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Response paper 4

Taking this course, I came in with the intention of finding better ways to deal with the many issues life throws my way. During the pandemic, I went through a huge mindset shift, as I aimed to find things that would help me grow as a person and be able to benefit me to deal with anything that came up. I was in a place in my life where I was no longer happy with myself and the ways I carried myself so I looked for different ways to get myself back to a point where I was happy with what I had become and who I was going to be. In this journey to change myself, I found comfort with many practices stemming from the Buddha, and his various teachings. I have a very active mind, one which I find extremely difficult to be kind to myself and is constantly thinking of different things at all times. With this in mind, I looked towards Zen Buddhism to be able to find different ways to process things that happen with my life and be able to switch my mindset.

With the Gatha, I chose to follow living in the present moment. A lot of the time, I tend to overthink things, especially when it comes to interactions with other people. When talking to people, I tend to have an instant cause and effect analysis that happens in my mind very frequently. I tend to think heavily on what my next response should be. At the same time, I am also taking in new information about what the person is talking about. Because of this, I feel like at times I am way too in my own head, to the point where I am not fully invested into what is happening. Not just about responding and conversing, but my passive mindset has always been active as well, thinking about other things that I should be preparing for or should be doing. This also distracts me from what I am doing and doesn't allow me to fully enjoy what is happening in front of me, but rather always thinking about the next steps or things that I need to tackle. In the same way I think about the future, I am also like this about past events, questioning my choices and thinking if

they were the right decisions. All of these lead me to the Gatha I chose to work with over the course of the quarter. I have found that I am very conscious when these thoughts start to form, and thus I have made an effort to remind myself when my mind reverts to this form of thinking to recenter myself in a way where I am invested into whatever is happening. Whether I was eating during the small window of time I had, or simply had some downtime to talk to my friends, I had to constantly think that I should be fully embracing the moment, rather than just think about what the next thing I had to get done was. Despite the constant reminder, this was easier said than done, as with the quarter system, I think sometimes you have no choice but to continue in a way where you are thinking about the next thing. There are often times where we just have to go from one thing to another. I myself found myself following this trend, especially having to play catch up throughout the whole quarter and seeing what exactly was the next thing I needed to get through. However, this was when the gatha was very helpful. It would allow me to stop and breathe. Not only that, but when I was doing work and reminded myself of my gatha, I was able to fully think about my work as well, and look at it from a different perspective than what it was at the time. I found myself appreciating the deeper meaning of the work, whether it be my overall end goal, and seeing it other than just the suffering it was inflicting on me.

Moving forward, I found that regardless of my gatha, sometimes there was nothing other to think about than what was currently filling up my plate. Thus my precept was to “not poison the current moment.” Going back to my point of my thinking, I feel like our mind is sometimes stronger than what we think. Because of this, it is sometimes harder to block out those thoughts and to live in the moment. All of these were affecting my attitude

within the moment, and as a result caused suffering in which I could not fix until I began to solve them. This also added to my feeling of not living in the present moment, and it ultimately added to my suffering. It really affected me and would take me out of the present moment. This is why I came to my precept because this form of thinking would ultimately negatively affect my mind.

I found that this would mainly deal with school but even in my personal life, I would be thinking about issues whether they would be with my family or friends. If something would come up, it would come up again later if it was an issue that was really pressing. Sometimes when I would be in class, I would have difficulty sitting down in the class or being fully in the class, as my mind would be somewhere else. I remember one time, I had to leave class because my mind wouldn't allow me to sit still and even try to distract myself with the material of the course and it was completely overwhelming to have those thoughts pop in. I remember being disappointed in myself because that was a time where I fully let myself poison the current moment and remove myself completely from the present moment. I have had this issues before which is why I do not want my mind to take control. However, this is where I felt like the material in our course has helped a lot.

In *How to Cook your Life*, Cohen Roshi talked alot about being mindful and aware to the point where we are able to process emotions and be aware of the emotions taking place. When I found myself slipping to being angry or any other negative emotion towards myself, I would remind myself that it is also perfectly normal to have those emotions or be able to think. However, I got to a point where I was not allowing myself to experience any of these emotions, which is why I would get to points where my gatha and precepts would fail, because I would be so filled with emotions but not tend to them, and instead

try to divert my mind without tending to problem at hand. This was really helpful in addition to my precept as it allowed me to be vulnerable with myself and be kind to myself when trying out new things and it not going my way completely. Not only that but it gave validity to my emotions at the time when dealing with those events, and gave reason to them when I myself was making them unreasonable. It also made the precepts a lot easier and made it to a form that was less strict. I had the opportunity now to not “poison” the present moment, but if it did then I was able to deal with it so that they never affect other moments. This was a method of dealing with them but also not allowing them to continue to press, which was what Roshi had mentioned when it came to being aware of what was going on, and our perception of emotions.

In terms of my Koan, I was questioning the true meaning of what I was doing, more specifically why I decided to do things. Growing up, I took the advice of the elders around me, because I was still learning about the world around me and didn't really know what was best. However, as I grew up I found myself more and more being unhappy with things, mainly because I was doing things for the sake of others, rather than to do for myself and for my benefit. With school, I found myself being down about what was happening and how much work I had to do. Regardless, I had to get it done but when doing it I thought about the overall picture. I started to question what I was really doing and why. In terms of school, it had started out to be doing something that many around me pushed for. I come from a low income community, one of which many don't have the opportunity to succeed. As a kid, you don't really think about the big picture, but as I grew up I started to think more and more about what the bigger picture was. For me it was recognizing the difficulty of creating generational wealth, and found that university and

higher education would be the quickest path towards the goal of helping those who helped me growing up.

Outside of school, I found myself questioning why I was doing things. For example, in conversations with people, it helps to think about why I am engaged in the conversation. Furthermore, not every relationship, whether intimate, family or friends is smooth sailing and may come into bumps. It was very helpful to apply the Koan into those circumstances. They allowed me to have a deeper insight into what was actually important to me. Furthermore, it helped me truly assess the nature of the relationship as a whole and whether or not that was adding to my suffering or not. They helped me draw a distinctive line between what was healthy for me and what wasn't.

This world has posed a lot of challenges, and they allow me to live a life that is completely unique and full of exciting adventures. However, there is the issue of living in a world that is constructed in a dualistic framework. This means that our concepts of things are completely different from our actual experience of them. They allow us to see the world in a different framework but also inhibit our ability to experience new things in our life. For me personally, I have a fixed mindset on seeing all possibilities. This forces me to think about various perspectives, leaving mine to be left out. That has created an anxious mind within me, that is constantly taking various viewpoints into consideration. With the world being more and more connected through the development of technology, there is always so much information that is based on the experience of others. However, we also have to consider our own experience and derive our own conclusions from them. I feel like this is extremely difficult for me to do because I seem to think about different perspectives. While this is okay in the sense of making the best judgment when weighing

out different options, I do see where this is bad as it sometimes may dissuade me from doing things because of the negative viewpoints/opinions that come with it. This is where I see Roshi's argument as he says that we can live in either extreme, and I tend to be more in the reserved extreme. While thinking about the possibility of the negative outcome, I stay focused on those and often only keep that in my mind. I find it hard to convince myself of the positive and instead lean towards a safer option.

Despite this, I have tried harder to be very aware of these thoughts and lean more and more towards the middle mindset Roshi advocated for, which is to have a direction but no goal. I feel like this level of indifference leads to being more open to experiences without predetermining an outcome and inflicting the natural thought process that comes about when assessing things. Rather, I found that when I adopt this mindset, I am more open to anything and see myself being happier as instead of worrying about what can or can be, I focus more on what is. I think about what it can be while also just allowing myself to experience it all together. I found myself being happier since adopting this mindset because I have been able to relieve myself from the suffering I have caused myself and focus on what is in front of me. I feel like this has also progressed my gatha and my precept because they allow me to just be fully immersed in the moment rather than be overthinking and taking myself to a place where I allow these thoughts to begin to take hold of my mind. Not only that but it has given me a new perspective in which I am allowing myself to hear my mind out but not letting it completely run my life. Rather than letting the emotions and thoughts control me, I am able to be aware about what they are doing and let them take their course in a way where I am in control.

I feel like through all of this, I focused heavily on the nutrients of consciousness. I focused a lot on other thoughts that would inflict a lot of general suffering within myself and it would create a negative effect in my mind. As highlighted before, they left me in a point where I was constantly thinking about things which put me in a place where I did not want to be in. They left me in a place where I was removed from other aspects of my life and left me feeling like a passenger in my life rather than giving me a sense of control. However, realizing this I found myself wanting to change it in a way where I can control it and take back a sense of control in my life. I found myself working in a way where I was letting my mind take over so much of the time and dictating a lot of what I was doing.

In doing so, I felt like I was watering anxious seeds. I think over the course of this quarter, I have realized that I am a lot more anxious than I actually am. Not only that but I feel like I have a lot more thoughts than those around me which lead me to believe that I am watering negative seeds within my mind. They don't really have a beneficial aspect to them other than keeping me safe. That being said they have created a mindset that is very cautious and light in the decision making. Furthermore, they have made it nearly impossible to move forward from past events and don't allow me to live in a way where I am able to be fully invested. I feel like they make it so I have constant doubts. That being said, I also thank my mind for also being aware of these ideas and thought processes that allow me to break away from them. While I have been watering this anxious seed, I feel like it would be unfair to look at it in a fully negative light. It is very beneficial to have it because it keeps me aware of my own actions and makes sure I am doing the best I can be. I feel like where this becomes an issue is when I let it go to the extreme, as in to be scared about outcomes to the point where I prohibit myself from doing things. I do feel in the



sense of implementing my gatha, precept, and koan, my watering has changed from applying to only the negative and instead focusing on watering the cautious and safety aspect. Not only that, I have also been focusing on taking care of the parts that keep me with who I am as a person. While I would love to be more outspoken and firm, that isn't who I am entirely and because of that I revert to feeling some sort of negative perspective of myself.

I feel like I have learned so much about myself and applying zen into my life. I started out in a way where I wasn't allowing myself to feel emotions and instead beat myself for feeling negative emotions. No one wants to feel them and in a way, they are safety mechanisms for myself to keep myself from feeling any type/form of suffering. However, that was a lifestyle that would prohibit myself from experiencing things in life that I would be interested in. However, the practices in the class have shown me a new method of living a life in which I am free from indirect suffering that I have inadvertently created for myself because of my mindset and how I saw the world around me.