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More Over

finding your worth beneath excess

Dillon Masters

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Finding Your Worth Beneath Excess

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Symbol of long life

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Dedication

I owe everything to the women with whom I have shared my life. A woman birthed me. Another woman reared me. Others have shared their love and passion with me. Women have seen me through emotional and spiritual death. Women have supported me in recovery and shown me the way back from despair to find a genuine life of wholeness. I am full of the lessons gleaned from these many women and I write here for a specific woman—my daughter who, I hope, will have a good life. She, and those with whom she will share this world after I am gone, will face turbulent and threatening times that result from our many excesses and our collective inability to address our problems, so desperately needed. And to Patrick, my best friend, who lost his sanity fighting with me in a war that represented the worst of all that we do. All of us are both flawed and perfect at the same time.

My hope is to signal a hurting humanity and lead them to awakening the perfect part and learn to accept the flawed part, both within ourselves and in others. What I share in this book I have learned from women. I have eaten the whole meal, chewed it up, digested it all, put my own stamp on it, and now return to sender.

The message of this book is a simple one: Fulfillment comes from within. That is what I have

learned in my full and complex life. It all comes from people not like me. It is to these that I dedicate this book. You taught me. Now listen to what you have said.

About the cover design

I wrote the first draft of this book in 2009, three years following the publication of An Inconvenient Truth—Al Gore's seminal work that introduced us all to the possibility that our global community was on a path toward devastation and step by step that devastation has continued. It took me some time to accept that I had an obligation to not just sit back and do nothing to alter our lemming march toward the abyss. I had no delusions of grandeur in thinking that I could alter the way in which the entire human race was living that was taking us step by step toward our collective demise. I did however, believe I possessed a solution to the essential problem; perhaps the only solution, and thus felt compelled to do what I could. The result of this compelling notion is this book.

I came to this persuasion out of a personal experience, preceded by a life-time of suffering, that resulted in a transformation so intense that is completely changed me and, without knowing at the time, pointed to the solution to our collective crisis. In a nutshell, that solution concerns the manner in which we understand our own essential nature. Until we stop seeing ourselves as disconnected individuals, each on separate paths to maximize our own selfish agendas, without realizing the harm we do to one another, and thus ourselves, there is virtually no hope of improving our way forward. I know this, not as an intellectual exercise, but in-

stead because of the transformation of which I speak brought me back from my own personal abyss, and if it can do that for me, it can do the same for anyone. It must, or we are all doomed. I know that sounds Orwellian and I know how difficult it is to accept such a big thought from someone so small as me. Nevertheless such seismic shifts can occur as the result of anyone bringing to the awareness of others. When the necessary time and conditions are ripe, even a small child can make a difference. Seven years ago, that time was not yet upon us and my time was also not yet ripe. Now it is. The world is, at last, awakening to a horror too awful to ignore and perhaps the human race is ready for finding the solution, which has little, if anything to do with how we are destroying our planet. Instead it concerns how we are destroying ourselves. Until we address that issue, it won't make any difference which source of energy we exploit, how much money people make, the damage we inflict on others, or any other conceivable form of negativity. The solution is spiritual, not a matter of natural resources.

Consequently, this is a book about finding essential worth within by employing the ancient art of Zen. I use the term "art" in the most basic sense to mean manifesting the creative human spirit. Zen maintains that beneath the extraneous, lies a purity of the heart, already complete, awaiting discovery. This spirit is inherent in Zen, beginning with nature and blossoming within a wide variety of human artifacts and cultural configurations, from architec-

ture to flower arranging, calligraphy, dress, interior decoration and virtually every other element of culture.

The hagiography of Michelangelo says that he understood his mission as a sculptor to chisel away the unessential stone to reveal the essential of what lay within. No one knows for sure if he said such a thing, but if he did then he would have captured the spirit of Zen. The cover design for this book is based on this essential, minimalist flavor. Here you see two dimensions: One foreground and an interior view of nirvana. The foreground is what lies immediately in front of us, and this has the impact of obscuring what lies within. Furthermore the image resembles an eye in reverse. As you will read, what we see determines our sense of reality and this is reversed from reality as it is. What would ordinarily be the optical disk is now reversed, with the surrounding white cornea. This image precisely captures the notion that nirvana is always present but obscured by delusion. What joins the two is a blue dot symbolizing the union of nirvana and delusion; it could be seen as the "plank in our eye" spoken of by Jesus Christ.

The message of this book is that we are traveling down the path to nowhere precisely because we imagine a distant nirvana without realizing that it is already present. It is delusion that blinds us, and because we are blinded we lust for more, and more never realizing that the more we seek is already ours. There is no higher art form than to employ the

essential spirit of being human to find our true worth, and that must be our mission as we move toward the abyss.

Preface

Someone else's problem is an abstraction. A crisis is when the problem is your own. And a tragedy is when a crisis goes unsolved and blows up in our face. Few of us give serious consideration to the problems of other people. Nearly everyone attempts to solve a crisis that threatens to wreak their own lives, or the lives of their loved ones, and sooner or later all of us experience tragedies.

The gap between abstract problems and tragedies is becoming narrower and narrower. What used to take a long time to emerge, fester, and arrive on our own doorstep is now picking up speed. And the magnitude of tragedies is likewise growing larger. Someone else's problems in another time and place are quickly morphing into global catastrophes that will consume us all. The issue of assigned blame is becoming a moot point. At some point along the trajectory of about-to-be-eaten-by-the-tiger, we need to stop pondering the question about who left the cage gate open and start running like a bat out of hell. Looking back to find the culprit has relevance only once you survive. Our biological makeup figured that out thousands of years ago: When faced with the perception of sudden death our biochemistry shifts into fight or flight overdrive and all systems shift away from rational processes and into survival mode. So the balance between thoughtful contemplation and chaos is largely a matter of appropriate timing. If we wait too long our capacity to

wrestle with and manage change will be overridden and we will be lost.

To put it mildly, living in complex social systems is a thorny challenge. Others see as absurdity what many see as a perfectly natural picture of the way things are. The notion of everyone being on the same page and getting an equal vote is somewhat of a luxury that we all desire. I suspect that most people are kind hearted and really do care about equal rights and the distribution of justice. And during times of relative calm and stability, democracy is the desirable way. I believe this, and I also believe that when catastrophe is looming is not the time to engage in ponderous debates. In case of emergency it is time to change course and adopt an alternate way.

What you're about to read is not a political manifesto. It is rather, a manifesto about a much more fundamental matter. This is a book that considers who we are as a human race, person by person, until we expand to the entire global family, because until we look at that issue, all the political posturing we could ever create won't make any difference. People with vested interests are not persuaded by rational discussion. Their agenda is, by design, self-serving, and they will not budge until tragedy threatens their own wellbeing. Ultimately politics, as a pragmatic matter, is not for the people and by the people. It is rather, for particular people and by those same people. Everyone is human, regardless of political affiliation or vested interests. If we can

find the fundamental link that joins and unites all humans there is a chance for universal survival.

Already I can sense the alarm bells ringing. I am quite sure that many who are reading this will come to the conclusion that I am an alarmist: A chicken little, prophesying a falling sky. But this is not my opinion. I see a bright future if we collectively make the right choices. I am open to that possibility but I am also a realist and know with certainty that bad choices lead inevitably to bad outcomes. There are now, and have been for a long time, excellent books written by thoughtful and competent people (indeed whole collections of people) who have similarly laid out the choices and likely outcomes. So far, we have universally either chosen to ignore their warnings or have been simply unaware of their messages.

One of the most compelling contemporary voices comes from Lester R. Brown of the 2011 Earth Policy Institute. Mr. Brown begins his book, World on the Edge—How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse with an observation made in 2009 by John Beddington, chief science advisor to the U.K. government, who said the world was facing a perfect storm of food shortages, water scarcity, and costly oil by 2030. A week later, Jonathon Porritt, former chair of the U.K. Sustainable Development Commission, wrote in the Guardian that he agreed with Beddington's analysis but that the timing was off. He thinks the crisis will hit much closer to 2020

than 2030 and calls it the “ultimate recession”—one from which there may be no recovery.

Time has passed since then and the forecasts have been updated. On Friday 25 November 2016, George Monbiot published an article in the Guardian speaking to 13 impossible crises that humanity now faces. They range from electing a new President in the United States who many intelligent people consider a risk to global wellbeing (along with his appointed cabinet that resembles that of Adolf Hitler) to global warming (which may have moved past a tipping point) to quicker depletion of natural resources than previously thought, to an extinction of animal species, out of control migration of refugees fleeing from middle eastern wars (and the response from citizens in effected countries around the world), emerging and continuing wars and more. Our time is running out yet members of our human family are seemingly preoccupied with matters of far less importance. The complexity of untangling these massive issues may be impossible to solve.

Is my message a “chicken little—the sky is falling?” Am I a prophet of doom or a sage advisor? That depends on whose ox is getting gored. We don’t seem to be motivated so much by warnings as we are by hope, which springs eternal. There is every reason for hope when we make right choices, and every reason for fear if we don’t. The link between cause and effect is hard to ignore, and it is naïve to continue making bad choices and expect good results.

So what you're going to read here is a balance between hope and fear and the discussion is going to give careful scrutiny to what it means to be deeply human from the inside out. In other words this is a book about making both good and bad choices by looking in depth at the human mind and soul—the basis of all thinking.

Introduction

We are birthed in pain. We die in pain, and in between we move and grow imperceptibly from day to day. So it is with every phenomenal creature from the smallest to the largest, regardless of distinction. And so it is with the institutions we create from families to communities, cultures, and nations. All of it goes through the very same process of growth. It happens in baby steps so subtle that we don't even notice the progression—youth to adolescence to young adulthood, onward to maturity and a final cessation. The changes are continuous and go unnoticed except when extended absences are considered. And then we see with amazement what has been ongoing. Cultures go through the same growth process, and it is always shocking and painful when the end game begins to approach.

It has been nearly 48 years since I first read The Limits to Growth, an insightful book commissioned by the Club of Rome. For those who don't know, or have forgotten, the Club was put together in 1968 at David Rockefeller's estate in Bellagio, Italy. The COR describes itself as "a group of world citizens, sharing a common concern for the future of humanity." I was a mere 28 years old at the time when the Club was formed but was greatly affected by the message of The Limits to Growth. The Club states that its mission is "to act as a global catalyst for change through the identification and analysis of the crucial problems facing humanity and the

communication of such problems to the most important public and private decision makers as well as to the general public."

The authors of Limits examined five interrelated variables based on the assumptions that exponential growth accurately described the patterns of increase among the variables and that the ability of technology to increase the availability of resources grows only linearly. The variables were: world population, industrialization, pollution, food production and resource depletion. The authors intended to explore the possibility of a sustainable feedback pattern that could be achieved by altering growth trends among the five variables. A concluding section of the book laid out our collective choices at that juncture nearly 48 years ago; either to continue unabated on an unsustainable path and experience unacceptable consequences, or to alter our patterns in a more moderate and distributed fashion.

There have been two updates since then. One came in 2004 with the Chelsea Green Publishing Company and Earthscan (under the name Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update). The second came in 2008 when Graham Turner at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) in Australia published a paper titled A Comparison of "The Limits to Growth" with Thirty Years of Reality. The Turner report compared the past thirty years of reality with the predictions made in 1972 and found that changes in industrial

production, food production, and pollution were all in line with the book's predictions of economic and societal collapse in the 21st century.

The movement since that first point has likewise advanced in steady progression along the track suggested by the book. When Limits first came out, few paid it much attention. Nixon was our president and we were coming out of the Vietnam War. Not many were interested in long views. We were absorbed with licking our wounds and dealing with the Watergate scandal. Both Watergate and the War collectively traumatized us, and these were ripping our nation apart. But having personally struggled to survive two years of conflict in Vietnam as a Marine, I was very aware of distant drumbeats. So I read Limits and was disturbed. Perhaps I was more attuned because of my struggle. Who can say? Nevertheless what I read made a lot of sense and it was frightening.

I began to observe what was taking place in our nation and around the world when looked at through the lens provided by Limits and it was clear that what had been predicted was unfolding step by step. Much has changed in the 48 years since then. Not only is my body undergoing advancing failure, but so is our nation. People don't like to acknowledge approaching failure, either for themselves or for their culture, but no single person or single culture has survived forever. Growth toward ultimate failure goes with the territory, like it or not.

Attendant to this process is the inevitable acquisition of material property. It happens with individuals, and it happens with the cultures we create. When we examine this behavior, we must question what is it about being human that compels us, like rushing lemmings, to acquire more and more to the point of excess and conspicuous consumption? When do we have enough and where is the dividing line between enough and hoarding, between sufficiency and waste?

As we struggle in 2016 to see the road ahead and to recover from a long and painful economic downturn, it is natural to break out the magnifying glass and consider where and how we might trim the fat from governmental bureaucracies, realign the distribution of wealth, correct political abuses and all of the other significant issues of our day. The war of values and blame is inevitable, and it's good to acknowledge that the government is simply a collection of individuals conducting themselves as we do. They and we have a tendency to hoard and retain what may have made sense at some earlier point but does no longer. Nobody—not individuals and not organizations readily gives up hard earned stuff. So the question, the critical question in the necessary trimming, is why? Why do we find it so hard to let go of the stuff? What is the fundamental motivation that compels us to collect it in the first place? A rainy-day fund? Hardcore greed? Selfishness? What? Clearly, individually and collectively we do this because we experience something lacking and must believe that further acquisitions will somehow

fill a sensed void. All of us are seeking fulfillment, at a great cost. So the question must be asked, "How is this path working out?" Do we experience advances in fulfillment, or the opposite? Two snapshots 40 years apart will provide us with a view arising from an extended absence.

In 1972 the annual median family income stood at $11,116 ($9,697 in current dollars). The cost of a new home was $40,000. A new car was $4,599, and a gallon of gas was 36 cents. The federal debt stood at the scary level of $435.9 billon and we lived on average 71.2 years. And while then, as now, everyone carped about paying taxes; the average was 30% for the combination of Federal, State and local taxes. Maybe because there wasn't such an abundance of adult toys back then few people seemed so compelled to own the very latest gadget.

By 2009 we were living longer. By then our life expectancy was 78.1 years of age but that didn't mean the average person was living better. The federal debt had risen to $12,300 billion (28 times as great as 37 years earlier). What $1.00 bought in 1972 had risen in cost to $5.50 by 2009. Median family incomes had risen to $46,326 and while that sounds like a meaningful increase it wasn't enough to keep pace with rising consumer prices. The year before, due to shaky business practices, the entire world held its breath as Wall Street shuddered on the brink only to be bailed out with a massive infusion of public funding. And Detroit followed on the heels of Wall Street, with $25 billion required to keep the

American auto industry from failing and jeopardizing the jobs and lives 13 million Americans. We had been waging two wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) since 2003 that had cost us over $1 trillion and by 2010 the federal debt stood at $13 trillion. Thirteen million workers were unemployed and roughly 4 million U.S. homeowners were 90 days or more delinquent on their mortgages or in actual foreclosure proceedings. It was the longest and most protracted economic downturn since the Great Depression and meltdown seemed clearly in sight.

If these statistics are not alarming enough it is becoming more and more evident that the wealth of our nation is increasingly concentrated at the top, and decimating the long held tax base of a vanishing middle class. According to a recent study[1], 7 years ago the share of household income held by the top 10% of the population stood at 49.7%, higher than any time since 1917 and even surpassing 1928, the peak of the stock market bubble just preceding the Great Depression. The gap between the super wealthy and the burgeoning poor was at an all time high. This disparity, as measured and reported by the Gini coefficient[2], shows an increasing divide in worldwide income inequality.

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[1] Striking it Richer, Pathway Magazine, Stanford 1 Center for the Study of Poverty and Inequality, Winter 2008.

[2] The Gini coefficient was developed by the Italian statistician Corrado Gini and indicates the mathematic gap

Further evidence pointing to the shrinking middle class has been reported by Yahoo Finance which said (among various things) that 66% of income growth between 2001 and 2007 came from the top 1% of Americans, over 1.4 million Americans filed for personal bankruptcy in 2009 (representing a 32% increase from the previous year), the top 1% of U.S. households own nearly twice as much of America's corporate wealth as they did 15 years previously, and despite the economic crisis of the past few years, the number of millionaires rose 16% in 2009. This is not unexpected when you consider the following—In 1950 the ratio of the average executive's paycheck compared to the average worker's paycheck stood at 30 to 1. Since 2000 that ratio has exploded to 300-500 to 1. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer and the middle class is gradually sinking into the abyss.

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between highs and lows, resulting in an index. The Gini index measures the degree of inequality in the distribution of family income in a country. The method was developed by the Italian statistician Corrado Gini and published in his 1912 paper "Variability and Mutability." It is a measure of statistical wealth dispersion. An index of 100 would be considered maximum inequality, while a score of zero (0) would indicate perfect equality. According to The World Bank, the US had a score of 41.1 in 2013 and ranked number 135 out of 176 counties measured. Ukraine was lowest with a score of 24.6 and South Africa was highest with a score of 63.4. (Data provided by Wikipedia, November, 2015.)

Like the Uncle Remus tar-baby story, the more we struggled the stucker we got. People were beginning to panic. Fear was in the wind with blatant greed and self-serving possessiveness were becoming increasingly evident. As the panic spread, one side became more and more dug in with various groups opposing perceived adversaries with inflammatory rhetoric and orchestrated acts of violence. What had taken decades to construct began to come unraveled. Unions were dismantled. Collective bargaining rights were shredded. Voting rights were in jeopardy. Funding for agencies responsible for overseeing environmental protections was chopped. Opposing politicians pounded their chests and vented indignation and platitudes, promising to do what nobody else could. Vested interests struggled to hold on to hard-won turf. Financial faucets were screwed down tight, investment spending began to dry up, consumers slowed their spending patterns and political unity was ripped apart with one biggie after another flailing about like a dying chicken.

What The Limits to Growth had predicted would happen if we didn't change our ways had ripened during the 48 ensuing years and the glue of social harmony began to melt. We were distracted. We didn't pay attention, and it was now time to pay the piper for our excesses. We had chased the rabbit and discovered where the chase leads, and there was no turning back the clock. Nobody can escape the impact of his or her choices, either individually or collectively. So now we must pay. And if we get through the pain perhaps we can learn something

worthwhile about genuine value, the kind that is not linked to never-ending acquisitions of constantly eroding stuff, which requires more and more excess.

What you're about to read is one person's grasp of a better way: a way of the heart rather than a way of material possessions. There was a time when I was as much entangled in this march to oblivion as anyone else. I didn't grow up with any religious or spiritual inclinations. I didn't have any desire to ponder what I considered un-useful speculations. I have, as long as I can remember, been oriented toward practicality and found no value in pie-in-the sky matters. I still don't, even though I could never have imagined what would happen to me that changed my life forever.

It was only after I was 40 years of age, having traveled far, suffered much and stood at death's door twice that I began to reach into the unreachable for a practical reason: I wanted to live but knew there was something very wrong with the way I had lived thus far. Before I had been dominated by a self-understanding that was based on fear and possessiveness. And to be completely honest, by the time I was 40 I had grown to hate myself and was so full of despair and frustration I was without hope. More than once I seriously contemplated suicide. My involvement in the Vietnam War, coupled with other life traumas, had persuaded me the I was without value and I sought out whatever means I could to deaden the pain. For most all of my adult life I had

lived with posttraumatic stress and had no clue regarding this root. My ego was so in my face I had no awareness there was anything else.

I had to learn the hard way that high living with trips around the world, summers on Fire Island, jetting off to the Caribbean Islands, dining out at expensive restaurants, and dropping a bundle on lavish clothing, while it gave me a sense of importance for a time, these things ultimately left me feeling empty and just as despairing as before. To me, all of this excess was a drug to help me escape from my nightmare of self-hatred. It worked for a time, but little by little I began to notice something: the more I had, the more I sensed a need for more. It was seductive and very much like a drug, which of course for me it was. As my level of excess grew, each indulgent increment meant less and less, but I was like the dog in the manger: selfish and reluctant to let any of my stuff go. The thought of giving up any of my addictions was too grievous to consider. I was hooked and saw no other way forward. Honestly, I was an emotional hoarder simply because at some deep place within I never knew who I was, and the inherent presumption in this entire arrangement was the notion that more must be better. What I found out was that this more needed to be overturned. When I finally discovered who I was, self-hatred fell away and less became best. At that deepest of all human levels, I knew that nothing could ever be added that would make me any better than I was already. I never knew, but when I awakened to my true nature it was like all the clouds of doom

were swept away. In that moment of truth I experienced perfection, and realized that what I had been seeking was already, and had always been.

The discovery didn't happen instantly. One day I realized that I was possessed by my possessions. I was bored with life, and my sense of joy was falling in direct proportion to the level of rising greed. Eventually this track imploded and I did a desperate thing: I gave it all away and left that way of life, which was not bringing me what I wanted. I didn't know what else to do, but I found Zen and this, after a time, brought me what I was seeking all along. I think what I wanted is the same thing that everyone wants—to accept myself without conditions, happiness, solidity, intelligence, lack of fear, health (emotional, spiritual…the whole thing), and quality relationships. Isn't that what everyone wants? I'm just guessing but I think it is.

At that juncture I chose to leave "the world" behind and close myself off from one realm and open myself into to another, and my choice was Zen. I chose that path because it held out the hope that I could learn to get beyond the horrors I had experienced that dwelled in memories too egregious to live with. These horrors occupied my unending thoughts, whether asleep or not, and Zen was all about cleansing my mind by suspending thought. Somehow I knew, what may seem obvious: that suffering was happening in my mind and I knew enough to realize if I was to ever find relief I would have to go to where the root cause was found. I lived in a Zen

monastery for nine months during which time I joined hands with Dante and walked through the bowels of the Hell I had created. When my journey came to an end I had drained myself of the infinite swamp of corruption, fear, self-hatred and doubt that dwelt in memory only and cleansed my heart and mind of contamination. I felt as though I had discovered a cure for cancer, or any of a myriad other fatal diseases, and I had to find a way to pass my discovery on to others, who I knew were also hurting. And the only way I could imagine was to go to seminary.

I discovered something very rare and special during that time: when all cognitive processes are gone, what remained was emptiness—the face of God, not as God is imagined, but as Meister Eckhart,[3] a German Christian theologian, philosopher, and mystic who lived 700 years ago clarified. To him, as for me, there was a distinction between God and the idea of God, which he framed as "*divine essence—is-ness.*" By the time I arrived at seminary I had seen that ineffable face and knew that God was the

[3] Meister Eckhart, a German Christian theologian, philosopher, and mystic who lived 700 years ago, is seen as a mystical companion of Buddhism. Johannes Eckhart, Mystische Schriften: In Unsere Sprache Übertragen von Gustav Landauer, Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, originally published by (Axel Junckners Buchhandlung), Berlin, Germany, 1903, translation by Karl Schnabel.

source of everything—the very same perfection I had experienced within myself. So I began to construct a new life blending thoughts with no thoughts: God in my heart and thoughts in my head.

Seminary was a most curious experience for me. Theology is all about words, thinking and objectifying what I knew could never be adequately expressed in words. The study of theology was thus most frustrating as I grappled to fuse my ineffable experience with an abstraction of the same thing. It was a process that took years for me to assimilate the two with some continuous and serious academic study. I found myself in constant conflict with people who wanted to do what I had rejected: fill their heads with words and abstractions of an experience I knew were a road to nowhere. Nevertheless I realized that if was ever going to be able to convey the experience with which I had been graced I had to travel the path they had chosen. There was no way to meet them at that place of indescribable perfection. It took me 30 years more before I was ready. I suppose it was like a pianist who must practice until the music comes out of them naturally.

While in seminary I encountered a message spoken by Jesus Christ in the middle of the beatitudes that said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."* (Matt. 5:8) Among other things I learned in seminary was how to read Koine Greek: The language used to write the New Testament. The passage is not well understood in English but it spoke

directly to me when read in Greek. When I grasped the essence of that statement, I found the key that unlocked the bridge between Zen (the discipline transcendent to words) and Christianity (a religion of words). I had learned that in Zen, words are considered as reflections: illusions of matters too deep to grasp with our true mind—dreams that dance on hot pavement and create heat waves. To ordinary Christians the heat waves are all.

So what was the key contained in that passage (*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*)? First, it's necessary to understand what the authors of the New Testament meant by the Greek word λόγος (e.g., Logos, English translation for The Word). Unlike our contemporary understanding of words, λόγος meant the embodiment of meaning expressed abstractly of the ineffable: the very matter that had bent my brain for years on end. What Jesus Christ intended in that statement of purity was to cleanse our hearts of an admixture of thoughts, whether good or evil.

When Western man imagines heart he think of the organ that pumps blood. But to the Greeks the heart was the center of life, just as it is in most mystical traditions. However, to people of Zen, there is no difference between the heart and the mind and was known first by the Chinese as "xin" and later by the Japanese as "shin," and there is a profound statement in both Chinese Zen (Chan) and Japanese: "Mu shin, Shin." The little "shin" means that admixture of thought that affects our hearts,

whether good or evil. When the admixture is gone, then "Shin" arises: the face of God comes out of that space of emptiness where our true nature and everything comes from. Shin is the unity between our corporal selves and the source of all, and these two as it turns out, are really not two. Shin is the embodiment of God within this limited body and when anyone experiences that fusion the world is changed forever, as it was for me.

It wasn't known until recently that an exchange had taken place between the East and the West that began as far back as the 6th century BCE following the death of Gautama Buddha, due to the diaspora of Buddhism out of India along the Silk Road to the West. As it spread from India to the West, a comingling of cultures took place. Alexander the Great's conquest occurred right in the middle of this geographic expansion. So, as Buddhism was spreading west, Alexander was moving east along the same route.

The latest archeological discovery of the Maya Devi Temple in Lumbini, Nepal (the birth place of Gautama Buddha) fixes his life in the 6th century BCE. He died somewhere close to 400 BCE (+/- 20 years, by most estimates). The Buddhist diaspora spread via the Silk Road, through Asia Minor, Central Asia and eventually as far to the west as the Balkans, arriving in the Middle East during the time of Plato (428/427 BCE–348/347 BCE). From 326 BCE, when he first invaded India, until 10 CE (nearly three hundred years later), the prevailing

religion from India throughout the Far East and into the Middle East was a syncretic mixture of Hellenism and Buddhism known as Greco-Buddhism.

At that time in history, the Balkans included ancient Greece and philosophers who accompanied Alexander the Great, during his conquests to the East, carried Buddhist thought back to Greece. Alexander's conquest ended in India at the battle of the Hydaspes River in 326 BCE and he died three years later. During his eastern conquest several Greek philosophers, such as Pyrrho, Anaxarchus and Onesicritus, were allegedly selected by Alexander to accompany him, and thus the exchange commenced. Pyrrho then returned to Greece and became the first Skeptic and the founder of the school named Pyrrhonism.

Upon the death of Alexander, a struggle for succession of power began, ending when General Seleucus defeated his adversary in 312 BCE and started the Seleucid Empire that lasted for 259 years, ranging from northern India to the Balkans. Meanwhile Buddhist thought was being well established back in Greece and is documented by quotes of philosophers of the time:

"Nothing really exists, but human life is governed by convention, and nothing is in itself more this than that." (Diogenes Laertius IX.61) Another of these philosophers,

Onesicritus, a Cynic, is said by Strabo to have learnt in India the following precepts: *"That nothing that happens to a man is bad or good, opinions being merely dreams. The best philosophy is that which liberates the mind from both pleasure and grief."* (Strabo, XV.I.65)

The Allegory of the Cave (also known as Plato's Cave, or the Parable of the Cave) was presented by the Plato in his work The Republic: a major work that reflects the fundamental understanding that perceptible life is like a shadow whereas real life occurs by enlightened beings perceiving the shadows. Numerous Buddhist teachings took root throughout this region, with some prime examples of their influence being found in such works those mentioned, depicting what is essentially the Buddhist understanding of illusion and the role of the Bodhisattva. Nearly all educated people across the Middle East studied Greek philosophy as a primer for their view of the world and the nature of being human. It is thus not surprising that there are many points in common between fundamental Buddhist thought and the teaching of Jesus Christ.

What few recognize is the influence Buddhist thought had on the development of early Christianity. What has never been established is the direct impact this had on Jesus Christ, but what has been established is the effect on the emergence and proliferation on a branch of early Christianity known as Gnostic Christianity. During the formative years of the nascent and emerging Christian Church, there

was no structure like what exists today. During this era, a branch of Christian mystics (with thoughts quite similar to Zen) arose.

The original Christian Gnostics maintained that genuine liberation was a matter of an inner experience or contemplation such as an internal epiphany. This knowing was an intimate and personal affair of the heart and did not rely on faith in ecclesiastical authority. Their teachings came into conflict with the Church orthodoxy and were destroyed. As an example of the uniformity among mystics, consider this view from Rumi, one among many Muslim mystic, who likewise expressed views quite similar to Zen and the Gnostics. His understanding of experiencing our essence was expressed as, *"Let silence take you to the core of life."*

The church, expectedly, rejected this threat to their hierarchy and the result has been to separate people throughout Christendom from any grasp of their own truth by requiring them to go through a filter of dogma and church authority. Strangely, this is exactly what Jesus Christ warned against.[4]

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[4] Luke 12:1-3, *"Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be*

This stance, understandably, soon came to be seen as a threat to church authority, and the movement was suppressed and ultimately destroyed. However, before their movement was brought to an end, they hid their scrolls in an earthen jar, which were then discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945. What was initially considered to be worthless turned out to be a collection of thirteen ancient books (called "codices") containing over fifty Gnostic texts, including scriptures such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Truth. The translation of these scriptures was completed in the 1970s, and has provided impetus to a major re-evaluation of early Christian history and the nature of this mystical form of Christianity. The discovery has radically changed our understanding of the early Christians and shown the correspondence between what Jesus Christ was recorded as having taught and fundamental Buddhist tenets. It is thus not surprising to grasp that the essential message of Jesus Christ was the same as that of Gautama Buddha: Unconditional, non-discriminate love (agápē; a word found only in the New Testament).

This is radically different from Christianity, for example, which sees Jesus Christ as unique—the "Only" Son of God (at least within Christian orthodoxy). However, with Gnostic Christianity, Jesus

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heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.'"

Christ taught a very different message: *"Jesus said, If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty.'"*[5] The Dharma says that the kingdom lies within each of us. Jesus Christ taught the same thing, as expressed in the Gnostic gospels but his teachings are not as central to Christianity as the Dharma is to Buddhism. Gautama Buddha taught that to see the Dharma was to see himself (no difference between the man and his teachings). Of course, Jesus Christ taught this also, that to see him was to see the Father, but what Jesus Christ taught carries less weight than who he was considered to be (the one and only son of God). To the ordinary Christian, Jesus Christ alone carries the spirit of God. To a devout Buddhist the spirit inhabits all things. Thus awakening is understood as a potential for enlightenment here and now in everyone, and this awakening to how the world works—what Gautama Buddha experienced and passed on—is now *The Dharma* and a fundamental aspect of his enlightened view entails dependent origination—

[5] The Gospel of Thomas 3 (http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gthlamb.html)

the union between the phenomena and the noumena: the seen and the unseen.

It is now clear that there is a very interesting correspondence between Gnostic views and those of Zen. Quite naturally the orthodox Christian Church was not pleased with what these gospels revealed. There have been numerous advocates of meditation within Christianity (as well as other religions). One such person was a Catholic Saint (Father Pio de Pietrelcina), who is quoted as having said, *"Through the study of books one seeks God; by meditation one finds him."*

Translating and grasping essential meaning is always problematic. The underlying essence of the teachings of Jesus Christ often left his disciples perplexed. His use of parables and metaphors frequently left them confused. Because of the depth of his teachings, and his being an outlier to Jewish conventional wisdom, his followers were left bewildered. This remains true even to this day. Could Jesus Christ possibly have been misunderstood? Of course. For example, when he said in the Beatitudes, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,"* we read it as a moral imperative compelling us toward an exemplary achievement without flaw. But why not understand this as purity—meaning the lack of conditionality—since the nature of God is supposed to be unconditional? When there are no conditions, all that remains is the unconditional, which is absolutely consistent with dependent origination.

As a frame of reference, compare this imperative from The Christ about purity of heart to a famous statement from Bodhidharma: *"The mind is the root from which all things grow. If you can understand the mind, everything else is included. It's like the root of a tree. All the tree's fruit and flowers, branches and leaves depend on its root. If you nourish its root, a tree multiplies. If you cut its root it dies…When a great bodhisattva delves into perfect wisdom he realizes that the four elements and the five shades are devoid of a personal self (anatman/ego—my addition). And he realizes that the activity of his mind has two aspects: pure and impure. By their nature, these two mental states are always present. They alternate as cause or effect depending on conditions, the pure mind delighting in good deeds, the impure mind thinking of evil. Those who aren't affected by impurity are sages. They transcend suffering and experience the bliss of nirvana. All others trapped by their impure mind and entangled by their own karma, are mortals. They drift through the three realms and suffer countless afflictions, and all because* their impure mind obscures their real self."[6]

This statement, perhaps better than anything else, sums up the dilemma concerning our contemporary crisis of trying to fill the poverty of spirit with mate-

[6] From The Breakthrough Sermon—The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma (Translated by Red Pine)

rial excess. It is our impure, rational mind with the unending lust that obscures our real self. The other personal self (ego) is an illusion that takes us into a quagmire of woe.

The Apostle Paul, more than any other is responsible for the writing of the New Testament and because he was reared in a Greek and Roman environment, he received a thorough education in the Greek language, history, and culture. It is highly unlikely that he didn't absorb this blend, even though he may not have been aware of the roots. By the time of his life, the syncretism had become common coin. The story of his epiphany, as recorded in the book of Acts (chapter 9:1-19), would satisfy the conditions of a mystical "sudden awakening" laid out by Zen Master Huineng (discussed later). The similarities are indisputable. While not a proof of his knowledge of Buddhist principles, there is one text in particular, in the book of Romans that suggests the association. *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*[7] Now compare this to the teaching of The Buddha—*"The greatest action is not conforming with the world's ways. The*

[7] Romans 12:2

greatest goodness is a peaceful mind. The greatest meditation is a mind that lets go."[8]

It is a gross mischaracterization of basic Christianity as being different from basic Buddhism since both teach the same thing, but seen only by digging deep into the roots of both Christianity and Buddhism. What has unfortunately occurred is for modern Christians to have blended a distorted understanding of the teachings of The Christ with Old Testament Judaism resulting in a mismatch between an "eye for an eye" discriminatory conflict of specialness, versus universal acceptance and brotherhood among all people. Nothing in the New Testament supports discrimination. Quite the opposite. The essential teaching in this new covenant is unconditional, non-discriminate love.

I've noticed when I mention Zen to most people who don't know what it is, the eyebrow arches and the red light of caution kicks in, most especially Christians. I've tried explaining that Zen simply means meditation of a particular kind that, if routinely practiced delivers the qualities of life stated above. I do say it is not a threat to basic Christian teachings, but their fundamentalist leaders have told them otherwise. I don't say it is about escaping

[8] Walter Taminang, Perspectives on Mankind's Search for Meaning (June 18, 2008), Publisher: Walter Taminang

into the mountains, wearing flowing robes, chanting in some foreign language and hanging out among people they'd rather not be seen with. Zen, in a pure sense, is not an esoteric religious matter. In truth it is the most practical of matters. I say further it is a psycho-spiritual discipline that builds a genuine grasp of who you really are, rewires your brain to enhance compassion and intelligence, and diminishes the part of your brain responsible for fear, anxiety and stress. It is not a "pop-a-pill-instant-nirvana" proposition. To reap the benefits it's necessary to practice, but that is true for anything. If you want to be a marathon champion, you need to start slow and build up gradually with routine practice. Your body adapts slowly. It is the same with Zen, only it's your mind that adapts. You get back in proportion to the time and energy you invest. Learning the essential skill is not difficult. The hard part is rearranging your life-style to practice routinely and then having the requisite discipline to get rid of the chaff and find the kernels of worth within. I have found that few people are willing to make this adjustment. Instead they stay wedded to that path to oblivion, apparently believing that just around the corner lies what they are seeking, but have never found "yet." For such people more of the same draws them tighter and tighter into the circle of possessions, with less and less payoff. As they chase the rabbit of excess, satisfaction runs away faster and faster. And because the lure involves so many, the process of depletion (just like Limits foretold) is speeding up. The craving toward the end is consuming and paranoid. Perhaps

people simply never understood what Zen is really, and it is for such people that I write here.

Self-esteem has become the gold standard by which we measure our lives. If this premise were established on solid ground, there would be nothing wrong. Genuine self-esteem emanates from who we truly are down deep, not who we think we are. Yet who we think we are has become the measure by which we govern our lives, individually and collectively. Genuine self-esteem is not the way in which the self is ordinarily understood. The self of ordinary understanding is a mirage: a ghost, an impostor or phantasm we have come to know as an ego. An ego, by definition is an image (self-image)—an idea we hold about ourselves, and like all ideas it is vulnerable and dependent. We dress this idea up with an infinite wardrobe, the more expensive and luxurious the better. What does it matter if we spend a couple of thousand on a pair of shoes? It enhances our image and makes us feel good (for a moment). What does it matter if we buy a house, with all of the latest bells and whistles, for a couple of million? It sends a statement to our friends and associates that we're important and again enhances our image. What is the harm of giving excessive tax breaks to the wealthy, while at the same time we cut off those most in need? It aligns us with the "right people" who are now indebted to us and again reinforces our image. The harm in such excess is that all of it is geared toward embellishing a ghost and keeps us ignorant of our true worth, which lies hidden beneath this mirage. Such activity does nothing

for establishing our true worth. It simply perpetuates a lie that our worth is equivalent to excess and the pursuit of this lie is doing precisely what Limits said it would. Most astute people can see what is happening yet few understand why or what to do to slow the flow. The ego self lies at the heart of the lust for more and is the basis for alienation, fear and hostility toward others.

At this stage in the human journey, the whole world seems to be teetering at a precarious balance point. People across the entire Middle East are erupting in anger and causing a sea of refugees running for their lives. All the while we remain convinced the solution comes either from commercial trade, war or diplomacy. The latter is based on the premise that political freedom is the answer. It isn't. After decades, the people of China and India have kicked into high gear and are carving off their own slice of the good life. In the meantime, the western world, (Europe and the United States) having enjoyed the good life, is now discovering the emptiness and unaffordability of the constant pursuit of more. True freedom is not free when it entails the endless pursuit of limited material excess. Freedom and happiness are matters of the heart and of the mind. You can't buy them or get them from politicians, achieve it through commerce or war, by fleecing wealthy high flyers or playing the role of an inverse Robin Hood. If these qualities don't come from within, they won't come at all. If we haven't learned that lesson yet, we are destined to keep inheriting the wind and will pay the ultimate price.

The world is not an inherently scary place. It is a joyous and abundant place. We don't have to live a life of fear and anxiety and spending billions upon billions, on more and more sophisticated weaponry, and more and more prisons to house people who never received enough to be well. The world becomes a scary place because we make it that way, and we make it that way because we hoodwink ourselves with the flawed notion that feeding the ego and obtaining more is better. More is not better. Less is best, but only once you find what you desire within yourself. The central, core question is why are we living at all? Is it an opportunity to feed an insatiable hunger for more and more, at the expense of others? Or just maybe there is a higher purpose. Thích Nhat Hanh offers an insight into that higher purpose when he said: *"We are here to awaken from our illusion of separateness."* That will produce an inexhaustible magnitude of harmony, peace and joy. The other means produces the opposite. Yet the number one obstacle to that needed awakening is our collective delusion of misidentification: We think we are an image; a powerful image which we know as an ego, and are lacking awareness of what lies beyond—our genuine nature.

You might wonder about my motivation for writing this book. The answer is simple: I care about a better quality of life for those I love. My life, like the culture within which I live is coming to an end, so what happens in the years to come won't effect me,

but it will effect my loved ones who continue on after I am gone. And among the wide array of gifts, that Zen has given to me is the awareness that we collectively create and share our world. So in a certain sense you could say that my motive is selfish. I don't know the vast majority of people with whom I share this world, and probably wouldn't like many of them, at least the reflections they equate with who they are. But this I know: We either profit together or we go down together. Nobody is an island. We are joined together. So for my loved ones to prosper, you too must prosper. Life and true love are unconditional. It's a package deal. The truth of Gautama Buddha, and that of Jesus Christ, doesn't belong to any individual. It belongs to humanity. My primary focus in this book will be the mystical discernment through Zen, with occasional references to mystical Christianity. My reason? First of all, by intention, Zen is dogmatically opposed to dogma, and secondly (perhaps because of the first), mystical Christianity has all but passed into an epoch of antiquity, precisely because dogma is at the heart of the religion and is no longer acknowledged by The Church of Christ.

So then the question: Don't we already have enough Zen literature, written by worthy advocates? Ordinarily, Zen texts available today remain esoteric, and because of that, and widespread misunderstandings, the Dharma (the ultimate truth) has not gained traction or the necessary critical mass to make a difference. This is likewise true for a stripped down, non-political, unembellished Chris-

tian canon. What is needed is a more accessible and user-friendly form of mystical Zen that is neither foreign nor abstruse. I write as a regular person for regular people and I am persuaded both, that the truth of Jesus Christ and of Gautama Buddha is life transforming and that too few know of the essence to make a difference. The reason Zen has lived as long as it has is because it has adapted and met people where they live. If that adaptation ceases, Zen will pass into obscurity and the world will be a poorer place, if we survive at all.

An ending note to this introduction: Throughout this book I will use the term “Jesus Christ” for the same reason I use the term “Gautama Buddha.” Both terms point to the title rather than the names of Jesus of Nazareth and Siddhārtha/Shakyamuni. It is my intension to equate the expression “The Mind of Christ” with “The primordial Mind of The Buddha.” Both point to the eternal, unborn/never-ending within us all, to be mystically discerned. In this sense the thought of “bringing Jesus into your heart” is an absurdity equivalent to a notion of bringing air into air. What is eternally present, in no way can be brought into, or created.

Chapter 1—What's Zen?

The Dummies® genre of contemporary books might be an excellent genre for what I'm writing now. Since you've decided to read this book, there's a good chance that you are open minded enough to acknowledge two things: First, that you fit the bill as a dummy, and second that you have a few things to learn. Both of these qualities are essential for learning anything. If we regard ourselves as adequately knowledgeable about a matter, we won't be open to learning. This admission is particularly important when it comes to learning about Zen, because the vast majority of the human race believes they know about Zen and there are strong odds they don't. Being ignorant and being a dummy are kissing cousins. A dummy is the person and being ignorant is what makes the person a dummy.

We are all born ignorant—all dummies, and as we live and try out things, we learn, and hopefully become less ignorant. But learning rests on the premise of being open-minded. Being closed-minded means that we have persuaded ourselves that there is nothing to learn, or we are threatened by what we may learn. Perhaps by learning something new we might see a need to relinquish cherished views and we are reluctant to do so. But making mistakes is vitally important to learning and becoming less of a dummy, and more importantly, acknowledging mistakes is central to any solution. Just because we make mistakes doesn't mean that we will confess.

Unless we make mistakes we don't figure out what doesn't work. Ignorance is not bliss. It leads us all into suffering, but unless we suffer we'll never become aware of something that needs fixing. Of course many people suffer in silence, fearing that to acknowledge error puts them in a bad light. That is their ego talking. Others live in states of denial, choosing a fabricated fantasy to their own grim realities. The result of such patterns of denial and fear is that we can't acknowledge error, thus we stay stuck and suffer even more. Growth and learning require honesty, forgiveness, compassion and more than a little bit of frustration—with what doesn't work.

If nothing else, we humans are problem solvers, but we only solve problems of which we are aware. We tend to not fix something we think isn't broken. If it works, we leave well enough alone. Unfortunately, often times we construct mental and emotional fantasies to cope, or wait until a problem is so huge that it crushes us before we have a chance to get it fixed, resulting in the need for insight and wisdom. As we will see, as we progress through this book, ignorance is the mother lode of the Buddhist understanding regarding suffering and the alleviation of suffering. The Dummies® genre of books could have been the perfect venue for learning about Zen, simply because people who gravitate to that genre have already taken the most important first step: Admitting they have something to learn. More about this later, but for now let's delve into the topic of Zen.

When we think about Zen, we ordinarily group it together into the compound thought of "Zen Buddhism." So then we think we've got it pegged as a branch on the Buddhist tree just like we think of Methodists being a branch on the Protestant Christian tree, or Tibetan and Tantric Buddhism as being similar branches on the religious tree of Buddhism—a branch or a subset of the larger plant. That is the ordinary way of categorizing Zen, and it is sadly both a truthful, and an inadequate beginning. Zen is an ancient form of mysticism, still practiced today, as all forms of mysticism are, by a limited number of passionate seekers. Mysticism has generally come to be understood as meaning the thrust toward "union with the Absolute, the Infinite, or God" by means of an altered state of consciousness. Nearly all recognized religions are associated with some form of mysticism, although all religious institutions denigrate, to some degree, their mystical arm. A partial list would be: Zen (Buddhist), Gnosticism (early Christian), Sufism (Islam), Kabbalah (Jewish) and Advaita Vedanta (Hindu). While every religious form conflicts with other religious forms, all mystical traditions are nearly identical. The truth, when mystically discerned, is universal: it is unconditional. On the other hand, truth dependent upon religious forms is relative, even though each and every one says they alone know the truth while others do not. There is an ancient mystical proverb that says, *"There are many roads to the top of the mountain. The only one that's a road to nowhere is the one that claims*

to be the only one." My life experience bears witness to the truth of this adage.

Zen is, of course, a word, a Japanese word, that represents a practice of something as well as certain principles, which usually define it as a discipline. But Zen didn't begin in Japan. It began in India and then moved on to a host of countries, where the name changed into the language of that land. Originally the name was dhyāna (a Sanskrit word). When it moved out of India and into China it became Chán. In the Pali language, it is known as Jhāna, Seon in Korean, Thiền in Vietnamese, and Samten in Tibetan—lots of different names for the same thing. So much for the etymology lesson, but none of that says what is Zen.

Zen, in the purest sense, is something you do. Importantly, critically so, it is not a philosophy in the ordinary sense, although it becomes a way of life once it bears fruit. Zen is not about rationally figuring out things or philosophizing. A philosopher is someone who contemplates life and tries to construct a rational model to describe certain dimensions of life. Thinking in that rational manner is the antithesis of Zen. In fact, the alleged father of Zen (a gentleman by the name of Bodhidharma) said that Zen is "not thinking," which to the ordinary way of grasping things sounds bizarre. How can anything contrary to thinking be of value? Thinking is an application of being conscious, just as seeing or hearing are, and so long as we are thinking we

can't access our fundamental being of consciousness.

So let's first say what Zen is not, before moving on to what is Zen. It is not a set of rationally configured constructs—a dogmatic framework or a one-size-fits-all formula, which we can apply to anything and everything. It is not embellishment of truth. Truth stands glowingly by itself and doesn't require additions. In Buddhist lingo, "suchness" is what things truly are; and Gautama Buddha referred to himself as the Tathagata, "One who has arrived at suchness." In other words, he saw the truth and his understanding became known as the Dharma. The way we imagine, or wish things to be, or imagine they are, is delusion, which emanates from ignorance. Unless we awaken to the truth, we are living in a state of delusion without knowing it, and we pay the price of suffering. There are many ways in which we do not see things as they truly are, and all of these distortions of reality fall into the category of ignorance and delusion. Zen is not, contrary to many misconceptions, a religion. It isn't a noun—a something. At the core of Zen is nothing. There are lots of not's and the not's are as important as the is's.

I'll be using this term Zen throughout this book, so it is important that we understand the term in order to make some progress in becoming less ignorant. Think of a bamboo stalk. The outside of bamboo is prolific and abundant, yet the inside is seemingly empty: just a hollow reed. In spite of this appar-

ently empty inside, the outside is connected to, and emerges out of this emptiness, into a great objective configuration. From the outside we can see this configuration, but no one can see the inside unless we cut it down, in which case it would die. Inside–outside, a single plant: both empty and unseen, yet prolific and evident. The practice of Zen is the inside. Buddhism is the outside. Zen is the heart, the sap, which runs through the veins of all Buddhist forms. In truth Zen is not Buddhist per se, which means that Zen stands independently apart from Buddhism and can and does find its way into many mystical traditions. It would be completely accurate to say that Buddhism couldn't exist—at least in the forms by which it is known—without Zen, which stands at the center of all Buddhist configurations. Without Zen, enlightenment could not occur. But that doesn't mean that you can't be enlightened unless you're a Buddhist. Plenty of people awaken who are not Buddhist, but it is not possible to awaken without Zen, because meditation is the mental technology that moves us beyond the prison of rational and conceptual abstractions to a place of suchness.

The normal understanding of a religion is *"A communal system for enabling coherent beliefs focusing on a body of thought which defines the supernatural, the sacred, the divine, or the highest truth."* And the etymology of the word religion means to "re-bind" or "re-link" what has been broken. In nearly every religion, the fundamental premise is that we humans have been cut off from

our source; and the religious mandate is to reestablish this broken link. How that re-linking is supposed to happen varies from one religion to another, and even within individual religious sects. But Zen is not concerned with this philosophical conundrum of brokenness, since Zen is by nature transcendent to rational speculation about metaphysics. It is singularly focused on just one matter: the human mind. Zen asks us to move beyond believing, to the base of all belief and thought. It has nothing to say regarding what we should or shouldn't think or believe. Instead, it is about the source of all thought.

Zen means meditation of a particular sort. Today there are many different forms of meditation (which I'll be discussing later), but initially there was only Zen/dhyāna. The practice of Zen is exactly the same mental technology Gautama Buddha employed to achieve his enlightenment (otherwise known as awakening), and dhyāna is one of the steps designated by Gautama Buddha which, when taken along with others, can lead all people to their own awakening. Dhyāna is the final step of the Eight-Fold Path laid out by Gautama Buddha. It also goes by the handle of "Right concentration" (samyak-samādhi/sammā-samādhi), as its Sanskrit and Pali names indicate. It is the practice of mental concentration (samādhi). And this step is what we use to learn about our own minds, which brings us to the important point: the Mind itself.

In various Buddhist scriptures (known as sūtras), Gautama Buddha speaks about the mind in a most curious, yet fascinating way. What we learn by reading these sūtras is that the true mind is beyond study. To study anything, there must be an object to study, but the mind is not an object. We can study anything objective, but the one doing the study is an indefinable, conscious subject—who we are. We, like the bamboo, are both an objective manifestation as well as the emptiness inside. In fact, according to his teaching, the mind both exists and doesn't exist—curious thought. But when looked at closely, it starts to make sense. It is helpful to think of the mind as a source instead of a manifestation. A tree grows out of the ground. Our thoughts and emotions grow out of our mind. What we ordinarily think of as our mind are thoughts and emotions (e.g., that's the part that is unreal). The part that is real is that indefinable, conscious source. From a Zen point of view, thoughts and emotions are manifestations. Mind is the ground of existence; all existence. In fact, in certain Zen teachings, mind is all; yet as Gautama Buddha taught, the true mind can't be seen or found. It is the source, and a source can't detect a source. A source can detect manifestations, but not itself. So Zen meditation (a redundant expression) is using the mind to discover and learn about itself, and this is done mostly by watching the absence of thinking and noticing the emergence and ceasing of thoughts and emotions. The question, the central question, in this entire practice is, who or what, is watching this coming and going and the absence of both? The discovery of the answer leads

us all to genuine self-awareness, and thus out of ignorance, despair, and suffering, on to true awakening, wisdom and bliss. When we awaken to the truth of our existence, we stop being dummies and lusting for more and more. When you truly know who you are, there is no need for more. Then you know you're already complete. The Buddhist Dharma (essential truth about life) says that we suffer because we are ignorant of our true nature. In short, we misunderstand ourselves. We identify with objective manifestations, which are in a state of continual flux and decay, and thus crave the preservation of good stuff and resist bad stuff. We desire more and more of one sort and less and less of another. But the nature of objective/conditional life is constant change—here today, gone tomorrow.

As we will see, according to Zen practice, genuine self-awareness is transcendent and continuous. We are not a static "it," at least on the conditional level, and yet at the deepest part of our being (which is indescribable) we are a constant, unchanging reality, which is the same for everyone. This deepest aspect of our beingness is who we are. We are beyond rational understanding yet continuously evolving; a dynamic non-entity that also never changes. Curious thought: change yet no change at the same time. Our true nature is awareness itself, pure, non-applied consciousness, what some call "Christ consciousness" or "The Bodhi Mind (Bodhicitta)"—The mind that perceives. We can neither think ourselves into or out of existence. We are not a thought or an image that we call an ego. We are

not an emotion. These are manifestations. Our true self is not a self at all. It is pure awareness, which can take on an infinite set of configurations through consciousness. When we see an object, there is visual consciousness. When we smell an aroma, there is olfactory consciousness, and on throughout the aggregation and co-mingling of sensory faculties, including the mental sense. Every sensory dimension is rooted in the mind of awareness, which can't be seen. It is who and what we are, before and following all manifestations. Our mind, according to Zen thought and experience, is a constant. It never changes. It is not born. It doesn't die. This life is eternal, unconditional and ubiquitous. Life, as we conventionally use the term, is not life but rather a manifestation of mind. And true life is not mine or yours.[9] We will soon come to the fundamental

[9] While perhaps somewhat foreign to the modern eye, this manner of understanding life is not completely dissimilar from the ancient Greek understanding, and their views were foundational to the language and construction of the Bible. Both views (Greek and Buddhist) saw life in three aspects: A source and two manifestations. From the Greek perspective the source was called Zoe and was thought to be the basis or source from which all life arose and returned (life principle or ultimate/eternal life). Buddhists called this the Dharmakāya (body of truth). The two manifestations were Bios and Psuche (Greek) and Nirmanakāya and Sambhogakāya (Buddhist). The precise understanding between the Greek and the Buddhist grasps of the two manifestations are somewhat different but the understanding of source is

premise of the Dharma and learn that this idea of "I" is a mental fabrication—an illusion, an impostor that is a critical piece of fundamental ignorance, leading us all into the quagmire of suffering. So with that piece of learning about the nature of Zen, let's move on and consider where Zen came from and how it found it's way into your hands.

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the same. In either case ultimate life is unborn, never dies, is ubiquitous and eternal. Unfortunately these subtle and important nuances have been completely glossed over in the English translation of the Bible. Where the Greek text reads Zoe, Bios or Psuche the English reads simply "life" and the reader is thus left uninformed.

Chapter 2—A very short discussion about something that has a very long history.

The story of how Zen found its way into your hands is a very long tale that began even before Gautama Buddha. Scholars argue about many things regarding the facts and hagiography of Gautama Buddha. For an understanding of Zen it isn't necessary to cover the twists and turns of these debates. Entire books have been written that do consider both the apparent facts, compared to the embellished and contrasting stories. While much of it is interesting, none of it really makes much of a difference to the matter of personal transformation.

Before moving forward to Gautama Buddha's contributions, it might be worth considering the cultural landscape and prevailing thoughts about human nature that were in place in India when Gautama Buddha lived. None of us can hope to be completely free of the thought processes, or the cultural presuppositions that exist during our lives, and even given awakening, we are influenced by such thinking. This was as true for Gautama Buddha as it is for us. He lived within a cultural context just as we do and his enlightenment occurred in relationship to a given cultural framework. Sometimes when we look back upon the lives of those who came before us we forget this and impose our fundamentals on them as we try to grasp their contributions. This is a mistake. So what was the thinking in that time and place?

As already pointed out, Buddhism was born from the womb of ancient India. For more than a thousand years preceding the life of Gautama Buddha, Indian sages knew about and practiced the principles of various Yogic methods, all of which were designed to bring about unity with their true nature. The fundamental premise of Yoga, as well as Mahayana Buddhism,[10] is that at the deepest level of existence there is unity, and the nature of that unity is transcendent, unconditional, and without distinction. Furthermore, this base of existence, while imperceptible, is what makes possible our distinctive natures—our relative world. This understanding says that, without this indiscriminate, absolute base, no relative manifestation would be possible and these two—the absolute and the relative—are bonded together. They are two sides of a common coin of existence. Thus there is both a conditional dimension (that of which we are ordinarily aware, based on perception) and an unconditional substratum of non-applied consciousness: the foundation upon which the conditional rests—a ground of being, or in other terms, the primordial mind, which in itself contains nothing but from which everything arises.

The Yogic understanding of this base, and how to reach it were recorded in Vedic literature and in Buddhism, throughout myriad sources. Yoga called this base "TAT" (That). Mahayana Buddhism called

[10] Zen is considered to be a branch on this limb.

it Buddha-Nature. Both agree that everything we know and can know is infused with this imperceptible yet essential force. It is who and what we are. Why do we suffer? Simply put: We suffer due to essential ignorance of our true nature and what grows from that ignorance. We see ourselves as an incomplete and vulnerable image (self-image/ego) that suffers, instead of a substantial and complete reality, which does not suffer. This imaginary ego-being identifies with changing phenomenal dimensions and thus craves the retention of those dimensions that bring pleasure and resists those that disrupt this identification. In other words, we misunderstand our selves as a manifestation instead of a source, yet we take the manifestation as our only reality and thus remain unaware of anything deeper. We see the flaw, because it is objective and can be perceived, but we presume the lack of a substantial, yet unseen reality, precisely because it is non-objective, and that error is the cause driving us toward the abyss.

From the perspective of Yoga, it's important to understand that emotional suffering (dis-ease)—dukkha, and its varied expressions such as depression, anxiety, and manifest forms of stress—stems from craving, attachment, fear, and certain unconscious universal constructs, existing in all unliberated human minds. These constructs form a basis upon which all other, more individualized neuroses are woven and re-woven through a complex association of desires, attachments, and experiences. If these constructs can be deconstructed through yoga

practices, all of the individual neuroses, which they support, will crumble away. Called kleshas (or afflictions), the five following constructs or crystallized thought-forms are described by Patanjali at the beginning of Book 2 of the Yoga Sūtra (1, 2, 4). When you read through the following list, you will be shocked, astonished yet amazed, of just how accurately this ancient wisdom captures our human dilemma, now and throughout all time.

Once the connecting web is seen in a clear light the connections have the chance of being controlled and potentially disappear. The intellectual mind is not enough for this. Various Yoga practices—yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, prathyara, harana and dhyāna (Zen)—will lead the mind toward the necessary purification. Zen maintains that true transformation—not just intellectual awareness—is possible only through awakening: the intuitive, sudden, and direct grasp of the absolute. The kleshas are as follows:

Ignorance of the true nature of reality (Sanskrit: avidya)

This is primal ignorance; that which pervades all of creation. This ignorance is experiential, not conceptual, in nature. To individuals, avidya means that, while the non-dual source of all existence and awareness is pure, all pervasive, immanent, and transcendent, radiating from the core of our being, we do not automatically perceive that this to be the

case. Our individualized and unpurified sensory mind and our sense organs, because they are relatively crude instruments compared to the subtlety of pure consciousness, are incapable of directly perceiving who we are truly. Our mind's higher nature (buddhi—The Mind of Christ) is capable of perceiving the radiant and blissful reflection of the divine self (in Buddhism this is known by various names: Dharmakāya, Buddha-Nature, The One Mind, witnessing presence, Ground of being, etc.), but only when it has been sufficiently purified through persistent practice. For most of us, such purification requires many years of meditation practice, as well as the help of an enlightened teacher. But ultimately, short of this dawning awareness, we are left to fight and attempt to destroy one another, never realizing that our true nature can't be destroyed, but what we are destroying is the vessel within which we live and have our being.

Mis-identification (Sanskrit: asmita)

As individuals, we also have what is called *ahamkara* or "I-maker" (ego). It is a single thought form, the idea (or image) of individualized existence. This single thought of a limited self is enormously convincing, because it pervades the entire body-mind complex. It is the nature of this individual "I-am" sense, or ego, to identify with something phenomenal (e.g., of the senses) and become attached. And because we don't easily perceive the existence of our pure nature, the ahamkara identifies with some sort

of a limited self-concept, usually our body-mind complex, our social identity, our individual attributes of personality or experience, etc., and we then become enslaved to such idea-attachments.

We are born into this world knowing only one thing: This body is mine. But we don't know who the one is claiming the body. The result of this ignorance of our true nature is thus our misidentification with some aspect of limited existence, which is inherently painful because it is incomplete. Once this misidentification occurs, our whole perception of reality is altered, so that the entire universe is divided into me versus not-me, and the objects of our experience are divided into mine and not-mine. This is asmita, or "I–ness," the second klesha.

Attachment (Sanskrit: raga)

However, because the identification with ego was false to begin with, and because what is I is relatively small compared to the large surrounding universe, mostly composed of not me, a sort of existential terror and insecurity result. We don't want to face the overwhelming feelings of terror, so we develop various strategies for distracting ourselves—for enlarging me and for buttressing and preserving our individual, and continually threatened small existence. This leads to the third klesha, raga, attraction (attachment), which creates in us a pattern of acquisition that is the compulsive motive driving the engine for excess. We begin to pursue human

relationships, knowledge, wealth, status, power—anything that might be capable of enlarging and protecting the illusion of a fragile individualized existence. We align ourselves with birds of a feather—like-minded conclaves, who band together against "them." And, most insidiously, we identify with fixed ideas and belief systems, which we accept as hardened givens. But because change is the nature of creation, all objects are impermanent, and thus subject to loss at any moment.

Anger following loss (Sanskrit: dvesha)

In experiencing an object that gives us pleasure, we become attached to that pleasure and desire to experience it again. When the experience becomes unavailable, we feel emotional distress. We blame the not-me for our predicament and lash out in a spirit of retribution, denigrating those who assault our ego. Our spouse, our partner, competitor or support system, whom we loved, depended upon and enjoyed, leaves us for another. We try to persuade her, him or it to return, or we try to find another. When after repeated efforts we are unsuccessful, while our attachment remains strong, our pain and anger turn to depression, helplessness, and finally hatred of the world and ourselves. This is the fourth klesha, called dvesha—the hate that follows after experiencing pain and loss, and we are seeing a rising, seething tsunami of such hatred in our world today. And it was this state of self-hatred that nearly lead me to commit suicide. The institu-

tions, cultural structures, support systems and ideologies upon which we previously relied are collapsing and vengeful hatred is rising to an all time level.

Misunderstanding life and death (Sanskrit: abhinivesha)

Because of ego attachment, a tremendous, continual, and habitual out-flowing of our energy and attention is surging. Emotional stress is exhausting. This outflow of all our attention and energy can only increase our identification with our physical existence, making it even harder for us to perceive or identify with our true spiritual nature. As this delusion progresses we become more and more paranoid; grasping at anything the promises relief, making us easy prey to snake-oil salesmen who offer us what we imagine will save us. Not only do we fear death because it represents an ending of our ability to fulfill our cravings, but we are also identify emotionally with our body-mind complex, and thus (at least subconsciously, if not consciously) fear that our existence will terminate with the death of our physical body. This is the fifth klesha, abhinivesha, the clinging to life, which dominates even the wise.

The tongue cheek, and seemingly uncaring fact is nobody gets out to here alive when the body alone is considered to be life. In 2014 the amount of money spent in the US, alone, for end of life care by Medicare: the largest source of medical insurance in the world, amounted to $170 billion to attempt the im-

possible of saving 2.1 million people, with six months or less left to sustain the body from death. If money is considered as the measure of our worth, then this harsh perspective is a reflection of not finding what lies beneath excess. And such clinging makes us vulnerable to such human practices as terrorism, which is running rampant throughout the world today.

The kleshas are imprinted on individual consciousness[11] from time immemorial creating and perpetuating the illusions that existence is limited to the mind-body complex. The theory says that even after death individual consciousness retains the kleshas in seed form, which sprout to full fruition in the next incarnation. As long as the individual thinks that consciousness is limited to the bodily existence, he or she is forever at the mercy of forces beyond his or her control, snatching a little happiness here and there, but always aware, even if it is on a subconscious level, that sooner or later the body will die and the vehicle of experience will be no more. However, at the core, once awakening occurs we all come to see that our greatest fear (bodily death) does not determine our true essence of life. Indeed, once awakening occurs, we understand that

[11] Sometimes called the sub-conscious mind or the storehouse of consciousness and often understood as a mind-set or disposition, which colors conscious states of mind.

we are all united, equal and it is impossible to wound another without wounding ourselves.

These are the points of commonality between Yoga and mystical Zen. There are differences, of course, but there is more in common than different between the two. Probably the most significant differences are balance and the Buddhist understanding of mind. The Buddhist notion is that the absolute and the relative are essential partners. Neither can exist without the other; they are interdependent, exist in partnership, and create one another. Dependent origination is a central premise of the Buddhist grasp of reality. In truth, so says Buddhism, these are just two aspects of the same unified whole. The notion is one aspect of The Middle Way. To see them as separate matters results in duality, which creates separation, confusion, alienation, and hostility. These two aspects take shape in our individual minds. There is a conditional dimension (which is not real, but an illusion) and an unconditional dimension, out of which arise our perceptions, intellectual (yet illusive) ideas and associated emotions. These two aspects of mind are partners and the thrust of Zen is to penetrate the conditional to reach the unconditional. When that is accomplished, we then discover our eternal and perfect true nature. Then we understand there is a reality that underscores and connects us with our relative world. These two aspects of existence are interdependent.

What is important is that we are here now, and we have real life issues to deal with if we are going to get beyond the rush for more. The tradition and knowledge passed on person by person since Gautama Buddha lived, are relevant, because the nature of being human hasn't changed a whit since then. He had a singular mission in life, and it is the same for us. Gautama Buddha wanted to understand and conquer only one thing: suffering. We suffer in our minds, and the condition has now been labeled mental illness. Physical pain also takes place in the brain/mind, but suffering is mostly an affect, which becomes a response and thus another cause. It's an issue of the mind. Everything is. What and how we perceive life, what occurs following perception (how we mentally process what we perceive—cognition and affectation), what we do with the conclusions we reach, how we relate to each other and the world in which we live, and finally what results from the manner in which we interact with one another—all of this comes from the mind, which of course has something to do with our brain.

To understand the mind, is therefore, of paramount importance to all life. If we think wrongly, we act wrongly. If we act wrongly, our lives will be a mess, and the opposite. Zen is probably the most thoroughgoing exploration of the mind ever conceived, and we owe the knowledge of that exploration to Gautama Buddha and to the Zen patriarchs and followers who came down the road after his time.

As stated in the first chapter, Zen (dhyāna) is the heart and soul of Buddhism but is not necessarily Buddhist. Zen is listed as the last of the eight steps articulated by Gautama Buddha as the solution to suffering. This order (last on the list) has always appeared odd to many, including me. It almost seems to imply that awakening (which results from the practice of Zen) is a payoff for what comes before. But that conclusion has relevance only to those of us who have the tendency to think in linear terms. Westerners, by and large, see life as one matter clearly following discretely upon the heels of what came before, rather than arising in tandem with other things. The circularity of life, in wheel-like fashion, was foundational to the views of those who lived in India 2,500 years ago, so the placement of Zen (last on the list) does not necessarily imply a lesser matter or a reward for what came before. In fact, there are substantial reasons to understand it in reverse order: that doing right follows understanding right, and unless we first clear away the brush, we are hard-pressed to see clearly and thus do right.

"Right View/Understanding" is Gautama Buddha's grasp of reality—his Dharma. In all likelihood,[12] he

[12] The expression "in all likelihood" is used here because, no one can say anything with absolute certainty about anyone who lived that long ago, and that includes Gautama Buddha. Much of what we think we know about the man and his life must be based on spurious

experienced enlightenment in his young adult life (or so we are told) and lived a long life afterwards. Before he died, at somewhere around eighty years of age, he formed a community of disciples to whom he passed on what he had seen when he awakened and saw the light. His teachings are known as the Dharma—his transcendent understanding of reality, why humans suffer, what to do about it and how the world works. The communities he established were called sanghas, sort of expanded spiritual conclaves. For the most part, these sanghas were for renunciates (monks and nuns) who left home and all means of support to dedicate themselves to finding their own psycho-spiritual release. Buddhism is a religion geared toward liberation and the prescriptions laid out by Gautama Buddha embrace that purpose.

During his quest, he too, had left home—apparently a life of excessive indulgence, and pursued a path of austere deprivation, believing that to achieve his goal it was necessary to subdue the lusts of the flesh. It didn't work, and he took himself to the edge of death before coming back from the brink. He then awoke. The result of this crushing conclusion was The Middle Way—a balance between the extremes of excess and deprivation and his realization that the spirit, mind, and body must be a single, in-

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documentation, but, as we shall see, what he taught (even according to him) is much more important than who he was.

divisible matrix within which liberation can occur: feet on the ground; a soaring heart beyond.

He passed on his Dharma to these renunciates, who likewise passed it on to others. The manner in which Zen (as opposed to Buddhism) was transmitted is perhaps unique among all spiritual traditions. Zen is known as a silent tradition, for reasons, that will be explained later. The story of the initial transmission concerns Gautama Buddha and his first disciple Mahākāśyapa.

"Not relying on words or letters.
An independent transmission outside the teaching of the scriptures.
Directly pointing to man's Mind.
Awakening of one's (Original) Nature, thereby actualizing one's own Buddhahood."

A fundamental premise that flows from this statement is that each and every person can awaken to his or her own essential nature. This way of transmitting the essence of mind was, and continues to be, both a blessing and a curse, and takes any conversation regarding Zen to the issue of substantial inherency (covered shortly). Nothing was written down for a few hundred years, so the scriptural evidence we have today is somewhat in question. In fact not much is known of how, by whom, when and where Zen continued until the early 5th century CE. The dating of Gautama Buddha's death is set at approximately 486 to 483 BCE, which means that roughly a thousand years passed with virtually no

information about what was going on with the practice of Zen. However it is known that Buddhism came out of India and moved in every direction: to the south into Southeast Asia, to the north into China, to the west along the Silk Road, and into the Middle East. However, by losing the label of Zen, and traveling backward in time, there is recorded evidence of dhyāna being practiced in India, found 7,000 years ago in the Rig Veda, which is perhaps the oldest book in the world.

There is no doubt that the stories of transmission were embellished. This is typical of all religious movements, so we must all learn to find separate wheat from chaff to discover our own truth. This does not mean that we should throw the baby out with the bathwater. It simply means that we must guard against believing that what is in all likelihood hagiography, is historical fact. Many religious zealots seem to be unable to separate the wheat from the chaff. Dogma (e.g., the unquestioning allegiance to religious teachings) was, and continues to be anathema to the practice of Buddhism in general, and Zen in particular. The Buddha in The Kālāma Sutta laid out the standard of belief, and conduct.[13]

[13] "Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing,
nor upon tradition,
nor upon rumor,
nor upon what is in a scripture,
nor upon surmise,

It must be pointed out; this reliance upon the mystical discernment of truth is in no way at odds with that of other mystical traditions.

Because of dogmatic convictions, and others, Zen advocates have chosen to address the mind almost without scriptural study, which can, and usually does, lead to debate and controversy. Indeed they have elected to do as Gautama Buddha did: to practice dhyāna, (now called zazen—sitting Zen) almost exclusively. The nature of Zen (as opposed to Buddhism) is and has been minimalist. Whereas permutation of Buddhism can be heady and intellectual, Zen is a discipline of silence. This choice requires a brief look into the fundamental nature of the human condition. Are we inherently evil, inherently good, or a combination of both? The answer to that question varies, not only from one spiritual tradition to another, but also within traditions. Buddhism parted company over that issue with the

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nor upon an axiom,
nor upon specious reasoning,
nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over,
nor upon another's seeming ability,
nor upon the consideration, the monk is our teacher.

Kalamas, when you yourselves know: *'These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them."*

Hindu cultural landscape that existed during the time of Gautama Buddha. The Hindu stance was that we had an indwelling essence of goodness—an element of God incarnate, called Brahma (an atman or a soul) that was eternal and lay dormant awaiting manifestation through various rituals. Accordingly, so the argument went, we were essentially good but lost and evil due to ignorance and delusion.

Gautama Buddha initially rejected this notion of a permanent atman, at least as a conceptual configuration, but instead emphasized what has come to be known as the three Dharma seals: impermanence, anatman (no soul), and suffering. His justification for that view related to craving, which he saw as the cause of suffering. To crave anything, even the idea of an eternal soul, he said, leads to suffering. All of phenomenal life is in flux. Nothing is fixed; thus to cling to ephemeral matters creates dis-ease. The clinging keeps us from life as we guard our flanks and attempt to encapsulate change: a delusive impossibility.

The offshoot of this thrust, in answer to the question of inherent goodness or evil, is that there is nothing of substance inherently within us. Thus emptiness (sunyata) became the operative condition, but not the sort of understanding we normally think of when wrestling with the idea of vacuity. Sunyata means not dependent or linked to either goodness or evil. I'll be addressing this important topic later on. Suffice it to say for now that followers of early Buddhism thought that the road to lib-

eration must be seen as letting go of the idea of substantial inherency. But because of the lack of historical fact, and because of the contention that arises over the matter, Gautama Buddha was suspicious of, and avoided, discussion of philosophy and metaphysics, except when absolutely necessary, which was rarely. The earliest known sūtras, which reflect his initial thinking, countered the idea of permanence and an indwelling essence. Accordingly, phenomena were seen as impermanent. However, subsequent sūtras seemed to contradict this notion and strongly said that, while there was no atman (soul), there was an inherent substance of enlightenment, a wellspring of goodness, which lay obscured beneath the dross of mental delusion and ignorance, resident in everyone. This came to be known as Buddha-Nature, the potential for awakening in all sentient beings. There is an entire corpus of sūtras, known as the Tathagatagarbha series (e.g., the Mahaparinirvana Sūtra, the Srimala Sūtra, the Angulimaliya Sūtra, and the Anunatva-Apurnatva-Nirdesa Sūtra), which unequivocally declares the reality of an awakening essence within each being.

In clear contradistinction to the Dharma seal teachings, these sūtras refer to a transcendent layer of the mind that is unconditional, permanent and full of bliss—the counter point of dukkha, and the possibility for all to experience their own enlightenment and liberation. These sūtras, and the premise that arises from them, became the foundational substance of the practice of Mahayana Buddhism

and Zen. The Zen premise was, and remains, that tangible transformation can only happen IF there is an inherent essence (it can't be created), and it is this wellspring of enlightenment that Zen advocates aspire to unveil.

Is there an essence of goodness and/or evil resident in us? In the final analysis it stops being a matter of intellectual concern and must be a matter of personal experience to make a difference, which is actually consistent with the instructions Gautama Buddha provided: to use one's own experience as the measure of reality. Doubt, rather than blind faith, is a hallmark of Zen. And the mandate is to find out for yourself. The Zen premise is that awakening is possible for everyone during his or her own lifetime, and will emerge if pursued and striven for. The task is thus to sweep away ignorance, and to destroy delusion through dhyāna, so that enlightenment will emerge. It is not a matter of manufacturing, fabrication or divine infusion, but rather revealing what is naturally already within. This premise is the radical difference between Zen and other forms of Buddhism, and indeed other religions, which maintains that evil is the natural human condition short of divine intervention. The entire Zen proposition would have collapsed if the three-Dharma seals of impermanence, anatman and dukkha had remained preeminent. It must be said, however, that there are segments of Zen, as well as Buddhism that still cling dogmatically to the three-Dharma seals posture. I'll address this matter in

greater depth in a later chapter, but for now let's look at how Zen came from ancient India to us.

How can we reconcile these apparently divergent views about substantial inherency? The most likely answer comes from a pedagogical tactic expressed by Gautama Buddha, namely: expedient means (upaya in Sanskrit). The principle of upaya is to teach at the level of the student (an extraordinarily valuable technique used even today by good teachers). Originally, the term had a medical connotation and was intended as a remedy for a specific disease. Since every disease was specific, each disease required a particular remedy. Gautama Buddha was known as the consummate doctor of the mind, and this tactic continues to be a central tactic employed by Zen masters. No person is at the precise same place on the road to liberation as anyone else, and every juncture is unique. Thus the teaching must be adapted to the condition of the student. The first step is different from the last. Before moving to an unconditional platform of ultimate freedom, a student first must become aware of the grasping nature of the phenomenal/conditional realm. Overcoming the ego is a preliminary to becoming truly self-aware. Only once that has been accomplished is one truly ready for final release. Given this progression, there are two sorts of Zen that have emerged: one that is geared toward the three Dharma seal conditions, and another, beyond that, with movement into the unconditional realm. Neither form is wholly right or wrong. Both are appropriate for different stages of spiritual development.

Illusion plays a central role in Zen thought in an interesting way. The notion of illusion can be grasped only against the opposite (substance), and understanding this dynamic is key to grasping an important aspect of mind. Everything can be understood only through comparison. We understand what light is by experiencing the lack of light, or sound by experiencing silence. Zen is a word-less tradition. Buddhism, on the other hand is a tradition of words. The two traditions round out each other. One thing is compared and contrasted to the opposite. If there were only one dimension, there could not be something else, and even the one dimension could not be apprehended nor understood. This is likewise true for illusion and substance, or, to use alternate terms, unreality and reality, or independence and dependence. Each of these opposites defines the other. Another facet of this understanding concerns cause and effect. Political actions are always laced with cause and effect impacts.[14]

[14] Examples of dependent origination are everywhere found throughout our lives. A recent hot potato example concerned the political wrangling, which took place in Washington over raising the federal debt ceiling. Both parties were seeing the need to reign in excess spending, but as always, the devil was in the details. One party was suggesting that cutting Medicare was a precondition for agreeing to raise the ceiling. While on the surface this may have seemed like a good idea, the problem was this link. It is questionable that cutting Medicare would solve this problem without creating another problem. Cause and effect links can't be avoided, and we are wiser to

While each stage may appear to be independent, in truth a dynamic interdependency is functioning behind the scenes; dependent origination—a central construct in grasping the truth of the Dharma. Phenomenal life appears to be solid, and immovable; furthermore, phenomenal life (e.g., of the senses) can exist only in relation to its opposite: noumenal life (e.g., beyond sensory).

We call something an illusion when we can clearly perceive it that way because of the cultural mind-set that prevails and is accepted as valid when we are living. What ancient people accepted as substantial is now seen as absurd illusion, but had you lived (for example) before Galileo, you would have quite naturally accepted the apparent cosmic centrality of the earth. Celestial bodies were seen to be moving across the night sky, so how could anyone think otherwise? Today we watch images on a television screen and accept what we're seeing as an illusion, or a representation (abstraction) of reality. In that frame of mind we don't deceive ourselves into believing that the images are anything other than what they are: an interesting story composed of abstract images. The images move and change. We see them move and change, and stories are woven around the movement and flow. What we ordinarily don't see is that our thoughts and emotions move,

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track the links and acknowledge results rather than foolishly having the wool pulled over our eyes by wily politicians with vested interests.

change, and flow in the same fashion, yet we see them as real, rather than as abstractions of reality. Things are not always the way they appear. Seeing them the way they actually are is suchness—the absence of delusion. Seeing clearly is central to awakening, and this entails illusion.

Take the matter of time. In truth there is no such thing as time as an independent and substantial matter. The principle of time, flows from a condition in our brain. We remember and thus construct "a moment ago." From this we fabricate a history, and from that history we imagine a future. This construction is useful, so we agree with one another and pretend that there really is something called time. The same is true for space. Mr. Einstein (as you may recall) pointed out that we really couldn't adequately discuss time or space separately, since the two are a single matter of space/time. This combined construct appears real, but in point of fact is an illusion (albeit a useful illusion). His most astonishing observation was, *"Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."*[15]

Both dimensions—space/time, originate in a particular part of our brain (the hippocampus), and so long as our brains are functioning in a normal way the useful illusion works. But as soon as there is a

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15 https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/albertein s100298.html

brain glitch, either one or the other (or both) of time and space can get rearranged. Mind (not brain) reflects brain activity; by learning to manage and control our brain, we can modify our sense of the real/unreal. Long before humans knew anything at all about the brain, they knew about the mind. They simply sat and observed their own mental activity, and this became what we know today as meditation.

Zen asks us to see mental activity as illusion, and then to find the opposite substance within us. If there were no watcher, there could be nothing watched. These two dependently originate each other. This relationship was articulated in the Mahaparinirvana Sūtra in these terms: *"Seeing the actions of body and mouth, we say that we see the mind. The mind is not seen, but this is not false. This is seeing by outer signs."*[16] The point here is one of dependent origination. Obviously the body moves, the mouth speaks, and just as obviously body and mouth are set in motion by the unseen mind. We must deduce mind because it can't be seen. Thus mind is considered to be real and unseen, as well as unreal yet seen. In similar fashion, smoke and fire are linked; thus when we see a pillar of smoke rising on the horizon, we imagine an unseen fire. The very first step in learning to meditate is to watch the flow of mental processes and be-

[16] Jesse Russell, Ronald Cohn, Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sūtra, Abe Books, 2016.

come aware that it is an unseen you who is watching. The unseen mind creates the smoke of thoughts and watches it arise. At a later stage in the progression, you learn to dwell purely in the fire of the watcher realm and not become swept up in the interplay. For now let's move forward and consider who brought Zen out of India and to the rest of the world.

As Zen is the central core, around which the religion of Buddhism has grown, the central core around which Zen has grown is the enduring and unresolved conversation regarding the mind. This conversation, much more so than any person or persons, has determined the vector of Zen thought and practice. As previously pointed out, the conversation began over the issue of an inherent essence or soul: an atman versus no essence or soul (anatman), and at the heart of this matter was the compulsion of craving, leading to dukkha. In the early teachings, Gautama Buddha had said that there was nothing inherently substantial and enduring to the human mind. Instead, it was the result of a chain of causation leading from a beginingless beginning onward to an endingless end: one thing/non-thing segueing into the next thing/non-thing. The notion of the five skandhas, or aggregates, being the components of mental projections mistakenly thought to be substantial, arose during this early period. Gautama Buddha had said that these five aggregates were form (matter), sensation or feeling, perception, mental formations (thoughts, emotions, cognitive products), and consciousness. None of

these in isolation was sufficient to fabricate the experience of a substantial reality. For the appearance of apparent substance to arise it took the comingling of these five together. The impermanence of all forms/phenomena was, and remains a central truth of this corpus; furthermore, the reason for this conclusion was to establish the foolishness of craving for what was passing away. The famous Diamond Sūtra, held in high regard by Zen advocates, teaches this point, saying:

"All conditioned phenomena
Are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, or shadows;
Like drops of dew, or flashes of lightning;
Thusly should they be contemplated."

Here Gautama Buddha taught that, *"... all things are devoid of selfhood, devoid of separate individuality ..."*[17] and that, *"... it (any phenomenon) is without a foundation,"* but rather all is *"... not Mind; they are merely called 'mind.'"* To the unenlightened eye such statements must seem nothing short of madness. The world, both internally and externally, appears before us. We see phenomenal objects. They are there. Cognizing occurs. Silently, we witness. My face itches. My hand rises to scratch. The tingling is resolved. What experiences these phenomena? What drives resolution? What experiences resolution? How can it not be mind?

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[17] Red Pine (translator), The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom, Counterpoint, 2001

How can one give even passing consideration to contemplation of such apparent vacuity and non-substance? It seems like insanity incarnate, but there is an unarguable logic there for the taking. Clinging to passing phenomena does lead to the experience of loss, suffering, anger following loss, and enduring samsara. For those unfamiliar with the term "samsara" means an unending cycle of grief brought about, largely, by not knowing who we truly are and thus creating our own suffering. The three-Dharma seals of impermanence, no self, and dukkha have a certain appeal. BUT…where is the joy?

The answer to that question leads to the seeming divide and returns the conversation to the issue of essential inherency—back to atman, not as a perceived and conceptual entity (nor the opposite), but rather to the actual experience of the blossoming of selfhood: the body of truth—the Dharmakāya or Buddha-Nature, and the true, not-divided mind. Gautama Buddha spoke only of one side of the Dharma: the side of which can be spoken, the phenomenal side of objects and forms. That side of the Dharma is the only side that can be spoken. It is impossible to articulate something that has no substance, no objective nature, but not speaking about something is not the same thing as denying its existence, which leads the conversation away from the phenomenal side to the other side of noumena—the true and enduring spiritual reality of the void: The ground of all being. With this shift, the strand of

Zen progression took on a new vector of the One True Mind, the Two-Truth Doctrine,[18] and the Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sūtra teachings: Form is emptiness—a single, yet apparently divided, Dharma. The two truths are expressed as two sides of a common coin of existence: one part apparent (an illusive phenomenon/ unreality), the other part an ultimate, substantial reality. In truth, not two, only one.

When Zen officially began (a foolish notion) with Bodhidharma in China, along about the 5th century CE,[19] there was no school or category of Zen. There was only Zen, as practiced by Bodhidharma, and it

[18] According to the Middle Way systematized by Nagarjuna, all phenomena are empty of substance or essence (Sanskrit: svabhāva), meaning that they have no intrinsic, independent reality apart from the causes and conditions from which they arose. Importantly, dependent origination would then say that a phenomenon itself arises from a cause, which is also an effect. Thus phenomena and noumena would be linked together—one side illusory, and the other side substantial. Neither could exist alone.

[19] Roughly coincident with the convening of the Council of Chalcedon in the western world, which repudiated the idea that Jesus Christ had only one nature, stating that Christ had two natures in one person, which led to the trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)—not significantly different from the Buddhist formula, which stated that The Buddha had three natures: the Dharmakāya, the Sambhogakāya, and the Nirmanakāya.

stayed that way until the life of Dajian Huineng, the sixth and last patriarch of Chán Buddhism (born 638 CE). Huineng is credited for starting the "Sudden Enlightenment" or southern Chán school of Buddhism. (Southern meant south of the Yangtze River in China.) The gradualist school took root to the North. The distinction between these two schools involves duality and identity. The gradualist perspective is mediated with an idea—an "I" idea (the ego) with the view that "I" am working for enlightenment. Thus there is a goal seen as separated from one's reality. *"I don't have it; it is out there somewhere and I will attain it."* The "I" is the obstacle, since this "I" is unreal. On the other hand, the sudden enlightenment process proceeds from the sudden awareness of the unreality of the ego and an instant crisis of *"If not that, what"?* Both the unreality of the ego and the reality of your true nature come in a flash of instantaneous awareness. And this leads one to the experience of truth, as opposed to a conceptual grasping.

The process of the gradualist school ultimately ends in the same place but ordinarily proceeds along an intellectual path, whereas the sudden school proceeds from a sudden awareness and then fills in the blanks with study and rationality. It is a chicken and egg matter. Both conclude with chickens, but start from different positions. The gradualist school takes longer and is encumbered by the necessity of working through layers of ideas, whereas the sudden school starts off with an intuitive grasp beyond

ideas that then can subsequently become supplemented within an intellectual framework.

Chapter 3—Dharma who? The Constituents of The Dharma.

Dharma, contrary to what the modern viewer of TV may think, is not Greg's flower-child wife. Instead, the term (at least within the sphere of spiritual thought) means a rule or fundamental law upon which life is based. That's the generic meaning, but it has a specific meaning within Buddhism, referring to the enlightened understanding of Gautama Buddha regarding how the world works. The teachings about this, as conveyed by Gautama Buddha, are known as The Dharma, and this Dharma is central to any study of Buddhism. Whereas the figure of Jesus Christ is central to Christianity (with secondary consideration given to his teachings), it is the other way around with Buddhism. This Dharma teaches that a Buddha is awaiting awakening within you and me—The primordial mind of us all.

Many have said that dependent origination lies at the heart of the Buddhist vision regarding the solution to suffering. To understand this principle is to understand the essential nature of the mind. Likewise, to understand the mind is to understand Gautama Buddha. Bodhidharma said, *"Buddha is the mind. There is no Buddha except the mind; no mind but Buddha."* So my intent now is to lie out the aspects of this essential teaching.

The first matter is to define the term. Something that is dependent is conditional and doesn't stand-

alone. A matter that originates has a beginning and an ending—it is impermanent. Thus dependent origination says that one thing comes into being dependent on what came before, and this in turn leads to something else. Rain, for example, depends upon water vapor in clouds and a particular combination of temperature and air pressure, and this in turn depends upon ground water being heated so that it is vaporized. The connections between these chains, or links, are all essential for rain to exist. The amount of rain (or snow, during the winter) is directly linked to the amount of water vapor in the clouds, and this is dependent on heat. If there is too much heat, an excess of water vapor will exist and there will be too much rain or snow, which in turn creates floods. Heat→vapor→clouds→rain/snow→ floods→more heat→... And such causal links permeate the entirety of all phenomena, whether water or people or anything else. What momentarily appears to be solid and independent is, in truth, interdependent and endlessly caused by other linked phenomena.

A second dimension of dependent origination concerns epistemology and ontology. Epistemology is the study of knowledge itself (how we know what we know) and thus concerns the mind, so here we need to consider the matter of perception and understanding. We can only perceive something through contrast, and understanding only has meaning and relevance given contrast. *Up* is a rela-

tive matter, as it contrasts with *down*. These two, in combination, define each other. And this is true for all phenomena. Then we come to the matter of ontology, which concerns how things relate to one another; here, too, contrast becomes important. Were it not for contrast, and discriminate differences, everything would be seen as the same thing and thus ontology would be a moot point, which is precisely the case, since from the Buddhist perspective mind is everything.

When we put these two aspects together, some quite interesting conclusions can be seen. One of the premises of Zen (and other branches of Buddhism) is that all phenomena are projections of the mind; thus the mind is the source of everything and phenomena are illusions. This means that the world around us is not substantially real.

"Every phenomenon is your own mind.
Apart from the mind there is no other phenomenon, not
Even the slightest."[20]

This perspective is not substantially different from the branch of philosophy known as solipsism, and is verified through modern neurological studies. In

[20] José Ignacio Cabezón, The Dalai Lama et al., The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel of the Oral Tradition, Meditation, On the Nature of Mind, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2011, p. 67.

truth, everything we can perceive and process must go through our brain, and our brain is the organ dependently originated with our mind.

We are tempted to imagine our minds located in our head and to think that there is a solid and independent world that we perceive "out there." When this *out there* idea is coupled with a dependent self-idea (ego), it is quite natural to see ourselves as separate from, and in opposition to, others "out there." But Gautama Buddha taught that the ego was just as much an illusion as any other phenomenon. It, too, is a projection of the mind. Likewise, he taught that there really isn't some conceptual configuration called mind that can be located in space. In various Sūtras we find Gautama Buddha teaching that the mind can't be found, but rather that we can deduce the mind only by inference from what the mind creates (all phenomena, one dimension of which is thoughts). But in other Sūtras he taught that phenomena and noumena are the same thing (Form is Sunyata), which is to say that every conceivable manifestation is either infused with the spirit or is essentially virtual. And here it is important to say what is meant by "virtual."

The dictionary definition will do nicely, which says, "…of relating to, or being a hypothetical particle whose existence is inferred from indirect evidence." It is that last phrase: *inferred from indirect evidence* that requires emphasis because, as we shall see, there is no way any of us can ever directly con-

tact reality. We infer reality of fire of the mind, indirectly by sensing the smoke of perceptions.

The causal linkage between phenomenal manifestations and a noumenal not-to-be-found mind is one of dependent origination, which in turn leads to the creation of our world through thoughts. What begins from the base of mind ultimately takes shape through actions. Thus it is impossible to separate ourselves from karma and the world that we create. Curiously, this link between thought and physical manifestation is reflected in the teachings of Jesus Christ.[21]

So the question is how this relates to a solution for suffering. The answer comes in two parts. The first related to illusion, and the second related to action (karma). If we imagine something as illusory, it is unlikely that we will be tempted to crave or attach to it. We watch a movie, and while watching we may become embroiled and emotionally involved with the projected story unfolding on the screen. But we know that what we are seeing is just a projected illusion or abstraction, so ordinarily we don't get upset. We contrast the images with our ordinary world and conclude that one is an illusion and the other is real (or so we imagine). What we fail to realize is that our thoughts and emotions are also fabricated projections and just as illusory as the movie. Because of this perceptual error, we take our phe-

[21] Matthew 15:13-20 and Matthew 5:21-23.

nomenal manifestations as real and thus crave the good ones, which reinforce our egos, and resist the bad ones, which threaten our egos. This, in turn, governs our actions, which dependently originate our karma. We crave more, and consume more, because we perceive ourselves as incomplete and/or flawed.

Whatever we perceive as threatening, we take action to ward off, and whatever we perceive as inviting we take action to secure. Clinging is the result of these two actions; and since all phenomena are fleeting, either kind of self-originating action produces suffering. So what is the solution? Again, the answer comes in two parts, the first of which is to surrender from attachments and learn to savor each passing moment. The past is gone. The future is yet to arrive, and what we experience in this moment is the karmic result of what we created through actions of body and mouth in a now dead past. To enjoy a brighter future is likewise dependent upon actions taken today. All phenomena are fleeting, from our thoughts outward to the world we create. In that sense, we are like corks bobbing in a sea that we ourselves create. Solace comes first through release, and then through discovering our own not-to-be-found-Buddha-Mind—our true self. How is that done? Through meditation, by learning to dwell in the ground from which phenomena arise. This ground of being is what we know as the noumenal mind. Whereas all phenomena originate, the mind does not. Like everything else, the mind and phenomena originate each other and provide the neces-

sary contrast. The mind is the flip side of phenomena in the same way that *up* is the flip side of *down*. One side is conditionally objective (and impure), and the other side is unconditional and spiritual (and pure). One side is apparent, and the other side is unseen. The mind can't see the mind, just as the eye can't see the eye. Like the brain that allows sensory functions to be perceived but can't sense itself, the mind is not to be found.

While this teaching may seem esoteric, there are numerous examples in our everyday lives to illustrate the practical way it plays out. Take, for example, the matter of crime affecting our lives. While we would prefer to think that people who commit crimes should be imprisoned, at great public expense, we are probably not seeing the causal linkages between our own actions, the criminal resulting from our actions, and the ultimate impact of the crime on us. So imagine a person being born into our world who, because of public policies to which we subscribe, does not receive loving guidance and support, but is instead subjected to poverty and abuse. Left in such an environment for years on end, the person who began life innocent becomes a hardened criminal who lashes out at society. Now we have a tough choice: Do we allow such people to continue to plunder society (at great harm and cost), or do we lock them up (also at great cost), and, if the cost becomes excessive, find that public officials charged with the responsibility for managing public funding are tempted to dump them back into society, where they create even more havoc? As

in the case of floods, which began with heat warming ground water, crime results from poor public policies. By reforming public policy it is quite possible to completely alter this dynamic chain of cause and effect and end up saving vast amounts of money as well as lives.

Another example is national defense. We have developed a national defense policy that is based on a principle of greater and greater levels of hostility, retribution, and costs, not only in currency but also in diminishing international relations. We spend billions annually designing, building, developing, and using weapons of war. So how is that process working? Are we more or less safe because of the dynamic? And what is the impact on our deficit, and on our relations around the world? Well, for sure, people throughout the world are not becoming better allies when we bomb their homes, destroy their infrastructure, and kill their loved ones. They may fear us, but they are not our friends. They are trapped between two destructive forces, one of which is The United States. Thus far we have spent over $4 trillion on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and what do we have to show for that expenditure? Worsened international relationships, a reputation as a bully, hundreds of thousands of people killed and maimed, and thousands of our own warriors killed, maimed, and/or mentally messed up. Too few realize, war scrapes off pieces of your soul. Could we perhaps have spent $4 trillion in a wiser way, one that would not have resulted in such devastation? In all likelihood, we could have, but retri-

bution is a powerful motive, arising from our sense of justice, which is dependently originated with our illusion of a separate and independent self

I could continue with examples from global warming to the debacles of Wall Street to immigration to others, even into families, but the point has been made that there is no way to extract ourselves from the choices we make and the impact of the benefits and consequences. Our thoughts determine our actions, and our actions come back upon our heads, either for the good or the opposite. Dependent origination shows us that there is no escaping. "Right Understanding" (the first of Gautama Buddha's steps to a solution for suffering) establishes the basis for what follows. If we understand how we are all linked together with the manifestations of our choices, then we will be in a more informed place to take the next step, which is "Right Intentions." On the other hand, so long as we remain ignorant of the links between our thoughts, our actions, and our connection to others, our intentions in all likelihood will remain self-serving and we will create suffering for others and ourselves. So a solid grounding in understanding dependent origination is foundational to starting down the road to grasping the Dharma and finding worth beneath excess.

Interdependence and Independence.

Then we come to the related matter of independence vs. interdependence. Dependent origination,

as we have seen, clearly shows that the idea of substantial independence is an illusion. Nothing phenomenal stands by itself; rather, everything is connected. While things appear to be independent, in truth nothing can exist in that way. The United States is, of course, based on the principle that people and political configurations are, in fact, independent, but as we move forward as a nation we are being forced to see that we are not independent, neither as a people nor as a political entity. Political sovereignty may be the beginning of freedom, by providing liberties that allow us to get to the next level, but by itself political independence does not deliver freedom, nor does economic prosperity. True freedom is a matter of moving beyond the pursuits of excess and finding the wellspring of freedom within. And this takes us to the premise of mental interdependence, which is a variation of dependent origination.

As Bodhidharma pointed out, there are two sides to our minds. There is the side that is phenomenal (our objective and perceptible side of manifestations), and there is the source from which the phenomenal side originates. These two sides are interdependent. They define each other in the same way that up and down define each other. A simple example may clarify the difference between a manifestation and a source. It would be the height of fantasy to think your car magically appeared in your driveway without first being manufactured in an automobile plant. It is likewise a fantasy to imagine our thoughts and emotions magically appeared in

our minds. Both the car and our thoughts must come from a source. The car comes from the automobile plant and our thoughts arise from our unseen mind. What is seen must have a seer; what is sensed in any way must have one who senses. The true mind can't be seen, but the manifestations can, and these two parts are interdependently related. This is a problem only because we trust what we can perceive and distrust what we can't—the source of perception.

The implication that flows from this understanding is that the manifestations (thoughts, emotions, and the world we create) are a part of us all. It is just as impossible to separate the car from the factory, as it is to separate our phenomenal minds from what the noumenal mind creates. *Up* and *down* is a single, inseparable thing, and so too is our mind and what it creates.

Mind

We can't get very far into understanding Zen by continuing with our ordinary way of comprehending our mind. What we imagine as our mind (thoughts and emotions) is, from a Zen perspective, not mind, but rather what emanates from mind. This distinction is key to grasping the significance of illusion and thus clinging, which lies at the foundation of suffering, and speaks to the matter of the unquenchable desire for more.

Perhaps the best way to describe mind is through the analogy of space and objects in space. From a scientific perspective, space is defined as the distance between objects, say, Mars and Venus. From this point of view, space is dependent upon objects, and if there were no objects, by definition, space would cease to exist. Then we would be looking at a vacuum or a void, which of course can't be seen or measured. We can say what a vacuum doesn't contain, but we can't say what it does contain, because it contains nothing; it is empty, yet somehow everything comes into existence out of this empty void.

Einstein argued that physical objects are not located in space, but rather have a "spatial extent."[22] Seen in this way, the concept of empty space loses its meaning. Rather, space is an abstraction, based on the relationships between objects. The development of quantum mechanics complicated the modern interpretation of a vacuum by requiring indeterminacy.[23] In the late 20th century, this principle was understood to also predict a fundamental uncertainty in the number of particles in a region of space, leading to predictions of "virtual particles" arising spontaneously out of the void.

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[22] This involves a statistical process involving variables to establish the location of an object within space.
[23] Quantum indeterminacy can be quantitatively characterized by a probability distribution on the set of outcomes of measurements of an observable object.

I don't want to begin losing you in the scientific forest and move away from the point of the analogy. The essential point here is that objects (Mars, Venus, a tree, an idea, an image…all objects) must rightly be seen as virtual particles arising spontaneously out of the void, which is mind. Nothing objective is permanent; rather, everything is impermanent, in motion, and subject to the law of dependent origination. The only thing that is permanent is the void itself. Objects come and objects go, but the void is permanent. When objects come into being, they arise from the context of the void and, when they cease to exist, they return to the void. There is no other place for them to come from or return to. The void is not affected by this coming and going; it remains a constant. In like fashion, we could say that thoughts are like clouds moving across the sky without affecting the sky of mind.

The mind is not only the void but is also objects, which arise out of the void. The primordial mind is just the void out of which everything arises—it is unconditional. Objects themselves are conditional, but the void has no defining characteristics, so it is unconditional. Let me repeat that: Mind has no defining characteristics. It is void. Might that statement be understood different ways? The first way is a description of equality (Mind=Void). Another way is location (which is no location, rather like the Internet: everywhere but nowhere at once). And the third way is what our primordial mind contains: nothing. Yet everything comes from this nothing, which is everything. These two: conditional objects

and the unconditional void, dependently originate each other. From the Zen perspective, mind defines everything, since there is nothing except mind. Every phenomenal thing is a virtual particle. There is nothing else. What we imagine as being concrete, real, and substantial are actually virtual projections, or illusions. The problem is that we mistake this virtual illusion for reality, which we use to define who we are, not realizing that we have mistaken something ephemeral for something substantial.

The science of neurology has now confirmed what mystics have been saying since the beginning. Of course they did not express their knowledge from a neurological point of view. The locus of the mystical experience has always been an internal matter but this awareness obviously had to be experienced, given the human equipment that allows intuitive perception to occur. Everything that can be perceived, by any and every means, is a mental projection registered in particular parts of our brain. To date, neurology has identified 52 Brodmann areas.[24] For example, Brodmann area 17 is the primary visual cortex—the registry location for vision. What we imagine as seeing (both external and internal) is, in fact, a projection of photons (virtual

[24] Brodmann areas were originally defined and numbered by the German neurologist Korbinian Brodmann. For a further understanding, see: http://neurosci.info/courses/vision2/Extrastriate/brodman.html

particles) projected onto the "screen" in Brodmann area 17. Doctor Andrew Newberg, in his book Brain Science & The Biology of Belief ... Why God Won't Go Away, put the matter this way: *"What we think of as reality is only a rendition of reality that is created by the brain."* In truth there is no way to see except this way, and what science has now confirmed was established by mystics (Zen and others) a long time ago. This should not, however, be misinterpreted as scientific findings by mystics. The science of neurology only validates this understanding.

Buddhism teaches that all phenomena are impermanent, and simple reflection affirms this. No phenomenal thing lasts, and to cling to or resist the impermanence of form creates suffering; thus bliss is not to be found in phenomenal life. So where is there a source of hope, that fills our longing for meaning and love? Our hope lies imperceptibly beneath impermanence at the heart of decay. And what is that heart? Huang Po (Obaku in Japanese; 9th century China) was particularly lucid in his teaching about this. In the Chün Chou Record, he said this:

"To say that the real Dharmakāya of Buddha resembles the Void is another way of saying that the Dharmakāya is the Void and that the Void is the Dharmakāya...they are one and the same thing...When all forms are abandoned, there is Buddha...the void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma. This spiritually enlightening

nature is without beginning…this great nirvanic nature is Mind; Mind is Buddha, and Buddha is the Dharma." Our pure, primordial mind is our true teacher, the truth and the source of all wisdom.

From Huang Po's perspective there is a bonded connection between phenomena and mind—they are the same thing. Neither can exist apart from the other. They dependently originate each other. This is what Huang Po said about this connection: *"To gaze upon a drop of water is to behold the nature of all the waters of the universe. Moreover, in thus contemplating the totality of phenomena, you are contemplating the totality of mind. All these phenomena are intrinsically void and yet this mind with which they are identical is no mere nothingness. By this I mean that it does exist, but in a way too marvelous for us to comprehend. It is an existence, which is no existence, a non-existence, which is nevertheless existence. To the ancients, to find the true essence of life, it was necessary to cast off body and mind. When all forms are abandoned, there is Buddha."*

Yet another understanding of mind, comes to us from the Śūraṅgama Sūtra: *"…All things in all worlds are the wondrous, fundamental, enlightened, luminous mind that understands, and that this mind, pure, all pervading, and perfect, contains the entire universe…it is everlasting and does*

not perish."[25] As we will see, in the summary toward the end of this book, everything is a manifestation of this one, true mind that understands, yet can't itself be understood, at least rationally. So allow me to paint a metaphorical word portrait of this mind:

Imagine that you're a person of enormous wealth—a producer with a great idea for making a movie. But making a movie is an involved process, and you know you're going to need some talented people with different functions to turn your ideas into an actual film. Because you're a wise person, you know that you need to hire the best people for each function, give them clear and adequate direction, equip them with the right tools, empower them with responsibility, and then not micro-manage the filmmaking process. If you do micro-manage, you can clearly see that there is no need to pay big bucks for the best talent. In that case, you might as well save the money you'd need to hire them and just do the job yourself.

So the first person you go looking for is a top-flight general manager. You want the best, and by that you mean someone as near as possible like you: a clone perhaps. If you can find such a person, then your job is going to be infinitely easier, because that

[25] Venerable Master Hsuan Hua , The Surangama Sūtra —A New Translation with Excerpts from the Commentary, Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2009

person will be able to anticipate your needs without you looking over his or her shoulder every few minutes. After some time of trial and error, interviewing various candidates, you find the person you're convinced is just right. Of course, the person doesn't come cheap, but in the long run it's better to pay the price than hire the wrong person, firing him when it doesn't work out, losing a lot of time and then having to start all over from scratch anyway.

After extensive contract negotiations, you hire the ideal GM. Now the two of you sit down and talk about your ideas and the need to find the rest of the crew. You tell your new GM that money is no object: hire the best and get moving. The GM is excited and off he goes to scout and hire the crew. Let's see, you're going to need someone to write the screenplay and that person must have a vivid imagination and wordsmithing skills. You'll also need an art director to work with the writer, a camera crew, an editor, someone to write a musical score and arrange and orchestrate the music, a costumer, someone to scout locations, another person to find and cast the actors, a director, and of course someone to produce and put together the work of all those people. Oh, and one more important piece of business—you'll need a theater where the film will be projected on a movie screen.

After what seems like a long time, everyone needed is found, hired, equipped, and given direction by the GM, and finally shooting begins. From time to time, you check in and review where the project

stands. You watch the dailies and talk with the GM about any adjustments you think are appropriate, but this is a delicate matter. People with the skill and expertise of your GM are not terribly comfortable with heavy-handed direction, and they are generally somewhat of a prima donna. So you need finely crafted people skills to get what you envision without alienating him.

All goes well for a while, but slowly and surely the GM starts to resent you. Of course, he thinks you are not aware of this developing situation, because the GM is crafty. What you don't know yet is that he is planning a coup and intends to steal the entire production. Being a wily person, he pulls it off (or at least thinks he). What he doesn't know is that you knew this all along and intended for him carry off the coup. Why would you do such a thing? Because you knew that an arrogant GM is like a wild stallion and needs to be broken to be of much long-term usefulness. Talent seems to come along with a big ego. You knew all along that the project would flop under his exclusive reign, and you knew that, when it did, it would be abundantly clear to everyone (most importantly to the GM) that the reason it flopped was because you were no longer running matters behind the scenes. You actually don't care if this project flops or not. Your wealth is vast, and you have a whole lineup of better film ideas awaiting production if you can find someone trustworthy and proven to take charge.

So you allow the coup to unfold with no resistance. And what you predicted happens: the show flops and, with hat in hand, the GM has no choice but to see that he needs you after all. Before that it wasn't clear. The GM had a big head and imagined his independent greatness; he had to learn the hard way, by failure. Now the real show can begin. Now the pompous, self-righteous GM has been broken like a wild stallion, and now the two of you can make some really great films together.

Are you wondering why I've spun metaphor? The reason is that this story is very similar to what happens in our mind. What all of us need to know is that we are people of great wealth already, and we make movies. It is quite the same as Shakespeare said: *"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages."*[26] True wealth is what we think we would buy one day once we have earned enough. So we spend our entire lives working to obtain that distant goal. We chase the rabbit of more, only to discover that there is never enough and the harder we run the faster the goal moves away. Then one day, if we're extraordinarily fortunate, we stop and catch our breath long enough to realize an invaluable truth: the prize is already closer to us than our own breath.

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[26] William Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII—All the world's a stage.

True wealth is not on the horizon for a number of reasons. First, there will never be a distant horizon. That is an illusion that shimmers like heat dancing on the pavement, as we race across the desert toward the mirage of an imaginary oasis. It only looks real. There is no distant. There will never be anything other than now. That's the first reason. The second reason is that we need to think more clearly about the nature of what we seek. What we all seek is to love and be loved, health, emotional and spiritual abundance, a sense of joy and amazement, happiness that arises like effervescent bubbles from our depth, quality relationships, having our basic needs provided, a lack of stress and fear, and a bone-deep knowledge that we are fine just as we are. These qualities constitute genuine wealth. They can't be purchased at any price, and they will never not be here and now, because they exist within us all. They are the worth beneath our mistaken notions that more of the stuff that passes away moment-by-moment will ever be enough.

We are all geese who lay golden eggs. Only we don't know, because we get into such a rush chasing that rabbit that we never pause long enough to find our roots. When we stop, we can find this never-eroding treasure buried beneath the race to oblivion. We were, and always have been, home, living in a castle of enormous wealth. It is called our mind. That is our true nature; our only true nature. Everything else is an illusion, a dance of insanity. Nothing is lacking, and the race to obtain what is already ours is sheer madness.

But then there are those who will read this and say, *"He just doesn't get it. If he only knew what I have gone through, he wouldn't be such a Pollyanna."* It is true that I don't know what you have gone through, but I do know what I've gone through. We all bear the rigors. We all suffer. Everyone experiences terrible tragedies. None of us can escape the consequences of adversity. I've had my own tragedies and suffered greatly to the point of utter despair. I stood at the edge of death a number of times. First in war, and later when I saw no reason for hope, I was ready to take my own life, but the grace of God spared me. I stepped away and I found Zen, and then I discovered my own treasure within, buried down deep beneath my own egotistical corruption. So don't delude yourself with this idea, this victim excuse, that mine is terrible and others aren't. Suffering goes with the territory of living. Nobody escapes, and everyone is already wealthy, beyond the boundaries of our rational imaginations. That is why Zen is known as being transcendent. Rational imagination is not your friend. That is a prison of the mind, and the ringmaster is the ego, the very imaginary being that stands in the way of genuine self-discovery. The technology of Zen moves you away from fantasy and back to reality.

The wealthy producer in the story is behind the scenes running the show, but nobody knows he's there except the GM. The GM is our ego—self-righteous, talented, with a big head and of very little worth without being broken. And how does an ego get broken? By trial and error. Give it enough rope

and it'll hang itself. Try to force its hand, and it'll resist. It's a crafty creature and up to no good, until it learns how inadequate it is by itself. You are the real power behind your own throne—the wizard of the Oz you create, and your ego has to learn the hard way that the two of you are a team. Until that lesson is learned, there is only chaos.

The rest of the crew are your various perceptual functions that collaborate to produce what appears to be a seamless rendition of reality. When the film is in the can and the audience assembled, the film is projected, but the screen is not "out there"—it is being projected in the theater of the mind. It is such a stunning movie that it is almost like being in the movie. What we don't realize is that we are actually "in the movie" that we ourselves produce. We will never be outside of the movie, since the movie is us, only we don't call it a movie. We call it our relative and conditional world, which, we imagine, is not us.

We are the movie, the crew who produced it, the audience who watches it, the GM, and the producer. It is all produced within a virtual world, which we imagine is a real world. Everything produced is a virtual reality—all conditional and based on causes and effects. But this cause is the true you, creating a sense of being that is virtual where another limited realm of causes and effects exist. Even the unconditional producer is a virtual being. The entire assemblage is an illusion. This is your mind at work, which can't be found. As the movie (movement) unfolds, our mind comes into being. When the movie

stops, our mind likewise ceases to exist. Our mind and the movie are one and the same thing. The only function of the mind is movement. When the mind moves, the world appears. When the mind stops, the world disappears. Zen masters ever since Gautama Buddha have said this is a true rendition, and now the science of neurology confirms it.

Is this just a fantasy? Perhaps an interesting story, but no more? Granted, I have taken some creative liberties, but fundamentally the story is an accurate portrayal of the way it is. This is Gautama Buddha's Dharma. This is what he saw when he woke up. It may seem strange, incredible, and fantastic, but it is accurate.

So how must we understand this? Zen says (and it can be confirmed only through personal experience) that we—our only substantial and true nature—are the unchanging and already complete producer, who is lacking nothing but can't be seen. Nothing can be added to, nor subtracted from, a complete mind, since mind is everything (yet nothing). To try to do either (add to or subtract from) is an exercise in utter futility. Nothing is lacking. Everything is already present. Clinging to anything adds nothing to who we truly are. Our true identity is secure, and the rush to add to something that is already complete is a fool's errand. Excess on top of completion is like adding shaving cream to whipped cream. The vector of wholeness does not come through addition. It comes through subtraction, and that is what you do when you meditate. You al-

low the virtual to vanish into the void and, when it dissolves, you find you are home, right where you've always been. *"In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired. In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped. Less and less is done."*[27] You are Buddha.

The Self

There are different ways the self is understood. One way is as a phenomenal image, which we can see. And what we see is a phantasm that bobs and weaves. The *idea* of the self is a conceptual construct—a mental fabrication that is wholly dependent, as all phenomena are. This fabrication is the basis of the western view of an ego and is the image that undergirds the notion of self-esteem. This way of understanding our selves, which is fraught with difficulty, is central to the dilemma of suffering. It is the ego that suffers and strives for wholeness by clinging to, or resisting, insubstantial phenomenal dimensions. But The Buddha taught, *"The foolish man conceives the idea of 'self.' The wise man sees there is no ground on which to build the idea of 'self;' thus, he has a right conception of the world and well concludes that all compounds amassed by*

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[27] Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching—Stanza 48, Jonathan Star (translator), The Definitive Edition (Tarcher Cornerstone Editions), January 2008. In Taoism, The Tao represents the primordial mind.

sorrow will be dissolved again, but the truth will remain."

When we say that a person is self-centered or egotistical, it is based on this idea of a self: a compound figment of our imaginations. And to imply a person is self-centered is to invite outrage! To the ordinary mind, calling this spade a spade is an assault on a person's sense of self. But this fabricated illusion of self is what drives the lust for more and obscures our true already-complete self, which has no shape or configuration. Our true self is what mystics call the void, Buddha-Nature (or you could call it our true self-nature). And like the mind, which can't be seen, this self can't be seen either. Buddha-Nature is not the same thing as an atman (nor an anatman). The atman and the anatman are both compound, conceptual fabrications and are thus conditional and incomplete. Our true self is unconditional and noumenal. It is not born and does not die. It is not vulnerable and is beyond suffering. It is the void, and this is life in substance—no coming, no going. What we ordinarily consider life, from a Zen perspective, is a phenomenal manifestation of the mind.

An idea is just a mental image about something, which is very different from what is being represented, and we are wiser when we grasp the difference. Meister Eckhart said, *"Man's last and highest parting occurs when for God's sake he takes leave of god. St. Paul took leave of god for God's sake and gave up all that he might get from god as well*

as all he might give—together with every idea of god. In parting with these he parted with god for God's sake and God remained in him as God is in his own nature—not as he is conceived by anyone to be—nor yet as something yet to be achieved, but more as an is-ness, as God really is. Then he and God were a unit that is pure unity. Thus one becomes that real person for whom there can be no suffering, any more than the divine essence can suffer." While this understanding, from a Christian mystic, equates an indwelling God as the point of intersection between our source and us, the Buddhist way of seeing this intersection is an inherent, never divided, and always-complete mind.

These two, the self and suffering, are an intertwined matrix. In The Sūtra of Complete Enlightenment, Chán Master Sheng-yen illustrates the relationship between these two by saying, *"We practice (meaning meditation—zazen) until the self (ego) is gone. When the self disappears, all obstructions will be gone too. There cannot be a self that is free from all obstructions. If there is a sense of self, then there are also obstructions. There cannot be obstructions without a self to create and experience them, because the self is an obstruction. This is nondiscrimination of the highest order."*[28]

[28] Chán Master Sheng Yen, Complete Enlightenment—Zen Comments on the Sutra of Complete Enlightenment, with a Foreword by Thich Nhat Hanh.—Chapter

Emptiness—Sanskrit: Sunyata

When we imagine emptiness, we see absence. Space is empty. A cup with nothing in it is empty. Anything is empty when it contains no phenomenal thing. Even though we can't see space per se, we see what exists in space. Likewise we can see what our mind produces, even though we can't see our mind. Emptiness has two meanings within Buddhist thought. One of these pertains to dependent origination and means that a phenomenal form is empty of substantial, independent inherency. It doesn't exist by itself. In that sense, form is emptiness, which is what The Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sūtra says: *"Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form."*

But there is another understanding of emptiness, somewhat similar, but not exactly the same. The true mind, while not seen, is empty of all phenomena—there is nothing there, yet the mind is the source of everything. It is thus said to exist and not exist at the same time. The mind is everything and nothing (no-thing). Indeed, the mind is not a thing. It is rather the source of all things. It is not objective. If it were objective, then it could not be mind, since an object, by definition, is conditional and limited. The mind is neither conditional nor limited. The mind, before manifestation, has no defining characteristics and thus no identity. It is naked

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on Bodhisattva of Pure Wisdom, Shambhala Publications, 1977

of all configurations and is thus pure and unconditional consciousness. That is the deeper understanding of emptiness—as the wellspring of everything.

Enlightenment

The western grasp of enlightenment is limited to thinking. It grew out of a philosophical movement that arose in Europe during the 18th century (otherwise known as The Age of Enlightenment). It was during this period that we began the movement away from religious dogma and into the secular province governed by philosophy, or intellectual, scientific, and cultural life, which served as the primary source for legitimacy and authority. Mystical enlightenment is not a matter of thinking but is rather transcendent to thinking, which as previously stated is limited to conceptual configurations; thus it is always abstract and conditional. The Zen thrust is to penetrate the abstract and directly access the unconditional mind. When that thrust has been actualized, awakening occurs, and the person is said to be enlightened. When you awaken, you find your own void; you discover your mind and thus yourself. And a truly amazing realization is that this mind is not yours. It is the same, unconditional source for all. Subsequent to that awakening, the view (or understanding) of the way true life exists is transformed forever. This is not an intellectual achievement. It is, rather, a transcendent realization of our true nature and once transformed

your entire grasp of reality moves away from separation and into the realm of unity.

Suffering and bliss

Suffering is a matter of the conditional mind and, as such, is subject to changing circumstances. Bliss, on the other hand, is a matter of our unconditional mind. If there are no conditions, how can there be suffering, since suffering is the result of changing conditions? Thus bliss is understood as the character of our natural, never-born, true self. Bliss is nirvana, and nirvana is substantially whole and real. It is that part of us that changes that leads to suffering. When the mind moves, there is change. When there is change, suffering soon follows. Consequently, the goal of Zen is to find the unmoving and never-changing true mind. The correct way of understanding the difference is very much as Meister Eckhart stated, by moving beyond the idea to find the source: *"Then he and God were a unit that is pure unity. Thus one becomes that real person for whom there can be no suffering, any more than the divine essence can suffer."*[29] It is in this state of unity where suffering is lost and bliss is found.

There is a note of confusion regarding bliss. On the one hand, it is eternal and doesn't come and go. On the other hand, bliss can only be experienced phe-

[29] Thomas Merton, Zen and the Birds of Appetite, The Abbey of Gethsemani, Inc. 1968, page 10.

nomenally, and we know that phenomena do come and go. What is spiritual can't experience what is spiritual. Experience must occur within the gestalt of our phenomenal existence. What is phenomenal has no ability to experience anything, since it is our spiritual aspect that does the experiencing. Thus bliss can be experienced only through an impermanent, ever-changing dimension. The physical and the spiritual are interdependent partners. One is the engine, and the other is the fuel that drives the engine. Bliss is thus real and unreal at the same time, and so, too, is suffering.

Fragmentation and integration

The notion of fragmentation is the flip side of integration. Like other dimensions of interdependence, these two define each other. Fragmentation and integration are opposite partners. Fragmentation means, of course, something that is divided, and integration means the opposite: to be made whole. From the mystical perspective, there is truly no such thing as substantial fragmentation, since the only thing that is real (the mind) is not, nor has it ever been fragmented. The mind is always whole and complete. Thus integration means becoming aware of the never-broken, always-integrated mind. It is the illusion of fragmentation, duality and dividedness that causes havoc and persuades us all that our world, and we ourselves, are broken apart and isolated from one another. Consequently, we have no trouble lashing out at others, since we rea-

son that we have nothing to do with others. When we see life through the lens of the ego, everything is imperfect, alienated, hopeless and we imagine a world that is incomplete, but *"When you realize how perfect everything is you will tilt your head back and laugh at the sky."*—The Buddha. In truth, we suffer greatly because of this misunderstanding. We are not separate and apart from each other, since there is no independent self. Our true nature is already united, but the unenlightened mind sees only fragmentation and this leads us all to possessiveness, greed, and excess.

Liberation and Becoming Whole

If we are already whole, then we can't become whole. Nevertheless, the quest to become whole is an ageless and futile proposition. The movement from anguish to freedom has been depicted in many ways since Buddhism began to take shape. While rationally walking through the stages of spiritual evolution described in this chapter, and coming to the end, we might wonder what's so special about that? But having the luxury of distance is a vastly different process from being lost in the path. Once we reach the end, whether intellectually, or in fact, we can look back with clarity and understand what is impossible to grasp while in process. And even when we can understand is no guarantee we will then be able to never be lost again. What is perhaps the most important aspect, is not the logic but instead the path itself. Life teaches us, by doing, not

from a distance. Just as a painting does not depict what the artist renders, the purpose of this book is not to teach but rather to describe. It, like the painting, is an abstraction—a portrait with words, telling a story.

Many years ago I attended an art exhibit of a famous painter. The curator had asked the artist to write a brief description of his work to be placed next to each painting, explaining his intent. I noticed both the paintings and the descriptions, and thought to myself, how utterly useless were those descriptions. They neither added to, nor subtracted from, the beauty of the paintings. Looking at a painting (or a description) does not make anyone into an artist. For that accomplishment one must study and practice for many years to create anything of beauty. The same hold true for accomplishing mystical consciousness, and that is also true for reading this book "about" transformation. Reading this one, or any other, may serve some purpose of description but it won't make you a master. That too takes many years of practice and study to experience transformation and understanding.

Enlightenment, the realization of one's true nature in an instant, is the objective of Zen practice. Since the victory of Huineng's[30] southern school, all Chinese schools of Chán have accepted the doctrine of

[30] The sixth Zen patriarch (638-713 20 CE) was a Chinese Chán monastic.

sudden enlightenment. Although awakening is instantaneous, the practice, which precipitates it, may be experienced as occurring in a series of stages. This may be understood as gestation and then sudden birth. Unfortunately the expression of awakening has a variety of definitions ranging the western *The Enlightenment* to the common-coin jargon of "wake up and smell the coffee," and none of these bares any resemblance to mystical awakening which transcends rational thinking and moves us into the deeper mind.

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Chapter 4—Planks and Other Forms of Delusion.

Seeing clearly is the hallmark for conquering suffering. When we see wrongly, we act wrongly, and such actions result in chains of conflict. Gautama Buddha, to remind you, referred to himself as the Tathagata (One who has arrived at suchness). Suchness is the way things truly are. But no one believes that he or she is not already seeing things as they are. Everyone is persuaded they are awake yet they remain, unknowingly, lost in illusion. It is extremely unlikely that you'll encounter a person who can, or will, readily acknowledge his or her own delusions and biases. Instead everyone attempts to see the world through cherished lenses without recognizing the filtration that is occurring. In the case of the accumulation of excess, people are persuaded they need their stuff because they identify with the stuff; their ego is defined through possessions. In their way of understanding, they and their stuff are one and the same thing. Money becomes an identity, fame, status or position. They egotistical reason they deserve the excess. It is exclusively theirs and to share is to diminish themselves. However people define themselves, whatever the source of that identification, becomes for them their identity, whether in terms of things or beliefs.

Was Jesus Christ a mystic? Meaning a fully awakened human? Even to ask the question may seem like an insult to those who regard him as "the only

son of God." His teachings and his life would satisfy any acceptable measure of mystic consciousness, based on what we know of him. This is thin ice, but we need to break the ice and consider the wisdom of another who saw things as they are. In the 7th chapter of the book of Matthew, Jesus Christ is quoted as having said, *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*[31]

That's a jam-packed set of instructions that concerns the matter of suchness vs. delusion, what we do with delusions, and the consequences of such seeing. The ordinary way of interpreting these instructions (that God will measure out your judgment in the manner by which you judge others) keeps us at a distance from our ordinary lives. The more practical way of understanding concerns the delusion from which judgments arise in the first place. The plank in our own eye represents the distortions we don't see, which then serve as the basis

[31] Matthew 7:1-5

for self-righteousness (a problem of the ego). Very few can see through these planks, while at the same time being aware of their presence. It is much easier to see the faults of others and thus judge them. This is a huge problem that goes along with fundamental ignorance. When we understand ourselves as a separate and isolated ego, it is perfectly natural to apply the same yardstick to others.

Here Jesus Christ cautions us to first take care of our distortions, and then we'll be able to understand those of others. Our natural, primordial mind is a mind without blemish. There are no distortions in this mind of purity. Unfortunately, our language gets in the way. We hear a rational concept expressed and we think we've got it pegged. This is a problem when it comes to matters of the mind and the heart (which are beyond conceptual construction). When we hear these terms, we start thinking about biological location and function, but the heart and mind, in a spiritual sense, are not about biology. The spirit is the engine that drives biology, not a manifestation of biology. We can measure brain waves and heart rhythms, but we can't measure the true heart and mind, which are beyond the physical. Such matters are the smoke that emanates from the fire of the spirit, or the fruit of the spirit.

This imperative is precisely the same as expressed in John 15:13, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* What the English eye misses, is what can only be known in Koine Greek. The English word for "life," in this

passage, in Greek is psuché (ψύχω)—mind (thoughts/ideologies) so a more meaningful, and linguistically accurate, translation would be: *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his ideas (e.g., thoughts and emotions about one's self) for his friends."* To be completely accurate, psuché has been variously translated as soul (psyche); a person's distinct identity (unique personhood)—individual personality. But in all cases, the understanding originates from an idea of self-understanding, not the true self beyond ideas and understanding. And when seen in this manner, the Eastern imperative is nearly identical to that of the Greek. It is manifestations of the mind that stand between, and separate us all from one another.

Phenomena are full to overflowing in delusion, none of which is recognized for what it is. A person whom others see as a bigot does not see himself or herself as a bigot. A person who feels justified in excess does not see himself or herself as an emotional hoarder. A person who sides with one political party, in opposition to another, thinks the other guy is wrong while he is right. The very nature of phenomenal life is opposition and discrimination, yet beneath phenomena lays non-discriminate unity. Racial bias, gender bias, economic bias, social class bias, and more, only serve the purpose of alienating one group from another. There is a good chance that you'll never find someone who says to you, "You know what? I decided that today I am going to

make bad decisions that will hurt people." On the contrary, we all believe that our choices are the right choices, and conversely believe that conflict is mainly the result of those other people making wrong choices. And this is the bane of dogmatic religious stances. When we choose to align ourselves with birds-of-a-feather, we end up attacking other birds who make other choices. We fight over differences and can see neither our own corruption nor the basis for unity.

It is all too easy to feel the victim when others do us wrong. This position makes us feel justified in striking back, whether that striking is physical or emotional: "That will teach them." Then the striking back is perceived and responded in kind. The consequences of such behavior keeps people locked in prisons of the mind, where both the judger and the judged are trapped. One who judges another does so from the posture of self-righteous blame and egotistical justification, thus imprisoning the judged in mental prisons, from which they may never gain freedom. Moreover, they may not even realize they have been imprisoned. The prison lies within, trapping the judger and alienating one person from the other. When we are wronged, blame is naturally assigned, and this label of blame may persist for years, during which time trust evaporates. Keeping this mental record of blame both destroys trust and makes it virtually impossible to see the other in a new light.

Seeing what's there, instead of our memory of the way things were, sounds incredibly easy. How could we not? We all have the same eyes and the world we see is the same. Yet if we all saw the world "as it is," instead of the way it was, how we would like it to be, or a way that confirms our preconceived beliefs and biases, it would be like Shunryu Suzuki referred to in his famous book Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind. There's a fresh or innocent perspective when we see as a child sees: an honesty that is neither right nor wrong. In such a state of mind there is no axe to grind, imbedded beliefs to defend, or convictions to uphold. Things just are, as they are. And Suzuki spoke of this prison of the mind by pointing out that unless we liberate ourselves from this prison, we would forever be in bondage. Every moment is new and filled with the potential to alter our course and begin again with a new perspective.

Yet, they did us wrong once, so they can't be trusted. We keep the record riveted in the memory of a dead past, which leaks out to poison our present. Jesus Christ called such people hypocrites calling out others for lacking moral purity without recognizing the impossibility of such purity. But what is never realized is that the phenomenal world is not real. It is an illusion of the mind. There is only one realm where purity exists—that of our unconditional mind. Love that arises from this place is pure and without flaw. This is what the Apostle Paul said about it:

"Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."[32]

Truth that is unconditional is not restricted or belonging to one discipline or another. Zen is precisely about transcendence, moving beyond phenomenal limits to wherever truth is found. There is much truth in the Bible, but as Jesus Christ himself warned, weeds and wheat grow together; we need to be discerning and winnow out the phenomenal from the noumenal. Everything phenomenal is conditional and fraught with delusion. Seeing clearly (suchness) is a matter of the unconditional heart/mind.

[32] The Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Sexuality and Spirituality—Two Ends of the Human Spectrum

While not specifically a delusion, the suppression of these aspects of human nature leads to delusion. Sexuality and spirituality are connected at the deepest part of each of us, and they share similar attributes. Both are means for uniting with each other and our source. Experiencing fulfillment of either results in bliss. Both are based on compassion or true love, since unconditional love is the essence of our primordial mind and this mind radiates outward into, and permeates, the conditional part of us. Both may result in birth, either physical or spiritual. We are fundamentally spiritual beings clothed in physical bodies. Neither can exist without the other. They dependently originate each other; thus the nature of both is the same, yet different. Spiritually, they are identical. Physically, they are different, but both sexuality and spirituality arise from our primordial mind. It is in our nature to satisfy both. The idea that some people express, that they are not spiritual, is absurd. We are spiritual by nature, so such a thing is impossible. Bodhidharma correctly pointed out that, were it not for the spirit that animates us, we might as well be stones. What we are, however, is not the same thing as being aware of what we are. Becoming aware of our true nature brings us into harmony with why we exist at all.

Having said that, however, I must go further and say that a lack of awareness can't be subverted nor repressed without paying a price. It is the nature of arising spirituality to percolate upward into our consciousness, and this tendency goes by the handle of immanence—the emergence of the spirit into conscious awareness.

Our essential core is constantly moving from unawareness into awareness. In fact, some enlightened Buddhists, say that this emergence is what life is all about, and this arising is known as immanent transcendence. Out of what seems like nothingness arises essential goodness, or enlightenment invading samsara. One of the most esteemed pieces of Buddhist literature[33] expresses the tension thus: *"It is the inner urge of Suchness in man to emerge, so to speak, from the state of unawareness to the state of awareness, or from the unconscious to the conscious. It is an internal movement of Suchness[34] within, from potential to actual, or from essence to existence, so that essence permeates into existence, or nirvana into samsara."*

As previously noted, in Buddhist vernacular, noumenality is called Buddha-Nature and is under-

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[33] Yoshito S. Hakeda (Translator), Ryuichi Abé (Introduction) The Awakening of Faith: Attributed to Asvaghosha, Columbia University Press, 1967

[34] Primordial consciousness/Original enlightenment—Buddha-Nature

stood as the wellspring source of all. It is our seed—our jewel of great value. The name we choose to articulate this transcendent seed is arbitrary. Any and every name is as good or bad as the next. No name can adequately define what is transcendent, and every name chosen leads us to conceptual error. Call it what you will, but understand that no name is adequate. "Buddha-Nature," "noumenality," "context," "God"—all names fail. But whatever handle we use, "IT" (or to use the yoga term "TAT" to mean *that*—to refer to the indescribable) naturally moves us along the path of constant change like an ever-present itch that demands scratching. It is this surge, which St. Augustine expressed thus in his Confessions—*"... our heart is restless until there is repose in God."* Augustine's understanding occurred within the framework of his cultural conditioning and was the best way he could express this itch.

We can, of course, ignore this emergence, particularly when we have decided that we are not spiritual. The consequence of that chosen suppression is corruption: the result of pretending to be what we are not. And the same can be said of sexuality. By denying this fundamental attribute, or repressing its emergence, corruption is the result. Any time we attempt to deny what is a fundamental attribute of being human, the result is corruption. The need persists but can get confused, and we reach out to gain satisfaction in unnatural ways.

The means we choose to achieve satisfaction ranges from one addiction to another: drugs, alcohol, food, illicit sex, power over others, status, and, of course, the accumulation of excess. All forms are only temporary quick fixes, which soon evaporate, requiring increasingly greater doses of some other aphrodisiac to both anesthetize our pain, our sense of incompletion and divert our attention away from associated suffering.

The orthodox church has long condemned sexual expression, relating it to the fall in the story of the Garden of Eden. It has likewise condemned the free emergence of spirituality that has sought expression outside the sanction of institutional clerical blessing. This has created an enormous rift between our basic, fundamental nature and the apparent venue for understanding and relating to our source. The result of this perversion has been an attitude of sanctimonious, pretended moral purity and corresponding hypocrisy of pretending piety in contradistinction to our fundamental nature.

It should not be surprising that we are being made aware of almost daily moral incursions by high-profile individuals who have not developed a meaningful spiritual foundation, in spite of their voices aligning themselves with one religious organization or another. The result of this moral flip-flop has become a growing acceptance that seems to favor "telling it like it is" as a sign of being genuine. Don't we all tell dirty stories in locker rooms? Don't we all lust for our neighbors' wife? What is the result

when we become aware of such failures? We judge others with the same hypocritical yardstick to which we ourselves are unable to measure up. Until such time as we are able to make contact with, and fan the flames of our fundamental nature, we shouldn't expect any meaningful cessation of these perversions. Nature will not be denied, but will rather persist and seek satisfaction, either in a natural or a tangential way.

The bliss of either sexual or spiritual union is both a blessing and a curse. Both produce the heights of human experience—that's the blessing. The curse comes through attachment and ultimate loss. The sensation of sexual orgasm or spiritual rapture is so intense and exquisite that the desire to retain and repeat these experiences is overwhelming. Such ancient disciplines as Tantra yoga were developed, in recognition of the correspondence between spiritual and sexual bliss. We now know that sexual organism produces the hormone oxytocin, made in a part of the brain, (e.g., the hypothalamus) transported to, and then secreted by the pituitary gland, responsible for the experience of sexual rapture.

Since every phenomenal experience is fleeting, with loss comes profound and deep suffering. If we are not exceedingly careful, we can become addicted to the bliss and lose ourselves in the memory of pleasure. Either can save us from despair, and both can ultimately destroy us through craving.

The temptations of Gautama Buddha by Mara, and of Jesus Christ by diabolos (translated as the deceiver—the devil), are instructive. In both cases, lusts and fears served as the final frontier preceding enlightenment. Both stood fast against every temptation thrown at them by these supernatural forces. The same temptations assault us, and we too either yield or hold fast to our essential core. Manifestations of the mind can be either evil or good, depending on the depth of our awakening. If we dive to the level of the conditional ego, nothing good will result. Our own true nature lies deeper, and when we arrive at the unconditional ground, there are only compassion and unconditional love.

Zen Master Huang Po revealed what happens when we plunge to the depths of our unconditional mind. In On The transmission of Mind[35] he said, *"If he (an ordinary man) should behold the glorious sight of all Gautama Buddhas coming to welcome him, surrounded by every kind of gorgeous manifestations, he would feel no desire to approach them. If he should behold all sorts of horrific forms surrounding him, he would experience no terror. He would just be himself, oblivious of conceptual thought and one with the Absolute. He would have attained the state of unconditional being. This then is the fundamental principle."* At that place within

[35] John Blofeld (Translator), P'ei Hsiu (Preface), The Zen Teachings of Huang Po—On the Transmission of Mind, Grove Press, 1994, pg. 106

us all, there is no fear, no temptation and no suffering.

Chapter 5—Leadership and Spiritual Training: What's a Zen Master?

The shortest answer to that question is that a Zen master is someone who has mastered the Dharma and has personally experienced awakening, plus one other important detail: A Zen master has been tested and confirmed by his or her own master, who has likewise been subjected to the same process all the way back to Gautama Buddha. The initial transmission of the Dharma occurred between Gautama Buddha and his first disciple, Kasyapa. It was a silent transmission. The story says that Gautama Buddha simply held up a flower, Kasyapa smiled, and transmission was completed. This transmission beyond words has served as a vital aspect of authenticating understanding. If we again turn to Huang Po, we can gain some insight.

"If I now state that there are no phenomena and no original mind, you will begin to understand something of the intuitive Dharma silently conveyed to Mind with Mind. Since phenomena and no-phenomena (e.g., noumena—my addition) are one, there are neither phenomena nor non-phenomena, and the only possible transmission is Mind to Mind."

Before moving on I want to draw your attention to a word that has special significance in mystical experiences. The word is "intuition." By living at this point in time, we have the benefit of tools and sci-

entific methods not available until now. This helps us to understand matters that previously had to remain obscure. Throughout the Zen saga, we find reference to intuitive discernment, such as appears in the quote above from Huang Po: *"... the intuitive Dharma silently...."* What we now know is that intuition and insight (e.g., wisdom) are right-brain matters, whereas intellectual rationality (or analytic processes) is mostly a left-brain matter. By grasping the process of Zen meditation (allowing sensory interplay to subside and pass away), it is now possible to understand the result in the brain, which causes a reduction of left-brain functioning to unfold and right brain processing to become dominant. Medically, this is known as deafferentation—*"a loss of sensory input from a portion of the body, usually caused by interruption of the peripheral sensory fibers*." Quieting the chatter results in mental stability known as serene equipoise (or equilibrium), and this in turn leads the meditator to an unborn state of mind.

"When scattering occurs, the 'scatterer' is the mind; lacking color and shape, it cannot be pinned down. When it rests, the 'rester' is the mind; it is the primordial reality that is liberated from the start. There is nothing to accept or reject, no hopes or worries, no judgments. One just settles into the great foundationless state that is empty from the

start."[36] Oftentimes when you read such statements they appear to be contradictory. For example, this expression, "… no original mind," sounds confusing in light of what follows, "… conveyed to Mind with Mind." Best guess is that Huang Po was contrasting the ordinary conception of mind (a theoretical proposition) with the true mind beyond conception. He wasn't entirely comfortable with the term "mind," since any and every term can be misunderstood and conceptualized.

Suffice it to say, the transmission is very personal, intimate, and deep, not even slightly similar to other clerical ordination processes, which are almost entirely the result of intellectual achievement, following study at a theological seminary. Such study concerns the foolish notion that God can be converted into an object for study and thus "understood." The role of a Zen master is consequently very different from the role other clerics play. Whereas a minister of *The Word* is concerned with filling the mind with objective data and stories

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[36] José Ignacio Cabezón, The Dalai Lama et al., The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel of the Oral Tradition, Meditation, On the Nature of Mind, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2011, p. 67. The quote is from Longchen Rabjampa (1308–1363 CE), a major teacher in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. His major work is The Seven Treasures, which encapsulates the previous 600 years of Buddhist thought in Tibet.

about God, a Zen master is concerned with the basis of all filling—the mind itself.

The desire by people to understand their source, and their relationship to that source, by reading scripture is nothing new. It happens within any spiritual discipline, Buddhism included. People, regardless of religious differences, are the same and desire shortcuts to understanding. Apparently this was a topic of some concern between Zen Master Bassui and his students. They too wished to validate their understanding through Sūtras, and Master Bassui told them to first awaken the mind that reads and then they would understand what they were reading.[37] In our ordinary mind of thinking we imagine we understand, but true understanding is a matter of the deeper primordial mind, not the rational mind of thinking. *"True vision isn't just seeing seeing. It's also seeing not seeing. And true understanding isn't just understanding understanding. It's also understanding not understanding. If you understand anything, you don't understand. Only when you understand nothing is it true understanding. Understanding is neither understanding nor not understanding."*[38] While this may

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[37] Bassui Tokusho, Arthur Braverman (translator), Mud and Water, The Teachings of Zen Master Bassui, Wisdom Publications, 1997

[38] Bodhidharma, translated by Red Pine, The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma, North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989

sound like gobbledygook, there is profound wisdom in grasping this essential teaching, beyond the rational mind. At the depths of the true mind there is just unconditionality; neither one thing nor another.

So what is the role of a Zen master? And how does that role play out? The role is to bring us to the realization of wholeness, recognizing that we think we are whole already (in spite of living within a mirage which we take as real). That is no easy task, which entails all manner of means of breaking down the delusions within which we are imprisoned (without knowing that we are imprisoned). One moment will entail harshness, the next moment the gentleness of a mother caring for a helpless child. Back and forth go the tearing and the mending, like a weaver passing a stitching awl across a loom. A good master of Zen is like a combination of Jack Kevorkian aiding us through the death of the ego and Mother Teresa nursing us to true life. They are chameleon-like magicians able to adapt on the fly and rise to unexpected challenges. The whole process is carefully orchestrated to cause disorientation, frustration, and doubt of everything we falsely believe constitutes a solid and predictable world. When we find ourselves at last in the midst of a shattered heap, then we are ready, and the real teacher appears: our own mind.

Every person is objectively different, yet the same. We are all snowflakes but essentially snow, and it is the role of a Zen master to strip away the differ-

ences so that we can discover what unifies us all. The delicacy with which this process unfolds is as unique and specialized as the differences of each of us. There is no such thing as a "one size fits all" method, precisely because there are no two people exactly the same. At its best, this is a dance between a master and a dilettante. The master leads, and the dilettante learns to follow, until the time when the student becomes the master and passes the process on to the next. Gautama Buddha was known as the consummate spiritual doctor, who administered just the right medicine for any and every nuanced disease, and it is the goal of every Zen master to follow in this path of expedite means.

This process has nothing at all to do with an intellectual education, which has become the only pedagogical norm today. Instead, it is a matter of leaping beyond the intellect and into the void: the source of all knowing. Some of the towering giants of Zen were illiterate: Dajian Huineng, for example, couldn't read, but allegedly awakened upon hearing the Diamond Sūtra being recited. The story says that he immediately inquired about the Sūtra and decided to seek out the fifth Zen patriarch, Hongren, at his monastery on Huang Mei Mountain. Zen Master Huineng later became the sixth and final Zen patriarch and founder of the sudden enlightenment school of Zen.

There is a temptation to regard such statements as spurious, since so few people have experienced what it describes. This would, however, be a mis-

take. Not many of us have devoted ourselves to training to be a marathon champion, but that in no way suggests than running a marathon is impossible. Those who train their minds are every bit as accomplished as marathon champions, and their accomplishments are every bit as noteworthy. The only difference is that one person trains his or her objective body, and the other trains his or her not-to-be-found mind. The task of the physical trainer is to train what is physical, and the task of a Zen master is to train what is spiritual.

Chapter 6—So You Think You Know Who You Are? Wait a Darn Minute (or more).

Thinking, as normally understood, is the result of an analytic and cognitive process. It is subject to the rules that govern all objective phenomena: It is impermanent, dependent and, unless flexible, is fraught with anxiety and suffering. It is all too easy to become persuaded by our own thoughts, convinced of our ideologies, and defensive of our positions. When thinking is arranged around the images we hold about ourselves, thinking itself becomes a source of woe. Chán Master Sheng-yen conveyed the essence of the relationship between thinking and ignorance by saying, *"When knowledge and views are established, knowing is the root of ignorance. When knowledge and views do not exist, seeing itself is nirvana."*[39] Said another way, fixed and inflexible ideologies (with the self as the illusive defender) are ignorant. Without this impediment we can see things as they are. With it we are driving down a dark road at night with no headlights. The self-image (the imagined "I") lives within the illusion of what we ordinarily regard as mind—that is, the manifestations, which emerge from mind.

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[39] Chán Master Sheng Yen, Complete Enlightenment—Zen Comments on the Sutra of Complete Enlightenment, with a Foreword by Thich Nhat Hanh, Shambhala Publishing, 1977

"...there cannot be a self that is free from all obstructions. If there is a sense of self, then there are also obstructions. There cannot be obstructions without a self to create and experience them, because the self is an obstruction."[40]

In like fashion we can say that there can be no freedom in thinking, because thinking is an obstruction. All thought is conceptual, and all concepts are fabricated obstructions. Genuine freedom is transcendent to thought. Freedom is an inherent birthright that is totally integrated with nirvana, the foundational basis of mind.

So long as we stay within the abstraction of thinking (without accessing intuition), we are operating with a half-engine, seeing only images and never getting down to essence beneath the thoughts. It is like seeing an image of yourself in a mirror and believing that you are that image, and nothing else. We are, of course, a projected image, which we imagine, but most importantly we are the one seeing the image. In point of fact, "seeing" is not the perception of objects, but is, rather, the conjunction between the seen and the seer. Moot point? Remove either what is seen or the seer, and seeing ceases to exist. As the saying goes, "It takes two to tango."

It is absolutely impossible to think ourselves into or out of existence. We are not thoughts or ideas. In-

[40] ibid, footnote 29

stead, we are the mind from which thoughts arise. If we were simply thoughts or self-images, when we stopped thinking or seeing images we would cease to exist. The standard western model of identity would have us believe that we are illusive egos, or some other compound configuration that entails an ego. And because of this view, western psychologists work to reinforce this image, in the interest of enhancing our sense of psychic worth. Such energy does nothing more than make us all addicted to a never-ending shopping list of acquisitions, all designed to reinforce a ghost. Instead, Gautama Buddha taught, *"... all things are devoid of selfhood, devoid of separate individuality...."*

This is, of course, an alien concept to our ordinary understanding regarding mutual exclusion and the Principle of Non-Contradiction.[41] However, this notion of mutual exclusion in no way takes into consideration the infinite domain of an unconditional mind. From the Zen perspective, ontology itself is wrong-headed, since ontology presumes one thing versus another. If there is only mind, there is no versus nor mutual exclusion. The fly in the oint-

[41] The oldest statement of the law is that contradictory statements cannot both at the same time be true, e.g., the two propositions "A is B" and "A is not B" are mutually exclusive. This is the statement of the law given by Aristotle. It takes no account of the truth of either proposition; if one is true, the other is not; thus one of the two must be false.

ment is the idea of individual possession, which is 100% joined at the hip to the "I" doing the possessing. Nagarjuna's Two Truth Doctrine[42] can, of course, be seen as a quaint fantasy with no relevance to real life, or it can be validated through the personal experience of awakening. To live your entire life in delusion, believing all the while in your own separate and incomplete existence as an individual and then suddenly wake up into your own unconditional wholeness is an amazing experience that transforms you from a groveling luster into someone who has destroyed the motive that drives all yearning. Subsequent to the experience, you know in your depth how both conventional and ultimate truths co-exist; you savor the taste of your own completion, and you are set free at last.

The Zen position on thinking is not contrary to other mystical positions. Being lured by quick fixes and sound bites is a huge loss to the human condi-

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[42] Nagarjuna, Jay L. Garfield (translator) Mūlamadhyamakakārika, Oxford University Press, 1997, 24:8-10, *"The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is based on two truths: a truth of worldly convention and an ultimate truth. Those who do not understand the distinction drawn between these two truths do not understand The Buddha's profound truth. Without a foundation in the conventional truth the significance of the ultimate cannot be taught. Without understanding the significance of the ultimate, liberation is not achieved."*

tion. The combination of instantaneous nirvana with this idea of being a separate individual is a toxic brew. We have forgotten what it is to truly know another and ourselves and are proceeding down the primrose path, holding hands with other lemmings like us and racing toward oblivion, all the while convinced that our ideas reflect a reality—one that doesn't exist. Principles such as Prajñā and Jñāna (Sanskrit), gnosis (Greek), or Chokhmah (Hebrew) have been superseded by reality TV, Saturday Night Live, and Fox News. To the ancients, knowing was not conceptual thinking, but was deep insight; it referred to pure awareness free from conceptual encumbrances. We have lost such awareness and traded it in for the poor cousin of abstract thought, and the magnitude of loss is incalculable.

The consequences of destroying mystical traditions is that we are left with Big Box religious stores, hawking the latest religious gizmo that promises instant highs and continuing prosperity for the right people and misery for others. This notion of "the right people" remains a central tenet throughout certain Protestant denominations and was a foundational thesis to John Calvin, who wrote The Institutes of the Christian Religion, first published in 1536. Calvin argued that it was God's unchangeable decree from before the creation of the world to freely save some people (the elect), foreordaining them to eternal life, while others (the reprobate) would be "barred from access to" salvation and sentenced to "eternal death." This predestined division between one group of people and another is still

taught at Calvin College, a liberal arts college located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, established and run by the Christian Reformed Church in America. Coincidentally the newly appointed Secretary of Education, billionaire Betsy DeVos, attended Calvin College. She pledged to oversee a "transformational change" in US education, something she pursued in her home state of Michigan. The Reformed Church in America, perhaps not so coincidentally, is the denomination to which President elect Donald Trump belongs.

We are too easily hoodwinked by spiritual charlatans and snake oil salesmen who claim to have an exclusive inside track to God and back up their claims with twisted and distorted translations, designed to fleece the maximum quantity of wool from gullible sheep. We have become spiritually vacuous, with no clue as to what genuine knowing means. We are now a house divided[43] that can't stand, because we are standing on a single leg and forced to lean on the crutch of well-meaning but ignorant clerics, who have themselves, been misled. Mark Twain, the great satirist, pegged this ignorance when he said, *"In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination."* Both the house wherein we have our being,

[43] Mark 3:24-25, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, it cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand."

and the earthly kingdom, wherein we collectively live are divided. What we experience internally is made manifest throughout our earthly kingdom. Conceptual thinking is one leg but sadly does not provide the necessary remedy for moving us beyond the lust for more. True knowing is the ship that brings us into the realm of the sublime and sets us free, and the wind in those sails is dhyāna (Zen).

Self-awareness—Or is That an Illusion?

"To thine own self be true."[44] It has a certain appeal, but how many of us truly know who we are? Without a solid grasp of who we are, we are doomed to a never-ending quest for meaning. Then we are Don Quixotes chasing the windmills of excess only to discover that Dulcinea is like the emperor with no clothes. Identity is not an "out there" condition. It is a matter of the heart. There is literally nothing "out there," except an illusion we try desperately to grasp. It is water running through our tight fists. To be aware of our true nature is to be aware of awareness itself, not the ephemeral clothing that we drape upon ourselves. The compulsion for more is being driven by a search for identity. But, as Shakespeare would have us see, *"…it must follow, as the night the day…,"* and when that happens *"Thou canst not then be false to any man."* Once we find our indwelling essence, it is impossible to be anything else other than who we have been all along. The illusion is to try gilding our lily with unnecessary embellishments and unsatisfying additions, which pass away as quickly as a child ripping through one package after another on Christmas morning.

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[44] William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act I, Scene 3, *"This above all—to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day."*

If you want to understand the magnitude of our dilemma, take a look at what we pay for different kinds of employment. A recent study conducted by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce is instructive. College graduates who pursued a degree in petroleum engineering could expect to earn a median starting salary that is more than 300% higher than the median salary of the lowest earning major of counseling/psychology — $120,000 vs. $29,000. All ten of the highest paying salaries went to young people who were educated to find and build stuff, while all ten of the lowest paying salaries went to those desiring to help others, or add to the cultural fabric of our world. It is curious that, as we acquire more stuff, more people are finding themselves in need, with little or no incentive offered to those who are trained to meet these needs. The presumption of our world is that the acquisition of more equates to fulfillment, and this delusion is being fueled by monetary incentives. Mirroring this destructive momentum is the current political thrust to decimate social safety nets, everything from unions, to voting rights, to environmental checks and balances, to oversight of greed-motivated industries, at the same time that environmental pollution, new strains of disease, and regulation of our financial networks are being rendered null and void. It is almost as if a virus has been placed in the drinking water, with the effect of destroying the intelligence of our leaders.

Chapter 7—Scientific Validation?

Zen is about the mind, and the mind is where transformation happens. The mind is the wizard behind our illusive Oz, which we know as our world. If it is true that the mind can't be objectified, then how can it be studied? The study of anything assumes an objective something to study. For the answer to that we must return once more to Gautama Buddha.

"Seeing the actions of body and mouth, we say that we see the mind. The mind is not seen, but this is not false. This is seeing by outer signs."

Not even a Buddha can see his own mind. So the object of study is what the mind produces, and the closest object for study is the human brain. Obviously, the brain is the organ, and the mind is related to the brain. So the brain becomes the object we can study, and by learning about how the brain is structured and functions we can learn a great deal by inference. The question of mystical awareness, being either internally or externally sourced is beside the point. In either case our brain is the organ of reception. We are fortunate to be living in a time when the science of neurology is telling us a great deal about the brain; ad as we learn what this cutting edge science has to say, a wealth of inference about the mind is expanding and clarifying.

One of the really amazing perspectives concerns how interconnected our system of internal commu-

nications is actually. Our old way of understanding the brain is very dated. The new way of understanding the brain is not so limited to mean what sits between our ears, but rather entails a vast array of sensory systems distributed throughout our entire body, with the stuff between our ears equivalent to a central processing unit. Every molecule that comprises our physical bodies is connected to that CPU, either biochemically or electrically or both. The tiniest tingle in a single toe is instantly detected in our CPU, with a near instant and appropriate response. Every sensory system is detected in a separate part of our brain, where it is integrated and assembled into a seamless gestalt of experience.

We have two connected hemispheres, each designed for different functions and ways of grasping and making sense out of what is perceived, whether internally or externally. So long as there is mental health (however loosely defined that may be)[45], all functions flow smoothly. There are, of course, glitches and malformations; when these are exam-

[45] According to a recent report by the US Surgeon General (David Satcher, MD, Ph.D.), *"...a firm and uniformly acceptable definition of mental health remains 'illusory' In other words, what it means to be mentally healthy is subject to many different interpretations that are rooted in value judgments that may vary across time and cultures."* See: http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/home-.html

ined and understood, we can better comprehend how the various functions work (or don't). We also have the benefit of tools and technologies that allow us to map, monitor, and learn how the brain works. From such study we know without any doubt that what we perceive is the result of electrical and biochemical projections in the brain, and this view has altered our understanding of what's real (and what is not). The overarching take-home lesson from the science of neurology is that what we ordinarily consider to be an objective and concrete world, whether internally or externally, is nothing more than images projected in our brains.

Ancient mystics discerned this intuitively and tried as best they could to convey this illusive nature to those who would listen. Few did, and consequently the world went on chasing the rabbit of illusion, determined to catch the brass ring. One of these mystics was Meister Eckhart, who is quoted as having said, *"Every time that the powers of the soul come into contact with created things, they receive the created images and likenesses from the created thing and absorb them. In this way arises the soul's knowledge of created things. Created things cannot come closer to the soul than this, and the soul can only approach created things by the voluntary reception of images. And it is through the presence of the image that the soul approaches the created world, for the image is a thing that the soul creates with her powers. Does the soul want to know the nature of a stone—a horse—a man? She forms an image."* This matter has now been vali-

dated by modern studies of neurology, which challenge our ordinary perspectives of reality, our grasp of objectivity, and adds new light on Gautama Buddha's vision regarding how the world should be seen.[46] By accepting this now-established fact, we can better understand why mystics (including Jesus Christ) cautioned us to build our lives on the solid ground of the spirit rather than the shifting sands of what we take to be rock. Ever since the Age of Enlightenment, we have opted out of a spiritual foundation, foolishly believing in a solid and objective world. Not only can the mind not be objectified, but also the objective nature we thought was so well established must now be questioned. The validation of science now destroys the very premise it sought to confirm.

Meditation and Health

Today there are many branches on the meditation tree, but when this practice began (nobody is quite sure when) thousands of years ago, there was only dhyāna. Now we use the term Zen instead. But whatever name is used, what was done when it began is still the same, and the results of a committed

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[46] *"Within this fathom long body is the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the path leading to the cessation of the world."* Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Rohitassa Sutta: To Rohitassa, Mette Forest Monastery PO BOX 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082-1409 USA

practice have a range of benefits from physical to mental to a complete spiritual transformation that can revamp your view of the true nature of the world and ourselves. You can shop à la carte or eat the whole meal. Whatever choice you make will have positive benefits, and these are now being scientifically established and documented. After thousands of years, meditation has finally moved from the monastery or the mountain to Main Street.

Perhaps the most popular adaptation of meditation today is what is called MBSR (Mindfulness-based stress reduction), which emanates from number seven on Gautama Buddha's Eightfold Path (Zen is number 8). Mindfulness is a method for training the mind to stay in the present moment rather than becoming lost in constant mental chatter. Mindfulness and concentration (Zen) were initially intended as a package deal: first you learn to reduce the chatter through mindfulness, and then you learn to concentrate the mind on itself. This latter is the method that produces a state of consciousness known as samādhi, where the meditator concentrates awareness on awareness until a state of meditative unification (absorption) is reached. As a practical reality, the practice of Buddhist meditation ordinarily includes both disciplines woven seamlessly together.

Much clinical work has been done to monitor and track the impact of MBSR in reducing stress, alleviating general chronic stress and pain linked to fibromyalgia, as well as treating patients with cancer

and coronary artery disease. Improvements have been noted in terms of both physical and mental health measures.

Over the past 30 years there has been an increase in the number of published studies on mindfulness. The current body of scientific literature on the effects of mindfulness practices is promising, despite the presence of many methodological weaknesses. The current research does suggest that mindfulness practices are useful in the treatment of pain, stress, anxiety, depressive relapse, disordered eating, and addiction, among other complaints. Mindfulness meditation has also been investigated for its potential benefit for individuals who do not experience these disorders, with positive results. Mindfulness practice improves the immune system and alters activation symmetries in the prefrontal cortex, a change previously associated with an increase in positive effect and faster recovery from a negative experience.

Mindfulness is often used synonymously with traditional Buddhist processes of cultivating awareness, as described above, but more recently has been studied as a psychological tool capable of stress reduction and the elevation of several positive emotions or traits. In this relatively new field of western psychological, mindfulness researchers attempt to define and measure the results of mindfulness, primarily through controlled, randomized studies of mindfulness intervention on various dependent variables. Researchers in mindfulness interven-

tions, measure many of the outcomes subjectively. For this reason, several mindfulness inventories, or scales (a set of questions posed to a subject whose answers appear in the form of a rating or category), have arisen. The most prominent include:

- the Attention Awareness Scale
- the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory
- the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills
- the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale

Through the use of these scales—which can illuminate self-reported changes in levels of mindfulness, measurements of other correlated inventories in fields such as subjective well-being, and the measurement of other correlated variables, including health and performance—researchers have produced studies that investigate the nature and effects of mindfulness. The research on the outcomes of mindfulness falls into two main categories: stress reduction and positive-state elevation.

Stress Reduction

Researchers from the Harvard Medical School have demonstrated that, during meditation, physiological signals show a decrease in respiration and an increase in heart rate and blood oxygen saturation levels. According to the National Institutes of Health, *"Practicing meditation has been shown to*

induce some changes in the body….Some types of meditation might work by affecting the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system." The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are two divisions of the autonomic nervous system of the body. The sympathetic nervous system is responsible for our reaction to stress, or fear, and is colloquially known as the fight-or-flight system. The parasympathetic nervous system is active during times of rest. The NIH goes on to say, *"It is thought that some types of meditation might work by reducing activity in the sympathetic nervous system and increasing activity in the parasympathetic nervous system."*[47]

One theory, presented by Daniel Goleman and Tara Bennett,[48] suggests that meditation works because of the relationship between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex. In simple terms, the amygdala is the part of the brain that decides if we should get angry or anxious (among other things), and the prefrontal cortex is the part that applies the brakes and causes us stop and think about things (it is also known as the inhibitory center). These brain parts are integrated with the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. The prefrontal cortex is very good at analyzing and planning, but it takes

[47] https://www.nih.gov

[48] Tara Bennett-Goleman, with forward by The Dalai Lama, Emotional Alchemy: How the Mind Can Heal the Heart, (Three Rivers Press, January 9), 2001

a relatively long time to make decisions. The amygdala, on the other hand, is simpler (and older in evolutionary terms). It makes rapid judgments about a situation and has a powerful effect on our emotions and behaviors, linked to survival needs. For example, if a human sees a lion leaping out, the amygdala will trigger a fight or flight response long before the prefrontal cortex responds. Back when there were actual lions trying to have us for lunch, this was a very useful reaction. A rapid decision to run, was followed by a quick response to relax (if we survived). Today there aren't many lions leaping about, but the amygdala functions in the same way. The problem now is that many people stay in a state of heightened anxiety with no ensuing down. The amygdala is not designed for rational thought processes. It has one purpose only: to kick our system into overdrive. When we are in a state of heightened anxiety, we don't think clearly. Making snap judgments leads to error, such as seeing danger where there is none, that could lead to a "tweet-storm" at 3:00 AM.

The frozen deer-in-the-headlights syndrome is a case in point. What we perceive can be fraught with distortion due to erroneous beliefs, biases, misinterpreted perceptual data, and more. This is particularly true in contemporary society, where social conflicts are far more common than encounters with predators, and a basically harmless but emotionally charged situation can trigger uncontrollable responses of fear, violence or anger—leading to conflict, anxiety, stress and lashing out to dominate

imagined predators. Such reactions are palpably evident in today's social environment. Consistent meditation can train your mind to counteract the override of the amygdala and thus enhance your states of calm, your relationships, and your perceptions.

Studies done by Yale, Harvard, and Massachusetts General Hospital have shown that meditation increases gray matter in the brain and slows down the deterioration of the brain as a part of the natural aging process. Brain scans of test subjects revealed that those who meditate have an increased thickness of gray matter in parts of the brain that are responsible for attention and processing sensory input. The study also showed that meditation helps slow down brain deterioration due to aging.

Another study involving the participation of a group of college students found that, when the students used a meditation technique called integrative body-mind training, "*Meditating may improve the integrity and efficiency of certain connections in the brain"*[49] through an increase in their number and robustness. Brain scans showed strong white matter changes in the anterior cingulate cortex.

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[49] Casey Johnston (Former Culture Editor), *"Meditation boosts part of brain where ADD, addictions reside."*(Ars Technica), 8/20/2010

Dr. James Austin, a neurophysiologist at the University of Colorado, reported that Zen meditation rewires the circuitry of the brain.[50] This has been confirmed using functional MRI imaging (fMRI), a brain scanning technique that measures blood flow in the brain.

Another study involving fifteen Carmelite nuns showed that, when they engaged in a form of meditation known as Unio Mystica (or Theoria), they experienced activation in far-flung parts of their brains in mystical union with God. The findings resulted from being monitored with an fMRI machine while meditating. Researchers using electroencephalograph (EEG) recordings of skilled meditators have shown a significant rise in gamma wave activity in the 80 to 120 Hz range during meditation. There was also a rise in the range of 25 to 42 Hz. These meditators had 10 to 40 years of training in Buddhist-based mind training. EEG done on meditators who had received only recent training demonstrated considerably less rise. Gamma waves are the fastest of the brainwave frequencies and signify the highest state of focus possible. They are associated with peak concentration and the brain's optimal frequency for cognitive functioning.

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[50] James H. Austin, MD, Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness, (The MIT Press), 1998

Dr. Sean O'Nuallain[51] is the first to interrelate the work on synchronized gamma waves in consciousness with the well-attested work on gamma waves in meditation in an experimental context. His work offers experimental evidence and simulated data to show that what both types of brain waves have in common is the ability to put the brain into a state in which it is maximally sensitive and consumes power at a lower (or even zero) rate. He proposes that this may correspond to a "selfless" state and the more typical non-zero state, in which gamma is not so prominent, accounting for the experience of an empirical self-image. Thus, the *zero power* in the title of his article refers not only to the power spectrum of the brain, as measured by the Hilbert transform, but also to a psychological state of personal renunciation.

Minimizing Perception Distortions

Studies have shown that meditation has both short-term and long-term effects on various perceptual faculties. In 1984 authors M. Forte, D. P. Brown and M. Dysart conducted a study[52] that measured

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[51] "Zero Power and Selflessness: What Meditation and Conscious Perception Have in Common", http://mindblog.dericbownds.net/2007/03/correlation-of-conscious-perception.html

[52] Michael Forte, Daniel Brown, Michael Dysart, "Differences in experience among mindfulness meditators." Article published in Imagination, Cognition and Person-

the absolute threshold of perception for light stimulus duration in practitioners and non-practitioners of mindfulness meditation. The results showed that meditators have a significantly lower detection threshold for light stimuli of short duration.

In 2000, Tloczynski et al. studied the perception of visual illusions (the Müller-Lyer Illusion and the Poggendorff Illusion) by Zen masters, novice meditators, and non-meditators. There were no statistically significant effects found for the Müller-Lyer illusion, however, there were for the Poggendorff. Zen masters experienced a statistically significant reduction in initial illusion (measured as error in millimeters) and a lower decrement in illusion for subsequent trials.

The theory of mechanism behind the changes in perception that accompany mindfulness meditation is described thus by Tloczynski: *"A person who meditates consequently perceives objects more as directly experienced stimuli and less as concepts…With the removal or minimization of cognitive stimuli and generally increasing awareness, meditation can therefore influence both the quality (accuracy) and quantity (detection) of perception."*

Brown also points to this as a possible explanation of the phenomenon: *"…the higher rate of detection*

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ality (1987) Volume: 7, Issue: 1, Publisher by: SAGE Publications, Pages: 47-60

of single light flashes involves quieting some of the higher mental processes which normally obstruct the perception of subtle events. In other words, the practice may temporarily or permanently alter some of the top-down processing involved in filtering subtle events usually deemed noise by the perceptual filters."

In 2009 Holley S. Hodgins (Skidmore College, United States) and Kathryn C. Adair (National Center for PTSD, Women's Health Sciences Division, VA Boston Healthcare System, United States) published a paper that appeared in the Journal of Consciousness and Cognition.[53] The article reported on their research designed to show the correspondence between perception and clarity. The article was titled Attentional Processes and Meditation. They concluded that, "*Many meditation practices involve techniques that direct attention to current experience, which facilitates noticing distractions and returning attention to monitoring momentary experience. Such practice aims to develop an inherently open quality of non-judgmental attention to experience. Intriguingly, our findings show that such practice is associated with literally seeing more accurately. It is likely that improved visual processing also influences various higher-order*

[53] Holley S. Hodgins and Kathryn C. Adair, "Consciousness and Cognition" 19 (4):872—878 (2010) Journal of Consciousness and Cognition, philosophical research online, http://philpapers.org/rec/HODAPA

behaviors, which all rely on attentional processing. Thus, for example, accurate attentional processing might enable individuals to experience events with less distortion and…which enhances performance among individuals and dyads.[54] *This speculation remains for future examination.*

Nonetheless, meditation does not aim at increasing attention simply for attention's sake. Rather, improved visual attention is a consequence of techniques aimed at reducing and eliminating erroneous conceptions…The current outcomes are more relevant to visual illusion than conceptual delusion. However, Gregory (2003) suggests that illusions can lead to delusions. Thus, the finding that contemplative practice is associated with better visual attentional processing suggests that, over time, meditation practice might also reduce, or at least avoid increasing, higher order delusions. Bottom line: Meditation works to minimize perceptual mistakes and thus enhance quality of life."

Dr. Herbert Benson[55] of the Mind-Body Medical Institute (which is affiliated with Harvard University and several Boston hospitals) reports that meditation induces a host of biochemical and physical changes in the body collectively referred to as the relaxation response. The relaxation response in-

[54] Pairs of participants

[55] Herbert Benson, M.D., Miriam Z. Klipper, The Relaxation Response, Harper Collins, Sep 22, 2009

cludes changes in metabolism, heart rate, respiration, blood pressure and brain chemistry. Benson and his team have also done clinical studies at Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayan Mountains.

Positive Effects

While much research centered on mindfulness seeks to reduce stress, another large body of research has examined mindfulness as a tool to elevate and sustain positive emotional states as well and their related outcomes. Barbara Fredrickson, et al. published a research report in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology[56] that studied the building of personal resources through increased daily experiences of positive emotions due to meditation. They found that meditation practice showed increases over time in purpose in life, social support, and decreased illness symptoms.

Richard J. Davidson, PhD, et al. published their research findings,[57] reporting on the relationship be-

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[56] Fredrickson, Barbara L.; Cohn, Michael A.; Coffey, Kimberly A.; Pek, Jolynn; Finkel, Sandra M., *"Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources."* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol 95(5), Nov 2008

[57] Davidson, Richard J. PhD; Kabat-Zinn, Jon PhD; Schumacher, Jessica MS; Rosenkranz, Melissa BA; Muller, Daniel MD, PhD; Santorelli, Saki F. EdD; Urbano-

tween mindfulness meditation and immune function. They concluded, *"These findings demonstrate that a short program in mindfulness meditation produces demonstrable effects on brain and immune function. Furthermore the findings suggest that meditation may change brain and immune function in positive ways and underscore the need for additional research."*

K. W. Brown, T. Kasser, R. M. Ryan, P. A. Linley, and K. Orzech published their findings in the Journal of Research in Personality on the relationship between mindfulness meditation and a sense of financial well-being. The title of their report is When What One Has Is Enough: Mindfulness, Financial Desire Discrepancy, and Subjective Well-being.[58] As the title implies, the research investigated subjective well-being and financial desire. They found that a large discrepancy between financial desires and financial reality correlated with low subjective well-

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wski, Ferris MA; Harrington, Anne PhD; Bonus, Katherine MA; Sheridan, John F. PhD, *"Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation."* Journal of Biobehavioral Medicine Psychosomatic Medicine: July 2003—Volume 65—Issue 4—p 564–570

[58] K. W. Brown, T. Kasser, R. M. Ryan, P. A. Linley, and K. Orzech ,"*When What One Has Is Enough: Mindfulness, Financial Desire Discrepancy, and Subjective Well-being*." Journal of Research in Personality 43 (2009), Elsevier Inc.

being, but that the accumulation of wealth did not tend to close the gap. Mindfulness, however, was associated with a lower financial-desire discrepancy and thus higher subjective well-being, indicating that mindfulness may promote the perception of having enough, which is a key finding that addresses the thesis of this book. Ruodan Shao and Daniel P. Skarlicki used a randomized controlled study[59] to illuminate the correlation between MBA candidates subjected to a mindfulness intervention and increased academic performance. Of special note is the finding that mindfulness meditation was positively related to performance for women.

And finally this: Richard J. Davidson, PhD., et al. showed that mindfulness practice improves the immune system and alters activation symmetries in the prefrontal cortex, a change previously associated with an increase in positive effect and a faster recovery time from exposure to a negative experience.[60] These changes in subjects persisted even after the periods when they were meditating. While this is a relatively new field for scientific inquiry, enough work has been done to validate the impact both on reducing negatives and on increasing positives—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The

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[59] Ruodan Shao, Daniel P Skarlicki, Ruodan Shao *"The role of mindfulness in predicting individual performance."* Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 2009/10

[60] ibid, footnote #51

research does not change what has been known for millennia, but it does confirm what has been known, thus opening the door to many who would otherwise remain doubtful and suspicious.

Chapter 8—Say What? I'm You?

The issue of identity is the gatekeeper of a swinging door through which we move from the phenomenal, conditional realm to the noumenal, unconditional realm of the mind. In an ordinary sense, I am me and you are you, and the two of us are clearly different. These differences are what we fight about. I like my points of view and, understandably, you like yours. We look different. Our life experiences are different, and so too are our values. Phenomenally, we are perceptually different. Sometimes we can find common ground, but most times we can't. This has always been the case, and it will never change, because that is the nature of phenomenality—differences, impermanence, and suffering (the three Dharma seals). When identity is understood as the ego, the results are greed, anger, and delusion. Our ego is the driving force fueling the engine of progressive alienation and hostility in the world. It is a ravenous monster that needs more and more and can never be fulfilled. By nature it is incomplete and will always be incomplete, simply because it is an illusion: a hungry and unreal ghost that seems very, very real.

As pointed out before, the standard western model of identity would have us believe that we are illusive egos, or some other compound configuration that entails an ego. Instead, Gautama Buddha taught, *"…all things are devoid of selfhood, devoid of separate individuality…."* This perspective is very dif-

ferent from the way in which we look at the world and ourselves. From our perspective (what appears to our senses), the world is very clearly defined and limited by differences. The Dharma says that this way of looking at life is the problem. We can see only Oz, but we remain ignorant of the wizard, and now science confirms the validity of this illusion.

In every conceivable and known spiritual discipline, duality is understood as the sine qua non defining the central challenge of the human dilemma. The Christian way of wrestling with, and overcoming duality, is to receive the spirit of God following a confession that recognizes Jesus Christ as God's redeemer: God's choice for resolving the split dividing all of mankind from divine indwelling. This story says, only in that way will the breech be overcome, and duality will be destroyed. Subsequently, the Holy Spirit will indwell and guide our lives. The evidence for this "born-again" status, however, remains unconvincing. Very clearly the ego remains the unaddressed and unresolved controlling gatekeeper, defying the very teachings of Jesus Christ, and argues against unconditional love and building our lives on the solid ground of the spirit.[61] Most

[61] "*Therefore everyone who hears these 43 words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of*

born-again Christians, however, seem to ignore his central teachings in favor of opposing non-believers. This choice remains conditional.

Whereas the phenomenal realm is governed by the rule of mutual discretion and differences, the noumenal realm is governed by the rule of unity. From the mystical perspective, these two realms are not two. Rather, they are two aspects of the same thing—the human mind, one part of which is seen, the other part of which is doing the seeing. We are all snowflakes, but unable to see that we are fundamentally just snow. Giving from the fullness of our inexhaustible mind to the world is an essential act of returning what is collectively shared. This exchange of positive energy is what creates a positive world, and the opposite is true as well. When we take, take, take, in order to have more and more, we act as thieves, not only robbing others but killing ourselves as well. At the level of our mutual truth we are just the same, none superior, none inferior, all the same—just snow.

Ultimately, this matter must stop being intellectual. The mind is not just conceptual; the mind is everything. There is no separation between the mental and the physical, since all is mind. But when we choose to make the mind just mental, we negate the

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mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."—Matthew 7:24-26

very quality that is special about being human. The value of ideas is meaningless unless ideas become manifested through action. Thinking is the bridge joining the abstract and the real, but thinking itself is of no value. We may be intellectually stimulated and titillated, but to be a positive force in the world it is necessary to act. At the same time, our actions must come from the natural mind of enlightenment, not the illusive mind of the ego and conditional swaps. In truth there is no ego. What functions as the gatekeeper, and denies access to our true nature, is not real. There is no gate and no gatekeeper. Our identity is no identity because mind is not a concept. Nobody was born into this life with a name, a title, or a status. We came in naked, and we return to our source in the same fashion. Every concept is conditional, but the mind is unconditional. How can there be a gate, or a gatekeeper, if there are no conditions? Conditions are all phenomenal. All images are phenomenal. In a very real way, we exist as virtual beings in a virtual world or to employ the Buddhist term; we are asleep. In the unconditional realm there is nothing upon which to hold, yet everything is already complete. It is empty, yet full simultaneously. Chasing the rabbit of more is insanity when you wake up and realize that you already have all that you need.

Nothing can be added. What we add with our ideas and our phenomenal collections contributes nothing of value unless it comes from the heart. Rather than adding, what we must do is learn how to sub-

tract. This wisdom was expressed in the Tao Te Ching, a much familiar ally of Zen:

"In pursuing one's studies
Something's added each day.
In practicing the Way
Something's subtracted each day.
It grows less and less
Until one reaches non-action.
When one reaches non-action
Nothing is left undone.
It's always through not interfering
That one can control the realm.
Whoever loves to interfere
Will never control the people."[62]

These are strange words to our ordinary way of understanding. What most of us attempt to do is manipulate, interfere, and control, believing that, unless we add our stamp on others, somehow they will not be able to manage. In our desire to be somebody we have forgotten that we are already somebody. Our world is overflowing with messages that tell us that, unless we comply with someone else's agenda, we will not measure up, or be worthy. Our true identity is secure and flows like water. It is our fake identity that is insecure and will never have

[62] Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching—Stanza 48, Jonathan Star (translator), The Definitive Edition (Tarcher Cornerstone Editions), January 2008

enough. And this predicament lies at the heart of our rush for more.

"Pursuing life and pursuing death
A third will be followers of life,
A third will be followers of death.
And a third chase life into the realms of death.
Why? Because they want to live to excess."[63]

For many it can be confusing to start a practice of meditation. We're not quite sure what the purpose or goal is. Perhaps we've heard stories that suggest that meditation is good for us, that it is a process that will produce desirable results like becoming more focused, more efficient, and less stressed. These reports are accurate, and now the scientific community is validating this view. A consistent mediation practice will produce these desirable and discernible results. But of what most may not be aware is that these are not the goldmine payoff that has been the purpose of Zen, even before the time of Gautama Buddha. So let me turn your attention to this goldmine by beginning with a story.

When I was a young man, I wanted to build a career in the advertising business. When I first started thinking about this goal, I had no idea what my specific job might be, because I was on the outside

[63] Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching—Stanza 50, Jonathan Star (translator), The Definitive Edition (Tarcher Cornerstone Editions), January 2008

looking in. What I later discovered was that the advertising business is the result of collaboration among many different people with different functions. There are copywriters and art directors, media specialists, and market researchers. Then there are account management people who serve as the interface with clients, and at the top of this collaborative team is agency management, whose purpose is an executive function to coordinate, direct, and manage the entire effort. Advertising, as experienced by readers and viewers, is just a seamless experience. From that vantage point, the collaboration is invisible.

My daughter is now approaching the time when she has begun, as I did years ago, thinking about her career. She, like me, has discovered that the filmmaking business is also a collaboration of many different people performing different functions. As she works through this discovery process, she is finding her niche. There is no better way to do this than to jump in and find out, through experience, what works and what doesn't. Producing a movie can't happen without a producer. When we watch a finished movie, the collaboration is invisible.

I tell you this story because it illustrates something very important about meditation. The proper way to meditate is to allow your thoughts to evaporate rather than stay attached to them and become embroiled. To the extent that you master this technique, you will reap the tangible benefits just referenced (e.g., becoming more focused, more efficient,

and less stressed). But here is what you need to know about the goldmine. The Buddhist view of reality has this two-part structure, phenomenal and noumenal. These aspects of the mind, you might say, are what's produced (phenomenal) and the producer (noumenal). What is produced can be seen, but just like in making movies, the producer is invisible. Unless you are most unusual and fortunate, the odds are you have never experienced your own producer.

When we think, it is clear that our thoughts come from somewhere and that somewhere is a function called a thinker. Thinkers think thoughts. There is no other reason for a thinker to exist except to think thoughts. Just as the heart organ causes the movement of blood, the thought organ causes the movement of thoughts. But the question remains, "Is that our identity?" When thoughts cease (as we are letting happen when we meditate), our identity doesn't cease. Thinking is an important function and we couldn't exist for a moment without thinking, but our identity—our producer—is not a thinker. Thinking is just one of the jobs of existence just as being a copywriter is one job in a vast collaboration of different people in the advertising or film business. So the clear question is, "If I am not the thinker, who am I?" René Descartes said, "*I think, therefore I am.*" His manner of defining and explaining fundamental human nature was by drawing attention to what is produced—thought—rather than the producer, our noumenal self that can't be seen or measured. Yet without the

experience of encountering our fundamental nature we are adrift and trapped as a bobbing thought—a mirage termed a self-image, the imaginary person we have always thought ourselves to be.

As previously stated, the great 14th-century Zen Master Bassui Tokusho told his students to awaken the mind that reads, and then they would understand what they were reading. This instruction is the same as the point I am making here. Nearly all of our lives we identify with the product of thoughts. There is no question that a consistent practice of mediation will produce tangible, measurable, phenomenal results, but the goldmine payoff is to actually meet (maybe for the first time) your intangible, not-to-be-measured, noumenal self—to awaken the mind that thinks. Once that happens, your life will change forever, because you will have discovered the ground floor of all life and you'll own stability not possible any other way.

And here is the take-home goldmine—this producer is not mine or yours. We can't possess it. It is unconditional, and as such it has no defining characteristics. It can and does produce phenomenal reality without limits. This producer is our shared identity, and it is already complete. None of us can add a single atom to make it more complete. What is without condition is the "who" of you, and of me. Our identity is no identity. We possess the very same qualities as the matrix from which we arise. We and the void are one and the same thing. At that

deepest of all levels of consciousness, we are Buddha—awake.

What K. W. Brown et al. found in their research regarding the relationship between a sense of enough and meditation must be brought to the fore and reconsidered in light of this awareness of an already complete goldmine. The title of their report sums up this valuable insight. Meditation delivers what we all assume can only come from the outside, by increasing doses of more. The lust for more becomes a progressively greater compulsion based on this assumption. As with any other addiction, we adjust and need more to deliver the same degree of satisfaction. At the core of every addiction, in whatever form, is a sense of inadequacy and a desire to be filled.

The false identity we hold with regard to ourselves is something that grows over time and life experiences. Critical to this self-awareness is a corresponding awareness of alternatives. Our norms become the standards by which we measure our lives. The norms may be crappy, but they are familiar, and we are creatures of habit. If we aren't aware of alternatives that might improve our lives, we naturally assume that, while what we are getting is abstractly insufficient, it is, nevertheless, just the way things are, and we adjust to our own discomfort.

This psychological tendency to adjust, and thereby reject encroaching tragedy, is so common that it has a name. It's called a "normalcy bias," and refers to a

mental state into which people enter when facing bleak outcomes. It causes people to underestimate both the possibility of a disaster occurring and likely effects. This often results in situations where people fail to adequately prepare for a disaster, and on a larger scale can easily engage in states of psychological denial to ignore pending and progressive environmental collapse or the failure of the government to include the populace in its disaster preparations. This condition can be seen at work when people get caught with their hand in the cookie jar but refuse to acknowledge fault. Instead, they defend their actions, attempting to justify their behavior even to the point of recasting a sense of obvious wrong by maneuvering to see it in a positive light. The ego is a staunch defender of self-serving needs. The assumption that is made in the case of this bias is that, since such a disaster has never occurred before, it never will. It also results in the inability of people to cope with a disaster once it occurs. People with a normalcy bias have difficulty reacting to something they have not experienced before and are ill prepared to contemplate improvements that challenge their norms. Need I point out the plight of the Jews when Hitler was coming to power?

In 2005 Terry Gilliam co-wrote and directed a movie that portrayed this dilemma. Tideland was a story of a girl (Jeliza-Rose) who had grown up in what we would call a dysfunctional family. Her drug addict father dies of a heroin overdose, and her mother chokes on and dies from chocolates to

which she was addicted. Jeliza-Rose is thus abandoned and takes up residence in a rundown farmhouse in rural Texas. While her life becomes even more bizarre as the movie unfolds, Jeliza-Rose seems unaffected. She has never experienced anything other than chaos, so to her, the bizarre is normal and she can't imagine anything better.

We watch this movie and conclude that Jeliza-Rose is deranged. However, given her experiences, she is normal. For anyone to choose something better, there must first be awareness that there is something better to choose. Everyone suffers, but we adjust until the depth of suffering is too great and then we are motivated to do something different. I can add personal testimony here: For most of my adult life (prior to my own awakening) I was so depressed I thought it was normal. In fact I eventually came to accept that depression was just the way life was. If the depth of suffering is sufficiently great, we may be ready to try anything to relieve the pain. Thus it is a rare person who will take action to avoid disaster. Rather, most of us wait for it to arrive on our doorstep. By then, unfortunately, the momentum and magnitude of tsunamic changes are so great that recovery is rarely possible. This is precisely the situation with looming catastrophes, from political upheaval to global climate changes. The downside of such matters is so egregious we go into states of denial. The ostrich is not safe. He just thinks he is.

When we look at each day, it is hard to see a trend. A trend is a pattern that can be noticed only given a sufficient amount of time and emerging encounters. A statistician may say something like, *our data are insufficient to draw any concrete conclusions….We need to study the matter further*. And what that means is that it takes time and more observations to see the patterns. The more time that goes by, and the more observations recorded, the higher the probability of any concluding predictions. The forty years since the publication of Limits is plenty of time to see the pattern and judge with a high degree of probability the direction of change, and it is disturbing. But that doesn't mean that a significant number of people are willing or able to come to terms with the consequences of the likely outcome. I have been watching this emerging trend develop for all that time, and I know what the solution is because of my own transformation, but I have been profoundly unsuccessful in moving others to take their own actions. Perhaps that will be changing because of the correspondence of two things: the validation by the scientific community and the progressive failure of our culture.

It is not surprising that the first point of Gautama Buddha's Four Noble Truths is "Life is suffering." It is phenomenally not possible to avoid suffering. But what surprises many is that the other three points reveal the solution, namely, The Eight Fold Path, of which mindfulness and concentration are the principal components, with Right View first on the list. In terms of Gautama Buddha's Dharma, his grasp

of reality is instructive. The way things appear is fraught with bias (such as the normalcy bias), and then there is the way things truly are. The way they appear is phenomenal—which literally means to be known or derived through the senses rather than through the mind. Our senses fool us and lead us to error. Science now confirms that how things appear is in fact a mental projection dependently originated between objects and our perceptual capacities distributed throughout our brain, and this validation may provide the needed bridge to genuine transformation, because we tend to trust science. The way things truly are is called suchness, and this is a mental and/or spiritual state known as noumenal. To, comprehend these two states of mind is transformative. None of us is a ghost or a phantasm but all of what our noumenal aspect produces is.

The Big words: Ontology, Epistemology and Soteriology

These three terms are commonly used when considering the mind. Epistemology concerns how we know what we know. Ontology is the study of one thing vs. another thing, and the relationship between the two. Soteriology is the study of salvation. Generally these three are looked at in combination. Soteriology makes sense only if we accept that there is a condition from which to be saved. If "it ain't broke," we don't need to fix it. Ontology makes sense only if there are at least two things to compare. You can't study anything if there is only a single thing. Then we would be doing the study so we

could compare and contrast ourselves with something not us—phenomenally yes; noumenally no. And epistemology is us studying ourselves and trying to fathom how it is that we have knowledge, which means to grasp and make sense of anything.

But, just for the sake of argument, let's consider that (1) there is only a single real thing,[64] (2) there is nothing from which we need to be saved, except the idea that that we are not already saved, and (3) it is impossible to extricate ourselves from ourselves by objectifying something that can't be objectified without creating an illusion, which we then consider as real. The Dharma (and now the science of neurology) teaches that there is only mind: the producer, and this is the only thing that is real. All the rest are an unreal projection of the mind. If we accept that premise, then ontology becomes moot. Likewise, the Dharma teaches that we are already whole and complete. We are all Buddhas awaiting discovery. Since we can't add a whit to our already saved nature, soteriology becomes moot. The Dharma likewise teaches that the true mind can't be

[64] The Vedanta says essentially this very thing, which harmonizes with Buddhist Dharma: *"One who sees everything as nothing but the Self, and the Self in everything one sees, such a seer withdraws from nothing. For the enlightened, all that exists is nothing but the Self, so how could any suffering or delusion continue for those who know this oneness?"* Ishopanishad: sloka 6, 7

found. We can consider the projections and look at the smoke and infer fire, but we can't actually find the fire of mind. So then we have a conundrum: either to make the mind into an unreal object, and pretend that the fabricated object is the mind, or examine the smoke and let that be enough.

Presumably, all of this study has a single goal: to understand our true nature and figure out what to do about it (if anything). The problem with that approach is that it is entirely conceptual and thus flawed. You can't measure what is unconditional with a conditional yardstick, without rendering the unconditional into an illusion. An illusion, however, is not worth study except to see that it is an illusion. That would, of course, be a worthwhile conclusion only if we could accept that learning doesn't have to be singularly objective and rational. Instead, it can be subjective and transrational. Transrationality (or meta-rational) is not the same thing as irrationality. Transrational means beyond the limitations of rationality—in other words, intuitive. We have two brain hemispheres that bring different functions to our mental powers. The left side is predominately rational, and the right is predominately intuitive; the two are supposed to be balanced and integrated. Unfortunately, this programmed integration gets distorted and disintegrated, creating imbalance and delusion.

Look at this as a matter of collaboration amongst parts, like my example of the advertising and film business. Different functions only work in making a

seamless whole if they are involved in integration, coordination, and orchestration. Somebody must be leading the band, or you end up with dissonance, cacophony, and chaos instead of music, which is a fairly adequate description of the cultural conditions we are presently experiencing. In our quest to see ourselves as smart people, by making rationality into a god, we have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. Now we have some unlearning to do. Rationality came out of the Age of Enlightenment as a solution to religious dogma, but rationality has become a different form of dogma. I am not suggesting that we return to religious dogma. Dogma of any kind is what happens when we close our minds to suchness—to things as they truly are. Rather than swing from one dogma to another, or one set of illusions to another, what we need to do is dump all dogma and illusions and rid ourselves of bias, and delusion. That is the thrust of mystical awareness. It is about seeing clearly; seeing things as they are rather than how we imagine they ought to be, or fear what they could be. Zen is about balance, integration, and harmony, and is opposed to imbalance, disintegration, and chaos. If that can be accomplished, there is good reason for hope.

Chapter 9—Contemporary Challenges and Zen Insight as Solutions.

As I contemplated how to best communicate the challenges we face, a thought came to mind: Just look at the news to find grist for the mill. I didn't have far to look before I found this: "*More than ever, the atmosphere in Washington seems so laced with toxicity that policymakers have largely given up merely debating how to spur the economy, cognizant that any approach will be deemed politically impossible."* Thank you, staff writers Janell Ross, Shahien Nasiripour, Sam Stein, Ryan Grim, and Nate Hindman of Huffpost Business (June 7, 2011) for making my point. That was now nearly six years ago and things have become steadily worse. Alienation, hostility, anguish, and hopelessness seem to be ever-growing signs of our time. People are pulling their hair, gnashing their teeth, and leaping off the deep end, frantic to find a solution to an unyielding and stubbornly persistent problem that won't budge in spite of all efforts.

We are teetering toward the brink, and everyone is digging in his or her heels trying desperately to halt the slide. But the question must be asked: Can we avoid paying the piper for excesses incurred long ago by mortgaging our future? It was politically lucrative and expedient to promise everything and pay for nothing, either by borrowing—one party's chosen means—thereby increasing our financial liability—or trying to increase tax revenues—the

other party's preference,—which was wildly unpopular. And whom do we blame? How about ourselves? We the people elected these politicians to do exactly what they did, that is, lie to us because we don't like hearing the truth. We would rather believe that we could have everything, instantly, and never have to work for genuine worth.

Grass grows slowly in spite of our hurry. There is only one speed—slow and steady. Plant the right seeds, give them adequate water and food, expose them to the sun, keep the weeds from encroaching, and wait. Inch by inch the grass grows, and the same thing happens with our growth: slow and steady, growing in the direction we ourselves determine. If we try to pretend, sooner or later life catches up and bites our behind. Cause and effect (karma) work every time, and nobody can escape the consequences of his or her own choices. We have to pay, and the slide can't be stopped, because we set our sails in that direction by making irresponsible and reckless choices of selfish excess. We pretended as if we were independent agents who could milk the system without paying the milkman, and now the he is ringing our doorbell.

Nice diatribe! But what does any of that have to do with mystical awareness, or transformation? Just this: the Dharma is a message of hope because it tells it like it is. It doesn't embellish. It doesn't gild the lily. It calls us to accept collective responsibility, and it works like growing grass—slow and steady. We are more than capable of meeting the crises we

face, surviving and making needed corrections, but none of that is going to happen so long as we continue lying to ourselves about being inadequate and victims. We are neither. We caused this crisis collectively and we must pay collectively, but we will survive. We are already adequate and have nobody to blame but ourselves. Zen unveils our enlightened mind, which is already present in all of us, and when we awaken to the truth we can see that we are a single, united people. Nothing on earth can stand in the way of a people who are united and moving toward equality for all. Freedom is a human birthright and is not dependent on phenomenal configurations of politics, economics, or increasing accumulation of material goods. Freedom is a state of mind—the natural state of mind. We are born that way and we can't add to that birthright. But we can detract from it through ignorance.

I'm nearly at the end of this book. A lot of ground has been covered, so it is a good place to begin tying up some loose ends. I want you to consider a thought so far out and incredible that even I am hesitant. First, let me share a few breadcrumbs from various perspectives discussed previously, which seem to point at this incredible notion. Once you digest these, then I'll give you the whole loaf.

Genesis 1:1-2
The English translation of the first two verses of the first book in the Bible says:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters."

That's the first breadcrumb. Now consider a view from physics/astronomy. I pulled what follows from a blog regarding the Big Bang.

The Big Bang (Comment by Patrick Weiler, alleged expert on astronomy)

Question:...*What was the location of the Big Bang?...*

Answer: "*Before trying to answer your question you'll need to try and imagine a pre-Big Bang condition. Some cosmologists have other theories, but it's easiest to think of that condition as having no time, no space, no energy, no matter—no nothing! It may have been an infinite and absolutely empty void. Then, somehow, the Big Bang happened. At the very first instant of that event, all the space and time and energy and everything else that was, is now, or ever will be suddenly came into existence. Now, here's the tricky part: since it apparently happened in that infinite void, there was no 'where' for it to happen. The feature of 'where' only existed after the Big Bang went off. Nor was there a 'center' to the Big Bang because it simply happened every 'where' at once."*

The Mind and the Void—From a Science Perspective

So now allow me to restate again: *Perhaps the best way to describe mind is through the analogy of space and objects in space. From a scientific perspective, space is defined as the distance between objects, say, Mars and Venus. From this point of view, space is dependent upon objects and if there were no objects, by definition, space would cease to exist. Then we would be looking at a vacuum or a void, which of course can't be seen or measured. We can say what a vacuum doesn't contain, but we can't say what it does contain, because it contains nothing; it is empty, yet somehow everything comes into existence out of this empty void.*

Einstein argued that physical objects are not located in space, but rather have a 'spatial extent.' Seen this way, the concept of empty space loses meaning. Rather, space is an abstraction, based on the relationships between objects. The development of quantum mechanics complicated the modern interpretation of a vacuum by requiring indeterminacy. In the late 20th century, this principle was understood also to predict a fundamental uncertainty in the number of particles in a region of space, leading to predictions of 'virtual particles' arising spontaneously out of the void.

The Mind and the Void—From a mystical Perspective

Likewise this: *The mind is not only the void but is also objects, which arise out of the void. The primordial mind is just the void out of which everything arises—it is unconditional. Objects are conditional, but the void has no defining characteristics so it is unconditional. Let me repeat that: Mind has no defining characteristics. It is void. Might that statement be understood different ways? The first way is a description of equality (Mind=Void). Another way is location (which is no location, rather like the Internet: Everywhere but nowhere at once). And the third way is what our primordial mind contains: Nothing. Yet everything comes from this nothing, which is everything. These two—conditional objects and the unconditional void—dependently originate each other. From the Zen perspective, mind defines everything, since there is nothing except mind. Every phenomenal thing is a 'virtual particle.' There is nothing else. What we imagine as being concrete, real, and substantial are actually virtual projections—illusions. The problem is that we mistake these virtual illusions as reality, which we use to define who we are, not realizing that we have mistaken something ephemeral for something substantial.*

To say that the real Dharmakāya of Gautama Buddha resembles the Void is another way of saying that the Dharmakāya is the Void and that the Void is the Dharmakāya…they are one and the

same thing….When all forms are abandoned, there is Buddha…the void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma. This spiritually enlightening nature is without beginning…this great Nirvanic nature is Mind; Mind is Buddha, and Buddha is the Dharma.—Bodhidharma

Virtual Reality and Neurology

And this: *Everything that can be perceived, by any and every means, is a mental projection registered in particular parts of our brain. To date, neurology has identified 52 Brodmann areas. For example, Brodmann area 17 is the primary visual cortex—the registry location for vision. What we imagine as seeing (both external and internal) is in fact a projection of photons (virtual particles) projected onto the 'screen' in Brodmann area 17. Doctor Andrew Newberg, in his book Brain Science & the Biology of Belief … Why God Won't Go Away put the matter this way: 'What we think of as reality is only a rendition of reality that is created by the brain.'*

So now that you have digested those small bites, here's the whole loaf (if you haven't already added it up yourself). Everything we humans think we know points to an inescapable conclusion, which is: Everything that exists came from an indefinable, preexisting void—everything: Stars, planets, space/time, you, me…everything. As far as anyone can tell, there is only one void. How could there be other voids, since from this void everything

emerged? By definition “everything” includes us. A void contains nothing, yet everything comes from there. Now the leap: We—you, me, everyone—are virtual projections, which is to say that we don’t exist as phenomenally real beings, meaning that there is nothing whole, substantial, and independent about us. Now the next step in this chain of crazy logic is this: Let’s suppose that Bodhidharma was right in saying that Buddha is the Mind and the Mind is the void. Okay? Are you ready for the ending note? This is what Gautama Buddha said (as incredible as it may seem): everything is just Mind and the Mind is the void. If that is true, then we are quite literally the same at the level of our true, yet indefinable, nature. Phenomenally we are different, but noumenally the same. We both exist and don’t exist at the same time. But the phenomenal aspect is nothing more than a virtual projection anyway, mediated by our brain. And that is the definition of the term phenomenal—as things appear, mediated by our senses.

The bottom line question that we must all consider is simple: “What difference does it make, this observation about being both real and virtual at the same time?” Even if it is true, as incredible as it may appear, what does it matter? Just suppose that we've got it backwards. What we ordinarily consider as reality is actually a virtual reality (phenomenally unreal, an illusion that looks real, but isn’t). And what we ordinarily consider unreal is actually a noumenal or spiritual reality. Zen says that only the mind (e.g., the void) is real, and the mind is Bud-

dha. When objects come into being, they arise from the context of the void and when they cease to exist, they return to the void. There is no other reality for them to come from or return to. The void is not changed by this coming and going; it remains a constant. In like fashion we could say that thoughts are like clouds moving across the sky without changing the sky of mind.

When these virtual thought objects disappear, there is the void and the void is Buddha. What difference does it make? The difference is that, if this unreality (which we take as reality) is actually virtual, then why attach ourselves to or resist, and get upset over something that is clearly an illusion? If we were watching a movie, we would know the images we were seeing were not real and thus wouldn't become attached; yet we do precisely that with virtual objects called thoughts. Buddhism teaches that suffering results from craving, attachment, and resisting unreality. Conversely, why instead don't we build our sense of self-worth on the basis of what is actually real, substantial, and eternal? If in the void there is no discrimination, or comparative differentiation, but there is instead unconditional wholeness, then at that level of existence we are truly one with one another and already complete. Our true worth is secure. It has always been secure and will never stop being secure, so to where are we rushing, and to get more of what? It is easy to say this and extraordinarily difficult to accept it as true. But then that is what awakening is all about.

When we awaken, we realize that is impossible to harm another without harming ourselves, because we and another are united. None of us would intentionally shoot ourselves in the foot with a real gun, but we do it all of the time figuratively (and sometimes literally), perhaps unintentionally. Compassion is exactly that: uniting with others, experiencing their pain and suffering as well as their joy. There is a close parallel between egotistically driven good works and genuine compassion. The first is motivated by the desire for accolades: to be recognized as a benevolent person by others or to enhance our own self-assessment. Doing good for others is not a bad thing, but when the motive is self-serving, it is not compassion. Jesus Christ warned about such motives[65] and brought to our awareness their superficial and hypocritical nature. Compassion, on the other hand, is the result of the bone-deep awareness that we are literally united with one another and experience a shared suffering, which becomes intolerable. Loving our neighbor as ourself is redundant since we, and our neighbor, are one. Shantideva spelled out the distinction between serving others and serving ourselves. He said, *"All the joy the world contains has come through wishing happiness for others. All the misery the world*

[65] Matthew 6:1-3

contains has come from wishing pleasure for oneself."[66]

It is as Bodhidharma said, *"If it weren't for afflictions, there would be nothing to create awareness. And if it weren't for awareness, there would be nothing to negate afflictions. Suffering is the seed, wisdom the sprout, and buddhahood the grain."*[67] When we become aware of our unity with others, there is no difference between their afflictions and our own. Wisdom sprouts when we awaken and find that we are one with everything; when we do, compassion is the result. This is easy to say and hard to do, but maybe it's a first step. We regard ourselves as logical and intelligent people, and for the life of me I can't pick that logic apart.

Having said everything about suchness that can be said, there is a temptation to conclude that nothing phenomenal ultimately matters so why bother with phenomenal entanglements at all? Why not just escape into the mountains somewhere and let the world go to hell? That would be the nihilistic conclusion. The flip side of that is the ultimate conclusion (e.g., our ultimate worth is established so why bother)? Neither of these views have any validity,

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[66] Shantideva—A Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life. translated by Vesna A. Wallace, B. Alan Wallace, Shambhala Publications, 1997

[67] The Zen Teachings of Bodhidharma. Red Pine, translator (Wisdom Publications 2003)

and both were destroyed by Gautama Buddha. His Middle Way resolution is ours, which was echoed by Nagarjuna's Two Truth doctrine. On the one hand lies the temptation of patience and acceptance, and on the other lies action. Are we to accept whatever comes our way and not attempt to rectify wrongs? Are we wise enough to recognize an ultimate wrong? Is there truly such a thing? Right vs. wrong is a sticky wicket and here is how I have resolved it.

I accept Nagarjuna's two truths as the only viable resolution; which is to say we live on two levels at the same time. There is no equitable phenomenal resolution since rights and wrongs stand in opposition to each other and discrimination is the yardstick. If that were all there was to the matter, we would all be forced to choose either patient acceptance (even of hard core evil) or active resistance. Clearly a large dose of wisdom is needed to negotiate that challenge. But the beauty of Nagarjuna's two truths is that there is the other truth: The noumenal/ultimate truth where this conundrum disappears. In the ultimate realm of the spirit everything is unified and there is no right vs. wrong.

That's a nice theoretical structure but what does it mean for us moment by moment? We can't live in some abstract and theoretical world. This fleeting, impermanent one, virtual as it may be, is all we have. What it means for us all is this: Phenomenally we have to choose, as best we can (recognizing our own less than perfect capacity) to act in the best in-

terest of all (which includes each and every person), and to know that noumenally we're okay either way. Our life is not at stake depending on the outcome of the choices we make. We do our best and allow the chips to fall where they may. Nobody can do more, and worrying about outcomes is a road to anxiety. The Buddha reminds us that, *"Serenity comes when you trade expectations for acceptance."*

If we don't embrace this guidance then we are surely lost and, for example, must accept all manner of evil such as environmental devastation motivated by corporate greed, unending wars, or marital abuse, or, or, or….I don't think that patiently accepting such things is terribly wise or compassionate. But having said that we must go further and acknowledge the thin line between non-violent action and violence—An extraordinarily delicate balance that requires great wisdom and discernment. Not even a mystic passively accepts assaults. Bodhidharma, the father of Zen, is credited with starting the martial art of kung fu, for defensive purposes, only. And we are unwise to not protect ourselves.

Many Buddhists opt for the patient acceptance end of this stick, which results in the grin-and-bare-it strategy. And their rationale is their dogmatic attachment to the three Dharma seals. To me these folks have missed the most important piece (the other truth). They are "half-Dharma" folk and tend to stay aloof and not involved. I am not one of those. Personally I like to eat whole rather than half-loaves. This divide is a serious matter, which

plays into the systematic destruction of our world. All of us live in these two simultaneous realms so the answer to this "what difference does it make" question is that we do what we can to promote and work for a better phenomenal world and we accept the outcome without attachment or resistance. In any event our ultimate worth is secure and not dependent. Our hearts may fly high but our feet are firmly in touch with the ground. And because of this we have to work at both, simultaneously.

In the book Meditation on the Nature of Mind, José Ignacio Cabezón writes an introduction to the ancient Tibetan Buddhist classic The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel. This work was originally transmitted orally and began appearing in written form roughly eleven hundred years ago. Otherwise known as the Chintamani Stone, it is said to represent the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara (Guānyīn in Chinese) and Ksitigarbha. In Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the Chintamani is sometimes depicted as a luminous pearl. Ksitigarbha may be translated as "Earth Womb." This bodhisattva is known for his vow to take responsibility for the instruction of all beings in the six worlds between the death of Gautama Buddha and the rise of Maitreya Buddha, as well as his vow not to achieve Buddhahood until all hells were emptied. He is usually depicted as a monk

with a nimbus[68] around his shaved head; he carries a staff to force open the gates of hell and a wish-fulfilling jewel to light up the darkness. Avalokiteshvara may be translated as "Lord who looks down," is the bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas. These two bodhisattvas, in particular, are understood as guardians committed to passing on the light of Gautama Buddha's message of hope.

We might well ask, what is the wish that is to be fulfilled and why is it called a jewel? Since the time of Gautama Buddha and before, stretching backward in time to the very beginning, humans have had the same wish—to be fulfilled by realizing their true self-nature. That quest doesn't change. It was the central message in The Bhagavad Gita, written somewhere between the fifth century to the second century BCE in India, and remains one of the greatest pieces of spiritual literature into the modern era. Every human, desires the same thing and, unless that desire is fulfilled, we all continue striving for more. When fulfilled, that desire becomes a jewel of incomparable value. Quoting Lord Milarepa,[69]

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[68] A nimbus is ordinarily understood as a rain cloud. In this sense, the symbol means to bring solace to earthly beings.

[69] Milarepa was the dharma heir of Marpa Lotsawa (1012–1097), sometimes known as Marpa the Translator: the Tibetan Buddhist teacher credited with the transmission of many Buddhist teachings from India to

Cabezón sums up the answer to this basic question at the close of his introduction. Here is what he said:

"To ascertain the view (e.g., Gautama Buddha's dharma), look at your own mind. Those who search for the view apart from the mind are like rich people searching for wealth. It would be foolish for those who are wealthy to search for money apart from what already exists under their own noses in their own coffers. Likewise, the view is closer 'than our own jugular veins,' as the Tibetan saying goes. All we have to do is to turn our attention to the nature of our own minds."

In our deluded state of mind we see ourselves in a very restricted way, separate and apart, not only from one another but from our source as well. We are, as Hakuin Zenji said,[70] like a child of a wealthy home wandering among the poor, or, as Jesus Christ taught in his parable of The Prodigal Son,[71]

Tibet, including the teachings and lineages of Vajrayana and Mahamudra.

[70] The Song of Zazen, Hakuin Zenji, Japanese, Thought in the Tokugawa Era, A Bibliography of Western-Language Materials, Hrsg. v. Kracht, Klaus. Bearb. v. Kracht, Klaus, Harrassowitz Verlag Publishing House, August 2000, Hakuin Zenji was one of the most influential figures in Japanese Zen Buddhism. Born in 1686 in the small village of Hara, at the foot of Mount Fuji.

[71] Matthew 6:27-30

eating from the trough of pigs while a banquet awaits us, or worried for our survival even though God cares for the lilies of the field. The log in our eye clouds our vision.[72] Remove the log and we'll be able to see what is always present, has always been present, and will never stop being present. Then we will see suchness—things as they are. Abundance is everywhere evident, because everything conceivable resides within our own mind. There is no separation between the outside and the inside. The gate is wide open, and there is no gatekeeper other than the one we imagine. Interests that are exclusively self-serving, and emanating from delusion are wrecking our collective lives.

Zen Meditation: Redundancy?

The term Zen, as previously explained, means meditation. Over the millennia the term has taken on some new clothing and has unfortunately become somewhat dogmatic. It has now morphed into a near belief system replete with conceptual formulas, not at all dissimilar from a philosophy. Gautama Buddha rejected philosophy as a means for rationally figuring things out, and he advised his followers to be suspicious of the religious experts. Instead, he wanted us all to find out for ourselves rather than swallow the dogma of others. His advice is laid out in the Kālāma Sūtra:

[72] Matthew 7:25-27

"Don't believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Don't believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Don't believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Don't believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Don't believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find anything that agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it."

That's sound advice, particularly for the times we are living in. Nearly every five minutes a new guru or savior pops onto the scene (soon to be revealed as a fallen angel), with one more seemingly sage piece of advice, yet another ideology or philosophy. It has gotten to the point where nobody trustworthy can be found, and maybe that's a good thing. *When,...after observation and analysis, when we find anything that doesn't agree with reason and is not conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then*...it is probably time to turn to the discovery of our own natural intelligence. And then perhaps we will be ready. Until we reach that point of utter frustration and disbelief, we are probably not ready for a genuine solution. We will instead keep trying one conditional solution after another and become more frustrated and angrier, with an ever-increasing sense of inadequacy.

Bodhidharma pointed out this state of readiness when he made his remark showing the connection between affliction and awareness. Once we have tried and failed to rationally determine a lasting solution, then we will be ready to move beyond rationality and find a true foundation, as in…*when you see your nature before you, you can put an end to rational thought*. Why would Bodhidharma have said such a thing? Isn't rational thought supposed to be the highest form, coming out of The Enlightenment? According to the western frame of reference, the answer is yes. But that is not the view of a mystic, which audaciously reaches beyond the rational to the intuitive. The rational mind is a conditional mind, and nothing conditional is lasting. Nothing that is singularly rationally determined has any chance of being a lasting solution, simply because it is conditional, and when conditions change, the solution changes with the conditions. That is, by definition, what conditional means— impermanence.

Our true nature (not the phony nature we call an ego) has no nature: no defining characteristics. Our true nature is empty, and the only function of that nature is movement. When our rational mind moves, we move. When it does not move, we don't move, and the nature of a mind at peace is an immovable mind—one without thought, existing in a state of samādhi. It is this fundamental mind, which Zen Master Bassui told his students to awaken. When that mind is awakened, we realize we are already whole and complete, and that nature

has no other function than stillness and tranquility. We look for that mind, and it can't be found. When there is no movement, mind doesn't exist. It comes into being with movement. And the primordial mind, does not move, is not only empty, but contains within it infinity. There are no limits to this fundamental mind. It can do good or evil. Awakened, it does good. Asleep, it does evil. In Buddhahood—our naturally awakened, unconditional mind—there is only goodness. Short of that, we will continue, as phenomenal and illusive beings, to suffer and strive endlessly for ever more excess and a nirvana that will never come. This, then is the solution to the lust for more that is destroying our world. It is time to awaken this true nature within; to overturn more, before we meet the tiger and become eaten.

In a certain sense, it really doesn't matter which person sits in the White House, because no one can stop or start change. No president can prevent a tsunami, nor massive floods, nor tornadoes, wild fires, melting ice caps, a hurricane that devastates entire cities, or earthquakes that swallow nations. No president can stop a vast insurrection spreading across the entire Middle East, and it is extremely unlikely that any human being, however well intentioned, can alter the course of human affairs through diplomacy or war. We have tried theses measures endlessly only to keep repeating the same failures. The movement is too complex and fraught with contention and adversity. However good a plan might be, no plan can predict and allow for

such monumental tidal shifts. We are standing on the edge of bankruptcy (morally and financially), trying to fix the consequences of such catastrophes. As the saying goes, there isn't enough money in Fort Knox, in spite of what politicians will tell us. Change is the nature of phenomenal life, and we must either live with the consequences of change or we must find our natural mind where no change exists, and out of that mind begin to craft a better way of living. On one side is suffering, and on the other side is nirvana. When we awaken that true, fundamental mind, there will be reason for hope. Until then, all bets are off.

That is the goal of Zen—the only legitimate goal. Anything else is a partial solution. According to Bodhidharma, it is for that purpose only that he transmitted the dharma: to teach this fundamental mind is Gautama Buddha. Buddha is the mind, and every person contains the grain of buddhahood. Nurture it with practice and it will grow. Ignore it and it will remain dormant. The mind is a powerful non-thing. It is terrible to waste it.

What About Other Forms of Meditation?

There are many forms of meditation. I am aware of others, but I am not an authority. I have restricted and devoted myself to mystical Zen because it worked for me. I know about Zen because I have studied and practiced it for 35+ years. I can share chapter and verse about that, and virtually nothing about other forms. I neither encourage nor discourage something I don't know. Heart Rhythm Meditation (HRM) is gaining some respect, and I don't know anything about it other than what I can read. You can do that yourself. The same must be said for TM (Transcendental Meditation). Then there is Vipassana, which means to see things, as they really are, the same goal as Zen. I also am aware that MBSR (Mindfulness-based stress reduction) has gained a lot of attention and is used extensively by trained technicians. While there may be untrained hacks practicing these forms, that is true for any and every form of meditation and I would advise you to proceed with caution. If you begin working with someone who tells you that it is "their way or the highway," get away as soon as you can. You don't want to simply trade one addiction for another. The goal of meditation should be freedom—to be able to achieve a balanced mind, not to remain a cripple, able to manage only so long as you serve under a guru. A competent master serves you, not the other way around. Sadly, there are some unscrupulous teachers who abuse their intimate relationship. This is an extremely unfortunate situation, but it does happen.

Working with competent teachers is not always what you would like or expect. Their task is not easy. They must use carrots and sticks to assist you in breaking out of the delusions you hold. What might work in a given moment might be a complete failure in the next. They are not there to be your friend or buddy. Their job is to help you on the road to liberation, and most people resist giving up their addictions. If they do their job correctly, you will undoubtedly go through a lot of anguish until you have overcome the delusions that imprison you. Your ego will not give up easily, and the battle may become intense. Persevere and don't give up. A ghost can't defeat you. You are stronger than an illusion, even though the illusion seems real. Beneath the pain lies a world of joy and freedom. It is worth any battle. Our collective lives are in jeopardy. So I wish you, and our suffering world, nothing but the best. I'm counting on your success.

Concluding Comments.

Every culture has attempted to understand the nature of our fundamental existence by asking such questions as who am I? Where did I come from? What is life? Is there a continuation of life following this one? All of these (and undoubtedly more) have shaped our collective inquiry. Moreover, each culture has been driven either by a spiritual or a secular agenda. Prior to The Enlightenment, the unchallenged agenda was spiritual; following that turning point, the unchallenged agenda has been secular. The desire for proof is understandable and somewhat justified, particularly when corruption and manipulation are taken into consideration. The presumption that only one side of this conversation has been corrupted, but not the other, is wrong. Wherever humans exist, regardless of ideologies, we find bias and corruption. But what doesn't seem to ever get factored into either conversation is reality itself, which is not awaiting our points of view and ideas. The sun seems to rise and set quite aside from our theories. The universe seems to expand into a never-ending void. Life continues unabated in spite of our ideas. Rational proof is icing on the cake, which is already baked and does not alter what is fundamentally real. Reality is not something that can be figured out. Instead, it is what we experience moment-by-moment.

It is not possible to prove anything without ideas, and ideas come out of biased people who have

vested interests and agendas, hidden from their own conscious awareness. The premise of being unconscious, or out of touch, illustrates the impossibility of equating reality with ideas about reality. Rational constructs, by their very nature, are built on presumptions, and these presumptions arise from cultural bias. It is a grand house of cards, with the ego dealing out the deck. The mind can't see or understand itself. The best we can do is study smoke and back into the fire from where it comes, or dive into the depths of consciousness and experience emptiness. That is essentially what awakening means—to wake up into the source of the dreams we take to be our conditional reality.

On one side is the realm of rationally constructed ideas about things. On the other side is the realm of intuition and insight. Both sides are needed for proper functioning and building a world worth living. It is not enough to just exist. Anyone can do that, but to have a quality of worth requires accepting both dimensions of life. The insatiable lust for more is being fueled by a sense of fundamental incompletion coupled with the idea that self-fulfillment results from acquisition. Until we collectively wake up to the reality that we are already complete, we will continue to move down the path to oblivion.

In the 8th century CE an Indian Buddhist philosopher by the name of Śāntideva[73] said that in order to be able to deny something, we first have to know what it is we're denying. The logic of his statement is peerless. He went on to say, *"Without contacting the entity that is imputed you will not apprehend the absence of the entity."* The world within which we live is dying; consumed due to the lack of awareness that the entity of the ego is driving the engine of excess and taking us all to the brink of existence. Yet we remain unconscious of that part of us all that can save us. The signs of this lack of awareness are everywhere, and growing more destruction every day. The poisons of greed, anger and ignorance are spreading like a roaring fire, creating an inferno burning an entire world. In the United States we have just elected a new president who is the poster child of this sickness, and he is surrounding himself with people whose lives testify to their focus of consumption. If it is true that when the US sneezes, the world catches a cold, then the world has caught pneumonia and few medications are at hand.

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[73] Śāntideva was an Indian Buddhist monk. He lived 8th-century and was an adherent of the Mūlamadhyamakakārika philosophy of Nagarjuna. Among his most famous works is the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra (English translation is "A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life" or "Entering the Path of Enlightenment.")

If I have accomplished nothing more in this book, I leave you with a single, yet powerful thought: Nothing can exist without an opposite. Just as i*n* and *out* arise (and cease) together, so too the ego and our true self-nature. Genuine reality and ignorance are likewise conjoined twins, the difference being opposite in nature. We are firmly persuaded we know what is real, but this error continues to lead us down the path to destruction. I conclude as I began: *There is every reason for hope when we make right choices, and every reason for fear if we don't. The link between cause and effect is hard to ignore, and it is naïve to continue making bad choices and expect good results*. Thus far we have made very bad choices. Time is running short and a large question remains if humanity can find our collective, core unity. It is 11:59 and time to wake up.

"All that we are is the result of what we have thought. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him."—The Dhammapada[74]

[74] The Dhammapada, by Anonymous, Ananda Maitreya (Translator), Thich Nhat Hanh (Foreword), Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Maitreya (Translation), Parallax Press, August 1995

Author's Profile.

Dillon Masters entered the stream of mysticism 37 years ago while living in a Zen Monastery in the Catskill Mountains of upstate New York. It was there that he awakened to the Buddhist understanding of reality following a major spiritual and emotional crisis which, brought him to the edge of utter despair.

Before, he served as a Marine Corps artillery officer with two tours of duty in Vietnam and later had a career in the advertising business in New York City. When he returned from his stay in the monastery he experienced a subsequent transformation, which lead him to study, and graduation from the renowned Union Theological Seminary. His path since that critical conjunction has been a blend of Zen and Gnostic Christianity.

In previous years he has taught Zen at both the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA. He has two grown children—one married and living in California, the other living in Pittsburgh.

At this stage in life Dillon is involved in sharing the fruits of his discoveries and giving back to his community as well as spreading the combined Christian and Buddhist vision that he believes is the hope for our suffering world. He is presently writing a series of books and also writes a blog of short

Zen messages which may be found at
http://dillonspace.blogspot.com

Suggested Reading.

1. The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma (translation by Red Pine)
2. The Zen Teaching of Huang-Po (translation by P'ei Hsiu, author John Blofeld)
3. The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi (translation by Burton Watson)
4. Meditation On The Nature Of Mind (The Dalai Lama, Khöntön Peljor Lhündrub and José Ignacio Cabezón)
5. The Surangama Sūtra (Excerpts by Master Hsüan Hua)
6. The Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sūtra—Last and most impressive teachings of Gautama Buddha about Reality and the True Self. (Dr. Tony Page)
7. The Diamond Sūtra (translation by Red Pine)
8. The Huang Po doctrine of Universal Mind: Being the teaching of dhyāna master His Yun (translation by P'ei Hsiu)
9. The Method of No-Method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination (Ch'an Master Sheng-Yen)
10. Complete Enlightenment (Ch'an Master Sheng-Yen)
11. There Is No Suffering: A Commentary on the Heart Sūtra (Ch'an Master Sheng Yen)
12. Faith in Mind: A Commentary on Seng Ts'an's Classic (Ch'an Master Sheng-Yen)
13. The Wisdom of Insecurity (Alan Watts)
14. Become What You Are (Alan Watts)

15. The Way of Zen (Alan Watts)
16. The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika (Jay Garfield Translator)
17. The Book of Rinzai (Master Eido Tai Shimano)
18. Living Yogacara—An Introduction to Consciousness-Only Buddhism (Tagawa Shun'Ei)
19. Essential Teachings of Zen Master Hakuin (Norman Waddell)
20. Mud and Water: The Teachings of Zen Master Bassui (Arthur Braverman)
21. The Path to Bodhidharma (Master Shodo Harada)
22. Morning Dewdrops of the Mind: Teachings of a Contemporary Zen Master (Master Shodo Harada)
23. Buddha—A Story of Enlightenment (Deepak Chopra)
24. The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Three Hundred Koans (John Daido Loori)
25. Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen (Eihei Dogen)
26. The Platform Sūtra: The Zen Teaching of Huineng (translation by Red Pine).
27. Verses From The Center—A Buddhist Vision of the Sublime (Stephen Batchelor)
28. Buddhism Without Beliefs (Stephen Batchelor)
29. The Awakening of Faith—translated, with commentary by Yoshito S. Hakeda
30. Why Lazarus Laughed—The Essential Doctrine: Zen–Advaita–Tantra (Wei Wu Wei)
31. Rebel Buddha—On the road to freedom—dzogchen ponlop

32. Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief (Authors Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'Aquili)
33. Mystical Mind (Authors Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'Aquili)
34. My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey (Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor)
35. Mindsight—The New Science of Personal Transformation (Dr. Daniel J. Seigel)