

Meditation and the Essence of Buddhist Teachings

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■ Abstract

Meditation is an adventurous journey within. However, like any journey, whether it is going into the mountains or going to the beach, this journey has to be well prepared for. The first part of the preparation is understanding that there is a mind and then discovering what exactly the mind is and how it works. The journey through meditation requires the mind to be absolutely clear and steadfast in its clarity. The mind has to dwell in equanimity and be at peace. We have to learn to clear the mind of all

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conditioning, preconceived concepts and ideas. If we prepare well, then the meditative journey will be gentle, profound and rewarding. This paper outlines how often overlooked elements of fundamental Buddhist teachings – such as The Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, Karma, and Five Precepts – can be used to facilitate progress on the path of meditation.

Keywords ● Buddhism, Four Noble Truths, Karma, Suffering, Causality

I. Introduction

Human beings are understood to develop certain cognitive abilities even before being born. For example, the human being begins to learn in the womb by becoming familiar with its mother's voice.¹⁾ Ultrasound studies have shown that when babies hear their mothers' voices, they alter their behaviour and experience changes in heart rate. In other words, it appears that the human mind begins to assimilate even when we are still in the womb.²⁾

However, we come into this world with a fairly empty mind and at birth and for the next few weeks, the baby's mind is vast. There are no preconceived ideas, there are no concepts, there is limited conditioning. At this point, the baby's mind is rather like a piece of straw that is held within a circle. As new things begin to be assimilated and experienced, the baby

1) Dewey(2021).

2) Dewey(2021).

takes that new piece of straw and places it inside the circle of the mind. When a baby finds something new such as a pen, it typically picks it up, shakes it to see if it has sound, and puts the pen in its mouth to taste it and so forth. Then the baby sees something new and does exactly the same with that object. When the baby sees the pen again, it will repeat the same process as if it had never seen the pen before – the pen is a totally new experience the second time. Whilst this process of experiencing is slow, the baby manages to put all of the pieces of straw neatly into the circle and things are fairly ordered.

However, as the baby grows, the input becomes faster and the mind begins to have problems with maintaining that order – the mind starts to become knotted up. The baby becomes a teenager who has been conditioned by their peers, their parents, their teachers and by themselves – the bundle of straw has little order now and the mind continues to accumulate and process experiences. By the time the individual reaches adulthood, they are going about their daily business carrying a huge bundle of disordered straw. Everything they see, hear, smell, taste, and touch is experienced through a barrier of straw.

The human being has a tendency to interpret situations and experiences through past conditioning.³⁾ So, are we actually truly making new experiences if we are interpreting those experiences through our past conditioning? If we wish to truly experience events through the process and discipline of meditation, then we must learn how to cooperate with the mind and instruct the mind not to overlay preconceived ideas and concepts onto a new experience. The mind has to learn how to see, hear, smell, taste and

3) Shonin et al.(2013).

touch things exactly as they are.

However, the mind is a very powerful and, if left on its own, it will do precisely what it wants, sometimes without our knowledge, consent and understanding. Essentially, we have three choices: 1) Allow our mind to live our life for us through its conditioning, emotions and feelings and so forth, 2) Allow the minds of other people to live our life for us, or 3) Live our life in collaboration with a well-trained and disciplined mind.

II. Right Type of Vessel

In order to learn to practice meditation effectively, we have to learn how to become the right type of vessel. This is an old Buddhist teaching which is explained very well by Gyaltzen (2016). According to Khenpo Gyaltzen, if we are with a teacher and we simply do not listen or we do not pay attention and we are easily distracted, then we are like an upside-down pot. If we cannot or do not retain what we are being taught then we are like a pot with holes in it – no matter how much the teacher pours into us, everything simply seeps away. Finally, if we listen to the teacher and allow the mind to add to and subtract from what we are hearing through our conditioning, we are like a pot containing poison.

Thus, we have to make the experience of learning with a mind that is without preconceived ideas. We have to allow what we are hearing to enter a mind that is absolutely clear – allowing ourselves to hear what is said exactly as it is. If you listen to the teachings with a mind full of preconceived concepts, emotions, attachments, aversions and ignorance, then whatever

you hear will be changed into something that has not been said (i.e., like nectar that is poured into a pot containing poison).⁴⁾ Therefore, a good place to commence the meditative journey is by exploring, without preconceived ideas, what is arguably the most important of all Buddhist teachings – the Four Noble Truths.

III. The Four Noble Truths

In the *Discourse that Sets the Wheel of Dharma in Motion* (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 56:11), the Four Noble Truths are described as follows:⁵⁾

1. Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.
2. Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.
3. Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, nonreliance on it.

4) Gyaltzen(2016).

5) Bodhi(2000), 1844.

4. Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view ... right concentration.

This can be summarized as follows:

1. Suffering exists.
2. There is a cause of suffering.
3. There is cessation of suffering.
4. There is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

Within Buddhism, this specific teaching has great significance and plays a central role.⁶⁾ Because of this, it is not surprising that a great deal has been written regarding the Four Noble Truths. However, irrespective of how many commentaries or books have been written about a particular aspect of the Buddha's teachings, there is always some additional wisdom that can be gleaned – especially if one is willing to do approach the teaching with a fresh and open perspective. For example, The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* reveals to us that on the occasion when the Buddha first taught the Four Noble Truths (an event referred to as the “first turning of the wheel of Dharma”) at the Deer Park in Sarnath near Varanasi, the primary recipients of the teaching were the five aesthetics (the Buddha's first disciples). However, a frequently overlooked observation concerning the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* is that the sutta also explains that the earth dwelling devas were recipients of this teaching. The inclusion within the audience of two very

6) Bodhi(2023).

different types of being—those in human form and those of the deva realm—has important implications for understanding the significance of the Four Noble Truths, and of the Buddha's teaching more generally. Most importantly, it implies that there are both outer and inner (or hidden) aspects to the Buddhist teachings that can be interpreted and transmitted on both exoteric and esoteric levels.⁷⁾

Basically, what the Buddha is saying with the teaching on the Four Noble Truths is that until we attain spiritual liberation (the third noble truth), we are going to suffer (the first noble truth), and the only way to end this suffering is to walk the path (the fourth noble truth) that acts upon the causes of suffering (the second noble truth).⁸⁾ With this teaching, the Buddha was presenting some simple facts and making some basic logical assertions about suffering. For example, because Buddhism accepts the principle of causality (i.e., all effects are the result of a cause), the second and fourth noble truths follow on logically from the noble truths that immediately precede them. In other words, since in the first noble truth the Buddha has already stated that suffering exists, then it is logical to assert that this suffering has a cause (i.e., the second noble truth). Likewise, because in the third noble truth the Buddha states that there is an end to suffering, then it is logical to assert that this end to suffering also has a cause (the cause of the end of suffering is walking the path that eradicates suffering – the fourth noble truth).⁹⁾

Thus, we could actually condense the Buddha's teaching on the four noble truths to a single phrase such as: *‘There is suffering which has a cause*

7) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

8) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

9) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

and there is liberation which has a cause'. However, because Buddhism accepts the principle of causality, even the above phrase could be further condensed. For example, if we state that there is suffering, then as discussed above, we actually don't need to state that there is a cause to suffering because that is already implied. Likewise, since we know that suffering exists because of certain causes (principally ignorance, attachment, and aversion), then we know that by removing these causes, suffering will also be eradicated. Thus, when we state that suffering exists, not only is it implied that suffering has a cause, but it is also implied that the removal of the causes of suffering will lead to the cessation of suffering.¹⁰⁾

Therefore, if you are a reductionist and enjoy reducing things down to their simplest form, perhaps you could capture the entire meaning of the teaching on the Four Noble Truths just by simply saying '*suffering exists*'. Alternatively, if you wanted to be more optimistic, you could simply say that '*liberation exists*'. In fact, perhaps these phrases could be made use of in your meditation practice: with the in-breath you could quietly say to yourself that '*suffering exists*', and with the out-breath you could quietly say '*but so does liberation*'.

A person might accept that the statement '*suffering exists*' implies that suffering has a cause and that removing the cause will lead to the cessation of suffering, but they might not accept that it can be logically inferred from the statement '*suffering exists*' that a path exists (i.e., the fourth noble truth) that can eradicate this suffering. However, such an objection can be easily overcome because just by stating that '*suffering exists*', this automatically establishes the existence of '*non-suffering*' (i.e.,

10) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

liberation). In other words, at the same time we accept the existence of something, we also have to accept the existence of its opposite.¹¹⁾ For example, if we accept that the 'left' exists, then we have to accept that the 'right' also exists. Left only exists because there is right – if we take away right, then we no longer have left.

Therefore, when we state or accept that suffering exists, we must also accept that liberation exists. Based on the principle of causality, having accepted that liberation exists, we can now make a logical deduction and accept that liberation has a cause. The cause of this liberation is none other than the path (i.e., the fourth noble truth) and we must now accept that the meaning and essence of all four of the Buddha's noble truths is logically implied within each truth individually. Of course, although the Buddha's teaching on the noble truths is perfectly grounded in logic, when the Buddha gave this teaching, he wasn't purely making logical assertions, but was talking from his experience.

One of the most important things we can learn by familiarizing ourselves with the Four Noble Truths in the manner described above is that this teaching has a very simple but profound message: *'we will suffer – for an indefinite period – until such time that we choose to dedicate ourselves to spiritual development in order to stop creating the causes of suffering'*. It really is that simple and it is up to each individual to make the choice. Even if the individual decides not to make the choice, that in itself is a choice. Life is fleeting and before we know it old age is upon us. The Buddha taught that everything is impermanent, and this includes suffering. But in the case of suffering, bringing about its impermanence is something that rests

11) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

entirely in our own hands. This is the quintessential message of the Four Noble Truths.

In addition to appreciating the spiritual significance and potency of the Four Noble Truths, a further essential take-home message concerning this teaching is that the statements that comprise the Four Noble Truths were never intended to be ambiguous. Indeed, not only were the Four Noble Truths intended to represent the Buddha's experiential understanding and expression of the truth, but they were also intended to represent statements of fact. For example, the Buddha's statement that suffering exists does not simply mean that there is the potential for suffering to exist, it means that with the exception of those beings that have realized the third noble truth (i.e., the cessation of suffering), all beings suffer.¹²⁾ Likewise, the noble truth of suffering does not mean that sentient beings suffer at certain times but not at other times, it means that sentient beings that have not ascended to liberation are continuously immersed in suffering.¹³⁾

IV. Suffering Exists

In everyday society, suffering is generally interpreted as the experience of either somatic or psychological pain. Therefore, in the absence of such pain and whilst experiencing favourable socio-environmental conditions and good health, individuals generally classify themselves as not suffering. However, from a Buddhist perspective, the term suffering takes on a much

12) Shonin et al.(2015).

13) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

more extensive meaning. Irrespective of whether a sentient being is currently experiencing psychological or somatic pain, and irrespective of whether a sentient being considers itself to be suffering, Buddhism asserts that the very fact an unenlightened being exists means it suffers.¹⁴⁾

This type of enduring latent suffering referred to above is known in Buddhism as *all-pervasive suffering*.¹⁵⁾ In essence, it is the suffering that arises due to an individual's ignorance as to the ultimate nature of self and reality.¹⁶⁾ Given that unenlightened beings have a distorted perception of reality, Buddhism asserts that they are deluded.¹⁷⁾ Thus, within Buddhism, to a certain extent the terms suffering, deluded and ignorant can all be used interchangeably.¹⁸⁾

According to the 12th century Tibetan Buddhist Gampopa,¹⁹⁾ although unenlightened beings (human or otherwise) experience all-pervasive suffering, they are generally ignorant of this fact:

Ordinary people will not feel the all-pervasive suffering as, for example, when one is stricken with a serious plague and a small pain in the ears and so forth is not noticeable. But the saintly beings—the noble ones beyond samsara such as the stream enterers and so forth—will see the all-pervasive suffering as suffering ...

In addition to all-pervasive suffering, we have two other forms of

14) Shonin et al.(2015); Van Gordon et al.(2015).

15) Gampopa(1998).

16) Van Gordon et al.(2022).

17) Tsong-Kha-pa(2004).

18) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

19) Gampopa(1998), 96.

suffering. The first is known as the suffering of change: all things change all of the time. Birth leads to death and being in love leads to separation, for example. This is the principle of impermanence which is very important in Buddhism.²⁰⁾ The third primary form of suffering recognized in the Buddhist teachings is that of *the suffering of suffering*. This is the most palpable form of suffering and is typified by experiences such as somatic pain, psychological distress, illness, hunger or starvation, thirst or dehydration, being too hot, and being too cold.

V. The Cause of Suffering

Buddhism asserts that because sentient beings believe they inherently exist, they constantly crave after objects and/or situations that they deem will better their predicament.²¹⁾ Not only is this craving itself a form of suffering, but as described by the Buddha, it causes an unending stream of sorrow:

Whoever is overcome by this wretched and sticky craving, his sorrows grow like grass after the rains.²²⁾

Just as a tree, though cut down, sprouts up again if its roots remain uncut and firm, even so, until the craving that lies dormant is rooted out, suffering springs up again and again.²³⁾

20) Dalai Lama(1995).

21) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

22) Dham., 24, 335; Buddharakkhita(1986), 113.

23) Dham., 24, 338; Buddharakkhita(1986), 133.

As a means of conceptualising within Western scientific settings the Buddhist position concerning the cause of suffering, along with colleagues I formulated the concept of ontological addiction.²⁴⁾ Ontological addiction can effectively be considered a new category of addiction (i.e., in addition to chemical addiction and behavioral addiction) and is defined as “*the unwillingness to relinquish an erroneous and deep-rooted belief in an inherently existing ‘self’ or ‘I’ as well as the ‘impaired functionality’ that arises from such a belief*”.²⁵⁾ Due to a firmly-embedded, yet scientifically and logically implausible belief that the self is an inherent and independently existing entity, Buddhism teaches that afflictive mental states arise as a result of the imputed “self” incessantly craving after objects it considers to be attractive or harbouring aversion towards objects it considers to be unattractive.²⁶⁾

VI. The Cessation of Suffering

Although I would argue that a being—including those that have attained Buddhahood—never actually concludes its spiritual journey, the Buddha's statement that there is cessation of suffering implies that liberation from suffering is not a half-way stage on the path to enlightenment. The reason for this is because it is logically implausible to assert that there exists a state in which suffering has completely ceased, but that in this state a being

24) Shonin et al.(2013).

25) Shonin et al.(2013), 64.

26) Shonin et al.(2016); Van Gordon et al.(2015).

is still subject to a subtle class of ignorance (i.e., suffering) due to still not having awoken to complete omniscience and enlightenment.²⁷⁾

Karma refers to the imprint that each individual's thoughts, words and deeds leaves upon their mind and that in-turn determines how they react to and perceive the conditions and occurrences around them.²⁸⁾ However, this concept is misunderstood by the many people and karma actually translates from Sanskrit as “action”. More specifically, this action is driven by intention and it is this ‘intention’ which has the greatest importance in terms of the karma we produce and experience. In Buddhism, there are three types of actions – action of body, action of speech, and action of mind. However, it is action of mind that governs the other two.

All of our actions, including our thoughts, produce reactions – that is to say, they produce karma and karma influences perceptions. There are many people who will say things such as “this is happening to me because of my past karma”. However, this is not the correct attitude toward karma. The correct attitude is to relate to karma in the here and now, yet we cannot see the here and now with clarity if we allow our conditioning to control us. As discussed previously, the human mind retains our reactions to situations and re-uses those past reactions to deal with similar situations that are happening now. What we think, say and do in this present moment will create our next present moment. We create our future within the present moment through our actions of body, speech, and mind. Therefore, what we have to accomplish is living in the here and now without conditioning.

27) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

28) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

VII. The Path

The fourth noble truth that there is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering principally refers to the Noble Eightfold Path that comprises the elements of (i) right view, (ii) right intention, (iii) right speech, (iv) right action, (v) right livelihood, (vi) right effort, (vii) right mindfulness, and (viii) right concentration/right meditation. As inferred by the Buddha's teachings on the Noble Eightfold Path in the *Mahacattarisaka Sutta*,²⁹⁾ although the eightfold path comprises eight individual elements, these elements should be considered as the individual strands that comprise a single rope. A rope is at its strongest when all of the strands are wound together and it is only when practised and embodied as a single path that the Noble Eightfold Path provides all of the factors necessary to attain liberation.³⁰⁾

In walking this noble path, we must be mindful of the journey and mindful of our own mind. We should maintain a constant collaboration with the mind. According to Van Gordon et al., the following are eight points that we can use to focus the mind upon our journey through meditation:

1. Accept the presence and inevitability of suffering for the duration of the spiritual journey.
2. Understand that the causes of suffering can be permanently eradicated.
3. Objectify suffering by adopting it as a meditative object. Do not connect the concept of self to suffering.

29) The Great Forty Sutta. ; MN., 117.

30) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

4. Perceive that suffering continuously changes in both severity and variety.
5. Recognise that the intensity of suffering is inversely associated with the degree of tranquillity in the mind that experiences it.
6. Understand that suffering provides the raw material that the spiritual practitioner works with in order to attain liberation.
7. Understand that ultimately, suffering is a relative phenomenon and it relies for its existence on a “self” that can experience it.
8. Instinctively understand that the perceiver of suffering lacks inherent existence and, as such, suffering is a creation of the mind.

As referred to earlier, unlike the suffering of suffering which is difficult for individuals not to notice, the suffering of change requires a deeper insight. According to Van Gordon et al, in order to cultivate mindfulness of the suffering of change, the practitioner should aim to maintain a continuous awareness—to the point that it taints all thought processes and arises automatically—of what are collectively known as the *Four Summaries of the Dhamma*.³¹⁾

1. Life in any world is unstable, it is swept away
2. Life in any world has no shelter and no protector
3. Life in any world has nothing of its own; one has to leave all and pass on
4. Life in any world is incomplete, insatiate, the slave of craving

As implied by the Four Summaries of the Dhamma, the practise of

31) Nanamoli & Bodhi(2009), 686-687; MN., 82.

mindfulness of the suffering of change requires perspective and clarity of vision on behalf of the practitioner.³²⁾ It also requires a full understanding of the principle and law of impermanence. Phenomena are born, they live, and they pass away. There are no exceptions to this rule—it is a mark of existence.³³⁾ The very fact that an individual enjoys good health serves as a cause for poor health at a future point. The fact that an individual is alive serves as the cause for death. Therefore, as described by the Buddha, we should try to non-conceptually observe and accept the coming and going of phenomena:

But let be the past, Udāyin, let be the future. I shall teach you the Dhamma:
When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When
this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that
ceases.³⁴⁾

VIII. The Five Precepts

Another fundamental Buddhist teaching related to the path of meditation is called the five precepts (pañcaśīla). If you consider the 'three trainings' principal (Skt trishiksha) of 1. Meditation, 2. Ethics and 3. Wisdom, the five precepts make part of ethical awareness. The five precepts provide a basic code for living a good life in keeping with Buddhist ethical values. While their literal meaning is obvious, they also have a more

32) Shonin & Van Gordon(2015a).

33) Shonin et al.(2014).

34) Nanamoli & Bodhi(2009), 655; MN., 79.

profound meaning, which is explored further below.

1. *First Precept*: I undertake the training rule to abstain from killing.

The more profound meaning of the first precept is that we should not kill the Buddha within. That is to say, we should not kill the enlightened nature within ourselves. Whenever we chase after mundane goals such as wealth, reputation and status, this is killing the Buddha within. Our time on this earth is very precious and very limited and sooner or later we will encounter death. At the point of death, all of our various life encounters and accomplishments mean absolutely nothing. They have no more significance than the fading memories of a dream and no matter how hard we try, nothing from this life can be taken into the next. The only exception to this is the spiritual insight that we manage to accrue on a day-to-day basis.

Therefore, if we don't use this precious human rebirth to nourish and develop ourselves spiritually, we suffocate the Buddha within. We suffocate the capacity to awaken our enlightened nature. When we are with someone who is talking with us, confiding in us, and our mind is thinking about either what we want to say or what we could be doing instead of being with that person, then we are killing the Buddha within that person and we kill the Buddha within ourselves. When we do not listen to the bird that is singing for us then we kill the Buddha within ourselves as well as the Buddha in the bird. That bird spent many lifetimes training to sing that song so that we could hear it and we spent many lifetimes training so that we could listen to what the bird has to say. The bird sang, we couldn't care, the moment passed, and we were not aware. We are as good as dead alongside the Buddha within.

2. ***Second Precept:*** I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking what is not given.

The more profound aspect of the second precept is that we should not steal from ourselves the opportunity to attain enlightenment in this lifetime. The second precept also means that we should not steal this opportunity from others. The opportunity to attain enlightenment is the birth-right of every living being in the universe. We steal away this opportunity from ourselves each time we practice mindless, selfish, and unskilful ways. We steal away this opportunity from others when we do not act with kindness, awareness, and gentleness in their presence.

When people set themselves up as ‘Buddhist’ teachers without having dedicated their lives to spiritual practice (or in some cases after having taken part in just one or two meditation retreats facilitated by people who have no real spiritual experience), they are putting their own spiritual lives in jeopardy. More concerning, however, is that they are stealing the spiritual breath of others. They are stealing other people's opportunity to attain enlightenment. People come to them obviously in need of spiritual nourishment and all they get is the unfortunate experience of being robbed – both spiritually and materially.

We should awaken each morning with gratitude and zeal. This is a new breath, a new day, a new life. We should make use of every moment to develop ourselves and grow spiritually. We should facilitate others do the same.

3. ***Third Precept:*** I undertake the training rule to avoid lustful conduct.

The innermost aspect of the third precept is that we should not lust after being a 'me', a 'mine', or an 'I'. Because of wanting to be somebody, people are unable to be themselves. The more we want to be someone, the more difficult it becomes to just simply be. Wanting to be a 'me', a 'mine', or an 'I' causes us to develop a big ego which acts as an obstacle to spiritual growth.³⁵⁾ When we let go of the idea that we inherently exist, we cease to separate ourselves from the energy and dance of the Dharma that is all around us. Phenomena do not exist as discrete entities. They exist as one. When the universe breathes in, all of the phenomena that it contains breathe in with it. When the universe breathes out, all of the matter and space that it contains also breathes out. When we stop wanting to be a 'me', a 'mine', or an 'I', we are able to relax into and once again abide in unison with the energy of all that is.

4. *Forth Precept*: I undertake the training rule to abstain from false speech.

The hidden aspect of the fourth precept means that we should not utter false speech by giving Dharma teachings on subjects that we have not fully and directly realised ourselves. It seems that the number of so-called Dharma and meditation teachers is rapidly increasing. More and more people are writing books about the Buddhist teachings (including mindfulness), and more and more people are offering meditation retreats and courses. Whenever we try to instruct others in spiritual teachings that we ourselves have not fully realised, we lie to them and we also lie to ourselves. This false speech serves to water down the Dharma, bolster our egos, and distance us (and those listening to us) from the possibility of cultivating true meditative

35) Van Gordon et al.(2021).

calm and insight.

The same applies when we utter words such as “I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha”. If during our day-to-day existence, we are only concerned with the petty affairs of our lives and getting ahead in the world, then these words are untrue. If we wish to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we have to stop thinking that the world revolves around us. We have to stop living a soap opera. We have to make our entire life a spiritual practice and not just engage in (what we deem to be) Buddhist practice when it is convenient to us or when we are going through a particularly difficult time.

5. ***Fifth Precept***: I undertake the training rule to abstain from ingesting intoxicants.

The innermost meaning of the fifth precept is that we should not fill up and intoxicate our own mind or other people's minds with concepts, clever ideas, and wrong views. Too many people have their minds full-up. If our minds are too full then there is no room for wholesome thoughts to grow and flourish. In a full mind there is no space for simply being, and there is no emptiness to nurture and refresh our being. Having our minds full-up all the time becomes stressful and tiring not only for ourselves but also for those with whom we interact.³⁶⁾ Some people that practice Buddhism fill up their minds with the idea that they are a Theravada Buddhist, a Mahayana Buddhist, or a Vajrayana Buddhist. However, a Theravada Buddhist who is caught up in the idea of being a Theravada Buddhist is not, in truth, a

36) Shonin & Van Gordon(2014).

Theravada Buddhist. The same applies to Mahayana and Vajrayana practitioners who foolishly attach themselves to the name and label of their particular Buddhist practice modality. In Theravada Buddhism there are strong Mahayana and Vajrayana elements, and in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism there are strong Theravada elements.

During my life, I have met many people that proudly introduce themselves as (for example) a vegetarian, vegan, spiritual teacher, meditator, or philanthropist. If people want to be a vegetarian or a vegan that's great – good for them. But if they over-identify with the idea of being a vegetarian and/or believe that it somehow makes them a more spiritual or virtuous person, then they have allowed their life choices to intoxicate their mind. We abstain from intoxicating the mind with concepts and wrong views when we observe but do not attach ourselves to thoughts and feelings. When we allow thoughts, feelings, and other mental processes to roll freely through the mind and not stick to it, the mind becomes completely immune to all forms of intoxicant.

IX. Conclusion

As with all Buddhist practices, meditation is deeply connected to the Buddha's teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path as well as the five precepts. The quintessential message of the Four Noble Truths is that until a sentient being attains spiritual liberation (the third noble truth), it will suffer (the first noble truth), and the only way to end this suffering is to walk the path (the fourth noble truth) that acts upon the

causes of suffering (the second noble truth). A meditation practice that does not encompass and remain attentive to these four truths of existence cannot be said to embody the authentic Buddhist Dharma. Suffering is a mark of existence, but by incorporating suffering into the path of meditation awareness, suffering itself can become a causal agent of liberation.³⁷⁾

37) Van Gordon et al.(2015).

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■ 한글요약

명상과 불교 교리의 핵심

에도 쇼닌

명상은 내면에서 이루어지는 모험적인 여정이다. 그러나 등산을 가거나 해변에 갈 때 여정을 준비하듯이 명상도 여느 여정처럼 잘 준비되어야 한다. 준비의 첫 단계는 마음의 존재 자체를 인지한 후 마음이 정확히 무엇이며 어떻게 작동하는지를 발견하는 것이다. 명상을 통한 여정에서 마음은 절대적으로 분명하고 변함없이 명료해야 하며 항상 침착하고 평온함을 유지해야 한다. 따라서 마음 속의 모든 상황, 선입견, 생각을 비우는 방법을 배워야만 한다. 이것을 잘 준비한다면, 명상 여정은 원만하게 이루어 깊은 의미를 찾고 보람도 있을 것이다. 본 논문은 명상 여정에서 간과되었던 사성제, 팔정도, 업, 오계와 같은 불교의 근본 가르침들이 어떻게 명상 여정을 쉽게 갈 수 있도록 돕는지 설명한다.

주제어 ● 불교, 사성제, 업, 고, 인과법

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