth and death, coming and going, cause our greatest pain. We think the person we loved came to us from somewhere and has now gone away somewhere. But our true nature is the nature of no coming and no going. We have not come from anywhere, and we will not go anywhere. When conditions are sufficient, we manifest in a particular way. When conditions are no longer sufficient, we no longer manifest in that way. This doesn't mean that we don't exist. If we're afraid of death, it's because we don't understand that things do not really die.

There's a tendency for people to think that they can eliminate what they don't want: they can burn down a village, they can kill a person. But destroying someone doesn't reduce that person to nothing. They killed Mahatma Gandhi. They shot Martin Luther King, Jr. But these people are still among us today. They continue to exist in many forms. Their spirit goes on. Therefore, when we look deeply into our self—into our body, our feelings, and our perceptions—when we look into the mountains, the rivers, or another person, we have to be able to see and touch the nature of no-birth and no-death in them. This is one of the most important practices in the Buddhist tradition.

### FINDING SOLID GROUND

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In our daily lives, our fear causes us to lose ourselves. Our body is here, but our mind is all over the place. Sometimes we plunge ourselves into a book, and the book carries us far away from our body and the reality where we are. Then, as soon as we lift our head out of the book, we're back to being carried away by worries and fear. But we rarely go back to our inner peace, to our clarity, to the buddhanature in each of us, so that we can be in touch with Mother Earth.

Many people forget their own body. They live in an imaginary world. They have so many plans and fears, so many agitations and dreams, and they don't live in their body. While we're caught in fear and trying to plan our way out of fear, we aren't able to see all the beauty that Mother Earth offers us. Mindfulness reminds you to go to your in-breath and to be totally with your in-breath, be totally with your out-breath. Bring your mind back to your body and be in the present moment. Look deeply straight in front of you at what is wonderful in the present moment. Mother Earth is so powerful, so generous, and so supportive. Your body is so wonderful. When you've practiced and you are solid like the earth, you face your difficulty directly, and it begins to dissipate.

### PRACTICE

#### Breathing in the Present

Please take a moment to enjoy the simple practice of mindful breathing: "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in; breathing out, I know that I am breathing out." If you do that with a little concentration, then you'll be able to really be there. The moment you begin to practice mindful breathing, your body and your mind begin to come back together. It takes only 10 to 20 seconds to accomplish this miracle, the oneness of body and mind in the present moment. And every one of us can do it, even a child.

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As the Buddha said, “The past no longer is, the future is not yet here; there is only one moment in which life is available, and that is the present moment.” To meditate with mindful breathing is to bring body and mind back to the present moment so that you do not miss your appointment with life.

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