

Forest Monastery Journal

The Dharmasar Solution

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The Setting of our Story—the Beautiful Central Mountains of Sri Lanka



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Foreword

There is a backstory to this Journal that will help you put it into context. In 2011, at the age of 64, my whole life fell apart. For almost 40 years I had been a disciple of a world-famous spiritual master and assisted him in building an international spiritual organization. After his death, I watched horrified as his organization became corrupt and withered away to a fraction of its former glory.

I kept up my studies and *sādhana*, and early in 2002 I had an extraordinary experience during a six-month solitary meditation retreat. Convinced that I was enlightened, I began to teach independently and initiate disciples as a *guru*. I established an *āśram* in India and published more than 20 books, over 750 videos and more than a thousand audio classes on spiritual life.

However, I found myself very dissatisfied. As my studies and realization deepened, I became aware that the path I was on for the majority of my life may have been fabricated as a tool of caste politics. The more deeply I studied and analyzed the most confidential and esoteric works of my lineage, the more certain I became of my doubts.



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In early 2011 I performed a very elaborate traditional Vedic *yajña*, (see photo above) in part to clarify my future. I saw myself giving up everything and leaving India. Profoundly disturbed, I made the most difficult decision of my life: I resigned from my position as *guru*, dissolved my organization and sent my former students and disciples home.

I spent some months in Spain, in deep contemplation of what happened and why it had gone wrong. This led to a study of state-of-the-art leadership techniques. In this study I realized that the **process of becoming** is key to being a leader and exercising effective leadership as a natural self-expression. This realization led directly to the teaching of the Buddha, which is the best knowledge of being and becoming available.

Of course I had encountered Buddhism before, in the US when I was searching for a spiritual path. But I had rejected it because it was clear that the versions of Buddhism available (Zen and Mahāyana) were several generations removed from the original teaching. I decided to take another look. I decided to travel to Thailand and learn Buddha's teaching from native teachers of the Theravāda lineage, the branch of Buddhism closest to the original teachings.

I traveled to Thailand with my partner but was not happy with what I saw. There was tremendous encroachment of modern values and lifestyle on Buddhist society, and the temples and monks were degenerating. By chance I contacted a Buddhist musician in Sri Lanka, and he invited us to tour some of the holy places there.

We left for Colombo on Christmas day of 2012. After three months in a rental house in Negombo, exploring the culture and temples, we could understand that the best and most traditional monasteries were in the highlands, far away from the development around Colombo. So we decided to leave Negombo and explore the upcountry.

This *Journal* covers my experience as a Sri Lankan Buddhist Upāsaka from that time until my ordination as a Theravāda monk. Unfortunately my partner decided to leave in late June, giving up on his second attempt to become a monk. But I didn't quit, and this is the inside story of my six-month transformation into a Buddhist monk.



Monastery Entrance

April 2-3—Forest Meditation Monastery

We started out thinking we were going to rent a cottage in the jungle and meditate. Leaving Negombo, we drove south around Colombo and east on the A4 highway, high into the mountains. Then down off the highway and deep into a jungle valley. But the stone cottage we intended to occupy wasn't ready. The water didn't work, and so many other things were broken.

Then our driver found a monastery through his sister that was open to us. We drove up higher into the central mountain country and visited the place. After meeting the monks and chief incumbent, we were invited to stay. We spent one more night in a hotel, then the next day we stored our stuff with the friend's sister. We brought a minimum of things with us to the monastery—mostly white clothes. I've been living in a monastery as a formal Upāsaka (candidate for Buddhist ordination) ever since.

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The Sri Lankan Forest Monastery tradition is at least 2,000 years old. It was here that the sermons of the Buddha to his monks were recorded in the Theravāda Suttas. Here that the most ancient commentaries and anthologies of the writings of the Buddha's chief disciples were compiled and edited.

We entered the monastery just before noon. The monks were very friendly and extremely helpful getting us settled. We stowed our belongings in a duplex *kuti* and went down to meet the chief incumbent monk. He seemed genuinely interested in us, asking many detailed questions about our spiritual life as our friend translated.

I was overwhelmed with the devotional mood. People think of Buddhism as dry and impersonal, but the deep mood of meditation brings out the love in everyone's heart. I spent the afternoon in a mood of deep relief and gratitude for being in association with such nice monks.



Cultivated Hills behind the Monastery



Terraced Rice Paddies Near the Monastery

April 4—Monastery Life

The Sri Lanka Forest Monastery tradition includes a lot of meditation. We get up at 3:30 AM, then prayers and an hour of sitting from 4 to 5. At 5:30 we take hot cream of rice soup with jaggery, followed by chanting. 6:30 is breakfast served by volunteers from the temple congregation: local-grown red rice, curry, green beans and bitter chutney with hot and spicy onions. Hot and cold water are served, along with a spittoon for cleaning hands, mouth and plate. Then from 7:30–8:30 it's right back on the cushion. 8:30 is hot tea and sweets, and then another optional hour meditation session. We opted for a bracing bath in a mountain stream with one of the monks. Not exactly Club Med, but we aren't here for sense enjoyment.

The Āranya Bhāvana monastery is high in the mountains, back in a beautiful green valley, terraced with neat organic farms and gardens. Many of the local people are lay disciples of the monastery's tradition, and come

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regularly to serve and meditate. The monastery is simple, but very clean and neat. Most of the buildings are about 30 years old.

I can't help feeling almost giddy with joy at being back in authentic spiritual community. I missed the life of a monk. Even though the life of a forest monk is austere, it holds deep esoteric pleasure for the sincere practitioner. It's definitely an acquired taste, cultivated over years of careful study and dedicated practice. The strict daily routine is surprisingly not mind-numbing, but mind-freeing.

Today at lunch we were privileged to witness a beautiful ceremony where one of the local families gave food, robes and other gifts to the monks. I was amazed at the deep devotion. Westerners think that Buddhism is dry and somewhat impersonal, but the devotion exchanged between the simple village people and the monks was profoundly touching.

What we saw today is a level of Buddhist culture and practice rarely seen by westerners, and never seen at all in the west. Western Buddhism seems too slick, packaged and intellectual. It does not reflect the practice of native Buddhists in their home countries. It cannot reach the depth of practice, either devotional or meditative, that we see every day in our simple mountain monastery.

Today I saw more devotion in a Buddhist temple than I ever saw in any group of so-called 'devotees'. Only people with developed consciousness can live on this level of beauty. Only people with much reduced ego can even see it; others will miss it, even though it is happening right in front of their eyes.

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April 5—Heart of Devotion

Last night the Chief Incumbent monk came to our evening meditation. Mahā-thero may have come to check us out, or to help bring us up because one of the older *Upāsakas* had fallen asleep during meditation in the morning. So much here is mysterious, but right, because it is done according to consciousness and compassion.

Almost at once the level of consciousness went very high. I had visions of three beautiful red jewels with sparkling, flashing lights. This led to what I call ‘the upper room’: a place very high up in the cranium where it is possible to experience superconsciousness. We felt wonderful afterward. At night I had dreams of devotion and goddesses.

How ironic it is that I would experience real devotion only among the Buddhists, and never with the Hindu ‘devotees’. The next morning I am still high, happy without any reason. Resting after morning meditation, I went exterior and was looking around at the pretty scenes of the countryside, seeing without eyes.

Buddhism in the west is distorted, crippled, walking with crutches. It’s missing an eye. There is no proper teaching of Dependent Origination, emptiness or no-self, no devotion. It’s all fabrication, just posturing, “I’m cool, I am a Buddhist.” Subtle egotism, covered atheism, missing the real meaning.

I have one friend, a prominent author and psychotherapist, who meditates every winter at Suann Mokkh in Thailand. After more than 20 years of meditation, he still has not resolved his childhood emotional issues. The best he can come up with is “My suffering is a gift, a lesson to be cherished.” And actually he didn’t realize that himself, it was given by a Catholic priest. That view is perfectly Catholic. And he wonders why I don’t buy it.

I want to ask him, “*Whose* suffering? *Whose* lesson? *Who* is cherishing?” He has completely missed the main point of Buddhism: emptiness, no-mind, no-self. I got farther, let go of more suffering in two weeks of meditation alone on a beach in Thailand than he did in twenty years of meditation at

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a famous monastery. I was able to let go of suffering by realizing that the self that was suffering is false—just a fabrication.

The secret is Right View. Right View is when our model of reality is in tune with nature, with Dhamma. There are millions of wrong views, but only one right view: that everything is phenomena, there is no such thing as a self. If you can accept this view, then there is no more suffering. If you want to struggle against it, fight to maintain your false ego, then as long as you do, you will be stuck with your suffering.

So many people in the west claim to be Buddhists, but they are just Catholics, holding on to their suffering in the name of Buddha. One famous so-called Buddhist teacher said, “Be gentle with your pain.” Which buddha is that? The Buddha I know would say, “Be ruthless with your pain. Dig down to the root of it and dig it up completely.”

“It occasionally happens that, through a lapse of mindfulness, evil and unskilled states arise, memories and thoughts pertaining to the fetters. His mindfulness is aroused only slowly, but then he soon **abandons** that state, **drives it out, abolishes** it, puts an **end** to it. Just as if, monks, a man were to let fall two or three drops of water into an iron pot that had been heated all day, those few drops would soon be **wiped out** and **vanish** — in the same way it occasionally happens to a monk living and practicing like this... but he soon puts an **end** to it.”

— *Dukkhadhamma Sutta*

In other words, a Buddhist should not tolerate or coddle the causes of suffering—what to speak of cherish them or be gentle to them—but work hard to wipe them out thoroughly until nothing is left.

This perfectly explains why we left the west and traveled to countries where original Buddhism is still practiced. It also explains why we waited, investigating various lineages and monasteries, rejecting several opportunities until we found what we wanted. That is why we made the extra effort to penetrate deep into the back-country Buddhist culture until we found one where the old forms are still practiced in the old mood.

The original taste of Buddhism is relentless meditation on emptiness, non-becoming and no-self, mixed with devotion and kindness to all beings. No other religion is so kind, so free from aggression. As a result, Buddhism has

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been mistreated by other cultures and religions. At present, this manifests as the distorted Buddhism preached in the west.

“Monks, these two slander the Tathagata. Which two? He who explains what was not said or spoken by the Tathagata as said or spoken by the Tathagata. And he who explains what was said or spoken by the Tathagata as not said or spoken by the Tathagata. These are two who slander the Tathagata.” — *Abhasita Sutta*





The Tomb of the Founder of the Monastery

April 6—The White Room

Last night we were summoned to the Chief Incumbent Monk's office. There we met a congregation member from Kandy, a teacher who speaks very good English. He was asked to provide guidance for us to learn Sinhala and Pali. This was an answer to a prayer. He also wants experience conversing in English with a native speaker, to help him present the Buddha's original teaching in English. So we will work together with him ongoing.

Getting used to the schedule, I awoke at 3:30 feeling refreshed and alive. I went to the meditation hall early and arranged my seat. My legs are stretching out now, and I can sit firmly for about 45 minutes.

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During last night's meditation, some tension at the top of my spine snapped. This morning I felt very clear and balanced, fresh and innocent. As I sat, I reviewed my dreams, which have become very lucid. I could easily see the falsity of the dream egos, and also that this waking false ego is just another type of dream consciousness. We tell ourselves, "I am this, I am that." But these are just stories to justify our ignorance and desires. This fabricated ego is the cause of all suffering.

In the dream state, our ego is childlike, innocent, absorbed in experiencing the dream. In waking state our ego is more calculated. Both however are false, without a shred of real being. Egos come and go like ripples of thought in the pond of awareness. They are only fabrications, temporary and insubstantial. Space, emptiness and awareness are real being: eternal, unconditioned and changeless.

I quickly concentrated my mind on my breath and became aware of the sign, a small spot of light in my inner vision. Maintaining concentration, it gradually transformed into the countersign, a cool moonlike luminescence described in the commentaries on Buddha's *Ānāpānasati-Sutta*. Once concentration on the countersign was established, I began to meditate on being.

False ego is inauthentic being. In other words, it's a lie. As soon as false ego arises, purity is lost and we are thrown into the world of suffering. False ego is meaningful only in relation with the world, just as money is valuable only in exchange. Money sitting in a strongbox or bank account is meaningless, without value. Similarly, false ego is useless and meaningless in our inner world.

I went up and up, leaving behind the dross of false identity related to the world. To myself, I am only awareness, a space where perceptions of phenomena show up. I kept shedding false ego with each breath, until I was not. **This** is authentic being, pure awareness, awakening.

Imagine a white room, completely empty and featureless, spherical in shape, windowless and pure. Entering that room, one floats effortlessly in perfect seclusion. There is no contact with matter or false ego. Mind is left far behind; time is simply irrelevant.

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The walls of that room are lit uniformly, as if self-effulgent from within. They gradually become brighter and brighter, until it is as if one were inside the sun. Yet the light is cool, tranquil.

One emerges from this meditation refreshed, childlike, purified. There is no trace of heaviness or darkness. The mind is unconditioned, supple, optimistic without any expectation, passion or attachment. One feels light, and happy with no immediate cause.

After the closing prayers and *sūtras*, we emerge into predawn darkness more alive, aware and awake. There is no need for speech as we float down the monastery stairs to the kitchen, where we gather for rice soup and jaggery. Another day at the Forest Monastery has begun.

This morning we were formally accepted—as formal as anything is around here—by the Chief Incumbent monk as *Upāsakas*. He came himself to our humble quarters to give us the traditional white scarves and show us how to wear them. Later on the way to breakfast, as we lined up behind the monks he flashed a smile of pure joyful approval and encouragement upon us. Somehow in our bumbling but sincere way we have pleased him, and I was overwhelmed with satisfaction. Getting approval from a *sādhu* of his stature really means something.

Later while taking bath and shaving our heads in the mountain spring, I reflect on how the last few days we have been so completely taken care of. Since leaving Europe for Thailand and later coming to Sri Lanka, we have been searching for a monastic community. We looked into several interesting ones but ultimately rejected them because of being too commercial, rule-bound or proselytizing. We found this forest monastery through the recommendation of a friend of a friend’s sister, who happens to be a congregational member here.

You’ll notice I don’t identify the exact name, lineage or location of the monastery. Frankly, it’s to keep curious tourists from ruining it. Some monasteries catering to westerners are run like hotels, with regular two-week retreats. You can even pay in dollars or euros. We don’t want anything to do with them. Nor do we want anyone but serious *sādhakas*

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showing up here. To find this place and establish relations with these people, you have to have developed a certain kind of sincerity, and a large amount of good *kamma*. Authentic Buddhism: apply within.

The first couple of days especially we were just about useless, having moved from a familiar setting to an unknown new place, city to back country, hot low seaside to cool mountain, relative independence to complete dependence on a spiritual community, laid-back lifestyle to intense *sādhana*. That's a lot of change, and we had to tolerate the inevitable confusion, disorientation and even exhaustion that went with it.

But it was also full of wonder, like the fresh world of a young child. Now that we are getting familiar with the temple routine and chants, getting to know the monks and the congregation, our minds are beginning to get over the culture shock and settle down. There are still many miracles, small and large, every day.

Today at lunch there was a *dāna* ceremony, where a congregational family cooks and serves lunch to the monks. Before taking the offerings, the monks teach from the *sūtras* and *vināya*. There was a beautiful chant of which we understood hardly a word, but the emotional and spiritual effects were astonishing.

Afterwards I was feeling so much joy and gratitude, as if my heart has come home. Of course, gradually we will learn all the prayers and chants. Maybe we will even be ordained as monks. That is still far off, but finally a real possibility. This sacred life is so right. Once we get a little more accustomed to the routine and practices, I can't imagine wanting to live any other way.

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Monks Preparing for Sutta Chanting

April 6-7—The Dhamma Game

We are afflicted with a disease—a disease of consciousness. The chief symptom of this disease is suffering. The chief cause among many other causes of this disease is the false ego: the construct of “I am.” The Buddha is the kind physician who gets us to accept the treatment and take the medicine.

When I was 10 years old I had severe tonsillitis, and had to get them removed. The family doctor, a crafty old Armenian, didn’t tell me “Now I am going to strap on this gas mask, give you ether and knock you out, prop open your mouth and cut out your tonsils.” That would have scared me to death! No, he told me, “We’re going to play a game. I’ll blindfold you and you blow up a balloon. After that you can have **all the ice cream you want** for three days.”

I could certainly relate to that! The point is, somehow or other he got me to accept the treatment, so my disease was cured. We are in a similar situation. If the Buddha tells us, “Now just relax, I am going to cut out your false ego, your phony sense of self,” we’ll run away as fast as possible. So he creates a game called “Dhamma.” When we play the Dhamma game, somehow or other we do the things needed to treat our disease and become free from suffering.

In other words, it is not important whether the teaching of the Buddha is ‘true’ in any other sense than practical—it may be a fabrication—but if we follow it, we get the result. The Buddha did not try to establish a comprehensive philosophical or metaphysical system; indeed, he avoided all questions of an absolute or theoretical nature and concentrated on the Noble Eightfold Path, the method of treatment for our disease of suffering.

The disease of suffering is unique to human beings. Certainly other beings feel pain, but they deal with it in the present. Only humans anticipate future pain and cling to past pain, and certainly only humans are capable of experiencing suffering from such intangibles as a loss of social status or reputation. Pain is inevitable, but it does not have to lead to suffering, because suffering is a quality of false ego.

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But our false ego is our dearest possession! How can we be convinced to part with it? This is the Buddha's great genius: he doesn't even try to convince us. Instead he says,

"Now, Kalamas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness' — then you should enter & remain in them."

— *Kalama Sutta*

In other words, "Go ahead, try it out. If you like it, keep it—it's yours. If not? Fine, no problem." There is no high-pressure sales talk. But you do have to perform the experiment. And if you do, of course you will find that it works. The Buddha knows perfectly well what he is doing.

The problem today is that there is so much false Buddhism—other teachings masquerading as the teaching of the Buddha. Western philosophy or mundane psychology expressed in faux-Buddhist terms is far from the original teaching of the Buddha. In fact, most of what is presented in the west as Buddhism is of that quality. That is why I initially avoided Buddhism and became a follower of the *Vedas*.

But real Buddhism works. The main difficulty is weeding it out from all the imitations.

Another miracle. Tonight in meditation I was stuck in thinking-aboutness. I was in the mud because I was having trouble with cramping in my thighs. It was so bad I had to sit with my legs straight out in front. Then Mahā-thero showed up, as he always seems to do when we need a lift, silently padding into the meditation hall.

As soon as he sat down I felt him probing, challenging me to do better, to see how high I could go. Meditation as a sport. I found myself responding, going into the first two *jhānas* in a few seconds and reaching for the third.

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After a supernova blast of third-*jhāna* bliss that nearly knocked me into the next universe, I found myself as high as I have ever been.



Suddenly the abyss of the fourth *jhāna* loomed before me. Beyond existence and nonexistence, perception and non-perception, the fourth has long been known as the ultimate spiritual challenge before complete nirvana. I was able to dip my metaphorical toe into it, but it seemed like only for a few seconds. I found myself back on the cushion, sore legs and all, and Mahā-thero was gone, soundlessly evaporated into the night.

Monks have been known to get stuck at the third *jhāna* for lifetimes. In the Thai forest tradition this is known as “sitting on a hundred-foot pole.” It’s easy to see how someone could get attached to the bliss of infinite space and unlimited consciousness. It’s so high, there is so much bliss and knowledge, and the next step is absolute nothingness.

There’s no cure for it other than taking the jump into emptiness. Hopefully with Mahā-thero to challenge me, I can avoid the trap and attain complete enlightenment in this lifetime.

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Monastery Ashram Porch

April 8—Crazy Like a Fox

Sit down. Focus your mind. Breathe in, breathe out. When the mind jumps into the future, into the past, into thoughts or dreams, gently bring your attention back to the breath. There, you're in meditation. Rinse and repeat until you reach Arahanthood.

Some tips: sit erect and cross-legged; don't slouch. Lotus posture is best, if you can maintain it without too much discomfort. You can watch the breath in the belly, in the chest or at the tip of the nose. Breathe slowly, evenly—all the way in and all the way out. After some training, this meditative breathing will become automatic, effortless and continuous. Don't overeat or oversleep. Stay interested in your experience and your progress.

When a small spot of light appears, watch it. When it becomes steady, your concentration is improving. Keep training and it will gradually grow into a softly glowing moon, then a bright but cooling sun as your concentration improves more and more.

This simple technique is exactly the same one the Buddha used to attain complete enlightenment. It still works. We started here in the Forest Monastery with three hour-long meditation sessions, beginning at 4 AM. Gradually we increased to five sessions. We're aiming for eight.

When I had my first powerful enlightenment experience in 1984, I had been meditating up to 18 hours a day for several weeks. What really matters is the quality, not the quantity of practice; but in my experience the mind does not become steady without sustained discipline and intensive training.

Once concentration is attained, you will be surprised how happy you become. That natural happiness was always there within you, but the scattered mind prevented you from feeling it. The more you become absorbed in concentration, the happier you will feel. Many desires will subside, and deep insights will arise spontaneously. You'll read the Buddha's words and instead of esoteric they will seem obvious.

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I'm at the point in my life where I don't want anything else. Actually everything else besides deep meditation is just suffering. Why bother?



Retreat Center Gardens

We live in a small forest meditation monastery, a branch of a Buddhist organization based in Colombo founded by a great Buddhist scholar. It cannot be found on any map, or on the Internet. Visits are by personal reference, invitation-only. There are about a dozen monks here, plus half a dozen male *Upāsakas* (novices) including ourselves. There are also some females; but since I don't need to know anything about them, I don't.

The monastery is located in the mountains near the top of a small, verdant valley at about 1,000 meters altitude, next to a large nature preserve. The climate is temperate and springlike, with warm days and cool nights, year-round. There is abundant wildlife including wild boar, deer, peacocks and many exotic songbirds. Water is abundant, and so pure we drink the groundwater with only a little filtering. Medicinal herbs and spices like *nīm*, betel, eucalyptus, turmeric and cinnamon grow wild everywhere, as do wildflowers; the air is redolent with their aromas. The natural spring where we bathe is surrounded by a fragrant bamboo forest.

There are many small family farms, terraced into the hillsides. Most of our food is grown locally, organic and in season. It is cooked slowly in iron pots over hardwood coals by local lay disciples, then offered with love and devotion to the monks. We eat like kings (but only once a day). There are

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no arguments or religious politics, believe it or not. The training schedule is flexible and largely self-determined. Everyone is consistently sincere, polite, helpful and affectionate. The monks are warm, devoted and very wise. Their chanting is out of this world.

Where is this place? I'm not telling. You will have to discover it for yourself. But I will give you a hint: it can anyplace where the Buddha's original teachings are actually followed. You need enough good *kamma* and *mettā* to deserve to live in a place like this.

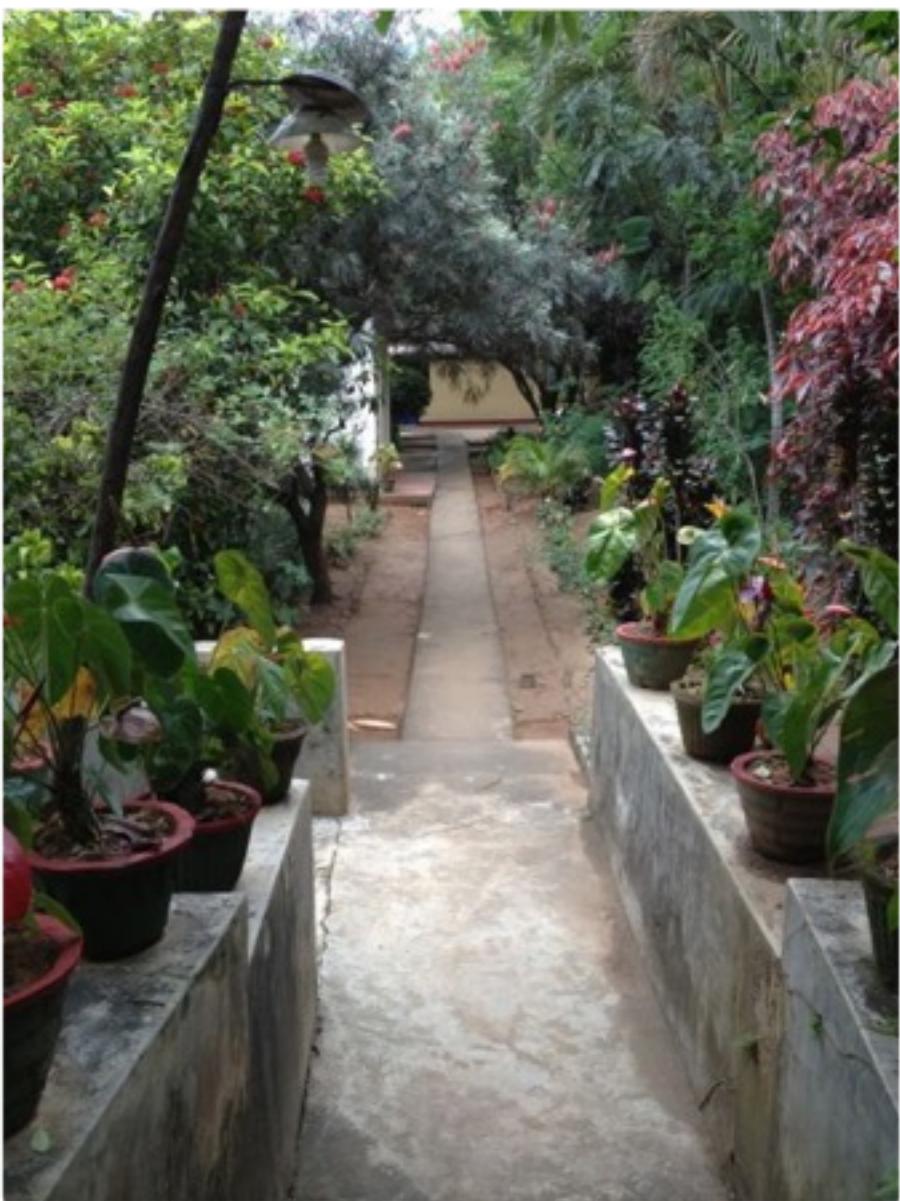
Some people think we are crazy to have given up everything and searched all over the world until we found this place. Actually, we are crazy.

Crazy like a fox.



Meditation Hall

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Meditation Path

April 10—Comforting Theories or Effective Methods

In the beginning of our life in the womb, there is no difference between our body and the body of our mother. We live through the mother, and whatever she experiences, we also experience. Let's call that state zero.

At the time of birth the umbilical cord linking our body with the mother is severed, and we must begin to breathe on our own. We then become aware of ourselves as a separate entity. Let's call this state one.

Soon we become aware of the fact that our mother is another being like ourselves. So our awareness expands to two. Then we become aware of the father—three. If there are any siblings, then four, five and so on.

As time goes on we become aware of the whole world with its myriad of similar and dissimilar beings, complex relationships, cause and effect. As we grow and mature, we become responsible for so many things. And of course, we become acutely aware that all this differentiation brings suffering.

Therefore as Freud analyzed, we long for the simple days of the womb when there was no differentiation between ourselves and the world. This fact accounts for so much of human nature and behavior.

We project our early experience on the world and use it as a pattern to try to understand and simplify it. For example, many people have the odd habit of inventing improbable and mostly unprovable theories of how things began. These theories all share the pattern of one thing becoming many. Others hear these fanciful theories and believe in them, often without a shred of empirical proof.

How can such irrational behavior be so common? Such theories appeal to us because they are an outgrowth of our early-life experience and a dramatization of our urge to return to the undifferentiated state of the womb.

That doesn't mean they have any truth or validity.

If we look at our actual experience and the historical record, we find that the world has always been a complicated, confusing, disorderly place, hard

to understand and impossible to control. Beautiful fantasies of implicate order notwithstanding, it is hard to find peace and mastery in life.

The Buddha does not present us with reassuring cosmological theories based on comforting analogues of our early experience. Instead, he tells us the truth: the world has always been like this, and it will always be like this. If we want peace and contentment, freedom from suffering, it is up to us to learn how to deal with it.

Differentiation alone is not the cause of our suffering; rather, it is the misconception that enjoying sense objects will give us relief. Sense enjoyment creates *kamma* that simply results in further suffering. People do so many troublesome things in pursuit of sense enjoyment. For example, they work very hard in exploitative companies to be able to afford nice material things.

But in the end such over-endeavor simply blunts our intelligence, and wastes our time and energy. The work meant to reduce our suffering simply multiplies it instead. We find ourselves worrying over fear-inducing news stories instead of taking intelligent action to mitigate our own legitimate fears and concerns. How foolish!

Fortunately, the Buddha has given us a workable method to overcome the endemic suffering of life. But to overcome suffering we have to be intelligent enough to do more than just read about it or discuss comforting theories of cosmic mother- and father-figures.

No one is going to save us. We must do the work of salvation ourselves. We must sit down and control our minds with determination.

The best process for this is simply concentration on the breath as described in an earlier post. There is more detailed information in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's book *Ānāpānasati* [[link to PDF](#)].



Mountain Peak Above Monastery

April 11–The Buddha's New Clothes

The Buddha seems to be the greatest Master who ever lived. He went beyond all comforting fallacies, beyond all the political phoniness of religion, to the real truth. He says, “You are suffering, and there is no god or *mantra* that is going to save you. There is no philosophy, no prayer, no religion that can make any difference. You are living surrounded by fabrications intended to save you from suffering, but in fact they are the cause of your suffering. Use my method to come out of your fabrications, and when you have come out, give up my method too and just stand naked.”

We do not like to hear this, and that is why in the modern world there are many phony imitation Buddhists. They want to make Buddhism into

another religion. But the Buddha's teaching is not a religion; in fact it is the very antithesis of religion. Ordinary religion means to take someone else's truth and pretend it is yours. The Buddha's teaching is to throw all such pretensions and live from pure awareness. It is very rare that someone has the courage to do this.

Religion has been partners with government for a very long time. The government does not want people thinking for themselves and acting on their own self-determination; they want obedient robots. The government wants to train people as workers and soldiers—disposable units, replaceable parts for the machine of society: human resources.

Government has long utilized religion and education as tools to control people's minds. They want to anesthetize people, so they concoct comforting stories about all-powerful gods who can only be appeased by thinking and acting in a certain way—which just happens to be the way the government wants you to act. These days we hear similar stories about an all-powerful conspiracy designed to oppress and control people. Such stories have exactly the same purpose as the old religions.

It is no coincidence that religious organizations and governments are full of neurotics, sociopaths, control freaks, pedophiles and so on—they are designed that way. School is also designed to stop people from discovering themselves. Researchers like John Taylor Gatto have documented this extensively.

It is no coincidence that most teachers are stupid losers, and educational administrators are even stupider. That is part of the design, intended to break people's spirit by making them prisoners of an arbitrary, nonsensical system. After twelve years of being frustrated by highly trained idiots, people give up seeking their own purposes and can be easily controlled.

So-called civilization is really just deliberate, organized insanity.

People seeking truth, sanity and self-realization drop out, develop their autonomy and independence as far as possible. They stop believing in the lies and half-truths they were told in school, and start looking for truth in their own experience. They also research the records left behind by those who have searched for truth before them.

The Buddha's original teaching in the Theravāda Suttas is the most important of these records, because he was the most radical in dropping all preconceptions. He even insisted that, once you get the benefit of his method, you also drop his method and continue just on your own awareness, your own intelligence. No other spiritual path offers us such freedom.

In fact for Buddha, freedom is God. He worships freedom to such an extent that he even frees you from the process of liberation. No other spiritual path is so radical, so liberal. Most others give some small benefit, but then try to make you their slave forever. No so the Buddha.

But he also demands that we give up all our comforting illusions, and that is not so easy for most people to do. Hence most so-called Buddhists try to have their cake and eat it too, by making Buddhism into another religion. The government may have a hand in that too, since it certainly is in their interest. So we see many phony groups teaching something they call 'Buddhism', but is really closer to Christianity, with Buddha as both Christ and God.

A real Master goes beyond all control mechanisms and all stories that lead to dependence on others. He even goes beyond his own stories and rationalizations to the naked truth. This is not easy, but it gives the ultimate in freedom.

Such a Master seems like a madman to an ordinary person. He lives without a safety net of comforting, sleep-inducing beliefs. He is independent to the point of not even believing in his own stories. He needs no authority to see the truth. He looks reality square in the eye, without flinching. He acts without thinking, from his deep intuitive wisdom, with total energy.

Religious people hate real self-realized Masters. Many self-realized people have been persecuted through history, and it is always by the religious people. If someone becomes authentically self-realized, they will be rejected by religion because they will not follow its rules. Why? The rules are pretensions, imitation saintliness. Real saints are not bound by them,

cannot be bound, because they are authentic. That is why authentic holy men are always in trouble with religion.

Religion suppresses the authentic being, controls the original impulse, and the result is phony saintliness. Actual saints find the source of being in awareness, and see the same Buddhahood in others. They are good without trying to be good, holy without having to follow rules in some old book or gain approval from others. Their Buddhahood is simply in being themselves, and that is the most revolutionary thing in the world.



Sand Path for Walking Meditation

April 12—Beautiful Buddha

The ideas of the Buddha are beautiful; in fact they are the most beautiful ideas in the whole world. They are beautiful in the way a powerful work of

art is beautiful—beautiful in conception, beautiful in execution, beautiful in the deep experience of their meaning.

Great art needs some preparation to appreciate fully. An ancient temple, a symphony of Dvorak, a painting by Dali, a book by Vyāsa requires some background, some education—otherwise its language and symbolism will be incomprehensible, and you will miss its meaning and beauty.

It helps to be an artist yourself. The experience of creating beauty helps you appreciate it more. You can understand how much inspiration, hard work and discipline goes into a masterwork of any kind.

In my case, I went to conservatory for musical composition. I studied the great composers, played and conducted their works, even wrote and recorded symphonies and other works of my own. Later on I became a professional writer in the computer software field. I read many great writers to learn how to express myself clearly. And of course, software is an art with a beauty all its own.

Finally, I spent many years as a student of a Vedic spiritual path. And not just an ordinary student; I went to the roots of the tradition in India. I was a practicing mystic, I personally realized many of the higher stages of the path. I was a *guru*, I wrote many complicated books on deep philosophical subjects, I had many disciples and followers.

And those ideas are beautiful, but I gave them all up when I came to understand and appreciate the teaching of the Buddha.

The Buddha's original teaching is simply incomparable. Buddha's teaching is so sophisticated, so powerful it can destroy religion; it can destroy the whole universe, it can destroy even God. And behind that power are a simplicity and elegance of concept, a skill in execution and a depth of taste and beauty that are simply unequalled.

Buddha makes us see that we are tremendously powerful beings; so powerful, we can even create universes. We can become anything, even gods. But we pay a price for our becoming: we suffer. Even great gods are subject to aging, death and degradation. The proof is that we ourselves used to be gods, and now we are just ordinary human beings.

The only escape from suffering is to end becoming. When we realize the intimate connection between becoming and suffering, we regain the keys to our freedom and the power over our destiny.

All the things we experience, including ourselves, the universe and even god, are the result of stories that we concoct to explain our experience to ourselves and others. These stories are fabrications—they are unreal, made up. Yet they have real power to affect our being and experience, because they define the modes of consciousness through which we contact the world.

Changing our stories changes our consciousness, which changes our experience, which is functionally indistinguishable from changing the world.

Has the light in your head come on yet?

Strangely, it seems to me, most people who profess to be Buddhists have not yet made the connection between sitting on a mat and watching their breathing, and creating worlds for themselves and others to live in. To me, the connection is obvious, direct and immediate. Once you truly understand Dependent Origination (the Buddha's explanation of how *kamma* works) it is but a short step to being able to change your *kamma* in any way you desire—including eliminating it completely, a unique phenomenon which is known as complete enlightenment.

As far as I am aware, there is no teaching of comparable power, beauty and sophistication in any other system. Like the Buddha himself, his teaching is unequalled in all the world. But you have to seek it out yourself. No born-again Buddhist is going to come knocking at your door to convert you. Buddhism is not like any other religion. It is the only religion that has never used force to make converts. In fact, it is not a religion at all. But that's a topic for another day.

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An Upāsaka Walks Past the Meditation Hall

April 12 – Die Now, Avoid the Rush

The Buddha reveals some very interesting insights about universal history in the Suttas. There are times when the universe contracts, and beings go out of gross material manifestation into subtle realms of existence. There we lived just like gods for immense periods of time.

Then when a new period of universal expansion begins, gradually beings take birth in new universes as Brahmās, or creator gods. Others follow, forgetting their previous existence and becoming dependent demigods in the new universes. This process is described elaborately in Vedic scriptures such as *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. But the Buddha's description gives the inside story:

“Thereupon the being who re-arose there first thinks to himself: ‘I am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Universal Seer, the Wielder of Power, the Lord, the Maker and Creator, the Supreme Being, the Ordainer, the Almighty, the Father of all that are and are to be. And these beings have been created by me. What is the reason? Because first I made the wish: “Oh, that other beings might come to this place!” And after I made this resolution, now these beings have come.’

“And the beings who re-arose there after him also think: ‘This must be Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Universal Seer, the Wielder of Power, the Lord, the Maker and Creator, the Supreme Being, the Ordainer, the Almighty, the Father of all that are and are to be. And we have been created by him. What is the reason? Because we see that he was here first, and we appeared here after him’.”

— *Brahmajāla Sutta*

The beings gradually create lower and coarser embodiments. This also goes on for a very long time, during which beings go up and down the scale of existence within the universe. Each time they take birth, they forget their previous embodiments, as if each birth were their first. Consequently they mistake the temporary process of becoming a particular type of embodiment with their real existence, and fall into the trap of becoming again and again.

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After a long, long time of such illusory existences, the time for universal contraction comes again. The myriad beings withdraw from gross manifestation into the subtle levels of existence, and the cycle of becoming and non-becoming, creation and annihilation begins all over again.

It appears that at the present time the universe is still expanding. At least on this planet, the beings appear to be fascinated with becoming. They play with all kinds of temporary, illusory identities and kinds of being. The general agreement seems to be that becoming is a good thing, and that non-becoming is bad.

The time will come when that will change. The beings, having experienced enough of becoming, will shift their interest to non-becoming instead. The agreement will gradually shift to taking more subtle embodiments, rejecting gross existence for more refined states of being. The current rush to becoming will change to a rush for non-becoming. Thus both becoming and non-becoming are part of the great dance of existence; they are just different parts of the cycle of universal expansion and contraction.

So while it is certainly true that taking birth as a subtle being in the heavenly worlds is better than birth as a human being or animal, such subtle existence is part of the same trap.

“What is the origination of stress? The craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there — i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming. This is called the origination of stress.” — *Sammāditthi Sutta*

While non-becoming may move us higher on the scale of existence, it is still a cause of suffering. Cessation of suffering occurs when we let go of the craving for both being and non-being, relinquish all processes of becoming that begin from desire. And we can accomplish this through the eightfold path given by the Buddha.

So in the present mania for becoming that is the currently agreed-upon style of being in this universe, one who wishes to move higher on the scale of being is often censured for being out of agreement with the majority of beings. Anyone who begins the search for spiritual truth experiences this.

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But some time in the future, this will change. The majority of beings will become interested in non-being, and anyone who clings to becoming will be out of agreement, out of fashion, out of style.

But is there really any difference between pursuing becoming or non-becoming? Non-becoming is just another type of becoming, only aiming at more refined states of existence. The key insight of the Buddha was to move beyond becoming entirely; to drop the process of becoming and also non-becoming by eliminating craving or desire:

“And what is the cessation of stress? The remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving. This is called the cessation of stress.

“And what is the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress? Just this very noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is called the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress.

“Now, when a disciple of the noble ones discerns stress, the origination of stress, the cessation of stress, and the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress in this way, when — having entirely abandoned passion-obsession, having abolished aversion-obsession, having uprooted the view-&-conceit obsession ‘I am’; having abandoned ignorance & given rise to clear knowing — he has put an end to suffering & stress right in the here-&-now, it is to this extent, too, that a disciple of the noble ones is a person of right view... who has arrived at this true Dhamma.” —*Sammaditthi Sutta*

So dropping the obsession ‘I am’—the compulsive formation of false ego leading to becoming in all its forms—leads to the complete, remainderless destruction of suffering. We accomplish this by meditation based on right view: the very understanding we are discussing and trying to impart in these essays.

From our present point of view, this may seem like a kind of death, and it is indeed the death of the false ego. We have been engaged in the process of becoming for so long, we have forgotten our original state of being as pure objectless awareness, beyond all limitations of time and space. The

Buddha's teaching helps to remind us of our real nature and give up the compulsive becoming that is the cause of suffering.



April 13 – The Art of Buddhism

The process of attaining enlightenment can be compared to a great artist giving a concert. First all the preliminary conditions must be right: he must study and practice for many years to master his art and instrument. The hall must be beautiful, with perfect sound. The audience must be present, attentive and appreciative.

Then once all the conditions are in place, the master artist can perform at the peak of his skill. Everyone will enjoy the fine performance. Finally after the concert is complete, everyone applauds appreciatively, the artist picks up his check, changes out of his tux and goes home.

Similarly in spiritual life, the preliminary conditions must be right. One must be in the right environment, a supportive spiritual community. One must have the necessary knowledge and skills, a competent teacher and stock of good *kamma*. Only then can the practice of meditation be successful. Finally once you attain the far shore of enlightenment, the raft must be dismantled and you can walk away, a free being. But none of this can happen if you attempt to perform the stages of the process out of order.

In the Buddha's original teaching there are three stages: preliminary, cultivation and completion. In the preliminary stage one acquires the necessary karmic merit and other qualifications. The cultivation stage is intensive practice of meditation. In the completion stage one attains final enlightenment and transcends even the path of Buddha-dharma.

We have been very critical of Buddhism in the west, and now with this structure of understanding we can make it clear exactly why. People are attempting to perform meditation (*Vipassana* or *Ānāpānasati*), the cultivation stage, without the necessary preliminary preparation. And they are even attempting completion-stage practices, such as Zen and Tantra, without mastering either the preliminary or cultivation stages.

Naturally, such unsupported practice fails to yield the fruit of enlightenment. And it leads to unnecessary misunderstanding, distortion and denigration of the Buddha and his teaching. Thus most people's practice leads at best to superficial benefits instead of complete enlightenment. Surprisingly, even monks with good training who teach in the west seem reluctant to address these structural problems.

Now let us examine the stages of the path in more detail.

In the preliminary stage you acquire the background knowledge and skills required for effective meditation practice. Ideally you should have a broad overview of the Suttas, especially those dealing with the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Noble Path and Dependent Origination. You should have a clear understanding of the doctrines of *anattā* (no-self) and *śūnyatā* (emptiness). You should have a relationship with a Buddhist community and a teacher who can clarify your questions. You should perform

ceremonies such as *dāna* (giving in charity to monks), making offerings, chanting the prayers and Suttas, making pilgrimage to sacred sites, and so on.

Skimping on the preliminary qualifications is the most common cause of failure in meditation practice. On the other hand, you should not remain stuck in the preliminary stage. The preliminary stage should lead naturally to the stage of practice, where you perform intensive meditation according to the Buddha's teaching of *Vipassana* or *Ānāpānasati*. These are the same methods the Buddha himself used to attain enlightenment.

Many temples and monasteries specialize in the preliminary, practice or completion-stage teachings. You may have to move from one temple or teacher to another as you advance. It is rare these days to find a temple or community that can support the entire path.

You should expect to practice meditation for some years before being ready for complete enlightenment. You should be comfortable with extended periods of meditation, practicing in seclusion until you are stable in the *jhānas* (stages of concentration). After this practice, enlightenment will happen when the time is right. Either you will meet a completion-stage Master, or it will occur spontaneously.

You must not enter the completion stage prematurely. Of course everyone wants to attain enlightenment, but that does not mean that you can fake it. If the concert musician we used as an example above were to attempt to perform without proper practice, if the stage was not set properly or the instrument was out of tune, the performance would be a failure.

Similarly, if you try to attain the highest enlightenment without proper preparation, the only result will be an embarrassing failure, a waste of time. Zen and Tantra are completion-stage practices for those who have successfully crossed the river of becoming, have attained the goal and whose need is to dismantle the raft. If you attempt them prematurely, the only result will be that you will wreck your chances of actually attaining enlightenment.



View from the Path to the Retreat Center

April 13–Zen Madness

Let's continue our discussion of why western Buddhism doesn't produce results. American culture in particular tends to be shallow and superficial. The image or symbol is taken as good as the thing it represents. That is a result of school conditioning, where value is defined as giving right answers on a test, instead of learning actual practical skills. Americans in particular are affected by symbolic conditioning. Unfortunately, that kind of culture is spreading all over the world now.

The result of applying that superficial approach to learning to Buddhism is disastrous. Instead of actually learning to meditate, people try merely to look and act like Buddhists. They cultivate appearances instead of reality. From our current vantage point in the midst of authentic Buddhist culture,

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the whole thing looks ridiculous, cartoonish. People are selling Buddhism in weekend workshops, making a business out of it, when real Buddhist culture is based on reciprocal giving and total immersion in mindfulness.

No one can walk in off the street and learn Zen in a weekend. Zen is a deep completion-stage practice. It requires so much background and experience that would be very difficult to acquire in the west. Zen assumes a degree of competence in meditation that would be difficult to achieve in a western cultural environment even with good training and years of practice. Authentic Zen requires a whole cultural context that simply doesn't exist in the west.

The idea that someone can actually practice Zen without years of learning, careful training and tough discipline is impossible. People are trying to imitate Bodhidharma without first going through the hardship and discipline required to become a real Zen Master. It is a kind of madness that can only exist in western culture. It's like dressing up for Halloween, where you get to be a policeman or cowboy for a day—only their Halloween is every day.

Everybody in the west needs to sober up and take a long, hard look at what it really takes to become enlightened. It's all too easy to join some charismatic group or follow a popular spiritual leader. But does the group really provide what is required to approach authentic enlightenment? Is the leader giving deep background in the Buddha's original teaching? Or is there merely a rush to attain some artificial social status that is labeled as enlightenment, but is only an external imitation?

History has seen many so-called spiritual schools come and go in the west. So-called enlightened masters create fast-growing organizations with a big media footprint, but can their communities outlast the hype? Is there any Buddhist organization in the west that has lasted more than 20 years? A good test of any spiritual group is whether it is a branch of a well-established community in its home culture. Or is it a new invention, a synthetic cult driven by greed for money and power?

As you can tell, I am very skeptical of western adaptations of traditional eastern spiritual paths. Maybe that's because I have personal experience of

several of them, and have seen how they so often go wrong and fall apart in predictable ways. They catch a popular trend, claim to fill a legitimate spiritual need, grow quickly, then crash and burn spectacularly when their weaknesses are exposed.

Let me share an illustrative anecdote from the early days of my spiritual search. I had known a yoga teacher who gradually began promoting ‘tantra’. During my second trip to India I contacted an authentic school of traditional Bhairava Tantra in Kashmir. Their community was thousands of years old, and had a huge library of Tantric literature.

On my return to the west, I found that the erstwhile yoga teacher had now become a full-time “Tantra Master”. But his “Tantra Workshops” consisted of giving people MDMA (Ecstasy) and having orgies. He knew nothing of authentic Tantra, had never been to India, had no initiation from any real Tantric lineage, didn’t know Sanskrit. In other words, he was a complete fraud, selling drug-saturated orgies in the name of Tantra.

Authentic spiritual teachings are well-rooted in traditional cultures and organizations in their home countries. They are based on stable communities hundreds, if not thousands of years old. They grow slowly, quietly, organically without making headlines. Their leaders stay out of the spotlight, are careful not to court controversy.

Before participating in or joining a spiritual group, make sure you know what you are getting into. Research the original teaching and scriptures. Get familiar with the cultural roots of the tradition. Look into the history of the group, its leadership and their recruiting methods. Find out what people in the ‘old country’ think about the western incarnation of their culture. Their opinions are surprisingly valid, especially in the long run.

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Steps to the Bo Tree Temple

April 13–Happy New Year!

The Sinhala New Year falls on *Mesā-sankrāntī*, the day when the sun enters the Vedic sign of Aries. Vedic astrology uses the actual observed physical location of the stars and planets in the sky. Due to a 2500-year-old translation error, western astrology uses a speculated system where about 23 degrees are added to all the planetary positions. That's why it is so much less accurate and useful than Vedic astrology, Jyotish.

Anyway, it's New Year here in Sri Lanka, a good time to reflect on our progress over the past year. We feel really blessed. Every day brings at least one miraculous, magical incident where we feel overwhelmed by our good fortune, or maybe I should say good *kamma*. Anyway, we must be doing something right, because things are going so well.

A year ago we were in Spain, struggling to understand what went wrong in our previous attempt to teach spiritual life. We had no good association, and it seemed that there was none to be found in that spiritually desolate place. The situation threw us back on our own resources, and that was actually helpful. We got to see that despite their pretensions, very few people are prepared to actually work hard for spiritual advancement and train themselves to reach perfection.

We went deep into a study of leadership, which led to the conclusion that the spiritual lineage we were attempting to teach was fatally flawed. Its structural integrity had been completely breached, such that the failure of our teaching efforts was virtually assured. In one way, it was a relief to know that the disaster we experienced wasn't entirely our own fault.

But in another way, it was burdensome knowledge because it led inexorably to the necessity of overturning all our assumptions and starting all over again to search for a valid spiritual path. I was a very tough realization to swallow at the time, but it led to a very satisfying conclusion because we didn't flinch from the great task set before us. We reviewed the ontological basis of our search for truth, and there we found the integrity and inner strength to press onward.

From a philosophical perspective, we began to see that the *via positiva*, the spiritual path based on belief in a supreme being embodying the fullness

of all existence, inevitably led to certain undesirable consequences. In the context of human society, religion has always encouraged and enabled oppression of the individual justified on moral grounds. It also led to an unhealthy consolidation of power in the hands of an elite whose interests almost always clashed with the well-being of the people.

We also began to see that the ontological function of the absolute positive—the Supreme Personality of Godhead—could be performed just as well, if not better, by the absolute negative: emptiness, nothingness or death. Thus we embarked upon a phenomenological investigation of the *via negativa*, the spiritual path of the negative, best exemplified by the Buddha's original teaching.

This investigation led to our leaving the west and traveling to native Buddhist countries to experience the culture first-hand. I had encountered westernized derivative Buddhism early in my search, and rejected it because it obviously distorted and diluted the original teachings. There is no substitute in spiritual learning for going to the root of the lineage and completely immersing oneself in its culture and practices. That is really the only way to imbibe the essence of any spiritual path.

Thus began a search for an authentic Buddhist community that was also open to westerners like ourselves, with good background in meditation but little experience in Buddhist cultural forms. We went to Thailand first because my partner had been there a decade ago to study martial arts, and was familiar with the culture and language.

However, we had problems with the extreme materialism of modern Thai culture. We often felt as alienated as we had in Europe. The influence of Chinese culture in Thailand was also disturbing. The formerly easygoing Thai people had become very hard-nosed about money, and all foreigners were viewed as sex tourists and consequently seen as targets for being ripped off.

We also found that the Thai monasteries that we open to westerners treated them like commodities. The typical deal was a two-week meditation retreat, for which they charged a fixed rate, like a hotel. It was more business than religion. When we expressed our desire to become part of

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the lay community of a temple, they couldn't even respond. Apparently they had no category for westerners like us.

When we received an invitation to appear on local TV from a prominent Buddhist musician in Sri Lanka, we decided to leave Thailand. We flew to Colombo, rented a house in Negombo, a popular tourist destination, and began to investigate the country. Sri Lanka's culture is similar to India, but cleaner and more organized. Since resolving its civil war, it has made a remarkable economic turnaround and is developing nicely.

The food is great, and the winter climate along the coast was perfect. Our house was very quiet and private, with a huge yard and only a few blocks from the beach. As spring came, however, we found the heat and humidity too oppressive. We made some trips upcountry and liked it very much. A friend-of-a-friend's sister invited us to check out the monastery where her family are congregational members. That's how we found our present place.

Our current location is the first spiritual community I have ever experienced where there are no sociopaths. That's one reason why I am very reluctant to reveal where we are. Another reason is that the monks here like the lack of disturbance as much as we do, and want to keep a low profile. We even offered to set up a YouTube channel and post videos of the classes and ceremonies here, but they refused. That is completely understandable, and we intend to cooperate.

But the lessons we are learning here are so valuable for all spiritual communities that I feel an obligation to share them, in the hope that others will benefit. So in the coming year I hope to continue this blog, more or less daily. I hope you get some tangible spiritual benefit from the insights we share.





Path to the Upāsaka Quarters

April 15—Cheaters and Cheated

You have been cheated, you have been abused and broken. I know who is reading this blog, mainly Americans and a few from other western countries. Maybe one or two from Asia; but the same is true for nearly everyone, unless you happen to be born in a very enlightened family. You have been cheated and damaged by the society around you.

I grew up in America, and I know exactly how you have been cheated, because the same methods were done to me also. But I did not break; I resisted and remained independent, individual. I created my own very simple business, and supported myself with very little effort while I investigated spiritual life.

I traveled all over the world, went to the roots of the great spiritual traditions, and what I learned is that they are also cheating you. They are giving you some rules that make you weak, that keep you subservient, that

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make you wrong. And you are not wrong; you should not be subservient to anyone, and to regain your spiritual health you must first regain your independence and strength.

It is very difficult to surpass the religious and social conditioning we have been given. You can reject it—become a skeptic or existentialist, an atheist or a nihilist—but that is not going to help you advance in spiritual life. The false conditioning has been hammered into us with the strength of the whole society. You need something positive, a method or path to bring you out of it; but it has to be given and practiced in a new way, so that it does not invoke the old conditioning.

I think I have a practical answer, and that is Ergontics. It is a kind of neo-Buddhism. People have already realized the danger of theism: the danger of the concept of God. It is not true that there is no god, nor one god—actually there are many gods, and each of us is potentially a god. We all started out as gods, but due to our ignorance and desire we have descended to our current miserable state. We can regain our godlike state and even more.

But the monotheistic model has given us only endless war, all over the world. Everyone is imitating god, competing to be god. The monotheistic model of God is a very poor role model: he is an absolute dictator, a jealous god, a very immature person at the top, and he makes everyone else into an imitation dictator. For the last five thousand years, the whole world has been fighting over who will be the dictator. It has been tremendously destructive. It is way past time to throw out that insane idea.

So our neo-Buddhism, Ergontics will be more like engineering than religion, more like therapy than theology. Its core truth is that we have been gods, and we can again become like gods—or something even better. There is suffering even for a god. We can choose how high we want to go. We can withdraw altogether from the compulsion to become. As the Buddha taught, we can stop becoming and end suffering completely.

There are only two negative rules: no meat eating and no intoxication. We are already intoxicated by lust and other desires for becoming. We need to establish a baseline consciousness for meditation. We cannot do that if we

are addicted to taking drugs or alcohol. Another disadvantage of drugs is that they are illegal. Tea and coffee, and doctor-prescribed medicines are OK.

And meat eating is very nasty, cruel and another type of addiction. When the animal is killed, adrenaline and other fear poisons are released into its blood. When you eat the meat, you become affected by those chemicals and feel fear yourself. It's a form of instant *kamma*. I have never met a meat eater who could understand the subtle truths of spirituality. Eating meat seems to block the higher consciousness required to realize that one is not the body. Plus there are so many diseases linked to meat eating, so that is also prohibited.

Most religious teachings also prohibit sex, but we are sex-positive. In fact we will promote sexual health. You cannot reach your highest level of energy without exploring sex deeply. Erotics was an important factor in my spiritual path. I do not think I could have come out of my conditioning without it. Plus it is unreasonable to expect westerners to practice celibacy; it is simply impractical. So we will support pan-sexual tolerance and education.

We will have some positive principles: integrity and authenticity. Authenticity means being straight about who you are to yourself and others. Integrity means to be accountable for your word. Both integrity and authenticity presuppose a degree of self-awareness that is very rare. We will actively filter out people who cannot develop integrity and authenticity.

Our focus will be to train teachers rather than students, leaders rather than followers. The world is in dire need of qualified spiritual teachers. We need to build community on a different basis. Monotheism is obsolete; the world cannot go on struggling, one dictator fighting against another. That model must be completely demolished, and deep tolerance, compassion and cooperation established.

Buddhism is the only world-class religion that has spread without violence, without conquering others. It is a beautiful religion and culture because it spreads by convincing people of its truth, rather than by fear or coercion.

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So we will use the Buddhist model and convince people of our truths by good arguments, and also by showing a good example.

We will also use the Buddhist model for generating merit, good *kamma*. No one can be successful in meditation without proper preparation. That preparation includes proper lifestyle, knowledge and accumulation of good *kamma*. Only then can the mind be completely peaceful. There must be beauty in life; so we will have music, exchanges of offerings and other activities meant to cultivate beauty.

We are not *gurus*, but trainers and coaches to encourage you to increase your enlightenment. Actually the idea of *guru* is another mistake. A *guru* is supposed to be a perfect human being, who has attained complete enlightenment. There is no such thing as perfection—final, complete enlightenment. Enlightenment is a series of illuminations, increasing without any end. Someone may be ahead of you on the path, someone else may be behind you.

The idea of final, complete enlightenment is a fabrication, to give a conceivable goal for small minds. Enlightenment is an eternal process; it never ends. The moment we stop trying to increase our enlightenment, we begin to fall. Even the gods must meditate and perform meritorious acts, or they fall down. Some process of enlightenment is a daily necessity for everyone.

There will always be greater and lesser, but it is the season of my life when it is appropriate to share my experience and insight. This is a small beginning; soon we will establish a center where people can come to be trained as teachers. From there, new spiritual communities will spread out all over the world. This is my vision: that all who have been cheated will get a second chance, a new opportunity to heal themselves from social conditioning, defeat wrong conceptions of religion and escape the trap of becoming.



View from the Monks' Ashram

April 15–Temple Gossip

I used to teach in a very structured intellectual way, strictly according to scriptural authority. Not any more; now our work is more in the mood of spiritual gossip, temple gossip. It's more personal, less authoritative. What is the topic? Whatever we enjoy talking about. Who is the authority? No need; we are just talking from whatever we have known directly.

The concepts of 'spiritual authority', 'lineage', 'disciplic succession' and so on are derived from the monotheistic model. Monotheism is a fabrication meant to take power from you and give it to the priests and rulers. They imitate god and lord it over us, or pose as intermediaries or advocates, but they are really no better than we are, and maybe a good deal worse because of their greed and lust for power.

The priests and rulers like to hide their vices behind the walls of exclusive clubs and huge estates with private security. They are far more wicked than ordinary people, because they have tremendous material resources

available to them. So they successfully hide their perversions, and cultivate a public image of sinlessness and saintliness.

And we have come to expect that image of our priests and rulers. If accidentally any of them are exposed for what they really are, they fall from grace and we reject them. But that image was a lie from the start. They created the idea of sin to make us bad, to put us down and control us, but according to their false standard, they themselves are by far the worst sinners.

So we reject the western monotheistic model, and everything built upon it. There are other models that are much superior: closer to the truth and more helpful for spiritual growth. For example, the Vedic polytheistic model says that there are many gods of different levels of power. Some are powerful only within this universe, while others have created their own realms and universes.

The polytheistic model is better, but it still has a number of defects. One of the worst is the concept that we human beings are *jīvātmā*, infinitesimal spiritual beings of pure consciousness. Although we are eternal, we fell down from the spiritual world because of our ignorance. So far, so good. However, in the polytheistic model we are always doomed to be infinitesimal and under the control of the many gods; we cannot rise above our station.

That teaching is destructive because it is false. We are all potential gods. We have been powerful godlike beings the past, and we can become that way again in the future. The polytheistic model may be better than monotheism, but it still supports an exclusive priesthood and the authority of petty rulers. The caste system is another one of its evils.

We could call the Buddha's model multitheism; there are many gods of various scope and powers, but we ordinary beings can also rise to that status. In fact, we can go even higher and attain a state beyond being, becoming and suffering. The gods still have desires, and therefore they suffer. Maybe their suffering is more elevated, more sophisticated and elegant than ours, but it is still suffering nonetheless.

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I like the Buddha's model because it supports a classless society with no sin, no spiritual authority and no theistic religion. The Buddha does not set himself up as an authority, and does not rely on any kind of force, subtle or gross, to propagate his teaching. The Buddha's original teaching is completely scientific, in the sense that if you simply try his method, the result is exactly what he says it will be.

There is no need for faith beyond willingness to test the teaching. There is no need for belief, hope, authority, force, social classes, war, armies, politics and so much other nonsense. No need for temples, churches, schools, universities, government or money. The Buddha taught a system of profound spiritual benefit powered by a simple economy of voluntary gift exchange, where those who have realized teach, and those who want to realize support them.

So if you want to know this is what temple monks gossip about. We want to see the whole world give up the means of oppression and take up the means of freedom. We want to see everyone experience the tremendous spiritual benefits available through the Buddha's original teaching. We want to see everyone happy and free from fear. We know from our personal experience that this is attainable. So what are you waiting for?



Temple of the Tooth, Kandy

April 15–'God' is Dead

Friedrich Nietzsche was the first man in the west to declare, “God is dead, therefore man is free.” Unfortunately he did not fully understand the tremendous implications of his statement, which is very profound. It has caused so much confusion in the minds of the western people. The Buddha asserted the same thing almost twenty-five centuries before, but his assertion created not confusion, but clarity. Let us look into this.

All the monotheistic and even polytheistic religions believe that some God created the world and also humankind. What is God? It is simply an ontological category, a role in our model of the world, the universe or reality. Because we are conditioned by gross material reality, our own birth becomes a pattern that we project on the whole universe. So we think that

the universe must have had a beginning, a creation, and therefore there must have been a creator.

But nobody has seen the creation, because it would have been before any of us existed. So otherwise intelligent people go on and on, theorizing about something that no one has seen, which is impossible to prove. And even the so-called scientists make up theories about the creation, except in their version there is no god, only a Big Bang. But I want to ask them, “Who set off the Big Bang?”

The trouble with all these theories is that they are infinitely regressive. Who created the Big Bang? If you reply that it was God, then that leads to the question, “Who created God?” There is no final answer possible. If creation is necessary, then the chain of creation is infinite, without any beginning. That is one problem, a logical or philosophical problem with the theory of creation.

And the ontological category of the creator gives us another great problem: if you are created by someone, you are only a puppet—you have no sovereignty, even over your own soul. And he can destroy you any moment. He never asked you whether you wanted to be created, nor is he going to ask you if you want to be uncreated. You are completely dependent, totally controlled. You have no authority, even over your own existence. You have no rights; you are nothing but a slave.

God, especially as depicted in western monotheism, is the greatest tyrant, the most ruthless dictator. If God is a reality for you—if you accept the fiction that he created the world and humankind—then your view must be that humankind can be nothing but a slave, a puppet to be controlled absolutely. Responsibility belongs to someone who has freedom to act. A puppet cannot be responsible for its actions. Either God exists, or freedom —both cannot exist simultaneously. Thus the basic implication of Friedrich Nietzsche’s statement is: “God is dead, therefore man is free.”



Road to the Retreat Center

As we discussed earlier in this series, there is an intimate relationship between government and religion. Therefore it is no accident that if you accept the idea of God as the creator, owner and controller of everything and everyone, you destroy the whole freedom and dignity of humankind. There is no possibility for puppets to have consciousness, freedom or love. They are simply interchangeable machines, replaceable parts. You are taking all responsibility from humanity, and reducing the whole of existence to just the whim of an all-powerful unknown person called ‘God.’

That kind of philosophy is a tyrant’s dream come true. Once the existence of God is accepted, you can write scriptures, and put any words you like into God’s mouth, say anything you want with his voice. And the governments have done exactly that. The Roman Emperor Constantine

edited the books of the *Bible*. Whatever he liked he kept, and whatever he didn't like was redacted, censored, deleted.

Before that, Vyāsa edited the *Vedas*. Why? The *Vedas* were already perfectly fine. They had existed for thousands of years before, without any editing. Vyāsa was related to Kṛṣṇa, who was a great and powerful king of the time. Kṛṣṇa is portrayed in Vyāsa's edition of the *Vedas* as God. Is that just a coincidence?

So Nietzsche's claim is perfectly right. It is very significant and meaningful, because for thousands of years the government and religious leaders have been deceiving everyone. Maybe there was some benefit in it in the past, when there was little scientific knowledge of the cosmos. But now that humankind has become a little more mature, our knowledge of the universe beyond this tiny planet has grown a little, it is time to know the truth. And the truth is not exactly that God is dead; it is that he never existed in the first place. He is a fiction, a terrible deception used to gain control.

Unfortunately Nietzsche's statement overlooks something, which was bound to happen because it is only based on rationality—logic and intellect instead of meditative insight. He has seen one part of the truth, but he has not seen the whole.

If God is dead and humankind is free, then the question arises: free for what? If you remove God, you also remove humankind's purpose for living and leave him utterly empty. Now where does he get his values, his direction? You declare his freedom, but how is he going to use his freedom creatively, responsibly? How is he going to avoid his freedom being reduced to chaos, mere animal lust and licentiousness? For this is exactly what has happened.

Nietzsche was not aware, not a student of meditation. He was only an intellectual—brilliant but narrow, one-sided. Man is free, but his freedom can be a joy and a blessing to him only if he is rooted in meditation. Remove the fiction of God—that is perfectly fine, the concept of God has been the greatest danger to human freedom. But also give man some meaning and significance, some creativity, some receptivity, some path to

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explore his inner reality and discover his eternal existence. The human race, now freed from the tyranny of God, needs a new game.

The teaching of the Buddha is the only acceptable answer to this problem. The Buddha's original teaching does not have any God—that's its beauty. But it does have a tremendous science to transform your consciousness, to bring so much light, so much awareness that you cannot commit evil. It is not a morality imposed from outside, but an integrity that springs spontaneously from your innermost being. Once you realize your authentic being, once you know your luminous being, your hidden inner Buddha, it is impossible to do anything wrong, it is impossible to do anything evil, it is impossible to sin—because you are no longer an ego, no longer a separate individual but part of the whole. And how can one part of you hurt another part of yourself?



April 15—Monkey See, Monkey Do

Friedrich Nietzsche realized that “God is dead,” but toward the end of his life he went insane. He was committed, kept in a madhouse. Such a great mind, what happened to him? “God is dead” is a negative conclusion. He became free, but ultimately his freedom was empty, meaningless. There was no beauty or joy in it because it was only freedom from the fiction of God—but then what? Freedom has two sides: freedom **from** and freedom **for**. The positive side was missing. That is what drove him insane.

Emptiness without spiritual values always drives people insane. You need some ground, some center, some meaningful relationship with existence. If the idea of God is dead with nothing to replace it, your relationship with existence is cut off, finished. Your whole ontology, your background model of reality, becomes rootless, defective. If God is dead, without spiritual consciousness you are left alone without any root. A tree cannot survive without roots, nor can you.

The concept of God was a fiction, but it was useful as a consolation. It used to give people hope, although it was a lie. But even a lie, repeated thousands and millions of times for millennia, becomes almost a truth. God has been a great consolation to people in their fear, in their dread, in their awareness of old age and death, and the unknown darkness beyond. God has been a tremendous consolation, although it was a lie.

A well-fashioned lie can console you; in fact well-told lies are sweeter than truth. That is why people love entertainment. Everyone knows that the actor on the stage or screen is not the character he portrays; everyone knows that all television programs (especially the ‘news’) are simply synthetic, fabricated lies. But a well-crafted illusion has the value that it gives us temporary relief from the mundane, the unavoidable suffering and unsatisfactoriness of life.

The Buddha said, “Truth is bitter in the beginning, sweet in the end—and lies are sweet in the beginning, bitter in the end.” Lies can give us consolation or relief, and that is why we tolerate them. But they are bitter when they are exposed. The concept of God was the greatest lie in history. Now it stands exposed, and there arises tremendous bitterness, because

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you have been deceived by your parents, by your teachers, by your priests and all your so-called leaders.

You have been continuously, systematically deceived and exploited for thousands of years, enslaved and manipulated by a lie so great and all-pervasive, it beggars description. That knowledge creates tremendous frustration, brings up great distrust of everyone and everything. It creates a vacuum, that nobody is worthy of trust. And we have to trust someone, otherwise there can be no friendship, no partnership, no love.

So Nietzsche went insane in the last phase of his life. It was the inevitable conclusion of his negative approach. We see the same insanity everywhere today. People have lost all direction; nothing is sure anymore, there is no trusted source of values or leadership. Everyone is corrupt, everyone is suspect. In such a bitter atmosphere, where is the trust needed for relationships?

People see that the leaders have no religion, no spiritual values, no integrity. So monkey see, monkey do. People in general are ignorantly following the leaders down the road of existential freedom to a hellish condition of life. The original teaching of the Buddha is the answer to this problem.



April 16—Facing Life Empty-handed

Nietzsche went insane toward the end of his life, the inevitable result of his negative conclusion, “God is dead.” He was a great intellect, but intellect can only be negative. Intellect is derivative; it can argue and criticize, be skeptical and sarcastic, but it cannot create any nourishment, any juice. Intellect is immature, partial; it can find fault, but it cannot create anything whole or living.

So in declaring God dead, Nietzsche lost his consolation and had to face the naked truth of life without any support. He became free just to be mad—in the words of Edgar Allan Poe, “to laugh, but smile no more.”

And not only Nietzsche; many intellectual giants go mad or commit suicide. The mad scientist, the emotionally dysfunctional intellectual is an

archetype in western society, because nobody can live in a negative darkness. We need some light, some hope and a positive, affirmative experience of truth. Nietzsche demolished the light and created a vacuum of doubt in himself and in all others who follow him—at this point, the majority of people in the world. That's why the world today feels as if it has gone mad: it has, just as Nietzsche did.

If you feel a vacuum deep down inside, as if life is utter emptiness with no meaning, it is because of Nietzsche's exposure of the lie of God. As a result, a deeply negative philosophy and social trend have grown in the West. Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Marcel, Jaspers, Martin Heidegger—all the philosophical giants of the twentieth century—taught mainly about meaninglessness, anguish, suffering, anxiety, dread, fear, angst, emptiness, nothingness and death. And this so-called existential philosophy destroys everything that has consoled you in the face of the enormity of the world, the complexity of life and the inevitability of suffering.

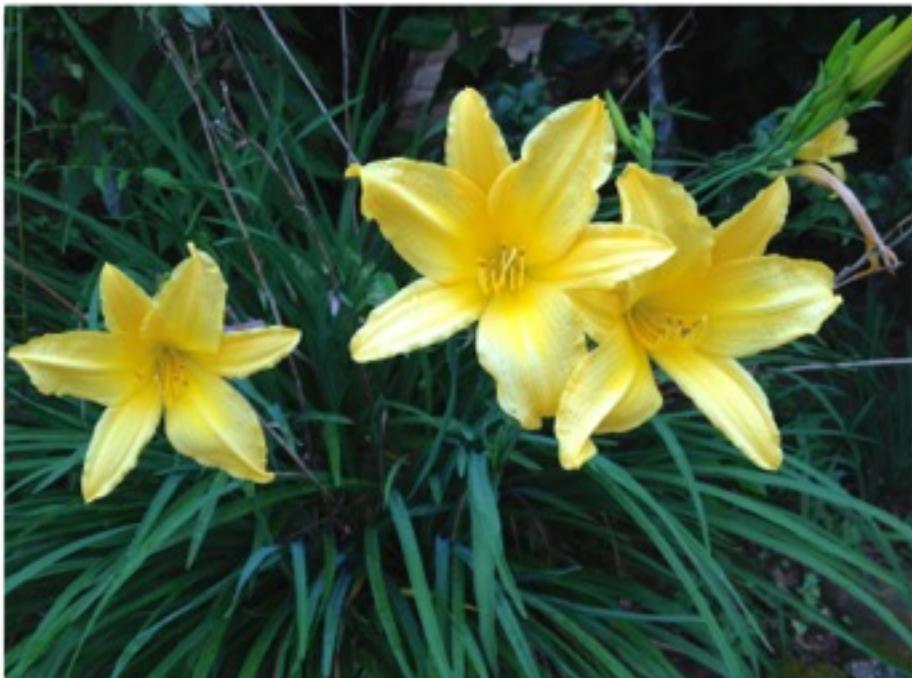
In one way the destruction was good, because what was consoling humanity was only lies. God, heaven, hell were fictions created to console humanity, and also to control him. It is good the old myths were destroyed, but without any positive spiritual value to replace them, humankind is left in a vacuum of meaning. Existentialism was born out of that vacuum, that's why it talks only about meaninglessness. The conclusion of the so-called existentialists is that you are unnecessary, that your life has no meaning, no significance. It makes no difference whether you exist or not. Existence is not in need of you at all!

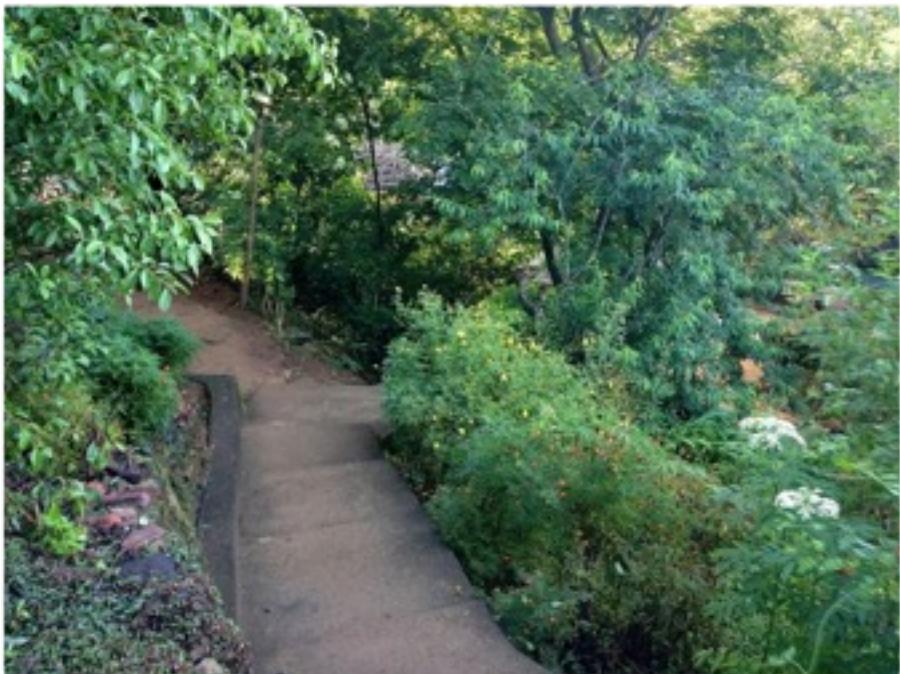
So Nietzsche was right, but his work will lead the whole of humanity to madness. Without God you are certainly free, but for what? You are left with empty hands. Your hands also were empty before, because they were full of lies. Now you are absolutely aware that the hands are empty and there is nowhere to go.

But we have a tremendous need in our being for meaning, to be related to existence. When we are rooted in existence, related to the whole of everything, life is tremendously overflowing with meaning, significance, blissfulness; life is simply a celebration of beauty. We need roots in

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existence, because only when the roots go deep into existence can our life be meaningful, can we attain our true potential, can we blossom into a Buddha.





April 16—The Only Living Truth

It was no accident or coincidence that Nietzsche went insane; it was the natural and inevitable outcome of his extremist negative philosophy. He was not an awakened being, he was not enlightened. The same insanity that drove Nietzsche mad is the condition his negative philosophy is creating for the whole of humankind. This situation, only negativity without a positive balance, creates insanity.

At first, skeptical existential philosophy only affected philosophers and theologians. But it has been spreading, because it is true; it cannot be defeated. This unbalanced philosophy has now permeated all cultures, all levels of society and all countries of the world. It is creating the danger that the whole world could go insane like Nietzsche; in fact, it is already happening.

Therefore to avert this clear and present danger, we have to provide the antidote, the balance. If God is dead, all the ordinary theistic religions of the world are corrupt, because they were affected by the same poison. We have to finish Nietzsche's incomplete statement, balance his unfinished syllogism: If God is dead, now the teaching of the Buddha is the only living truth.

The teaching of the Buddha does not need a God, nor do his followers have a God, but they never went mad. All the great Zen and Tao masters—Bodhidharma, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Lieh Tzu—never went mad, and they don't have any God, any hell or heaven. What is the difference? Why did the Buddha and his followers not go mad without God?

And it is not only the Buddha; in the twenty-six centuries since him hundreds, if not thousands of his followers have become enlightened, and they don't even talk about God. They don't even say that there is no God, because there is no point. They are not atheists, nor are they theists. God simply is not there, so there is no question of atheism or theism.

There being no God does not create a vacuum in a person who is spiritually aware. By leaving aside the idea of God, a follower of the Buddha gains the dignity of an individual who is free—free to become a Buddha himself. The ultimate goal of freedom is Buddhahood, complete enlightenment in the here and now.

The fact of the nonexistence of God gives you freedom. But unless your freedom becomes a flowering of awareness, leads you into eternity, leads you into the root of existence, into the cosmos and eternity, you will go mad. Your life will be meaningless, without significance. Whatever you do, it will matter not at all. That meaninglessness brings insanity.

According to the existentialists who follow Nietzsche, nature or existence is absolutely unintelligent, mechanical. They have taken away God, so logically they conclude that if there is no God, existence also becomes dead, with no intelligence, no life. God used to be the life, the consciousness of existence. With God no longer there, this whole existence becomes soulless, life and consciousness become just byproducts of matter. So when you die, nothing will remain.

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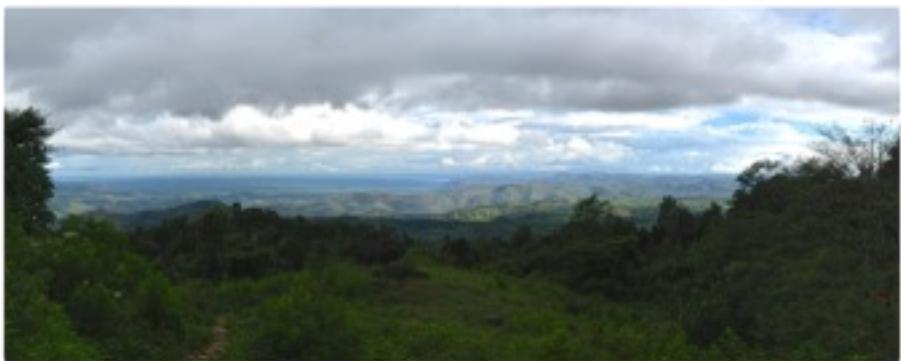
And there is no question of being good or bad. God used to care about you, whether you are good or bad. Existentialism holds that existence is absolutely indifferent; it does not care about you at all. Once God is removed, there is no relationship; existence doesn't care, cannot care because it is unconscious. It is no longer an intelligent universe, it is simply mechanical, dead matter, just as you are.

No wonder that Nietzsche and his followers went insane; they held such extreme views. All extreme views are only of the mind, of the intellect; they are exaggerated, hysterical, hallucinatory, imaginary, false. It is one extreme to believe in God; the opposite extreme is to disbelieve in God. Awareness means to be just in the middle, balanced and flexible. Atheism and theism become irrelevant because all extreme views are categorically wrong, insane.

Once you realize that a balance is needed between the negative and the positive, then you have the possibility to put down roots into existence. Your balance brings a new light, joy, a blissfulness to you, a new category of intelligence that is not of the mind. Intelligence that is beyond the mind makes you aware that the whole existence is conscious, it is tremendously aware and intelligent. It is not only alive, it has sensitivity, it knows you and responds.

This is my experience, and the experience of anyone who becomes enlightened. The truth is never in the extremes, but always in the middle. This middle path is the essence of Buddha's philosophy, and it is the antidote to both the lie of God and the poison of existentialism that is driving the whole world to the brink of madness and war.





View from the Retreat Center

April 17–Mastering Buddhahood

The extremes of mental obsessions, intellectual positions have made you sick, neurotic. You have believed the philosophers, teachers and priests, fallen into the trap of the elites and politicians; you have become unbalanced, weak, easily manipulated. You can be pushed into making commitments that keep you enslaved, nose to the grindstone, your whole life.

Go to college, choose a career, get married, have kids, buy a house—before you know it, all your time is dedicated to someone or something else. Now you are no longer free; you are obligated, your time and energy are occupied by the wife, family, job, politics, religion. There is no time left for yourself, for thinking and dreaming, for art or for love. Now every moment is planned, scripted. Your schedule is known, fixed for the next six months.

What is the difference between you and the ox yoked to the grinding wheel? He walks around and around, grinding the grain for the farmer but never really going anywhere. You also go around and around your routine, always in motion but never really going anywhere. Your work makes the capitalist rich, your taxes feed the government, your contributions build a

house for the priest, but you are a slave with not even a moment for yourself, for your spiritual growth and edification.

Day by day you are dying, any day death may come, and you do not even know yourself. Stop! There is no alternative but to rebel, to break your false agreements, made in ignorance, under coercion. Stop working for others and choose for yourself for a change. Take the time to inquire into your being, to look inside.

At first there will be only confusion. You have forgotten who you really are. Read the teachings of the Buddha; he explains everything. Meditate deeply, and think over the choices you have made, the actions you have taken. See how you have enslaved yourself and made yourself a fool over some unproven ideas given by ‘authorities.’ Get to know yourself, not according to others’ values but as you really are to yourself.

Once you know your inner being, reach absorption in bliss through concentration, drop desire and clinging, drop striving and becoming, become balanced and silent and peaceful. Suddenly doors that have been closed by your thoughts open by themselves, and the whole existence becomes clear to you. You are not accidental, you are significant. Your life is meaningful all by itself, without god, without society. Existence itself needs you. Without you, something will be missing in existence that nobody can replace.

That in itself gives you dignity: that if you are gone, the whole existence will miss you. Everything in the universe will feel that a small place is vacant, which cannot be filled by anybody except you. This gives you indelible joy, profound fulfillment because you are related to existence, and existence knows and cares for you. Once you are clean and clear within, you will feel tremendous love coming to you from all directions, from the existence itself. This is my experience.

There is no need for god. You are the highest development of existence, the intelligence of existence, and it needs something from you, it is dependent on you. To know this, you have to clean your mind, develop your intelligence. If you grow even higher than the mind and go beyond intelligence, towards no-mind and pure consciousness, existence will

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celebrate: a human being has reached to the ultimate peak! One part of existence has suddenly risen to the highest possibilities of the intrinsic potential in every body, in every thing.

We are not separate from existence. Our joy will be shared even by the trees, even by the rocks, our enlightenment will be a festival for the whole of existence. When I had my enlightenment experience in 1984, the plants were rejoicing, even the rocks were smiling, even the air itself was full of bliss.

Meditation fulfills your inner being and fills the vacuum that was vacated by the great lie, the existence of God. And as we have pointed out, many lies have grown around the idea of God. The whole deception of government and religion, the enslavement of humanity by social conditioning, education and corporations has come from it. After all, if God is the dictator and we are simply slaves, someone has to become the slave master. And there are many rascals, many sociopaths who would like that job!

And if you agree with Nietzsche that god is dead, but remain with the negative, sooner or later you are going to go insane. You are out of balance, you have lost all contact with existence, you have lost your meaning, your value, and every possibility of finding them again. You have certainly dropped lies, especially the biggest lie. That is a good beginning, but it is not enough to find the truth.

Drop the lies, certainly, and also make an effort to go inward, to find the truth. That is the whole teaching of Buddhism. My point is expressed by my completion of Nietzsche's syllogism: "God is dead—now the teaching of the Buddha is the only living truth." The first part destroys all the lies and false structures used to enslave you. Then once you become free, if you use your freedom to become a Buddha, you will realize that you are deeply related with existence, indeed you are the culmination of existence, its blossom. Then you are no longer a puppet; you are a master.



View from the Retreat Center

April 18—Adventure with Monks

The last two days we have been on the road, making a pilgrimage to visit the senior monks of the order and offer New Year gifts. It is always a challenge to describe spiritual experiences because there is an external or outward aspect on one hand, and an internal, subjective experience on the other. A rich, deep living experience often comes across in prose as dry, flat and tasteless. Finding the right balance can be difficult.

Externally, we drove from the monastery down to Colombo by a circuitous route involving many obscure back roads; we visited some beautiful monasteries and devotees in very rural locations; we met the senior monks of our order and offered them various gifts. Internally, we experienced a

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process of self-discovery in which many mysteries were revealed, many surprising discoveries showed up.



Relics and Offerings in a Temple Stupa

The advanced meditator is in a different state of consciousness from the ordinary person. A truly saintly person can act as a mirror that often reflects views of ourself from new and unaccustomed angles. Whether we are ready to accept these views is another matter. We like to think of ourselves as pure, our actions as unquestionable, our ideas as justified. When someone shows us otherwise, it can come as quite a shock.

Encountering a truly enlightened being is like plugging into a high-voltage circuit. Years of deep meditative living have raised their energy level and consciousness far beyond the ordinary. The New-Age pretenders talk glibly about raising vibrations; it is quite rare to actually meet such a person. You will not find them in the conference and lecture circuit, or at the big, opulent city temples. They are hidden away in obscure locations, screened by networks of caring devotees, protected by esoteric forces beyond manipulation or force.



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In other words, to meet such beings requires us to generate the requisite *kamma*. It cannot be accomplished by looking for them on the Internet. There you will find only pretenders and phonies, ready to exploit you. You have to prepare, audition many possibilities, turn down almost all of them until you find an authentic circle, and recognize it when you do.

I wish it were easy to meet an authentically enlightened being, but it is not. They are rare and well-protected. First you have to be ready and willing to walk down a long and demanding road.

Which brings me back to my story. When we went on our road trip with the monks, we thought we were just going to Colombo to renew our visas, and the monks wanted to ride along and see some of their friends. Nobody briefed us on what was going to happen. We had no idea of the high adventure that awaited. We were given the opportunity to discover it for ourselves as the experience unfolded.

Leaving the monastery at noon, packed into a van full of monks, we drove through sweet farming villages and way up into tea country. Down the other side, we encountered some spectacular mountain scenery, huge vistas, amazing waterfalls, and more farming country. We rode the main southern route down into the coastal plain. The weather went from cool, fresh mountain air to the hot sultry haze of the jungle.

Our first stop was a small temple in the foothills. The chief monk there has performed innumerable missions of relief work during Sri Lanka's 30-year civil war. He was a student of our chief monk. After exchanging gifts and the inevitable tea, we drove off into the night.



Temple Stupa, Thalagala

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Then we visited a palatial monastery, square porticos around a central compound. The chief monk here was a contemporary of our Maha-thero, a well-known meditation teacher. I had eaten something that didn't agree with me, and I felt quite ill. So I didn't really get to encounter him deeply. We arranged to stay at that monastery, in a nice cool room basement room. The other monks went to stay with Maha-thero's sister.

The young monks all crowded around our iPhones and iPads. My partner gave a short Kung-fu demonstration and showed them some Bruce Lee videos. He always tells them, "Learn to meditate and you can fight like Bruce Lee." It's not just a story; Lee was quite a deep meditator and ontological thinker.

Next morning we woke up late but refreshed, took a nice breakfast in the kitchen and prepared to hit the road. On the way out to meet our van we met an old monk with a radiant meditative aura. He was very glad to see us western Upāsakas, and we were very happy to meet him. We found out later that he is over 100 years old, one of the most senior monks in Sri Lanka, and considered enlightened.

Our next stop was a beautiful monastery in Thalagala, with a pagoda full of amazing frescos of the Buddha's life, as good as or better than anything in the Vatican. The chief incumbent there is a brother of our Maha-Thero, and currently number two monk on our lineage. We had a long conversation in English about our reasons for becoming Upāsakas. The monks are always fascinated that we would leave the west and come to live in the mountains. They are surprised that we regard materialism as a trap, and bathing in a mountain stream as paradisiacal.

I always tell my story of how I was a Hindu monk for many years and even became a *guru*, but gave it up because I wasn't satisfied. They love our description of how our philosophical search for the cause of our suffering led us to the teaching of the Buddha. They smile when we talk about how we couldn't find a monastery in Thailand where we could have an authentic relationship.

We departed from there to another temple nearby. The chief monk there is also a brother of our chief monk. He is very likable and we exchanged

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some joking words. So in one morning we met all the most prominent monks in our lineage.

We pressed on to Colombo to the visa office. We had been told that our visitor visas could not be extended more than once. We already got that extension, and were expecting to be turned down. But one of the monks went in with us and explained to the officer how we are studying in the monastery, and may even become monks in the future. He approved our extension.

After finishing our business in the big city, and feeling very blessed, and with a big burden off our minds, we returned by stages to our beloved mountains. First we picked up Maha-Thero where we had left him, relaxing on the porch of a rural monastery, and went to visit his sister. Our chief Monk's sister was like a female edition of him. She had a beauty far beyond the physical. It is very rare to meet such an enlightened woman. We also met his father and mother, also great saints. His father gave us a bag of tangerines from their tree; we will plant some seeds here at the monastery.

Then came the long ride home. As night fell over the mountains, the air changed from the pollution of the lowlands to the pure fragrance of pine sap, tea and orchids. We got in after midnight, physically exhausted but refreshed with new spiritual purpose.

We had experienced untold blessings; some we could barely fathom, others with immediate and direct effects. The monks are powerful because they are willing to confront the mysteries of life and being, and resolve the paradox of becoming by meditation. We feel so fortunate that they have compassionately adopted us, and are willing to share their lives and pastimes with us.

And these blessings aren't mere pleasant emotions or decorations for some kind of false ego. They provide immediate insight into suffering and its cause, the cessation of suffering and its means. This benefit of realization of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths is rare, difficult to obtain, and the most excellent thing in human life.



Thalagala Temple Murals

April 19—Ontological Time-bomb Revisited

Almost ten years ago I wrote an article titled *Ontological Time-bomb*, examining the predicted Singularity and its likely impact on human affairs. In that article I expressed the opinion that the anticipated negative effects of the Singularity were almost entirely due to humanity's default ontology being devastated by accelerating advances in technology.

I stand by my analysis and conclusions, but now I have a much better understanding of the underlying context. The implications of completing Nietzsche's incomplete statement, balancing his unfinished syllogism—"If God is dead, now the teaching of the Buddha is the only living truth"—are extremely profound.

That the concept of 'God' is no longer an adequate foundation for human thought is not a new message; it has been the basic theme of empirical science from the time of Galileo. But Nietzsche's century-old proclamation, and the work of the great thinkers who took it up as their rallying-cry, signify a tipping point in the maturity of human thought.

It is now legitimate to speak openly of the realization that 'God' is not, nor ever was, existent as more than a concept. However, toppling this concept from its central place in human thought is not without serious consequences: unless something can be found to replace it, humanity must at some point go insane.

Just as a tree cannot live without a root, humanity cannot live without an ontology: a model of the world, its structure and interactions. For many thousands of years, humanity's default ontology revolved around the concept of a supreme person: a transcendent, all-powerful creator, controller and master of all. But we have come to point now where the publication of physicist Stephen Hawking's paper "God was not Necessary for the Big Bang" is headlined on the mainstream news, and there is no significant objection.

Other headlines on the same day include several chillingly similar stories of gunmen and bombers killing dozens of people, and then themselves, for no apparent reason. That correlation is not accidental; the central root of humanity's ontology, our explanation of how the world works, has been

pulled up. Just like Nietzsche went mad after realizing the nonexistence of god, the rest of the western world is following suit.

What has driven the western world to the brink of insanity is the conviction, whether theistic or atheistic, in the existence of the ego, the individual self. As long as god exists, it is possible to justify the existence of the individual self as a reflection, creation or emanation of god. With a growing section of humanity realizing that the concept of god is completely unnecessary to explain nature and the universe, whether we realize it or not, the concept of the self is also under attack.

Not only that, the invalidation of the concept of god destabilizes the rationale for the structure of most human organizations, which are modeled after the theological vision of god as the head, and his creation as his energy. In that vision, individuals function as organs and limbs of a central authority—the model of the corporate structure pervading human society today.

With the cornerstone of the foundation of our model of reality—and by implication, individual ego-identity and corporate structure of our society—under attack, it is no wonder people are going mad. They are losing their faith, their certainty, their values, losing their very sense of self. Never mind that these were and are all illusory—human beings must have an ontology to keep a sense of balance and proportion. And that has been lost, demolished by existential thought.

However there is an extensive section of human society that has lived quite well for thousands of years without any concept of god or individual self. Of course, we are speaking of the Buddhist world. Our direct personal experience living within this society in rural Sri Lanka is that it is far more sane, happy and nonviolent than the western world. How is this possible?

Let us return to our extension of Nietzsche's unfinished syllogism. We can also insert our corollary ontological conclusions from above. Then it becomes, "If God is dead, the ego is a fraud, and corporate society nothing but greedy, animalistic exploitation of the weak by the strong, now the teaching of the Buddha is the only living truth."



Authentic Buddhist society flourishes in the absence of any theistic concept because there is no need either for god, the individual self, or the organizational extension of theism, the corporation. The Buddha's original teaching in the Theravāda Suttas contains a complete alternate ontology. It explains how life and the universe can operate perfectly well "without a self, or anything belonging to a self."

Most people cannot imagine living without an ego, without a god in control, without a corporate hierarchy to give them a position and tell them what to do. But we can attest from our personal experience that it is not only possible, but we are much happier without that unnecessary and illusory baggage. All the foregoing would be mere philosophical speculation if it were not for this experiential fact. Having experienced both, we find Buddhist life superior.

Humankind needs a replacement for an outworn theistic ontology. Buddhist thought is fully compatible with all modern scientific theories; it is practical and provides a basis for trust and personal self-realization missing from all other systems. For the center of the Buddha's ontology is humankind itself, and its purpose is the eradication of human suffering. Without the unnecessary burden of service to an imaginary god and the equally imaginary extensions of ecclesiastical, governmental and corporate hierarchy, that long-sought goal is now well within our reach.

The imminent collapse of all structures based on theistic ontology and hierarchy offers an unprecedented opportunity for humankind to reform its worst habit and most egregious error: acceptance of and enthrallment by god's self-appointed representatives.

We cannot regress to more primitive times when the theistic principle was a universally accepted premise. Once having realized the lack of necessity for god, and the corollary realizations of no-self and the emptiness of social structures based on the ecclesiastical model, there is no going back. The present flawed structures may destroy themselves and each other in their death-throes, but the future is clear, and it belongs to none other than the teaching of the Buddha.



Mahāmevnāwa Monks at Dāna Ceremony

April 21–Systematic Attention

Today begins our one-week meditation intensive, up to full-moon Poya day on the 28th. I'm writing this at 5:30 AM after the first morning session. I'm starting to get a very nice light feeling during meditation. This is in contrast to the intense but heavy feelings of bliss in the first and second *jhānas*. Of course, that is supposed to happen. I just surprised it's happening so soon.

I attribute it to the good guidance we're getting. Over the last few days we have met and got blessings from many very senior monks. One of them

also gave us a very important book, *The Buddha's Teaching and the Ambiguity of Existence* by R.G. De S. Wettimuny. I am serializing an edited version of the book on this blog.

This is **the** book to read if you want to get into serious meditation. By 'serious' I mean that you really want to overcome suffering, completely and permanently. The main cause of suffering is the ego. Specifically, we attach the concept of a self to each and every perception.

All perceptions are simply phenomena, with no self. We create the synthetic concept of a self and add it to everything we experience. Every impression, every sensory experience has to be identified and tagged to maintain the ego. That is a lot of work! When the Buddha attained complete enlightenment, he marveled at the unparalleled ease he experienced. I am starting to feel just a hint of that ease.

Generally people do not want to really work on themselves. If they can dress up in white, sit for a few minutes and feel just a little better, they are satisfied. This morning we had a roomful of white-clad meditators, led by a lone monk. How many of them are seriously after complete enlightenment? Maybe two or three, besides ourselves.

Sitting meditation is important. It's a laboratory where we can go deep and try new techniques. But the real meditation is 24/7, changing our mental habits to avoid the onerous creation of ego as we go through the day. To do this, we have to be attentive to our attention, aware of our awareness. It's like an additional layer of software on top of our usual preoccupation with our experience.

Wettimuny's book might seem to be dry, but it contains an extremely valuable presentation of the Buddha's original teaching, translated into the language of existentialism and the analytical style of Heidegger. Any of our readers who have gone through our video series Being in the World are already familiar with this approach.

This makes it possible for people educated in postmodern western thought to go beyond the mere academic exercise of existential thought to its real application. Wettimuny begins by making a distinction between immediate

experience, reflective thought and reflexive attention. This is far more than mere academic hairsplitting.

Reflecting analytically on our experience, while helpful to establish categories of thought, does not lead to personal transformation because it deals with memory, with the past. Real progress begins when we reflect on our present experience. Such reflexive thought allows us to alter our experience in real time. After all, you can't eliminate your ego-making retrospectively, in the past. You can only change your thinking now, in the present, while it is happening.

Wettimuny goes on to detail how we create the ego. His excellent description is drawn from the Buddha's Suttas, but cast in the language of existentialism. It is a phenomenology of our 'I'-making and 'mine'-making, allowing us to visualize and alter the process as it occurs. This is, of course, exactly the purpose of meditation.

I got excellent results, in terms of eliminating suffering, from just a few weeks of Ānāpānasati meditation with minimal study. This new material makes me feel like what I have been doing was just a hack. I am already feeling fresh progress, entering a deeper layer of meditation using this method. And I haven't even finished reading the book!

April 21—Life Without 'I'

Dusk. Birds fly home, chanting, in V formation under orange-painted cumulus. Fragrance of eucalyptus, chrysanthemum and myrrh. Dark rain clouds perched on the summit sprinkle the thirsty hills. A gibbous moon shines through, pregnant with the coming month.

Walking up and down, a hillside path carved by ancient herds of cows. Mindful. Nature has everything in place, ready for the next moment. Nothing wrong, nothing needed, nothing extra. Will it rain? the temple bell asks, announcing the evening meditation.

Murmurs of prayer. Blessedness showers along with rain. Thankfulness needs no one to thank. Holiness feels better outside of church. Conscience is the deity of the temple of the heart; integrity the sacrament, silence the hymn.

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No loneliness in aloneness; seclusion is enough, a good friend. What more can be said? The sunset would be just as beautiful without people to experience it. The whole rest of existence is there to see! People are the only ones who are blind.

Colors are more vivid, even the sounds of silence can be heard. Aromas floating by tell a story of their own. Every meal a gourmet feast. The sun and wind are the best lovers. Mind is satisfied when there is nothing to do, nowhere to go, no one to be. There is enough time for everything.

Your ego is not needed; in fact it is in the way. Everyone is just putting up with it. Such a nuisance! Please do away with it as soon as possible. Thank you.



April 22—Lay Down the Burden

I know a secret. Deep within everyone's brain, at the base of the cerebral cortex, is a factory. Like Santa's workshop, it is full of busy little elves. They keep a fire burning bright, and are hard at work all day and night, manufacturing 'I' and 'mine'.

Here's how it works: when a perception comes in through the senses, they inspect it, fill out different tags and attach them. One tag reads 'good', another 'bad' and another 'neutral'. Then they hold the perception up to the fire, and project its silhouette up on the temple wall. All the elves kowtow to it, chanting "All glories to the ego! All glories to 'I'!" Finally they gift-wrap the perception and add a final tag, 'mine'. Then they offer it to the projected image of the ego.

Of course this is an illustrative fantasy, but it helps to realize what is going on habitually, compulsively in our minds. According to the Buddha, there are six stages of 'I'- and 'mine'-making:

Perceiving X as X

1. He **conceives X**
2. He conceives **in X**
3. He conceives **from X**
4. He conceives '**X is for me**'
5. He **delights** in X
6. Stage 1 is the immediate experience.

Stage 2 is where the elves tag the perception: 'taste of tea, hot, good, needs milk'.

Stage 3 is where he begins to endow the perception with the feeling of 'I'. (X is 'I')

Stage 4 is where he separates 'I' from X. (X exists in relation to 'I')

Stage 5 is where he appropriates X, makes it 'mine'.

Stage 6 is the goal: egoistic existence, possession and enjoyment.

Anyone who seriously observes his mind during concentration can observe these stages occurring more or less simultaneously as the mind receives each perception. It is going on in most people completely unconsciously and automatically. The creation of 'I' and 'mine' in successive perceptions creates the illusion of a permanent 'I', just as the succession of still pictures projected on a screen creates the illusion of motion in a movie.

This is how the illusion is performed; knowing this, one can put a stop to it by an effort of will. This is one of the most important skills to develop during meditation. It can be made into a habit, and it is very interesting to see how one can get through the day with very little sense of 'I' and 'mine'.

Of course, it helps to be in a meditative atmosphere like a monastery. Everything is provided, there is a daily routine, and one can focus on attaining and maintaining the egoless state.

April 22–Empty

"Nature abhors a vacuum." This principle is applicable in every area of life, but it especially applies to spiritual life. If you want to become full in something, it is enough to empty yourself of its opposite. Then the desirable thing will be drawn to you automatically, magnetically—you will not be able to avoid it.

This is the real secret of fulfilling all desires. Forget about your desire; desiring will simply push the object of your desire farther away. Rather, concentrate on eliminating whatever is in the way of it.

For example, every spiritual path instructs us to get knowledge. Knowledge is considered to be very valuable. But you can go blind studying all the books in the world, and still not have enough knowledge to satisfy your purposes. However, there is a very easy method to attain knowledge—and that is simply to get rid of your ignorance as far as possible. Then knowledge will come to you automatically.

What is ignorance and how to get rid of it? The Buddha goes into the subject in great detail. I will summarize the topic briefly.

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First of all, abandon sensual desire. Reduce your desires for material pleasure, luxury, sense enjoyment. Live simply. This alone will save so much time and energy, you will become more intelligent automatically. Oh, and because you act less lusty, everyone will like you so much more.

Then, get rid of ill-will. Negative emotions like envy, jealousy and anger simply make a fool of the person who harbors, feeds and expresses them. Get rid of these, and you will immediately begin to act like a person with knowledge.

Laziness, sloth & torpor are great enemies of knowledge. Instead of hanging out with family or friends, surfing the net or watching television, take up meditation. You don't have to know what you're doing. Just the fact that you're sitting there will begin to still your mind, which will help you get rid of...

Restlessness & anxiety, another great waste of time and energy. Worrying about a future that may or may not happen is foolish. Wait and deal with problems when they come, instead of trying to anticipate them.

Abandon uncertainty by finding a good source of knowledge, such as the Theravāda Suttas, and commit to reading them through, studying them carefully and learning to see the world and life through them. The Buddha's arguments are so convincing that you will forget all nonsense speculation and take refuge in his superior knowledge.

Give up being impressionable and develop equanimity. On seeing a form via the eye, hearing a sound via the ear, smelling an aroma via the nose, tasting a flavor via the tongue, touching a tactile sensation via the body or cognizing an idea via the intellect, do not be gladdened or saddened, but remain equanimous, mindful & alert.

There is more—lots more—but getting rid of these aspects of ignorance should keep you well-occupied for some time. And you will be surprised: knowledge will come to you, even wisdom will start knocking on your door. People will start to see you as advanced & intelligent, even if you have ordinary mental faculties. Stay empty of ignorance. For most of the secret of intelligence is just to avoid doing anything stupid.

April 23–The Existential Ambiguity

“He should develop the perception of inconstancy so as to uproot the conceit, ‘I am.’ For a monk perceiving inconstancy, the perception of not-self is made firm. One perceiving not-self attains the uprooting of the conceit, ‘I am’. [He attains] unbinding in the here & now.” — *Sambodhi Sutta*

The Buddha’s use of the term ‘here & now’ indicates that he is speaking of existential matters. His teaching is not about past experience; it is not philosophical reflection on memories. The Buddha’s method is phenomenological, rooted in the experience of the present. He wants to change our experience in the moment, alter our existential consciousness; that can only be done in the here & now.

The main thing the Buddha would like to teach us is to uproot the conceit ‘I am’. Conceit can mean excessive pride, or it can refer to an imaginary notion or an elaborate metaphor. The Buddha’s meaning here is a bit of each.

The notion ‘I am’ is an elaborate fiction. ‘I’ begins when we separate from the mother in the experience of birth, a tremendous trauma that lays the foundation for creating all kinds of individuation and existential suffering later on. As we have discussed in previous posts, the sequence 0, 1, 2 and so forth is implicit in the experience of parturition and early childhood.

As infants and children we are conditioned by others to create an artificial separation between our immediate experience and our ‘self’. This becomes such a deeply ingrained habit, applied to each and every perception, that we come to believe firmly in the existence of an entity called ‘I’—although it is a complete fabrication. In fact we are ready to perform any kind of action to defend or convince others of the existence of this ‘I’.

Yet the self is an illusion, like a movie, where many still pictures flashed on the screen in rapid succession on a screen appear to be moving. Similarly, we become so expert at the process of fabricating ‘I’ from phenomena we experience that we can do it in a fraction of a second. This creates the

illusion of the continuous existence of a single, persisting self from the creation of many separate ‘Ts—dozens of them every second.

To observe this, we have to slow down our mental processes until the process of ‘I’-making and ‘mine’-making is cognizable. This is done by tranquility meditation, using the technique of Ānāpānasati, until we can clearly see the fabrication of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ taking place along with each perception.

The Blessed One said: “There is the case, monks, where an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person — who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma — perceives earth as earth. Perceiving earth as earth, he conceives [things] about earth, he conceives [things] in earth, he conceives [things] coming out of earth, he conceives earth as ‘mine,’ he delights in earth. Why is that? Because he has not comprehended it, I tell you.” — *Mulapariyaya Sutta*

In this passage, ‘conceives’ means the same as ‘imagines’. As soon as we make something ‘ours’, we instantiate the ‘self’. And we do this so often it creates the effect of a continuously existing ‘I’.

Only the ‘self’ that we create has no positive existence. Can you show me your ‘self’? Not your body, not your stuff, not even your memories or your mind—where is your self? It is software; it is a continuously repeated speculation, just a story we tell ourselves to reassure ourselves that we indeed exist.

The point that no one but an advanced meditator can understand is that, by separating our ‘self’ from our experience in order to make it ‘mine’, we lose the actual pleasure of being an integrated living part of a living world. Our fabricated egoistic enjoyment can never recapture the freshness and completeness of the original, intimate experience.

We create our own egos and try to acquire, possess and enjoy our experience. But in the process we also create our separation and alienation from the whole. Then we wonder why we are suffering, and pray to a ‘God’ fabricated in our own egoistic image. How pathetic the whole thing is, how intricately we are bound—and yet how easy it is to give up the whole nonsense one we understand.

‘I’ is imaginary. It doesn’t exist, and it never has. How can something so insubstantial become so important that we are ready to invent false religions to worship its image, projected as ‘God’? That we are ready to die for it, or kill others over it? This absurdity, this ambiguity is the root cause of human suffering. It’s way past time that we grew up and finish this disease—the disease of ‘I’.

April 23—The Puthujjana

A Puthujjana is a worldling; a person who has no acquaintance with or practice of the Buddha’s Teaching, the Dhamma; or, by implication, has only a partial or distorted idea of it. In common Buddhist usage, a Puthujjana is anyone who has not yet attained stream-entry. And what is a stream-winner?

“Monks, there are these five groups of clinging. What five? The body-group of clinging, the feeling-group, the perception-group, the mental-formation-group, the consciousness-group of clinging. And when, monks, the Ariyan disciple understands the arising and the passing away, the attractiveness and the danger, and the deliverance from the five groups of clinging as they really are, he is called an Ariyan disciple who is a Stream-winner, not liable to states of woe, assured of final enlightenment.” —
Sotāpanna Sutta

The realization of the nature, function and above all, the danger of clinging is the most important method of the Buddha’s Teaching. Clinging to ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is the precise nature of the disease of *samsāra*, repeated birth and death in the material world. Once a person sees this, realizes it and thoroughly understands it—not just in theory but in practice—he is known as a stream-winner (Sotāpanna). Until then he is just a Puthujjana, a worldling with a bad case of *samsāra*.

The Puthujjana’s consciousness is limited to attraction by pleasure and repulsion by pain. How ironic that in his constant thirst and search for pleasure, in clinging to pleasure he creates *kamma* that binds him more tightly to states of being and suffering in the world.

Even more ironic is the fact that most people who identify as Buddhists are caught in the same muddle. In Thailand we saw many temples dedicated

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simply to earning merit for householders. They want to create good *kamma* so they can enjoy material opulence, heedless of the fact that by enjoying material opulence they bind themselves even more tightly to the wheel of birth and death.

And Buddhism in the west is totally broken. It is as if someone took a church, and replaced Jesus Christ with the Buddha. Even the sermons taught in those temples sound more like the Bible than the Buddha's Dhamma. They teach ridiculous things like, "Be gentle with your pain," when the Buddha said, "Be ruthless with your pain. Uproot it completely. Extinguish it without remainder."

The Dhamma has a certain pure flavor: the flavor of emptiness. The Buddha said, "I live always in a dwelling of emptiness." Emptiness means there is no real being in temporary material existence. Without the concept of emptiness, Buddhism is as impotent as any other religion to save people from *samsāra*. Emptiness is the heart of authentic Buddhism. We don't perceive that heart-flavor in western Buddhism.

So most so-called Buddhists, without a clear grasp of the Buddha's Dhamma, simply remain Puthujana. They could easily rise from that condition and win stream-entry, if they would just study and comprehend the Suttas for themselves. But out of laziness, sloth and torpor, they would rather let someone else interpret the Suttas for them. Thus they cheat themselves of the greatest benefit possible in existence: complete cessation of suffering.



April 23–No Salesman Will Call

As regular readers are aware, we are living in an authentic Buddhist monastery in an ecologically pristine community in rural Sri Lanka. Somehow by great good fortune, we got an introduction from a sympathetic friend. The monks like us and have more or less adopted us.

At this very early stage of cultural assimilation we are pretty useless except for study and the most menial tasks. The language barrier is formidable; we have to learn both Sinhala and Pali. But we are making steady progress and as long as the Venerables are happy, we are happy. Every day something occurs that makes us feel profoundly grateful to be here.

Today I began thinking about my previous spiritual organization, how my spiritual master came to the US from India at an advanced age to convert

us heathen westerners. It struck me that a similar mission to introduce authentic Buddhism to the west would not only be possible, but also very desirable.

With my previous experience as a senior monk in just such a mission, I could understand just how to structure it. Before long I could visualize the outlines of such an organization in my mind. It would be well within my capabilities and experience to organize and write up the project, create a set of books on the philosophy, assemble a team, create a plan and manage its execution.

Then I stopped. I am by far not the brightest light in the room around here. There are many monks far more enlightened and experienced than myself. Why didn't they initiate such a mission long ago?

A little more contemplation and the answer lit up: because Buddhism is not a religion, to proselytize it is inappropriate. Proselytizing is an aspect or extension of the same 'I'-making and 'mine'-making process that creates all our suffering in the first place. It is equivalent to making a person 'ours', making him a part of 'our group', bringing him into subjugation.

The whole proselytizing mood is very distasteful to any authentic Buddhist. Even the Buddha did not teach until he was invited.

Of course, there are those who have made Buddha's teaching into a religion, and maybe they would find proselytizing more to their taste. In fact they have; the west is full of missions and schools teaching more or less distorted and diluted versions of Buddhism. I know from experience that bringing an esoteric teaching to a wide audience always results in such distortion; would I really want to see that happen to our path? Of course not.

Authentic Buddhism is very rare. It survives only in remote forest monasteries in obscure corners of Buddhist countries like Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. It is not a religion; it is a methodology of complete freedom from suffering.

Religions have created so much suffering in the world with aggressive proselytizing. Buddhism should show a better way—and it does. We had to

work very hard to find this authentic teaching. There was no proselytizing; we had to do the research, seek and find it ourselves.

So that is the mood. We wish you well; we want you to be happy, to give up your ignorance and take up the Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path. We hope that very soon you become enlightened and attain Buddhahood.

But we will not come to you; if you want this high teaching, you have to seek it out yourself. No salesman will call, no one will try to convince or convert you—your salvation is completely up to you.

April 26–Shining a Light

Now that Poya is past, things have begun to settle down to a normal pace here. That means plenty of time for meditation and contemplation. Meditation is like shining a light into the dusty hidden corners of the mind, and contemplation is about recognizing the things we find there.

The things we see in the neglected shadows of our minds are not always pretty, or easy to own. Early in the morning today, 4 AM, I was meditating, entering the third *jhāna*. After the heavy, intense bliss of the first two *jhānas*, the third is very peaceful.

There I could see very clearly the lies of theism, and why theists are always more or less crazy. Making up stories and then worshiping them is always risky. The first story we create is that 'I' am. Where is this 'I'? Can you show it to me? Just like any abstraction, any of our stories, it is more or less a fabrication—that's a polite word for 'lie'.

But we don't stop there. No sir, while we're at it, we make up all kinds of fictitious entities—from corporations to whole countries and religions—and then identify them as part of 'I'. But the greatest lie of all is that there is one person who made everything, owns and controls everything. Yes, I'm talking about 'God'.

So now you have one fictitious entity—"I"—worshiping another fictitious entity. Is there any wonder there no end of craziness around 'god' and religion? In my previous spiritual path, we were supposed to realize 'god' and our 'eternal relationship' with him. Of course, all the great saints of

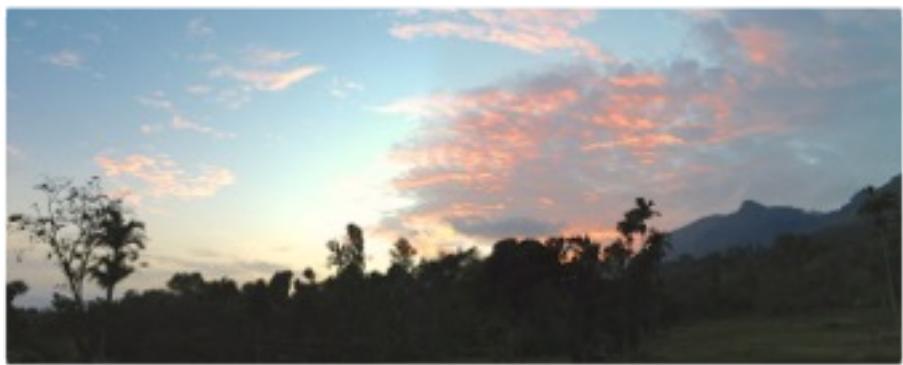
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that tradition were madmen. They admitted it themselves! But they built a religion around their madness, called their epileptic seizures ‘spiritual ecstasy’.

And to think, I was actually teaching that nonsense! No wonder I went crazy. I have to apologize to all the people I may have hurt or misled. The whole thing was bogus. The result of trying to make an eternal self of any kind is madness. What to speak of an eternal self that eternally worships an eternal ‘god’ with no possibility of any change!

Nothing is eternal, nothing is forever, everything and everyone is subject to change, decay and death. In the realm of ego-identification, everything is a dream, an illusion, words without substance. Don’t be fooled by any amount of flowery words or someone’s psychosis dressed up with poetic expression. It is just very beautiful suffering—the most refined level of masochism. Don’t go for it.

I will never again get involved with spiritual organizations and preaching. It is just spreading one person’s psychosis and egomania to others. Anyone can read the Theravāda Suttas, sit down and realize everything directly for himself. No need for religion, spiritual master or religious organizations. Just shine a light into the dark corners of your mind, and clean up the dust and spiderwebs you find there.



April 27–May All Beings be Happy!

Every day we chant with the monks these words from the *Karaṇīya-mettā Sutta*:

*ye keci pāñabhūtathī, tasā vā thāvarā vanavasesā.
dīghā vā ye va mahantā, majjhimā rassakā anukathūlā.
dīthā vā ye va adīthā, ye va dūre vasanti avidūre.
bhūtā va sambhavesī va, sabbasattā bhavantu sukhitattā.*

“Whatever living beings there may be — feeble or strong (or the seekers and the attained) long, stout, or of medium size, short, small, large, those seen or those unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born as well as those yet to be born — may all beings have happy minds.”

Of course we know, despite our good wishes, that most people are miserable. And why? The separation of ‘I-making’ and ‘mine’-making alienates them from their own core, their inmost being—not to mention from the whole rest of existence. “Stay back! I am me, the great self! Stay away from everything that is mine!” Is it any wonder that we are so lonely? We want to reach out and merge, feel the same ecstasy we had in the womb of our mothers, the same oneness with everything. But we can’t—we have our ‘self’, our ‘ego’ and our ‘possessions’ to protect.

The training of society, the conditioning received in childhood, has become a deep hypnosis. We continue to separate ourselves from all and everything, just to prove that we are such good little citizens. See? We follow all the external rules, we make ourselves miserable just to get a little social approval. Go to school, make a career, buy a nice car, get married, buy a house, have a family, work ourselves to death—all in the name of someone else’s pleasure. And we never get to experience our authentic self, what to speak of approaching our core, our real being, the immortal part of us that never suffers, never dies.

When I think of all the suffering I have experienced in this life, and how it has become insignificant with just a little practice of authentic Buddhist meditation, it seems very remarkable. I want everyone to have this benefit, this inner freedom; but of course, I didn’t just attain this state overnight. I studied all the great spiritual paths and teachings, traveled all over the

world, studied Latin, Sanskrit and other languages, immersed myself in the sacred culture of many lands. I studied many books of ancient wisdom, served many teachers, made many offerings, performed many austerities and sacrifices, went into deep meditation—often for weeks or months at a time.

So when I had a difficult life crisis to face at an advanced age, searching for the cause and the cure, and I finally encountered the authentic teaching of the Buddha, I was well-prepared to receive and implement it. Not many people are so ready to go deep into meditation. It would take most people years to reach where I have reached in just a few months. Still, it is not impossible if you just follow the instructions so clearly given in the Suttas.

The problem is, there are many so-called Buddhist teachings that have nothing to do with the actual original teaching of the Buddha. And most people have heard so much nonsense talk against Buddhism, usually from religious leaders who consider it competition. But Buddhism is not competition, because it is not a religion. There is no God to obey, to serve or to please. Buddha taught that each of us is fully responsible for both our bondage and our liberation.

And to get the full benefit, you will have to give up your constant effort to maintain a separate self. ‘I’-making and ‘mine’-making is hard work! It is like a program that runs all the time in the background, stealing resources and life energy from what you really want to do. The Buddha calls giving up that meaningless chase ‘Laying down the burden.’

So the meditation given in the *Karanya-mettā Sutta* is a very good place to start. You can send blessings, good wishes to all beings. You will be surprised what happens: your heart will fill to overflowing with kindness, beneficence and love. You will be moved to ecstasy, even to tears with gladness. It is a good place to start to heal all the wounds of the heart that have kept us imprisoned in illusion for so long: May all beings be happy!

April 28–The Religion Game

Religion is a game. Spiritual life is a game. Enlightenment is a game. A game is any condition or situation where there are goals, purposes, rules, rewards, punishments, players and a playing field. In most religions, the goal is to attain salvation by pleasing some god—which in practice works out to serving the hierarchy of the priesthood and other leaders as if they were gods. You ‘win’ by attaining a high position in the hierarchy.

The same is true of pseudo-religions like Śāṅkara’s *advaita*, where the goal is to **become** god. Most religions are hoaxes, but *advaita-vāda* is an especially ridiculous and obvious one. Once I was riding with a couple, talking about spiritual topics, and the man claimed to be god. I said, “Fine. Will you please create one small insect here in my hand, just to prove it?” Of course, he could not.

In all religions, the conceit of the ego, ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is projected onto a screen the size of the universe. The result is “God”, who shows up as a rather angry, jealous and spoiled creature, with a mental age of seven or less. The resemblance of ‘god’ to the personality of a typical frustrated religious person is blindingly obvious that of course, most religious people miss it completely.

The teaching of the Buddha is also a game, but its rules are very different from the religions. Of course, there are people who approach Buddha’s teaching like a religion, but they are considered neophytes. There is a need to generate good *kamma* in the beginning of the path, and the religious aspect of Buddhism fills this need.

The Buddha is a good friend; he is honest. He admits that his noble eightfold path is a fabrication, but it is a deliberate, admitted fabrication meant to lead us to the point of not needing fabrications any more. The ego of a Sādhu or Bhikkhu leads to the goal of giving up ego altogether. In the Buddhist path, the field is one’s own self, and the goal is *nibbana* (*nirvāna*), which literally means ‘cooling’.

The passions and mind should be cooled by tranquillity to the point where the fabrications of false ego, in particular, are easily visible. Then it is a simple matter to stop them—“lay the burden down,” the Buddha calls it.

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Ego-fabrication is the game of asserting the existence of 'I' and 'mine' over the natural phenomena of existence. Actually there is no 'I' and 'mine', but we create it.

Let's take any phenomenon—for example if I lay down and close my eyes, there are some lights or visions floating in the darkness. These are simply phenomena that are present, but if I assert that they are 'mine' then I indirectly create the necessity for 'I'. This process is going on continuously, habitually and automatically with every one of the thousands of perceptions we experience every day. In this way we create the illusion of a permanent 'I', although actually no such thing exists.

Release from the burden of ego-fabrication is enlightenment, the goal of the noble eightfold path. What then? The Buddha is silent on this point. Anyone who has come to the end of the path will be able to see for themselves. Freedom! No more birth and death. All games are over. You have won.



April 29–Conclusions Regarding Leadership

This blog began at the end of a long, deep study of leadership. This study was motivated by the failure of my former spiritual organization, and the subsequent failure of my attempt to create a better, kinder, more intelligent version of it. In both cases, the failure seemed to be one of leadership, so an inquiry into leadership seemed to be in order.

After carefully studying the state of the art in modern leadership, we went deeper, to its roots in postmodern existential philosophy. Here we encountered thoughts that seemed to echo the ancient insights of the Buddha, so we reviewed his teachings as well. That is when the light started going on in our heads, and we really understood what happened and why. These insights are well worth passing on to our readers.

Inspiring transformative leadership is, at its root, thought leadership. A successful leader inspires others to adopt a certain line of thinking, which leads to conclusions supportive of the leader's project or aim. Those being led then support the leader's project spontaneously, on their own initiative.

There are various tricks of the thought leadership trade, but that is not what I want to highlight here. I don't want to focus on how to do thought leadership, but on what it is. In its essence, thought leadership is about being and becoming. The leader displays a certain type of being that is attractive enough that others want to become like him.

The role of a leader seems very attractive, but there are many hidden traps. The Buddha explains that being and becoming are the main causes of suffering. So the leader is, in essence, offering the follower to trade a lower class of suffering for a better class, 'improved' suffering.

But suffering is still suffering, no matter how you spin it. There is a better deal in town, and that is to end suffering entirely. The same conceptual tools of being and becoming used in contemporary leadership can also be used to attain the complete cessation of suffering. When you compare better suffering with no suffering at all, the ethical choice is pretty clear. Therefore, we abandoned our study of leadership for the study of the Buddha's teaching.

Still, there are some valuable takeaways from our leadership studies I would like to share. We already discussed how the principal product of leadership is a new, improved kind of suffering. Any aspiring leader, if he knows what he is doing, can find enough people who are in the market for a better type of suffering to support his project.

Our concern is the ethics of leadership, and how it affects both leaders and the led. Being and becoming both generate *kamma*. Being is specifically the creation of a particular type of false ego—a fabricated identity. If a person follows a leader and fabricates an identity that causes them to accumulate *kamma*, part of the *kamma* they generate thereby also accrues to the leader. This is one reason why leaders get into trouble.

Another reason is the concentration of power at the top of an organization makes it possible to achieve states of being and becoming that would be impossible for an individual acting alone. However, this also tempts the individuals at the top to abuse or misuse that power for selfish ends. We see examples of this in the news every day as such leaders are exposed.

Organizations involve a power trade. Individuals who become members of an organization give up a certain amount of their power and energy to the organization, trusting that the group will achieve certain desirable goals. One of the goals of any organization is to optimize this trade, to get as much and give as little as possible. In other words, every organization devotes considerable study and planning to how to cheat its members more efficiently.

For the above reasons and more, we decided to terminate the study and practice of leadership, and concentrate on the teaching of the Buddha. Our goal is to attain complete enlightenment, which gives total freedom from being, becoming and *kamma*.

At this point, the only legitimate application of leadership that we can envision is to inspire people to take to the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha and finish all their suffering. Perhaps in the future we will have an opportunity to implement such a thought leadership project; at this time,

we prefer to concentrate our attention and energy on getting free from suffering ourselves.



April 30—Three Stages of Buddhism

We often see a partial presentation of Buddha's teaching, focusing on only one of the three stages of Buddhist practice. But to get the full benefit of the Buddha's teaching, one should practice it in the correct order and sequence. Briefly, the three stages are:

- **Exoteric:**

Religious Buddhism, stress on positive aspects (making merit, study)

- **Mesoteric:**

sādhana, stress on meditation, insight (Ānāpānasati, Vipassana)

- **Esoteric:**

Realization, stress on negative aspects, unbinding (Zen, Tantra)

These are often called the initiation, cultivation and completion stages.

We often see people attempt to jump into the higher stages without proper preparation. This is like trying to climb a high mountain or take a long journey without forming a team, gathering provisions, establishing a base camp, etc. The usual result is that the purpose of the Buddha's teaching remains unattained; the individual is not released from becoming and the attendant suffering.

This is tragic, because the teaching of the Buddha can bestow so much benefit. Enlightenment is a very big attainment; it is possible to reach it in one lifetime, but it is not cheap—one must be prepared to invest the majority of one's time and energy. The proper strategy and approach are critical.

In the first stage, the aspirant recites Suttas and prayers, makes offerings, becomes affiliated with a temple, seeks a qualified teacher, studies the Suttas and learns the holy life. He may remain a lay disciple or accept monastic vows. These days there is such a shortage of monks that they are often overworked and have no time for meditation; for one's personal benefit it is often better to learn and practice as an Upāsaka.

In the second stage, one practices inner cultivation of meditative states according to the methods taught by the Buddha. The necessity of having a right view of the path cannot be over stressed; clinging to wrong views can nullify all the hard work of meditation practice. We personally know many practitioners who have not achieved the first *jhāna* (stage of concentration) even after years of practice. Their progress is blocked because of wrong view.

In the third stage, insight dawns, the practitioner realizes the Four Noble Truths for himself, and he is released from suffering. Exactly how much suffering is released depends very much on how well he has understood the Buddha's teaching and how accurately he has practiced it in the previous stages. Sometimes it is necessary to go back and correct a mistake to attain complete realization.

The classification of the path into three stages is based on the simile of the raft:

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The Blessed One said: “Suppose a man were traveling along a path. He would see a great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the further shore secure & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. The thought would occur to him, ‘Here is this great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the further shore secure & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. What if I were to gather grass, twigs, branches, & leaves and, having bound them together to make a raft, were to cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with my hands & feet?’ Then the man, having gathered grass, twigs, branches, & leaves, having bound them together to make a raft, would cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with his hands & feet.

“Having crossed over to the further shore, he might think, ‘How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don’t I, having hoisted it on my head or carrying it on my back, go wherever I like?’ What do you think, monks: Would the man, in doing that, be doing what should be done with the raft?”

“No, lord.”

“And what should the man do in order to be doing what should be done with the raft? There is the case where the man, having crossed over, would think, ‘How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don’t I, having dragged it on dry land or sinking it in the water, go wherever I like?’ In doing this, he would be doing what should be done with the raft.

“In the same way, monks, I have taught the Dhamma compared to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Understanding the Dhamma as taught compared to a raft, you should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas.”—*Alagaddupama Sutta*

So the three stages of the path are like recognizing the situation and realizing what has to be done and building the raft, sailing the raft across the flood, and finally letting it go on the other side. Our situation is that we are in trouble because we are suffering and have to be reborn. What has to be done is first, to learn the Buddha’s teaching completely and accurately,

and also create enough good *kamma* to sustain us during the cultivation of insight.

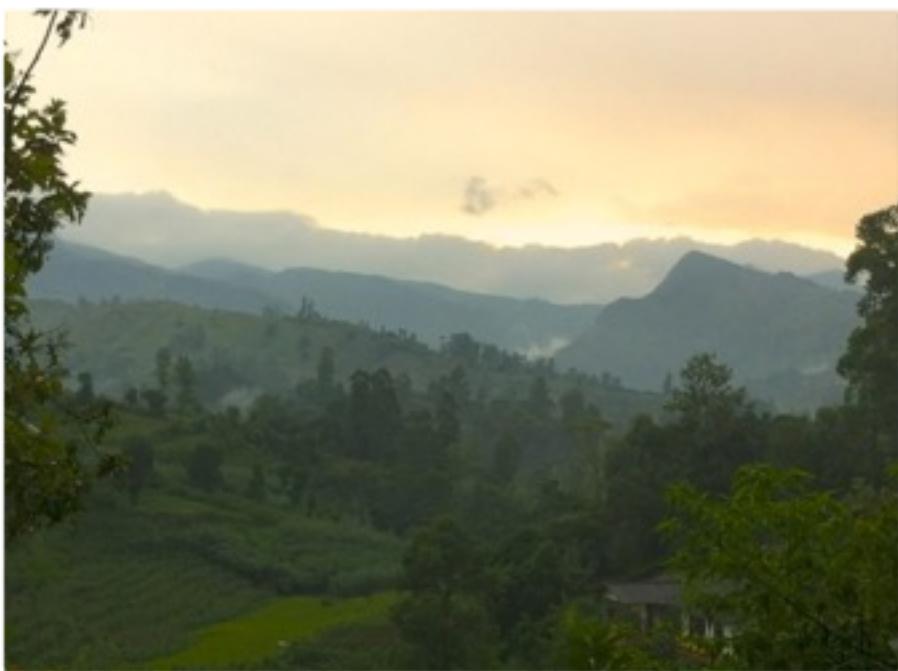
Second, having understood the Buddha's teaching we must implement the original teaching in its proper form, developing the necessary concentration to gain insight and realization. Third, having realized the cause of bondage to *samsāra*, we must let it go, along with the rules and practices of the path. Then we are free, fully and rightly enlightened.

But this freedom cannot be faked. There are some who act against the precepts, claiming to be enlightened. But if they were authentically enlightened, they would follow the precepts spontaneously—not because they are rules, but because they are the way an enlightened person behaves. Much damage has been done by phony claims of enlightenment.

If someone is really enlightened, gradually it will become known to all. There is no reason, no need to advertise it or make a public claim. Recognition will happen, just as realization has happened. Leaving the raft behind means no more need to rely on religious formalities; but it also means that one is really on the far shore, completely free from desire and ignorance.

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May 1–The Ultimate Addiction

We are coming down from a long, strange trip. We have been getting off on egotism, getting high on cooking up a self, hallucinating an identity. And like so many things concerning ego, it has become a competition, an item of machismo. “My ego can beat up your ego!”

Until you see it, it seems like the only game in town. But once you have seen it, it’s just ridiculous, ludicrous: a child’s game of make-believe.

In my previous spiritual group, the aim was to become lovers with god. Ego or the creation of a false self involves the perceptions of eternity and pleasure. So the penultimate ego is to be god’s lover, god’s intimate friend. Of course, the ultimate in that game is to become god himself; but our sect

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viewed that as too outrageous. We were more discreet—we only wanted eternal existence as god's girlfriends, as his mates.

Of course, many of the devotees in that line went mad. Now we are suffering like anything. But god will save us! He will come and take us to his perfect planet and make love with us forever. Just think of it—the greatest pleasure, stretching into eternity!

It's a nice story, a very pleasant dream—but it's not true, can't be true. So the devotee is torn between the lovely dream and the harsh reality. The devotees of that sect are all neurotic, vicious egotists. Their daily reality is one of extreme political conflict. There is tremendous competition for the temple leadership posts; you can't believe it, just dog-eat-dog.

No one can relax in that group, no one can disclose anything personal to a friend. Just like in Stalin's Russia, everything is political; any confidence you reveal can and will be politicized and used against you. The nepotism is pervasive, the politics are intense and unrelenting.

Why is a group ostensibly dedicated to love of god so vicious? Because it is not really love of god, it is love of self—egotism of a very high degree. Of course they are fighting among themselves, they are all enormous egotists! But of course, it is hidden behind a mask of so-called nonviolence, piety, humility and service—all phony.

They have big scriptures, manufactured by learned pandits, in great Sanskrit poetry. The meter is so long and complex, not even a great scholar can parse it. Extremely flowery words used to describe and propagate something actually so prosaic: a false ego competition. Beware of those who claim to be selfless; they can be the greatest egotists of all.





May 1—The Limit of Egotism

The so-called devotees have become the greatest egotists. They have taken the game of ‘I’-making and ‘mine’-making almost to the limit—they want their ‘I’ to become lovers of god, they want to make god ‘mine’—their own. There is only one way to go beyond that, and that is to try to become god himself. Of course, by that time they are already mad, insane.

The ego twists and distorts everything. The mind should be a mirror, but under the influence of ego it becomes a funhouse mirror, distorting everything it reflects. It is no more reliable, it misleads you. This is conditioning. You have become conditioned, twisted by society and religion, until you no longer know what is truth, what is reality.

The so-called devotees have blown up the ego-making process to infinity. So naturally it is impossible for them to see the truth; their minds have become too distorted. Actually they are mad. It is bad enough when

someone identifies the body as the self. But at least the body has some objective existence. It persists as a concrete entity for some time, although it gradually changes and grows old.

The Vedic spiritualists create a fictitious entity called the ‘soul’ that lives forever. Not only does it exist eternally in the future, but also in the past. Then they identify their fictitious ‘self’ with the fictitious ‘soul’, then expect by chanting some mantra that they will get to live forever with some fictitious ‘god’ in the next life. No wonder they are so crazy! Their whole inner life is fiction, religious fiction.

It’s a beautiful lie, a very artistic creation made by experts in human psychology, politics, literature. A story written by master artists to enthrall and captivate the mind. Only a fool or a very astute person would fail to be captivated by it; only an idiot or a self-realized person could escape. Even great kings fell for it, became devotees of the Vedas. Of course—kings are already egotists, and in Bhakti they are getting the ultimate ego-trip!

In the advanced stages of Bhakti the devotee is advised to imagine or visualize a spiritual identity, in which to experience imaginary pastimes with an imaginary god. There are even Buddhists who practice this kind of visualization, and take it very seriously! I guess they haven’t read the Suttas very carefully.

As science-fiction writer Phillip K. Dick famously said, “Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.” Belief in a god and an eternal self takes a lot of energy. When we finally stop believing in them and they go away, the sense of relief is tremendous. This happened to me a few months back, when I started meditating seriously on the Buddha’s teaching. I could not believe how much suffering disappeared simply by stopping belief in these things that do not exist.

People believe in all kinds of fictitious abstractions: school, grades, the news, nation-states, corporations, money, reputation, the Big Bang, religion, their own egos—the list is long. They would benefit so much by giving up their false beliefs. They think they need these fictions to be

happy; but the real truth is that these illusions are the source of their suffering.



May 2—Complete Death

When the body disintegrates, most people still cling to being and life. They don't die completely. That's why they have to be born and suffer again. The Buddha's teaching enables us to die fully and completely, so we can start all over again from zero to determine the meaning of our existence.

The beauty of existence is that it has no intrinsic meaning—it is up to us human beings to create the meaning of our lives. Animals and plants have no need for meaning; to survive is enough for them. And the quest for pleasure is merely an extension of the struggle for survival. There's not much meaning in that.

Real human life begins from the realization that we are free to determine the meaning of our existence for ourselves. Once we realize this, our life becomes art. We can use our creativity, not only for making music or painting or dance, but for creating a life of beauty, of compassion, of understanding.

But few people realize their potential for creating meaning in this life, and die unfulfilled and incomplete as human beings. They leave the body still craving being as a personality, so they have to ride the wheel of *kamma* around to the point where they can become human beings again.

Depending on the *kamma* one has accumulated, that might be a long ride. It means bondage to *samsāra* and suffering.

The Buddha didn't die like an ordinary man—he attained complete Unbinding. Unbinding is different from ordinary death in that there is no residual *kamma*, nothing to determine the following birth. It is return to zero, to complete freedom. This is an almost unimaginably high state. It is higher even than the conception of god.

So the technique and philosophy taught by the Buddha is much more than a simple religion—it is a path to complete cessation of suffering, complete freedom from rebirth and becoming. As soon as we desire being on any level, we fabricate a false sense of self—an ‘I’—according to the level of our desire. Desire leads to the feeling of ownership, of ‘mine’, and of course there must be some person to be the owner.

In this way we create our own existence through desire. But because we don't realize the implications of desire—entanglement in *kamma*, in *samsāra*—out of ignorance we create suffering for ourselves. Buddha's teaching shows us the way out of that entanglement and suffering, if we understand it properly. But to get the benefit, we have to be willing to give up the false personality, proprietorship, the ego or sense of ‘I am’.

To most people this feels like death, and it is a kind of death of the ego. But it is also release from *kamma*—after all, if there is no person, who is going to receive the *kamma*? Who is going to suffer? And it means freedom from the constraints and conventions of ordinary human beingness, new abilities and freedoms that we can hardly imagine in the ordinary state of

egoistic being. Buddha's teaching offers us the opportunity to hit 'reset' and begin all over again from zero to create the meaning of our lives—this time with full knowledge of the consequences.



May 3—Make it Beautiful

Despite what we have been told by self-interested parties, there is no intrinsic meaning in life. You are free. You can make of it whatever you want. I only have one request: whatever you do, whatever you create in your life, make it beautiful.

So far the human race has not made much that is beautiful. Our track record is pretty abysmal. Just look at the news, look at history. So many wars—not beautiful. Big banks price-fixing interest-rate swaps, foreclosing houses and robbing people of their life's work—not beautiful. Suicide among young and middle-aged adults rose more than 30% over the last 12

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years—not beautiful. More and more people are abusing, even shooting and killing their families before killing themselves—not beautiful.

Just walk down any street. The buildings are not well-sited; they are poorly designed. The architectural styles clash. The sidewalk is broken. Glaring signs offer this and that product that I don't need or want. Ugly music blares from shops on distorted speakers. The noise of traffic is deafening.

Kids spend more than 12 years of their lives chained to a desk, learning useless stuff they will never use, dictated by government planners, just to socialize them. Then they spend the majority of their adult life working for some rich capitalist to make him richer. More and more wealth and power is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The surveillance state grows more powerful every day; more and more ordinary acts are criminalized, more and more ordinary people treated like criminals, thrown in jail.

Stop! This is not beautiful!

Where I sit, it's 4:30 AM. There's a silver gibbous moon high in a clear sky full of stars. The world is silent except for the sounds of crickets and the perennial rush of a waterfall up the valley. The scents of pine, eucalyptus, wildflowers and recent rain mingle. I am in a small cabin—one of several, almost identical, scattered around the lush hillside in a forest monastery.

Soon the headmaster's bell will ring, the monks will finish their morning meditation and head to the tea house for brown rice soup and jaggery. Soon the songbirds will begin their morning concert. The wood fires in the kitchen will emit fragrant smoke as breakfast is prepared. Another beautiful day has begun.

I have been awake for some time already, looking inward. There is so much light within, sparkling and blazing like the sun, but cooling as the moon. There is so much pleasure and satisfaction in this simple life. I have found something very beautiful here, and I am doing my best with whatever small talents I have to share it with anyone who cares.

The Buddha has created something very profound and beautiful. He found the cure for suffering just by looking into himself. Many have tested it, and it works. There is no need to suffer any more. No need take birth again. No need to be ugly, no need to destroy.

Please look into yourself and find something beautiful. Make it, do it, share it with the world.



May 6–Existentialism, Ontology and Enlightenment

If you are comfortable with the above terms, then you already can understand most of what this *Journal* is about. If not—well, that's why I need to write this.

Existentialism, the dominant philosophy of the twentieth century, is sort of a manifesto of postmodern thought. It goes hand-in-hand with phenomenology, the science of experience. Existentialism asks the vital question “What am I?” but does not supply an answer. It is up to every one of us to search out the answer for himself in his experience.

Ontology is the science of being and becoming. It has to do with our model of the structure of reality, and how it influences consciousness. It goes together with phenomenology, an experiential approach to life and learning. Ontology provides tools for the comprehension of life and mastery of being and becoming.

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Enlightenment is the peerless teaching of the Buddha, the key to the complete cessation of suffering. Mastering the Four Noble Truths—suffering, the cause of suffering, cessation of suffering and the path to cessation of suffering—is the key to enlightenment, the perfection of human life.

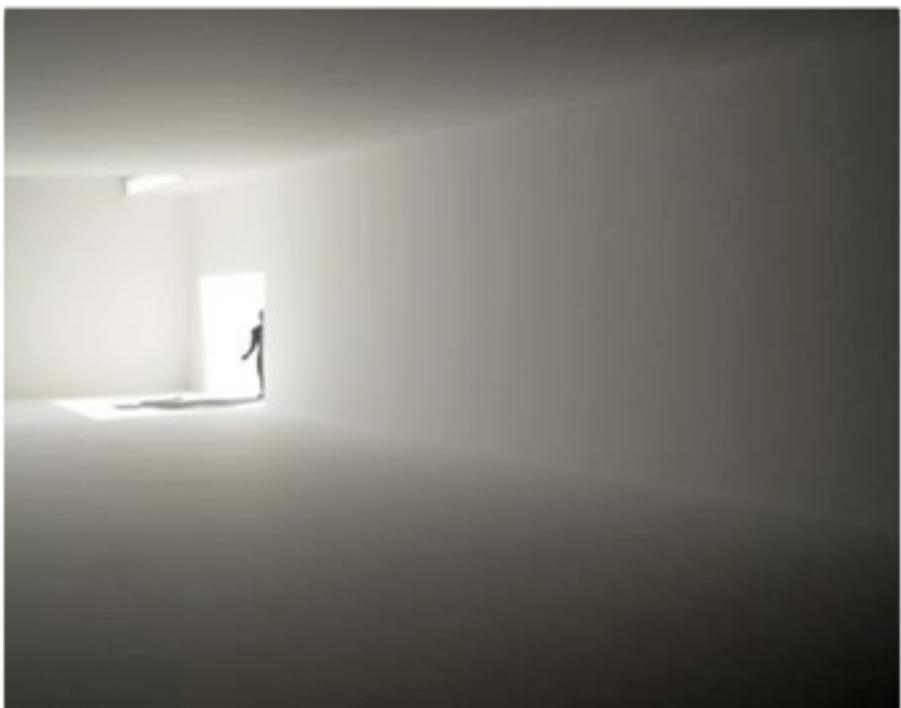
Ergontics is from the Greek *ergos*, work; and *ontic*, of or having to do with the possibilities of being. Our work involves a scientific approach to questions of the possibilities of being. Specifically, beginning from issues of integrity in leadership, we developed a line of research into being and becoming that led back to the original teaching of the Buddha.

Forest Meditation Monastery is our present residence and workplace located in a remote rural area in the mountains of Sri Lanka. Here we are participating in authentic Buddhist community in a pristine ecological environment. It is a perfect situation for deep meditation and learning spiritual truth.

Existential Ambiguity is our podcast on Buddha's Teaching, expressed in the language of existential ontology. We are following Wettimuny's *Buddha's Teaching and the Ambiguity of Existence* as a text, and adding a lively discussion and our personal clarification and insights.

Your Dictionary is your friend. Make liberal use of it to get the best from this site.

We welcome your comments and suggestions.



May 7—A Whole Lotta' Nuthin'

This morning I awoke extra early, got to stay in bed and concentrate before the bell. Once it rang I got up, washed my face and sat down on the seat I had prepared before retiring. I reached concentration pretty quickly, getting the first Sign in a couple of breaths. The Countersign soon showed up, hanging in the sky of my mind like a big fat harvest moon of bliss.

Usually it just stays there through the *jhānas*, but this morning I entered into it. I floated through a strange, silent landscape of huge formless structures, all glowing with the self-illumination of inner reality. Sometimes they moved aside as I approached, revealing yet another layer of depth within.

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Finally I approached a kind of boundary, and there, framed in nebulosity, was empty space— infinite, boundless no-thing-ness. I've been someplace similar a couple of times before, seen it from afar, but this was up close and personal, so close I could touch it with my mind.

Pure emptiness is scary. It means the end of ego, period. It reminds me of the time I went diving off the east coast of Guam. The west coast is nice, a shallow rolling sandy bottom, a favorite hangout for vast schools of small, brightly colored fish. The east coast is the dropoff to the Marianas Trench: 35,000 feet (10,000 meters) nearly straight down.

When I was in the water, I could feel the awesomeness of it. No silly tropical fish here—big barracuda and reef sharks patrolled over us, and the huge void beckoned with a kind of infra-sound that I could feel somewhere deep inside. It was fascinating but terrible.

This morning's void was even deeper and emptier, like pure black liquid antimatter ready to annihilate anything that ventures in. I hung back; there's still something I'm not ready to let go of. I know that to enter it means a kind of death, the end of something I have carried uselessly for a long time. The monk who emerges from that void will not be, cannot be the monk who entered it.

I'm not quite ready for that yet. But I have seen. Once you have seen something, you can't un-see it. I know that awesome empty void is there, waiting. Someday soon I will get up the courage to enter it.

When I get ordained, I'm going to ask to be named Monkzilla.





Eucalyptus Forest Behind the Monastery

May 9—Why We Do This

Sometimes people ask, directly or indirectly, “Why do you maintain this blog? Why go through all the trouble of writing and editing, recording podcasts and posting? Why not just sit in the woods and meditate, now that you’ve got the chance?”

First of all, meditation is not a matter of putting in time. We are not punching a time-clock and recording the hours spent sitting. If it were just about duration, then so many people we know who have been sitting in meditation for years would already be enlightened—but they’re not. Why?

The answer has to do with the quality, not quantity of meditation. One hour of good concentration and meditation, while following the Precepts

and proceeding from Right View, is worth far more than any amount of bogus meditation based on a distorted or partial view of the Buddha's teaching. We are explaining Right View in our podcast series, so I'm not going into it here.

I can't help thinking of a friend who has been sitting in a monastery in Thailand every Rains for over twenty years, and is still hung up on his childhood. Another friend went on a 100-day solitary retreat, and spent the whole time just thinking about his problems. If they had Right View based on emptiness, they could solve those issues in a few days or weeks at most.

So what's wrong? They are holding on to 'self'. And that is why we feel compelled to put together articles and podcasts explaining the essence of the Buddha's teaching: so many have got it wrong, to the point where their meditation is having hardly any effect.

One of the most effective ways to get one's meditation on the right track is generating mettā—sending good wishes to all beings. That works well, but even better is to invest time and energy in actively helping them progress on the Eightfold Path. It's a win for everyone, especially us.

So we aren't trying to start yet another Buddhist cult or build a business teaching meditation. We don't even care to start a temple—there are enough temples already. We don't even need to be ordained as monks, although that would be nice.

We are trying to realize our practice of *mettā*, make it concrete, practical—and personal. We really do care, and want to see people—you, for example—make significant progress toward enlightenment. We would like to see more discussion, to make this help even more effective. So don't be shy, leave a comment and join the discussion.



May 10—Enlightenment for Dummies

Don't you wish you could get step-by-step instructions on how to attain enlightenment, straight from the Buddha? Well, you can. Just go through our Existential Ambiguity podcast!

The podcast goes through Wettimuny's book *The Teaching of the Buddha and the Ambiguity of Existence*, which is pretty much a translation of the Buddha's teaching into the language of existential philosophy.

You are probably an existentialist, whether you know it or not. Existentialism was the dominant philosophy of the 20th century, and so far nothing in the 21st century has even come close to its influence. We find existential ideas penetrating art, music, literature and even popular entertainment.

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Existentialism has done away with belief in unverifiable entities such as ‘god’, and this is very beneficial. But existentialism has a problem: it has raised questions that it cannot answer without some outside source of information. Vital questions such as “What am I”, “What is life?” have been found by some very smart people to be unanswerable, insoluble with existential philosophy alone.

This is where the Buddha’s teaching comes in. The Buddha took those insoluble questions, declared them invalid, and proceeded to discover a path to the cessation of suffering by looking into himself. This is good phenomenology, basing everything on direct experience. And we can have the same experience by following in the Buddha’s footsteps: the experience of emptiness.

But to do this we have to dissect our experience into its components and analyze its structure. Just like repairing a car or other machine, we have to take it apart. Once we see how it operates, we can adjust everything and put it back together again. Our podcast is giving detailed instructions on exactly how to do that.

May 11—The Meditative Life

At 2:30 AM the world is dead asleep. So is my body, but I am awake and working. I'm observing how my mind manufactures dreams out of the inner light, like a kid imagining animals in the shape of a cloud. The light moves in shapeless forms, and the mind brings in its memories and associations, creating objects, people and events that have no real existence.

An ordinary dream consists of a series of more or less arbitrary, meaningless and improbable collages of objects, persons and experiences. Interpretations of dreams say far more about the interpreter, his frame of reference and biases, than the dreamer. Dreams have no more significance than the shapes or symbols imagined in clouds of smoke. But like everything we experience, we like to add 'I' and 'mine' to them, and justify our inauthenticity by an elaborate system of rationalizations.

It seems like the 'I' and 'mine'-making machine relaxes somewhat when we are asleep. We accept our dreams uncritically, because our mind and intelligence are on hold. But my observation of the dream-making process is that it is just associative imagination fueled by the same formless illumination seen in meditation.

After some time I move out of dream space into awakening. This critical stage is normally when the 'I'-making machine turns on. This morning it got caught in the net of self-observation and could not get started. Even a little self-awareness stops the 'I'-making process, because it relies on the obscurity of unconsciousness to hide its deception.

So I was able to ride the edge of awareness between sleep and waking, stopping the 'I'-making mechanism and staying in the bliss of egolessness, for several hours. When I finally did wake up fully around sunrise, it felt like something was missing—sort of like a missing tooth, but in my mind. The habit of 'I'-making is so deeply ingrained in our consciousness, we don't notice it until it's gone.

The morning went quickly. I took rice soup with the monks and went to work writing and preparing our daily podcast. Lunchtime snuck up before

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I knew it. At lunch there was a large group of congregational members. As usual they were staring at the western Upāsakas.

I just tucked one leg under and went into meditation. These days I see the Sign very quickly; I am never far away from concentration. This inner vision led quickly into a world of light. I'm never quite sure what is going to be there, but it's always fascinating. No need for LSD, thank you; I have my own quite entertaining internal light show.

I must admit I have gotten quite used to the bliss that accompanies concentration. I am never at a loss for happiness. All it takes is a little jhāna, and I feel completely satisfied. I'm not writing this to impress anyone, but to encourage people to meditate and develop these skills.

Anyone can learn to meditate; all it takes is practice. Meditative states that used to take hours or days of effort, I now obtain in a few minutes. That's because I have been training for a long time. You can do the same; start young and by the time you're old, you'll be a master!



May 12—The Endgame

A game condition is any created situation that has goals, means, a playing field with boundaries, rules, rewards and penalties. We are familiar with games like checkers, chess, cards and roulette. Business and politics are games. But life is also a game; religion is certainly a game.

In most games like chess, there are three strategic phases: the opening, the development and the endgame. In the opening, the players establish a strategic position; in the development phase, the implications of the strategic position are worked out; and in the endgame, the dominant player clinches the victory. We can understand these phases in an ordinary game like chess; but what about the game of life?

Specifically, what about the endgame? Most religious and spiritual paths are only games that transition from the ordinary game of life to some supposedly higher game in heaven or the spiritual world. The original teaching of the Buddha is the only game whose endgame leads to the end of all games altogether.

In chess, the principal playing piece is the king. The king cannot be captured or killed; when the king has no more moves, the game ends. In life, the principal playing piece is ‘I’. One of the rules in life is that ‘I’ must never die. When ‘I’ is seen to be subject to death, we immediately create a new ‘I’ based on a different experience, and the game goes on.

For example, if we are in a relationship and the relationship ends, we immediately create a new identity based on a new relationship; or if that is not immediately possible, we create an identity based on the game of seeking a new relationship. Similarly, if we are a member of some religion and suddenly we see its inadequacy, we can change religions and build a new identity based on our new belief.

The Buddha’s noble eightfold path is certainly a game, a fabrication; but it is the only spiritual path, the only game whose purpose is explicitly to lead us to the end of all games. The Arahant who has come to the end of all pretension, stopped all fabrications, no longer claims anything as ‘I’ or ‘mine’, no longer is subject to game conditions. Why? He has no goal, follows no means, and has no ‘I’, no playing piece.

Thus the Buddha’s teaching is indeed a game, but its goal is to end all games. The Arahant—one who has realized the Buddha’s teaching of emptiness—relinquishes the burden of a self, of identifications, desires and goal-oriented activities. Refusing to define himself in any way, he is free from all limitations, and thus attains complete freedom. He has completed the endgame of human life and won the game.



May 13—A Taste of Nibbāna

The season and weather have changed. Now whenever it's not raining, it's windy—wild and gusty, from the south. Eucalyptus leaves and branches shower everywhere. The air is dry, with a certain cutting discomfort. Makes me glad I'm a writer, and not a farmer. My work is inside, in more ways than one.

The wind these last few days didn't stop us from making a nice garden plot in front of the kuti, though. And my partner is sculpting terraces into the steep hill behind our place, building rock walls and making flat places for flower gardens. We've got lots of seed and have several trays sprouting already. Our goal is to have it all planted by Wesak: the Buddha's birth, death and enlightenment anniversary in ten days or so.

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Our interest in Wettimuny's work has borne some very interesting fruit. We have got in contact with his son, who has given his permission for us to continue with the online version of his father's book. He is also working on a book and wants me to edit it. Plus there is another very exciting project in the pipeline that I can't talk about yet.

So my desire to have some personal connection with the line of work connecting existentialism and the Buddha's teaching descending from Ven. Nānāvīr and Wettimuny is satisfied. Who knows where this could lead? The saga of the Adventure Monks continues...

This morning I awoke spontaneously at 3 AM, my favorite time for meditation. It was pitch-dark and silent except for the incessant wind. I was feeling strong, so I formed an intention to go very deep. Maybe today I would make a breakthrough and discover the secret of enlightenment!

I had a bit of tea and some biscuits, washed my face and settled down to my *bhāvana*. I put in earplugs and wrapped a towel around my head. I didn't want any distractions from external light or sound. There are enough internal lights and sounds to keep track of! I laid down under a blanket, got very comfortable and went inside.

There is a sky inside the mind, with stars, a sun and moon. There are clouds and weather there too, and music. And many other things with no names. Although sometimes I get distracted in meditation, I am never bored. There is a very extensive inner landscape to explore. I don't think I will ever reach the end of it.

Sometimes I see visions, like Chinese brush-painted landscapes in deep shades of burgundy, or calligraphy in some unknown language. They are always very beautiful and meaningful. One time I saw Escher-like patterns of dark green leaves; another time, Suttas written in golden Brahmī script above a vermillion sky riven with clouds.

This morning I saw the most glorious sight: the sun breaking out from behind clouds. I noticed that the more I was able to halt the 'I'-making machine of mind, the more the brightness of the sun shone forth. It was dazzling, sparkling, pure. The mental sun is unlimited, all-pervading

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consciousness. It is there within all of us. How many have seen it and known it for what it is?

One thing about the inner world; there is no time. Hours can pass in a few moments, or a few seconds can expand to many minutes of external time. Suddenly the breakfast bell was ringing: 6:30! I came out of my meditation and got up. No point in trying to make it to breakfast. Anyway, I was satisfied by my meditation experience.

Later on at lunch, I went into light meditation during the *dāna* ceremony. Eyes half-closed, I surfed the brilliant inner light. Suddenly I got a taste of *nibbāna*, a really indescribable mental pleasure. I can understand now why the Buddha described it as cooling (*nibbāna* = cool).

Nibbāna isn't exactly cool, just like the inner sun and moon aren't exactly like the external ones. But there is really no word to describe it. I never had this particular feeling before, but I knew it was *nibbāna*. The feeling comes with its own transcendental knowingness. Writing this, I can taste it a little again.

Having even once experienced this, how could anyone want to experience the coarse and debased pleasures of the external world? Having even once tasted this, how could anyone think the taste of egotism is anything but poison? Having even once tasted this, how could anyone desire anything but another, deeper taste of *nibbāna*?



Walking Down to the Retreat Center

May 16—Ontological Buddhism

The **original teaching** of the Buddha in the Theravāda Suttas is, in our experience, the **cure** for the suffering of human life. You may be surprised to know that meditation, while an important part of the mental training taught by the Buddha, is **not** actually the cure itself. The actual cure is **conceptual**, a shift in **ontological viewpoint**.

The Buddha attained enlightenment not while in meditation, but while resting after a night of meditation, watching the morning star fading in the light of dawn. Many monks attained enlightenment from some chance event such as a breaking cup, a blown-out flame etc. after the mind had been **conditioned** by meditation and **contemplation** of a certain conceptual view.

So the condition in which we find the teaching of the Buddha today, encrusted by unnecessary religious rituals, useless scholarly commentaries

and restrictive rules, is **artificial**. Buddhism today is **crippled** by its religious context. We would like to **liberate** the original teaching of the Buddha from this crust, conceptualize, reframe and recontextualize it, and broadcast it in such a way that many people can benefit.

There is no intrinsic reason that the teaching of the Buddha has to be related as a religion. In the **past**, there was some reason for an infrastructure of monks and temples dedicated to preserving the Buddha's teaching and passing it to the next generation. But **today** with the Internet, the teaching can effortlessly be copied, perfectly preserved and transmitted to anyone, anywhere on the planet.

The religious aspect of Buddhism has **outlived its usefulness**. Now it is just **in the way** of anyone who wants to penetrate to the essence of the Buddha's method of eliminating suffering. It is time to **liberate** the Buddha's teaching from this outworn context and create many new expressions of it, more in keeping with the time.

We want to create contemporary instructional materials, complete with entertainment value, to distribute the concepts of the Buddha's teaching to a new, **nonreligious** audience. There is really no limit to how the Buddha's teaching could be repackaged and expressed. I could be communicated through video, animation, music, even **humor**.

I envision a project with a sequence of **progressive stages**:

- **Extract** the essence or conceptual core of the Buddha's teaching (the "Eye of the Dhamma").
- **Explicate** that core, giving references to the original material and many examples.
- **Present** the explication as a workbook, enabling anyone to cognize it for themselves.

Once cognized, use the teaching to **create** innumerable varieties of art.

Ontology provides a way of communicating a subject by creating a context. The idea or subject need not ever be spoken of directly; yet it can be communicated effectively through its presence in the underlying context. School works this way; it effectively communicates the concepts of

class consciousness and mental slavery without ever mentioning them directly.

We have a different message in mind, but it can be communicated by the same technique. The teaching of the Buddha can free us from the self-imposed mental slavery of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. But enclosed as it is by the trappings of religion, it has become ineffective. We aim to set it free.



Arriving at the Retreat Center

May 16—Non-Religious Buddhism

There is **no reason** that the Buddha’s teaching has to be wrapped up in religious packaging. Actually it’s a **science**, a method of treating a certain **disease** that is responsible for the **vast majority** of our suffering—‘I’ and ‘mine’.

Let’s say I were to discover the **cure** to some **major disease**—cancer or heart disease—in some ancient book. And let’s say that in the time since it

was written, the book has become part of the advanced literature of some religion. So maybe the members of that religion would be able to avoid cancer or heart disease—if they got around to studying that particular book.

This is **exactly** the situation with Buddhism today. It is a religion that has grown up around the teaching of the Buddha. It contains a book, the Sutta Pitaka, that gives the **cure** of the disease of mental suffering. But the members of the religion don't often study that book; it is considered **too advanced** for the general public because it talks about Being.

Instead, they are given **commentaries** to study, which are too scholarly and impenetrably logical or even ontological. Or they are given popular **adaptations** that distort, misinterpret or otherwise **mangle** the original teaching and make it **useless** for attaining the cessation of suffering.

I think the situation calls for breaking the original teaching out of the religious packaging and **recasting** it as mental health self-help—but **without changing** or compromising it in any way. Make it a step-by-step program that **anyone** can follow. **Throw out** all trappings of ritual and worship. Take the medicine out of the package and **throw** it to the hungry crowd.

I want to write a book or a series of articles or books—call it “Straight Talk About Buddhism” or something like that—that gives the **core essence** of the Buddha's teaching without anything added or removed. Pure, uncut Buddha, but in normal **conversational language**.

I know the path. I have experienced the result, or enough of it that I know it works. So I can speak from my own experience without getting too technical, or lapsing into ‘spiritual’, ‘mystical’ or ‘religious’ concepts.

I could even imagine making songs, cartoons, animations and other **multimedia** on that same basis. No reason why the Buddha's message can't be **entertaining** and attractive too! If it isn't, that is our lack of imagination, creativity and just plain caring to make it appeal to people in general.

Real *mettā* (compassion) should be **effective**. Not just ivory-tower **sentiment**, prayer wheels spinning in the wind. But real, substantial **help** to reduce people's suffering. I am not advocating doing away with religious Buddhism. There is certainly a place and an audience for it. But what about the **other** 8 billion suffering people? What can we do to help them?



May 17—What is Being?

The subject matter of this blog is **Ergontics**©. “Ergontics” is a compound word formed from ergo + ontic + ics. Here are the relevant definitions:

ergo-, *prefix* used to form terms relating to work, from Greek *ergon* (ἔργον): deed, doing, action, labor, work, task.

ontic, *adj.* pertaining to actual being, rather than some philosophical or scientific theory of it (that would be ontology).

-ics, *suffix* forming nouns denoting arts or sciences, branches of study, or profession.

Ergontics© therefore means “The study, science and art of work pertaining to actual being or direct experience.” It is an efficient modern technology for attaining enlightenment. Its background philosophy is the original teaching of the Buddha, as presented in the Theravāda Suttas, the earliest and most accurate records of his teaching.

So our work is about being—**actual Being**, as experienced in life, as opposed to **theories** or doctrines concerning ‘being’ (*bhava* in Pali). What are we? We are human beings. What is a human being? A specific kind or type of being. What is being? Being means existence—‘what is’.

We are going to investigate and work with our **existence**, ‘what is’ about human beings according to the teaching of the Buddha. Why do we want to do that? Because part of the **nature** or being of a human being is our **possibilities**, and the Buddha discovered or opened up a possibility that had never existed before: the **complete cessation of suffering**.

Suffering—especially mental suffering—is one of the qualities unique to the human being. Other types of beings suffer physically; but anxiety, negative emotion, lust, fear, attachment, possessiveness and so on are especially **common** in human beings.

So being—what exists or what is experienced—for a human includes **suffering**, and it is natural to search for a **remedy**. Many people have proposed innumerable varieties of remedies for suffering down through history. But if we look into these various remedies, we find that all of them are more or less **incomplete**.

The Buddha is the first to discover a **complete** and **permanent cure** for **all suffering**. Buddha’s way or path to the cessation of suffering has to do with changing our quality of being. So to implement it successfully, we must become very familiar, even **expert** in knowledge of being and how to work with being.

Unfortunately, being is one of the topics or subjects that is almost **taboo** in our western materialistic culture. Ontics and ontology, the study of actual being and philosophical or scientific theories about being respectively, are relegated to the graduate level of education.

This is very strange because **every** human being is a **being**, and has being. Similarly, every human being gets hungry and eats food; so naturally, food is a very common subject matter at all levels of human society. Why then is being, which is equally common and natural to all human beings, considered a highly specialized subject and relegated to the curriculum of advanced studies?

The reason for this odd condition is that there are **enormous vested interests** in keeping human beings within a very narrow range of possibilities of being. Governments, corporations, schools and religions all have a strong interest in keeping human beings in a suffering condition,

always attached to strong cravings for sense desire. Why? Simply because people in such a condition of being are **easy to manipulate** and control, just as a hungry animal is easy to control with food.

The Buddha's teaching gives simple, practical methods for taking **control** of our quality of being, **changing** it at will, and **transforming** it such that we can reach the end of all suffering. But because of our cultural limitations, we first need some basic **education** in being so that we understand the scientific language of being. Then using that terminology, we can learn the various techniques discovered by the Buddha leading to the **elimination of suffering**.

Now, some people may object to this on the grounds that 'Buddhism is a religion'. Indeed there is a religion of Buddhism that claims to be based on the teaching of the Buddha, just as there is a Christian religion supposedly based on the teachings of Christ, and so on. This is not surprising because in ancient times, any valuable knowledge was enshrined in a religion or mystery school to protect and preserve it.

But due to the nature and mechanics of religion, all religions **distort** the original teachings upon which they are based. Theravāda Buddhism is one of the best documented and least distorted religions, yet Buddhist religious culture forms a formidable **barrier** to anyone from another culture who wants to understand and implement the teaching of the Buddha.

As I write this, I am sitting in my room in a Theravāda Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka, at the end of a foot trail, miles from the nearest paved road. The sweet aromas of incense, cooking fires and the sounds of Pali Suttas chanted by the monks waft through the evening air; otherwise it is profoundly silent. We are guests here, welcome to do our research and writing, but we will always be somewhat **alien**. Even if we penetrate this way of life deeply enough to accept ordination as Buddhist monks, we will never be quite fully at home here.

But actually there is no need to encapsulate the teaching of the Buddha in a religion. It works just fine as a self-help method for personal growth, which is the way we treat it herein. Especially these days, when everyone has access to the Internet, the religious aspects of Buddhism are an

unnecessary burden on the Buddha's teaching. The extra complexities of religious ceremony and doctrine are not at all needed to apply or reach the result of the Buddha's teaching.

Consequently in this work we will consistently differentiate the original teaching of the Buddha, as given in the Theravāda Suttas, from the various religious flavors of Buddhism found in eastern countries today. We beg readers who may be religious Buddhists to forgive us; but we are interested in attaining **results** as directly as possible without any additional layers of religious formulas.



View from the Retreat Center

May 18–Good Kamma

In the previous section we talked about Ergontics as the art and science of being as taught by the Buddha, removed from its religious context and presented as a methodology for personal growth and self-healing. Now, how do we make **progress** in this practice and discipline?

When working with **actual being** (ontics), as opposed to **theories** and doctrines about being (ontology), it is insufficient to compile ‘facts’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘evidence’ about being, and use them to speculate some ‘theories’ about being. Rather, in Ergontics we will be looking at our **actual experience** of being, and using it to develop practical methods of working with being to realize advanced possibilities of being, in particular those related to the cessation of suffering.

So this **practical** study of being (ontics) is quite a different thing than the usual theoretical or philosophical study of being (ontology). It demands a different approach and different methods. In Ergontics our methods will be based on actual experience and self-observation (phenomenology).

Our actual experience of life, in our current state of being, is that there is suffering. Given a choice, a sane person will choose to reduce his suffering. The problem is that in most circumstances or states of being available to the average person, the choices that will reduce his suffering are simply unavailable. Why? The short answer is, because of *kamma*.

Some people will object that ‘I don’t believe in *kamma*’. But everyone accepts the existence of cause and effect, and *kamma* is simply cause and effect on the mental level. The Buddha taught, “*Kamma* is simply **intention**.” The problem is that, due to ignorance of the workings of the mind, we have created intentions that condition us to suffering. Due to the restrictive nature of these intentions, we literally cannot choose not to suffer.

Untangling this mess requires some explanation and understanding of the intricacies of being. I will take some time, practice and self-discipline. But it also will require generating some good *kamma*, or beneficial intentions. Good *karma* is like fuel for making progress in being. Good *karma* is as essential to better being as gasoline is essential to a car.

So, how do we make good *karma*? By creating beneficial intentions. First, let us take a look at our typical intentions during an average day. An ordinary person, that is a person in the default range of being, centers all his intentions on himself: ‘May I be happy’, ‘May I possess this thing’,

‘May I enjoy a relationship with this person’, ‘May I increase my bank account’, and so forth.

If our intentions include another person, it is usually still in the context of self-benefit: ‘May this person consider me attractive’, ‘May this other person give me money’, and so on. It is very rare to form an intention for the benefit of another person without any thought of selfish gain. But this is exactly what we must do to generate good *kamma*, or intentions that lead that lead to an expanded set of possibilities.

Here are some examples of intentions for generating good *kamma*:

“May all beings, of all types in all directions, be **happy**.”

“May all beings... be **safe** and **comfortable**.”

“May all beings... be **free from suffering**.”

“May all beings... have **everything they need**.”

We are starting the practice of Ergontics from generating good *kamma* for the same reason that we put gas in our car before traveling: if we want to reach our destination, we need fuel. Good *karma* is the fuel of expanded possibilities, particularly those relevant to the cessation of suffering. These expanded possibilities are the karmic result of beneficial intentions.

If you think for a moment about what Ergontics itself is, it is simply an expanded, elaborated form of the intention, “May all beings be free from suffering.” We also need good *karma*, so we have created a concrete, distributed form of delivering our good intentions to people everywhere: making the original teaching of the Buddha available worldwide through the Internet, in the form of Ergontics.

You can participate in this process by passing this knowledge on to your friends and associates. Especially if you know someone who is in anxiety or other mental distress, simply referring them to this material would be an act of great kindness. Studying and practicing this knowledge to benefit yourself is a good start, but unselfishly passing it on to others for their benefit is where you start to accumulate some serious good *karma*.

There are certainly other ways you can generate good *karma*—acts of charity, goodwill, selfless service, making religious offerings according to

your faith, etc.—but all of them begin from good intentions. Creating good intentions, to benefit others is the root of progress in being and elimination of suffering. Just as a tree or other plant cannot give fruit without a root, we cannot attain the fruit of the cessation of suffering without very strong roots of good intentions. Please regularly practice creating good intentions toward others (*mettā* in Pali) to fuel your progress toward the highest attainment, the elimination of all suffering.



Bo Tree at the Retreat Center

May 18—The Problem of Suffering

According to the teaching of the Buddha, the fundamental problem of life is suffering (in Pali, *dukkha*). All of our thoughts, words and actions are motivated by attempts to avoid, reduce or eliminate various kinds of

suffering. The Buddha calls this the First Noble Truth: ‘**there is suffering**’.

And the Second Noble Truth is similar: ‘**there is a cause of suffering**’. If we can understand the cause of suffering, then we can do something about it; thus the Third Noble Truth is: ‘**there is the cessation of suffering**’. And taking action to do something about it is the Fourth Noble Truth: ‘**there is a path leading to the cessation of suffering**’.

Anyone who penetrates these four questions to the root becomes freed from all suffering; this is called enlightenment (in Pali, *nibbana*). *Nibbana* simply means cool. For example if someone is suffering from fever, when their temperature become normal again we say they have cooled down: *nibbana*. Or when a cake is removed from the oven, before it is ready to eat it must cool: *nibbana*.

Similarly, when the temperature of our *dukkha* is reduced, we attain *nibbana*. *Dukkha* does not mean exactly the same as the English word suffering; *dukkha* really means ‘existential suffering’. This concept requires some explanation. Briefly, we can distinguish physical pain from mental suffering. We can experience pain, as from a cut or scrape, but it does not necessarily cause suffering. On the other hand, worrying about something causes mental distress, without necessarily any physical pain. This mental distress is *dukkha*.

Dukkha can take innumerable forms, but the root of *dukkha* is ‘existential anxiety’. We can define existential anxiety as ‘the shadow of the fear of death’. Fear has a definite object, such as fear of old age, suffering or of death itself. Anxiety, however, has no definite object; it is ‘**floating worry**’ or existential doubt about our existence in the abstract, about the integrity of our self or identity.

We do not exist in isolation; all existence, all being (*bhava*) is ‘being in the world’, or being in relation to other entities, living and non-living. In fact, our being or identity is defined in terms of these relations; and this is part of the problem of *dukkha*: there is nothing in ourselves that we can clearly identify as ‘self’ or ‘my self’.

This **question of the ‘self’** is the central problem in life, and it has vexed countless thinkers down through history. The French philosopher Camus expresses it nicely in his *Myth of Sisyphus*:

“Of whom and of what in fact can I say, ‘I know about that’? This heart in me, I can experience it and conclude that it exists. This world, I can touch it and conclude again that it exists. But my real knowledge stops there, and the rest is all construction. For if I try to grasp this ‘self’ of which I am assured, if I try to define it and sum it up, it is no more than a liquid that flows between my fingers. I can depict one by one all the faces that it can assume; all those given it too, by this education, this origin, this boldness or these silences, this grandeur or this vileness. But one cannot add up faces. This same heart which is ‘mine’ will ever remain for me undefinable. The gap between my certainty of my existence, and the content that I strive to give this assurance, will never be filled. I shall always be a stranger to myself. ... Here, again, are trees and I know their roughness, water and I experience its savor. This scent of grass and sight of stars, night, certain evenings when the heart relaxes—how shall I deny this world whose power and forces I experience? Yet all the science on this earth will give me nothing that can assure me that this world is mine.” (Translation by Ven. Nānāvīra Thera)

This is a beautiful account of the difficulty facing every intelligent human being. Our experience is full of objects and beings—the things, phenomena and people of the world—and they are certainly real to us. We are also convinced of the reality of our own existence; yet when we look inward to find our ‘self’, there is nothing solid and reliable that we can positively identify as ‘I’, either to ourself or others.

If we are honest, like Camus we have to admit deep uncertainty and ambiguity concerning our own existence. However, most people are not so courageous or candid, and fill up Camus’ “gap between my certainty of my existence, and the content that I strive to give this assurance” with “all construction”, a fabrication we then call ‘I’ or ‘my self’. This fabrication is constructed both by ourselves and others.

Consider a young child, playing with friends. Today they are playing ‘hospital’, and he is the Doctor; tomorrow they may be playing ‘war’, and he will be Top Gun ace fighter pilot. Yet when he returns home for dinner,

according to his parents he is ‘my boy Tommy’; when he goes to school, he is ‘Thomas L. Smith, DOB 2005-03-06, SSN 148-56-1234, 2nd grade, GPA 3.6’.

According to his own view, he is a doctor today or a pilot tomorrow, depending on his pleasure. But according to his parents or the school administration, he is something quite different, something not according to his own will, impossible for him to change or alter. Besides his own view or cation of his self, he receives a designation from an external source, one with authority to make his life quite miserable if he misbehaves or ignores it.

Now, who is he, the pilot or the schoolchild? It depends on whom we ask, and when; indeed, how he sees his own being is subject to contradiction and confusion. Yet unless he can answer this question satisfactorily, there will always be uncertainty, anxiety and suffering for him. For in fact, the question of ‘self’, existence or identity is not just another question—it is **the** question upon which all others depend. After all, if one does not know his own self, what else can he know?

The essential attribute of ‘self’ is that it is ‘mine’—subject to my own pleasure or will alone. And yet, there is also a meaning or designation of ‘I’ or ‘my self’ that **not** ‘mine’, that is determined by another or others external to ‘my self’. But if ‘I’ or ‘my self’ can be defined or determined by others, if it is subject to their authority or judgment, then ‘I’ am not the owner or master of ‘my self’, because ‘I’ am not completely free to define or determine ‘my self’ according to my will.

Therefore the French existentialist Sartre philosophized, “I am **forever not-this.**” I feel that ‘I **am**’, that ‘I **exist**; but if I exist then I must **be** something, that is, I must be **identified** with something or other. But because whatever I can find to identify with is not wholly identical with ‘my self’; I always feel that ‘I am **not-this**’. Thus my identity is always in question.

There are certain ontic or existential questions that naturally exercise any thoughtful person—questions like “Do I exist? Do I not exist? What am I? What will I become? Why am I here? How did I get here? Where did I

come from? Where am I going? Is there a next life?” and so on. As long as these questions remain without satisfying and practical answers, we shall remain, in Camus’ terms, ‘strangers to ourselves’, a condition the Buddha summarized in Pali, *attā hi attano nattī*: “He himself is not his own.”

But very few people have taken the trouble to work through these questions to a satisfying conclusion. Thus the definition of ‘self’, ‘I’ or identity we wind up accepting just to get through life, is not really a satisfying answer, but just a utilitarian **assumption**. We assume that ‘this is who I am’, although it is impossible for us to determine with any certainty if this is **really** who we are.

This is the essential ambiguity of life and the real source of our suffering: the meaning of the Second Noble Truth.



Retreat Center Bo Tree Shrine and Meditation Kuti

May 18–The Arousal of Thought

Now that we have established that **there is suffering** (the First Noble Truth) and that **suffering has a cause** (the Second Noble Truth), let us consider briefly **the cessation of suffering** (the Third Noble Truth) and **the path to the cessation of suffering** (the Fourth Noble Truth). We will go much deeper into each of these later on.

If the root cause of suffering is the question of the **existential ambiguity** of self and identity, then we would expect the cessation of suffering to have something to do with a solution to this question. Indeed it does, but the Buddha's solution is surprisingly unique. To help us appreciate the uniqueness of the Buddha's solution, let us take a very brief look at the broad classes of other proposed solutions.

We can group other solutions to the problem of suffering into three broad classes: **rational**, **religious** and **experiential**. Rational solutions like modern science and philosophy offer a way out by thinking about the problem. Religious solutions offer relief from suffering through faith in mysticism. Experiential solutions propose to eliminate suffering by engaging in some kind of activity, usually sense enjoyment.

Actually most proposed solutions to the problem of suffering are some mixture of these three types. And that should be expected, since all of them begin by accepting certain *a priori* **assumptions** about the self, the mind and life. Even the rationalists, who should know better, start by assuming certain things about the self, consciousness and being. But these assumptions are not at all subject to proof; they are more or less unquestionable mystical articles of faith.

Mystical thinking violates the laws of symbolic logic. These laws, codified by Aristotle and expressed in algebraic notation by Boole, are learned by every philosophy student—and promptly forgotten. They are:

- **The Law of Identity:**
if anything is A, it **is** A. ($A == A$).
- **The Law of Contradiction:**
nothing can be **both** A and not-A ($A \neq \bar{A}$).

- **The Law of the Excluded Middle:**
anything must be **either** A or not-A.

For example, like many religions, Indian Vedic philosophy holds that God is the Absolute Truth, the creator, owner and controller of everything. Everything that exists, including the innumerable living beings, emanates from God (whether God is conceived as personal or impersonal) and is thus part of God—nevertheless they remain separate and individual.

This is a perfect example of mystical thinking, because it violates the laws of symbolic logic. A being must either be part of God or individual—it cannot be both. What happens in practice is that the living beings are understood either to be part of God or separate from God, depending on the desired conclusion or result. This kind of opportunistic thinking is not only bad logic; it also indicates a lack of personal integrity.

Many similar examples of violations of the laws of symbolic logic abound, even in so-called rational scientific thinking and philosophy. We will examine their roots in some detail as we proceed with our discussion. Similar types of illogical thinking existed in the time of the Buddha. He saw them for what they were, and disposed of them by rejecting the rational, religious and experiential approaches to the solution of the questions of the self.

He did this by **rejecting the questions themselves** as insoluble, and therefore invalid. And he went on to develop a unique and quite different approach through careful self-observation, cultivation of concentration and meditation, and insight. Thus the teaching of the Buddha is not a philosophy or other process of rational thought, nor is it a religion or other faith-based process, nor is it a path of works.

The Buddha's path to the cessation of suffering is not a science, a religion or an activity; it involves certain elements of all three, but its active and organizing principles are completely different. The important point here is that the Buddha's teaching **in its original form** does **not** violate the laws of symbolic logic. **How** this is so will become clear as we develop our discussion.

This integrity of thought makes it possible, using the teaching of the Buddha, to develop a system of thinking that is free from inherent contradictions. To **see** the teaching of the Buddha means not only to understand his teaching and instructions, but also to see **why** it has to be the way it is, and how **it could be no other way** and still give practical relief from suffering.

So the method originated by the Buddha and practiced in Ergonics is a unique form of self-observation and analysis of our actual experience **in real time**, leading to crucial insights into the nature of the self.

Technically this approach is known as **phenomenology**. On this path, nothing is assumed to be true unless you can locate it in your experience.

You may be surprised to hear that enlightenment (*nibbana*) and the cessation of suffering do not come about through meditation, but through the **insight** derived from locating certain views in your own experience. Meditation is simply a means of preparing the mind for this insight—making it strong, supple and removing the flaws developed through years of wrong living and illogical thinking.



Bo Tree and Shrine, Retreat Center

May 28—Magical and Religious Thinking

Magical thinking is when someone wants to attain a certain result, but doesn't know precisely all the stages of the process for attaining it. They can hope that 'somehow or other' they will get the knowledge they need to complete their task, or they can rely on someone else helping them out, or they can simply hope for 'good luck'. When the person they hope will help them out happens to be 'god', that is religious thinking.

In any case, magical thinking is a guessing game, a gamble, and ultimately a losing proposition. Suppose I have a problem with my car. If I have the knowledge, I can fix it myself. But to do that, I would have to know how to troubleshoot, find the part that's broken, take the car apart and put it back together again. If I don't know, I could just start working on the car and hope that something I do fixes it. Or I could just hope the car fixes itself

‘somehow or other’. Otherwise I could pray to ‘god’ about it. Or I could just take the car to a competent mechanic and have him take care of it.

Magical or religious thinking is obviously not very practical when it comes to simple issues like car problems; then why should we expect it to solve the greatest problems of human life: ignorance, death, rebirth and suffering?

Yet millions if not billions of people all over the world, when faced with exactly the same problems, do just that. They pray, recite mantras, make offerings and perform ceremonies to appease some ‘god’ instead of taking the responsibility to get the knowledge required to solve them, or find someone who already has that knowledge.

Faith in luck, others’ mercy or religion gives hope, and that can help people tolerate the suffering of life. But if left unchecked, sooner or later the suffering outgrows the consolation of hope, leaving us no solution except to suffer, or go in search of a real solution. Unfortunately, this often happens too late in life and there is not enough opportunity, strength or time to find the real solution to life’s problems.

I was a religious person for most of my life. In fact I even was a religious teacher with many students. I tried my best to take refuge in the consolation of religion, tolerate the suffering and hope for eventual relief. However, at a certain point the suffering became too bad. I quit my position as a religious teacher and went in search of an effective solution.

Fortunately, I was able to find the teaching of the Buddha in time. I was able to make an effective solution to my suffering. But most people are not so fortunate. That is why I write about and teach the Buddha’s path. It has been effective where nothing else worked: solving the greatest problems of human life.

The Buddha has given all the knowledge required to solve the problems of life. But we should not indulge in magical thinking, make a religion out of the Buddha’s teaching, and expect him to save us. The Buddha specifically does not present himself as a ‘god’ or offer to save us; we have to work out the solution for ourselves. Thus we should educate ourselves in the Buddha’s teaching and methods until we understand the entire process in

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all details. Or if we are incapable of that, search out a competent teacher who can explain and demonstrate until we understand.



Sunset, Retreat Center

May 28–Midnight Sunrise

It's 2 AM. Most beings are dead asleep. The world is silent, but I am wide awake.

I watch my breath closely. I have a towel over my eyes to block out even the dim moonlight. I want to see only light that comes from within. After a few breaths, I see a small spark of light in my visual field. Concentrating my mind on the spark, it becomes a thin line. Gradually, a glowing sphere of diffuse light gathers around it.

I continue breathing and watching the sphere of light. It moves a little, bobbing and weaving like a candle flame in a soft breeze. Sometimes it looks like the moon; at other times, it resembles the sun. Sometimes clouds of egoistic thoughts obscure it; I put attention on my mind's process of 'I'-making, create some good wishes for the beings around me, and they go away.

Concentration grows slowly with time. Gentle efforts are better than strong ones. Gradually the light intensifies, spreads, becomes a gateway into a world of light. I enter in.

There are no words to describe it. Everything is made of light—blissful, blazing, conscious light. Forms of evanescence come and go like the shapes we sometimes see in clouds. They are not anything we know; the mind tries to recognize them but they dissolve and re-form with every moment of awareness.

Gradually the churning ocean of light becomes peaceful. I see a sky that is not sky but infinite space, and a horizon that is not a horizon but the end of everything. Only the beautiful blackness of emptiness lies beyond, and it is not my time yet to enter there.

Here is only tranquility, peace and sweet seclusion from the world. I'm bathing my awareness in pure joy. Not the kind of joy that makes you shout, but a peaceful, secure happiness that knows no bounds.

It is almost dawn. Soon the temple bell will ring, awakening the monks. I take a few minutes' nap, and dream of lions. Then I slowly bring myself back to the world.



On the Path to the Retreat Center

May 28—Study Meditation in Sri Lanka

We are really serious about inviting a few dedicated students to study the Buddha's teaching here in Sri Lanka. We have a very nice facility—a rural Dhamma center on about five acres of prime agricultural land, up in the mountains where it's nice and cool. There is a new residential building, and we are planning to build several cabins for students.

The greatest benefit we offer is direct personal association with monks who have realized the essence of the Buddha's teaching: the Eye of the Dhamma. Some people think that the Dhamma Eye is something very high (which it is) and therefore unattainable (which it is not). The Dhamma Eye can be expressed very simply: "Whatever is subject to origination is all

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subject to cessation.” Or it can be explained elaborately in thousands of Suttas.

The complete Eye of the Teaching is a detailed model of the Buddha’s teaching that explains exactly how to attain enlightenment in a methodical and logically consistent manner. A proper system of terminology drawn from the original Pali Suttas is the foundation of this system. Once it has been understood and the first stage of realization attained, the process continues until complete.

Our aim is to provide students with the information leading to cognizing the Eye of the Teaching, along with suitable facilities for attaining the stages of realization of the Eightfold Path. A remote location free from mundane distractions, pure environment and good association are the key ingredients leading to success in realizing the Dhamma.

This is not a business or money-making venture, like the many “Dhamma Hotels” found in more accessible parts of the island. While students must take responsibility for their travel and personal expenses, there are no charges for the program. Donations are encouraged—but to be perfectly clear, they are to be given to the temple.

This is an authentic monastery, although not as strict as many of the more traditional ones. We are fortunate to have a very open-minded Chief Monk, who is willing to experiment with new approaches. The program is very flexible, however those who want to stay here must become real Buddhist Upāsakas, following eight precepts.



May 30—Eye of the Dhamma

There are many references in the Theravāda Suttas to the “dustless, stainless eye of the Dhamma.” And what is it? “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.” This principle, along with its corollary, “Whatever is conditioned, that is suffering; whatever is suffering, that is not-self” is the core of the Buddha’s teaching.

If we understand and realize these two statements for ourselves, we can not only derive the rest of the Buddha’s teaching by logic and self-observation, but also attain complete enlightenment and release from all suffering.

If we consider our existence, we have to admit that everything we ordinarily take as ‘my self’ is caused by something else. Even our body, to which we are very attached, is the result of the conjugation of our parents. It has no independent existence; without the several causes that brought it into being, it would not exist.

The body is a conditioned entity, and as such, it is subject to cessation. We tend to assume that our body and self are permanent, but actually this is not the case. Although we may not remember our birth, nor can we perceive our imminent death, we can observe that all others who have been born have also died. Therefore our body is also subject to death.

If we go on to examine the various things we take as self, we see that they are similar to the body in that they are caused by other things. The philosopher Descartes’ statement “I think, therefore I am” is backwards. We are, therefore we think and do so many other things. Being is the root cause of our existence; everything else is dependent upon it.

We want to assume our being is permanent, or even eternal, because it gives us pleasure to do so. Yet if we examine our ‘being’, we find that everything about it is conditioned or caused by something else. There is no evidence of a permanent self, either in our body, our mind, or in the world around us.

This realization gives us suffering or displeasure, and there is no way out of this suffering except to give up the notion of a permanent self. This

renunciation of the false transient ego is another cornerstone of the Buddha's teaching. The 'emptiness' he taught is simply the recognition that everything we think exists, is actually empty of real or permanent being.

Instead, we assume something impermanent to be permanent, and that false, impermanent 'being' is the cause of our suffering. If we can understand this simple truth, we save ourselves a great deal of grief. But we have so much investment in the idea of a permanent self, many people find the notion very difficult to give up. In fact, the entire institution of religion exists just to promote the idea of a permanent self or 'soul', and also to project the idea of a soul on the scale of the universe, as 'god'.

These are very dangerous ideas because they distract us from the actual situation—the suffering and anxiety of human life—by promising eternal existence in the future, in some mystical 'other world' where things are, somehow or other, different. Of course, there is no proof of this whatsoever, but the very idea is so attractive that many people not only believe in religion, but even are willing to sacrifice their lives for it.

We should never underestimate the power of an idea that appeals to our false ego to deceive us. Therefore we should be extremely alert to all manifestations of illusory, false 'being' and be willing to let go of everything that is not our authentic self. If we do this, we find spontaneous pleasure in the integrity of authentic being that arises from the ashes of the false ego. This is the bliss of self-realization, the cooling ease of *nibbana*.



Our Front Yard

June 1—One of These Days...

...I'm going to sit down, go into meditation, and attain enlightenment. It could happen tomorrow, or in a hundred years. But I think it will be sooner than later.

This morning I awoke, as usual, about 3 AM. I went into concentration and started meditating. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but I got into looking at my clinging and relaxing it. I found a place in my mind where the clinging was especially tight. Then I started looking at my clinging to clinging...

Let me digress here for a moment. I have been meditating regularly and seriously—meaning, with the intention to attain enlightenment as described by the Buddha—for about eight months now. I started making progress and getting good results almost immediately, which I attribute to having a competent teacher: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

My understanding at the time could be boiled down to a single sentence: “One should not cling to anything whatsoever.” That was the Buddha's reply when he was asked to summarize his teaching as concisely as possible. The Right View I got from Buddhadasa, while simplistic, was correct enough that a sufficient trial-and-error effort based on it yielded substantial benefits.

Now after detailed study of the Theravāda Suttas and sustained practice under gradually improving circumstances, I am still working with the same principle. However, whereas in the beginning my tool was a blunt instrument, now it has become quite sharp. My view of my clinging is becoming much clearer and more detailed, and my ability to relax it much finer and more controlled.

That said, my meditation this morning was deeper and finer than ever before. I was able to see deep into my mind, and relax fine details of clinging that were formerly inaccessible. I am aware of a certain configuration or landscape of clinging, with clear features and a definite geometry. It has a center, a bright crystalline structure that must be dissolved with the proper solvent, rather than fractured by force, or it simply reattaches.

Later after breakfast, I went into the meditation hut and got back into the same space. I felt a deep letting-go that was very satisfying. I stayed in the hut practically until lunch—about three hours. When I emerged, I was changed. Things looked different—more detailed, more cinematic, deeper. I didn't need my glasses to see details far away, as I usually do.

We are practicing the Buddha's teaching because we want to change. We do not want to be rubber-stamp Buddhists but remain the same underneath. The process works; we just have to apply it as directed to get all the advertised benefits.



June 2—Groundbreaking

This morning at precisely 7:42 AM, the most auspicious moment calculated by the Jyotish *pañcangam*, we broke ground on our new meditation hut. We lit a lamp and incense, the monks chanted prayers for protection, and we started clearing the land. Even the big old lizard who lives under the huge rock nearby came out to see what was happening. Of course, it was raining. Everyone thought that was a good sign.

The hut will have two rooms, 10 x 12, one each for me and The Arahan, a small kitchen and attached bath, a porch and a screened-in meditation shelter on a large flat rock in front. The location features a fabulous view, literally a hundred kilometers on a severe clear day.

Building the hut, the first of several planned, is the first (literally) concrete step of our Dhamma Leadership Adventure program. We want to invite several students committed to the Buddha's path to study here, not only Buddha's teaching but also the state of the art in leadership. Our course is based on the officer leadership program used at the US Air Force Academy, but we have expanded and improved it, adding deeper layers of instruction based on the Buddha's teaching.

The aim is to create a new generation of Buddhist leadership, freed from the constraints of the traditional religious culture, and armed with personal realization of the core of the Buddha's teaching. They will be able to export Sri Lanka's excellent Buddhist culture and practice, and establish it anywhere in the world. This is something very much needed in the current situation.

There are many flavors of Buddhist teachings available in the west, but as far as we know, none of them are based on the original teaching of the Buddha in the Theravāda Suttas. In particular, deep understanding of the principle of emptiness (*suññata*) is missing. *Suññata*, the emptiness of real existence in the created 'I' and 'mine' we take to be our 'self', is the core of the Buddha's teaching. The goal of the Eightfold Path, cessation of suffering cannot be reached without deep realization of emptiness.

Our Dhamma Leadership Adventure will include deep analysis and experience of the meditative and insight process taught by the Buddha. It will also include physical training for health and well-rounded character. We teach yoga, tai chi, chi kung, various martial arts styles, and there will be periodic mountain hiking trips to beautiful meditation spots.

To have a facility for doing all this, we need an adequate residence. So we decided to build a cabin big enough for living, office, and even teaching a few students if necessary. I am retired, and will probably stay here the rest of my life. Anyone who wants to share my considerable accumulated

knowledge and experience is welcome to study here. But you have to be willing to make a serious commitment.



June 2–The Art of Barefoot Rock-Breaking

After yesterday's ground-breaking ceremony, then the real work began. A small crew began clearing the site, digging into the hill to make a flat site for the cabin. Only one problem: the mountainside is full of rocks and gnarly tree roots. So for every shovelful of dirt we moved, we had to pry out a basketball-sized (or bigger) rock.

We have two kinds of rocks here, I discovered in the course of a hard day's rock-breaking: igneous and sedimentary. The igneous rocks were belched out of the earth by some ancient volcanic eruption, and the sedimentary were from former sea floor. Because the igneous rocks were red-hot, they cooled in shell-like layers from the outside. Consequently they tend to fracture that way, like eggshells. Their sedimentary brothers, on the other hand, break in nice clean straight lines.

Why does this matter? Because trying to break the different types of rocks requires different techniques; and if you mix them up, there is

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considerably more effort involved. Besides, the sedimentary rocks with their flat sides and fractures are good for making walls; the others are useful only as fill, or in the foundation.

The tool of choice for rock-breaking is the ‘Texas Toothpick’, a two-meter spike of hexagonal iron rod with a point on one end and a chisel on the other. You use it to pry the rocks out of the hillside. Then once the dirt is cleaned off, you find the fracture lines and insert the pick or chisel. An accurate stroke with sufficient force can break a large rock in one shot. But most of the time, the rock has to be ‘warmed up’ with a sledgehammer. A few good shots usually reveals the fractures, and then we continue with the toothpick.

So we spent a nice sweaty day out in the fresh air, digging a slot in the side of the mountain where we will construct our cabin. Needless to say, I required a good massage afterward. But still, it was refreshing; in fact, I plan to do it again today. Why don’t I just sit in our nice cool residence hall and write my book? Because my friends are working in the hot sun, and helping out is the right thing to do.

Maybe you thought I was going to spin this into some clever metaphor about breaking rocks and meditation. OK, here it is: to the enlightened person, breaking rocks is just breaking rocks.



June 3–Brain Surgery

Maybe breaking rocks was not such a bad metaphor after all. In our series of technical posts on the root-structure of the Puthujana's reflexive consciousness based on the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta*, we discussed how appropriation leads to clinging via a six-step process. Since becoming aware of this process, I have been able to observe it in my own consciousness in many contexts. This has led to giving up clinging in a number of difficult and formerly unreachable areas.

The other day I was sitting as usual, and I became aware of a clinging tension on the right side of my brain. I followed it down to its root, which was very deep in the medulla area, and was able to relax it. Since then a number of things have changed for me. My vision has become much clearer, more beautiful and more cinematic. And I am not so much aware of 'I' as before. Needless to say, this is very welcome.

In the days following, more changes have been surfacing. Now when in concentration, when my attention is placed somewhere, it stays there. No more jumping around like a monkey. It's like a huge space has opened up where there were formerly many thoughts competing for attention. This is also very nice.

But there is still 'I', and certain attachments related to 'I'. Of course in the Puthujjana, the flavor of 'I' is in everything. So there has been a lot of progress. But of late the root of the experience of 'I am' has become apparent.

And it comes down to this: at some point we saw someone with an 'I', and it looked like they were having a lot of fun, enjoying their 'mine' and so forth. And there must have been a moment of recognition, when we saw that "Oh, that's an 'I'! Let me also have one." And then proceeded to go through the stages of the root-structure of appropriation and clinging for the very first time, regarding 'I' itself.

And from that point on, every impression, every sensation, every perception was in association with the root-structure, with 'I' and 'mine'. How to turn back the clock to that moment and undo that decision! But instead we must do 'brain surgery' by going deep into concentration and tranquility. The deep structures of the mind can only be worked when they are very cool, close to absolute zero, *nibbāna*.

So my work now is to dig down to that fundamental experience and undo it. It feels like brain surgery. I have been here before; in deep meditation the structure of the brain actually changes. You can feel things moving around, old pathways being broken and new ones opening up. Old tensions relax as they are permeated with fresh energy and awareness.

I have been meditating for almost 50 years now. At first there was nothing, only silence and darkness inside. But now I'm getting to the good part. My consciousness is really changing, and I feel so much better. All the effort and time spent was very much worthwhile. Soon 'I' will be gone, and the whole world will be a better place for it.

June 3—Buddhist Perspectives on Forbidden History

By now we all should know that the version of history we are given in school is bunk—pure political disinformation and cultural whitewash. I want to add another dimension to the views of alternate versions of history: the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha appeared in India at a time when the caste Brahmanas thought they had it made. Their aristocratic tradition had locked up all important knowledge in Sanskrit codes. They had made themselves indispensable, or so they thought.

Then the Buddha upset their little game with his Teaching, which was simple and fabulously effective. What's more, it was expressed in the accessible Pali language, a common vernacular of the day. Buddha annihilated the caste system by showing that people from almost any background could attain *nibbāna*, enlightenment far exceeding the pitiful, ego-heavy states of religious consciousness attainable by Vedic brahmanism.

The fabulous, explosive success of the Buddha's teaching, and especially his exposé of the caste system, made the Brāhmaṇas very envious. Almost as soon as the Buddha disappeared, they began organizing against Buddhism. As a result, two centuries after the Buddha, there was a cruel and terrible slaughter of Buddhists in India. Buddhism was driven out of India with the help of Islamic invaders.

This is the secret why the Indian Brāhmaṇas tolerate Islam, even until today: they helped the Brāhmaṇas eradicate Buddhism in India. Despite their terrible atrocities, even against Hindus, Islam is protected in India because of this obligation. Buddhism was a tremendous threat to the hegemony of the Brāhmaṇas and their exploitative caste system. Therefore it was driven out of India, and Buddhist monks fled all over the ancient world.

There is plenty of evidence that Buddhism was known, even popular, in ancient Greece and Rome. Of course, it was also feared by the ruling classes there, up to today. So you will not find historical references very common in western books. You have to go to original Buddhist sources,

which clearly describe the connections and influence of Buddhism on Greek intellectual culture.

There is—or was, until it was destroyed by the British—evidence that Jesus traveled to the east during the part of his life missing from the Bible, and that he studied Buddhist thought there. Many of the surviving sayings and teachings of Jesus and his disciples mirror Buddhist thinking exactly. The details will be the subject of another post; theorist here is that Buddhist culture and teachings were well known in the ancient west.

What happened? Just as the teaching of the Buddha was viewed as a threat by the Brahmanas, it was also feared by the western ruling classes. Consequently, it was erased using a variety of classic disinformation techniques. In the east, the colorful character Kṛṣṇa was elevated to the status of the Supreme, and various amazing tales were spun about his romantic and other exploits in books like the *Bhagavat-Purāṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. Other scriptures were compiled, defeating Buddha's teaching by the straw-man technique: mis-stating his teaching and then arguing against the inaccurate rendition.

In the west, all references to Buddhism were simply deleted. For almost ten centuries during the Dark Ages, the Roman Catholic Church was practically the sole curator of written knowledge. It was simple for them to annul all references to the Buddha in their libraries when copying them. Buddhist knowledge was anathematized, added to the immense trove of secrets kept by the Vatican, and gradually forgotten.

More recently, the introduction of state-controlled education to ‘modernize’ traditional Buddhist cultures has resulted in a huge shift away from the temple as a cultural center. Of course—that is exactly what the grade-and-classroom prison of state education is designed to do. Almost every formerly Buddhist country has devastated its traditional culture by introducing what veteran educator John Taylor Gatto calls “weapons of mass instruction”, destroying the well being and peace of mind of its citizens in the name of enriching the leaders.

So we can trace down thought history the pattern of staunch egotists of every description mobilizing against the Buddha's teaching. The ruling

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classes are ever prepared to sacrifice the happiness and spiritual progress of their people for the advancement of their hegemony. They view the Buddha as a turncoat, one of their own who took the side of the common people and overturned the very basis of aristocracy.

Of course, in this age of political correctness, the war against the Buddha's teaching has turned covert. Many so-called Buddhist leaders are actually working against the Buddha's teaching by introducing deviations that nullify its effectiveness. Notions of eternalism and other brahminical ideas show up with increasing frequency, especially in flavors of Buddhism exported to the west.

The problem is, it is difficult to see all this until one personally realizes the core principle of the Buddha's teaching: emptiness or no-self. Until then, it is easy to be misled by misdirected so-called Buddhist teachers who are actually working for other ends.



Meditation Kuti, Retreat Center

June 7—Nobody Really Knows

Nobody really knows the Buddha's teaching. We are all like little tiny mice gnawing on a huge elephant-sized block of cheese. Our potency is so limited, the scope of our grasp so small—and the Buddha's teaching is BIG. So big, none of us really can devour or even see the whole thing.

Each of us is gnawing on one tiny corner of this vast cheese. Those of us who are inclined to scholarly and literary work are like bespectacled mice selling maps of what little they know of the cheese to the other mice.

Those who make a business of teaching meditation are like mice charging other mice to teach them to eat cheese. Those who pretend to be monks without any real hope to attain *nibbāna* are just like mice on welfare, getting free cheese in exchange for a little work. Then there are the red-robed clergy of the Church of Cheese, solemnly intoning prayers and Suttas, teaching Commentaries they do not even understand, demanding others to bow down and worship them. Then there is a whole class of mice who claim they own the cheese, and make a living speculating on cheese-estate. And let's not forget the party-mice who just love to get high and make out on the cheese. We are all phonies. None of us have a prayer of attaining *nibbāna*, or even getting close to it, in this lifetime or even the next. Maybe there are a few forest recluses who know something; but they wisely remain in hiding while we pretenders duke it out for top mouse. We keep gnawing on the tiny corner of the cheese that we know, waiting for the world to recognize how enlightened we are. Don't hold your breath, Mickey.

Maybe—just maybe—there is an authentic teacher, a real *Arahant* out there somewhere. But the longer I search, the more convinced I am that they are either all gone, or have made themselves inaccessible. We're on our own, fellow mice. And no matter how much cheese we've got, that's a scary thought.



June 7—Attributes of a Teacher

These are my personal requirements, besides the attributes of a teacher of the Dhamma mentioned by the Buddha in the Suttas:

- **Honest**—no mystical, religious or organizational authoritarian basis for his teaching.
- **Convincing**—he would be able to convince me that he has realized the Buddha's teaching for himself.
- **Revelatory**—he would be able to understand my situation at least as well as myself, and reveal innovative approaches that accelerate my progress.
- **Systems Thinker**—he would be able to explain the Buddha's teaching in the Suttas as a complete, interdependent, logical and ontologically consistent whole.

There is probably more, but since I have never met such an individual in more than 50 years of spiritual search, I'm willing to keep it short.

The one spiritual teacher that did meet my requirements, back before I had #1, was my previous spiritual master. I studied the Vedic teachings of Bhakti and *Vedānta* with him and remained his follower for almost 40 years. He was an expert musician, a profound author, expert in Sanskrit and many other arts.

But once I had absorbed and realized all the knowledge he made available, I could understand that my realization was incomplete. I still was suffering, and had huge gaps in my practical knowledge. I came to see that the hierarchical authoritarian religious model was insufficient, that it led inevitably to various ills. After a thorough review of the options, I changed my orientation from Vedic to Buddhist. But I still have not found a teacher comparable to my previous spiritual master.

June 17—The Last Boundary

What is, is. And what is, is only the conditioned and the Unconditioned. The conditioned is ‘mind’, ‘self’, ‘I’, ‘mine’ and ‘things’, painful by nature. The conditioned is darkness: categories and boundaries. The Unconditioned is pure, bright, without boundaries and limits, I or self—pure pleasure.

I stand before the last boundary, the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. It’s clear now: all ontology is ultimately bogus, fabrication—this is the only distinction that really matters.

In reality, there is nothing but the Unconditioned. The conditioned stands upon the Unconditioned. The Unconditioned is everything and everywhere, even in the conditioned. But the conditioned is not in the Unconditioned.

The Unconditioned in the conditioned is like water, which though formless, fills any form of container. Without form, the Unconditioned moves but does not change; therefore it is timeless.

Once you realize this, there is no more ‘meditation’, only seeing what is. Who is meditating? What are they meditating on? There is no more Dhamma or Buddha. The *jhānas* are a relief after dealing with the conditioned, though.

I did not get this realization from any book, but from experience. Soon I will let go of the conditioned, and enter into the Unconditioned. I am already standing in the door, facing so much light.

When that happens, I’m not sure if I will still be able to write. What would I write? “Dear World, Having wonderful time—wish you were here. Love, Dave.”

Maybe I could make a video where I look into the camera and just laugh, and laugh... But who would post it? These are deep questions.

Sure, I could mock up a mind, an ontology or a ‘person’. But then I have to clean it up again to get back to normal. Why bother?

I want to lay down the burden of self, I and mine. They are fictions, pretenses. The Buddha always described enlightenment in the negative:

“Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, ‘Fully released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’” — *Alagaddupama Sutta*

Contact with the Unconditioned breaks down all conditioned mental structures. Enlightenment is not death, nor is it eternal life. It just is what it is—and there are no words to describe it.

June 18—Overcoming Lust

I awoke early today, took some breaths and concentrated my mind. Mindfulness illuminated my vision. In my mindful state, my inner eye was clear—all was revealed to be either conditioned or Unconditioned. Regarding the conditioned, there was clear understanding and realization of the danger of lust.

One who stays focused on the beautiful,
is unrestrained with the senses,
knowing no moderation in food,
apathetic, unenergetic:
Mara overcomes him
as the wind, a weak tree.

One who stays focused on the foul,
is restrained with regard to the senses,
knowing moderation in food,
full of conviction & energy:
Mara does not overcome him
as the wind, a mountain of rock.

—*Dhammapāda* 7-8

It is natural to seek beautiful things—natural in the way an untrained wild animal is natural. Sensual pleasures lure us into thinking that lust and

desire are OK, even as they ravage our mind and heart, and reduce us to a captive plaything, conditioned and controlled by sense pleasures.

All authentic spiritual paths and teachers agree that lust—especially in the form of sex desire—is a most significant obstacle on the path to enlightenment. Steadiness of mind and unshakable resolve cannot exist in one who is affected by lust. To attain success in meditation one should not be passionate, but cool (*nibbāna*).

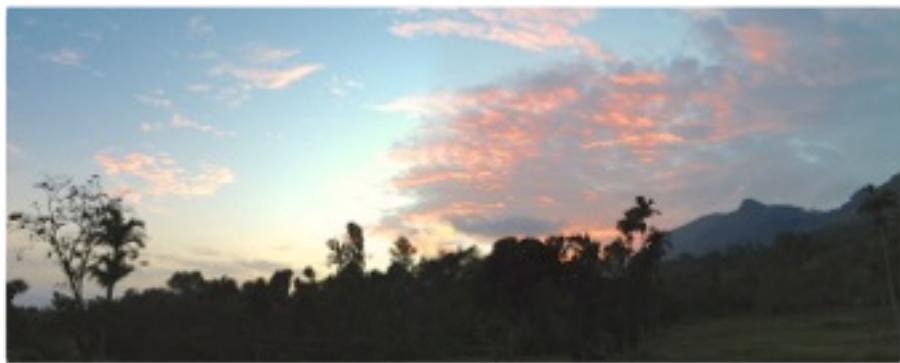
It is hard to conceive the advantages of this coolness if one has never experienced it. The mind is calm, and stays focused without effort. The inner vision is clear, revealing truths that cannot be seen otherwise. Many other benefits, too many to mention here, also flow from it, from health to social.

But the greatest benefit is that only one who is celibate, free from lust, can attain enlightenment. A beautiful description of the Arahant is given by the Buddha that makes all ethics, psychology, psychiatry, religion etc. look like a child's game:

“Friend, the monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of deliberately depriving a living being of life. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking what is not given so that it constitutes theft. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of pursuing sex. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of knowingly uttering falsehood. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of laying up treasure for indulging in pleasure as he did when he was a householder. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking a course of action through desire. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking a course of action through hate. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking a course of action through delusion. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking a course of action through fear. Friend, the monk who is an Arahant, in whom the fetters are destroyed, has done what had to be done, has laid down the burden, attained the highest, completely destroyed the fetter of ‘being’, released through right knowledge, is incapable of these nine behaviors.” — *Pāsādika Sutta, Khīṇasavābhabbathāna (Dīgha-Nikāya 29)*

The *Arahant* is incapable of doing these nine things. The nature of *Arahant*-ness is such that it is impossible for him to do these things. For these things to be done, notions of ‘I’, ‘mine’ and ‘self’ must be present; and these notions are absent in the Arahant, nor can they ever arise in him again.

Soon in our parallel series on Wettimuny’s book we will cover the inner state of the arhat, and see exactly how this freedom from lust leads to the highest attainment of immunity to all suffering.



June 19–Impermanence

Impermanence is what the world is made of:

Time does not creep, but fleetingly it flies.

Before you know, there comes what we’re afraid of:

For all our ‘hellos’ there must be ‘goodbyes’.

Don’t believe in any fabrication,

No matter how it gives relief today.

When the time arrives for its cessation,

You can bet it’s going to go away.

Alas, but even love is not forever;

There’s nothing permanent we can arrange.

Don’t make commitments for always or never;

For time subjects the aggregates to change.

If we would escape pain and confusion,
With skillful means we should become adept.
Give up the eternalist delusion;
Change is something that we must accept.
“Die before your death!” proclaims Gotama;
Deep into the *jhānas* we must go.
Give up all our temporary drama,
Eternal Unconditioned we must know.

June 21—Getting ‘The Call’

Back in the days when I was in the music and TV business, everyone was a freelancer. There was fierce competition among young, talented professionals for gigs. After struggling to keep afloat, if one got an offer of a substantial gig, it was something to boast to friends about. We termed it ‘Getting The Call.’ A typical conversation might go, “Hey did you hear? Joe got The Call. He’s leaving for The Coast tomorrow.”

The Call happens in spiritual life too. One can search for a high-level teacher for many years before it happens. So many preconditions have to be fulfilled. But when one’s *kamma* is mature, it comes—an invitation into the inner circle, the private world of advanced teachers and practitioners, tiny unknown monasteries on private estates, huge tracts of land with substantial endowments from very old families.

I now know that my concern about transmitting the Buddha’s teaching with fidelity to the future generation was groundless. There is an esoteric circle of advanced teachers and monks, quietly maintaining the highest standards of philosophy and practice, strictly according to the original Theravāda Suttas. They all know one another and visit one another’s monasteries.

They are not interested in publicity or having a following. They are well aware of the dangers of public exposure. They do not wish to be placed in the spotlight or to compromise their principles for the sake of fame or fortune. They put tremendous value on maintaining their privacy.

You see, a beginning student cannot recognize an advanced practitioner. If he is fortunate and open-minded, he may be able to see that another monk has realized something he has not. If he is humble and teachable, he will approach that monk for guidance. One can see that another monk has realized less than himself. But a beginner cannot recognize an arhat, or anyone who is much further along the path than himself.

For this reason, it is useless to present advanced teachings to the public. For example, for some time we have been serializing R.G. De S. Wettimuny's excellent book, *The Buddha's Teaching and the Ambiguity of Existence*. However even after posting so many excerpts, no one has made a cogent comment, what to speak of any intelligent discussion on the subject.

Nevertheless, we know from our personal experience that discussion of the book is not only possible, but easy if one has certain understandings. We have also posted an ongoing informal discussion of the topics in this book in our podcast series. However again, there was no meaningful response—even from monks and other intelligent people who have heard the series.

What does this mean? Are we wrong? Are we crazy? Of course not. This tells us that there are certain things that can be understood only by people with the requisite personal experiences, and those people are quite rare. We have simply gone beyond the sphere of topics accessible to people in the public marketplace.

This has certain implications. It means that we can no longer afford to spend our time and energy trying to attract like-minded people from the public. It also means that we are better served by focusing on our own personal development rather than trying to teach. Who can understand?

I also implies that the teachers who are available in the public sphere, no matter what they may claim, are not at the highest level of attainment. If they are presenting to the public and getting attention, if people are understanding them and responding, it means they are teaching at a lower level. The highest level of teachings is simply not available to the public, for the reasons discussed above.

So what does this mean for the rare person who is ready for complete enlightenment? Forget about the Internet; you will not find the highest

level of teaching online. You will have to go to a country like Sri Lanka where the original teaching of the Buddha is still alive, and penetrate to the esoteric circle by your own investigation and practice.

With this post, and maybe a few more, we will wind up the current series. We are going into retreat in a place without Internet access. It's possible we may continue later on, but doubtful. For we have got The Call, and we're leaving for The Coast.

June 23—I Finally Understand

I finally understand the Buddha's method.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for renewed becoming [*bhava*]—accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there—i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming

"Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress' 'This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed [*bhavetabba*]’ 'This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress has been developed'

"As soon as this—my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be [*bhuta*] —was truly pure, then I did claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its devas, Maras & Brahmās, with its contemplatives & priests, its royalty & commonfolk. Knowledge & vision arose in me: 'Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming'." — *Samyutta-Nikāya* 56:11

Thanissaro explains:

Thus to put an end to suffering, it's necessary to put an end to becoming. And to do that, it's necessary to understand the process that gives rise to becoming, so that the problem can be attacked at its cause. This is why the Buddha focused on becoming as process. And he found that the process has three components, which he likened to the act of planting a seed in a field. The field stands for the range of possibilities offered by

past and present *kamma*. The seed stands for consciousness, together with other kammic factors that nourish it. The water moistening the seed represents the present mental act of craving and clinging, which fixes on a specific spot in the range of possibilities offered by the field, allowing becoming to develop from the potentials offered by the seed.

This is where the Buddha ran into the central paradox of becoming, because the craving and clinging that provide the moisture do not have to delight in the field or the resultant becoming in order to bear fruit. If the mind fastens on a particular set of possibilities with the aim of changing or obliterating them, that acts as moisture for a state of becoming as well. Thus the desire to put an end to becoming produces a new state of becoming.

Because any desire that produces becoming also produces suffering, the Buddha was faced with a strategic challenge: how to put an end to suffering when the desire to put an end to suffering would lead to renewed suffering. His solution to this problem involved a paradoxical strategy, creating a state of becoming in the mind from which he could watch the potentials of *kamma* as they come into being, but without fueling the desire to do anything with regard to those potentials at all. In the terms of the field analogy, this solution would deprive the seed of moisture. Eventually, when all other states of becoming had been allowed to pass away, the state of becoming that had acted as the strategic vantage point would have to be deprived of moisture as well. Because the moisture of craving and clinging would have seeped into the seed even of this strategic becoming, this would eventually mean the destruction of the seed, as that moisture and any conditioned aspects of consciousness the seed might contain were allowed to pass away. But any unconditioned aspects of consciousness—if they existed—wouldn’t be touched at all.

So *kamma*, created from desire is the root of becoming. As long as one is busy fabricating states of being in which to enjoy, when the underlying sense objects change there will be suffering. We never get to see the fading out of our fabrications because we are so frantically busy creating new ones, which then land in the old ones:

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Ven. Ananda: “This word, ‘becoming, becoming’—to what extent is there becoming?”

The Buddha: “If there were no *kamma* ripening in the sensuality-property, would sensuality-becoming be discerned?”

Ven. Ananda: “No, lord.”

The Buddha: “Thus *kamma* is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance & fettered by craving is established in/tuned to a lower property. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming in the future.

“If there were no *kamma* ripening in the form-property, would form-becoming be discerned?”

Ven. Ananda: “No, lord.”

The Buddha: “Thus *kamma* is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance & fettered by craving is established in/tuned to a middling property. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming in the future.

“If there were no *kamma* ripening in the formless-property, would formless-becoming be discerned?”

Ven. Ananda: “No, lord.”

The Buddha: “Thus *kamma* is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance & fettered by craving is established in/tuned to a refined property. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. This is how there is becoming.” — *Anguttara-Nikāya* 3:76

As soon as we stop feeding our fabrications the nutriments of *kamma*, consciousness and craving, they begin to fade away. If we simply wait and let this happen instead of trying to fabricate new forms of being and becoming, they all fade out by themselves. This also explains why my last serious attempt at enlightenment back in 1984 failed, and I lost all my gains. I was using an indirect method, and I didn’t take it far enough.

So the practice is threefold:

1. Stop mental fabrications by fabricating the being of one-who-stops-all-fabrications.
2. Stop verbal fabrications by *Ānāpānasati*.
3. Stop physical fabrications by tranquillity.

The trick is to create a desire and intention (*kamma*) to stop fabrications, and then wait until they fade out—at which time we also drop that desire and intention. The last intention to go is bodily fabrications of in & out breaths. Entering *jhāna* by practicing *Ānāpānasati*, once mental and verbal fabrications cease, one gradually enters deep tranquillity until the bodily fabrication ceases as well.

I am entering reclusion, and this is all I'm doing until I get it. Let me know when you get there.



Retreat Center, Monks' Ashram

June 24—Notes on Becoming

Kamma is the field, consciousness is the seed and craving is the moisture for becoming. For each act of becoming there is also a place and time—location and duration. Becoming in beings of lower development is in sensuality—which the Buddha defines as “passion for one’s resolves”—in beings of middling development in form, and in beings of higher development in formlessness, in increasing degrees of subtlety.

Ontically, as I observe my experience, I survey the field of possibilities provided by my past and present *kamma*. Then I consciously choose one of these possibilities by how much sensual pleasure I estimate it will give me. I water that possibility with desire, clinging to it as my present or future location and beingness for a particular duration. Then when I see the pleasure from that state of being begin to fade and decrease, I search for another possibility, and the cycle repeats, *ad nauseum*.

Life observed from this platform begins to look somewhat comical, like a fantasy movie in which each one is playing the part they think will yield the most pleasure, based on past experience and future projections. They are living in the past and future instead of the present, calculating strategy instead of experiencing reality. They are suffering now as a result of past becoming, but still placing bets that their next becoming will hit the jackpot. The tremendous, frenetic energy people invest in this futile obsession of becoming is both amusing and pathetic.

I stand aside and watch, knowing that I must participate in the farce of becoming, even as I seek escape from it. I perceive the levels of becoming in sensuality, form and formlessness constantly flashing through the mind, giving meaning to the perceptions of present and future becoming. There are experiences of formlessness and nothingness only a moment long, serving as reference points for the mind’s measuring and classifying other states of beingness. When these are stabilized in meditation, they become the higher *jhānas*.

Anyway, the whole spectrum of being and becoming, from Brahmā down to the hellish worlds, is available to us—and it is all suffering. It may be coarse and gross, or refined and subtle; all becoming is suffering because it

involves being, and being requires ‘I’ and ‘mine’, desire, clinging, and bets about conditions, space and time that always ultimately fail. And all these things determine suffering. People spend their whole existence struggling violently with greed, attachment and aversion, minds scattered to the winds, never trying the Buddha’s simple method.

Therefore the escape from fabrications and consequent suffering is through *jhāna*. When I watch myself enter *jhāna*, in the beginning there is always some verbal formula, almost like a mantra, that I use to center the mind and ride it into concentration. Something like ‘now I am entering concentration’, or if the session has a specific goal, something about that.

Once the mind becomes illumined through concentration, mental and verbal fabrication ceases for there are simply no words to describe the formless realm of light. There are no more thoughts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, for there is no longer any differentiation based on form. There is also an ecstatic feeling of wonder that such an experience can occur. All these allow one to transcend the ordinary mind based on becoming.

So everything depends on attaining *jhāna*. But we see people, even well-instructed Buddhists who should know better, running away from the peace of *jhāna* and cluttering up their lives with being and becoming. This is a trick by the conditioned mind to ensure its survival. There was and is a good reason for the disciplinary regulations of the Buddha’s Order, that kept the monks in a poverty-stricken and dependent position. There was nothing else for them to do but meditate.

Today, especially, we have far too many distractions to attain *jhāna*. This means we have to take drastic steps, if necessary, to simplify our lives so we can enter into the advanced stages of meditation and approach complete enlightenment. Without such firm committed action, it is highly doubtful that we should ever find our way to the cessation of all miseries.



June 26—Two Kinds of Knowledge

In earlier posts we discussed the distinction between ontology and ontics: ontology is analytical knowledge of the categories of being—**what has been** and **what can be**. Ontics is also analytical knowledge of the categories of being, however its concern is exclusively with the present, and with immediate experience—ontological analysis of **what is**.

Ontological knowledge tends to systematic categorization of past and future experience; in other words, it is theoretical **knowledge about** life. Ontic knowledge is more practical, direct and flexible analysis of what is happening in the here and now: phenomenological **knowledge of** life.

My partner left today; he can't reconcile his need for sense enjoyment and independence with his desire to become a monk. So I will go on retreat alone.



New stone hut under construction

July 4–Secret of the Golden Flower

What if the key to awakening turned out to be something really simple—like say, pulling energy in a place where we normally push? But it happened to be in a place that was normally blocked by various mental

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effluents? If that was so, then how would you teach it? How would you even describe it? And what if so many of the teachings were not about attaining enlightenment, but about **keeping** it?

Awakening, I remember the secret of the golden flower. It's to pull the energy in through the 6th chakra. Usually it goes out, especially when I-making or desiring or thinking. It's pretty subtle, but when you get it, wow!

Here's a quote from Rajneesh:

“Master Lu-tsui said: ‘**When the light is made to move in a circle, all the energies of heaven and earth, of the light and the dark, are crystallized.**’

“Your consciousness is flowing outward—this is a fact, there is nothing to believe in it. When you look at an object, your consciousness flows towards the object. For example, you are looking at me. Then you forget yourself, you become focused on me. Then your energy flows towards me, then your eyes are arrowed towards me. This is extroversion. You see a flower and you are enchanted, and you become focused on the flower. You become oblivious of yourself, you are only attentive to the beauty of the flower.

“This we know—every moment it is happening. A beautiful woman passes by and suddenly your energy starts following her. We know this outward flow of light. This is only half of the story. But each time the light flows out, you fall into the background, you become oblivious of yourself.

“The light has to flow back so that you are both the subject and the object at the same time, simultaneously, so that you see yourself. Then self-knowledge is released. Ordinarily, we live only in this half way—half-alive, half-dead—that's the situation. And slowly slowly light goes on flowing outward and never returns. You become more and more empty inside, hollow. The Taoist experience is that this energy that you spend in your extroversion can be more and more crystallized rather than spent if you learn the secret science of turning it backwards. It is possible; that is the whole science of all methods of concentration...

“Just standing before a mirror some day, try one small experiment. You are looking at the mirror, your own face in the mirror, your own eyes in the mirror. This is extroversion: you are looking into the mirrored face—

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your own face, of course, but it is an object outside you. Then, for a moment, reverse the whole process. Start feeling that you are being looked at by the reflection in the mirror—not that you are looking at the reflection but the reflection is looking at you – and you will be in a very strange space. Just try it for a few minutes and you will be very alive, and something of immense power will start entering you. You may even become frightened because you have never known it; you have never seen the complete circle of energy.

“And although it is not mentioned in Taoist scriptures this seems to me the most simple experiment anybody can do, and very easily. Just standing before the mirror in your bathroom, first look into the reflection: you are looking and the reflection is the object. Then change the whole situation, reverse the process. Start feeling that you are the reflection and the reflection is looking at you. And immediately you will see a change happening, a great energy moving towards you. In the beginning it may be frightening because you have never done it and you have never known it; it will look crazy. You may feel shaken, a trembling may arise in you, or you may feel disorientated, because your whole orientation up to now has been extroversion. Introversion has to be learned slowly slowly. But the circle is complete. And if you do it for a few days you will be surprised how much more alive you feel the whole day. Just a few minutes standing before the mirror and letting the energy come back to you so the circle is complete... And whenever the circle is complete there is a great silence. The incomplete circle creates restlessness. When the circle is complete it creates rest, it makes you centered. And to be centered is to be powerful —the power is yours. And this is just an experiment; then you can try it in many ways.

“Looking at the rose flower, first look at the rose flower for a few moments, a few minutes, and then start the reverse process: the rose flower is looking at you. And you will be surprised how much energy the rose flower can give to you. And the same can be done with trees and the stars and with people. And the best way is to do it with the woman or man you love. Just look into each other’s eyes. First begin looking at the other and then start feeling the other returning the energy to you; the gift is coming back. You will feel replenished, you will feel showered, bathed, basked in a new kind of energy. You will come out of it rejuvenated, vitalized.” — *Secret of Secrets, Vol. 1*

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This is also my experience. I spent several hours in *bhāvana* and *jhāna* today. The lights are getting intense, I'm in the upper room and the 6th-*chakra* flow is inward most of the time. Almost back to where I was in 1984:

I lived for some time in Portland, Oregon, working as a technical writing contractor. After my project was finished, I had some time remaining on the lease of my apartment and nothing to do. I had been studying Taoism and especially, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, an esoteric text on meditation. My apartment was very quiet. I had the time and the place to do some nice meditation.

So I took several months off and simply sat, starting with about 3-4 hours a day. I have always had trouble with my legs falling asleep while sitting. So I would sit for 20-30 minutes at a time, get up and walk around for a few minutes, and sit down again. I made a very comfortable sitting place with a raised seat, which helped me stay sitting longer.

What did I do? Nothing. I sat and waited. I watched my breath, my mind and my heart, and my energy. Soon I realized that even without doing anything, even without thinking, there is a lot going on. There is no need for TV, no need to be bored, ever. Inside of us there is a very entertaining display of energy and motion. All we have to do is sit down and watch.

I sat every day like that for 10 weeks or so, gradually working my way up to 12–18 hours daily. Then on December 21, 1984 I sat for the morning as usual, then had some whole-wheat ramen noodles for lunch. After lunch I rested for a few minutes, then got up and prepared to sit again. Suddenly I felt that someone else was in the room—a distinctly feminine presence. After meditating so much, I had become very sensitive to people's energy. I looked around the apartment but nobody was there.

Then I felt a tap on my forehead.

Energy rushed up my spine and out the top of my head. Suddenly I was overwhelmed by a spiritual vision. I could see conscious spiritual energy everywhere, in everything. I felt totally ecstatic. I saw the same thing everywhere I looked: luminous, conscious spiritual energy pulsing and coursing through everything, like an all-pervading ocean of milk.

The experience lasted for hours. After four hours of unrelenting bliss, I decided to take a reality check; I visited a local tea house. As I walked in, the potted plants greeted me happily—but the humans ignored me completely. They were so dead they may as well have been cardboard

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cut-outs. At first, I got in the line like everyone else. After some time of being completely ignored, I decided to test the boundaries.

I cut through the line, grabbed a cup, filled it with hot water, dumped in a tea bag and some honey. Looking around, everyone was still studiously ignoring me. Pushing it to the limit, I took my hot cup of tea, sauntered towards the door and walked out without paying.

Silence. No response at all. This experience revealed an interesting aspect of the mass hallucination in which most humans live. They hate happiness and avoid ecstasy so much that if someone is truly happy or ecstatic, they behave as if he isn't there. Denial is a powerful drug.

In the days and weeks that followed, all I had to do to repeat the ecstatic experience was sit down and take a deep breath. More experiments with people showed beyond a doubt that whenever I was in an ecstatic state, I was effectively invisible.

I am going on meditation retreat for the summer, and this will be my last post for some time. However I will be maintaining this Journal and will post it when I return.



Hiking up from the Retreat Center toward the road

July 7–Rains Retreat

We are as if trapped in a dark cave with a vicious animal, the mind. A rock wall seals off the mouth of the cave, and the rocks are too heavy for us to lift, too thick for us to penetrate. But the Buddha gives us instructions that by looking at the wall in a certain way, it will disappear and we can walk out of the cave into the open air, a free man.

The Buddha's instructions are detailed and intricate; but in my experience, when they are understood and followed precisely, the benefit is immense. Some people see me as a pest because I insist on details like quoting the Buddha accurately and providing references to Sutta passages to back up our opinions. One lady even called me a 'fundamentalist'—which made me happy because I think a little more fundamentalism, in the sense of accuracy and attention to the details of the Buddha's teaching, would benefit us.

This will be my last post for some time. The day has finally come when I am leaving my Mother Temple for Rains retreat at an isolated and confidential location in the jungle of Sri Lanka. I don't know exactly how long I will be offline.

I feel very close. When I look at that solid rock wall in a certain way after preparing my mind properly, a window opens and I can see the world of freedom and light beyond. But I cannot yet go there. Given the exalted association I will be fortunate to have, anything is possible. One of my associates will be a monk who regularly gives discourses to crowds of 30-40,000 people. Publicly he is known only as 'The Arahat', because he wants to preserve his anonymity and privacy. I am honored to help him publish English translations of his talks.

I may return ordained as a Theravadin monk, or maybe even 'it' will happen. I beg everyone for your forgiveness for being a pain in the neck sometimes, and your blessings for a successful retreat. I am trying to both thunder **and** rain. Namo Buddhāya!

There are these four types of thunderheads. Which four? One that thunders but doesn't rain, one that rains but doesn't thunder, one that

neither thunders nor rains, and one that both thunders and rains. These are the four types of thunderheads.

“In the same way, these four types of persons resembling thunderheads are to be found existing in the world. Which four? The one that thunders but doesn’t rain, the one that rains but doesn’t thunder, the one that neither thunders nor rains, and the one that both thunders and rains.

“And how is one the type of person who thunders but doesn’t rain? There is the case where a person has mastered the Dhamma: dialogues, narratives of mixed prose and verse, explanations, verses, spontaneous exclamations, quotations, birth stories, amazing events, question & answer sessions.[1] Yet he doesn’t discern, as it actually is present, that ‘This is stress.’ He doesn’t discern, as it actually is present, that ‘This is the origination of stress.’ He doesn’t discern, as it actually is present, that ‘This is the cessation of stress.’ He doesn’t discern, as it actually is present, that ‘This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.’ This is the type of person who thunders but doesn’t rain. This type of person, I tell you, is like the thunderhead that thunders but doesn’t rain.

“And how is one the type of person who rains but doesn’t thunder? There is the case where a person has not mastered the Dhamma: dialogues... question & answer sessions. Yet he does discern, as it actually is present, that ‘This is stress.’ He discerns, as it actually is present, that ‘This is the origination of stress.’ He discerns, as it actually is present, that ‘This is the cessation of stress.’ He discerns, as it actually is present, that ‘This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.’ This is the type of person who rains but doesn’t thunder. This type of person, I tell you, is like the thunderhead that rains but doesn’t thunder.

“And how is one the type of person who neither thunders nor rains? There is the case where a person has not mastered the Dhamma: dialogues... question & answer sessions. He doesn’t discern, as it actually is present, that ‘This is stress.’ ... ‘This is the origination of stress.’ ... ‘This is the cessation of stress.’ ... ‘This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.’ This is the type of person who neither thunders nor rains. This type of person, I tell you, is like the thunderhead that neither thunders nor rains.

“And how is one the type of person who both thunders and rains? There is the case where a person has mastered the Dhamma: dialogues...

question & answer sessions. He discerns, as it actually is present, that ‘This is stress.’ … ‘This is the origination of stress.’ … ‘This is the cessation of stress.’ … ‘This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.’ This is the type of person who both thunders and rains. This type of person, I tell you, is like the thunderhead that both thunders and rains.

“There are these four types of people to be found existing in the world.”
— *Valahaka Sutta* (*Anguttara-Nikāya* 4.102)

July 8–Packing up my Life

Today I was packing, getting ready to go to Colombo tomorrow & Ven. S.’s monastery the day after. The feeling suddenly hit me that “This is not just another temple excursion; something **much bigger** is happening.” The more I contemplate the current situation, it seems that this marks the beginning of another **major new chapter**.

Since coming to Sri Lanka, I have met many nice, but more or less **external**, religious Buddhists. Even the monks we have met so far don’t seem very **serious** about studying the deeper meaning of Suttas, doing meditation or attaining **enlightenment**. But to me, at this stage of my life, these are **the only things that matter**.

I have also become pessimistic about presenting the higher Theravāda teachings to **westerners** in English. The westerners want to make a deal: “OK, I’ll believe in no-self, give the Buddha lip-service, but on condition of **no vinaya; no rules**.” The way Zen and Tibetan Buddhism are presented in the west, they can get away with that. But **no one is attaining enlightenment**; instead they go through the motions of sitting, but they are just **thinking**. There’s no realization or **insight**.

Part of the problem is cultural; but over the last few months I have gradually become convinced that there is a fundamental **lack** of both moral and intellectual **integrity** in the west. Of course, it doesn’t help that everyone in the west is so conditioned by sense enjoyment that they literally **can’t conceive** of living without it.

I want company of people—whether they are monks or not doesn’t matter—who are committed to understanding the Theravāda Suttas on the **ontological systemic level**. That means, as Ven. Nāṇavīra famously said, that “their thinking is all of a piece—you can’t change one thing without affecting everything.” That means duplication, understanding, contemplation and realization of the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths on a **deep level**—penetrating to their essential meaning.

I am relatively new to the Buddha’s teaching. I **rejected Buddhism** when I was searching for a *guru* back in the 1960s, because only Zen and Tibetan Buddhism were available at the time, and they **didn’t appeal** to me. I recognized the **primacy of the Theravāda path** only less than a year ago. I’m sure there are many things I still misunderstand and don’t even know about. But I feel an **enormous urgency** to realize this teaching, since who knows how long we have left in this world? I want to **stop suffering**, and I’m prepared to do **whatever it takes** to attain enlightenment.

So the company of those who value the Buddha’s teaching enough to **work hard** at realizing it is very important to me. My intention is going to Ven. S.’s monastery tomorrow is to associate with people who ‘**get it**’, who are close to **realization**, who are ahead of me and who can **articulate** and **communicate** their realization. Whether or not I become ordained is not at all as important as understanding the Buddha’s teaching **as it really is**.



Looking Back at the Retreat Center

July 9—Auspicious Beginning

I just left the temple for the retreat. As I walked over the bridge, there was a **peacock** on the road. He ran **uphill**, to the right, in the direction I was going along the road. I looked where he went into the forest, and there was a whole patch of mature **tulsi** (holy basil) bushes. I picked a bunch of leaves and *mañjarīs* (seeds) for medicine.

With these **auspicious signs** begins a new chapter in my life. I finally feel empowered to **give up** so many things I have been attached to for a long time: music, teaching, being in control. D. has gone back to Norway to earn money; I am completely on my own for the first time in more than a

year, and I feel very **free**. There are finally some people in my life who are enlightened enough that I can **relax**, let go the teacher role and trust them. This is a **very, very big deal**.

I'm deliberately **not** posting this—or anything else—on Facebook, at least for the duration of the retreat, and maybe longer. The major online players have shown themselves to have **no integrity**. They don't seem responsible or trustworthy anymore. Why should I trust them with my intimate personal story?

And the names of the monks and other friends in this chapter are **anonymized**. If you know me well enough, you'll know who they are. Otherwise, they deserve their privacy and anonymity. There will also be a fair amount about '**The Arahant**'—a fully-enlightened monk, and that is the monicker he goes by in public life. No one who is not personally connected with him knows his actual name. And that's the way it should be.

As I walked the kilometer or so up the hill to the road to meet the van, I had another realization. One cannot truly realize how unsatisfactory ordinary life and existence are until one has tasted *jhāna*. I understand now **why** all feelings and sensations are considered *dukkha*, and all experience, from the hells to the Brahma worlds, is considered **unsatisfactory**.

It is in comparison with *jhāna*. *Jhāna* is so pure and pleasurable, when one attains it everything else is **pale** by comparison. One of the reasons I have been feeling so dissatisfied the last few days is that I had **less time to meditate** due to preparing for the retreat. I can only watch the stream of unsatisfactory experiences go by until I can again enter *jhāna* and feel that **pure happiness**, with no side-effects or karmic consequences.

Knowing that such ineffable happiness is merely a quiet place, a few mindful breaths and a few moments of concentration away **changes everything**. Especially, it **devalues** all other forms of so-called happiness. In fact, it makes them seem like suffering in comparison.



Retreat cottage at Ven. S.'s Monastery

July 10–Ven. Ñ's Commencement

Today I attended the **commencement** (graduation) ceremony for my dear friend the Ven. Ñ., the chief monk of the Retreat Center where I have been staying for the last six weeks. He is getting his Bachelor's Degree in Pāli. I don't know why they call it 'commencement'; it would seem more logical to call it something more like 'completion' instead. Oh well—since when is **education** about **logic**?

We got to sit in a huge air-conditioned tent with several thousand monks and family members, while 500 and something graduates were called by name, marched up to the podium and picked up their diplomas. As usual,

I was the only Upāsaka and the only Westerner. So I was given a seat in the Press section in the front row, so everyone could **stare** at me.

Of course, the opening ceremonies and everything else were in **Sinhala**, of which I understand approximately **ten words**. So except for the twenty seconds or so it took my friend to pick up his diploma, it was **profoundly boring** and irrelevant. So I sat there in the nice comfortable chair in the nice cool tent, concentrated on my breath and **went into meditation**.

I think it's likely that of the several thousand monks and lay people there, I was the **only one meditating**. I didn't do a survey—I was too busy being **ecstatic**. I had about two good hours of *jhāna* after my friend got his sheepskin, and I made the best of it. During that time I had approximately 2,746 intense realizations and insights, most of which I have forgotten, only because I forgot to sneak my iPad in under my robes. But I'm going to try to write something here about the ones that **didn't** get away.

First, if you want to get the **most** out of meditation, especially Ānāpānasati, it has to become your passion, your **obsession**, your career, your **lifestyle**. Meditation as a hobby, or even as a daily exercise will certainly give benefits, but you will get no farther than the preliminary stage of concentration. To make further progress, your personal, emotional and perceptual **center of gravity** has to be in meditation (*jhāna*) itself.

What do I mean by that? It means that meditation is not just something you **do**; it becomes your **life**. Whenever you are not in meditation, you are looking forward to the next opportunity to meditate. More than that: you are **longing** for it, like a **lover** in separation from the beloved. You should view meditation as the only time when you are **fully alive**.

Social conventions, polite small talk, business, family life, romance, art, science, philosophy are **nothing** compared to meditation—what to speak of entertainment, politics and other such **garbage**. That is how I could—literally—turn my back on an auditorium full of monks and lay Buddhists paying polite attention, close my eyes and go into my own **perfect little world** of seclusion in concentration.

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Just imagine the **irony**: I am the only westerner in a roomful of Buddhists, at the commencement ceremony of a Buddhist university, where people are supposed to be studying the teaching of the Buddha at a high level, surrounded by senior monks, and I am the **only one** in meditation! Everyone else was thumbing through the program, politely interested in what was going on. I never was very good at pretending interest in boring ceremonies.

Such exercises seem to me to be nothing but a sophisticated form of **suffering**. My friend takes the funky local bus to Colombo—8 hours each way—for classes every Sunday. Now, **that's** suffering! And what is the gain? Now he gets to append BA, MA, Ph.D, D.Litt or whatever to his other titles. All that effort, all that suffering just for a **designation**? Will having that title bring anyone closer to **enlightenment**? No, thank you.

And the head of the university, an old monk—so advanced in age he needs help to climb the stairs to the dais—he's also suffering. He should be **meditating**, in seclusion, **preparing for death**. Instead, he's onstage for over two hours, **handing out diplomas** to 500 people he doesn't even know. That's **suffering!**

So from my perspective, the whole value of the experience was the opportunity to do a little meditation. But what the experience brought out for me is, **how very precious** is the opportunity to meditate. If you have the knowledge and skill, don't waste a moment of time: whenever you **can** go into meditation, **do it!** Which brings us to our next topic:



Panorama from my front porch

July 11—My Commencement

Last night at dusk I arrived at the Ven. S.'s monastery, accompanied by the **two chief monks** of the forest monasteries I have been staying at for the last three months. This place is **really** far back in the sticks! No Internet; barely even a cell phone connection. After a short and pleasant visit introducing me to Ven. S. and expressing their happiness and satisfaction with my new mentor, the monks went on their way back up the mountain.

I was left alone with Ven. S., a **very senior monk** described by a friend who knows him well as "**a walking library**". He is also reputed to be an Arahant. Certainly he is not an ordinary man, nor even an **ordinary monk**. His presence is very inspiring. After a short conversation touching on many subjects, I was shown to my simple but adequate quarters.

This morning I awoke to the songs of exotic birds outside my *kuti*. I took a refreshing shower, brewed a cup of tea and sat down for meditation. After dawn, Bhante's assistant came knocking to call me to breakfast, a tasty mix of traditional Sri Lankan cuisine.

Once the morning chores were complete, I sat down to await Ven. S. When he came out of his quarters to give audience, I was the **only one** present. We had a long conversation including a little of my background, the state of Buddhism in the world and in Sri Lanka, the Buddha's teaching in the Suttas, various monks and teachers, and finally on meditation. Here are some gems:

"Words are inadequate to express the Buddha's teaching completely. The only way to understand it is to experience it for yourself. Certain questions can only be answered by the practice. Do you want to know? Come and see."

"When the Buddha was asked, 'What have you gained from meditation?' He answered, 'Nothing. But there are so many things I have lost: ego, self, designations, conditioned existence, suffering and unhappiness.' After so many things have gone, there is nothing left but joy itself."

July 12—Real Suffering, Real Happiness

All happiness is **not the same**. There are, or should be, different **comparative valuations** for different kinds of happiness. Why? Most so-called happiness is **actually suffering**, simply **dressed up** as enjoyment.

For example, people are desperately searching for **sense enjoyment**—especially **sex life**—imagining it to be happiness. They think, “Being alone is suffering. I will find a partner and enjoy.” They don’t realize that in the course of searching for a partner they will have to meet so many **nonsense people**, go to bars and other **places of ignorance**, endure **rejection** and experience so many other **indignities**.

Even if they are **fortunate**, and come from a good family that can arrange for a qualified mate, they still have to go through **courtship**, endure the **risk of rejection**, make so many **impossible promises** (’til death us do part’) and meet so many **unreasonable demands**. And then, even if things go well, there is planning the wedding and the ceremony itself. Ask anyone who has been through it whether **that** is suffering.

Finally the newlyweds move into their new home together. That’s when the **suffering really starts**, because no actual relationship can meet the **impossibly high expectations** of romantic bliss portrayed in books, stories and other media. Now they have to adjust their lifestyle and habits to one another **as they really are** (rather than as they presented themselves during courtship) and become responsible for each others’ happiness—**forever!** And the financial burdens and anxiety of buying and maintaining a home last for **decades**. If **that’s** not suffering, I don’t know what would be.

Then there’s raising children: **twenty years of suffering** per child. And let’s not forget **old age**, when youthful beauty fades and the heat of passion cools. Then where is the enjoyment of married life? Maybe they get divorced, or one partner dies before the other. Or a long illness or disability makes life difficult for one or both.

Convinced yet? Oh, but there's **more**. Certainly if there is **any** cure for suffering in this world, self-realization is it. But the relentless pressures of family life leave **little or no time** to pursue self-realization. The **constant disruption** due to sharing one's living space with mate and children makes deep meditation **impossible**. Then there is the problem of **jealousy**, when one partner discovers the **deep fulfillment** of spiritual life before the other.

All of the above means that the pleasures of passion are **not really pleasurable** at all; indeed, they are simply **layers of suffering**, piled higher and deeper over our **essential aloneness**, our lack of shelter and refuge in this life. Finally, while all this suffering is going on, one must **Maintain the act** of being happy and enjoying. That in itself is suffering, because it is a **lie**: no one can change the fact that human life is essentially **unsatisfactory**.

In the final analysis, the **frantic tempo** of material life leaves no time for mindfulness. This leads to inconsiderate thoughts, intemperate words and thoughtless actions, all of which **cause suffering** for oneself and others.

Not by **wasting time** in temporary pleasures will you become free from the influence of time, but by **wisely utilizing** your precious time to discover the **cause of suffering** and the **path to its cessation**. Not by running from death will you become free from death, but by offering death your **unnecessary attachments** and useless habits. Not by learning from books and scriptures will you become wise, but by learning from **observation** when you put your book-learning to the **test of experience**.

Let me recount a little tale I call "**The Parable of the Amnesiac**".

Once upon a time, not long ago or far away, there was a man who had a great treasure. Maybe he inherited it, or maybe he just found it—no one knows for sure. Concerned that someone would try to **rob** him of his treasure, he thought, "What if I **bury it** under the floor of my house?"

On the **pretext** of having some work done in his house, he had the floor dug up. One dark night he **concealed the treasure-box** under the floor. The next day under his watchful eye, he had the workmen cover up the spot as good as new, and **no one was the wiser**. The treasure was

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safe, or so he thought; so he simply told his relatives he had hidden the treasure, and that was that.

Some time later he was working, and **slipped** on a banana peel. Falling, he **hit his head** quite hard. Passing into a coma, when he awoke some days later, he had completely **lost his memory**. He could no longer recall anything—even **his name**. As soon as he recovered enough to go home, his relatives began to ask him, “Where is your treasure hidden?” But he didn’t even remember **having** it.

So the relatives, looking everywhere, dug up all around the house; but of course, they didn’t find anything. Although they questioned him repeatedly, the man never did remember, and passed away a pauper, although he had a huge treasure **buried under the floor of his own house**.

This is our situation. We have within us the source of **unlimited happiness**, free of charge. All we have to do to access it is **meditate** according to the instructions of the Buddha. But we have **forgotten** all this, and stubbornly insist that we will become happy in **some other way** that is far more trouble, and does not really give us the happiness we seek. The “Pearl of great price” mentioned in the Bible is authentic self-realization, the actual cure of suffering. One should literally sell or give away **all that one has**, and go in search of this great treasure.



Quail in the field

July 13—When the Music Starts

Serious meditators have no need for music and other entertainment; the inner life is more than sufficiently entertaining. We live simply and austere because we regard the *jhānas* (stages of concentration) as **ultimate pleasure**. The pleasure of the *jhānas* does not require action of any kind; in fact they spring from the **cessation** of all action. One sits and practices Ānāpānasati, and one by one, the *jhānas* arise spontaneously in the concentrated mind. That's when **the music starts** for the meditator.

In the perfection of this practice, one **breathes in ecstasy** through the third eye, and **breathes out mettā** through the heart. This is extremely

pleasurable, even ecstatic. The **flood of pleasure** from *jhāna* washes away the mind, the false ego, the ‘self’ and concepts based on it. In the end, there is nothing left but **pure joy itself**, without any support. That is the ultimate and **final enlightenment**. But until that highest stage is reached, one should experience the pleasure of the *jhānas* to one’s heart’s content, and this will **satisfy** one’s heart and mind completely.

The path to the **higher *jhānas*** goes from the third eye, up through the top of the head. There is more structure beyond that. It is literally beyond ecstasy; but the first four *jhānas* still persist and are **foundational** to attaining higher *jhānas*. I discovered this on the first day of my retreat. I got access to the higher *jhānas* and could see all of them as **fabrications** or conditioned states.

First during concentration, I felt a **pressure** on my nose, as if someone were pressing it with a finger. Of course, no one was there; it was an **energy phenomenon**. Normally our habitual discursive thinking pulls energy **out of** the 6th (third eye) *chakra*; in the higher states of meditation, the energy flows **into** the third eye.

There are various methods for accomplishing this change. I used one of them to **switch the direction** of energy flow, and was rewarded with brilliant lights and an intense feeling of bliss. Now the energy illuminated the ‘**upper room**’, the highest *chakra* of the thousand-petalled lotus at the top of the head. I could feel it from the inside. I found a way to direct the energy to the center of the crown *chakra*, and it **suddenly opened**.

I felt the energy rush through the opening. As I rose up and up, I saw a **vision of a Bo tree** with a strong straight trunk and lush greenery, planted firmly in the center of the crown *chakra*. The roots went down into the ordinary mind, and were nourished by the water of purified thoughts. The trunk was the first four *jhānas*; and the branches, leaves, flowers and fruits were the higher *jhānas*. A pair of **strong lions** guarded the base of the tree.

I went high up in the tree and there was a **beautiful temple** made of jewels. A white Buddha image was floating there. I went in and offered him a lamp by making a flame of light arise in my joined palms. I made an

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intention that the flame of that lamp should be **eternal**, and left it there burning in the temple before the Buddha. Then I went out to enjoy the each of the branches, leaves, flowers and fruits of the higher *jhānas*, as well as the beautiful multicolored birds of ecstasy that roost there, **freed from all cares**.

Now after **settling in** to my retreat, I am going back and experiencing each lower and higher *jhāna* fully, savoring its flavor, qualities and mood:

“There was the case where Sariputta — quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities — entered & remained in the first *jhāna*: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. Whatever qualities there are in the first *jhāna* — directed thought, evaluation, rapture, pleasure, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that ‘There is a further escape,’ and pursuing it there really was for him.

“Furthermore, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, Sariputta entered & remained in the second *jhāna*: rapture & pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. Whatever qualities there are in the second *jhāna* — internal assurance, rapture, pleasure, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that ‘There is a further escape,’ and pursuing it there really was for him.

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“Furthermore, with the fading of rapture, Sariputta — remaining in equanimity, mindful & alert, and physically sensitive to pleasure — entered & remained in the third *jhāna*, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ Whatever qualities there are in the third *jhāna* — equanimity-pleasure, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He understood, He discerned that ‘There is a further escape,’ and pursuing it there really was for him.

“Furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure & stress — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — Sariputta entered & remained in the fourth *jhāna*: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. Whatever qualities there are in the fourth *jhāna* — a feeling of equanimity, neither pleasure nor pain; an unconcern due to serenity of awareness; singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that ‘There is a further escape,’ and pursuing it there really was for him.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, [perceiving,] ‘Infinite space,’ Sariputta entered & remained in the dimension of the infinitude of space. Whatever qualities there are in the dimension of the infinitude of space — the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of space, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness,

desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that ‘There is a further escape,’ and pursuing it there really was for him.

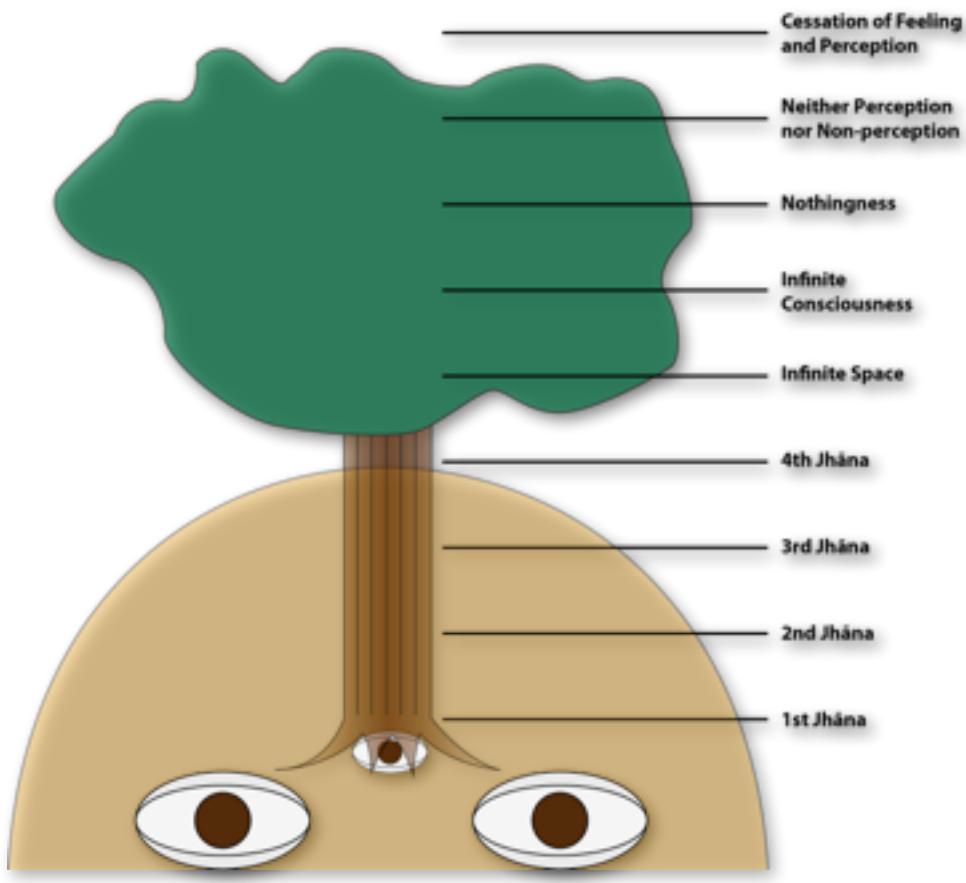
“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, [perceiving,] ‘Infinite consciousness,’ Sariputta entered & remained in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. Whatever qualities there are in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness — the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that ‘There is a further escape,’ and pursuing it there really was for him.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, [perceiving] ‘There is nothing,’ Sariputta entered & remained in the dimension of nothingness. Whatever qualities there are in the dimension of nothingness — the perception of the dimension of nothingness, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that ‘There is a further escape,’ and pursuing it there really was for him.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, Sariputta entered & remained in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. He emerged mindfully from that attainment. On emerging mindfully from that attainment, he regarded the past qualities that had ceased & changed: ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that ‘There is a further escape,’ and pursuing it there really was for him.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, Sariputta entered & remained in the cessation of feeling & perception. Seeing with discernment, his fermentations were totally ended. He emerged mindfully from that attainment. On emerging mindfully from that attainment, he regarded the past qualities that had ceased & changed: ‘So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.’ He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that ‘There is no further escape,’ and pursuing it there really wasn’t for him.” — *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111)

It’s interesting to observe that the qualities of the first *jhāna*—”rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation”—may also be reached indirectly by meditation on a *mantra*, a Deity form, intellectual contemplation of a truth and by various forms of Tantrik *sādhana*. However, to go beyond the first *jhāna* by those means would be very difficult indeed. Only the Buddha’s teaching shows how it is possible by Ānāpānasati—concentration and meditation on the breath.



Crude Map of Jhānas

July 14—Slander & Revenge

“Monks, these two slander the Tathāgata. Which two? He who explains what was not said or spoken by the Tathāgata as said or spoken by the Tathāgata. And he who explains what was said or spoken by the Tathāgata as not said or spoken by the Tathāgata. These are two who slander the Tathāgata.” — *Abhasita Sutta* (AN 2.23)

There is a section in the Vedic scripture *Vedānta-sūtra* (*Adhyāya* 2, *Pāda* 1, *Adhikarāṇa* 3) whose purpose is to defeat Buddhism. The trouble is, the ‘Buddhism’ it defeats has **no resemblance whatsoever** to what the Buddha actually taught. For example, it asserts that Buddhism is based on nine principles—a concept which does not appear **anywhere** in the Suttas. One of these purported principles is “I am”, which as every real Buddhist knows, is precisely the **opposite** of what the Buddha actually taught.

As a former Vedic devotee and *guru*, I am familiar with the Vedic arguments against Buddhism. But now that I know what the Buddha **actually** taught, the astonishing thing about these arguments is that **all** of them are **false**. They argue against an imaginary ‘Buddhism’ that, as far as I have been able to ascertain, does not exist and **never has**. What is going on? That type of argument is technically known as a ‘**straw-man**’, an argument against something your opponent **never said**. It works only as long as the opponent is not present or able to present his side of the story.

That was the case in India during the time when the current Vedic philosophy was conceived. Buddhism had been virtually wiped out in a **bloody genocidal campaign** begun by the Vedic Brāhmaṇas and aided by the Muslim invaders. Monks were bullied, imprisoned, maltreated, tortured and killed—often in the **most horrible and grisly ways**—for nothing more than following the Buddha’s teaching. Buddhists fled India to all parts of South Asia. Deprived of access to Gayā, the central Buddhist holy place, Buddhism **fractured** into Sri Lankan, Tibetan, Chinese and Thai factions, and never has recovered its original unity.

What made the Brāhmaṇas and Muslims feel justified in doing this was the Buddha’s popular defeat of the hereditary **caste system**, and his introduction of the **principles of democracy**. The Buddha admitted people from **any** background into his Sangha, which was governed by a strict ethical code—the *vinaya*—implemented by a **voting system**. Some community transactions required only a quorum and simple majority, while others—expulsion, for example—required full consensus of the community. A complete **system of appeals** and justice procedures

existed. Physical punishment had **no role whatsoever** in the Buddha's community justice system.

The Brāhmaṇas had long enjoyed an **autocracy** determined by the accident of birth, and enforced by the Vedic kings with a brutal code of **physical punishment**. A Vedic king could imprison, torture or kill **anyone whatsoever**, for any reason or none at all, with impunity. Under the 'Code of Manu', what passed for a code of justice under Vedic rule, the king's decision was **final**. He was prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner in one. Justice completely depended on the king's integrity, or **lack thereof**.

Any attempt to transcend caste distinctions was looked upon with **extreme prejudice** by the Vedic Brāhmaṇas and kings. They considered the Buddha and his followers to be the **ultimate heretics**. After the reign of Emperor Ashoka, there was no one powerful enough to stop the **revenge** of the Vedic Brāhmaṇas and kings against the Buddhists. Buddhists were **slaughtered wholesale** in ways very similar to the medieval **catholic inquisitions**. This fact is **curiously missing** from every historical tradition of South Asia except the Buddhist.

This brings up an interesting philosophical point. In theistic religions, adopting an heretical view is considered equivalent to **serving the devil**, or whoever is responsible for propagating evil in the world. Such a person is thought to be **condemned** to a hellish existence, sometimes eternally, by their deviance. But no one has—or can—logically explain how any of this gives the theistic believer the license to **break the tenets of his own religion**, and harm, torture or even kill the unbelievers.

Such a narrow, vindictive, hypocritically selfish and vengeful nature is **foreign** to the teaching of the Buddha. Here he describes the state of mind of monk who follows his teaching:

"He abides, having suffused with a mind of loving-kindness one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with loving-kindness, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will."

“He abides, having suffused with a mind of compassion... of sympathetic joy... of equanimity one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with equanimity, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.” — *Vatthupama Sutta* (MN 7)

July 15—Offering Service

All religions and spiritual paths, if they contain even a grain of truth, instruct their followers to **serve others**. Theistic religions often urge believers to serve ‘god’, which **motivates us**, strokes our false egos and makes our service seem very **important**. But ‘serving god’ **in practice** usually amounts to serving other **ordinary human beings** like ourselves: a teacher, other members of the religious group, or the community.

Offering service to others **conditions results of wholesomeness**, goodness, pleasure and knowledge. Serving ourselves engenders just the opposite. Serving others is the primary purpose of this Journal. The idea is that people can get an insider’s view, an accurate concept of the authentic Theravāda Buddhist teachings and practices, and that will benefit them. **Dhamma-dana**—giving the gift of the Buddha’s teaching—is the highest and most powerful form of **skillful kamma**.

My experience since starting this Journal and publishing it in installments has been **very instructive**. Not only has my own life become more and more spiritual and pleasant, but many **good things** have been happening around me as well.

I moved from the urban environs of Negombo to the U. Monastery in the mountains of central Sri Lanka, and then to the even smaller and more remote I. Monastery, a one-kilometer hike down a mountain trail into an **ecologically pristine** fertile valley. I have made **many good friends** among the Theravādin monks, friends who I can **trust** because of their high ethical standards and personal affection for me.

Spiritually, I have gone from a beginner, studying the Buddha's teaching externally in books, to an **advanced student**, a full-time practicing meditator studying with the Venerable S., a very senior monk in the Siyam Pitaka, and closely associated with another famous monk, the Ven. A., known publicly only as "**The Arahant**".

I have gone from uncertainty and unclarity regarding the core teachings of the Buddha, to **directly experiencing** them for myself. As I wrote above, on my first full day of meditation practice under Ven. S., I was granted a vision of the **eight jhānas**, and could see for myself that they are **fabrications**. Just yesterday that insight was confirmed by one of the Suttas of the *Majjhima-Nikaya*.

Nevertheless I am going ahead with my study of the *jhānas*, first by properly **establishing my meditation seat**. I can now sit more or less comfortably in half-lotus for 30 minutes, up from 20 minutes when I started. I want to gradually increase my endurance to one hour. That way I will be able to sustain the concentration required to **enter and experience the jhānas** at will.

So I feel **extremely satisfied** with my progress over the last six months. I ascribe my good fortune during that time to the fact that I have done my best to **share the knowledge** I have been given through my blog, this Journal and any other means available. **It matters not** that few people read this Journal, and no one takes it seriously enough to contact me through my blog or initiate a serious discussion on it; the power of giving is in the **intention**.

My intention is to **benefit the readers** by exposing a rare insider's view of the Sri Lankan Theravāda tradition. The Buddha's original teaching, and most of the original practice, **lives on here still**, carried to each new generation by an **inner core** of dedicated monks. They do not advertise, proselytize, or in many cases, even teach publicly. Their monasteries, hidden away in the dense jungle of Sri Lanka's tropical interior, cannot be found on the Internet. They are not open to the public, but by **invitation only**.

These constraints are necessary to avoid the **inevitable dilution** of the teaching of the Buddha that **commercialization** would bring. In the near future, when I become ordained as a Buddhist monk, I will also **cease my public online activity**. This is required to maintain the **confidentiality** of the inner teaching. However, this Journal will stand as a **testament** to the path I walked—in the hope that in the future, someone courageous and adventurous enough to follow the Buddha's path to total freedom may **find** it, and **benefit** thereby.

July 15—Email to my Family and Friends

(This will be sent to my few remaining family members, and a few old friends I have managed to locate over the years)

A few days after you receive this, I will be **ordained** as a Buddhist monk. My name will be changed, and my previous life will **end**. My optional personal vows include a commitment **not to communicate** with people from my former life who, in my judgment, mistreated me. So this is intended as a final message, **my last goodbye**.

I shall retire to a small, **obscure monastery** high in a mountainous tropical jungle, where I will spend the rest of my days in **reclusion**, living in a simple stone hut and associating only with a few carefully-chosen **senior monks**. No electricity, no phone, no Internet.

I am **very happy** with the way things have turned out. After much struggle and misfortune in life, I have finally found **satisfaction** in a life of **meditative solitude**. I don't expect you'll **understand**, or want to **respond**; but if you do, simply reply to this message. If there is time, I may answer if I foresee any **benefit** in it.

As you are no doubt well aware, I have always been an **unusual person**. I was born in a single-parent household at a time when that was simply **not done**—at least in the socioeconomic **class-consciousness pretensions** of my larger family and society. I received much maltreatment and abuse because of the **accident of my birth**. Not the least from my own family, who were fond of calling me ‘the bastard’ behind my back.

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Our family has many dark secrets, and it keeps them well—**even from itself**. I should know—I’m one of them. In the future, when at some typically dull family gathering, someone asks, “Whatever happened to David—you know, the one who became a Hare Kṛṣṇa?” Those of you who have read this will give each other a certain **surreptitious look**, meaning “Oh no—don’t bring *that* up!” and remain silent. Anyone who breaks the **code of denial** and silence is ostracized.

But I have nothing to lose, so here goes: My family used the circumstances of my birth to justify **cheating** my mother and me out of our rightful shares of the **family estate**. I was adopted by my **own grandmother** at age 8—a legal strategy to prevent me from later filing a probate action contesting her will. After decades of verbal and emotional abuse, my mother was **committed** to a state mental institution by her own family members and priest. She lived out the rest of her life in that situation; however, according to her medical records she was **never diagnosed** with a mental illness. That was because besides some anxiety and depression due to family abuse, there was absolutely **nothing wrong** with her.

But way before all that, at a very early age, I conceived a strong desire to establish **direct personal contact** with God, as understood by the Christian religion. That desire was like a **fire in my mind**, illuminating it and driving me to evaluate everyone around me by spiritual criteria. Unfortunately, most everyone around me fell far short, even by their **own professed standards**. Ultimately I rejected Christianity because of its **philosophical poverty** and the pervasive **moral hypocrisy** of its adherents.

When I finally attained majority and was free to do as I wished, I **left** my dysfunctional family and began a comprehensive, methodical **search** for a spiritually realized teacher. After a long hunt, in which I met most of the prominent spiritual teachers of the 1960s, I accepted the famous Vedic devotional author Abhāy Charanāravindam De as my spiritual master. I also **privately** accepted him as my **father**. Because my biological father never did show up, I had an **empty place** in my heart. With his exalted character and deep spiritual wisdom, Śrīla Prabhupāda **deserved** and filled that place nicely.

I served Śrīla Prabhupāda as a monk, disciple and son for **forty years**. Even after his untimely death, I **remained devoted** to him and

continued to propagate the spiritual values, philosophy and practices I had learned from him. I finally **realized Krsna** directly in 2002, after which I began to teach the same path to students worldwide. By 2011, I had become a **senior monk** and *guru*, with an *āśram* and disciples of my own in India.

However, something was wrong. Though I had reached the **pinnacle** of the *bhakti* path, I was still **suffering**, and my detailed **ontological analysis** of the confidential literature of *bhakti* began to give rise to deep **suspicion** about its actual origin and nature. It seemed more and more clear to me that it was simply a **fabrication**. I couldn't resolve my doubts, and **resigned** from my position as *guru* to devote time to personal research into my issues.

Unfortunately my disciples didn't understand or appreciate my resignation, since it **cut them off** from becoming *gurus* themselves. They engineered a **spectacular scandal** that, though it was hurtful at the time, in the long run succeeded only in making sure my bridges to my former spiritual path were **very thoroughly burned**. With all previous ties severed, released from my commitments, I found myself once again a **free agent**.

At first I conceived my difficulties as a **leadership issue**, so I educated myself on the state of the art in leadership studies. From this I learned that spiritual realization, leadership and management are **separate skills**. Just because I attained **spiritual realization** did not automatically qualify me as a competent leader or manager. However, this realization was just the **tip of an iceberg**—I'll spare you the details—the beginning of a line of inquiry that ultimately led me to the **teaching of the Buddha**.

In the **original teaching** of the Buddha (as distinguished from 'Buddhism', the various popular religions derived from that teaching) I finally found my **spiritual home**. The Buddha's original teaching, recorded in the Theravāda Suttas, was **unavailable** in English when I first searched for a spiritual path in the 1960s. But now, some very good English translations enabled me to appreciate its **profound value**.

As soon as I began to implement this teaching, within a few weeks all my mental suffering **disappeared**—evaporated **without trace**. I could understand that I had discovered something of **enormous value**, and I wanted to know more. I knew from my experience with the Vedic path

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that there is always an inner or **esoteric circle** of advanced practitioners who keep a spiritual path alive from generation to generation. I determined to **find** the monks who were practicing the Dhamma purely, and **learn** from them.

I traveled to South Asia and after a six-month search, found a group of monks who are practicing Buddha's teaching at the highest level of attainment: **Arahants**. By good fortune, I was able to approach them, serve them and now I am studying with them. Soon I will be ordained into this **confidential circle** of monks, and that will be the end of my public life, including all relations with my past family and friends. Truly, the Buddha has become a **better father**, and his monks better family and friends, than I ever could have dreamed of.

So why am I telling you this? Because I know that **you don't care**. You don't care, and that is why I had to go **so far away** to find satisfaction. You don't care, and that is your **deep and tragic misfortune**. You don't care: that is **your disease**. And that is why I am not with you today. That is why I **left** you, after trying my **best** in our relationship and getting nothing but **frustration** and denial in return.

My relationships with family and friends throughout my life were marked by a singular characteristic: **you never cared** about my issues. You didn't want to **hear** about my issues, **consider** them as important, **discuss** them or **respond** to them. Whenever I would bring up my issues, you tried your best to **bury** them as soon as possible—ignore or deny them out of existence. My efforts over the years to **contact** you and explain myself have been met with incomprehension or stony silence.

You don't care!

Sometimes I could get a friend or relative to consider my issues by threatening to **terminate the relationship**. But to me, if just to get a fair hearing of my issues I have to resort to **politics** (threatening to leave), then the relationship is already over, because there is **no love**, no consideration, no care.

Real love means **understanding** another person. And if there is any problem, being willing to communicate and **invest** whatever time and effort is necessary to understand. Understanding leads to **trust**, and trust creates an atmosphere where **love** is possible. And what is the use of relationships without love?

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So **it's over**. You **had** your chance; you had plenty of opportunity to inquire sincerely **why** I was unsatisfied, **why** I was so distant, **why** I withdrew, **why I had to leave**. But you **didn't**. That is why I had to go far away and find people of a different race, different nationality, different religion and philosophy to relate to. People with **conscience**; people who **care**.

I know, you don't care. It doesn't matter to you; **I** don't matter to you. You're better off **without** me—or at least, **so you think**.

The real fact is, at almost any point in my journey I had access to **advanced knowledge** that could have **improved your life** in so many ways. But because you didn't care, you refused to **hear** from me, so I **couldn't share it** with you. I couldn't plant those valuable seeds in your hard, unreceptive, rocky, dry soil. It would have been **wasted** on you.

You **cheated yourself**; and there you remain, still where I left you. Sure you've gotten **older**, but hardly the **wiser**. Otherwise, how come I haven't **heard** from you? You occupy yourself with your collection of old mossy **rocks**, refusing to recognize the brilliantly shining **diamond** that was before you, within your grasp. And now it's gone.

So the wheel turns, life goes on and **everyone gets exactly what they deserve**, according to the choices they have made. *Kamma is just* and equal to all.

“And in the end, the love you **take** / is equal to the love you **make**.”

—John Lennon

I am not at all **sad** about this. Indeed, I have discovered an abundant and reliable source of **transcendent joy** in meditation, and that makes up for all the pain of the past. I do **regret** that I was **unable to share** this wonderful discovery with you. But in all fairness, that wasn't **my choice**; it was **yours**.

July 16—Ignorance and Suffering

Ignorance is the cause of **suffering**. Ignorance of **what**? Ignorance of the **Four Noble Truths**. The Four Noble Truths are not an invention of the Buddha; they are a principle of nature that he **discovered** through self-observation. The Buddha discerned, as it actually is present, that:

“This is suffering; this is the origination of suffering; this is the cessation of suffering; this is the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering.” — *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* (MN 26)

There is a distinction between **pain** and **suffering**. Pain is simply unpleasant **physical** sensation, such as stubbing one’s toe; suffering (*dukkha*) is a displeasurable **mental** sensation, such as, “I stubbed my toe and broke my toenail—now I am feeling pain, I have to go through so much trouble to fix my toenail, my afternoon is ruined, etc.”

For example, **anxiety** or anticipating future suffering is *dukkha*. **Fear** is *dukkha*; **ignorance** is *dukkha*. And specifically, ignorance of the Four Noble Truths is the **root cause** of all *dukkha*. The Buddha said:

“From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form. From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.” — *Paticca-samuppada-vibhanga Sutta* (SN 12.2)

The process of production of suffering (*dukkha*) from ignorance of the Four Noble Truths is called **Dependent Origination**. The type of causality involved is called ‘**this/that conditioning**’; in other words,

“When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn’t, that isn’t. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.” — *Assutavā Sutta* (SN 12.61)

Notice the use of present tense throughout. There is **no time delay** between cause and effect in the chain of Dependent Origination. They

are, for all practical purposes, one thing. Thus as soon as there is ignorance of the Four Noble Truths, the entire chain of Dependent Origination **manifests at once**. Conversely, as soon as ignorance of the Four Noble Truths disappears, the entire chain of conditioning down to suffering disappears.

That's the **good** news; the **bad** news is that, especially for modern people following western cultural modes, it is very difficult to comprehend the Four Noble Truths. Why is this? Because of the deep-seated conditioning to the concept of 'self'. We'll look into this more in the next essay.

July 19—Fabrications of 'I'

Meditation is going very well, realizations are **pouring** in—**way** more than I can record here. So I will focus on the more **important** ones.

I have been working with **directed thought** and the **first jhāna**, trying to characterize it fully. Specifically, I have been trying to **trace** the arising, persistence, fading and disappearance of **fabrications**, mental formations, determinations, or however you want to translate the Pāli term *sankhāra*. We create fabrications out of **desire**, especially desire for a particular type of '**being**'. Our intention is to enjoy a certain type of '**being**' more or less eternally.

When (not if) we perceive that this type of '**being**' is **not** going to provide the expected pleasurable sensations, or is in danger of fading out, we immediately start work on a **new** fabricated '**being**' to supplant it, **distracting** us from the fading & death of our previous '**being**'. Sometimes we even **hasten** the death of the previous '**being**', and this is craving for '**non-being**'.

Perhaps an example will help to make this clear. One of the proximate causes of my birth was my mother's **strong desire** for sensual pleasure and being loved. I remained in her womb, saturated by her desires, while she was actively practicing **Karezza**, a form of Tantra. When I was born I retained this **inherited desire** for sensual pleasure and love, however

since I was without a father, others in my environment were **prejudiced** against me. I did not get the love and affection every child needs during my formative years; and my inclination toward sensuality only pushed me even **further** into desires for sensual pleasure.

By **age three** I could understand that people **loved** this fellow called ‘Jesus Christ’, and that he had regular conferences with ‘god’, who was (as far as I could tell at the time) his either separated or **imaginary** father. It was inevitable, perhaps, that I would put these facts together and conclude that perhaps I could get the love I craved by being **like** Jesus Christ and talking directly with ‘god’. In other words, I set my course on becoming a **mystic**.

I developed a strong interest in **religion**—not the official hypocritical beliefs but experiential religion, where one has **direct experience** of ‘god’. In fact I **rejected** the exoteric Christian religion because of its **hypocrisy**. I could see, even as a child, that ‘religious’ people **talked** about being good, but were privately doing whatever they thought they could get away with. I didn’t know it at the time, but I was cultivating the ‘being’ of an **esoteric** Christian.

But by late adolescence I had **tired** of the Christian religion. It could not answer any of the real **questions** I had about life. I remained **agnostic** for a while, but by the mid-1960s was gradually drawn by inclination and circumstances toward **yoga** and the Vedic spiritual path. The Beatles’ interest in Mahārṣi Mahesh Yogi and Śrīla Prabhupāda had a strong **influence** on me at the time. The ‘being’ of a *guru* seemed very **attractive** to me, since it involved getting a lot of attention, service and love from one’s disciples.

I developed a desire to become a *guru*, and investigated numerous spiritual groups before settling on the **Hare Kṛṣṇa** movement, which I joined in 1971. Over the years I worked my way up the ranks as a **scholar** and editor, avoiding administrative engagements. I left the organization in the late 1980s, but continued my practices until attaining **Kṛṣṇa-dārśan**

early in 2002. I then felt sufficiently qualified to assert myself as an **independent guru**.

I was **successful** in attracting followers. However, I found that there was much more **struggle** and **suffering** in being *guru* than appeared on the surface. I grew **disenchanted** with being a *guru*, and also discovered **evidence** in some newly-translated confidential materials of the sect that it was likely a complete **fabrication**. I **resigned** as *guru*, gradually letting go of the trappings of the position until a disaffected follower caused a nasty **scandal**, bringing the entire episode to its bitter **end**.

I went on to investigate **leadership**, which led to an analysis of the process of **being and becoming**, which led to accepting the Buddha's teaching of **enlightenment** late in 2012.



July 20–Endgame

I was going to write a detailed **analysis** of the above biographical material, and I did work one out; but when I went to write it all down, suddenly I didn't have the **energy** or focus to do it. Things are moving so **fast**; yesterday's big realization is today's taken-for-granted **assumption**. Let me sum it up like this: I fabricated so many **symbols** to convince myself and others of my 'being' as a 'smart guy', but instead of bringing me love, the result was just the opposite.

Even my attempts to get love by playing **music** were not very successful; and when they were, in the end they were unsatisfactory as well. For music to keep my interest, it had to be **too sophisticated** for the popular ear. And according to the Buddha's philosophy, intense emotions, relationships, 'ecstatic symptoms', music, dancing, poetry, plays and all other forms of art are actually **forms of hysterical insanity**.

So at this point, I am thoroughly tired of and **disenchanted** with the roles of the musician, writer, scholar, devotee, the 'teacher', the 'helpful instructor', the '**authority**'. My experience is that people **don't appreciate** the hard work it takes to understand and write about the inner life. They don't have the **motivation** to really study and learn difficult subjects.

And I am fed up with my own tendency to grandstand, to ham it up, to be the smart guy, the smart-ass, the **wise-guy**. These are all English colloquial expressions for a person whose game is '**I am smarter than you**'. Maybe I am; but so what? Like my friends used to tease me, "If you're so smart, why ain't you **rich** already?" Now it's more like, "If you're so smart, why ain't you **enlightened** already?"

There's another saying, "**Put up or shut up.**" It means that if you talk big, you have to prove it by action. 'Put up' is short for 'put up your dukes', 'put up your fists and get ready to fight'. So it's time to 'walk the talk', or actually **do** what I've been talking about for so long. Writing and even reading seem dull, hollow—symbols instead of the reality of the practice.

Forest Monastery Journal

One of the things that has taken the wind out of my sails as a writer and all-around wise-guy is that I just found out about **two groups of monks** living in the forest wilderness near **Adam's Peak**. Ven. S.'s monastery collects donations for them and takes a load of food to them every month, one for the group of two monks on the 25th and another for the group of nine monks on the 10th.

The monks are staying in tents, eating once a day, living as simply as possible and dedicating all their time to *bhāvanā* (meditation). When I heard about this, I became very **attracted** to the idea of going there and **staying** with them. As it turns out, it will be possible to go with the devotees bringing them food. So I am planning to make the trip on the 25th, and will document it here.

I do not want to spend the rest of my days in some comfortable monastery, living like a **householder** and **wasting away** with degenerative disease. Ven. S., for all his wisdom, is doing that here. He has diabetes and other chronic diseases, and seeing his condition, I do **not** wish to die like that.

Better to be out in the **open air**, away from the **greedy householders**, up **above the madness**. Better to get pneumonia from the cold and be gone within a few days, than to drag on to the last in some **dark airless room** with endless medicines, doctor's treatments, cunning servants and doting parishioners. Better to face death with some **nobility** and get it over with, rather than hide from it like a **coward**.

There is also the matter of how people will view my life in **retrospect**. If I can achieve some **honor**, inspire some Buddhists to follow the Dhamma more strictly, that will lead to great good wishes and other **merit**. If I can die with **courage**, following strict Vinaya, I will not be seen as a coward who hid from the results of my past, but **transcended** the infamy of living a lie for so many years as a 'devotee', finally achieve **real devotion** to the **real truth**.

I once saw a **movie** about a sea captain, in charge of a ship transporting Hindu refugees from Bangladesh to India during the troubled times of

Partition. The leaky old ship got caught in a **typhoon**, and the captain and first mate **abandon ship** in the one and only life raft, leaving hundreds of helpless men, women and children to their fate.

When the rascals make it to port in Calcutta, the ship is **already there**. Against all odds, the refugees had piloted her to safety. The captain was stripped of his license and became a **drifter**. Somehow he made it to Burma or Thailand and became the pilot of a **river scow**, a drunkard haunted by his past.

By fate he takes a job of hauling emergency supplies and **weapons** to a village taken over by bandits. Courageously, he **kills** the bandit chief, helps the village **overthrow** the gang, and as a hero marries the **headman's daughter**. She introduces him to **Buddhism**, and we see him studying Suttas and meditating.

After some time they have a child, but the bandit gang has vowed **revenge**. They attack the town, which is now well-armed, and the former captain goes to **negotiate** a peaceful settlement. This he does, and conveys the agreement to the headman, who is naturally **skeptical**. To seal the deal, the former captain vows that if anyone is killed by the bandits, he will **forfeit his life**.

Of course, the bandits **break** their promise and kill the headman's son. The former captain sets up an **ambush** and kills them all. Then he has a moment of **doubt**. Should he run away or face the consequences of his, in retrospect, ill-conceived promise? He consults the Suttas and meditates over it. In the end, he keeps his word, **returns** to the village and allows himself to be **shot** by the headman.

It may sound a bit depressing, but the point is that the disgraced seaman **recovered his honor** and reputation, not only in the minds of others but more importantly, in **his own** mind.

July 20—Peaceful Abiding

No ‘left’, no ‘right’; no ‘up’, no ‘down’,
A timeless place where energy abounds.
Infinite consciousness, infinite space;
No limitations in this place.
No ‘this’, no ‘that’; no ‘you’, no ‘I’,
There is no earth here, only sky.
No point of source, but all is bright;
A silent symphony of light.
Like fireworks, this birthplace of stars;
So alien, but not so far.
Through *bhāvanā*, effortless scry
This galaxy before the inner eye.

July 21—“I Fabricate, Therefore I Am”

So often, the fact that human beings create **artificial entities** is taken as evidence that they are more intelligent than the animals. “After all,” the argument goes, “animals don’t have language, they don’t use tools, they don’t create art. We humans are **far advanced**. ”

But if we see things with the Eye of the Dhamma, the situation looks quite different. The human ability to fabricate can certainly be used to **extricate** ourselves from *samsāra*; but more often it is misused to **bind** us more thoroughly to it. Like any tool, fabrication can be used positively or negatively, constructively or destructively.

The double irony of Descartes’ famous synopsis of ontology—”I think, therefore I am”—is that not only is almost all thinking fabrication, but also the conceit ‘I am’ is the **basis** of all other fabrications, the **Big Lie** that initiates the whole chain of Dependent Origination.

In this world, the typical *puthujjana* can't even be authentic about the kind of 'being' he really wants to fabricate—what to speak of even **recognizing** the fact that he is fabricating a 'being'.

The Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path is admittedly **also** a fabrication, but one that leads to the **end** of all fabrications, the end of all suffering. Can **any** of Humankind's other inventions equal such exalted excellence? Instead, most of them simply increase suffering in various ways.

Let's take **religion** for example. Religion is a situation where **two imaginary entities**—the 'soul' and 'god'—have an **imaginary relationship**. All kinds of outlandish claims are made about this relationship and its results, **none** of which are provable. Complete faith is required in a system that provides its result only **after death**.

There is enormous scope for **misrepresentation** and **cheating** in religion. Religion has been used to justify some of the most **heinous crimes** in human history: the Crusades and the Inquisitions, the genocide of the American First Nations, just to make a small beginning of a list.

...

But here again I find myself **without the will** to continue. My whole **attitude** towards writing is changing. I'm tired of my **tone** as 'the smart guy who is going to expose the common way of thinking as bogus and establish the real Truth'. I need to find a **new voice**, one that does not rely so heavily on put-downs and other **harsh speech**.

After writing the above, I made myself a cup of noodles with butter and *hing*. I ate it **steaming hot** with Ayurvedic medicines that balance my body chemistry and prevent disease. One preparation contains over **200 herbs** and is cooked for more than **four months**.

Then I just sat there and did **nothing** for a while. Nothing—**not even think**. And the thought occurred to me, "I don't **have** to think; I don't have to work. I don't have to **produce** or **consume** anything beyond my

basic needs. I don't need titles, designations, positions, fancy possessions or other **symbols of power**, fame or value. The value of my life is not measured by that; it is measured by how much direct happiness and satisfaction I experience." And this realization is very satisfying.

July 21—Don't Just Do Something—Sit There!

You don't **really** need to watch that TV program—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to check your email, news etc.—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to have another coffee/tea, etc.—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to have a snack—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to chat with your friend—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to go shopping—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to take a nap—meditate by walking instead.
You don't **really** need to read that novel or magazine—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to go out for a drive or walk—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to go to the temple—meditate instead.
You don't **really** need to tell the world how to think—meditate instead.



July 22—A Taste of Transcendence

The meditation is going well. This morning, being Poiyā Day (full moon), all the Upāsakas gathered with Bhante (Ven. S.) to take **precepts**. Reaffirming one's vows is done monthly by the Upāsakas and fortnightly (full and new moon) by the Monks.

I was up from 2-5 AM meditating, and so came a little late and **missed** the ceremony. Instead of doing it over again, Bhante just asked me how many precepts I am following. "Eight," I replied, and that was the **end** of the matter. We conversed on many other subjects for more than an hour.

Although his body is old and decrepit, Bhante is **sharp** and very understanding. We talked about my sitting and how I am able to meditate for up to 40 minutes now, by resting my right leg without breaking concentration. We also discussed the **lights**, sometimes brilliant as the sun, that I see during meditation. He advised me not to get attached to them or try to cultivate them, but just **observe** them patiently until they go away.

Later on after lunch, there was a typical rainstorm (see photo above). It rained pretty hard for half an hour, gradually tapering down to a steady drizzle that lasted most of the afternoon. This created a wonderfully fragrant, cool, peaceful atmosphere just right for meditation.

I was able to do two 45-minute sessions with a five-minute stretching break in between. Something very interesting happened toward the end of the first session: I contacted an area described in the Suttas as the dimension of **Nothingness**. The Buddha also calls it 'Beautiful Blackness':

"Then again, the disciple of the noble ones considers this: 'Sensuality here & now; sensuality in lives to come; sensual perceptions here & now; sensual perceptions in lives to come; forms here & now; forms in lives to come; form-perceptions here & now; form-perceptions in lives to come; perceptions of the imperturbable: all are perceptions. Where they cease without remainder: that is peaceful, that is exquisite, i.e., the dimension of nothingness.' Practicing & frequently abiding in this way, his mind acquires confidence in that dimension. There being full confidence, he

either attains the dimension of nothingness now or else is committed to discernment. With the break-up of the body, after death, it's possible that this leading-on consciousness of his will go to the dimension of nothingness.” — *Aneñja-sappaya Sutta* (MN 106)

This is a very high state. It's like one's awareness is diving into a swimming pool filled with soft black pillows, cutting off all sensory perceptions—including the mind. It is extremely pleasurable and comforting.

'**Exquisite**' is certainly the right word to describe it. As the Ven. Ānanda described it, “Precisely what is pleasurable is that nothing is felt.” I wanted to stay there for a long time, but the state was not stable, and I found myself back in the mind. But this is really something worthwhile to strive for.

July 23—End of Public Life

“Thus in this way, Ānanda, skillful virtues have freedom from remorse as their purpose, freedom from remorse as their reward. Freedom from remorse has joy as its purpose, joy as its reward. Joy has rapture as its purpose, rapture as its reward. Rapture has serenity as its purpose, serenity as its reward. Serenity has pleasure as its purpose, pleasure as its reward. Pleasure has concentration as its purpose, concentration as its reward. Concentration has knowledge & vision of things as they actually are as its purpose, knowledge & vision of things as they actually are as its reward. Knowledge & vision of things as they actually are has disenchantment as its purpose, disenchantment as its reward.

Disenchantment has dispassion as its purpose, dispassion as its reward. Dispassion has knowledge & vision of release as its purpose, knowledge & vision of release as its reward. In this way, Ānanda, skillful virtues lead step-by-step to the consummation of Arahantship.”

One of the things Bhante (Ven. S.) said in yesterday's talk was, “Whatever you have **done**, that you must **undo**.” We were talking about mental fabrications and their role in forming personality. I was interested in how the identities we create shape our experience, especially our suffering. His point was that the **mental fabrications** that condition our present

‘identity’ and ‘personality’ have to be **undone** to realize the **unconditioned reality**.

We have to be very **careful**. Even the *jhānas* can become a base for ‘I’-making and ‘mine’-making. Of course, in the ultimate view, **any** kind of ‘I’-making or ‘mine’-making is a delusion, a kind of **insanity**. This is true not only of **ordinary ego** based on the body and gross qualities, but also of ‘**spiritual**’ ego based on mind and subtle qualities.

For this reason, I now view my almost 40-years experience in ‘Kṛṣṇa consciousness’ as an **extended episode of insanity**. ‘Kṛṣṇa consciousness’ is an extreme case of what happens when eternalistic views of ‘self’ as ‘soul’ are **projected** on the entire existence as ‘god’. Then the relationship between the ‘eternal soul’ and the ‘Supreme Personality of Godhead’ is also viewed as eternal and ‘**transcendental**’, which actually means fabricated or **imaginary**.

Naturally this leads to states of ‘ecstatic emotion’, or in other words **hysterical psychotic episodes**, such as those frequently exhibited by Chaitanya and his followers. Chaitanya also suffered from **epileptic fits** and consequent paralysis, but this was portrayed as ‘ecstatic trance’ and ‘*samādhi*’ by his followers. The so-called ‘spontaneous devotional service’ was simply a pretext to **throw out all moral principles** for Kṛṣṇa and his ‘pure devotees’.

Now, does any of that lead to **skillful virtues** as described by the Buddha in the quote above? I don’t think so. Therefore I want to **limit my contact** with people suffering from **delusion** and insanity, from the phony misled western ‘Buddhists’, to the ‘devotees’, to the great brain-eating **zombie horde** of the Interwebs.

I want to live a strictly **solitary** and meditative existence, protected from contact with *puthujjanas* in general. This requires reducing my contact with the general population, and even monks and other nominal Buddhists who are not deep meditators. I want to live mostly in **silence** and concentration, focused on the *jhānas*. Whatever contact I do have with

others should be **focused on Dhamma** and not wasted in frivolous chatter and other nonsense.

This means completely letting go of any pretensions of **teaching** or **guiding others** in spiritual life. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha says:

“Therefore, Ananda, thus should you **train yourselves**: ‘We shall abide by the Dhamma, live uprightly in the Dhamma, walk in the way of the Dhamma.’

“He possesses unwavering faith in the Dhamma thus: ‘Well propounded by the Blessed One is the Dhamma, evident, timeless, inviting investigation, leading to emancipation, to be comprehended by the wise, **each for himself**.’

“Therefore, Ananda, be islands unto yourselves, refuges unto yourselves, **seeking no external refuge**; with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge, seeking no other refuge.

“Those bhikkhus of mine, Ananda, who now or after I am gone, abide as an island unto themselves, as a refuge unto themselves, seeking no other refuge; having the Dhamma as their island and refuge, seeking no other refuge: it is they who will become the highest, **if they have the desire to learn**.

“It may be, Ananda, that to some among you the thought will come: ‘Ended is the word of the Master; we have a Master no longer.’ But it should not, Ananda, be so considered. For that which I have proclaimed and made known as the Dhamma and the Discipline, **that shall be your Master** when I am gone.”

In other words, realizing the Buddha’s teaching is a **do-it-yourself project**. The Dhamma and Vinaya as taught by the Buddha in the Theravāda Suttas is the authority. In the advanced stages especially, there is no need for an external teacher. Others may help us in various ways, but ultimately we are all **responsible for our own enlightenment**.

Therefore I wish to be free from relationships of teaching, training, mentoring or leadership where others would be **dependent** on me, or I would be **responsible** for them in any way. I wish to be free from **sponsoring** others, directing or **managing** them, hosting them or making **arrangements** for their spiritual or material welfare. In general, I wish to be free from all **codependent relationships** involving fixed titles, designations, roles, positions, emotional attachments and other forms of delusion.

In the Buddha's teaching, everyone is equal and independent. It is up to each individual to **find their own way** to the Dhamma according to his intelligence and initiative. Any other view inevitably results in **delusion** and **suffering**, and I have had enough of that.

Therefore in consideration of all the above, from now on I will strictly **limit** my Internet use. I will no longer be available on any social networking sites. I will only **check email** every few days. I will continue to send out this Journal to a few **trusted friends** whenever I get around to it. This Journal is **confidential** and **copyrighted** material, not to be forwarded or shared without written permission.

Since 2002 I have **styled myself** as a teacher, and others also tend to view me in that way. But this has to **change** in order to remove all obstacles from my path to enlightenment. Especially once I **ordain** as a monk, I will **not** be available for casual association. I will have a strict program of **solitude, silence** and **meditation**, with limited scheduled 'office hours' for other business related to Dhamma.

This also **cancels any and all previous plans** to write books, make videos, create courses, open centers, host retreats, recruit students, make disciples, travel, teach, preach etc. I found the Dhamma by using my own intelligence and initiative, and all others are free to do so as well. **May all beings attain enlightenment!**

And the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus, saying: "Behold now, bhikkhus, I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish.

Strive with earnestness!” This was the last word of the Tathāgata. —
Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (DN 16)

Commentary: Earnestness (*appamada*) is explained as ‘presence of mindfulness’. “You should accomplish all your duties without allowing mindfulness to lapse!” Thus did the Blessed One, while on the bed of his Parinibbāna, summarize in that one word on earnestness the advice he had given through forty-five years.

“Those who know don’t teach,” and the corollary: “Those who teach don’t know.” This comes from Lao Tzu or Chuang Tzu I think, and it goes along nicely with these points and realizations.

There is only so much time in life. If one gets involved with teaching, there is no time left for deep meditation and realization. And the obverse is also true. Also, a real student with dedication and determination will learn somehow or other, and a poorly motivated student who needs the help of a teacher to learn will never attain anyway.

There is also the matter of taste: one who is highly realized has no inclination to put up with students’ nonsense. Anyone who is able to stomach that must not be very advanced, and must be motivated by material gain.

So I choose to be a knower instead of a teacher. The Buddha has already made everything very clear; what need is there of further explanation? We also see that those who are very loudly promoting themselves as teachers are generally self-interested fools; those who are genuinely self-realized are quietly content to let qualified seekers recognize them.

August 10—It Has Happened

That which I have been working towards my whole life: I have attained.

I went on Rains Retreat with a very special group of monks, in an isolated forest monastery. Most of the monks are already Arahants. There was no idle talk, no goofing off, no breaking the Precepts—nothing to distract

from deep, intense practice. It paid off. In that association, it was very easy to attain something wonderful.

That means the end of this blog, which was tailored for seekers and concentrated on philosophical details of Theravāda Buddhist practice. I just can't get that excited about philosophy, writing and teaching anymore. In fact a whole lot of my previous 'personality', and many earlier interests are simply gone.

A big "**Thank you**" to the readers of this blog, whose interest and understanding encouraged me to continue my quest. And I strongly recommend you to read and follow [**The Arahant**](#), another blog about Buddhism from a different angle: **Q&A with a fully-realized Theravāda monk**. Thanks again for being with me; the journey has been most rewarding.

September 4—The Pain is Gone

This is a post that I **always wanted** to write, but I wanted to wait until I was sure. I am **so happy** to tell you that day has finally come.

After studying the Buddha's teaching intensively for over a year, traveling to Thailand and Sri Lanka, living in monasteries, and more recently meditating many hours a day, I can finally say that I have **conquered dukkha**. The mental and emotional pain that I bore since early childhood is **gone**. No more depression, no more anger, no more paranoia. **Gone**.

It didn't happen all at once. It was **not** like I envisioned it at all. But one day recently, looking back at how I have been most of my life, I realized that am **profoundly changed**. I have lost some things, but gained others. I am no longer so rigid, and much more flexible and open. On the other hand, I am less certain about who and what I am. However, my grasp of the **future** and what comes when this body is finished is very strong and confident.

The Buddha taught that the idea of a permanent 'self' is a fiction, a **conceit**, a fabrication that we use to give ourselves and others the **illusion of a continuing identity**. True, some parts of who and what we are persist for a relatively long time, but other parts come and go like

the wind. **Here today, gone tomorrow.** The nature of **all** existence is impermanent. And yet we **cling** to the parts that we claim as ‘I’ and ‘mine’, and try to create a permanent structure out it.

It doesn’t work; it **can’t** work. All creating an ego is good for is **suffering**. The effort to maintain a consistent ‘self’ in the face of the constant change of the world is **exhausting**. It generates constant stress and leads inevitably to **defeat**. When we finally relax and allow ourselves to bend naturally with the changes, life is **so** much easier.

There is much more, which I have gone to great lengths to explain in **previous posts** on this blog. Please read them in order to understand how I got to where I am today. Of course I have to thank my dear friend [The Arahan](#) for his invaluable help in making my quest for enlightenment a **success**. My gratitude also goes out to my other friends and readers who have encouraged me along the way.

Budu saranai!

September 5–Defending Enlightenment

May all beings in all worlds be happy and safe. May they have everything they need. May their minds be at peace, free from desire, anger, sadness and all disturbance. May those who are bound become free; may those who are ill become well. May they use their free will to choose enlightenment with every breath.

I wrote this prayer. I meditate on it several times a day. But it’s not just a goofy sentimental wish or a fabricated work of religious art; it is my way of life—it **is** my life. Every day I spend a minimum of time sleeping, eating, taking care of my body and mind (meditating). Most of my time is dedicated to thinking hard about how to help people understand, to writing and making videos on the teaching of the Buddha, for the welfare of all sentient beings.

I found what I was looking for. I attained what I always wanted, what I was always searching for. The pain is gone now. I don’t need to think about myself anymore. I’m quite sure that I’ll be OK.

I'm not looking for fame, friends, reputation or influence. I know where those lead, and I don't need the hassle. I'm fine, living here in the mountains all alone.

Through my computer, I have all the knowledge of the world at my fingertips. Inside, I have the deep intuitive wisdom that comes from self-realization. I can know anything I want to know.

I have more resources and help than I need, and more available for the asking. I don't need to ask. I have offers for TV shows and interviews. I turn them all down. I don't want to complicate my life.

The one thing I **could** use, I can't get: competent collaborators and helpers for my work. [The Arahant explained](#) why that is so. Still, it would be great to be able to help more people.

My only desire is to see more people embrace the teaching of the Buddha **and** get it right. I'm tired of lazy Asians stuck in historically irrelevant traditions, doing nothing as western influence trashes their culture. And I'm disgusted with lazy Westerners changing the Buddha's teaching to make it culturally acceptable and economically profitable.

When convenience takes precedence over integrity, people wonder why the world seems devoid of ethics. I have news for those people: **you** are the problem. Doing the right thing is almost **always** inconvenient. It's just the universe asking, "Are you **sure** you don't want to give up your integrity to have an easy life?"

Yes. I'd rather do the right thing, no matter how damned inconvenient other people, the economic system and the governments make it. My integrity has no price tag—because it's priceless.

My integrity is the only thing standing between me and fear of death, between me and caving in, giving up my dream like so many of my generation did when faced with the hard choices. The spiritual quest, the adventure of self-realization is the only game in town. Don't let anyone fool you; enjoyment isn't enjoyable if it's temporary, and **all** material enjoyment is temporary.

September 8—"Case Dismissed"

I am trying to record as much of my experience as I can now, because once I am ordained as a monk, there is much about my life that will become **confidential Sangha business** due to Vinaya rules.

As part of applying for ordination as a Theravāda monk, there is an **informal investigation** of the aspirant's **moral background**. As I have already posted elsewhere, about two years ago I went through a **meltdown** of my personal **belief system**. I came to realize that the religious community in which I had invested more than 30 years of my life was founded on a **total fabrication**, that all of the disciples of my spiritual master had been **betrayed** by his desire for fame and influence.

It is very disconcerting to suddenly discover that the foundation of one's life is a **sham**. I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me, that my life no longer had any **firm basis**, that I was standing on nothing and that all rules of **proper behavior** were **suspended**. This led to some very **bizarre behavior**, some of which unfortunately was **photographed**.

Completely discouraged, I **resigned** from my position as spiritual master. All of my so-called disciples at the time **abandoned** me. One of them tried to **blackmail** me with the pictures. When I refused to meet his demands for money, he **published** them online. They are still floating around in cyberspace.

Of course this history **came up** in the course of the ordination background check. Some monks who are envious of my quick success in self-realization accused me of **immoral character**. A **hearing** before a panel of senior monks was held, and I was confronted with the evidence.

When asked to **explain myself**, I related how I had come to be a disciple of a Vedic spiritual master back in the 1960s and '70s. I **traveled to India** in my late 20s, giving up all materialistic enjoyment to rise at 4 AM, chant mantras, study Sanskrit and serve in the temples. I became a **scholar** and **preacher**, traveling all over India and other countries, presenting the Vedic philosophy. As an American, I was very **successful** at recruiting Asian disciples for my spiritual master's organization.

To shorten a very long story, eventually I became a *guru myself*, with dozens of disciples and an *āśram* in India. As a senior disciple, my studies led to the **most esoteric** and **confidential** materials of my lineage. And there I discovered that the whole spiritual process of my school of *yoga* was founded on nothing but **speculation and imagination**. I also found out other things about the character and activities of my *guru* that were shocking betrayals of the trust I had placed in him.

The net effect of all this was that for a time, I **lost my moral compass**. The way I put it to the monks, I had an episode of **temporary insanity**. I could point to the fact that since becoming a student of the Buddha, my conduct has been **exemplary**.

No one could disagree or present evidence to the contrary. After a few minutes of deliberation, a vote was held. The issue was held to be void and **the case was dismissed**. My ordination is scheduled for a few days from now.

September 13—At the Crossroads

It's decision time, and strange as it may seem to those who know me, I'm having trouble making up my mind. I have the opportunity to be ordained as a Theravāda monk, but I find myself hesitating. The main reason is that what I have attained in meditation since coming to Sri Lanka has made me so satisfied that I don't feel a need for further *sādhana*. And teaching has also become less satisfying, because the people who read my posts and watch my videos simply are not responding.

Of course, if I were a monk, there would be plenty of teaching opportunities right here in Sri Lanka. But then I would come under scrutiny of the Buddhist establishment and be expected to conform to their expectations about what Buddhism is and how it should be presented.

The bottom line is, while I would welcome the prestige and authority of becoming a monk, I feel like I would lose a lot of freedom. I'll go with Benjamin Franklin, always the pragmatist: "When in doubt, don't."

My sense is that rather than unnecessarily complicate my life by trying to assume a prominent position, it will be better to fade into the background

and remain obscure. That way, instead of becoming subject to excessive scrutiny, I will retain my freedom and autonomy, which are most valuable to me.

September 14–Night Solitude

I often awaken in the middle of the night, for no discernible reason. Sometimes I recall my dreams—long and complex dramas, full of sound and fury, to be sure, but signifying nothing—and never frightening. More often, I am simply and suddenly completely awake.

It happened again last night about 2 AM. I tried to roll over and snooze, but sleep was far away. Alright then, I would meditate. I concentrated but found my mind a bit agitated. Something about the last few days is bothering me. I no longer have the urge to teach, and I find it disturbing.

Sometimes these days I barely know myself, as parts seem to be falling off faster than I can restore them. Anyway, concentration always works. I take a breath and the lights come on inside, as they always do. I can *see* the mental disturbance, like pounding waves in the sea of light that is my mind.

Useless to fight with it, so I simply go up, beyond earth, beyond heaven, beyond Brahmā and his passionate insistence on being the Creator. We are all creators, each in his own universe. In a very real sense, we create the world in which we live by choosing our points of view, our intentions and actions.

I choose to be above everything, where it is dark and calm. Nothing happens; nothing is felt.

Ven. Sariputta said to the monks, “This Unbinding is pleasant, friends. This Unbinding is pleasant.”

When this was said, Ven. Udayin said to Ven. Sariputta, “But what is the pleasure here, my friend, where there is **nothing felt**?”

“Just that is the pleasure here, my friend: where there is **nothing felt**.
— *Nibbana Sutta* (AN 9.34)

But that doesn't mean that there is **nothing** here. What is here is whatever you want to see. What you feel here is whatever you want to feel. We're for sure not in Kansas anymore, Toto.

I feel immense relief at not having to **be** someone, to **do** something, to justify my 'existence'. There is no economics, no politics, no conflict over scarce resources. Here I can be nothing, or anything: unconditional Being.

There is no space or time; there is only mind and awareness. It is a good place. From here, even the *jhānas* seem like limited, compressed states. This is expansive, completely natural. There is no urgency at all, no 'becoming'. It's just pleasant.

At some point I fall back asleep and wake up in my bed in the morning. It's just before dawn. Everything is clear now. It's almost time to leave here and go to that place forever. That's why I've lost my taste for everything in this world, why nothing seems to matter anymore.

Maybe someday, someone will read these lines and go, "Yes!" Or maybe not. Maybe someone will understand, and find their way to this place on their own. It can only be found on your own; but what others have said, especially the Buddha, can help you find it.

If you do find it, I won't be there. I won't be...

September 19—The Paradox of Teaching

I'm starting to understand the real difficulty in teaching the Buddha's message to others. It is the fact that there are huge conceptual gaps in the Buddha's teaching. Those gaps exist for a reason. The reason is that language — any language — is quite incapable of expressing or communicating them.

Language is linear; one word is succeeded by another word, a sentence is succeeded by another sentence, and paragraphs follow one another down the page. Each word can have one and only one definition in its context. And the context for the speaker and the reader must be identical for communication to take place.

Experience is nonlinear; thoughts arise in no particular sequence, associations follow one another in no particular order, feelings arise, change and disappear in a moment. Nothing is certain, nothing can be predicted in advance. Experience means a confrontation with the Other.

But the Buddha's teaching goes beyond this limited context. And there is no way to express the context of the Buddha's teaching in linear language. Even ordinary experience is difficult to shoehorn into our language — what to speak of the transcendent reality realized by an Arahant.

So, what tends to happen is that schools of Buddhism fill the holes in the Buddha's teachings with their own speculations. Those speculations then become assumptions, carried forward in their work as given truths. For example, the assumption that one attains Arahant or Unbinding and then remains there forever, eternally, and ceases to exist, is clearly a form of nihilism or eternalism. Yet we see this assumption in many schools and commentaries.

I wish I had the words to describe what it is to be self-realized. I wish I could express it in a way that would make it easy for everyone to understand and realize. But language betrays me; it makes me say things that I don't mean, because those are the only things that it **can** say. What it can't say, what language can never say — any language — is that one's possibilities become unlimited.

There is literally no way to express this precisely in any ordinary language. The best that language can do is to indicate a lack of limitation. But this indefiniteness is not communication. It is not philosophy; and it is useless as a direction, as an instruction to others. It's like waving one's arms in the general direction of the center of the galaxy and saying, "The truth is out there somewhere." It doesn't really help you to attain it.

That's why I say often that the Buddha's teaching is a do-it-yourself project. Any mode of teaching can only go so far; the teacher can take you to the diving board, but he can't show you how to jump into the pool. You are going to have to figure that out for yourself. I know you don't want to hear this; you want me to make it easy for you.

It's frustrating for me too; I'm supposed to be an expert professional writer with dozens of books and millions of words to my credit. I'm supposed to be some kind of authority on spiritual life, but I can't even talk about my experience because of the limitations of language. It sounds like a scam, I don't want to believe it myself. I want to tell you exactly how to attain enlightenment. But I can't. That's just the way it is.

September 20–Burning

Burn, burn, ‘being’ is ever burning
Burning like dry wood
Consumed by the fire of Becoming.

‘Being’ is the fuel,
The Unconditioned the flame,
Time the billowing smoke.

Do not fret
Oh, do not lament
This burning gives great pleasure.

For ‘being’ is the fetter
That ties us to *samsāra*
The yoke of Becoming.

Let the fire burn
Until the fuel extinguished
Quenches the flame of Becoming.

Stop adding the fuel of ‘being’
And let the fire of Becoming go out
In time, all by itself.

September 22–Harder than Stone

Recently I was talking with my friend and chief monk, the monk I call [The Arahant](#). We are building a nice two-bedroom stone cottage at our forest monastery for the two of us to live. The ground here in the mountains is very rocky and building the cottage required digging out many stones. Breaking and moving the stones was hard labor, something I can't do very much these days.

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Until the cottage is complete, we live in another stone building designed as a dormitory. There are four large rooms; The Arahant and I occupy two of them and the others are empty. Some young monks also stay at the monastery, but they live in another building.

Yesterday I asked The Arahant why the boys moved out of our building, and he replied, "They make too much noise, you would not be comfortable." When I suggested that we could have trained them to act in a civilized manner, he laughed. "They are children. You cannot change their hearts and minds," he said.

I thought it over. Even children are so stuck, clinging so hard to their notions of identity, their feelings and behavior that it is impossible to train them to act nicely. Instead we had to relocate them to avoid disturbance.

Then I found out that when our cottage is complete, the boys will move back into the dormitory. In other words, all our trouble and expense in building the cottage is a necessity only because of the stone-like attitudes of some young monks! When I presented this observation to The Arahant, he laughed. "Yes, our hearts are harder than stone. It is easier to build a stone cottage than to change some hearts and minds."

I thought about this deeply. Certainly we are all clinging so hard to certain fabrications, harder than stone. Even experienced monks are not immune.

Last night I read a talk by a famous rock-star monk given at a meditation retreat. There had been some construction noise on a neighbor's land, and many of the retreatants were disturbed. The monk spun the story toward tolerance and building concentration; but I thought that in the old days, the monks would simply move to a deserted spot where there was no disturbing noise.

Nowadays the system is arranged so that even monks can only live and meditate in monasteries. They cannot move about freely as it was before. Instead even we monks are clinging to land and buildings. Isn't this a form of mental bondage? Aren't we fettered to our possessions and identities and modes of thought, speech and behavior? And this clinging is stronger than steel, harder than stone.

September 22–Childhood's End

When a child is young it is totally dependent on its parents. A baby cannot feed himself, cannot care for his bodily or emotional needs. He needs his parents for survival; this inescapable dependency colors all his thoughts and emotions.

Later on, the childlike human adult still seeks support from a higher authority, a more powerful and mature parent figure. Thus religion was invented along with belief in God, a system of rules for pleasing him, and a philosophy for justifying the whole thing. This system gives immature people the consolation of a parent, someone to take care of them.

Of course, religious belief in any form is a type of fabrication; nevertheless, it does provide relief from anxiety and suffering. Thus there is a need for religion in society; to console and relieve immature people who feel inadequate to care for themselves.

There is also the need to justify morality in terms that people can understand and are motivated to follow. If the approval of the parent-figure God depends on following moral rules, this motivates believers to overcome their animal urges and behave more like actual human beings.

Finally, religion provides a context for spiritual aesthetics and activities of offering and giving. Charity and welfare activities are important sources of good *kamma*, which can provide a foundation for actual self-realization later on. Attempting self-realization without this foundation is futile, because it is based only on mental speculation.

But when the human being enters the mature stage, understanding the subtle laws of *kamma*, he realizes that he is competent to care for himself. He does not require the consolation and relief of religion; he knows how to control the process of becoming to reduce or eliminate the suffering of life. A person in this position has no more need for a parent figure; he has become, in the words of the Buddha, an island unto himself — his own refuge.

Nor is there any need for a mature human being to propagate the myth that a self-realized person is restricted from enjoying all the normal

activities of life. The time of the religious model, the myth of the purified monk, is over. Yes, there may be a stage in which the sage finds it necessary to limit the activities of life to provide time and energy for the process of self-realization. But once self-realization is attained, that necessity disappears on its own.

However, the self realized, mature individual no longer sees the necessity for so many activities of his previous life — his childhood. Those were necessary only to counteract the suffering experienced due to ignorance. Once ignorance is overcome, suffering abates, and the natural easy pleasures of consciousness and spiritual life are enough.

What is needed is the recognition that the self-realized person is not limited to the proscribed lifestyle of the religious. He can and may exercise his will and enjoy a full range of activities like any normal human being. But his motivations are entirely different from the immature person; he no longer sees the necessity of striving for his own benefit, for he has already achieved the highest benefit. His motivation now becomes the welfare of all living entities.

September 23–Sociopathic Music

I used to love music—almost any kind of music. In fact, I rejected a full scholarship to MIT to attend music school. I earned a degree in composition, got a great job in New York City writing film and TV scores, and made a good living in music for over a decade.

But I find that I have changed, and music has also changed. It's hard for me to say this, but I find myself liking music less and less. And the music that I do like these days is only the finest and most refined. What do I mean by that? For me, the finest music contains a space of listening, a sacred silence that the listener is invited to enter into and experience the moods of the composition.

But since seriously engaging the teaching of the Buddha, I experience most music as a dramatization of the composer's false ego. It begins to sound shrill, fabricated, bombastic, neurotic. It reminds me of people I have known and rejected because they were too sociopathic. The

incredible arrogance of Beethoven, the neurotic romanticism of Tchaikovsky, the religious patriotism of Sibelius. The introverted solipsism of bebop. The lusty, raucous hillbillies of rock. And don't even get me started about heavy metal and rap. Music has gone drastically downhill since the 1960s.

I can't listen to any of it anymore. Even Indian music, my greatest love for many years, now screeches upon my ears like cats fighting in a metal trash can. What I formerly experienced as *rasa*, the exalted emotions of Vedic sound, now seems like self-indulgent emotional hysteria.

There are only a few, very exceptional artists that I can hear these days without cringing. Even then, only certain of their pieces and periods appeal to me: Miles Davis, Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Ali Akbar Khan, JS Bach. But mostly I prefer the sound of sweet, sweet silence. There is enough going on within my own mind to occupy my intelligence completely. I don't want to be dragged out, kicking and screaming, through my senses to hear some fatuous, pretentious fabrication. Leave me alone.

Even my own works and recordings seem cringe-worthy to me now. The Buddha warned his monks not to attend—what to speak of participating in—music, dance and theater shows. In fact, he called these things “symptoms of insanity”. It's now clear to me why he did so.

The ego is based upon fabrication—fabrication in the sense of something manufactured, a lie. Ego-identity is a falsehood based on sense perceptions, a constant process of becoming that eventually becomes exhausting to maintain. The art that we create mirrors our inner reality; it merely reflects what is there inside of us. Mostly, it reflects a profound insecurity and ugliness.

I hear the space of listening for beauty in a few rare tracks. I don't hear that in 99% of the music out there. But that space of listening for beauty is also there in the best kind of meditation. There is certainly beauty to be found, but the beauty of this world is transient and unsatisfactory. The beauty within is eternal, unconditioned and perfect.

I learned something from music, it is certainly true. But what I have learned is that real beauty resides within, in the space of our attention, in the aim of our intention. That beauty never fades.

September 24–Religion Without God

An amazing post found on [Reddit](#). I couldn't have said it better myself:

You don't have to respect it intellectually, but I'll try to explain it to you. I studied religion in college, and so I had to read everything from all the big religions and talk to a load of people about it, and I came to an understanding that helped me understand it more. It's a bit long winded, but it's a really dicey thing to try to type out. Bear with me.

All religions basically boil down to one idea. The idea sounds complex but it actually the most simple thing. It's called non-duality. Basically it means that the self and the other are the same thing.

You can talk about it in a lot of ways. But the way Taoism explains it is probably the best. It says, "The tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao." This is the case because non-duality can't be defined through any conventional way of speaking. Why? Because non-duality means that the speaker and the listener is the same. It's essentially a paradox. It's the oldest paradox. In some ways, it's the only paradox, but I would say definitely the most important.

There was a guy in the 1950s called Joseph Campbell. He wrote a book called "The Hero with a Thousand Faces." Basically he read every ancient myth, back to Gilgamesh and the Old testament, and North American Indian myths, and Buddhist stories, and so on. And basically he said that all stories follow a basic pattern. It's the ultimate archetype. It goes like this:

Man is living in some condition. He gets a call to go on an adventure. He leaves, and he encounters struggles. He learns. He faces the ultimate obstacle, and he dies. Then he realizes non-duality. Then he is reborn, and he returns to his people with the message.

Campbell argues that every story follows this basic narrative, even if it is updated and hidden from view. He became very influential, and George Lucas credits him with helping to influence the story of Star Wars.

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The reason Campbell's insight is important is that all religions basically center around a narrative. For Christians it's Jesus. For Jews, it's Moses. For Muslims, it's Muhammad. For Buddhists it's Buddha. But in each case, the story is the same. Just the setting and the trimmings change.

Religious practice in major traditions also include ways to train the mind to find this sort of "realization" of non-duality. These are the mystic sects, usually. Sufis, monastic orders, zen monks, and so on. They all talk about the same thing: Dissolve the ego. Why? Because if you dissolve the ego, the "you" you realize that "you" are actually one with all of reality. "You", your "self" is a microcosm for everything that exists, all the universes, all the quantum particles, everything. It's all contained in the self. It IS the self.

The thing is, this isn't an idea I would call "intellectual," because again, it relies on this idea that non-duality isn't something that can be understood. It's just a deep, profoundly simple truth. No one that talks about it can really SAY it right, because using language to describe it, like I said, is by definition inaccurate. That's why if you look at zen practice, it involves getting smacked a lot, and non-sensical sayings. Sufi practices involves spinning in circles and chanting the same thing over and over. Monastic practice involves not talking. It just isn't something to be conquered with the rational mind. It's something that can barely be glimpsed, maybe for an instant, if you practice and practice. It's what's called "God."

Now in the Bhagavad Gita, there's a description of what the Hindus call different "yogas" or ways to reach an understanding of God. I forget their names, but in English they're "Mind yoga," "Body yoga," "Heart yoga," etc. They spent a lot of time on these, and tried to figure out the different "paths" to get to this idea of God.

Heart yoga involves loving God until you're overwhelmed. If you read Rumi, a Sufi poet, you'll understand it. It's also why Christians talk about loving Jesus, and Hindus love Krishna.

Body yoga involves repeated postures as part of a discipline, to overcome the ego and reach a deeper understanding. That's why Muslims pray five times a day and assume different postures.

Mind yoga is the toughest. It involves trying to *understand* so minutely, that you somehow come to grips with how amazing reality is, and realize your

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true place in it. Your true belonging. I'd say (and forgive me here) that's probably what most Atheists are doing.

See, at it's core, religion doesn't need God. It really doesn't. Sure, lots of people make money off religion, because people have an innate call to feel and understand non-duality. That's why they say they want "something more" or they want "meaning." It's the same way people make money off love. We all accept that love is a real human urge and understanding, but we don't complain that some hucksters use our desire for it to sell magazines or clothes or music or deodorant.

I can completely understand why people don't like organized religion. Probably the same reason why they don't like "organized love." It's silly. But then, none of the major prophets actually really called for organized religion. They basically just went on the hero's journey, came back, and said "Oh my God people, you won't believe what I just figured out." It's everyone else that makes this whole apparatus around it for their own selfish purposes, or because they don't really understand it themselves, or because they think that other people are too dumb to understand it, but should still be tricked into getting closer to it through practice. So yes, accepting a religion wholesale without actually *going on the life's journey* yourself, in this day and age, is probably a cop-out. But not an intellectual one. It's a human one. It's also a cop-out though to get mad at religion, and therefore stop examining yourself, or cutting short your own journey. It's a cop-out to decide you've conquered life because you can intellectually disprove the childish derivation of an idea that can't really be understood. You don't have to call anything God. That's not important. But you do have to confront non-duality on some level. I don't know why. It's like you have to confront death, but even deeper than that. So in short, I think you need to redefine your question. I'm not sure how. It's less about "God" being real or not real. Or "religion" being good or bad. Because I think if you went to certain religious people, they'd agree with you. They're trying to climb a mountain, and other people are handed a Polaroid of what it looks like at the top and claim to be mountaineers.

It's more about your understanding of your self, and what you really are. If you think that latching on to an idea of "God" that is borrowed from an old man in a funny outfit, I'd probably agree with you, but I'd also say be careful that you don't shut your mind to the possibility that some crazy

religious people might actually be on to something that can make life somehow....more human.

Tl;DR; God is like love. Just like the impulse to love is not fully summed up in a love song, the impulse to God is not summed up in religion. Religion is inspired by God like the song is inspired by love. Hating on love because you don't like the song is not right.

TL:DR; God is like love. Religion is a love song. A messy, sometimes violent, sometimes liberating love song.

September 26–Portals of Time

There are portals in time, paths of possibilities, once having gone through which, there is no turning back. As I posted here recently, [the pain is gone](#); the existential ache that had been with me as long as I remember is no more. That disability that made my life among men a difficult trial, that stood between me and a normal decent life, is healed. How tempted I would be to go back, to start again the ordinary life, this time to be comfortable, secure in myself and able to tolerate my fellows!

But it could not be. That possibility was destroyed by the very thing that cured me: realization of the Buddha's teaching. For, once having tasted the freedom of the high spaces, those dimensions beyond the world, beyond time, how could I again wallow in the mud of temporality and ignorance?

There is no going back. For once having seen, there is no unseeing; having known, there is no more unknowing. The whole process of being and becoming is plain, laid out before my inner eye. Could ever I walk that path again? I think not.

For to put on a mask, having known the naked freedom of truth, is too much burden for anyone. Yet there remains a certain nostalgia for the ease of hiding, for the false image so casually adopted, so easily manipulated. If only those conveniences of fabrication were not also fetters binding us to suffering! If only the masks did not come with chains and locks!

Do you hear me, here? I am not going to make it easy for you. This is not preschool anymore; this is the real thing. No more talking down to irresponsible children. I am going to assume you have done the

assignment, read the foregoing, and know the contents of the dictionary well. I am tired of lecturing to children; I crave dialogue on my own level. Are you listening? Can you respond in kind?

It is very late in the game. Much time has passed, and I am near the end of the present life's journey. One, even an enlightened one, cannot do much. But a network trained in Skillful Living can do much; actually it can change the world. If only I were younger, knowing what I know now, I could do so much more. But many of you are still young, and can easily learn what is given here. Any of you could make the breakthrough that is so badly needed, find the key that opens the secrets, that changes everything, and change the world for the better.

I have given so much, and plan to give more—to give everything. Whatever I have seen, that also I shall report and describe. Can you follow me among the sheer cliffs of the summits? And what will you contribute in response? What gifts do you have for the comfort and elevation of humankind? This Dhamma-dana is the arena, and this my challenge to you. Can you meet me here? Can you hold your own on this stage?

September 28—Love and Power

There is a great tension between Love and Power that is the basis of all morality. This tension drives them ever apart, while holding them together by their very polarity. Love must never be sullied by power. The purity and trust so necessary for love must never be overcome by the intrigue and deception that taints power. Love's integrity must be preserved at all costs, for without it, men go insane.

That is the situation now; the lust and greed of power have overcome love. There is a cabal of men so overcome, so drunken with power-lust that they wish to own and control everyone and everything. Their attachment is so colossal that they are willing to sacrifice their humanity, their very souls, to the blood-lust of power. And in doing so they threaten to turn the whole planet into a sterile radioactive desert.

You know this; deep in your bones you can feel the truth of it. But your external personality has become overwhelmed by the social conditioning

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of greed to the extent that you would deny it except within your deepest reveries. But in your most intimate heart of hearts, you know I speak truth —the truth of love.

Without trust there can be no love; and without love we lose the essence of humanity and become like animals, fighting our own kin over a crust of stale bread. But all trust has been quite methodically erased until there is no more room for love, no safe place out of the prying omnipresence of greed, scheming and betrayal.

This is how it ends. This is how the world slips from civilization into a dark age. This is how we become animals, by allowing lust to impinge upon love's quiet integrity.

Are there no brave souls who are ready to call and end to this travesty? Are there no authentic heroes who will not bend to the siren call of lust? If so, let us join together to rid the world of soul-killing tyranny. If not, then it is too late; the last Wise Ones will leave and the planet will spin down its damned trajectory into chaos.

Hear. Just hear what I have to say, for I speak the language of the heart, I hear the words of the Ancient Ones and repeat them in today's language. The same thing was said by all the Great Ones of old; but you have not heard them, so why should you hear me? I say, you should not only hear but also repeat this message; it may be our last chance to rescue the honor of humanity.

We should not go quietly into this dark night. We may lose, but it should be the honorable defeat of brave men, of heroes who refused to bow to tyranny and injustice, who refuse to be cowed by power or tempted by bribes. We should do our duty, the duty conferred by intelligence and knowledge, the duty of wisdom to put truth on the table where it belongs.