

# *Insight* *Journal*

Fall 2003

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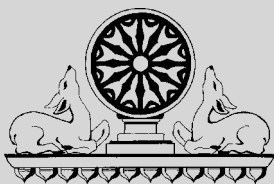


Barre Center for  
Buddhist Studies



# Insight Journal

is a publication of the



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### What is Insight?

Insight involves an intuition of mind and heart that takes us beyond knowledge toward wisdom. It has to do with deeply understanding the nature of things, rather than knowing a lot about them.

In the Buddhist tradition wisdom is nurtured by the deep investigation of experience. This involves the careful integration of both study and practice—the study of Buddha’s teachings (Dhamma), and the practice of meditation.

This journal is dedicated to exploring some of the insights that such a balanced inquiry uncovers about our ourselves, our world, and our fellow beings. Please join us.

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## Whose Life Is This, Anyway?

I don't know many people in this country who *really* believe in rebirth—do you? I often meet Buddhists of various sorts, and yet it seems that most, like myself, have inherited from their cultural upbringing the “one life to live” model of the human condition. It makes me wonder how much of Buddhism we are really capable of absorbing.

When we see how much of who we are *now* is embedded in our habitual responses to specific conditions in a world we each create from our unique illusions, what could it mean to be “ourselves” in another lifetime? If we have a different body and gender, if our upbringing, language and learning, our memories, dreams and attitudes, are all different, then how much sense does it still make to call such a person “myself?”

Buddhist doctrine has an answer for this, of course: It doesn't even make sense for you to call yourself “your self” now, let alone in another rebirth. This sense of self is just an assumption from which all our sufferings emerge. The central teaching of Buddhism is to let go of this self, lay down body and mind, cure yourself of the need to believe you are something coherent, independent or exceptionally meaningful.

I suspect our Western acculturation makes it virtually impossible for any of us to really do this. The notion we have of “ourselves” is just too deeply rooted. Selfhood in the modern West is so intrinsic to our worldview, it is the very water in which we swim or the air through which we fly. “Being” is inconceivable to us without selfhood, as swimming or flying lose meaning entirely without water and air.

The Buddhist tradition offers up some useful metaphors to help understand rebirth: Like milk changing to curds, then changing to butter and changing again to ghee. Each manifestation is so very unlike each of the others in their particulars, and yet the causal thread connecting them is so evident.

So I am the heir, perhaps, of the deeds of someone long dead. I am grateful to that person, and presumably to many before her, for the karma I have inherited has been fortunate. But I don't relate to that person as having been “me.” “I” am somebody that is defined by my body, nationality, language and by my unique blend of neuroses, all of which are born of and conditioned by the specific context of this particular life. I appreciate my former self as an ancestor, but unless I have the sort of experience (said to be attainable through yogic meditation) wherein I remember my former life—empirically and in the first person—then the ancestor will always be somebody else to me.

We are given the great gifts of life and consciousness, perhaps from an immeasurably long line of beings more or less appropriately called “former selves.” We are also given a material world with a delicate ecosystem to support our current needs, and as a special bonus it is populated with a lot of other beings with which we share it all. And that is about the extent of what we directly experience.

Is this an impoverished picture of the human situation? I think not. Who needs to reach beyond all this wonder surrounding us—consciousness, nature, other beings, a mind and heart which fashions such nuanced constructions? Who needs to feel they will survive their death, either as a transcendent conscious soul residing in heaven or re-entering nature again and again? What we are given is precious enough—a moment of awareness. And, if we are fortunate, another, and another.

If it is a sense of gratitude I feel for my forebearer and all her predecessors, it is a great sense of responsibility and benevolence I feel for whatever I will become next: perhaps an astronaut. She will be the heir of my karma—of all my actions, my words and even the fruits of my thoughts. At the moment of my death I will have spent a lifetime crafting a “self,” which I must then hand over to somebody else. And they, too, will take what I have nurtured, will creatively renovate it, and then give it up when their time comes.

The worldview emerging from this perspective on rebirth involves a universe based on *dana*, on generosity. We are the recipients of immeasurable generosity when we are given life, consciousness, a world and the company of other beings. We are participants in the cycle of giving when we (willingly or not) give up and give back all we have received. The quality with which all this is done is the only thing upon which we have any influence. The quality of each moment of awareness we experience is where our world unfolds, where we construct our character, where our “selves” have any real existence.

Our lives or our selves can only be said to be “ours” to whatever extent we are aware of them. The last lifetime I was not me but somebody else. Next lifetime I will no longer be me but will have given myself over to another. The same can be said for my past and future in this very life. The only part of all this that can be considered in any sense real to me is the present moment, and I lose even this if I am not clearly conscious as it occurs. All the rest is given away.

I think we just have to accept the fact that we will not survive this life. Rebirth in the Buddhist sense, I suspect, has never been about survival. There will be a continuity, and perhaps in many ways the next being can be causally traced back to our actions in this life—but it will be another being. When the Buddhists say the next being is neither the same nor different from the current being, we tend to hear the part about it not being different (on account of our wishful thinking), and somehow we miss the significance of the part about it not being the same, either. A traceable thread of causal continuity from one being to another is a far cry from the sort of personal survival we crave in our bones.

How can we help but be Bodhisattvas? There is little alternative for us. We are living for the benefit of all beings—whether we like it or not. The question is only: With what quality will we live this moment?  
--Andrew Olendzki

# Becoming More Clearly Human

An Interview With  
Sayadaw U Pandita



PHOTO: "BUZZ" BUS

*It is quite important to not rest before the point of becoming a stream-enterer.*

*The Venerable Sayadaw U Paḍōitābhivāṣa is one of the most renowned teachers in the tradition of the Mahāsi Sayadaw. U Pandita continues to act as guiding teacher of the Panditārāma meditation center in Burma, and offers students from around the world the wisdom he has gained over seven decades of integrating in-depth theoretical study with intensive practical application of the Buddha's teachings.*

**We are very grateful, Sayadaw, that you have agreed to talk with us today. Your remarks will be shared with a number of people who have a sincere interest in the Dhamma and in your understanding of it.**

Asking things you want to know concerning the *Buddha-sāsana* [the Buddhist tradition] is good, for in doing so one's knowledge increases. It also shows an interest in and a desire for the Dhamma, which is a cause for development and success. I will answer the questions to the best of my knowledge.

**What sort of training did you receive in the early part of your life?**

I became a *sāmaṅgala* [novice] at the age of twelve, and a monk at the age of twenty. After finishing the primary levels of training, I went on to study Pali grammar [the language of the earliest Buddhist texts] and a number of Abhidhamma meditation manuals. Even before I became a novice, I had been studying some of the *suttas* [discourses] for guiding the lay life, such as the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the *Sāgālovāda Sutta*, and so forth.

**What motivated you to become a monk in the first place?**

I saw the suffering of lay life all around me and understood that if I stayed in the lay life I too would suffer. I also entered the *sangha* [monastic community] with the intention of studying the texts for myself and of doing meditation. When I was young I was not as interested in *vipassanā* [insight] meditation as in studying the texts. I was especially interested in studying the Pali texts and the Abhidhamma.

**What difficulties did you come across?**

In my life as a monk I did not come across a great many difficulties, such as lay people do. There were, of course, difficulties when the Japanese came during the Second World War—having to flee from one place to another, for example. But this was really all; not such great difficulties. I had very good teachers who guided me with particular care, and because I was following the rules of study and guidance they laid down, I stayed out of trouble.

**Many people in lay life in this country**

**consider it to be very difficult to ordain into the monastic community (see how few there are!). Why do you think Americans might think it to be a more challenging path?**

In Burma there are many monks already and many monasteries in every town and area. Since America was originally a Christian country, the Buddhist tradition does not yet have a strong foundation. That's why it's more difficult. Also, in this country there are lots of sensual pleasures freely available. People are pulled down by the gravity of sensual pleasures. Once they can resist the pull of this gravity, there can be many more monks.

**I think some of us experience this gravity more than others.**

Indeed. When people let their actions run freely, their mouth run freely, their minds run freely, it doesn't take much pull for them to fall in. Even with a slight gravitational pull, they dive into sensual pleasures. Isn't that true? So it's not so easy to be a monk in this country [chuckling].

**Please speak about the conditions in Burma for the practice of Dhamma.**

Relative to other countries and to the rest of the world, one would have to say that Burma has many people who follow the Dhamma. Of a population of fifty million, there are ten million non-Buddhists; the rest of the forty million consider Buddhism to be their religion. However, of those maybe three or four million, through having good teachers and mentors, have come to practice the Dhamma seriously. Of the other thirty- six million, those with a strong religious spirit are not few, though they may not yet really have maturity of practice. This is the state of things in Burma today. When I was young, there were many people who just studied the texts. These days, there are many people who study and also many people who practice deeply.

**Why do you think an American would become interested in the practice of meditation?**

There may be many conditions behind a person coming to practice. Perhaps one reads a book about the

benefits of Dhamma, or hears from someone that the Dhamma is good, or hears a Dhamma-talk, or discusses Dhamma with a friend. Or, a person might come across a lot of suffering in life, and not finding a solution with worldly means, comes to the Dhamma for the answer. At first it might sound exotic, and then when someone gets a taste of the Dhamma for themselves they come over. There can be any number of reasons.

One yogi [Daniel Goleman] once told me that this country is very successful in terms of scientific and industrial development; new products are always arising and then becoming outdated, one after another. There is a very high standard of living. But because after a while these things get old, people here suffer from many kinds of problems: tension, depression, stress. ... "Like being in an air-conditioned room with their hearts on fire," he said. From the outside it looks like they are well-off, but inside they are burning. So some might come to the Dhamma to cool these fires.

**I'm always interested in finding ways to express the essence of mindfulness practice: how it works and transforms people. How would you express the benefits of *satipatthana* [the foundations of mindfulness]?**

It enables one to control oneself, to prevent oneself from going wrong. That's the heart of it. If one controls oneself so as not to do wrong, one doesn't lose one's integrity, and one doesn't harm others. For example, in driving a car, if you can't control your driving you get in an accident; you harm yourself and harm others. If you can control your driving, you stay out of accidents; you protect yourself and others.

When people practice fully, they gain happiness and peace of mind. With this comes a sense of moral caring about not doing wrong, as well as caring not to do any harm in the future. Also, one's courage to avoid unwholesome actions becomes strong, and one gains the courage to do good things. Essentially, the practice cultivates the

courage to avoid harmful actions and the courage to do good.

Most people don't have enough courage to avoid going wrong, and therefore meet with many unhappy consequences. The courage to do what's right is also weak in most people, in which case they don't get the benefits of such action. If one practices mindfulness well, many dangers don't arise and even more benefits are gained.

**And these dangers and benefits extend to other realms of existence as well, don't they?**

In ancient times there were some people who wanted to enter the happy realms of the *devas* [heavenly beings], to experience these kind of luxurious rebirths with many sense pleasures. This was not fear of bad rebirths, but rather the desire for luxurious existences.

There were also those who realized that even such luxurious existences are not free of the dangers of aging, pain, and death, and thus practiced to gain freedom from all of that. They realized that sense pleasures give a fatal happiness, and practiced to gain the faultless happiness.

The burning fires must be extinguished as fast as possible. That is how urgent it is.

**Do you have any particular advice for the lay person in this country who has practiced diligently a long time, in their homes and during meditation retreats, etc.? Should they just continue with as much meditation as they can manage, or do you have any additional advice?**

In practice, it is best if one can have the goal of reaching at least the first path and fruition, *sotàpatti* [stream-entry]. Only with that attainment will one have made the best of being born as a human being and coming into contact with the Dhamma and the Vinaya [the Buddha's doctrine and discipline]. By doing so, one is established firmly on

the path to awakening and is assured of not ending up in an unhappy state. But the Buddha's intention was that people practice for full liberation. He encouraged practitioners to become *arahants* [fully-awakened beings].

Liberating the mind of its defilements is much like curing a severe and highly contagious disease.

The Venerable Sàriputta [the Buddha's follower foremost in wisdom] encouraged people to achieve stream-entry in order to be free of the realms of woe; after that point he didn't care very much if people continued to practice. But the Venerable Mogallàna [the Buddha's follower foremost in meditation] encouraged those people whom Ven. Sàriputta had led to stream-entry to keep going. So practitioners will be differentiated on the basis of whom they have studied with.

It is quite important to not rest before the point of becoming a stream-enterer. But this is not likely to happen by just practicing for ten days at a time with long intervals in between. When one is back at home, one is caught by the gravity of sensual pleasures and falls down easily.

**Most of the people who practice in this country have respect for the tradition and want to fulfill it but have many other responsibilities. Is it not enough to practice whenever possible but rest contentedly trying to be a good person?**

To be true to the teachings, one would have to say that the important thing is to practice to become a stream-enterer. In the texts [M.63] it is said that for someone pierced by an arrow in the chest, getting the arrow out of the chest is the most important thing. Likewise [A.10.51], for someone with his turban on fire, putting out the fire takes precedence. The *kilesas* [mental defilements] are piercing you—they need to

be removed. The burning fires must be extinguished as fast as possible. That is how urgent it is. By comparison, worldly concerns are not so urgent.

One way of thinking about this is asking the question: Which is more important, a year's worth of work that will feed a family for a year, or a year's worth of work that will provide support for a lifetime? Isn't there a difference in the value? Satipatthana practice is like work that with a year's worth of effort will provide food for a lifetime.

**And is the practice of mettà [loving-kindness] meditation of similar value?**

At the time of the Buddha there were people who were experts at practicing *jhàna* [absorption in concentration], but they were not free of mental defilements. They came to the Buddha to learn the method of cutting off the defilements. Concentration practices (including *mettā*) do not cut off the latent potential for the defilements; only *satipañhàna* [mindfulness] does that. However, most people can practice *mettā* while not everyone can practice *satipañhàna*, so those who can't yet practice the foundations of mindfulness should practice the development of loving-kindness.

Even if one takes medicine to relieve the symptoms of a bacterial infection, if the bacteria are not eradicated throughout the body, the infection can recur. If all the bacteria are killed off, with none left, then the disease is cured. In the same way, *samatha* [concentration meditation] does not eradicate the defilements bug, though it can relieve the symptoms.

**How exactly does the practice of mindfulness eliminate defilements?**

One can use the metaphor of someone suffering from a malarial disease. First of all, the person has a very high fever, say 104 or 105 degrees F. The first stage is to lower the fever by using ice cubes or wet towels. That brings down the fever and initiates the second stage, in which a cyclic fever pattern develops, with fever attacks every other day. In the third stage, one takes medi-

cine to eradicate the malaria parasites. If one has completed the course of medicine to eradicate the parasites, the malaria does not recur.

Liberating the mind of its defilements is thus much like the curing of a severe and highly contagious disease. There are several stages: first comes prevention, then reduction or suppression, and finally eradication and cure. *Sāla* [virtue]—not harming oneself and others through bodily action and speech—is most important as prevention. With the defilements that occur only in the mind, on the other hand, one has to not only protect against them occurring, but also cure them if and when they do occur. The defilements of greed, hatred and delusion occur because the latent tendency for them is still present, even when they do not show their symptoms. So one has to suppress and then eradicate this latent tendency. When insight knowledge arises, the defilements are suppressed; when the noble path and fruition consciousness occur, they eradicate the latent tendencies once and for all.

So just as there are three kinds of defilements, there are three respective methods by which one cures them: transgressive defilements are treated by moral restraint (*sāla*); obsessive defilements are calmed by concentration (*samādhi*); and latent defilements are cured by wisdom (*paññā*).

It is only when mindfulness is strong that phenomena come to be known clearly.

**And how would you summarize the basic meditation instruction?**

The practice taught by the Buddha is simply to be mindful of whatever is arising in the present. This means every seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching...even every thought. Every rising and falling of the breath...be

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aware of it, he said. Protect the mind from the defilements by being mindful of all these experiences. That is the instruction given in the texts.

For example, try clenching your hand. If we aren't mindful, we don't notice the hand or the clenching, we don't know what is involved at all. When one does pay attention and clenches the hand the mind arrives at the form of the hand and doesn't run off. Even just this much is quite good. If the attention stays on the clenching motion, it doesn't run off anywhere. When one does this a lot, the energy to gather the mind becomes strong, and going beyond the shape and mode of the hand, one comes to know the sensations of tension and tightness in the moment of clenching. That is where the attention penetrates.

When it penetrates in this way, do craving or aversion arise? No. Are there any other defilements? No. The mind becomes clear and still because it is under control, and the tightening is known immediately as it arises. This is insight knowledge. This is knowing what is really true. When you hold the fist clenched for a while, what do you notice? Stiffness, soreness, it becomes uncomfortable. The mind starts searching for an escape. It wants to be comfortable, understanding that if there is release, it will get comfortable. The mind is agitated. Then go ahead and release. There's relaxation, and comfort comes. Throughout this process, these phenomena are precisely experienced.

Through being aware of experience just as it is arising, such mind moments of awareness are nurtured from just a few into many. Though at first weak, the mindfulness become quite strong. This giving strength to the mindfulness is called *bhāvanā* [the development of meditation]. It is only when mindfulness is strong that phenomena come to be known clearly. When insight arises, the mind becomes mature and develops the stamina to withstand the vicissitudes of life.

Essentially we're doing self-research, looking into what is happen-

ing in oneself, controlling the mind, and uncovering the truth to be known. That's all. As one understands the benefits of controlling the mind, one comes to value it and to gain conviction in the nobility of this work. Thus the desire to practice becomes even stronger, and one takes even more care; then even more mindfulness happens,



and even more stillness and concentration of mind comes. With aiming and effort to bring the attention to the presently arising experience, its true nature is known. That is because this power comes in: the power to protect against defilements, destroy them when they do occur.

Gradually the gravitational force of mental defilements is lessened. When a physical body is free of the earth's gravitational force, it becomes very light and floats around in space.

Similarly, when one is free from the gravitational force of the mental defilements, one's life feels like that.

To give an example, sending a rocket into space requires a first, a second, and a third stage. First the rocket has to be launched, it has to take off. Gradually the rocket travels through the atmosphere, with the second stage.

By the third stage, the rocket is free of the earth's gravity. In the same way, one has to propel one's mind out of the gravity of the mental defilements.

At first, one has to work hard to propel the attention to reach what is happening in oneself. When the attention is on these objects a lot, this mindfulness gains strength. The mind no longer runs off elsewhere, it is under control. When the energy is strong and mindfulness becomes firmly

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established, the nature of phenomena becomes known. When you practice, you can see this for yourself.

**How important is it to read and study the textual tradition?**

The texts are very important. They give the method for avoiding the mental defilements, which is beneficial indeed. To take the analogy of medicine: when you take medicine it is important to read the instructions on the bottle, rather than just saying, ‘Hey, it’s medicine, that’s good enough’ and taking it. You have to read the directions or consult a physician to make sure you are using it properly. Only then can one take the medicine with assurance of its intended effect.

For people who want just to practice for themselves, it’s enough to know the method. But for those who want to broaden their intellectual knowledge, or for people who are going to teach, explain the practice, or encourage others, it is important that they study the texts. Then they can balance both theory and practical application, and explain the teachings so that others can understand them. Moreover, continuing to preserve the study of the texts in this way effectively keeps the Dhamma that the Buddha taught alive. So there are many benefits.

**In your opinion, is the Dhamma taught well in the West?**

If the original Pali texts and their translations are used as a foundation, then there is good potential for the future development of the Buddhist tradition in the West. If, on the other hand, it’s ‘some of this, some of that,’ then it is not very likely. The *sāsana*, the Buddha’s culture, will last only as long as there are people who practice by integrating theory and first-hand experience... in accordance with the method. In that case, it will indeed have good potential.

If people’s practice of morality in their actions declines, or if there is a big gap between the study and the practice of what the Buddha has taught, then not only the tradition but beings also will suffer and decline. There are those here

who take the lead, and there are people here who practice. If teachers teach, and practitioners practice, it will continue to last. However, doing it in the original way is important.

It is fine to use practical scientific examples to get young people interested in coming to practice. If, however, one inserts modern methods, from the physical sciences, for example, the teachings will get diluted. If the modern approaches that prioritize materialism are thrown in, it will collapse.

The method of mindfulness practice is really very simple—just being mindful of whatever arises. But with this simple practice one will come across truly amazing things. There is no need to insert any other methods. What I mean to say is that using drugs or machines to help gain insight will not work. One yogi at this current retreat said, ‘It would be great if there were a pill to make insight arise.’ There is nothing like that that will work.

**What would it take for the Dhamma to eventually flourish here in the West?**

With the diligent application of this mindfulness meditation, intellectual understanding gets filled out and the mind becomes clean. Insight really opens up, and that is greatly encouraging. Only by practicing can ‘the burning hearts in the air-conditioned room’ be cooled.

Thus, if an individual or a group wants to spread this truly practical Buddhist culture, there must be alertness and vigilance. There must also be honesty, one must be straight-up, meaning not trying to make profit for one’s own benefit off the Buddha’s teaching. And finally, it takes hard work. With effort, the teaching will flourish and bear seeds.

I have heard some people say that only now, after practicing mindfulness, do they feel like they have become clearly human. Some put it simply, saying it’s only now that they can walk, only now can they sit or eat, only now can they sleep or drink, only now can they talk. They had been doing these things without mindfulness; now they

do them with mindfulness. Being mindful, they now know they are on fire, so they immediately take the path to cool and extinguish the mental defilements.

People who have only knowledge and lack compassion will be wronging others, harming others. Worse still is when there’s not even wisdom. With knowledge, one knows what is beneficial and what is harmful. With compassion, one is guarded against causing harm. If there come to be many such people, the practice of the noble ones will shine here in America. It will really flourish.

May there be many people with wisdom in this country, and may there be many compassionate people. And also may these people, knowing what is beneficial and what is unbeneficial, be able to do their best to help those engaged in unbeneficial activity.

**Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu.**



# From Burma to Barre

## The Liberation Teachings of Mindfulness in the Land of the Free

by Jake H. Davis

Where did the mindfulness  
practice taught at IMS  
come from?

How has this teaching  
been transmitted from  
Burma to Barre?

The Mahāsi Sayadaw (1904-1982), an influential Theravāda Buddhist monk born in Burma at the turn of the last century, was responsible for gaining one particular form of mindfulness practice worldwide popularity. Through their guidance of young Americans in the 1960s and 70s, teachers such as Anagarika Munindra and Dipa Ma helped establish the Mahāsi technique as the primary method of mindfulness practice taught at IMS. One of the Mahāsi Sayadaw's leading teaching disciples, the Venerable Sayadaw U Paḍōitaḥhivaṁsa (1921-), has played a major role in cultivating the seeds of this tradition in American soil. Many of the senior teachers from North America as well as Europe and Australia trained under U Paḍōita in Burma and at a series of three-month-long meditation retreats that U Paḍōita taught in the 1980s at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts.

It was Sayadaw U Paḍōita who proposed and then supervised my own term of fifteen months as a monk, immersed in the language and culture of Burma, studying Theravādin theory and the language of the Pāli texts, and engaging in intensive, long-term mindfulness practice. This world was opened up for me in the first place by two of the American teachers who studied with U Paḍōita, Steven Smith and Michele McDonald. My teachers and I share a strong sense of gratitude and respect for the practices we have inherited and the lineage of teachers who have transmitted them.

“One suffers if dwelling without reverence or deference,” the Buddha observes in the *Gāraṇa Sutta* (S 6:2). In a recent interview, Steven expressed his deep thanks

to Sayadaw U Paḍōita for twenty years of guidance and mentorship; Sayadaw directed this gratitude towards his own teacher, the Mahāsi Sayadaw, and in turn to the Mingun Jetawun Sayadaw, the Ale-Tawya Sayadaw, the The-Lon Sayadaw, and so on back to the Buddha. U Paḍōita cited a discourse from the Pāli (A 2:119) on the two types of people that are “Hard to Find”: those who give freely, without expecting anything return, and those who are grateful for such gifts and recognize the responsibility to repay their debt. As long as there are people acting in these two ways, Sayadaw said, the transmission of the teachings for awakening will be carried out in accord with the teachings themselves, and thus be triumphantly successful in generation after generation.

The central aim of *Strong Roots* is to demonstrate theoretically and practically the importance of operating from a coherent teaching lineage and continually returning to it to frame new interpretations. At first glance, such an attitude may appear incompatible with the values of independence and self-reliance that many Americans hold dear. People in the West have been eclectic in choosing elements from various spiritual traditions, and are often reluctant to engage in serious scholarship of any one. To elucidate the vital role of tradition, I employ a theory about the process of interpretation put forward by a critic in the Western humanist tradition, George Steiner. Steiner illustrates how a kind of reciprocal relationship with the source renders a translation or a transmission authentic. I extend this approach to suggest that continuity of practices between different cultural contexts is

*Jake Davis grew up just a few miles from IMS. He first became involved in insight meditation through the young adults' retreat there. He went on to spend more than a year as a Theravada monk in Burma, learning the language, studying texts and practicing meditation.*

*The Dhamma Dana Publications project, hosted by BCBS, is in the process of publishing Jake's book Strong Roots for free distribution, with the ongoing support of generous donors. The book grew out of his undergraduate thesis at Marlboro College, and this article introduces its primary theme.*

made possible by an ongoing cycle of return to the tradition's framework of understanding. Therefore, even while celebrating the pioneering spirit that planted the seeds of mindfulness practice in the West, I advocate a contemporary transmission of the mindfulness practice that is firmly rooted in its source. In particular, I am asking for explicit and pervasive acknowledgment of the teachers who developed and transmitted the various practices employed today, and for a return to the principles that have framed the Theravàdin teachings for centuries.

#### TRANSMISSION: THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION AND ITS AUTHENTIC COMPLETION

How does a human practice change, and how can it possibly stay the same in the process of transmission between very different cultures? As a Theravàda Buddhist method of mindfulness meditation is imported from Burma to the United States, for instance, how is the practice reborn and how are the Americans transformed? If people arrive at certain experiences through mindfulness, how are their understandings presented through, and shaped by, different languages?

In considering these questions, each part of *Strong Roots* addresses some aspect of interpretation. I focus on oral and written discourses, referring to these collectively as 'texts'. Human beings interpret particular patterns of sound, marks on a page, or bodily motions, I argue, based on past and present context: their cultural heritage, their individual history, and the particular situation in which they find themselves. 'Freedom', for example, has a very different meaning in the context of the Buddha's teachings than it does when singers of the "Star Spangled Banner" extol the "Land of the free/ and the home of the brave." Meditation teachers must use social and linguistic mechanisms to communicate with students, to offer guidance and inspiration. Thus, in analyzing the transmission of mindfulness practice from Burma to the United States, we are examining the process of rendering various texts in the terms of different social contexts.

Such understanding and interpretation is a ubiquitous part of human activity. Scholars use the term 'hermeneutics' to refer to the ways of understanding various people employ, and to our methods of interpretation generally.

If each individual occupies a different "world of experience," if each of us has slightly different associations with words, then every interpretation involves motion and change. Steiner puts it well, "All communication 'interprets' between privacies." To determine how their message gets across, meditation masters make conscious and unconscious choices in rendering, and in leaving unsaid, aspects of the tradition they have inherited. If so, teaching of mindfulness practice must involve hermeneutics – what Steiner calls the "disciplined understanding of understanding" – be it implicit or explicit.

How do people go about interpreting between human contexts? Steiner describes four stages in the process of interpretation. Drawing on the European tradition of translation studies, Steiner illustrates the first three parts of what he calls the "hermeneutic motion." An interpreter begins by advancing towards the undeciphered text, presuming some value there. Next is the "invasive and exhaustive" appropriation of meaning from the source, which dispels the mystique of the unknown and leaves the text exposed to examination. The interpreter then brings the meaning home, assimilating foreign symbols and ideas into the native culture and language. Calling something a translation assumes these three: approach, decipherment, and rendering in a new tongue. This much may be somewhat obvious.

Steiner's great contribution lies in his recognition of the fourth and final part of the 'hermeneutic motion'. It is through a return to the source, through fulfilling unfulfilled potential as well as through revealing and demonstrating the original's own strengths, that a rendering becomes authentic. The act of appropriation creates an imbalance; equilibrium must be restored by giving the audience's attention to the source, by crediting its virtues and respecting its principles. Thus the new rendition remains rooted in the original.

A retreat center attempts to create the conditions for students to engage in skillful conduct as well as learning and discussion of the practice, in order to develop tranquility and insight. In each of these areas, we can observe a cycle of understanding: only if people find some resonance between the presentation of the teachings and their own experience do they become interested and make a tentative

In *Strong Roots* I advocate a contemporary transmission of the mindfulness practice that is firmly rooted in its source.

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approach, perhaps coming to hear a talk or participate in a retreat. As they listen, discuss, and apply the teachings, they appropriate certain understandings and practices from the tradition and assimilate them into their own lives, or not.

Steiner sees a return to the source as the means by which an interpretation becomes authentic. The Theravàdin practice of mindfulness meditation is guided and framed by the philosophical principles of the Pàli. In order to do justice to the source, to reveal its full power and applicability to modern America, we must integrate theoretical study and practical application of the teachings. Presenting the establishment of mindfulness, *satipañhàna*, in its native framework enables modern people to achieve full benefits of the practice as described by the Buddha in the Pàli; such is what I have called authentic deep transmission. This definition illustrates how there can be a continuity of transmission between Burma and Barre, how the mindfulness practice can be substantially similar across human contexts. The success of a teaching tradition thus rests upon its ability to foster each part of the ongoing hermeneutic cycle, from initiative trust through a full engagement of the source tradition.

#### FROM BURMA TO BARRE

The Mahàsi Sayadaw propagated his version of mindfulness practice in a time of rapid social change, and his was part of a larger movement of Theravàdins towards meditation. The Buddha's discourses in the Pàli frequently prescribe personal development through concentration and insight. Later in the Theravàdin tradition, however, meditation seems to have been much less valued than Pàli scholarship and social rituals. Beginning around the first century CE in Sri Lanka, there is evidence of a debate over the relative merits of textual scholarship and mindfulness practice. With royal and popular support, those dismissing meditation practice seem to have gained the upper hand by the fifth century CE. There may have been episodes in which regional lineages of the Theravàda returned to an emphasis on meditation; nonetheless, at the time of the British invasion in the nineteenth century, the Theravàdin establishment in Burma was focused on textual scholarship and social functions, almost to the exclusion

of mindfulness practice.

Some American mindfulness practitioners are aware that lay people in Burma rarely engaged in intensive meditation until figures like the Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) and the Mahàsi Sayadaw advocated lay practice. Less well known is the fact that the Theravàdin establishment at that time did not strongly encourage mindfulness practice even for ordained monks and nuns. Most were primarily scholars, though some did engage in intensive concentration practices. According to Sayadaw U Paōōita, when he was young, more people in Burma “just studied the texts... These days, there are many people who study and many people who practice deeply” (see interview p.5).

Apparently a number of nineteenth century monks were inspired by the meditation techniques collected from the Pàli discourses in one seminal text, Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*. Scholar-practitioners such as the The-Lon Sayadaw and the Ledi Sayadaw are said to have put this textual guidance into practice without personal teachers to guide them in mindfulness practice. The Buddha and the classical commentators who collated his teachings were themselves human practitioners; nonetheless, it is remarkable that these modern scholar-practitioners were able, solely with guidance meditated through the texts, to found lineages that have led many thousands of twentieth-century practitioners to achieve – according to their own reports – significant levels of liberation from suffering.

The Mingun Jetawun Sayadaw U Nàrada (1868-1955) was one monk who became interested in applying his theoretical knowledge from the Pali, but mindfulness practice was apparently so rare in nineteenth century Burma that he had to travel to the wilderness of the Sagaing Hills for guidance. There he found a recluse who had practiced with the same The-Lon Sayadaw mentioned above, namely the Aletawya Sayadaw. U Nàrada inquired of this reclusive monk how to achieve the goal of the teachings he had studied so extensively. The Aletawya Sayadaw reportedly asked U Nàrada in return, “Why are you looking outside the sense fields?”

The mindfulness practice taught by the Mingun Jetawun Sayadaw to the Mahàsi Sayadaw and others did not require extensive tranquility preparation previous to insight

Presenting  
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*Strong Roots* makes note of many similarities between the social context that the Buddha taught in and that of the American vipassana movements.

practice. Some have suggested that this system gained popularity because lay people did not have the time to devote themselves to the scholastic and absorption practices traditionally engaged in by ordained renunciates. In any case, the recent emphasis on lay practice in Burma and Sri Lanka coincided with the imposition of British colonialism and European ideals, most notably Protestantism, with its ethic of unmediated personal religion.

Intriguingly, similar conditions seem to have been present when the Pāli discourses were composed, with their emphasis on the cultivation of direct knowing. *Strong Roots* makes note of many similarities between the social context that the Buddha taught in and that of IMS. A few conditions stand out: Like modern America with its global connections and social ‘melting pot’, northern India around 500 BCE was the meeting place of a number of radically different world-views, as waves of Aryan settlers gradually integrated into areas previously occupied by hunter-gatherer societies and other republican communities. This period also saw the rise of a class of merchants and small landowners and of urban communities; recent centuries have featured similar trends in Western societies. Many of the Buddha’s followers were drawn from the newly arisen middle class; practitioners of the Eightfold Noble Path constituted a small part of society, and not a very insular one. Likewise, American practitioners of insight meditation have the majority of their social interactions with people who have no allegiance to this particular vocabulary and value system. ‘Theravāda’ or ‘Buddhism’ for these practitioners is not a national or ethnic identity, as it has been for certain Southeast Asians.

Based on this evidence, we might make some interesting speculations. Perhaps an emphasis on meditative experience arises in times of rapid social change predicated in part by ‘multi-culturalism’. In contrast, relatively homogenous and isolated societies where religious establishments such as the Theravāda become a crucial part of national identity tend to emphasize institutionalized scholarship and social ritual.

#### THE TREE OF AWAKENING IN THE LAND OF THE FREE

The tradition of mindfulness practice that the Mahāsi Sayadaw transmitted has begun

to take root in the soil of the United States. When the seeds of confidence were sown in the 1960s and 70s, nothing much substantial moved from Burma to Barre: no great migrations of people, no massive importation of texts or images or robes. Rather, much as the genes encoded in a *Ficus* seed interact with environmental conditions, using the energy of the sun to transform soil and water into an entirely new *Ficus* tree, so too Theravādin principles of understanding have employed the light of Dhamma to transform American practitioners and American society.

This particular tree of awakening is young and vulnerable but also vibrant. Senior American practitioners have brought forth leaves of wisdom in the form of numerous books, articles, and various programs in schools, hospitals, and corporations. As this new manifestation of the tradition develops, its roots extend further and further into the native literature, economy, and politics, seeking fertile pockets in the society. Extending the potential of the Buddha’s teachings in the Pali benefits many people, for the tree of awakening is a “nitrogen-fixer” to boot. As more and more individuals cultivate purity of conduct, skillful attitudes, and deep understanding, the overall health of the society and its complex web of inter-cultural interactions is enhanced. These developments, in turn, create the conditions for further growth, both at home and abroad.

American interpreters of mindfulness meditation have excelled at finding new applications and new potential, fulfilling one aspect of the authentic completion advocated by Steiner. On the whole, however, we have yet to really fulfill Steiner’s second prescription, to make “the autonomous virtues of the original more precisely visible,” to direct American inquiry past the interpreters’ own capabilities into the depths of the tradition. Such a movement would bring out the holistic approach of the Pali, emphasizing the first five factors of the Eightfold Noble Path – right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, and right livelihood – as well as the last three: right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Western renditions have so focused on meditation that other vital aspects of the teaching have been neglected, and the full benefit of the tradition has not been realized. Gil Fronsdal’s comments are revealing.

As the number of people participating

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in the mindfulness practices of Insight Meditation has increased, a loose-knit lay Buddhist movement, uniquely Western, that is sometimes known as the “vipassana movement,” has evolved. With minimal remaining connection to Theravāda Buddhism, the movement speaks of “vipassana students and teachers,” vipassana centers and communities,” and even a national “vipassana journal.” As a result, many more Americans of European descent refer to themselves as vipassana students than as students of Theravāda Buddhism.

In this eclectic environment, lineage seems to be given much less importance than in the Burmese Theravāda, the Tibetan Vajrayāna, or the Japanese Zen schools, which have all emphasized the importance of transmission from teacher to student beginning with the Buddha. Though the practice being taught by the senior teachers at IMS is basically that propagated by the Mahāsi Sayadaw, and despite the fact that anyone teaching in this tradition is at most three or four generations removed from him, I have found that many practitioners and even staff in Barre do not know the Mahāsi Sayadaw’s name. In contrast, almost everyone who comes to IMS is familiar with the name and face of the Dalai Lama. This is due in part to the Dalai Lama’s popularity in the mass media, but the articles and interviews featured in the IMS community magazine over the past six years apparently mentioned this Tibetan teacher more often than they brought attention to the Burmese monk who made the mindfulness practice taught at IMS accessible to the world.

Rooting the mindfulness tradition in contemporary American society may result in more people getting started, but in order to be fully effective the teachings must also be firmly rooted in the coherent framework offered by a particular living tradition. For it is the instructions contained in a seed that enable it to develop into a sapling and then a tree; it is due to these same strings of amino acids that various nutrients become organized into leaves and flowers; it is the tree’s genetic inheritance that ensures that its fruit contain the fertile seeds of a new generation.

The transmission of this tradition of awakening to the West resembles the sowing of a seed more than the transplantation of a cutting: very little of the Asian cultural context is included in the package. Burmese and Americans share many biological and lin-

guistic structures, but our interpretive frameworks have also been shaped by very different cultural and personal histories. The *Dhamma-Vinaya*, ‘the Doctrine and Discipline,’ is defined by such human contexts, I have argued; different people understand the practice very differently. If so, specific meanings are not inherent in the particular vocabulary and ideas transmitted from Burma to Barre; the same texts can be, and have been, interpreted very differently in various philosophical contexts. In order to effectively communicate the intention and genius of the Theravādin teachings, then, to be responsive to the audience and responsible to the source, new interpretations must present ideas in their traditional hermeneutic framework.

The liberation teachings of mindfulness meditation are gaining popularity in the United States, but this mindfulness tradition is still young and vulnerable. I have discussed how the Theravādin tradition has been influenced by ancient Indic conceptions of existence as well as by modern Western understandings of ‘Buddhism’; these instances demonstrate how practitioners’ and scholars’ understandings of a tradition shape and define it. If so, those of us who interpret the Doctrine and Discipline for ourselves or for others have an important responsibility. As caretakers of the *Sāsana* at this crucial point in history, we need to be humble. We must take care not to assume that we can engineer a better tree, not to dismiss the Theravādin principles nor to dismiss new mutations that are consistent and coherent with the tradition. My studies of the Mahāsi Sayadaw’s teachings and the discourses of the Pāli, as well as my experiences practicing and interpreting at meditation retreats, have given me great confidence in the ability of the traditional philosophical principles to direct our investigations of contemporary questions. To whatever degree Americans continue to return to the source while we fulfill its potential, this transmission of the mindfulness tradition will be, in a word, authentic.

The liberation teachings of mindfulness meditation are gaining popularity in the United States, but this tradition is still young and vulnerable.

References for works cited can be found in the published version of *Strong Roots*, freely available for download at <http://strongroots.vijja.net>.

**(THAT'S IT)**

I knew IT was there  
wandering aimlessly  
through mind chatter  
clinging with might

I found IT on a cushion  
after the third bell  
legs crossed  
back erect

I felt IT in the vibrating  
pulse  
of aching pains  
with each heart beat

I heard IT  
in the silent screams  
of waking emotions  
erupting with each breath

I saw IT  
in the vivid pictures  
of life acts gone by  
and moments created

I settled IT  
when I became IT  
and IT was  
no more

*Juan Rogers*

## Pizza Parlor Satori With The Works

Feeling the wind blowing  
through particles of self  
I float above the zafu,  
nothing  
and everything  
between me and the cushion,  
the floor, the earth.  
The wound of the gong  
winds the labyrinth,  
heavy incense  
in train: I smell and hear  
with my toes, think  
with every cell,  
every cell infused  
oh yes!  
with a burst of garlic,  
oregano and yeast,  
and the taste  
of anchovies,  
of olives and tomatoes,  
the bite of spicy pepperoni,  
the look of the great wheel,  
eight cuts, and eight eyes  
and twenty fingers reaching out  
for the works,  
the heat  
of the chilies  
the other heat  
from the huge brick oven,

the thrum of guitars,  
the beat of percussion and bass  
from half a dozen speaker  
pulse-pulsing with the chorus  
of our own hearts, the circulation  
of the blood and feelings and  
words  
layered and blent,  
the shivery chill  
when the door cracks  
admitting a gush of people  
and needles of snow that prick  
and melt  
on red hot cheeks  
stretched and throbbing  
like a tympanum,  
melting, subtle as mozzarella,  
extending tendrils,  
endless interlocking dendrites  
sparking affection,  
thinking, oh,  
making the mistake  
of thinking, oh,  
I want  
I want this  
I want this perfect moment  
never never never  
to end  
which means  
it did.

*Patricia L. Sharpe*

## A Smile

It is said that the flutter of a butterfly's wings  
wafer thin and imprinted with an intricate pattern  
can influence the course of weather far away  
and also that a two penny nail  
lost from the shoe of a horse belonging to a key  
person  
can affect the outcome of a battle and the course of a  
war.

If this is so then cannot a simple smile  
fragile as a butterfly wing  
and commonplace as a nail  
influence life with the message of ease  
if only for the moment  
in the face of everything else.

And when these moments are repeated  
and the effects propagated  
again and again  
the collective energy  
of those who have tasted this respite  
may enable new unanticipated possibilities.

*Roy Money*

## Choose to be More Beautiful

I can make a choice.  
I can either die  
or become more beautiful.  
So I chose beauty over death  
as the old layers peel off me  
like reluctant rose petals  
slowly falling from their thorny stem  
revealing a fragrance so sweet  
even I can't detect it  
only the most pure  
like a white crowned sparrow  
or a god  
or a friend who chooses  
to love the parts of myself  
that haven't yet  
fully come into light.

*Terri Glass*

This page contains material sent in by our readers. If you have a poem, drawing or photograph you would like to share with others, relating to your meditative insights or retreat experience, please send it to the editors at

## No Map No More

I have no map  
no compass  
no guilt

no camel  
no desert or mirage  
no mountain pass  
no guide, no yak  
to fall off a cliff.

Only my breath  
and a clear, clear night  
with a thousand glittering stars.

*Terri Glass*

## Presence

Being there,  
In Space,  
Totally unsupported,

I could put out a tiny bird foot to touch the  
edge.

But I don't need to—  
And I won't

*Ruth Nelson*

Like a piece  
Of ash sits  
The Buddha,  
Awaiting the  
Nothingness  
That comes  
With the  
Wind.

*Daniel Rainwater*



## The Net of Brahma: 62 Flavors of Wrong View

The chart on the following pages outlines at a glance the first discourse of the *Dāgha Nikāya*, the Long Discourses of the Buddha, which lays out a number of different ways in which people can hold mistaken views about the nature of the self and of the world.

The first eighteen views are based upon speculations about the past, while the final forty-four all have their root in speculation about the future. In both cases we see the drawbacks of “hammering it out with reason,” but we also see how easy it can be to draw erroneous conclusions from deep meditative experience.

Of course the one thing all the mistaken views have in common is the assumption that the self exists, and it is the core insight of the Buddha to see through this appearance to a more subtle, process-based understanding of selfhood and identity.

<p><b>ETERNALISM</b></p> <p>Here a certain ascetic or brahmin has by means of effort, exertion, application, earnestness and right attention attained to such a state of mental concentration that...</p>	...he thereby recalls [up to 100,000] past lives.	1	<p>And he says: The self and the world are eternal, barren like a mountain-peak,* set firmly as a post. These beings rush round, circulate, pass away and re-arise, but this remains eternally. How do I know? I have [experienced it myself].</p> <p>* i.e., incapable of producing anything really new</p>
	...he thereby recalls [up to 10] periods of [world] contraction and expansion.	2	
	...he thereby recalls [up to 40] periods of [world] contraction and expansion.	3	
Here a certain ascetic or brahmin is a logician, a reasoner. Hammering it out by reason, following his own line of thought, he argues:	4		
<p><b>PARTIAL ETERNALISM</b></p> <p>Here a certain ascetic or brahmin has by means of effort, exertion, application, earnestness and right attention attained to such a state of mental concentration that...</p>	<p>...he thereby recalls his last existence, but recalls none before that. And he</p>	5	That Brahma [who arose first in this world period] is...eternal... But we who were created [by him] are impermanent...
		6	Some devas [not corrupted by pleasure] are...eternal...but we are impermanent...
		7	Some devas [not corrupted by envy] are...eternal...but we are impermanent...
Here a certain ascetic or brahmin is a logician, a reasoner. Hammering it out by reason, following his own line of thought, he argues:	8	Whatever is...body...is impermanent... But what is...mind...that is...eternal.	
<p><b>EXTENSIONISM</b></p> <p>Here a certain ascetic or brahmin has by means of effort, exertion, application, earnestness and right attention attained to such a state of mental concentration that...</p>	...he dwells perceiving the world as finite. He thinks:	9	This world is finite and bounded by a circle.
	...he dwells perceiving the world as infinite. He thinks:	10	This world is infinite and unbounded. Those who say [otherwise] are wrong.
	...he dwells perceiving the world as finite up-and-down, and infinite across. He thinks:	11	This world is both finite and infinite. Those who say [otherwise] are wrong.
Here a certain ascetic or brahmin is a logician, a reasoner. Hammering it out by reason, following his own line of thought, he argues:	12	This world is neither finite nor infinite. Those who say [otherwise] are wrong.	
<p><b>ENDLESS EQUIVOCATION</b></p> <p>Here an ascetic or brahmin does not in truth know whether a thing is good or bad. He thinks: I might declare "That is good" or "That is bad"...</p>	...and that might be a lie...Thus fearing to lie, abhorring to lie...	13	<p>...he resorts to evasive statements and wriggles like an eel: "I don't say this, I don't say that. I don't say it is otherwise, I don't say it is not. I don't not say it is not."</p>
	...and I might feel desire or lust or hatred or aversion...Thus fearing attachment, abhorring attachment...	14	
	...but I might be questioned...and I might not be able to reply... Thus fearing debate, abhorring debate...	15	
Here an ascetic or brahmin is dull and stupid. Because of his dullness and stupidity, when he is questioned...	16		
<p><b>FORTUITOUS ORIGINATION</b></p> <p>There are certain devas called Unconscious...when a being falls from that realm and arises in this world. He recalls his last existence, but none before that.</p>	<p>Here a certain ascetic or brahmin is a logician, a reasoner. Hammering it out by reason, following his own line of thought, he argues:</p>	17	<p>He thinks: The self and the world have arisen by chance.</p>
		18	



**SPECULATIONS  
ABOUT THE FUTURE**

## 62 FLAVORS OF WRONG VIEW

<p><b>IMMORTALITY</b></p> <p>They declare that the self after death is healthy and conscious and...</p> <p>(19-34)</p>	material	19	of uniform perception	27
	immaterial	20	of varied perception	28
	both material and immaterial	21	of limited perception	29
	neither material nor immaterial	22	of unlimited perception	30
	finite	23	wholly happy	31
	infinite	24	wholly miserable	32
	both finite and infinite	25	both happy and miserable	33
	neither finite nor infinite	26	neither happy nor miserable	34
<p>They declare that the self after death is healthy and unconscious and...</p> <p>(35-42)</p>	material	35	material	43
	immaterial	36	immaterial	44
	both material and immaterial	37	both material and immaterial	45
	neither material nor immaterial	38	neither material nor immaterial	46
<p>They declare the self after death is healthy and neither conscious nor unconscious and...</p> <p>(43-50)</p>	finite	39	finite	47
	infinite	40	infinite	48
	both finite and infinite	41	both finite and infinite	49
	neither finite nor infinite	42	neither finite nor infinite	50
<p><b>ANNIHILATIONISM</b></p> <p>Here a certain ascetic or brahmin declares and holds the view:</p>	Since the self is material, composed of the four great elements, the product of mother and father...	51	...at the breaking-up of the body it is annihilated and perishes, and does not exist after death.	
<p>Another says to him: Sir, there is such a self as you say. I don't deny it. But that self is not wholly annihilated. For there is another self...</p>	...divine, material, belonging to the sense-sphere, fed on real food.	52	<p>It is this self that at the breaking-up of the body is annihilated and perishes, and does not exist after death.</p>	
	...divine, material, mind-made, complete with all its parts, not defective in any sense-organ.	53		
	...which has realised the Sphere of Infinite Space.	54		
	...which has realised the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness.	55		
	..which has realised the Sphere of No-Thingness.	56		
	..which has realised the Sphere of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception.	57		
<p><b>NIBBANA HERE AND NOW</b></p> <p>Here a certain ascetic or brahmin declares and holds the view:</p>	In as far as this self, being furnished and endowed with the fivefold sense-pleasures, indulges in them, then...	58	<p>...that is when the self realises the highest Nibbana here and now.</p>	
<p>Another says to him: Sir, there is such a self as you say. I don't deny it. But that is not where the self realises the highest Nibbana here and now.</p>	But when this self enters and abides in the first jhana...	59		
	But when this self enters and abides in the second jhana...	60		
	But when this self enters and abides in the third jhana...	61		
	But when this self enters and abides in the fourth jhana...	62		

# Making a Joyful Effort

Christina Feldman

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*These remarks have been taken from a talk given at IMS in February of 2003.*

It is really important that there be a sense of joy in our practice.

This evening I'd like to speak about joy in the practice and about joyful effort. Meditation is never meant to be approached as an ordeal, a grim task of chipping away at a rock face. The Buddha once said that this path is a path of happiness that leads to the highest happiness, which is peace. Some people when they hear that think he's talking about everybody but them.

It is really important that there be a sense of joy in our practice. Joy doesn't mean that we just have pleasant sensations, blissful experiences, or happy thoughts. It is something much deeper than that. If we are going to be able to really sustain a vital and deepening spiritual practice, not only in retreats but also in our lives, that sustainability will be rooted in the kind of joy we can find in our practice and in ourselves.

It takes effort for all of us to get up in the morning, to raise a child, to bring things we dream of to fulfillment. It takes perseverance. It takes effort for you to come to the meditation center, and to actually engage with the meditation hour after hour. To take one step after another in walking meditation when inwardly there can be countless voices encouraging you to flee, to be elsewhere—this too takes effort. It takes effort to sit with ourselves in stillness during times that are not always easy, when part of us knows there's countless other things, more gratifying things, that we could be doing in that moment. We can look at all the journeys we make in our life, and the pervading theme in all those journeys is that they ask for effort.

In many ways the effort we make in our lives is really the visible face of our commitment. We give effort to what we are dedicated to. And for us to bring anything to fulfillment, to deepen in anything, to explore any new

landscape, it requires us to find dedication and perseverance and effort. Sometimes I think the only instruction perhaps we ever need to give in retreats is to encourage people to just keep showing up—no matter what doubts, what struggles, what anxieties—just keep showing up.

In the Zen tradition they call this sitting like a mountain—remaining steadfast and firm and receptive amidst all the weather that comes. I personally have no doubt that if you simply keep showing up, your meditation will surely deepen. You will find a greater openness, a greater learning, a greater sensitivity, a deepening sense of the many ways that we can be touched by life. And yet we all also know that it's very possible to show up physically, and to psychically be quite somewhere else; we can be very far from our bodies, very far from this moment. So I think it is also a matter of how we show up. And this is what we explore when we look carefully at effort. Effort is always going to be part of our practice, part of all the journeys we make. But the kind of effort we bring to life reflects a great deal about who we believe ourselves to be, what we have faith in, and what we sense to be possible for us.

In the Buddhist tradition much is said about wise effort, and in many different ways. One teacher might say if you want to realize peace and serenity, you should be prepared to sweat beads. One teacher has pointed out that there will come a time in your practice when you look back upon all your heroic efforts and have a sense of futile actions performed in a dream. Sometimes we hear of effort as a quality of simply being present, a greater sense of gentleness, of benevolence, to just simply attend to being here. Other times we hear about goals, and still another time we hear about having no goals. One of the teachers



PHOTO: NIMI

with whom I sat used to shout at us in sittings. Everyone would be sitting there quietly and upright. Suddenly this booming voice would shout out saying, “Work, work, work, strive for your own enlightenment!” It certainly woke us up in that moment. We hear constantly of the efforts we must make to liberate ourselves. In whatever voice it is delivered, we often hear that all the transformation we’re going to see happen, all the freedom we are seeking to realize, somehow relies upon the personal effort and exertion we make.

I think it is important to understand the kind of effort we make in our practice, and how to investigate it, because effort is not just a means to being awake. Effort in itself is a source of understanding and awakening. The effort we bring in our practice is constantly reflecting who we believe ourselves to be. Sometimes our effort is reflecting images we hold about ourselves, a sense of identity that lies at the core of our being. Our effort can reflect not only what we sense to be possible for us, but also what we sense to be impossible. When our effort is born of unconscious self images, then it very often will manifest as unwise or unskillful effort. That doesn’t lead to greater freedom or joy, but sometimes instead perpetuates the very life patterns and identities from which we would most like to be free.

If we look at the type of effort we bring to our practice, and the kind of effort we bring to our lives, it’s very likely they will resemble one another. Some of our effort can be quite habitual, because some of the identities we hold about ourselves are habitual. I’d like to explore some of those more habitual, unconscious efforts I’ve come across in teaching, and also some I’ve experienced in myself.

#### UNSKILLFUL EFFORT

There is the striver who comes to practice with a big agenda of goals that must be attained. Sometimes women, for example, may think of themselves as less striving, and yet there are so many subtle dimensions of the striver that can live within us all. This can happen where practice is sometimes treated as something of a test of worthiness. And we know that life itself is sometimes treated as a test of worthiness. In that kind of striving, the practice is sometimes treated as a mountain we need to climb, a place to succeed or to prove ourselves.

The striver often has some very visible characteristics, for example using the vocabulary of good and bad, or success and failure. One looks for signs of progress and is equally acutely alert to signs of failure. And there’s often a sort of checklist in practice. “How many breaths in a row did I have in that sitting? How many times did I move?” That becomes a sign of success or failure. “How many insights did I have today?” Often we can see that when striving is present in our practice, there’s also a good deal of self-consciousness and a constant measuring inwardly. We are looking for evidence of one kind or another. And of course with all that measuring and evaluating going on, the voice of the inner critic is quite often a steady companion. All because we can never really feel quite good enough.

There is another kind of habitual effort which is much more ambivalent, a sort of lethargic, half-hearted effort. We can be quite conscientious about showing up, but everything else looks like a lucky accident if we run into the occasional breath. In this kind of effort, it’s just bad luck if we spaced out completely in the whole sitting. It’s almost like waiting for meditation to deliver a glimpse of something, as if we’re waiting for

Effort is not just a means... it is itself a source of understanding.

Correctly understood, effort is an invitation to insight.

a delivery to arrive. This is a disengaged type of effort, and reflects an inner belief that life is something that just happens to us—we are not a conscious participant in the kind of world we live in. Sometimes that ambivalent effort manifests as low expectation or a reduced sense of inner possibility.

Just as the striver is a casualty of their own inflated expectations, more of us, I think, can suffer from too limited expectations, from too low a sense of possibility. In this case we can perhaps resign ourselves to far less than what's possible for us—in our lives and in our practice.

There's another habitual and unconscious kind of effort. This is an aversive effort, where meditation practice is approached as a sort of onerous task. It's a medicine, it tastes bad, but everybody's told us it's really good for us. So we're kind of willing to swallow it. Sometimes when we have that aversive effort we sit and we walk but it's almost fulfilling a sense of obligation because we're supposed to. It's a duty, but with an underlying aversion. And often we don't spot the aversion; but the clue is we spend a lot of time in fantasies and daydreams, which provide the camouflage for aversion.

There is also the opposite of aversive effort, the warrior effort that manifests as will power, where life and practice, and sometimes even oneself, is regarded as an obstacle to conquer. In this effort, there are a lot of enemies, a lot of things to subdue, to transcend, to force our way through. And this kind of overly heroic effort often carries very fixed views about how things should be. Anything that doesn't fit in with how we believe things should be is basically an enemy to overcome.

Most people don't fit neatly into any one of these categories, nor do most demonstrate only one of these dimensions of effort. Depending on our mind state at the moment,

as well as the historical beliefs we carry about ourselves, we can find a number of these different qualities of effort appearing during the day. We can start the day as the warrior and end up in the throws of aversive effort or ambivalence.

### SKILLFUL EFFORT

Correctly understood, effort is an invitation to insight. The kind of effort we make in our practice and in our lives is communicating something. At times it's communicating the mind state of the moment: doubt, fear, craving, or aversion. Sometimes the kind of effort we're making is communicating a more historical belief system or self image that dominates our lives. However our relationship to effort manifests, we are invited to listen well to these communications.

I think we need to allow the practice itself to be the practice of freedom, to be the practice of peace, to be the practice of compassion, rather than feel that all of that somehow comes as a result of something else. It doesn't make sense, does it, that we would strive or struggle and expect that somehow the fruit is going to be peace? It doesn't add up that we're going to battle with ourselves and beat ourselves up and chip away at the rock face, and that the fruit of such activity is going to be joy. So let's find a way to make the quality of effort itself the goal of practice. Let's make our effort joyful.

When we cultivate not just wise and skillful effort, but also joyful effort, we discover what I think Joseph Campbell described as the rapture of being fully alive. It is very difficult to define joy, isn't it? We're really good at defining misery. We could write a book on it: it looks like that, feels like that, comes from here, moves through me like that; it expresses itself like that, and so on. But defining joy is



difficult. One of the most curious things about joy is that it often doesn't seem caused. We don't usually say, "Oh, yes, that makes me filled with joy." Joy comes to us often in quite unexpected, unanticipated moments. And yet also we don't mistake it for something else. We know what it is like to feel joy, to feel a delight of being, to feel a celebration of the moment; the joy of being touched by sometimes the simplest of things.

Joy has a lot to do with having the openness of heart to receive life as it is. It's not a result always of some complex endeavor. It's often more revealed to us in the times when we can discover that space of being and that space of receiving. There's a Chinese saying, "You should keep a green bough in your heart. The singing bird will come." I often think of mindfulness practice as learning to keep a green bough in our hearts, and then the singing bird comes in most curious and unanticipated moments. It's not just a fleeting experience or a state of mind. Sometimes there is such joy in just being awake. Once when the Buddha was traveling through a village this villager came to him and said, "How come you're so radiant? Are you some kind of angel, some sort of god, some kind of saint?" And the Buddha answered simply, "No, I'm awake."

#### VISION AND CONFIDENCE

There are two dimensions of joyful effort, and both are interwoven. One is the dimension of *vision*, the quality of aspiration that we hold, the possibility of having trust in our practice and in ourselves. It is faith in the possibility of really discovering the mind of awakening within ourselves. The other dimension of joyful effort is a *confidence* that trusts, moment to moment, our capacity to bring to fulfillment the vision we

hold. It means having a pervasive confidence in ourselves, our practice, our path, our capacity for depth. A joyful effort asks for these two qualities of vision and confidence to be always in balance, because it's when they fall out of balance that we tend to fall into unskillful or unwise effort.

Vision is an intrinsic part of this practice and teaching. I'm always reluctant to use the word "goal," because it comes with so many charged associations, but certainly vision or aspiration is the reason we practice. We practice because we are concerned with the end of sorrow and conflict, with an emerging compassion and understanding. Our aspiration is not something static, of course, and is constantly being altered by experience and by new understanding. Sometimes we can come into retreat with a mind beset by chaos and struggle and agitation. Our aspiration in that moment might just be to find a little serenity. Or someone might come into a retreat with a really broken heart. They're not coming here to contemplate the profound emptiness and perfection of all things. They're looking for a little healing, to find some sense of balance, some kind of renewal within themselves.

Sometimes a person comes into retreat and they just feel battered and overwhelmed by life, like it's just been too much pain or too much struggle. And again, you know, their aspiration in that moment may be just to find a way of reclaiming some inner authority, some inner listening, some inner spaciousness. And sometimes we find what we're looking for. We discover ourselves again, and we do find the peace, the serenity, the healing. And...that's not the end of the task.

Sometimes discovering some peace opens up a wider sense of possibility, in which we see that calmness itself is not a destination. This is the beginning of a real deepening of insight. We may see that healing a broken

Joy has to do with having the openness of heart to receive life as it is.

What matters is that we sense the worthiness of the moment.

heart is not the end of the path, and this insight inspires us to see how we might bring such healing to suffering wherever it exists. We learn to reclaim some inner voice of authority, and this is the beginning of finding an unshakable balance and wisdom.

We see how one moment of realizing aspiration is almost the beginning of a whole new sense of possibility. We all have dreams and longings that bring us to practice. Sometimes we don't even articulate them to ourselves. Sometimes we listen to the words of the teachings of mystics and sages and they stir a kind of echo within ourselves, a sense of longing, a sense of yearning. It's really important to honor those yearnings and their sense of possibility, because it's what gives meaning to our path. It's what gives meaning to the effort we bring and to the challenges we meet. It allows us to know what we're doing and why we're here. It doesn't matter if you sit and your body is aching or your mind is chaotic. That's not important. What matters is that we sense the worthiness of the moment. What matters is that we honor the intention for wholeness, for clarity, and that we honor the intention to cultivate that. And honoring this is actually what brings joy to the practice. It does so even in times when it is difficult or seems to make no sense.

In our practice what we're learning is really to breath life into aspiration. We're learning to embody it, to nurture it, to cultivate it in every step we take when we walk, in every breath we breathe. All those moments are in the service of honoring the deepest intentions we can bring to our life and practice; they're all in service of honoring our capacity for wisdom, for compassion, for authenticity. Everything we do then serves to fulfill our sense of vision.

Confidence is the second dimension of joyful effort. This is the place where we

can falter or be a little more fragile. Nothing leaches out joy or freedom from our lives more than doubt and fear. Doubt and fear make us so hesitant in the face of so many things, makes us afraid of taking new steps or afraid of opening up. It makes us so afraid of disappointment.

I wonder where we think the classroom is for gaining confidence. Clearly not in the moments when we feel certain and unshakable and fearless; neither in the times of feeling uncertain and full of of doubt, or afraid and ready to resign. Yet these are also the times we learn about confidence. When we find ourselves willing to come back and be with that which we were previously so resistant to or afraid of, we learn something about confidence. When we find ourselves willing to be with something that seems so impossible, when we forsake the habitual places of hiding and sanctuary and come back and open up to the present—that's where we learn about confidence.

Sitting here [in this hall, with other people] is a gesture of confidence, in ourselves and in our path. It's an expression of our willingness to open, forsaking the habit of abandonment. That's basically what we do here in mindfulness practice: we forsake the habit of abandoning the moment, abandoning ourselves. And that is a very profound gesture of confidence.

It's also a manifestation of vision in that it allows us to turn towards what we habitually turn away from. When we do that, we discover the fear was built on very shaky foundations. We learn that our lack of confidence was really built more on what we imagined might be. It's like so many things that seem impossible, but when we approach them they turn out to be not very solid. Someone said once, "It's very hard to hate someone you really



understand.” It’s also very much harder to fear something you truly understand.

It’s like the story of the little boy who says to his mother, “Mom, imagine you’re surrounded by a herd of hungry tigers all wanting to devour you. What’s it like? What would you do? How would you feel?” She says, “Oh, I would be terrified! I wouldn’t know what to do. What would you do?” And the little boy says, “I’d stop pretending.” We can build up a whole world of impossibility, but it’s really only based on believing in impossibility. And possibility is not based just on believing something else; it’s based upon exploring the possible in the moment, which is something very different.

#### **BECOMING MINDFUL**

One of the things that most undermines confidence is not being conscious. When we’re not conscious in our lives, we’re prone to walk some very old and tired pathways. In that unconsciousness, we walk the same pathways we’ve walked a thousand times before; pathways of judgment, of self-condemnation, of self-doubt, of resistance, of fear. We fall into these states in the moments we’re most unconscious, and it so undermines our confidence. I think in such moments we feel like we’re somehow betraying those deepest intentions in our lives that are worthy and most important to us. This leaves us feeling very fragile and almost unable to trust in ourselves.

When we bring consciousness into those places where we’re most unconscious—by becoming mindful—we make ourselves less habit prone and more enlightenment prone. It’s that simple. Everything we do here is in the service of making ourselves prone to insight, prone to being awake, prone to understanding everything. The schedule, the silence, the commitment, everything is in the service

of that. I think it’s really important to hold it in that light. We’re not just going through the routine of a retreat. We are here to make ourselves less prone to being unconscious and more open to seeing what’s possible when we are truly conscious.

Sometimes that means challenging ourselves a little. And we can do that out of curiosity, out of interest, or out of a sense of possibility, rather than from duty or expectation. Sometimes we learn in our practice to challenge our edge just a little bit, to see where we’re most prone to slip into some of the unconscious identities and beliefs that can seem so set in stone. We learn to ride our edges a bit. That doesn’t mean pushing or forcing; it means to keep looking at what’s possible, keep questioning the moments we want to throw our hands in the air and say, “That’s it! Not a moment more.” What is possible here? Where is the peace in that moment? If our aspiration is to nurture compassion, to deepen peace, to discover clarity, then it’s in that very moment we need to say, “Where is it? Where is it in this moment? Where is the contentment, the serenity, the kindness, the compassion, the wisdom in the moment that we are in.”

We often think about effort as just a means to take us from here to somewhere else. It’s as if there’s this big gap in the middle. In learning to bring joy to our effort, we’re learning to bring the somewhere else into the here. The effort is in the moment; it is the effort to be awake, to be free, to embody aspiration and confidence. Only then, I think, is our practice really pervaded with joyful effort. This is where we find the joy in the practice and the joy in being.

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# Meditation and the Therapist

by Paul Fulton

When we look closely at some of the empirical studies conducted on the effectiveness of psychotherapy, it begins to appear as though most of what accounts for effective treatment has very little to do with the technique or the philosophy of the therapist. In fact, what seem most to account for outcomes are factors that have next to nothing to do with the treatment at all. It has far more to do with certain qualities that the patient brings, and for other changes in their lives.

For example, if a person is depressed over having lost their job, the single most powerful treatment is to get a new job. That's going to exceed anything that the therapist is going to do. There are also expectation effects and placebo effects which have been empirically demonstrated. It has been shown, for example, that somebody who has one visit to a therapist seems often to have done as well as the person who is in continuous treatment over three months.

The truth is we don't really know what's going on in treatment. But from our training in graduate school, we acquire a tremendous body of explanations that we offer ourselves. These tend to justify the time and expense of our training, and the fees that we receive. But in fact, what is happening seems to not be precisely what we think is happening.

The area where we *do* have the most to contribute to what's happening in treatment is, of course, in the nature of the relationship itself. And most importantly, it's not the therapist's assessment of the quality of the relationship. It is the *client's* assessment of the nature of the relationship that's going to be most predictive of having a positive outcome. That being the case, I have come to believe that the greatest value of meditation practice for the psychotherapist is in the way it helps us to cultivate certain qualities of mind—in fact, it helps us cultivate precisely those qualities which are most conducive to the successful treatment relationship.

This is the theme I would like to explore with you this morning. Let's look at some of the specific ways that meditation practice is of benefit for the therapist.

## MAKING CONTACT

In meditation practice we are simply learning how to make contact again and again and again with what's actually before us. We make contact not through our concept formation and through our thinking, but through returning to what's most adamantly true in the moment, without recourse to our usual avenues of avoidance. When we find ourselves vanishing into fantasy, or into desire, or into memory, we come back again to things as they are—not because they are more pleasant (in fact, usually our fantasies tend to be more pleasant), but because they are true.

We do this knowing that we need not actually get rid of anything. When people come into treatment, or when they begin a meditation practice, it's usually with the expectation that the only problem is the need to be someone else. Woody Allen said his only regret in life is that he wasn't born someone else. When people come to treatment, it's usually because they have something they need to get rid of—some quality or habit or pattern. Or there's something they feel they lack, that they need to get more of, that they're going to “get” through the psychotherapy or through the meditation. We all have these fantasies of what enlightenment is going to get us. It's very interesting to look at what our ideas are about that.

When we practice meditation, in fact we're not trying to get rid of anything, and we're not trying to hold onto anything. We're simply practicing attending to what actually is. There may be the subtle intent to change the world through our practice, but that's a distortion. The practice is always and only taking refuge in this moment, just as it offers itself to us.

In the process, then, meditation practice

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teaches us how to open to and accept intense affect. In the process of learning to tolerate more of our own discomfort and pain, it simultaneously and automatically grants us the ability to tolerate the affect of our clients as well. The more we can be truly accepting of our own experience, the more we can be accepting of our clients' experience. This, of course, is simply the practice of equanimity. It's not equanimity in the sense of being remote and distant. It's being absolutely present with what is, and allowing it to come, and allowing it to go, because we know that it will. This is also learning to be non-judging; as we learn to let go of judging, others around us, including our clients, feel this and can begin to trust.

### HOLDING THE FORM

What enables us to do this hard work in meditation is of course a bit different than what happens in psychotherapy, though each offer "containers" to support us. The thing that allows us to tolerate what is difficult in psychotherapy is the structure. Certainly, the integrity of the therapist, is paramount, evinced by respect for the boundaries of the relationship, and the absolute promise of confidentiality. But also you've got elements of structure like the scheduled hour—the predictability, perhaps, of the same time each week, knowing that you're going to start on time and end on time. The frame of the professional relationship is actually very powerful. Even the very fact of an exchange of fees gets the client off the hook of having any other obligation to the therapist but to show up and be honest. That right there is a huge support, a container, and a protection.

Those things allow the client, then, to begin to move closer to what is difficult than is possible when those supports are missing. This is the reason why people don't do as well speaking, for instance, to friends. With a friend there is a more reciprocal relationship, with all the obligations that implies. This message came home to me in my very first therapy, which was analytic therapy on the couch several times a week. I was concerned that I was boring my therapist at the time. Though I wasn't sure at first, I came to feel that his comment was terrific. He said, "It's okay. You're paying me enough." He didn't tell me I wasn't being dull, only that it didn't

matter. I was off the hook of having to be entertaining. The fee I was paying him gave me permission.

In meditation, of course, there are a number of different supports for standing ever closer to the heat of difficult experiences. We can run through a quick list:

Sitting in a group is a great support in itself. You may feel like running screaming from the room, but you don't because of the social pressure. The truth is that taking refuge in the *sangha* [community] is a way of using social pressure to support something which would be more difficult if done alone.

Another support is found in the teachings. Just knowing that there is a map, a body of understanding and instruction, which can help us understand and guide our practice is very helpful. We're not just out there flapping about. Even though the instruction is so simple—to stay with this moment—in fact it is supported by an enormous body of understanding.

There is also the fact that this path has been traveled by many, many people before us. There are teachers, for instance—people who have walked this path and can provide support to help us tolerate things that we might not otherwise put up with. It gives a great sense of confidence.

Still another support that makes it possible to tolerate the affect is holding to your posture. This is really a matter of being willing to abandon other methods of avoidance. Typically, if some discomfort comes up, we're immediately scratching the itch or shifting our posture. When we renounce, for the moment, the easy escape—wiggling or itching or moving—we actually empower ourselves to redirect our attention to look at our relationship to this thing we would normally habitually avoid. In other words, to decide not to move, even for a brief period of time, becomes very empowering because it redirects our attention.

In the process, we also cultivate greater concentration. When the mind remains unmoving—when you choose just one object and come back to it again and again—concentration becomes stronger. Concentration brings certain qualities of mind, such as stability, imperturbability, and calmness, which make it possible to endure being thrown about by the emotions. It's not enough just to be mindful of changing mental states; concentration is the

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fortification that allows us to stay with these experiences in a steady way.

### THE CONTINGENCY OF EXPERIENCE

Our meditation practice teaches us that no emotion is ever final. What's interesting is that in the throes of many emotions, we don't know this. While depression is not precisely an emotion, it's a wonderful example of what I'm saying. When a person is depressed, there's no life, no future, outside of this experience. There is no hope. Hopelessness is in fact a primary symptom of depression. Never mind that as recently as weeks ago, an individual may not have felt depressed. But the memory of that is not sustaining, because the notion of the future has been contaminated by the symptoms of the depression. Against all reasoning, against all logic, we may come to believe that what we're experiencing in this moment is forever.

One of the things that we learn from our meditation practice is, "*It isn't so.*" Nothing remains. No emotion, no experience, can be counted on to remain. It may get much worse! But it will not stay the same. As therapists, it's useful to know this, to *really* know this in our own experience. It tells us that we can tolerate what for the moment our clients can't, because we hold this understanding of impermanence. Indeed, we can hold the memory of a time that the client felt better. We may even do something as simple as remind the individual that this was not always so, and that we know that it will not always be so. Their job right now is not to rid themselves of this feeling, but to take care of themselves until such time as it leaves them.

Moreover, we learn that our happiness is not dependent upon external conditions. In fact conditions can be wonderful and conducive to happiness, and we can still be miserable and stewing all the time. Or conditions can be enormously difficult, and we can be joyous in the midst of it. Somehow we have this idea that we need to control our lives and make everything "just so" as a qualification to happiness. Yet we can begin to see this as just the effort of our minds to try to control things. In fact, happiness is so often entirely independent of our material conditions.

It is possible, even in the midst of tremendous pain, to enjoy our lives. We can feel joy, not because everything is fine, but in spite of

the fact that it's not. If we are capable of recognizing this ourselves, it also means that we can begin to be a model for our clients of how to be happy. I suspect that happy therapists are more effective than desperate, despairing therapists.

### CULTIVATION OF EMPATHY

Other benefits for the therapist include the cultivation of empathy and compassion. We know that empathy is the cornerstone of a good treatment relationship. Yet graduate schools have yet to find a way to teach students to be empathic. However, when we become compassionate and empathic with ourselves, simultaneously the heart can open, and we can allow ourselves to be empathic and compassionate with our clients as well. Meditation is the only method I can think of to truly teach this. Simply suffering through your life may not be enough. Think about people who have endured tremendous hardship and sorrow. In many instances it can lead to tremendous compassion. But it can also lead to hardening and withdrawal. It's not enough just to suffer. There needs to be a practice of generating kindness and compassion toward ourselves for that to become an opening experience.

To be attuned, attentive, not absorbed in your own thoughts, internally quiet and still yet responsive—these are the qualities cultivated in meditation practice. When we learn to listen to our clients with the same degree of wholeheartedness and undistractedness, wonderful things are likely to happen.

### GAINING EQUANIMITY

Empathy for the suffering of a client will also be tempered by the broader view of equanimity. Meditation practice helps us to cultivate an absolute respect for the integrity of another person's experience. We can develop all manner of compassion and empathy toward our clients, and at the same time recognize that all of that is not going to make a difference in the quality of their lives *per se*. Ultimately they themselves are the owners of their own experience. We recognize that we give everything that we have to offer, within the framework of the treatment relationship, and we also recognize the absolute and genuine limits of our ability to change anybody. When we are not covertly insisting our clients change, they are granted an environment in which they

We can tolerate what for the moment our clients can't, because we hold an understanding of impermanence.

are free to choose.

### LEARNING HUMILITY

Such equanimity leads to the cultivation of a quality of humility as well. Our clients may attribute to us all manner of powers, and it is so easy, I think, for therapists to begin to buy their own press. These attributions can sometimes be very useful; a positive transference doesn't really need to be analyzed until and unless it becomes a transference resistance. On the other hand, to begin to believe that we're as powerful as our clients secretly believe is very, very dangerous. Meditation, I think, helps us to remain mindful of the limits of our own capacities. It teaches us humility.

### SEEING HIDDEN POSSIBILITIES

The meditation practice teaches us of possibilities that are yet unseen by the patient. We can see that there are ways to not be trapped that the client doesn't yet see. I don't think we need our meditation practice for this, truly. The greatest asset I always felt I had with my own clients is that I wasn't them! Whatever my traps were, they happened to be somewhat different than those of the person sitting before me. Therefore I had some capacity to see the traps that they were setting for themselves and stepping in. I could demonstrate how maybe the world needn't be defined by the particular dilemma that they posed. I could show them there was another way out that comes from reframing, letting go of the problem as the client has defined it. Meditation is excellent training for this dimension because it always calls on us to see how we construct the world, our conflicts, our struggles; it invites us to step back, and back, and back. Perhaps it is more a constant process of "deframing" than "reframing."

### REVEALING ONE'S OWN NARCISSISM

The meditation practice also helps us to identify where our own narcissistic needs are entering into the treatment, and to know it without judgment, without needing to be a saint. The greatest danger is to imagine that we are not narcissistic when we are. It is in the denial or the negation of these things that lurks the greatest harm.

This is one of the great contributions not

just of meditation, but of having a good analysis as well. You really begin to learn about transference and countertransference, and indeed, this is why a course of treatment is good training as well. You begin to see those things that were formerly invisible, and the places where your own sense of identity gets activated in certain ways. We can begin to see how our own needs can interfere with the treatment. Our need for the clients to rid themselves of their pain, for instance, because *we* can't tolerate it. Or the need to be a good therapist, or to be admired by our clients. I'm not suggesting that we're going to rid ourselves of these things. I am suggesting that the most important piece is simply to see them as clearly as possible for what they are.

### LEARNING TO NOT KNOW

A very powerful contribution of meditation practice is simply this: You don't know what the next moment will bring. So too as a therapist, it's often the ability to not know that helps the most. We have to truly let go of our expectations of our clients, those we might have because we think we know them, or the expectations based upon adhering to some model or theory of treatment. It's in letting go of that—which can be frightening—that the ground of creative possibility and of real growth arises. We help people not by knowing where they need to go, but by creating a space in which they feel safe amid the uncertainty. When a person begins to feel that safety, understanding can emerge from the not-knowing-ness.

The meditation helps us to recognize the limits of our own theoretical model-building. We are all so well trained. But I believe there is an imprinting period in professional development. Whatever it is you learned as a graduate student seems to stick with you, no matter how much subsequent training you get. And you don't even see it, it's so subtle and pervasive. But with meditation, we begin to unearth many of our assumptions about what people are made of and how they operate. We learn to let go of our models, and even our confidence in diagnostic labels. I don't think I know of a single experienced senior therapist who hasn't abandoned to some degree a lot of their adherence to theory.

### LEARNING TO SEE YOUR MIND

Something else of great value has to do with the moment of clear comprehen-

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sion. This is the thing: you learn to see your mind. As one sees one's own mind, so arises the capacity to see another's mind. When you see them getting identified with and lost in the story, you can remain centered and see how they may be replicating all of their neurotic conflicts in the treatment itself. This is a genuine contribution of having done meditation work for a period of time.

Another important thing we learn to see about the mind is that it is constantly regenerating itself. The immense value of this momentariness of life is that there is a genuine opportunity to begin again in every moment. We not only offer ourselves this opportunity—regardless of a history of failures—but we offer this to our clients as well. We're not going to hold them to their history. When they're ready to abandon it themselves, we're there with them. And it is never too late.

#### GAINING A WIDER WISDOM

Meditation is useful for cultivating, for lack of a better term, wisdom, or the ability to clearly discriminate. It helps us to not mistake what I call existential suffering for neurotic suffering. People come to therapists because they don't know where else to go with some personal sorrow or suffering. They come as though they believe all suffering is a neurotic problem to be solved. It reflects the assumption that if one is mentally healthy, one would not have to endure the suffering. Because we assume we are supposed to be happy, the fact of unhappiness must be taken as evidence of illness, or arrest, or neurotic conflict. So people come to therapists.

Therapists have never met a problem they didn't feel they could solve. So we take the bait, and believe that we're actually equipped to help someone cope with concerns that may not be neurotic at all, but may be absolutely endemic to having been born into a human form. Because of its home in a branch of medicine, psychotherapy uses the metaphor of health and illness, often appropriately, and often to some harm.

One of the great contributions of meditation practice is to recognize what elements of human suffering are not neurotic and are therefore not susceptible to psychotherapy treatment. Rather, they are part and parcel of being born as a human being. Therefore, they need not be personalized or needlessly

pathologized. A therapist does a great disservice to his client if he neuroticizes a problem, making a person feel responsible for forms of suffering that are innate to living. Even in such instances talking with a therapist may have benefits, but only if we keep in mind the universality of suffering and don't promise what psychotherapy can't deliver.

In fact, if we are not clear about this ourselves, we can make things much worse. This alone would be reason enough to wish to go to a therapist who has a meditation practice, so that they can begin to make some of these discriminations. The metaphor that comes to my mind for this is that very often people are in a pit. They come to the therapist, who hands them a shovel, when what they really needed was a ladder. For many clients, a reasonable outcome of therapy may be to "go the next step," reach for the ladder and begin their own meditation practice.

#### DIFFERING GOALS

Finally, a word needs to be said about some differences between the practice of mindfulness meditation on the one hand, and the therapeutic tradition on the other. It's so natural for us to look at these as equivalent. While the common denominators between the two traditions are pretty evident—both are responses to suffering; both address profound levels of non-conscious experience; both rest on the idea of insight or of re-framing our understanding, and both rely on introspection—there are also some profound differences that need to be understood.

The most important has to do with the ultimate goals. Certainly when we do meditation we reap therapeutic benefits. Just by virtue of doing the practice there are psychophysiological benefits. People's blood pressure improves; trait anxiety abates; people become more accepting; they learn relaxation techniques. Psycho-physiological disorders benefit because they are less exacerbated as we manage stress.

Early on in meditation practice, Westerners often do a whole lot of therapy while sitting on the cushion. We don't particularly care to return to something as dull as the breath when we've got these magnificent stories unfolding before us. In fact, people will spend hours, or years, doing therapy with themselves

on the cushion. It's not meditation, but it may not be useless either. It may actually be quite helpful for someone to do this work. However, the purpose of meditation is not to do psychotherapy. It's not to be invested in understanding the particulars of *my* conditioning, but rather to begin to learn about conditioning in a more general way.

Generally speaking, the goal of any form of treatment is to begin to return people to full participation in the collective web of meanings of their society. It is to restore people from the estrangement that comes from being too idiosyncratically lost to individual troubles. In every culture there is a codified view of what it means to be healthy, whole, and to be an ideal person. This is what we call a view of the self.

### SELF AND NON-SELF

We tend to hold, in our systems of psychology, a view of the self that is separate, autonomous, individuated—these are, of course, the milestones of development. If you manage to successfully traverse the entire developmental gauntlet, you wind up with a self that is cohesive, integrated, non-fragmented. In other words, the purpose of growth and development in the West is to become a person, singular, related, capable of reciprocal relationships, but nevertheless bounded, independent and autonomous. There's tremendous emphasis on this idea of being autonomous and self-sufficient that it drives people crazy, because it is ultimately not possible.

Why is it not fully possible? The self is not something that stands alone. The self is a process that is constantly created and informed by interaction with the rest of the world. It is something that is invented in the moment, and abates when the conditions for its arising vanish. Yet our forms of treatment are all organized around trying to help the person become more of a self, to become independent and autonomous. We use the tools and the methods of psychotherapy, appropriately, to try to help restore the self. Through mirroring, simple admiring, acceptance, we actually help a person to come to feel at home in their own self.

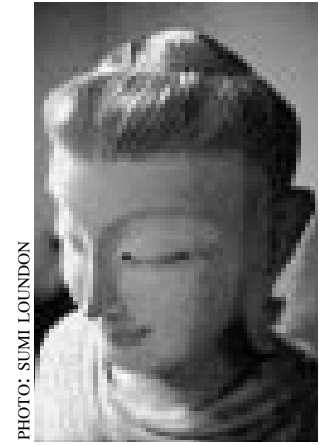
But these are not the goals of the meditation practice. It's true we may sometimes use meditation practice—mistakenly—to establish some sense of identity, or to become more of

what we think we ought to be. But if everything goes really well with our meditation practice, in time we begin to see how that is a mistaken motive, and that we're actually misdirected. The very thing that we most thought we need, which is to *become*, is the thing that's causing us some degree of distress. We begin to see how the sense of self, when you need to hold to it, becomes a huge vulnerability, an exhausting and endless project, and a source of suffering.

It becomes an unsolvable riddle: The self wants to be more of a self, to be fortified and impregnable, which is an impossible enterprise because there is no "self" to the self—it is all fluid. So we have to run as fast as we can just to try to stay in one place.

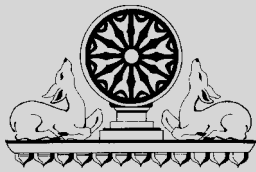
What we are seeking to do in meditation is gradually see through all of our concepts, including the concept of "me" which we may have worked a lifetime to erect. We begin to see that all of our attachments to our fixed positions is the very thing giving rise to our unhappiness. This is a way of thinking about growth and development that is not ultimately compatible with the view of psychotherapy. Psychotherapy can take us some of the way down the road, but at the heart of our therapy practice is always the assumption of becoming more of something. This is in contrast to the idea of a radical, psychological, spiritual, emotional emancipation, a view of human potential that is not embodied in academic or clinical psychology.

It's so easy, I think, to mistake meditation as simply another arrow in the therapeutic quiver. It is that, but there is some risk associated with reducing it to only that. But, though we have to be mindful of important differences as we begin to appropriate these techniques into therapy, there can be no doubt about the tremendous benefit of meditation practice to the therapist in cultivating qualities of mind that support a healing therapeutic relationship.



The self is a process that is constantly created by interaction with the rest of the world. It is something invented in the moment.





# Barre Center for Buddhist Studies

...for the integration of scholarly understanding and meditative



The Barre Center for Buddhist Studies is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to bringing together teachers, students, scholars and practitioners who are committed to exploring Buddhist thought and practice as a living tradition, faithful to its origins and lineage, yet adaptable and alive in the current world. The center's purpose is to provide a bridge between study and practice, between scholarly understanding and meditative insight. It encourages engagement with the tradition in a spirit of genuine inquiry and investigation.

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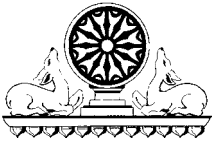
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Dec. 12-14 (Weekend)	<i>Mu Soeng</i>	The Great Way is Not Difficult: The Zen Poem of the Third Ancestor
Dec 19-21 (Weekend)	<i>Sumi Loundon &amp; Matthew Daniell</i>	Dharma for Young Adults: Integrating Body, Mind and Spirit
Jan 15-17 (Weekend)	<i>Trudy Goodman &amp; Chris Germer</i>	Meditation for Psychologists and Psychotherapists
Jan 30-Feb 1 (Weekend)	<i>Chok Hiew</i>	Meditation and Healing: The Energy-Karma of Body and Mind
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Feb 13-15 (Weekend)	<i>Christopher Queen</i>	Mindfulness and Social Change: Walking the Path of Compassion and Service
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Feb 27-29 (Weekend)	<i>Rev. Pat Enkyo O'Hara</i>	Song of the Precious Mirror Mind
Mar 5-7 (Weekend)	<i>Ellison Findly</i>	Women in Buddhism
Mar 14-21 (7 days)	<i>Andrew Olendzki &amp; Annie Nugent</i>	Bhavana Program: The Noble Path of the Householder
Mar 26-28 (Weekend)	<i>Greg Kramer</i>	Cultivating Intention
Apr 2-4 (Weekend)	<i>Daeja Napier</i>	Kalama Sutta: Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry
Apr 9-18 (9 days)	<i>Leigh Brasington</i>	<i>Satipatthana &amp; Jhana</i> (Foundations of Mindfulness and the Meditative Absorptions)
Apr 23-25 (Weekend)	<i>Ven. Santikaro Bhikkhu</i>	Bodhicitta and Paramis in Theravada
May 1 (Saturday)	<i>Sylvia Forges-Ryan</i>	Ripples in a Pond: Haiku and Meditation
May 2 (Sunday)	<i>Doug Phillips</i>	Family Dharma: Practice in a Family Context
May 8 (Saturday)	<i>Lama John Makransky</i>	Giving Tantric Expressions to Buddhist Attitudes
May 9-14 (5 days)	<i>Andrew Olendzki</i>	Essentials of Buddhist Psychology
May 15-22 (7 days)	<i>Andrew Olendzki &amp; Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia</i>	Bhavana Program: Empty of Self



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## Keeping the Wheel Rolling

### Sàriputta Thera

Thag 991	gàme vā yadi vāraṃṃe ninne vā yadi vā thale, yattha arahanto viharanti, taū bhāmiū rāmaōeyyakaū	In the village or the forest, In the lowlands or the highlands; Wherever the worthy ones dwell —That terrain would be found pleasing.
Thag 992	ramaōāyā araṃṃāni, yattha na ramatā jano vātarāgā ramissanti, na te kāmagavesino.	So pleasing (they find) the forests, Wherein most people are not pleased. Rid of passion, they will be pleased —They do not pursue mere pleasure!
Thag 998	rukkhamālaū va nissāya muōōo saūghāñipāruto paṃṃāya uttamo thero Upatisso ‘va jhāyati.	Settled at the root of a tree, With shaven head, clad in a robe, The elder foremost in wisdom —Upatissa just meditates.
Thag 1006 upasanto uparato	mantabhāōā anuddhato dunāti pāpake dhamme dumapattaū va māluto.	He has become calm and at rest, Wise in speech and not self-centered; He’s shaken off unwholesome states —Like wind would leaves from a tree.
Thag 1007 upasanto uparato	mantabhāōā anuddhato abbahi pāpake dhamme dumapattaū va māluto.	He has become calm and at rest, Wise in speech and not self-centered; He has plucked off unwholesome states —Like wind would leaves from a tree.
Thag 1013 mahāsamuddo pathavā	pabbato anilo pi ca upamāya na yujjanti satthu varavimuttiyā	The mighty ocean and the earth A mountain, or even the wind Are not adequate similes —For the teacher’s splendid release.
Thag 1014 cakkānuvattako thero	mahāṃāōā samāhito pathavāpaggi samāno na rajjati na dussati.	The elder keeps the wheel rolling, Possessing great wisdom, composed; And just like earth, water and fire, —He’s neither attached nor opposed.

Sàriputta (also known by the name Upatissa) was the Buddha’s leading follower, particularly praised for his wisdom. These verses, containing eight syllables per line, have been extracted from a longer poem of thirty seven verses preserved in the *Theragāthā*. They describe a □ *arahant*. The elder keeps the dharma wheel of the Buddha’s teaching rolling by such dedication to meditation practice, and by exemplifying the attitude of non-attachment in all that he does. The phrase may also refer to Sàriputta’s pivotal role in the development of the Abhidhamma tradition.