



# NON-ATTACHMENT TO VIEWS

ART /  
EARTH /  
TECH /

WORKSHOP  
EXHIBITION  
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Newspeak House,  
133 Bethnal Green road,  
London E2 7DG



# Non-Attachment [to Views]

Consider that one of the greatest obstacles to our well-being is our attachment to views — that we are right and others are wrong. As a result, we find it hard to change our views and to hear others. This can result in dogmatism, fanaticism and even violence both physical and emotional. At a personal level, our attachment to views may be one of the greatest obstacle to our own well-being and enlightenment because of the difficulty we face relinquishing deep-rooted beliefs in an inherently existing ‘self’ or ‘I’.

*... Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.*

The first Mindfulness Training “Reverence for Life” by  
Thich Nhat Hanh & the Plum Village Community



*The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects, in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusion may remain inviolate.*

Bacon, 1620 / Novum Organum Aphorism 46



# Why is non-attachment great?

Non-attachment is a subtle and far reaching internal orientation away from depending on things. These things include all “objects” which the subject might fallaciously come to believe are either itself, or needed to support itself. This includes cars, food, relationships, ideas, thoughts, emotions, indeed all phenomena which occur in “experience”. Objects which confuse experience also includes all “spiritual experiences, awakenings and states”.

The yoga sutras on patanjali focus on just this issue, in that they presuppose that the problem of existence is that “consciousness has become entangled with the world” and the disentangling of the two is the work of the yogi. In this way yoga practice is very similar to buddhist practice (the difference being that the yoga tradition believes that pure consciousness exists whereas the buddhist tradition, at least theravada, also regards consciousness as a construct, the true reality being just emptiness). In this way buddhism has been regarded as superior to the yoga traditions of india because only in buddhist is there a focus on not only letting go (becoming non attached), but also of letting go of letting go (being non attached to becoming non attached). This is essential because it avoids what was known in the western

christian traditions as “the sin of the saints”, i.e. pride in one’s spiritual attainment.

In a practical sense, what is going on phenomenologically and moment to moment in perception is that we think objects (thoughts, emotions, cars, food) are somehow “out there” or indeed “in here” and are appearing to “us”, the subject. When they do, several things can happen. In the worst cases, the ego is in need of such support (being an incomplete ego, noting that the function of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in the west is to construct a strong ego) that the ego identifies with the object: “*I am a person who drives a porsche*”. When the porsche disappears, suffering occurs, the inherent dukkha in existence: “*wherever there is clinging, there is suffering*”. This is going on in all human beings. Those humans who engage in some practices of awareness and non-attachment will hopefully suffer this type of experience



less, but however they will still be experiencing the aversion and the attraction to sense objects as they arise moment to moment. For example, being attracted to sunshine and aversive to clouds on gloomy days in Cambridge. These days, one of the main insight practices being taught is the development of an awareness of how our aversion and attraction to sense objects arises. This is said to begin to reduce attachment and ultimately to demonstrate the emptiness of the subject-object as a construction in perception.

This last point is critical because whereas almost all other traditions aim to reach some kind of pure unchanging level of consciousness, sometimes equated with religious ideas such as God, the Buddha noted that the very experience of existence (which he called “consciousness” appeared out of a chain of interdependent events in the process of cognition. In other words, our experience of being a subject experiencing the world (object) has no intrinsic reality and is a fabricated consequence of the process: event, sense data, perception, recognition etc. This chain of events in the construction of perception now appears to be well verified within cognitive science. The fabrication of perception and indeed our experience of existence through interdependent co-arising, paticca samuppada, is the central doctrine which leads to the perception of emptiness and the incalculable freedom that entails.

One very important and easier

way to practice non-attachment in the world is non-attachment to view. This is simply not being attached to your viewpoint, it being a construction based on conditioning which has nothing to do with “you”. If we could even get beyond something as simple as attachment to view in the world, we would have no more wars. Hooray.

An attachment which is notoriously hard to let go of is the attachment to body and mind. Most of us think we are our body and our mind, and even when we realise this is simply ridiculous, we continue to be attached to the pleasant states of mind and body. Many people appear to practice meditation and do physical exercise simply to increase the amount of time they are in pleasant mind body states. Indeed, I often realise my practice in everyday life has been reduced to this rather poor mode.

Why is non-attachment great? Because it is one of the characteristics of freedom. Buddha did not teach about being good, or achieving something spiritually, he simply taught a method for freedom. You could summarise these practices as *“Things don’t exist, and therefore freedom does”*. But then again, that is simply another view....

by Jonathan Ekstrom





# If you are not attached to something, how can you be committed to it?

Commitment and non-attachment form an irreconcilable opposition. How can you invest in something if you are not attached to it? And, if you are not attached to something, how can you be committed to it?

When I think of commitment, I think of the person who speaks. When I think of non-attachment, I think of the person who listens. To be wise, we need to be both. And that is the difficulty: to strike that balance, to walk on that fine line

To me, to perform commitment and non attachment “in a sequence” means not being afraid to take strong positions. However, it also means to listen, to be ready to change position anytime and never taking personal offence. (I like the idea that views are not your views, they are just views.)

Finally, there is this passage I read in Siddhartha by Hermann Hess that I wanted to share with you: *“One can pass on knowledge but not wisdom. One can find wisdom, one can live it, one can be supported by it, one can work wonders with it, but one cannot speak it or teach it.”*

by Ninon Godfroy



*“When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir”*

John Maynard Keynes, Economist,





## What are Attachment and Non-Attachment?

Ordinarily we think of attachment as something positive or

even neutral: I'm attached to this old watch because my father gave it to me, or the boat is attached to the shore by a rope. And conversely to be unattached offers sounds a bit negative. For example, if you say "I'm unattached" it means you are without a romantic relationship — whereas to be attached is to have one (observe that common slang for getting married is to "get hitched" which roughly approximates to to "get attached").

And this sense is still there when it comes to views. Not to be attached to a view is to be de-tached. Whilst there can be a positive sense of dispassionate and independent as in "the judge considered the arguments with a sense of detachment", there is also the sense of uninvolved and uncaring: "the man watched the dogs attack the fox with an air of detachment".

Thus our use of attachment may be surprising. In ordinary english attachment is often used in as positive context: we are attached to places, people and things that we like and care about. Conversely, the opposite of attachment — detachment — has a mildly negative sense of emotionless unconcern, anomie, lifelessness — "he kissed her with an air of detachment", "he lived detached, absent, as if something were permanently missing".

Our use of attachment and non-attachment are somewhat special and rather specific. It derives from a Buddhist tradition. In that tradition "attachment" is the translation for key concept

around the way that we "cling" to things: experiences, things, ideas, even consciousness. It can be found as a key phrase in translations of the Four Noble Truths, the core teachings of the Buddha:

Life involves suffering  
Suffering arises from attachment [also translated as "craving", "clinging to" ...]  
Suffering ceases when attachment ceases

Freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Eightfold Path

The special usage also explains why we use non-attachment rather than de-tachment as the contrast to attachment. Non-attachment, which is our focus here, is not detachment. It is not simply an absence, a lack of attachment. Rather it is something positive, a positive choice that makes true engagement and commitment possible.

Consider an analogy with listening. When we listen to another person we can listen in several ways. One way to listen is to do passively. It is listening just as not talking but without really engaging with what the person is saying. What they say comes in our ears but we do not really hear it or listen to it in a true sense. This is "detached" listening. On the other hand, there are times when we truly listen and listen deeply. This is an active not a passive act. Where actively engage ourselves with what they are saying, opening our mind to it, positively welcoming what they are saying.

by Rufus Pollock

# The Science of attachment to views.

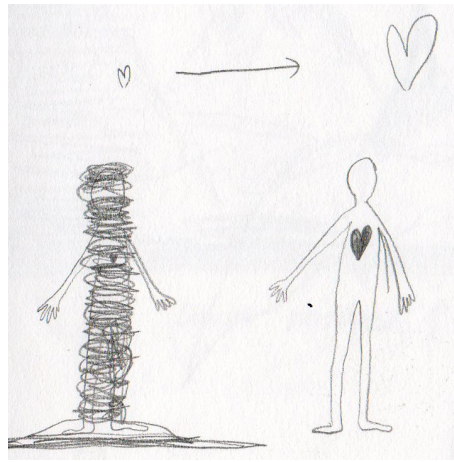
## OBAMA

On August 4, 1961, a young woman gave birth to a healthy baby boy in a hospital at 1611 Bingham St., Honolulu. That child, Barack Obama, later became the 44th president of the United States. Notwithstanding the incontrovertible evidence for the simple fact of his American birth—from a Hawaiian birth certificate to birth announcements in local papers to the fact that his pregnant mother went into the Honolulu hospital and left it cradling a baby—a group known as “birthers” claimed Obama had been born outside the United States and was therefore not eligible to assume the presidency. Even though the claims were met with skepticism by the media, polls at the time showed that they were widely believed by a sizable proportion of the public (Travis, 2010), including a majority of voters in Republican primary elections in 2011 (Barr, 2011).

Lewandowsky et al. 2012

## VACCINE & AUTHISM

A single 1998 study in the United Kingdom suggested a link between a common childhood vaccine and autism. It received widespread media coverage and generated considerable fear



in the general public concerning the safety of the vaccine. Though the study was later discredited and further research found no link between the vaccine a sizeable minority Britain and the United States continued to believe in a link including many health professionals.

This has had a large impact for public health as parents decided not to vaccinate their children resulting in thousands of preventable deaths and illness. It has also resulted in unnecessary expenditure of large amounts of money for follow-up research and public-information campaigns aimed at rectifying the situation.

## IT IS NOT JUST THE FACTS, IT IS THE NARRATIVE WE TELL ABOUT THE FACTS

Even when we think we've properly corrected a false belief, the original exposure often continues to influence our memory and thoughts. ... Lewandowsky and his colleagues at the University of Western Australia asked university students to read the report of a liquor robbery that had ostensibly taken

place in Australia's Northern Territory. Everyone read the same report, but in some cases racial information about the perpetrators was included and in others it wasn't. In one scenario, the students were led to believe that the suspects were Caucasian, and in another that they were Aboriginal. At the end of the report, the racial information either was or wasn't retracted. Participants were then asked to take part in an unrelated computer task for half an hour. After that, they were asked a number of factual questions (“What sort of car was found abandoned?”) and inference questions (“Who do you think the attackers were?”). After the students answered all of the questions, they were given a scale to assess their racial attitudes toward Aboriginals.

Everyone's memory worked correctly: the students could all recall the details of the crime and could report precisely what information was or wasn't retracted. But the students who scored highest on racial prejudice continued to rely on the racial misinformation that identified the perpetrators as Aboriginals, even though they knew it had been corrected. They answered the factual questions accurately, stating that the information about race was false, and yet they still relied on race in their inference responses, saying that the attackers were likely Aboriginal or that the store owner likely had trouble understanding them because they were Aboriginal. This was, in other words, a laboratory case of the very dynamic that Nyhan identified:

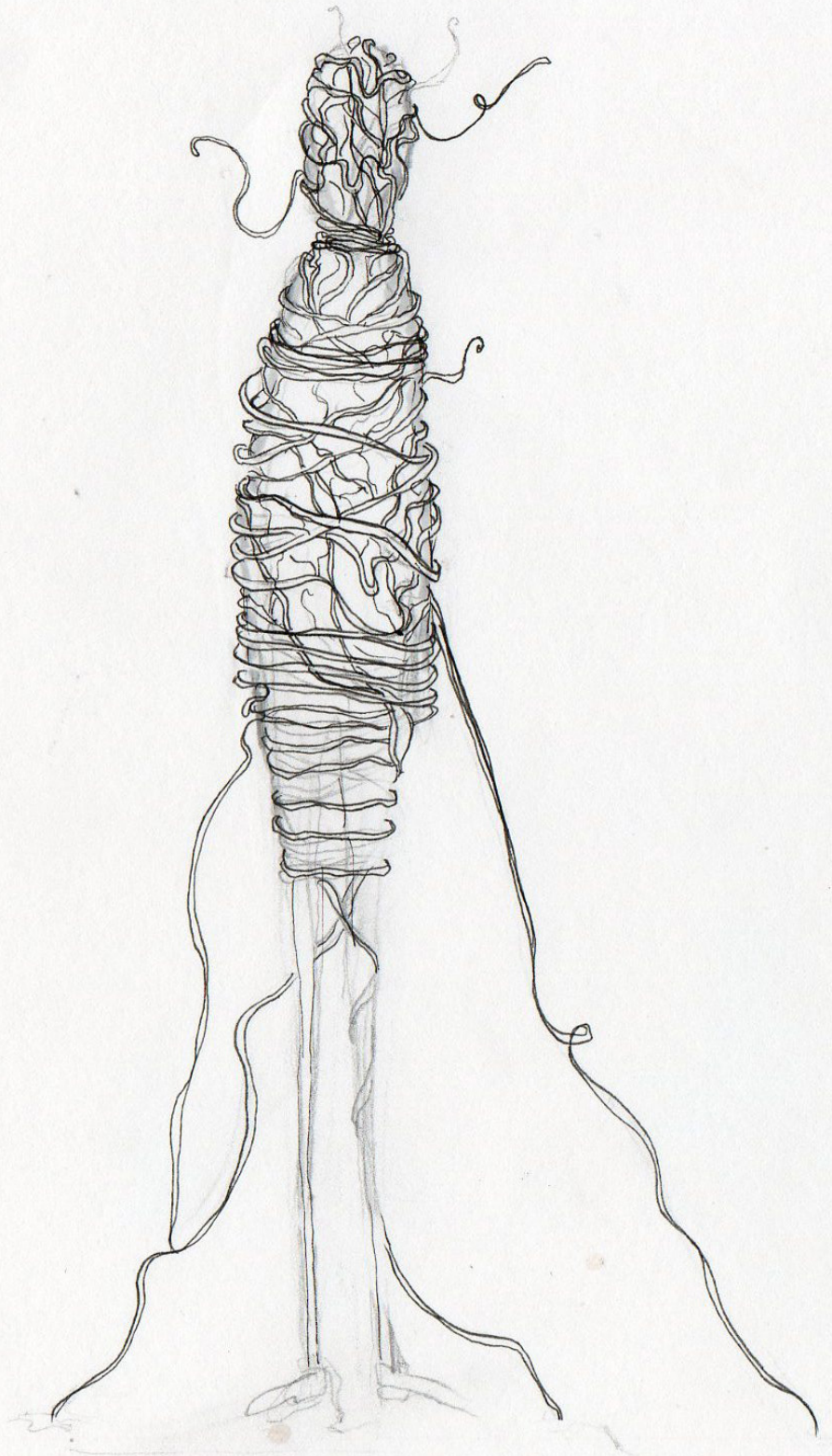


strongly held beliefs continued to influence judgment, despite correction attempts—even with a supposedly conscious awareness of what was happening.

In a follow-up, Lewandowsky presented a scenario that was similar to the original experiment, except now, the Aboriginal was a hero who disarmed the would-be robber. This time, it was students who had scored lowest in racial prejudice who persisted in their reliance on false information, in spite of any attempt at correction. In their subsequent recollections, they mentioned race more frequently, and incorrectly, even though they knew that piece of information had been retracted. ...

False beliefs, it turns out, have little to do with one's stated political affiliations and far more to do with self-identity: What kind of person am I, and what kind of person do I want to be? All ideologies are similarly affected.

*"I Don't Want to Be Right"* by  
Maria Konnikova in the New  
Yorker May 16, 2014



# A Loving Father Rejects His Son

The Buddha told the story of a merchant, a widower, who went away in a business trip and left his little boy at home. While he was away, bandits came and burned down the whole village. When the merchant returned, he didn't find his house, it was just a heap of ash. There was the charred body of a child close by. He threw himself on the ground and cried and cried. He beat his chest and pulled his hair. The next day, he had the little body cremated. Because his beloved son was his only reason for existence, he sewed a beautiful velvet bag and put the ashes inside. Wherever he went, he took that bag of ashes with him. Eating, sleeping, working, he always carried it with him.

In fact, his son had been kidnapped by the bandits. Three months later, the boy escaped and returned home. When he arrived, it was two o'clock in the morning. He knocked on the door of the new house his father had built. The poor father was lying on his bed crying, holding the bag of ashes, and he asked, 'Who is there?' 'It's me, Daddy, your son.' The father answered, 'That's not possible. My son is dead. I've cremated his body and I carry his ashes with me. You must be some naughty boy who's trying to fool me. Go away, don't disturb me!' He refused to open the door, and there was no way for the little boy to come in. The boy had to go away, and the father lost his son forever.

After telling the story, the Buddha said, 'If at some point in your life you adopt an idea or a perception as the absolute truth, you close the door of your mind. This is the end of seeking the truth. And not only do you no longer seek the truth, but even if the truth comes in person and knocks on your door, you refuse to open it. Attachment to views, attachment to ideas, attachment to perceptions are the biggest obstacle to the truth.'

*From The Art of Power by Thich Nhat Hanh*



# Non-Attachment a form of intelligence?

Attachment to our pain as our pain becomes present. It slowly turns into a habit which then becomes our identity. Letting go of who we are, of what we believe we are to create a new self is the greatest challenge of all. It is the greatest gift we can give to ourselves and the world.

To be at peace with oneself and the world creates freedom.

Wouldn't it be amazing to be able to navigate around different perspectives and points of view without feeling the need to create meaning in them? Wouldn't it be amazing to be present with what is and not constantly be looking for what is missing?

Non-attachment is abundance. It is learning and discovery. When we are attached we become inflexible, tense and anxious. We become prone to fear, hate and sadness.

One of the subtlest forms of non-attachment is to be attached to being non-attached. This can create a guilt spiral with no escape. Non-attachment is not to be attached to not being attached. To be present with whatever is.

When attached we miss out on seeing our errors and freeing ourselves from them. We create distance from love, peace, connection, presence, appreciation, gratitude and discovery.

Maybe non-attachment is a form of intelligence: an ability to change our mind in ways that work for "life". This intelligence requires the emotional willingness to change views.

Finally why is non-attachment interesting to our society today? Because non-attachment allows us to put our ego aside for a purpose or cause and have an authentic interaction with others.

In a world where we are normally so attached to our ego and beliefs, we can step into freedom and peace.

by Sylvie. Barbier

Sketches by Emily Bowers

