

*Aiming for Freedom
and Fulfillment*

Readings on Transcendent Renunciation

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Table of Contents

Preface

A verse from the Dhammapada

From The Eighth Dalai Lama's Prayer

1. Renunciation is Letting Go With Wisdom and Compassion

On the Wisdom aspect

2. On the Importance of Relying on Wisdom

3. If You Want to Know the Way Out, Seek Wisdom, and Not Emotion

4. The Inseparability of the Two Truths

5. Renunciation of samsara is not only the business of monks and nuns, by
Lama Yeshe

6. Two selections on renunciation, by Ringu Tulku

7. What Renunciation Is and Isn't, by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

8. Oh Joy to Know At Last - There is No Happiness in Samsara!

9. The Perfection of Renunciation, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

10. From The mind and renunciation, by Venerable Thubten Chodron

11. Compassion and Self Compassion

12. Awakening Unconditional Compassion for Self and Others
13. Getting the Proportions Right in Dharma Practice
14. The Most Interesting Thing About the Meditation On Death
15. On Renunciation, from Introduction to Tantra, by Lama Yeshe
16. From The Way to Buddhahood, by the Venerable Yin-Shun
17. Quotes on how much we need realized people in this world
18. There is no time to lose
19. Hey, fortunate one!
20. From The Life of Milarepa
21. Verses on Renunciation
22. From The Treatise on the Paramis, by Acarya Dhammapala
23. From Essence of Refined Gold, by the Third Dalai Lama
24. From Wisdom, Method, and the Three Paths, by Geshe Sopa
25. On the Meaning of Renunciation, by Matthieu Ricard
26. On Renunciation, by Ani Tenzin Palmo
27. On the Gratification, the Danger, and the Escape
28. A Renounced Mind, by Ven. Thubten Gyatso

29. Four Courses of Action
30. A summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings
31. Renunciation, or The Determination to be Free, from The Tushita Introductory Course Materials
32. From The Lam Rim Outlines, by the Venerable Karen Valham
33. On Renunciation and Bodhicitta, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, from Freedom Through Understanding
34. Two verses
35. From At this time
36. Homage to the Dharma, from Aryasura's Aspiration
37. The Original Meaning of Sacrifice
38. From In the Spirit of Manjushri, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama
39. From Working with the Five Hindrances, by Ajahn Thiradhammo
40. From The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun of Mahayana Thought Training, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche
41. From the teachings of Ajahn Pasanno
42. From The Balanced Way, by Bhikkhu Bodhi
43. What is Nekkhamma, by Ajahn Munindo
44. From The Craft of the Heart, by Ajahn Lee

45. From Inner Strength, by Ajahn Lee
46. From the teachings of Bhante Gunaratana
47. The Toy Horse
48. Letting Go As a Skillful Means
49. From The Peace Beyond, by Ajahn Chah
50. Renounce and Enjoy, from the Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center
51. On Sacrifice, by Ani Tenzin Palmo
52. On Contentment
53. Nekkhamma, from Wikipedia
54. Right Intention as Renunciation, by Danielle
55. From Renunciation, by Ani Tenzin Palmo
56. I carry within me medicine
57. Entering the gate of the Dharma, by Yangthang Rinpoche
58. Notes from Letting go - Nekkha Parami, by Ajahn Sucitto
59. The Graduated Path, by Ajahn Sucitto

* * *

60. Practicing the One Vehicle

- 61. In Praise of the Buddha's Liberating Activity
- 62. For the sake of all who struggle and suffer
- 63. A prayer
- 64. On the Potential Power of Vows
- 65. Taking Refuge, Individual Liberation Vows, and Verses for Generating the Bodhisattva Vow
- 66. Vow

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About these selections: The Traditional texts in this collection are my own versions; and the the teachings offered here have been edited, and in some places revised, according to my understanding. In these cases, I have done my best to be true to the meaning.

Aiming for Freedom and Fulfillment

Preface

The wish for happiness is innate to us as human beings, and to animals too. It doesn't have to be added. What we then do with this impulse varies widely - just look. Some go down bad roads, leading to further misery, while others find peace, freedom and fulfillment. Finding ourselves at this very juncture is the starting point of a religious or a spiritual path.

It's said that the Buddha to be saw that the life he was living, having every comfort and sense pleasure met, was not complete. He experienced a strong dissatisfaction with empty promises of a shallow materialistic life, and fortunately for us all, he was living in India at a time when spiritual paths were honored.

In the telling of early part of his life story that's come down to us as The Four Messengers, Siddhartha first saw old age, then sickness, then death, and finally a spiritual seeker - 'one of serene countenance', and decided then and there to find the deeper truth - the happiness and wholeness that is possible for us here as human beings.

That initial impulse is what kept him going the whole time in his search. When something is not complete, not fulfilling, we need to acknowledge it. This is our innate wisdom functioning - the sense that there is something more, or something we have yet to find, or to experience fully, or embody.

I call this a 'divine dissatisfaction', and if we don't numb ourselves, or stop, it is onward leading. We find, because we search out Traditions and their teachings, and test them out in our own lives.

Pull any corner of a carpet, and the whole carpet moves

It's interesting to me that different people will hear the same teaching, and get something different from it. Even one person can return to a teaching, and find something new in it. This is how it is with anyone who studies for a time, and stays with a theme, or cycles through a set of teachings.

Take for example the subject of ethics. When we study this more deeply, we find the need for meditation, and wisdom, kindness and compassion, honoring our connection with teachers; we find the need for greater patience, and diligence.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra, it says

*One teaching contains all teachings,
and one practice contains all practices...*

We know this when we are able to see and practice deeply.

In the Lam Rim, or *the Stages of the Path Teachings*, we find brief summaries, as well as more extensive teachings on each related theme. Having learned and reflected on them, when we again review the whole of the spiritual path, each element stands out more vividly. They each make more sense to us, and are able to apply them even more effectively in our lives. This is how it should be.

We can also see the relationship between different practices, and how we can't leave anything essential out.

It's like our practice is a vehicle, taking us from one place to another, from the state of an ordinary, worldly person, to that of someone becoming free from confusion and suffering. This is what is known as *A change of lineage*.

If anything essential is left out, or is not given its due, we are held back. If ethics is missing, for example, meditation is not what it could be; and if the mind is not settled and clear, with the ability to look deeply into things, then wisdom has a hard time arising, or staying long, or being integrated.

To use an organic metaphor then - taking care of the most basic things on our path is like watering the roots - everything flourishes.

In addition to the outline of ethics, meditation, and wisdom as essential, another description of the path is that of *renunciation* - letting go of what holds us back from finding freedom from suffering, *bodhicitta* - setting our motivation throughout our lives to be of the greatest benefit, and *insight-wisdom*.

If any of these are left out, we will only go so far. They are each an integral part of the path. See for yourself.

*It's especially easy these days to overlook the importance of the fundamental teachings. After even a short time, we may say, 'Oh, I know that already - tell me something new', but these essential foundations need to be appreciated more and more, clarified and strengthened, so that realizing all the rest of the teachings follows naturally.

I remember someone coming into the bookstore where I worked in Berkeley in the 90's, and saying, 'I want books on the ultimate view - I don't want any of those relative teachings' - and while I could see his point, I remember telling him, 'The ultimate is easy, but it's the relative that allows us to realize it' {or something to that effect}.

I'm still working on this, of course, but now with a little more clarity about what this means.

Over the years, I've gathered teachings on various topics, all essential.

There are collections on appreciating this precious human life, and impermanence, on joy, ethics, and purification, on meditation, and wisdom; on metta and the bodhisattva motivation, on Buddhist prayer, and other subjects.

{A page with the books I have written and edited can be found [here](#). Scroll down a bit.}

Each of these I feel are important to know about and to practice, as we are able, and to explore any one of them in depth is just for purpose of strengthening our understanding and practice, no more and no less - each according to our temperament, and our need.

If we have time to research and study in depth, this is best. For those with less time, resources, or opportunity, it's my hope that anthologies or summaries such as these will be useful. I have simply tried with this and other collections to write and to find sources that further my own understanding, and to have something beneficial to share.

This present collection is on the subject of renunciation, or stated positively, *Aiming for Freedom and Fulfillment*. There are these two sides to it, naturally, and like with the other teachings, all teachings and practices can be found in this.

*May all find the happiness they seek
May there be peace and fulfillment in our lives,
and in all the lives in this world*

It is wisdom that enables letting go of a lesser happiness
in pursuit of a happiness which is greater.

- The Dhammapada, verse 290

No matter where one wanders in the three worlds -
From the highest heaven to the lowest of hells -
One finds only all-pervading dissatisfaction.
Therefore, may I transcend it all and find
That firm ground of liberation and spiritual joy.

- From The Eighth Dalai Lama's Prayer

Renunciation is Letting Go With Wisdom and Compassion

When we study religious traditions, and look at our own feelings about teachings, we can see a wide range of responses to this one word, 'renunciation'. At its worst, renunciation has this common reputation for being life denying- an aversion to everything that we know in our heart to be right and beautiful in this world. It feels like it's all loss, and we think, What would be the point of that?, but there's a lot more to letting go, or giving something up than this limiting definition would have us believe.

For me, Buddhism, and all religious traditions are about ending *samsaric* suffering, and finding meaning and fulfillment in our lives. To that end, naturally, *we're going to want* to abandon the causes of suffering, and everything that holds us back from accomplishing our aims, and those of our beloved family.

Much of what has come down to us with the name 'renunciation' attached to it is what people try to do, and tell others to do, may be well meaning, but it's without wisdom. This is what gives it all bad name, predictably.

Without wisdom- understanding the purpose, *and a complete path* backing up letting go, there's bound to be resistance, and conflict. As we can see, so often when moral principles alone are asserted, there follows hypocrisy, shame and denial, fear, and hostility towards teachings such as these.

We *want*, and we don't want to give up anything. We don't see the point of it, and we snarl like an angry dog when we think someone is trying to take any pleasure at all from us (drinking and drugs, food, sex, sleep, laying around in the sun, and so on)...

I'd like to point out here that we already do have some amount of discriminating thought and wisdom functioning. It's what chooses for us. If we watch throughout the day, we 'renounce' all the time, even if we don't

use this word for it. We think, 'Eh, this is meaningless', or, 'No, thank you', or, Forget *that*'.

This is all well and good, as far as it goes.

But there's a greater pleasure, a higher peace and fulfillment that can be known,
This is what we're all looking for, and if not for this, there'd be no point in letting *anything* go.

From his very first teaching, the Buddha asserted that all suffering can be ended, and this is his main point. He taught that freedom can be known, and enjoyed, and shared with others. Once we know this, then the different kinds of letting go make sense, and are naturally appealing. They are nothing less than the expression of wisdom and compassion for ourselves and others.

The foot of the path is relinquishment,
as attachment to food and wealth disappear...

- from the Karma Kagyud Lineage Prayer

Such renunciation, or letting go, happens easily, naturally, on account of clear understanding. We let go joyfully, gratefully, and we find spaciousness and rest there.

Note that *when we renounce* something, it necessarily means that it previously had value for us. After all, we can't let go of something we never had hold of. Maybe it was even the most important thing in our life, and *we changed our mind* about it. We gave it up, decisively. We relinquished it, we thoroughly and comprehensively let it go.

Of course, we have to contend then with our habit energies, which are the currents of our past actions, and those we've inherited from our family, and culture. These can be fearsome at times, and so we rely on accomplished

teachers, saints, and those holy ones whose sole purpose is to help beings like us to achieve our spiritual aims, of complete health and peace.

Enter the Three Trainings - Sila, Samadhi, and Prajna, Ethics, Meditation, and Wisdom

*Homage to the Dharma,
that opens the wisdom-eye of beings,
and is the means of removing the poison arrow of latent tendencies*

- from Aryasura's Aspiration

Initially, *at the level of ethics*, letting go of what we were previously attached to makes for more peace, and allowing the mind to settle more comfortably in the present;

then, *in meditation*, letting go of attachment, contention and aggression, and other activities facilitates the mind settling more deeply, and becoming clear;

and *on the level of liberating wisdom*, the letting go that happens at the point of insight completes the practice.

Paradoxically, when it comes to the false ego-ideas we produced and held onto tenaciously, with discernment-insight, we see that there is nothing to let go of.

As it's said in the Tibetan Tradition, at this point,

Not seeing is perfect seeing,

and the world opens up. A much greater freedom than we could have imagined is here, and there is light, and an all-embracing love.

This is realizing Sila, Samadhi, and Prajna, and this is renunciation at its best.

*May we all enter a path
that leads to the complete freedom from suffering
and may we all find peace and fulfillment in this very life*

On the Wisdom Aspect

On the Importance of Relying on Wisdom

If You Want to Know the Way Out, Seek Wisdom, and Not Emotion

The Inseparability of the Two Truths

On the Importance of Relying on Wisdom

From a letter to a friend, in March, of 2021

One thought came to mind to tell you about, when you asked, 'How do we respond when other parties may not have activated the innate part of them which knows ultimate truth perspective?' -

I may have told you in a previous message how my interest in the teachings on the Two Truths was driven by the desire to understand that very question. I was thinking of someone I cared for who was paranoid, and imagining things, but was very difficult to convince of the need to see things differently, or to listen to those who knew her and cared about her.

Sounds familiar right? It is to the point of it being universal, I do believe.

In any case, I did have this *aha* moment this week, looking, and looking, and not finding, but best of all, recognizing that I had not yet found what I was looking for in terms of something that felt like a deeper understanding of what is needed.

Then, I was reading about the Two Truths, and one commentary mentioned *the four reliances* - and right away I remembered what those were about, and felt something break open (you know the feeling)

I've been having this sense that I couldn't answer the question we are both asking, about how to engage others, and encourage them, because the terms are wrong, or not sufficient for the result we want.

The Four Reliances, you may know, are

Don't rely on the teacher, rely on the teaching;

Don't rely on the words, rely on the meaning;

Don't rely on the provisional, rely on the definitive;

and,

Don't rely on ordinary awareness, rely on wisdom

and it's this last one that feels like it is the Way here.

It's saying that, with some kinds of minds, problems don't resolve, but with wisdom, or insight, it's workable. At least that's how I read it now, out of necessity.

I had this image for a time of how being caught feels: It's like a fly in a bottle - going up and down and back and forth, banging into the glass, but not getting any further, for all its' desperate efforts, and oh, have mercy! This is on account of staying in just this one framework, when something else *entirely* is needed.

Perhaps you can relate it to those who hallucinate, or imagine things that aren't there - it is the same with every ordinary consciousness, that believes so fully in its own view. Something qualitatively different is needed, and knowing this saves so much energy, of struggle, or speaking when it's not effective to do so.

Don't rely on ordinary consciousness, rely on wisdom.

This is the great remedy, and it saves a lot of time and energy that we may otherwise use trying to change some situation, but without having a complete method to do so.

In those same teachings on the Two Truths, they then make the interesting point that the purpose of the conventional view practices are just so that we can gradually understand, take up, and accomplish what transcends this point of view. In Buddhism, we need to be clear that this is the aim. This is what is known as freedom.

I'm really glad we can share this much.

Thank you so much, and may we all together realize liberation.

If You Want to Know the Way Out, Seek Wisdom, and Not Emotion

The provisional and the definitive teachings each have a different function in freeing us, personally and collectively, from wrong views and suffering. If we don't know this, we may spend time and energy over the years, expecting a result from practicing one aspect alone, when our attention and energy can be more effectively used.

We get hints that the provisional teachings alone are not enough, for example, in the calm abiding or jhana teachings, where we are reminded that *we need wisdom to uproot the defilements*; and in the teachings on loving kindness, and the other Brahma Viharas, we're told that although we can attain very refined states through these practices, *we need insight to complete our practice*, both for our own sake, and for all those we care for.

As I understand it, the teaching on the Two Truths developed out of Middle Way, Madhyamaka thought, as a practical expression, and a further clear statement of those teachings. One of the things I admire about these particular teachings is that they aim to be inclusive of *all* states of mind, in all realms, from our various mistakes and their results, all the way to the pure, clear mind of wisdom, and freedom. They divide our experiences into *the relative*, and *the ultimate*, which I have defined for practical purposes as *that which is true, whether we see it or not*. This allows room to grow as we learn to see more deeply.

When it comes to practicing with the relative and ultimate truths, we have *the provisional* and *the definitive* teachings.

*The purpose of all the relative practices, I've seen, is to purify and transform *the qualitative aspect* of our mind and heart;

and the purpose of the definitive teachings is to purify and transform *the conceptual aspect* of the mind, *and this* is what brings freedom.

As Shantideva said,

All of the teachings have been given for the sake of wisdom

If we depend on the provisional to accomplish what only the definitive can do, we will be disappointed. We will not realize our aim. At this point, we need wisdom, in the form of insight into our true nature.

We do need both the relative practices, and the definitive. They each have an essential role to play in our fulfillment, but they are different.

The necessary relative practices, such as ethics, patience, meditation, generosity, the purification of faults, renunciation, faith and devotion, are also called *provisional* in the sense that they enable us to move from one place to another; they prepare the ground, they nurture and sustain us, just as our everyday provisions do, and they provide necessary the supporting conditions where wisdom-insight can arise and become strong.

To make the distinction, in Mipham's *Sword of Wisdom*, it says,

Whichever sutras (teachings and practices) are directed toward engaging the path are called provisional, and whichever sutras are directed towards engaging the result are called definitive.

In more detail, whichever sutras teach about the self, living beings, and a self where there is (in fact) not a self are called the provisional teaching;

And whichever sutras teach about emptiness, the signless, the wishless, and the absence of self - these teachings on the doors to liberation are called the definitive meaning.

There's a well known quote of Einstein where he says, *We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.*

And I found an exposition on this idea from Babaji Bob Kindler. He said,

You can't solve a problem created at one level with a solution that is also at that same level; you have to go to the next level and get the solution and then apply it back to the earlier level of the problem.

This is *exactly* what we should be aiming to do in Buddhism. If we don't, but instead get caught up in an emotion, which feels right and does have some truth to it, the problems, and the suffering do not resolve. In every case, the freedom from suffering we seek comes from wisdom.

I heard this line back in the early 1990's that has stayed with me to these many years.

Back then, I was careful not to take initiations I was not ready for, especially when they involved commitments. I remember calling the hosts here in Northern California of Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, who was scheduled to give a Manjushri empowerment at Pema Osel Ling. I asked the person who answered the phone if he could ask Rinpoche if there was any commitment accompanying this initiation, and I could hear him in the background be asked and say, *'Is there a commitment? Yes, Seek wisdom, and not emotion'*, which the host then repeated to me.

Wisdom has a dispassionate quality to it that allows us to see more deeply than when we are stirred up, even with a righteous emotion, such as referential, subjective compassion, or devotion to a teacher or to an ideal. By comparison, whether we like to hear it or not, that kind of mind stays on the surface. So much of what I see in our modern social political engagement is strong on emotion, but without the insight that can finally resolve these challenges, of racism, violence, greed and corruption.

The hard part to express about this is that we need more than emotion. There *is* truth to the wisdom of our feeling nature, and it *is* necessary to educate our emotions to the truth, but that is only the qualitative, the

provisional, the relative, and not the complete right view, which has the right conceptual understanding, and gives the definitive answer.

We are naturally attached to what we know on some level is a right, true, and appropriate way of responding, but we need to ask ourselves if our view is complete, and if we are achieving our aims, with just our passionate convictions. If we have not yet accomplished our goals, personally or collectively, then we have to think more deeply about what could be missing, and this, for me is where the teachings on the Two Truths are invaluable.

In terms of practice, we need both the provisional and the definitive, working together towards our one end, of resolving suffering, personally, in our communities, and in our world. From the outside, they may seem to be contradictory, involving as they do self and no self (or what transcends the self), but when practiced, all this becomes clear.

Ani Tenzin Palmo said,

The ego (wrong view) dissolves naturally through deep insight into the nature of mind... until then it is the self, the ego that walks the path...

and in *The Buddha Within*, Shenpen Hookham says,

One cannot rely on the dualistic, deluded mind to undo its own delusions (which is using the same kind of mind that created the problems)

Finally, it is the non-deluded, noncompounded, nondual (knowledge of the) ultimate reality itself that has the real power to remove delusions...

This distinction, and the balance and harmony of the relative and the ultimate comprise the whole of the spiritual path.

We can fully understand these two aspects, and how to apply them most efficiently, guided by our noble spiritual friends.

{This series of articles concludes with an essay on the inseparability of the two truths.}

The Inseparability of the Two Truths

There is an easy way to recognize the inseparable nature of the relative and enduring truth. If we begin with enlightened activity, we can see their essential unity, plain as day.

There have been times for all of us, I'm sure, when we have given or received help and support *that happened spontaneously, creatively, and in a way that surely felt not-separate*. These are the very characteristics of enlightened activity- the compassionate motivation, together with the intelligence or wisdom responding to the needs of the moment.

Now, we can't say that the words spoken, or written, or the compassionate gestures were at all separate from this awakened nature we can find in our teachers and in ourselves- they are the expressions of this nature, like the rays of the sun.

As Suzuki Roshi said,

Strictly speaking, there are no enlightened people, there is only enlightened activity.

And as the Thai Forest Master, Ajahn Maha Boowa said,

For an enlightened being, there is no other response to the human condition, than compassion.

In the same way, the work that we do, and our everyday activities are not at all apart from the true, unchanging basis, the ground of our living.

What we call 'the relative' is just this nature rising to meet the needs of the time, and these expressions are not for a moment separate from the ultimate truth.

One way of thinking of the ultimate, or definitive truth is *the way things are, whether it is seen or not*. This gives us room to gradually learn, and it accommodates all the mistaken or partial beliefs a person can have in a larger view.

Seeing the unity of the two truths, the relative and the definitive is onward leading. We gradually learn to see more clearly and more fully.

Another term for the relative is *the provisional*, which I like because of its connotations - *provisions* are what enable us to get from one place to another. *They are all necessary*. They fulfill an essential function.

We may easily overlook what seems to be commonplace, the transient, the ephemeral, preferring the lasting, the sure and reliable, but this life of freedom and helpful activity is fully realized through the temporal.

The two truths, the relative and ultimate are known then to be essentially one. They are two aspects of one truth, that when well understood are of equal importance.

Renunciation of samsara is not only the business of monks and nuns.
Whoever is seeking liberation or enlightenment needs renunciation of
samsara.

- Lama Thubten Yeshe

Two selections on renunciation, by Ringu Tulku

From The Precious Garland of the Supreme Path

The Karmapa was saying, I thought it was very interesting, that compassion for yourself is renunciation and compassion for others is what we call compassion. Compassion for yourself is renunciation, because you see that just being trapped in the samsaric worldly concerns only, with aversion, attachment and all this, is not really bringing me anywhere else. It's not really bringing any lasting, true benefit to myself. If I really need to find a lasting peace and happiness, I need to work on myself and transform myself. If I see very clearly that the ocean of samsara, the samsaric state of mind, is something I need to transcend and transform, if I really see it like that, that's renunciation. It doesn't matter where you stay. It doesn't matter what kind of dress you wear. It doesn't matter what kind of life you lead. It's that determination to transform yourself. *That's* renunciation.

* * *

From a commentary on A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, by Shantideva, chapter 6, Patience, by Ringu Tulku

Although {by itself} suffering and pain does not have anything good in it, this should make us realize that we should work on freeing ourselves from the samsaric state of mind. It's a reminder. Every time we have a problem or painful state, we should take it as a reminder that we should work basically on our samsaric state of mind. In this way, we take the suffering as an instruction or teaching- not as something totally negative, but something that will always happen if we have this state of mind.

As it says

*If I had not known pain
I would never long for freedom.*

Therefore o, my mind be steadfast.

When we experience suffering or pain, we have to look at it as a reminder or an instruction. [In this way, we take the suffering as] a motivation for renunciation.

Renunciation does not mean leaving everything and going to live in a cave. You can go live in a cave and not renounce at all. Renunciation means seeing very deeply that: *as long as we are in a samsaric state of mind, we will have constant pain and problems and suffering*, and then to understand that *there is a way out of this, that it is possible to change the situation*, and then to decide, *I want to do this*.

So renunciation must have these three aspects: seeing the problem, the samsaric state of mind, seeing the possibility of changing this state, and then genuinely wanting to do that¹.

If this renunciation is not present, then Dharma practice will not lead to real freedom. In a way, it is not truly Dharma practice, because you are not really working on your mind. When this renunciation is present, then you are really working on your mind, because the samsaric state of mind is the state of mind you have. And by really knowing deeply that, if I'm in that state of mind, then there is no escape from having this sense of dissatisfaction, the sense of not getting what I want and the fear of losing what I have. When you see this, you want to change this state of mind.

¹ See also the Four Bases of Success - *Chanda* - strong desire, *Virya* - energy, *Bhavana* (or 'Citta'), cultivation, and *Vimansa* - evaluation.

What Renunciation Is and Isn't

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Question: How do renunciation compassion and devotion relate to each other in one's personal development in the evolution of their practice?

I think renunciation, for a start, is a very difficult one for westerners to get their minds around. It's very noticeable that many people, in a way, expect to complete the whole path and get enlightened in one lifetime, without ever giving up the slightest thing ever in any way.

Other people assume that renunciation means, you know, giving up everything and and going off and living in a cave or in the wilderness.

And the whole idea is that renunciation is a moment-to-moment thing, of actually giving up the ego- that's what we're giving up. It's not our outer possessions or our relationships per se, but the demands of the ego.

And as a help in learning what perfect renunciation is, then compassion can help because we realize that we are not just one (by ourselves alone)

I mean the whole problem for all of us, really, is that the whole universe revolves around each one of us.

Recently I was in New York, and we were in this apartment which was on the 28th floor, and at night overlooking Manhattan you saw all these thousands upon thousands of lights all the way up the towers, and to think that each one was peopled by you know beings who, to each one, they themselves were all sufficient.

Each one - thousands and thousands and thousands of lights, all out there, everyone with their own problems, their own worries, their own concerns.

(To) each one their own concerns and worries were the center of everything.

And when one thinks about that, and one's own predicament, then compassion naturally arises, and when that kind of compassion arises one begins to see how one is so *enclosed* in in one's ego domination and *then* the idea of renunciation makes sense - because we see that our obsession with our own wants and and dislikes and hopes and fears is what keeps us so in suffering, as the buddha said, and that the way to freedom is to drop it, and that is another word for renouncing.

It's not that you just renounce, you know, having another new suit next month, or something, it's got nothing to do with that. It's to do with this whole idea of being completely covered and obsessed by all the ego's drives.

And that each one of us is like that, so within a family there's conflict, within businesses there's conflict, within the country there's conflict, within the world there's conflict, because each of us is driven by *this inability* to see beyond our own needs and concerns;

And there's no compassion, because we don't recognize that the person that we're looking at is (the same as) ourselves.

And a way to develop both this renunciation and this compassion of recognition that all beings are just a reflection of our own inner being, both on a higher level and in our pain, is through opening the heart.

And one of the quickest ways to learn to open the heart is to open heart to something which embodies for us *genuine* wisdom, *genuine* love, *genuine purity* in the true sense, and that is usually embodied in the presence of the teacher.

So if we can open ourselves *to that*, then that points out to us our true being which is not the being that we normally cling to, and from that naturally develops this lack of interest in feeding this false sense of self, and from that also, that sense of interpenetration with all the other beings who are caught in the same trap, so of course they all go together...

Oh Joy to Know At Last - There is No Happiness in Samsara!

For a mind that only knows cycling through experiences that can be described as the six realms, the search for happiness is endless, and bound to be disappointing, and frustrating, again and again and again. This is teaching us: There is no lasting satisfaction for a samsaric mind - one that clings to a self, and misperceives the nature of this life.

As I remember it, I first heard the line *Oh joy at last - to know there is no happiness in the world* in a zen teaching. Under the moonlight, an old mendicant is walking alone when he realizes the profound truth, and his search for peace at last reaches its aim.

From the smallest creature right up to the most famous, rich and powerful figures, we all wish for happiness. However, it's only when this fundamental intention realizes a transcending wisdom that its aim is fulfilled.

We then become a bridge, a light in the wilderness, food and shelter, medicine, comfort and care for all other wanderers.

This doesn't mean we can't enjoy our ice cream, or fortunate circumstances, or relationships. On the contrary, we enjoy them even more, because we are no longer unconsciously asking them for what they are simply unable to provide - such things as lasting peace, and security, and satisfaction.

There is a kind of knowing that is qualitatively different from a mind that grasps at concepts, of self, and others, and experiences, chasing projections and not recognizing the profound nature of all of our being here. The Indian Saint said

*Hafiz saw this for fifteen seconds,
and it made him a servant for life...*

When we are able to step beyond cycling through the hell, and hungry ghost mentalities, animal dispositions, human dramas, deva and exalted, rarified divine outlook and experiences, then we see them all differently. As long as they are the result of causes, and subject to change, they are not ultimately satisfying, as alluring and pleasurable as some of those states may be.

What we long for, in a deep way is lasting peace and well being. That is fulfillment - anything less and we're not fully at ease, or satisfied, even when we're enjoying ourselves. See for yourself if this is so. Check up.

Many give up on ever attaining joy and satisfaction, figuring to just take as much of ordinary happiness as they can, while they can. They lower their aims and expectations, close themselves off to any higher possibilities, and gradually de-volve. These same minds though are always able to transcend the six realms, and find freedom and ease. Now that is truly something to celebrate.

'Oh joy - at last' means that, after ages of fruitless search, and great frustration, and disappointment, we have *finally* seen the nature of all these experiences, and have stepped beyond them. We have glimpsed the ever present, ever fresh truth, like stepping out into an open field, however briefly, and nothing will be the same after that.

The Perfection of Renunciation, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Over the past few weeks, I have been explaining the practice of the ten spiritual perfections, or *the dasa-parami*. I've listed them according to the Southern, or Theravada Tradition. We find a similar, and partly overlapping list in the Mahayana Tradition.

So far we've explained the perfection of giving and the perfection of virtue, or moral discipline. Now we come to the third perfection, which is called *Nekkhamma Pāramī*, the perfection of renunciation. And on the sheet, which has the formula, this is the formal aspiration:

May I always have the discernment and strength of will to renounce the worldly life and go forth into homelessness in order to lead the pure spiritual life. May I be able to relinquish all points of inner attachment in order to enter the exalted concentrations, absorptions, and liberations of the mind.

This *pāramī* or aspiration establishes the importance of renunciation as a factor in the Buddhist training. I think it very necessary to place special emphasis upon this aspect of the Buddha's path in order to ensure that we retain and keep in view what I call *the transcendental dimension* of the Buddha's teaching.

Some people when they come across Buddhism, and particularly when they start to interpret it for a new culture tend to water down, to dilute this rather bitter edge of the teaching, to make it seem that Buddhism is a way simply to live a comfortable, ethical life within the world, sometimes by doing good in order to benefit others, and trying to be simply mindful and aware when engaged in day-to-day activities. So Buddhism becomes transformed or we can say translated into an 'art of living' rather than a path to liberation.

I don't want to underestimate the importance of having a proper art to living. In order to function within this world, we have to live according to

high ethical standards. We have to fulfill our responsibilities to others; and also to experience some calm, equanimity, and balance of mind. We need mindfulness, awareness and contemplation. But, the Buddha's teaching isn't really aiming at keeping us within the range of the world {what is taken to be the world}; it aims, points in the direction of, what I call *transcendent, the lokuttara dimension, the supramundane, or transmundane* dimension of reality. That is, the teaching is leading in the direction of *liberation* from birth and death, to *Nibbāna*, or *Nirvana*. I think this is equally true whether it's Theravāda, Mahāyāna or any other form of Buddhism.

I think there's a popular way of interpreting Buddhist teachings, and saying that Theravāda aims at liberation from the world; Mahāyāna aims at a kind of affirmation, or reaffirmation of samsaric existence. I think there are some differences in interpretation between the two schools, but what underlies them both, in, I would say, the true dimension of both the Theravāda and Mahāyāna, is a recognition of the unsatisfactoriness of our ordinary conditioned existence within the round of birth and death, and an aim for ultimate liberation from birth and death. In other words, breaking the shackles that keep us in bondage to this round of rebirth, and gaining access to the ultimate, or *transcendent* dimension, *the deathless* reality.

The difference is, very concisely, that in the older form of teachings preserved in Theravāda, one aims at *a complete liberation* from samsāra and *complete* realisation of Nibbāna, whereas somebody who is following the bodhisattva path has to, in a sense, keep one foot *within* the realm of birth and death, in order to work to benefit sentient beings, but the other foot, ideally, should be planted in the unconditioned element, in Nirvana.

Now, we don't find in the six pāramitās of the Mahāyāna a special pāramitā called renunciation, but this doesn't mean that the Mahayana, what I would call the real Mahāyāna, neglects the importance of renunciation. If one looks at the work, especially of Atisha, who was a great synthesizer of all the different schools of Indian Buddhism in the 11th century in India, and one of the figures who was important for bringing Buddhism to Tibet - he

created a synthesis of the path in which he emphasized *three main stages* of training:

The first stage is the training in *Renunciation*; after that comes the training in *Bodhicitta*, the aspiration for Buddhahood; and then after that, the training in the *wisdom* that realizes emptiness.

And this formulation of the path has become quite instrumental in the development of Tibetan Buddhism. So even in the Gelugpa School, in Tibet, in the works of Tsongkhapa, the first stage that's strongly emphasized is renunciation, and this is the foundation for all of the higher practices of the path. So this stress on renunciation is extremely important in all schools of Buddhism.

And *ideally*, when the mind is strongly motivated by this urge for renunciation, it will lead to the going forth into homelessness. That is why when the Buddha himself, before his enlightenment, when he was a prince living in the palace, enjoying all of the luxuries of his wealthy estate, then at some point later his mind was shaken by the discovery of the dangers of conditioned existence- old age, sickness and death. Then he encountered an ascetic, a wandering ascetic, and it was the sight of that wandering ascetic that inspired him with the desire to leave the worldly life, and to go forth as a homeless ascetic, seeking the truth.

And then after the Buddha, when he made this great renunciation, he lived as an ascetic, struggling and striving for six years. And after his enlightenment, then he established a monastic order, an order of monks and nuns, to provide a field of opportunity for those who wanted to practice his teaching in full earnestness. And this monastic order has continued through the flowing stream of world history for now about 2500 years.

O.k., so, even though most of the followers of Buddhism will not be able to make this step of going forth into the homeless life, but still, if one is really

serious in the cultivating the Buddha's Path one has to develop gradually according to one's own station in life a mind which leans, elides, and inclines in the direction in the direction of renunciation.

And the way to push the mind in the direction of renunciation is by reflecting on what we call the dangers or unsatisfactoriness first in sensual pleasures, and then in worldly existence in general. So, in the formula that I have given, you say,

May I always have the discernment... to renounce the worldly life

Discernment means the wisdom, the insight, the natural perceptivity *to see* the dangers or the unsatisfactoriness in a life of sensual enjoyment, and more broadly the dangers, the unsatisfactoriness in the round of birth and death in samsaric existence.

And one impresses a sense of the unsatisfactoriness in sensual pleasures upon the mind *by systematically contemplating* the different dangers or miseries tied up with sensual pleasures.

There are various formulas that come down in the texts, but just if you reflect upon how sensual desire works, you see that the mind always becomes filled with an image of ultimate gratification to obtaining some object of sense pleasures. And then *we strive and struggle* to obtain that sense object, in the end we find that it doesn't bring us the real happiness that we wanted. And we become driven further into this cycle of wanting, desiring, struggling to obtain the object of desire, obtaining it, enjoying it for a while, and then finding that we are not really satisfied with it. And this process repeats itself through the sense desires through each of the physical senses.

We go seeking wonderful, beautiful forms to the eyes; beautiful uplifting sound, celestial music to the ears; delightful scents; wonderful delicious tastes; and a variety of tactile sensations.

So we go exploring, investigating trying to find some satisfaction to the senses. Sometimes we'll obtain the object that we want, then we're delighted and we enjoy it, but very often the object that we wanted eventually gets lost, or destroyed, or goes its own way, and then we are left feeling miserable and unhappy. Other times, when *we fail* to get the object that we want, then *we feel frustrated, miserable, angry*, and we have to pursue it even more vigorously. Then if we get it, we get this momentary satisfaction, but then, even when we can hold on to the object we want, but we find that our interest in the object starts gradually to fade away, fade away, fade away...

Like I remember, long before I became a monk, I used to like music, and always you see a new record album, and you think, Aah, I have to get this album - that will be the answer *to all* of my unhappiness. And one dreams about this record album (laughs), one saves up one's weekly allowance, little by little to get enough money to buy it. Then one buys it, and one listens to the songs. One time it's *Oh, it's celestially delightful! Heavenly!, Wonderful! Exquisite!...*

Then one wants to listen to it a second time (laughs again) - it's a little less enjoyable the second time. You listen to it a third time, starting to get a little tedious, but still, uplifting... By the time you listen to it five or six times, it's already becoming boring. And then before long it just rests someplace in the record cabinet, gathering dust, and the mind is focussing on a new record album that has just come out (laughs), or an old one that you've just noticed, and now all of your mental energy, your thoughts are obsessed with acquiring *that* record.

Ok. So in this way, sense pleasures give little satisfaction, and they bring much trouble. They obsess the mind and in the end they result in disappointment.

And sometimes to get the objects we want, we invest a lot of energy to get them. And this investment of energy in the end leaves us tired and exhausted.

So in the Suttas, the Buddha has given a series of similes to illustrate this unsatisfying nature of sensual pleasures. Some are a bit strong, but I'll mention them anyway.

He says that sense pleasures are like a chain of bones. And the explanation that is given is that it's like outside a butcher shop, there might be a dog waiting, a hungry dog, and then the butcher throws out a chain of bones, from which almost all of the meat has been removed. And the dog goes after the chain of bones, and starts gnawing on them, but he can't really find very much meat, but it goes on nibbling, and other dogs come along they get involved in dog fights with other dogs, but none of them get much satisfaction.

And then, another simile is that sense pleasures are like a baited hook. Of course, a baited hook is used to catch fish, and the fish comes along and thinks '*What a delicious worm*' floating around in this pond... He takes a bite of the worm, and before long, gets caught by the hook...

And so people are attracted by sense pleasures, thinking they can find their happiness in sense pleasures. And so sometimes the mind becomes so beguiled by this attraction to sense pleasures that even the laws of morality, the rules, principles of ethics no longer have any binding force on them. So people are ready to steal, to cheat, lie, *even to kill* in order to enjoy sense pleasures.

If you look in the newspapers, there are reports about the murders that take place - so many of them take place - with men fighting over a woman, or people trying to get more wealth - for which purpose? To enjoy pleasures - sense pleasures... All of these bank robberies - one thinks, by robbing the bank, I'll get a lot of money, then I can enjoy myself, retire early,

go to another state, another country, buy a nice house for myself, have many different cars, several girlfriends, a lot of commodities that I can enjoy...

But yet when people break the principles of morality, then they don't have any real quietude in their mind, but the mind is always agitated. And so to violate the principles of morality because of sense pleasures won't bring any real satisfaction. But because sense pleasure exercise such a deceiving hold over the mind, people are easily sucked in to discard *any kind of* principles of restraint in order to enjoy, to indulge in their desires.

Again, in the texts, sense pleasures are compared to *salty water*. A person feels thirsty. He wants to quench his thirst, and he comes across a pond or a pool of salt water, and he thinks using this water I'll quench my thirst, but when he drinks the salt water, a few minutes later, he is consumed by *an even stronger* thirst than before. This is the way sense pleasures obsess the mind and makes one crave enjoyment even more and more intensely.

* And then another consideration- in my mind an even more effective way to reflect on them - is to consider that they have a degrading impact on the mind. If one is dedicated to the development of *the higher consciousness*, a *higher mind*, a deep and steadfast spiritual life, then sense pleasures become felt and experienced as something agitating and disturbing, rather than gratifying and enjoyable. And to indulge in them is considered low and degrading, something that pulls the mind downwards rather something that helps the mind move upwards.

For example, consider some people enjoying themselves on a night out in a night club drinking, watching the chorus girls dancing, or themselves listening to music, dancing, joking, chitchatting- to them, they're having a wonderful time. They're really enjoying themselves. And when they get home at night, they say *Aah, what a wonderful night we had!* But when we look at it from the standpoint of people who are leading a meditative life, this seems to be something which is really worthless, fruitless and pointless

- a way of squandering precious time as a human being. {the grievous loss of an opportunity}

And so as the mind becomes more and more refined, then *even subtler* types of sensual enjoyment seem to be something that pulls the mind downwards, something that blunts the higher faculties.

So even if somebody says to me - Come, let's go to Chinatown, and have a nice Chinese meal - then I feel I don't want to go, because, even though the food might be very delicious, but just to indulge in the variety of tasty, delicious food would be something that causes disturbance in the mind.

So these are a few examples of ways to reflect on the dangers, the unsatisfactoriness in sensual pleasures.

But to really *impel* the mind more strongly in the direction of renunciation, what I would call *radical renunciation*, one has to look *even more deeply* into the general dangers inherent in all conditioned existence within the round of birth and death, within samsāra. These are summed up in the Pali tradition in the formulation called 'the eight bases for samvega', for acquiring a sense of urgency.

*The word, 'samvega' is a sense of urgency. It's a kind of commotion or agitation which takes place in the mind, which moves the mind. It breaks the mind out from its accustomed routine. It dispels the ordinary sense of *complacency* of acceptance of things the way they, the acceptance of ourselves the way we are, and *it pushes us* to some urgent action to resolve what we might call the dilemmas of human existence.

When the bodhisattva was still living in the palace and he saw the old man, the sick man, the dead man, the dead body- these created in him *samvega*, the sense of urgency. And throughout the unfolding history of Buddhism, it's been this arising of samvega which has driven millions and millions of men and women from worldly life, into the homeless, renunciant life.

{or to embrace the Bodhisattva's way of life}

And so, what are the eight bases of urgency? These are actually eight themes of contemplation or reflections:

The first is reflecting on birth – considering the pain and misery of coming back after one's death, coming back into the womb, or some other modes of existence; even rebirth as an animal in an egg; considering the possibility of death that may take place during the gestation period; then pain of actually undergoing the process of birth.

The next is contemplating the miseries of old age; becoming feeble; losing the sharpness of one's sense faculties, the fading of one's memory; becoming dependent on others, weak, helpless...

Third is illness – reflecting that as long as one is alive in embodied existence, one is subject to many types of illnesses, heart disease, stroke, cancer, pneumonia, AIDS, flu, diabetes, etc.

Then, the fourth is death – cutting off of life; and all of the fear and anxiety that surrounds one's approaching death;

The next is reflecting on the miseries in one's *past* existences in samsāra – the great mass of suffering that we've undergone, reborn again and again, and again, again and again undergoing old age, sickness and death;

Then the next is reflecting on the dangers, or the miseries of one's *future* existences within samsāra – particularly if the the rounds go on and on for inexhaustible time, in all of these lives, one has to undergo {birth, living,} old age, sickness and death;

The next is reflecting upon *the miseries in the lower realms of existence* into which one might be born, if one loses one's heedfulness, and engages in

unwholesome action- the possibility of rebirth into planes of misery, as an animal, as a tormented spirit, even rebirth in the hells;

Then, the eighth is something people don't usually think of, but it's called 'the suffering connected with the search for food'. Maybe some people even laugh when I say this, but one has to reflect upon the situation for *even billions* of people in this world- in America, we are quite comfortable with our full supermarket, our full refrigerators, but throughout the world there are several billion people who never have enough to eat. {This is the truth.} Even in Africa, there are millions and millions of people who are almost living at near starvation levels. And so after each meal they complete, they never have enough to eat, so they are thinking obsessively of the next meal. {Think about that.}

Throughout the animal realm, *their whole life* centers around this quest for food. The animal is constantly on the lookout for food, for more food, more sources of food, and fears being devoured in turn by animals that subsist on the body of *your* particular type of animal.

And even human beings living in a fairly prosperous society still have to work to earn money to buy food, they have to go shopping, to cook the food, wash the dishes...so, even in an affluent society there is a fair amount of burden centering upon the consumption of food;

And then we reflect further that through this *beginningless* round of existence, the amount of food we have had to eat is incalculable, immeasurable; we eat the food, there's one meal after another, we enjoy the meal, then the next day we expel it from the back, then we have to search for more food. And until we gain liberation from samsara, this quest for food, this need to eat will go on interminably.

And so these are ways of reflecting upon the dangers in the rounds of existence.

So to generate the mind of renunciation, first one contemplates the dangers in sensual enjoyment, the enjoyment of sense pleasures; then one contemplates the dangers, the unsatisfactoriness tied up with samsaric existence in general;

Then the next is to reflect upon the benefits of renunciation. This is the important complement in developing this pāramī. One considers that, in the words of the texts and the Sutras, the Buddha says again and again that

*the household life is cramped and confining,
whereas the life of renunciation is like open space,
like open air*

One is free from all the burdens and responsibilities of looking after a house, looking after a family, and so on. One is able to live a life of *utter simplicity*. One's life becomes, in a sense, stripped down to its bare essentials.

Many people living on the outside might look at the monastic life and think, *How boring that must be! What do monks do for fun?* - They don't go to concerts, they don't go dancing, don't go to nightclubs, don't go to cinemas, don't go to restaurants - so what do you guys do for fun?

Well, after some time one comes to enjoy very simple routines, doing the same thing over and over every day, waking up at the same time, performing the service, the liturgy at the same time, taking simple meals at the same time, but *this life of simplicity gives a joy and happiness to the mind* that one doesn't find in a life of complexity, of complicated commitment, involvement and obligations.

And again, one reflects that the life of renunciation is a life of purity. By putting on a particular type of robes, a particular type of appearance one signifies that one has stepped away from involvement in a world of sensual pleasures, and one is committing oneself to the purification of one's mind.

And one considers that in a life of renunciation, one has the leisure and opportunity to devote wholeheartedly to the study and the practice of the Dhamma. One's time is no longer consumed by external obligations, so one can devote one's whole time, from morning to night to the study and practice of Dharma.

And even though there might be differences, natural differences in the lifestyle of monks and lay people, but still lay people who want to earnestly and seriously follow the path of the Dhamma should try to incorporate principles of renunciation into their own life, and the basic way to do this is by simplifying their lifestyles as much as possible, first trying to be content with simple requisites of life.

Of course, one would like to have a nice home, and one needs a car to move about; one has to provide for one's family, but still one should try to avoid unnecessary luxuries, particularly ostentatious luxuries, trying to purchase and to possess things that will impress others. You have to realize that happiness is something that arises from within yourself, not by acquiring and possessing many external commodities.

And so, you purchase the things that you need in order to lead a fairly comfortable life, but don't over indulge yourself. Try to live as simply and plainly as possible, this way you'll be reducing your dependence on externals. Try to cut off unnecessary commitments. Try to avoid living a very busy schedule of social obligations, social involvements...

This doesn't mean you should try to become a complete recluse, but try to reduce them to those which will give you some relaxation and leisure, and yet will not consume so much of your time that your life, your attention becomes deflected away from your focussing on the Dharma

And then try to find and develop happiness in quietude, by finding activities related to the Dhamma that give one joy, a sense of meaning and a sense of purpose.

For example, you could make it your aim to study particular Dhamma texts, studying them very intensively, and once the mind becomes involved in studying these texts, then you lose interest in externals. You just become engrossed in this project.

You should be devoting a certain amount of time to devotional practices and meditation every day, and then this will give you a glowing inner joy, a joy that swells up from within yourself, and makes you lose interest in the enjoyment of the outer world.

Ok now, *Nekkhamma* as renunciation has a deeper meaning merely than that of giving up external things, or merely by adopting a particular way of life, monastic life. *Nekkhamma* as renunciation also signifies what is called here ‘the relinquishment of all points of inner attachment’. So in the formula, the aspiration or vow of renunciation reads:

May I be able to relinquish all points of inner attachment in order to enter the exalted concentrations, absorptions, and liberations of the mind.

* Ok, this inner renunciation is the renunciation of those mental states that hinder the higher development of the mind. The Buddha summarized them as the five hindrances– of sensual desire, ill-will, laziness, restlessness and doubt. Besides those five particular five hindrances, there are all the thoughts, projects, plans, mental constructions that spring up from those five hindrances and that ordinarily overrun our mind and cause so much disturbance and inner distraction.

And so, to fulfill the practice of inner renunciation, we have to work at weakening and eliminating the five hindrances, and quieting down and stopping all of the disturbing, agitating thoughts and emotions, and find the inner peace, the inner bliss that comes from detachment {even temporarily.}

And when one is able to break the hold of these points of inner attachment to relinquish them, then one gains access to the higher states of consciousness, to various higher attainments of meditation, which are called the *samadhis*, the deep concentrations, or the meditative absorption, *jhanas*, and the the *vimokṣas*, the liberations of mind. And it is these higher states of consciousness that form the foundation for further progress along the meditative path, and to the development of insight and wisdom.

Ok, so this will be the discourse for the morning. Thank you very much for your attention, and may the blessings of the Triple Gem be with you always.

From The mind and renunciation, by Venerable Thubten Chodron

So when we talk about the first principle aspect of the path: renunciation or the determination to be free, what are we determining to be free from? What are we renouncing? We're not renouncing happiness. Happiness is what we want. We're renouncing all this addictive behavior and all the misery that it brings, okay?

Now there are different kinds of misery and I think I'm going to have to wait until tomorrow to talk about it because I want to get into it and there's not a lot of time right now. But to really think about this, because we are so hooked into what is appearing to our senses right now, that we think that is all that there is. But actually there is not only this universe full of other beings, but what we label 'I' comes from the past, goes into the future. So we've been there, done everything, had samsara since beginningless time. What do we want to do now? We've done all of that before. We've met the Dharma now. What do we want to do now? So this, I think, is the real thing that we need to think about and to see it in this big picture.

So instead of just seeing what appears to us right now, where we get locked into it: "Oh this clock is the most precious thing, because it's in front of me right now." To really think about this whole situation of being in cyclic existence and going from one body to the next uncontrollably; and having chased after and struggled for all these happinesses; and having gotten all of them. And what good did it do? And to really ask ourselves, "What is happiness?"

Buddhism is not telling us to renounce happiness. What the Buddha is saying is that we've been addicted to low grade happiness for a really long time; but there's high grade happiness. So why remain addicted to low grade happiness that doesn't really satisfy you when there's another form of happiness, that you haven't experienced yet that might be longer lasting and actually be satisfying? So that's what the Buddha is asking us.

The Buddha is not asking us to be miserable. We hear renunciation and we think, "Oh, living in a cold dank cave, eating nettles." You know, living in a cave doesn't get you out of samsara. Samsara isn't where we live. Samsara is a mental state. Samsara is the body and mind under the control of ignorance and karma. That's what samsara is. That's what we want to get rid of.

And incidentally, lots of people talk about, "How do I have compassion for myself?" *Wanting to get your self out of samsara is the most compassionate thing you can do for yourself.*

Compassion and Self Compassion

What we call compassion is the love we have in us, meeting suffering in ourselves, in our family, and in the world.

We are closest to ourselves, and so of course we know our own suffering better than that of others. We need this one quality called self compassion to turn to what is difficult, and to keep our attention on it, and hold it tenderly until it begins to transform.

Sometimes this feels like caring for a young child, one who is frightened, or in tears. At first it may be that all we can feel is our own hurt, trembling, uncertainty, remorse, or fear. When we can hold this feeling, encompassing it with the warmth of unconditional love and compassion, we calm down. We find a sense of ease restored.

Thinking back now, I can see how compassion for myself is what had me begin to search for a way to live in this world, and to heal myself. It's what led to what is colloquially called taking refuge in sources of safety and protection.

In my thirties, I travelled to Asia for this reason.

In my 50's I went on retreat for a year, from this same compassion for self and others.

Self compassion is like this - it has us begin, and it's the power in us that has us continue, until we find deeper answers, and deeper healing.

Some traditions speak mostly of love for oneself, as essential, but to me compassion is more to the point here - that we are addressing the suffering we have known, and carry.

It's easier to speak of compassion and care for our loved ones, and those all around us in this world, but this - *self* compassion, is how we know what it is to be human, to struggle and suffer, sometimes to fail, and to endure. It's what we need to find comfort, and relief that is longer lasting than what the world commonly offers.

Having compassion for ourselves is what has us begin a path of practice, or begin again, as many times as needed, and then to continue, and from that, we are able gradually to be more available to others, and to share what we have found that actually helps.

The warmth we feel for others we have to have known ourselves.

As it's said in the Bible, in the first letter by John,

We love, because we were loved first

which I can read now as,

We have compassion for others, because we ourselves have received compassion first.

This can be from a parent, or a teacher, or a friend, or a Holy Being, or it can be from ourselves, from a pure, deep place inside ourselves.

When we choose to let go of negative, destructive habits, or an entire outlook and values, it's because of this self compassion, that is protective, and that has wisdom, knowing the effect of actions over the long term.

Refuge and renunciation of samsaric suffering then both have this basis, of feeling worthy of love, and of self compassion.

How often do we really appreciate the indestructible, healing quality of compassion throughout our lives as it arises to meet our needs? It's a truly

beautiful quality that isn't talked about or highlighted enough, I don't think, but it should be praised, and cultivated, and honored by all, and its importance shared with others.

Over the years, I have taken the bodhisattva vows many times in my heart, but I have to say, in truth, that I have not yet fully resolved my own samsaric suffering. What I have found is that it really is difficult, and it really does take time and dedication to practice for a person to completely transform the mind, as our great teachers have done, and to accomplish the stages of liberation, and non-regression.

Until then, what is plain to see is that *What I can give is limited by my own lack of freedom*. How can I give to others what I don't have myself? To modify the language just slightly of something I wrote over a decade ago, about cultivating love for ourselves

I know that some people, especially in spiritual traditions, would try to skip this step, of having compassion for themselves, or gloss it over lightly, on the way to the great, heroic, and truly praiseworthy actions of a bodhisattva living in this world, but I've come to realize that this is a mistake.

We can only help others to the extent that we understand our own experience, our own samsaric suffering, and get free of it, and we do this by receiving and awakening compassion for ourselves, and learning what it means to care for ourselves well, for our whole lives.

I'm afraid that those who would skip this step, and even put it down, achieve neither their own personal liberation, or the ability to help others. So the more I think about it the more it seems that this is something that is absolutely necessary.

Compassion leads to Great Compassion

This precious quality of self compassion can be with us all throughout our lives and meditations, and it is naturally onward leading. When we are in

touch with how hard it is to overcome suffering in our lives, over time we become less judgmental, more patient, and gentle, and generous, creative and adaptive, and willing to meet ourselves and others wherever we are in our lives. This only comes about because when we have not turned away from our own difficulties, sorrow and confusion, however much of it remains.

The clouds part at last, and the sky clears, and this one sun illuminates us all.

Look at the dedicated lives in this world, at our spiritual teachers, at those with something to give, and you will see it is this way.

So please, do your best to be kind and loving and compassionate to yourself. It is the way out of the wilderness, to safety; it is a protector; it is light and sustenance all along the journey, and the way to find purpose and fulfillment here on earth.

Awakening Unconditional Compassion for Self and Others

As Westerners, we have inherited the dysfunction of self blame, and the bitter rejection of parts of ourselves and others that don't fit with an idealized image.

Whether or not we consider ourselves Christian or Jewish, the ideas of good and evil, and the rejection of what is confused and suffering are the shadow side of our collective values, but these can only take a person and a culture so far. If we are going to understand ourselves and others we need to understand how our mind works, and that we can either avoid, or learn to look deeply into our experience, and find resolution to suffering.

There is a phrase by Milarepa that I found on a card at the first retreat I ever went to here in California, in 1989.

It said,

Contemplate all energies without fear or disgust, for that is the stone that turns everything to gold.

- and I've been thinking about this a lot lately, because I have found those qualities in my own way of looking. Fear and disgust are certainly rejection and avoidance, sometimes subtly, or aggressively pushing away, or shutting down perception, and I can see how these effect not only my own looking into problems, struggling, and difficulties, but how it also extends to the way we deal with challenges collectively.

To begin to see more clearly, and to learn to care for ourselves, we need qualities that are *completely* different.

We need honesty, and courage, the willingness to look, and most of all, we need compassion.

When I think about shame, the image that represents this universally is a person covering their face. This means, literally, 'I cannot look', or, 'I do not want to be seen like this'.

Imagine if we went to a caring and skilled doctor, with a wound, but would not want to show it to him. He would have to patiently convince us that we are safe with him, and that he needs to see the condition, to begin the process of healing.

The opposite of fear and rejection is clearly open hearted compassion, and this is the path we need to take to begin to tenderly hold our own suffering, and that of our family, neighbors, communities, and world.

We begin with ourselves to understand what it feels like to have a part of life not known, or seen, or, that feels shameful to us, and is hidden away for that reason. It can lead to every strategy ever invented to avoid feeling, or knowing directly - binge watching programs, alcohol and drug use, or relationships, for example, and endless activity for the sake of distracting ourselves.

What we need is something very different. The one quality that is not judgmental rejection, but is the exact opposite of this, that has not least denial, or aversion, but is wanting to know, and to care for ourself and others is a great compassion, that is gentle, and courageous, dedicated, and enduring.

We naturally relax and open up when we meet this quality of heart, whether it is from a kind parent, or from a wise teacher, or from our own deeper nature.

We need to tenderly hold what is hurt in us, not turning away at all, so that we can begin to see more deeply into the causes of our suffering, and its cessation.

The appearance of suffering is actually a precious opportunity to witness, to begin to understand ourselves more and more, and to heal.

We can do this without even the slightest irritation, or neglect, or impatience, but with more attention and care, with our resources of light and peace, and strength. This is what is needed, for as long as it is needed.

What is true on a personal level, we can also tell is true with those we know and care for - our friends and family, and those in our community who suffer and cause suffering. They too may have learned to reject themselves, mirroring the reactions of authority figures and society, and feel shame and guilt, keeping the truth hidden, but this does not further any of our aims for peace and wholeness.

What has been rejected here as well needs to be warmly embraced, with no judgement, and with no shame; with steady unconditional love and compassion, and the willingness to look deeply for as long as it takes, in order to understand.

This is the Great Work of healing deeply, and then becoming an effective agent of change in the lives of others, and this is all one action of the spirit within us.

Getting the Proportions Right in Dharma Practice

To get the best results from Buddhist practice, we need to gather certain factors together, and then use them together in a way that is most effective for us personally.

Seeing that we have good causes and conditions at this time is really something to celebrate, but by themselves, these are not enough. We need to take full advantage of this precious opportunity that we have now. This is the time to practice with these different factors in just the right amount to match our own unique needs.

*Ethics, meditation, study, and contemplation,
a connection to realized beings, loving kindness and compassion,
the purification of faults, joy and ease*

*- all of these work together towards a single aim -
that of liberation, and being able to help others in the best possible ways.*

When it comes to Dharma practice, it's up to each of us to understand our own mind, and then to practice as necessary to realize a full result.

'Practicing correctly is your own responsibility.' For some, this can mean more time spent meditating quietly, calming and clarifying the mind, increasing the continuity of attention, and the powers of mindfulness and discernment in that way;

for others, it can mean more study and reflection, using our rational side, and bringing out that keen edge of awareness, so that, when we meditate quietly the result is a greater depth of insight;

for some, or at some times, it can mean focussing on purification;

and for some, or at some times it can mean more time given to all the heart practices that brighten the mind, and bring joy and strength, and highlight the wisdom of our feeling nature.

Generally speaking, for dharma practice to be effective here in the West, in the 21st century, I'm sure that we need quite a bit of calm abiding practice. This is something that is not emphasized as much as it should be, and so I'll say it here plainly, by way of encouragement. So much is at stake for ourselves, and close ones, and for our world at this time.

The result of not having the different Dharma factors in balance is that our cultivation does not produce the freedom and ease that it could. The potential is there, but it's not yet manifest. Especially in the West, too much intellectualization is a hindrance to meditators, myself included, if I'm not mindful of this. It is difficult at times to counter our habitual tendencies, but in this case this is just what we need to do.

The Wat Pa Tam Wua Thai Forest Monastery teaches that, especially for those inclined to inquiry, *make sure you keep up Samatha practice as well. It is essential in order to keep the mind fresh and powerful enough to walk the path of wisdom well.*

At some point, as some lineages teach, these two kinds of meditation, concentration and insight, may merge, and it is then one single practice.

See for yourself what works best for you.

To know our own particular nature so that we can practice effectively is not something we do just once, rather it's a dynamic balance, from day to day, month to month, and year to year, session to sessions, or even within a session.

Sometimes we will know what we need ahead of time, and at other times, we need to experiment, or perhaps not succeed in our approach, and suffer

and struggle and then learn from it. Looking at the results of how we have practiced, when we've calmed down a bit and have some perspective, we can analyze, and adjust as needed.

All these factors that contribute to awakening work together: kindness and compassion for ourselves and all beings, and a basic method that cultivates calm and clarity, and a full presence of mind that allows insight-wisdom to arise are all necessary parts of a functional path.

Any of the essential factors can be lacking so it's up to us to see what works. Our teachers can guide us, but ultimately we are responsible. This is the way practice works.

The Most Interesting Thing About the Meditation On Death

There are a number of contemplations in Buddhism that we can use to transform our mind, and among these the meditation on impermanence is one that is frequently recommended, especially to counter attachment to the things of this world. There are different aspects to this meditation, such as recognizing that all conditioned things are impermanent, but, for me, the most compelling is that we do not know just how long we have here.

When I wake up in the morning, I don't know if this is going to be my last day, and when I go to sleep at night, I don't know if I'm going to live to see the sunrise. This is just the truth of it. Some live a long life, and some we would say a shortened life, but for all of us, our time here is not at all fixed.

People die every day, in every city and nation on earth, from all kinds of different causes, and most of the time, it's a complete surprise, or a shock. Almost all the time, the people themselves and their family and friends express that they weren't ready for it. 'I thought we had more time', we hear them so often say.

Lama Zopa said,

Death could come at any minute, so transform your life into dharma

When I really grasp this, I can tell right away, because it cuts my pettiness, and hesitation right then and there. If I feel like I should do something, I don't doubt - there is just no time for that - I get the energy and then do my best, and I feel peace in the midst of it all.

The meditation on death, when it's effective, is a midwife for love, with all its qualities, and so I can tell if I am moved. If my heart is changed, it's evident in my thinking and speaking, and acting.

On the other hand, if these are just words to me - 'Oh, I've heard all that so many times already... and I'm still here...', then I know the meaning hasn't reached me, or else it's faded. The challenge then becomes how to re-awaken to this truth, to sustain it, and see it more and more clearly.

It's a challenge for anyone who hears a teaching more than a few times, or for more than a year or two, to keep the insight fresh, and the inspiration going. They have a simile in Tibetan Buddhism for when a person becomes inured to teachings. They say it's like a leather bag that's become stiff, and then what it holds doesn't penetrate or soften it anymore.

When I think about my own life here, and that of my loved ones, and can really see that it's impermanent, that these forms themselves, by their very nature are perishable, and that *I don't know how much longer we will have together*, immediately, I soften. I cherish each day, and each encounter, and I want to do all I can to bring them happiness, comfort, and joy.

Of course, this naturally leads me back to asking, What is the best thing I can be doing with my life, with my remaining time here? In light of these truths, there is a lot that gets easier, like full breath returning. My priorities become clear for a time, and I am unhindered, relatively, to do what is essential, each day, and each step at a time.

When I mentioned my interest in this particular aspect of death and dying to a friend - that our time here is uncertain, she immediately brought up how this theme is frightening, and how it can bring so much sadness to mind to think of it. Yes, I said, it is usually completely avoided for just that reason, but thinking about it calmly can have so many tangible benefits.

It's especially the aspect of uncertainty that I find liberating to think about. For as long as this is kept in mind, there's freedom from small fears and anxieties, and from self doubt and stinginess, that small life.

We can all be generous with our time and resources. We can all be gentle, and patient. We can all be forgiving, to some extent at least, and we can all be more compassionate to ourselves and to one another. All this is brought to light and actualized when we can tenderly touch this truth about our time here together².

{As we can see, nothing essential can be left out, when it comes to living a life of peace, and fulfillment...}

² For more on this theme, see *The Wisdom of Impermanence*.

On Renunciation, from Introduction to Tantra, by Lama Yeshe

Emerging from Dissatisfaction

The major prerequisites for the practice of tantra- commonly called the three principal aspects of the sutra vehicle to enlightenment- are renunciation, the dedicated heart of bodhichitta, and the correct view of emptiness. Here, to emphasize that the cultivation of these three states of mind creates the space in which tantric transformation can take place, we discuss them under the chapter headings emerging, opening, and dissolving.

First comes renunciation: the mind emerging from its ordinary, limiting preoccupations and taking an interest instead in realizing its unlimited, completely liberated potential.

What is renunciation?

Some of the preliminary methods for making space within our mind have been mentioned already. For example, tantra can only be practiced effectively once we have become disillusioned with our ordinary way of grasping at sensory desires. *We must have a deep, heartfelt understanding that such grasping never leads to satisfaction but only to pain and disappointment.*

If we fail to see how our ordinary attachment to pleasure binds us tightly to the wheel of repeated disappointment (samsara), we will make the same mistakes with tantra that we have been making in our ordinary pursuits of happiness. Whenever we experience a blissful sensation as a result of our practice, we will grasp at it as something self-existent and definitely capable of giving us endless enjoyment. Like a spider waiting for a fly, we will pounce greedily onto whatever attractive experience comes along.

Trying to squeeze pleasure out of things in this way is completely deluded, and as long as we have such an unrealistic attitude we will never know true

satisfaction. If we do not let go of this grasping attitude we will unintentionally turn tantra into yet another meaningless journey around in circles.

So, first of all, we need to develop a certain amount of renunciation. Because renunciation is often confused with the fearful, rejecting state of mind I criticized earlier, perhaps I will start by describing what renunciation is *not*.

If a situation is difficult, we can renounce it by giving it up or avoiding it; this may be called renunciation but it is not the renunciation of samsara.

Or perhaps our heart is broken because we fought with our friend, so we move to another city to escape further pain. Again, this is not renunciation.

Or perhaps we cannot cope with society any longer so we run away into the bush declaring, "I renounce worldly life completely!" By living like an animal without any of the conveniences of civilization we are certainly renouncing something, but this is still not true renunciation.

We may think that renunciation has something to do with religious observance, that by studying spiritual teachings and practicing meditation we are a true renunciate. But this is not necessarily so. If someone criticizes what we are doing- "You are just on a weird Eastern trip!"- and we get upset, this shows we have not developed renunciation at all. Instead, it is a sign that we are holding onto our religion as we would any ordinary sense object. In other words, by our grasping attitude we have turned a spiritual practice into yet another form of ordinary attachment.

What the development of true renunciation implies is that we no longer rely on sensory pleasures for our ultimate happiness; we see the futility of expecting deep satisfaction from such limited, transitory phenomena. It is important to understand this point clearly.

Renunciation is not the same as giving up pleasure or denying ourselves happiness. It means giving up our unreal expectations about ordinary pleasures. These expectations themselves are what turn pleasure into pain.

It cannot be said too often that there is nothing wrong with pleasure. It is our grasping, exaggerating, distorting, and polluting attitude toward pleasure that must be abandoned.

Developing Detachment

The Tibetan term generally translated as “renunciation” has the literal meaning of *definite emergence*. It indicates a deep, heartfelt decision definitely to emerge from the repeated frustrations and disappointments of ordinary life.

Simply stated, renunciation is the feeling of being so completely fed up with our recurring problems that we are finally ready to turn away from our attachments to this and that and begin searching for another way to make our life satisfying and meaningful.

Thus, the cultivation of renunciation, or definite emergence, involves detaching ourselves from those sticky habits of attachment that hold us back from experiencing our fullest human potential.

There are certain times during our life when our senses automatically withdraw from their objects and we experience what could be called a natural detachment, or a natural renunciation. At such times there is nothing for us to grasp onto and nothing for us to be attached to. In such a state, even the most attractive sensory object is powerless to magnetize and divert our mind.

But generally we are anything but detached when it comes to the objects of our experience. We are continually attracted to and hypnotized by a never-ending stream of sense impressions and forever on the lookout for

something new and different to excite and interest us. If we own a car, that is not good enough: we need two. And when we have two, it is still not good enough: we need a boat. Even the boat is not enough: we need a bigger one. And so it goes on and on to infinity. This is dissatisfaction, the very opposite of the truly renounced, or emerging, mind.

Somehow we need to learn to be natural, to be naturally detached from material objects, from our grasping after this and that. I am not saying this because, as a backward Tibetan, I am jealous of wealthy Westerners. Nor am I saying that you are bad because you remain rich while others are poor. I am merely trying to answer the question: "Why are we dissatisfied?"

We can always find some external cause to blame for our dissatisfaction- "There is not enough of this, not enough of that"- but this is never the real reason for our restlessness and disappointment. What is missing *is inside* and this is what we all have to recognize.

Satisfaction is not dependent on material objects; it is something that comes from simplicity, inner simplicity. When I talk of being detached what I mean is to be simpler, more easy-going.

Detachment does not mean totally renouncing everything. It means that you loosen your grip and be more relaxed. There are many pleasures available in the world, but as long as you are uptight and anxious, fearfully holding onto your money and possessions, your wealth will only make you more and more unhappy. If you do not know how to relax and be satisfied with what you have, if you do not know how to appreciate the natural beauty of your environment, if you do not know how to be simple, then even if you were to possess all the money in the world you would still be miserable.

Renunciation, then, does not mean that we should give up our pleasure. Far from it! The whole philosophy of Buddhism in general and of tantra in

particular is that, as human beings with virtually unlimited potential, we should aim for the highest pleasure possible.

What true renunciation is based on is the realization that our ordinary pleasures are second rate. They are inconsequential when compared with the extraordinary bliss to be had from awakening the energies latent within us and fulfilling our deepest potential. Not only are these ordinary pleasures second rate, but our grasping at them prevents us from experiencing the superior happiness of full self-realization.

Our grasping, squeezing attitude is an intoxicant that dulls our natural clarity. We become more and more deeply enmeshed in the world of ordinary appearances and more and more removed from our essential nature.

To develop renunciation means to realize how our ordinary reliance on pleasure is preventing us from tasting this higher, more complete happiness. With the proper development of renunciation we give ourselves a break from our usual compulsive and constricting reliance on sense pleasures.

The more we understand that these pleasures are not capable of giving us the lasting happiness we desire, the more we relax our expectations and become realistic. Instead of being uptight, from either craving after pleasure or rejecting it guiltily, we feel more at ease. Unpleasant circumstances cease to bother us so much. And if we experience something pleasant we accept it comfortably, taking what enjoyment it has to give without demanding or expecting anything more from it.

We can be relaxed in this way not only because we understand that these pleasures are transitory, but because our sights are set on an even higher form of happiness: the fulfillment of our essential nature.

With this transcendental goal in mind we do not become overly excited by the fleeting pleasures we experience, nor do we become depressed when things are going badly. In other words, instead of taking refuge in sensory objects as the solution to our dissatisfaction, *we place our reliance on our own inner potential.*

Giving Up False Refuge

The phrase *taking refuge* is borrowed from its traditional context- the often repeated Buddhist declaration of faith in the teachers, teachings, and spiritual community:

*I take refuge in the Buddha,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
I take refuge in the Sangha*

- to make the point that taking refuge in momentary, transitory pleasures is something we are doing all the time with an almost religious fervor and conviction.

For example, one day we may think, “Oh, I am so depressed; I think I’ll go to the beach,” so we drive to the ocean, jump into the water, play around like fish and then lie down to fry in the sun. When this becomes boring, we think, “Now I am hungry; where is the refreshment stand?” Then we stuff ourselves with as much junk food as possible, hoping to find some satisfaction in the ice cream, popcorn, Coke, and chocolate we are devouring. We take refuge in these things as a way out of our depression and boredom, only to end up fat and sunburned.

When Buddhism speaks of taking refuge it is emphasizing the importance of breaking out of this desperate, unfulfilling search for satisfaction. Taking true refuge involves a changing of our attitude; it comes from seeing the ultimate worthlessness of the transitory phenomena we are ordinarily attracted to.

When we see clearly the unsatisfactory character of the things we have been chasing after, our compulsive striving for them will automatically diminish, and the driving force of our grasping will subside. We cease to be tossed this way and that by the changing fortunes of our life and gain the space to begin tapping our inner potential...

One may be born in chaotic times when people's lives are difficult; one wants to help but does not have much power to provide relief. Investigating this in depth, one knows that only by studying Buddhism and becoming a Buddha can one really save sentient beings from suffering. One thus has great compassion that leads one to seek enlightenment and to save all.

- From The Way to Buddhahood, by the Venerable Yin-Shun

Quotes on how much we need realized people in this world

Because sentient beings are suffering and need our help, we need to actualize dharmakaya right now

With this realization you can perfectly guide sentient beings with perfect methods all the time, without the slightest mistake.

The quicker we achieve enlightened understanding and activity, the quicker we actualize it through the practice of Dharma, the quicker we can guide sentient beings, and the shorter they suffer. The longer it takes, the longer other sentient beings have to suffer, and even one sentient being suffering is too much.

- LZR

This desire to gain liberation comes from unbearable compassion for others. We realize that the longer it takes us to achieve enlightenment, the longer everyone we could help will have to wait.

The strong intention comes from the wish to help others as much as possible, as quickly as possible.

- LTY

This is a matter of great urgency, of great urgency.

Here we are talking about liberating ourselves from all suffering, but our reason for taking refuge doesn't finish right there. Numberless sentient beings are suffering like ourselves and in order to free all of them from all those oceans of samsaric suffering and its causes, we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, who have the qualities and the power to liberate us and all sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric suffering and its cause, delusion and karma.

With this vast understanding, this deep understanding of suffering and the cause - of your own and numberless sentient beings' suffering - you generate compassion toward them, then rely upon Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. With that, you recite the prayer. Then the words and your heart go together.

It's important for you to practice Dharma as much as possible yourself, to actualize the path, and to help other people, those sentient beings who have human bodies, understand Dharma; to get others to practice Dharma. Actually, it's unbelievably urgent...

- LZR

That which naturally takes a long time to accomplish can be shortened by the intensity of action.

- Swami Vivekananda

You should not give in to the ignorance grasping at true existence anymore.

Dispel this darkness of ignorance from your mind and the minds of all dear mother sentient beings by sharing this light of the wisdom (of emptiness) with others.

It is better that we do not waste our precious time and rather engage in the urgent mission of bringing unconditional happiness and peace to all our mothers and to ourselves.

Concluding the day with a meditation on emptiness (wisdom) and sealing the day's virtuous practices with prayers will be profoundly helpful.

- Geshe Dorji Damdul

Time is running out
There is no time to lose

Death comes without warning
There is no time to lose

There is so much suffering in the world,
and we can do something about that

So many extraordinary conditions have come together,
but these conditions will not last

And I have wasted so much time already,
being unable to practice-
There is only time now for what is essential

Our family, and this earth needs our care
The needs are great
and for every one of us, the time of death is uncertain

May I see all of this clearly
and fulfill a good purpose with my life
while I can

Hey fortunate one! {A song}

Hey fortunate one!

You're alive

You've made it this far - to this day, this hour,
and as long as you are here,
why don't you make the best use of your time?

See how it is just now:

You have this human life,
with your senses intact,
in a place that is relatively at peace -
and long may it be so;

You're not oppressed by any illness,
or overwhelmed by delusions at this time,
no, not today, not this hour,
and long may it be so -

Compared to yourself in the past,
and to so many others in this world right now,
it's amazing, just how fortunate you are!

Think about it...

With these conditions coming together just so,
for this brief time, you have this remarkably precious opportunity -

This very day, this very hour,
you've got the very ground
where all that is excellent can grow,
for yourself, and your loved ones, and community,
and for future generations

Hey!,

and not *only* that,
in this life you have met amazing, noble teachers who were learned,
and who themselves accomplished the teachings...
Now, just think about that!...

How wonderful, and how rare!

and not *only* that,
you've been able to practice and gain some result,
such that your faith is based at least in part on experience,
and that can lead you.

This is something great.

You've heard teachings on benefitting yourself in this lifetime,
and in the future,
on complete liberation from every form of suffering,
and on enlightenment -
now, just think about *that*,

and, you didn't die last night,
with your work for self and others unfinished
That would have been tragic, such a great loss!

And so tell me, fortunate one,
How are you going to live today?

Think about how it is just now, today,
that *so many* in this world don't even have the barest necessities,
of food, shelter, and medicine

and so many have no guide,

and so they are lost and confused,
harming themselves and others, endlessly

In this world, a very few have heard teachings,
on higher rebirth, liberation,
the bodhisattva vow, and wisdom teachings,
and among those, many can't make sense of them -
it's as though those teachings were spoken in a lost language

or else,
they can't convert their understanding into an effective practice
to ease their suffering,
and bring freedom to themselves and their families

What a loss! Truly, what a loss,
to have come just this far, and then to go no further

*So tell me, fortunate one! -
how will you live today, this hour?*

You have methods to accomplish the aims
of yourself and others,
who are all so worthy of your love and care -
All of them!
All of them, I tell you!

Have mercy!
Let your heart be open,
and your mind be clear

Realize this Path,
and share all of this good you have,
with all who are in need,
in whatever form it needs to take for them

Aim to give to others as much as you can,
of light and peace,
health and strength,
and inspiration making the way clear,
for now and for the future...

This human body can be a precious means for those who wish for freedom, but it can also lead sinners to the lower realms.

I understand that with this body and mind, there is the vital choice for me now between enormous profit and loss, relating to eternal happiness or misery, and that I am currently at this crossroad.

Relying upon your power of compassion as the venerable guide of sentient beings, I am endeavoring to achieve liberation from the ocean of samsaric suffering, from which escape is very difficult.

- From The Life of Milarepa

Verses on Renunciation

From Je Tsong Khapa

Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering. They are uncertain and cannot be relied on. Recognizing these shortcomings, May I generate the strong wish for the bliss of liberation.

Led by this pure thought, mindfulness, alertness and great caution arise. The root of the teachings is keeping the pratimoksha (individual liberation) vows. May I accomplish this essential practice.

- From The Foundation of All Good Qualities

* * *

4.

Freedom and endowments are hard to find
This life is fleeting, its length is uncertain, and there is no time to waste
Gaining familiarity with this counters the attachment to this life's
pleasures;

And thinking again and again
about the nature of karma,
and about the sufferings of unenlightened existence,
counters the attachment to all future samsaric lives

5.

When, by having trained in that way,
there is no arising, even for a moment,
any attraction to worldly pleasures,

and, day and night, continuously,
 the intuitive desire to seek liberation arises,
 then you have truly generated the mind of renunciation,
 the wish to be free

- From The Three Principle Aspects of the Path

* * *

If you do not make an effort
 to think about the nature of suffering,
 you will not develop a keen interest to work for liberation.

If you do not consider its evolution,
 you will not know the means
 for cutting the root of this vicious circle.

Therefore,
 you should cherish the renunciation of samsaric existence,
 by knowing which factors bind you to its wheel.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.
 You who also seek liberation,
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

- From Lines of Experience

* * *

Even if I achieve the rebirth of a deva or human,
 I will still have to experience suffering endlessly in samsara
 Because of not having abandoned ignorance and the afflictive emotions.

Therefore, may I reflect well upon the way of circling in samsara
 And continuously follow, day and night,
 The path of the three types of precious trainings -
 of Sila, Samadhi, and Prajna - the cultivation of liberating wisdom,
 The principal method for becoming free from samsara.

- Adapted from A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path Containing
 All the Important Meanings, by Dorje Chang Lozang Jinpa, v1

* * *

Middle scope aims for practice and accomplishment:

As a consequence of taking Refuge and practicing virtue
 we receive a higher rebirth,
 but we must still experience limitless samsaric sufferings
 because of our remaining uncontrolled delusion and karmas,

therefore we must think about, and realize profoundly
 the evolution of this samsara,
 from uncontrolled death, to rebirth

Please bestow upon me the ability,
 day and night,
 to follow the three trainings
 which are the main methods to release me from samsara

* * *

Though I may win the rare, high state of a human or god,
still, hundreds of sufferings,
like birth, aging, sickness and death will torment me endlessly -
since I shall fall again to an ill destiny,
why should I place my trust in even a high status?

Having gained this favored, opportune birth, this one time,
and been received by an excellent Path-showing Guru,
now, at last seeing samsara's faults and Nirvana's virtues,
I must quickly free myself completely from samsara

- From The Essential Nectar, by Yeshe Tsondru

* * *

No matter where one wanders in the three worlds -
From the highest heaven to the lowest of hells -
One finds only all-pervading dissatisfaction.
Therefore, may I transcend it all and find
That firm ground of liberation and spiritual joy.

- From The Eighth Dalai Lama's Prayer

* * *

Bestow on me your blessings to practice the three higher trainings,
 Motivated by firm renunciation gained from the clear comprehension
 That even the prosperity of the lord of the devas
 Is merely a deception, like a siren's alluring spell.

- From The Prayer of the Graduated Path, A Guru Yoga Prayer from The
 Inseparability of the Spiritual Master and Avalokiteshvara, by His Holiness
 The Dalai Lama

* * *

Entering the Path to Complete Freedom from Suffering

We can then add to the factors covered so far the knowledge that all of
 samsara, or ego-centered, unenlightened existence is suffering, and the way
 that liberation is possible.

Understanding this on an intellectual, or an experiential level, even briefly,
 believing in the possibility of liberation, and not wanting to suffer any
 more, *these are the causes* for the motivation to be completely and
 permanently free of samsara to arise naturally in the mind, and the unified
 practice of the Three Higher Trainings, of Ethics, Meditation and Wisdom,
and the result, which is liberation.

- From A summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings

* * *

If your revulsion toward cyclic existence is weak, discussing liberation is mere words. You must reflect again and again on the disadvantages of cyclic existence.

From The Path to Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism, by Geshe Acharya Thubten Loden

* * *

When you have thus trained well in the teachings associated with a person of small capacity and have made this practice firm, you should contemplate often the general and specific faults of cyclic existence, and in general, turn your mind away from cyclic existence as much as you can.

Then, having identified the nature of karma and the afflictions- the causes from which cyclic existence arises- create an authentic desire to eliminate them.

Develop broad certainty about the path that liberates you from cyclic existence, i.e., the three trainings, and particularly make effort at whichever of the vows of individual liberation you have taken.

- from the Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment,
by Lama Je Tsongkhapa

* * *

From the moment of birth may I never
Be lured by the pleasures of existence,
But, guided by renunciation intent on freedom,
Be resolute in seeking the pure life.

A Prayer for the Beginning, Middle, and End of Practice, by Je Tsong Khapa

From The Treatise on the Paramis, by Acarya Dhammapala

Renunciation is mentioned immediately after virtue, because renunciation perfects the achievement of virtue.

Renunciation (letting go, relinquishment) has the characteristic of departing from sense pleasures and (samsaric) existence;

its function is to verify their unsatisfactoriness;

its manifestation is the withdrawal from them;

a sense of spiritual urgency (samvega) is its proximate cause.

The perfection of renunciation should be reflected upon by first discerning the dangers in household life

Then, in the opposite way, one should reflect upon the benefits in going forth.

From Essence of Refined Gold, by the Third Dalai Lama

Although by avoiding the ten non-virtues and practicing their opposites, the ten virtues, you can attain a special rebirth in the higher realms, you will not pass beyond the frustrations of cyclic existence. For this reason seek to attain nirvana- liberation beyond all misery and pain.

What is the nature of the shortcomings of cyclic existence? Those of the lower realms have been explained. Meditate upon them well, for when you have done so you will automatically generate an intention to work by any possible means to remain free of such unsatisfactory modes of existence. However, even the higher realms are not beyond the reaches of suffering, and to progress along the path you must eventually face this truth...

Think about these general and specific sufferings of the various realms of samsara and then strive in every possible way to attain nirvana, or liberation from them all. Such a state is not without causes and conditions, so train in the practices that bring the actual attainment of liberation, i.e., the practices of the Three Higher Trainings- ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom.

From Wisdom, Method, and the Three Paths, by Geshe Sopa

As Shantideva has pointed out, one must begin with compassion for oneself.

One must want to be free of suffering oneself before being able to want it truly for others.

The spontaneous wish to free oneself from suffering is renunciation.

Most of us do not have this renunciation. We do not see the faults of samsara.

We cannot ourselves continue being entranced by samsaric activities while speaking of working for the benefit of other sentient beings. Therefore one must begin with the thought of personal renunciation of samsara, a wish to obtain freedom from all misery. In the beginning this is very important.

Then this quality can be extended to others, as love, compassion and the bodhimind. These two combine as method.

When united with wisdom, realization of emptiness, one has all the main causes of buddhahood.

On the Meaning of Renunciation, by Matthieu Ricard

Had I renounced the Western world? Renunciation, at least as Buddhists use the term, is a much-misunderstood concept. It is not about giving up what is good and beautiful. How foolish that would be! Rather it is about disentangling oneself from the unsatisfactory and moving with determination toward what matters most. It is about freedom and meaning—freedom from mental confusion and self-centered afflictions, meaning through insight and loving-kindness.

- From 'Happiness - A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill

* * *

Renunciation is not a question of turning away from what is truly good in life—that would be absurd. Rather, it the letting go of the on-going addiction we have to the causes of suffering, such as malice, arrogance, envy, jealousy, and other mental states that harm others and ourselves.

- From Buddhism and Individualism

On Renunciation, by Ani Tenzin Palmo

Q: What does renunciation mean for Westerners? How does a Westerner in the 20th century practice renunciation?

A: Perhaps Westerners are in a better position to practice true renunciation than uneducated Orientals because most Western people, by the time they come to the Dharma, have led a pretty full worldly life with lots of sensual pleasures, money and lots of toys to play with. They have seen that the path of accumulation of worldly treasure does not lead to happiness or contentment. That's why they come to the Dharma.

Naturally, this leads to the other side, the giving up – living a very simple life, trying to purify your life and to make a center within yourself, of stillness and peace. It's not a big sacrifice where you grit your teeth while preparing to renounce. It would naturally unfold...

On the Gratification, the Danger, and the Escape, from In the Buddha's Words, Chapter Six, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

The education that the Buddha imparts to us brings about *a deepening of our perspective on the world*. To help us transform our understanding and deepen our perspective on the world, he offers us three standpoints from which we can appraise the values by which we order our lives. These three standpoints also represent three “moments” or steps in an unfolding process of insight that starts from our common-sense attitudes and moves strategically toward higher knowledge, enlightenment, and release. The three moments are: gratification (*asāda*), danger (*ādīnava*), and escape (*nissarāga*).

The Buddha underscores the importance of this scheme with the bold pronouncement that until he was able to fully evaluate the world in this way, he did not claim that he had attained the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment.

In advancing systematically through this scheme, one begins by recognizing the indubitable fact that such worldly phenomena as sense objects, forms, and feelings give us some degree of gratification. This gratification consists in the pleasure and joy (*sukha-somanassa*) we experience when we succeed in fulfilling our desires. Once we acknowledge this fact, we can then probe deeper by asking whether such pleasure and joy are entirely satisfactory.

If we address this question with utter honesty, in a dispassionate frame of mind, we will realize that such pleasure and joy are far from satisfactory. To the contrary, they are saddled with drawbacks and defects ranging from the trifling to the catastrophic, defects that we perpetually hide from ourselves so that we can continue unhindered in our quest for gratification.

This is their danger, the second moment or step of observation. The most pervasive danger lurking behind the innocent façade of our worldly

pleasures is their inherent nature of being impermanent (*anicca*), bound up with suffering and discontent (*dukkha*), and subject to inevitable change and decay (*vipariṇāmadhamma*).

The third moment, the moment of escape, follows from the second. “Escape” here is not escapism, a word that implies an anxious attempt to avoid facing one’s problems by pretending they don’t exist and losing oneself in distractions. True escape is quite the opposite: the sanest, most rational, most judicious course of action we can take when we accurately recognize a genuine danger. It is our search for an exit from a burning building, our visit to the doctor when we’re beset by a persistent fever, our decision to give up smoking when we understand how it jeopardizes our health.

Once we see that the objects of our attachment are flawed, beset with hidden dangers, we then realize that the way of escape lies in dropping our attachment to them. This is “the removal of desire and lust, the abandoning of desire and lust” (*chandaṅga-vinaya, chandarāga-pahāna*) referred to in the texts.

The Pāli commentators, not surprisingly, connect these three moments with the Four Noble Truths. “Gratification” implies the second noble truth, for pleasure and joy arouse craving, the origin of suffering. “Danger” is the truth of suffering itself. And “escape” is the truth of the cessation of suffering, which also implies the Noble Eightfold Path, the fourth truth, the way to the cessation of suffering.

Selections from the Suttas on The Gratification, the Danger, and the Escape

(1) Before My Enlightenment

“Before my enlightenment, O monks, while I was still a bodhisatta, it occurred to me: ‘What is the gratification in the world, what is the danger in the world, what is the escape from the world?’ Then it occurred to me: ‘Whatever pleasure and joy there is in the world, this is the gratification in the world; that the world is impermanent, bound up with suffering, and subject to change, this is the danger in the world; the removal and abandoning of desire and lust for the world, this is the escape from the world.’

“So long, monks, as I did not directly know, as they really are, the gratification in the world as gratification, its danger as danger, and the escape from the world as escape, for so long I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

“But when I directly knew all this, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with ... its devas and humans. The knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘Unshakable is the liberation of my mind; this is my last birth; there is now no renewed existence.’”

(AN 3:101 §§1–2; I 258–59)

(2) I Set Out Seeking

“O monks, I set out seeking the gratification in the world. Whatever gratification there is in the world, that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the gratification in the world extends. “I set out seeking the danger in the world. Whatever danger there is in the world,

that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the danger in the world extends. “I set out seeking an escape from the world. Whatever escape there is from the world, that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the escape from the world extends.”

(AN 3:101 §3; I 259)

(3) If There Were No Gratification

“If, monks, there were no gratification in the world, beings would not become enamored with the world. But because there is gratification in the world, beings become enamored with it. “If there were no danger in the world, beings would not become disenchanted with the world. But because there is danger in the world, beings become disenchanted with it. “If there were no escape from the world, beings could not escape from it. But as there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from it.”

(AN 3:102; I 260)

A Renounced Mind

By Ven. Thubten Gyatso

We know the general methods for protecting our mind: recollecting the imminence of death, the sufferings of samsara, the skeleton beneath the skin, the rotting corpse, honey on a razor blade. But we don't really believe them.

One evening in 1975, on the hilltop at Kopan, my girlfriend suggested that we spend one last night together at a hotel where the sun can be seen rising over Mt. Everest. I pointed to the Pole Star, a point of light that remains unmoved while the entire universe revolves around it, and told her that that was my resolution to become a monk, and that we had better skip the night at the hotel. A few days later I received novice ordination from Lama Thubten Yeshe.

Three months later, at Tushita Retreat Centre, while introducing me to one of his older Western students, Lama Yeshe said, "This is Dr. Adrian, he has just become a monk. He has achieved the renounced mind of samsara."

I took a glance at my mind and replied, "No, not yet, Lama."

Lama Yeshe grabbed me by the shoulders and drew my face close to his.

With a serious expression, he looked deeply into my eyes and said, "Good answer, 'not yet.' It will take a long time."

In 2002, out of the blue, I received an email from Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche warning me that if I went to Korea, as was my plan, there would be danger of my disrobing. Between 1975 and now I have seen many, many monks and nuns come and go. I have also had to deal with my own mind and, even now, as I wonder what the Korean beauty would have looked like (I didn't go), my reply to Lama Yeshe's statement remains, "Not yet, Lama."

With no renunciation, there is no bodhicitta, definitely no concentration and therefore no wisdom. So, after nearly 28 years as a monk, I have yet to enter the Buddhist path. It does take a long time. When am I going to stop

looking at eyes, hair, breasts and bottoms with desire? I once heard a family friend, a good Roman Catholic in his seventies, pondering the same question. During a dinner at Nalanda Monastery in France, with Lama Yeshe, Dakpo Rinpoche, Sogyal Rinpoche, and Gonsar Tulku present, a Benedictine monk told the group that the age of 48 was the danger time for monks at his monastery to disrobe. They were still young enough to 'have a chance.' He asked what methods Buddhism had to deal with the energy of desire. Looking at the bottle of wine he had brought along to the party, I thought the answer was rather obvious, but Lama Yeshe replied, "We meditate deeply on the suffering of life and, in tantra, there are special methods to transform the energy of desire into the path."

The best aid to generating renunciation is our vows, especially the small ones: Always wear the robes. Do not be alone with the opposite sex. Keep your eyes on the path ahead. Avoid distracting movies. I was once at Tharpa Choeling, Geshe Rabten's centre in Switzerland. His monks were like the PhD's of Western monasticism, all speaking fluent Tibetan and knowing the profound teachings. Intellectually, they could run rings around us Lam Rim wallahs from Kopan. About seven monks were crowded into the room of one of the gelong's who had a television set. As the movie became more and more raunchy, I went out onto the verandah in disgust. There was a breathtaking view of the full moon rising over the Swiss Alps and Lake Geneva, so different to the atmosphere inside, and then left for my own room. Within a few years every one of those learned gelongs had disrobed.

Next, don't gossip about sex, even as a joke. Don't get involved in discussing sex when you are counseling. For monks, it has been my experience that when women start describing the sexual inadequacy of their husbands, more often than not they have you in their sights as a replacement. Don't even talk about Lam Rim alone with persons of the opposite sex. I know several monks whose downfall began with making frequent appointments to 'teach Dharma' to young ladies. We know the general methods for protecting our mind: recollecting the imminence of

death, the sufferings of samsara, the skeleton beneath the skin, the rotting corpse, honey on a razor blade, but we don't really believe them. We think we are not going to die today; we think sensual pleasure is pure; we think our desire is transcendental love; we think we can take the honey and avoid the blade. Then there was the American monk who declared to His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche that he was ready to begin practice with a consort. Tantric fools like him are the most deluded of us all.

Ever since I took ordination I have made it a practice to ask high Lamas if they think Buddhist monasticism will catch on in the West. The universal answer, including the one given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama's response, has been, "We'll have to wait and see." It's up to us.

Four Courses of Action

A course leads somewhere. We engage in various actions with an aim, or a goal in mind, even if it's not expressed in language. In our thoughts, we aim to go this far.

No one intends to suffer- we only do so because we didn't know any better at the time. As we see this in our own lives, we can learn from our experiences.

I can see now that there are these four courses of action that we can take:

There are:

actions that bring happiness now, but pain later

actions that bring pain now, but happiness later

those that bring pain now, and suffering and hardship later

and,

those that bring happiness now, and happiness later

All this leads naturally to letting go of those actions and involvements that don't serve our purpose.

How I arrived here

In the teachings on the graduated path from the Pali Canon, there are elements that are not found in the Tibetan teachings, and it's useful to combine these two, with the same aim in mind - the Buddha's teaching should be accessible, wherever we are in our lives and spiritual development.

Where the initial level of motivation is often taught in the Lam Rim *as the happiness of future lives*, in the Theravada, we have more teachings in addition on what Bhikkhu Bodhi calls *the happiness visible in this life*.

When I first came across this in his translations and commentaries, it filled a need I'd felt, and that I've seen also with other Westerners too, who are not thinking about future lives, but are looking for more comfort, safety and peace in this life as their aim.

Some conflict, it seems, came up for me, remembering the Kadampa teachings, where Atisha said:

Ask me what the results of thinking only about this life are and I will tell you: they are merely the results of this life. Ask me what will happen in your next lives and I will tell you: you will be reborn in hell, as a hungry ghost or an animal.

In his Friendly Letter, Nagarjuna said

Actions motivated by attachment, hatred, and ignorance are nonvirtues. From these, all sufferings arise. From virtuous actions, all happiness arises...

What is being described in the first instance has been called 'attachment clinging to this life', and I can see the point being made, that this doesn't lead to any kind of fulfillment at all. This is obvious in these materialistic United States, in the twenty-first century, where most people treat themselves as though they were only physical bodies, and that its pleasures are the best we can do. The result is often a dulling of the spirit, and a devolution.

Still, there *is* another, positive side to the present moment's happiness and ease, that is not always affirmed in the Buddhist teachings, though it should be, for balance sake.

In the Pali Suttas, before the Buddha's awakening, this challenge of the right approach to pleasure and comfort was met, as recounted in Majjhima Niyaka 36:

After the Buddha-to-be (Bodhisatta) had taken the path of extreme asceticism and self-denial to its limit and had still failed to attain liberation, he remembered an occasion when he was a young boy sitting in the shade of a rose-apple tree while his father performed a royal ceremony. As he waited there his mind spontaneously calmed to the point of entering the first jhāna, and he experienced a joy more wonderful than he had ever known.

It now occurred to the famished Bodhisatta, "Could this be the path to enlightenment?" Intuitively the answer came, "Yes, this is the path. Why am I afraid of that happiness that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures or unwholesome states of mind?" He then ended his torturous fasting and made his way to the Bodhi Tree. There he sat down and directed his focused attention into the deeper and deeper levels of meditation...

In Working with the Five Hindrances, Ajahn Thiradhammo says:

I would say we need a certain degree of 'sensual pleasure' in the form of comfort in order to continue to live and pursue spiritual practice. If the body is uncomfortable we have a natural desire to relieve its discomfort or pain, or we succumb to ill-will and/or restlessness, two of the other Hindrances.

The mind needs to experience a certain degree of safety and security before it can be non-defensive and open to new reflections or contemplations. We can, of course, sometimes move outside our comfort zone to some degree, although it is often hard to differentiate between what we need and what we want...

It should be emphasized that sensual pleasures in themselves are not hindrances, fetters or underlying dispositions; it is the desire or lust for them that becomes a hindrance, fetter or underlying disposition.

and,

In contrast to a life of sensuality, the Buddha encouraged the principle of renunciation (nekkhamma) (the orientation of letting go, or having let go), a fundamentally different attitude from that of the world. Without wishing to sound too simplistic, the average person usually aspires to find happiness in pleasures of the senses. The renunciant foregoes this 'worldly' happiness in order to experience spiritual happiness and, ultimately, complete liberation...

This is why the first teaching of the Buddha begins:

Bhikkhus, these two extremes ought not to be cultivated by one gone forth from the house-life. What are the two? There is devotion to indulgence of pleasure in the objects of sensual desire, which is inferior, low, vulgar, ignoble, and leads to no good; and there is devotion to self-torment, which is painful, ignoble and leads to no good.

"The middle way discovered by a Perfect One avoids both these extremes; it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to peace, to direct acquaintance, to discovery, to nibbana.

(Bhikkhu Nanamoli trans.)

How to distinguish, and reconcile these aims, appreciating and taking care of the present, and long term, future benefit

To add some detail to the four possible courses of action, the first is:

actions that bring happiness now, but pain later

We are all too familiar with these types of actions: a thief has to pay for his crime; something tastes good, but later makes us feel unwell; or an affair where there's some pleasure involved later brings strife and regret... we can all add our own examples, I'm sure.

Then there are:

(2) actions that bring pain or discomfort now, but happiness, well being and peace later

These are things like beginning exercise, or any fruitful discipline. At first, they may not be enjoyable, but they yield good results in time.

Rumi has a poem comparing discipline and indulgence where he says:

*There's a fire on the left, and a stream on the right.
One group walks toward the fire, and into the fire,
and another goes toward the flowing water.*

*We can't tell which are blessed and which not.
One walks into the fire, and suddenly appears in the stream.
Another's head goes under the water,
and that head pokes out of the fire.*

*Most people guard against going into the fire,
and so end up in it.
Those who love the water of pleasure,
and make it their devotion are cheated...*

When it comes to meditation, we can see something of the same dynamic. Ajahn Sumedho said:

When you try to get rid of fear or anger, what happens? You just get restless or discouraged and have to go eat something or smoke or drink or do something else. But if you wait and endure restlessness, greed, hatred, doubt, despair, and sleepiness, if you observe these conditions as they cease and end, you will attain a kind of calm and mental clarity, which you will never achieve if you're always going after something else.

Some actions take a long time to bear fruit, maybe not in any foreseeable short term. What to do then? This is where a deep faith in cause and effect applies. Without such intuitive insight, it seems we would not take up a greater work for ourselves or others, or continue.

*Some seeds take a hundred years or more to grow,
but we tend to them now,
and walk in the shade of tall trees...*

Then there are

(3) those thoughts, words and actions that bring pain now, and suffering and hardship later too

This is the most obvious, I think, so not much need to be said about it, but it should be reflected on as well.

and,

(4) happiness now that leads to happiness, health, and good fortune in the future

I had to come to this to reconcile the happiness visible in this life, with looking beyond present enjoyment alone.

There are some ways of taking care of ourselves, and delighting in the richness of this world that at once fulfill both these purposes. These support and sustain us in necessary ways, if we are to learn, and progress, mature and find greater freedom and ease. We can tell when our enjoyment is not an end by itself.

There can be an overlap between what is pleasant here and now, and what is beneficial in the long term.

I believe this is what the Buddha encourages us to do as we live our lives- to keep our noble aims in mind.

We each need to look deeply then, to see what truly serves our purpose, of living, and finding freedom, and caring for others in the best of ways.

A summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings

‘There are three sets of causes, with three results’

*Having fortunate conditions, becoming liberated,
and enlightened, all arise due to causes,
and we should know what these are.*

I. Entering the Buddhist Path

We all have Buddha Nature, which is the innate potential to have happiness, to become liberated, and enlightened. Our spiritual teachers help us to know this, our true nature. Remembering their wisdom and their great kindness and compassion naturally awakens reverence, and confidence in the path.

Following their guidance, we then reflect on the subjects of:

the rarity and preciousness of a fortunate human life;

the reality of death and continuation;

both the evident and the hidden sufferings of samsara, or unenlightened existence,

cause and effect, including teachings on ethics and purification

and the qualities of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Seeking safety, and having diligence comes from this.

Thinking about these, and remembering the struggles and dangers of samsara; out of real love and compassion for ourselves and for all others, wanting to be safe and to have health and happiness, now and in the future, both for our own sake, and for the sake of others,

and then, with faith, aiming to continually take refuge in the Buddha as our Teacher, to practice the Dharma as our way of life, and to rely well on the Noble Sangha as our Spiritual Companions, *these are the causes, and the result is having fortunate conditions*, now and in the future, including higher rebirth. From this follows the inestimable benefits of safety, joy and peace, and well being that are the basis for all subsequent attainments.

II. Entering the Path to Complete Freedom from Suffering

We can then add to the factors covered so far the insight that all of samsara, or ego-centered, unenlightened existence is suffering, and the knowledge of how liberation is possible.

Understanding these on an intellectual, or an experiential level, even briefly, believing in the possibility of liberation, and not wanting to suffer any more, *these are the causes* for the motivation to be completely and permanently free of samsara to arise naturally in the mind, and the unified practice of the Three Higher Trainings, of Ethics, Meditation and Wisdom, *and the result is liberation*.

III. Entering the Mahayana directly - the Path of Universal Benefit

In addition to the above realizations, when one has great love and compassion for all that lives, together with the thought that enlightened understanding and activity is both possible, and is the highest good for all, so greatly needed in these times, *these are the causes* for the bodhisattva motivation, which is the aim to live an awakened life in order to bring the greatest benefit to all sentient beings, and the practice of the Perfections, *and the result is enlightenment*.

Renunciation, or The Determination to be Free, from The Tushita Introductory Course Materials

Renunciation is a state of mind that involves wanting to be free from suffering and its causes (the first two noble truths). It isn't simply *not wanting* to experience pain- that's something every being has already. It must involve understanding where suffering comes from- what its causes are- and making a conscious effort to avoid these.

*There are two types of renunciation, or the determination to be free:

1. The determination to be free from suffering in our future lives, which is the level of motivation of the lower capable being, as explained in the lamrim, or Stages of the Path teachings.

&

2. The determination to be free from all cyclic existence, from samsara in general, and not just the lower realms. This is the level of motivation of the intermediate capable being of the lamrim.

The Path of the Lower Capable Being

It was explained earlier that after death we will be reborn (due to karma and delusion) in one of the six realms. Three of these are unfortunate- the realms of animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-beings- in which we would experience terrible sufferings. To avoid such a rebirth, we need to cultivate certain attitudes and ways of behaving, to live our lives wisely. The way to do this is to reflect on the following:

The preciousness of our human life and the importance of using it for spiritual (Dharma) practice;

The inevitability of death;

The sufferings of the three unfortunate realms;

and,

Taking refuge and living in accordance with karma, the law of cause and effect.

The Path of the Intermediate Capable Being

Even if we take rebirth in the fortunate realms- the realms of humans, gods and demi-gods- we will still experience suffering. We still have to die and be reborn, separate from loved ones and cherished possessions, experience eventual dissatisfaction, confusion, anger, jealousy, and so forth. The solution is to become altogether free from samsara, the cycle of death and rebirth, and to attain liberation or nirvana.

To achieve nirvana we need to free our minds from delusions, especially the three main delusions of attachment, anger and ignorance, which are the root causes of samsara and all of its suffering. The main practices to be done to achieve nirvana are the Three Higher Trainings: ethics, concentration and wisdom.

The energy and will-power to practice these three come from renunciation of samsara, which can be developed by reflecting on the suffering nature of samsara...

From The Lam Rim Outlines, by the Venerable Karen Valham

In order to not arise attachment to samsaric rebirths, the best method is trying to realize that all the samsaric realms of rebirth are in the nature of suffering. From that, aversion arises, and then the renunciation of samsara arises.

Whenever the person achieves fully renounced mind of samsara, through meditation, at that time the person enters the path. If the person has bodhicitta, then that person enters the mahayana path.

On Renunciation and Bodhicitta, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, from Freedom Through Understanding

Question: What causes bodhicitta to arise?

Rinpoche. One of the most important things you need to have in order to develop bodhicitta is renunciation based on an understanding of the nature of samsara and its shortcomings- impermanence, death and the three levels of suffering, which I was talking about before.

If you understand how your own samsara is in the nature of suffering and have renunciation of that, then because of your deep understanding of the evolution of your own samsara, you can easily understand other sentient beings' suffering; how others are trapped in samsara and suffering...

Then, with great love and compassion, we have the wish to help them to be happy and free of suffering, and on that basis, bodhicitta arises.

Though wishing to be free from suffering,
they create the very causes of suffering itself

Though wishing to have happiness,
like an enemy, they ignorantly destroy it

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, by Shantideva,

Chapter One, Verse 28

Powerless, their minds confused,
these beings are incapable of accomplishing their own ends
Therefore, I will do this for them...

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, by Shantideva,

Chapter Six, Verse 50

From At this time

So much more than for my own sake alone, then,
millions of times, billions of times more,
uncountable times more than for my own sake alone,

for all my family, who are precious to me,
for all those who have never even heard of liberation and enlightenment,
for all those who have heard but who have no opportunity to practice,
and for all those who practice, but who have not yet attained the full result

for *all* of their sake, because of all their inconceivable suffering now
and the possibility of all their suffering in the future,
because of their not having completely realized their true nature,

and because of all their potential for happiness,
that is not yet realized, and that would otherwise go unrealized,
it is most urgent,

To be able to fulfill their needs
May I realize the Teachings,
and my prayers
to do all I can
to accomplish the aims of living beings

Homage to the Dharma
that opens the wisdom-eye of beings,
and is the means of removing the poison arrow of latent tendencies

- From Aryasura's Aspiration

The Original Meaning of Sacrifice

These days, we've got it backwards. In 21st century Western culture, the common misunderstanding is that *a sacrifice* involves giving something up, and is a net loss. We say, for example, Aah, the parents made such sacrifices for their child!... Or, he sacrificed a lot to get here, or, to do his work... Such notions are often heard.

Actually, the opposite is true, as every spiritual tradition will testify. With a true, intelligent sacrifice, we give up something of lesser value, for a greater return.

A seed falls to the ground, and becomes a flower;

A grain of corn transforms herself into an ear of corn that we can eat;

Some hours, days, months, and years are given to study, rather than to games or dissipation, and the result is a doctor, or a counselor, a teacher, or a sage.

And there is no way to measure the gain.

Rumi says,

Always see infinite life in letting the self die...

and,

*Here, one rose buys the whole garden,
one coin, the entire gold mine...*

and,

'The cost of knowing the Divine is your whole life' -

*When a wise person hears this, he runs, shouting,
What a bargain! I'll take it!*

Even if we are hungry, it would be foolish, short sighted, and spiritually blind to eat all our grain, and not plant at least some of it. In the same way, it would be ignorant to squander this life just on the material side of things, and not nurture our spiritual life.

When we don't know this much, we cling to small pleasures that stupefy, and that stunt our mental and emotional growth - think of all the indulgence, and children's games being played by people in grown up bodies.

Somehow, we're not taught these things from an early age, and so it's difficult to even hear that *there is a deeper joy, and a greater fulfillment to be found*. Part of this is because of the barren, late-stage capitalism of our times, and part of it, surely is the corruption of religious traditions. When teachers themselves are ignorant, what could they possibly offer?

It's at times like this, when there is such dense darkness, collectively, that luminous teachers, such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Ajahn Pasanno, Ani Tenzin Palmo, Ringu Tulku, and Matthieu Ricard shine brilliantly, across oceans and continents. The wisdom of people like Lama Yeshe and Thich Nhat Hanh can be accessed everywhere, and we need only follow clear teachings and noble examples to find ourselves once again released out into the open, our bodies and souls refreshed, joyous and dancing.

When we open our wisdom-eye, everything takes its rightful place.

Let us use this time well, and share all we have with one another. I am convinced, this is the very best way to live.

From In the Spirit of Manjushri, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Based on the true recognition of the unsatisfactory nature of existence in samsara and also based on the full appreciation of the desirability of liberation from this, one should develop a genuine aspiration to seek such freedom. This is called true renunciation. In order to develop a genuine aspiration to attain full liberation or freedom from samsara, one needs to develop a certain understanding of what nirvana or liberation really means. In this context one also needs to have some idea of what it means to attain such liberation. *This understanding arises from the recognition that the delusions of the mind can be removed.*

* * *

It becomes important to not only appreciate the destructive nature of negative thoughts and emotions, but also the completely undesirable nature of them. Anyone, so long as they remain under the control or power of the delusions, becomes an object of pity and compassion. They have no joy or satisfaction. In a real sense, so long as we remain under the control of the delusions we are in some sense imprisoned within cyclic existence.

By reflecting on the destructive nature of the negative emotions or thoughts and also by reflecting upon their destructive power and ability to continually bind us to cyclic existence, one can generate a genuine aspiration to seek freedom and liberation from them.

This is the true renunciation.

It is by appreciating the negativity or undesirable nature of suffering and also appreciating the causal mechanism of the origin of suffering that one can eventually develop a genuine aspiration to attain full liberation. When we talk about developing a genuine aspiration to attain freedom from suffering, here we are not talking about suffering in the ordinary sense but all samsaric suffering...

When one fully recognizes the true nature this suffering then the wish to attain liberation will be very strong. This desire or aspiration then to seek liberation or freedom is said to be true renunciation.

From Working with the Five Hindrances, by Ajahn Thiradhammo

When the Buddha-to-be was on his spiritual quest before his awakening, he reflected that thoughts of sensual pleasure led to his own and others affliction, 'obstructs wisdom, is associated with distress, and is not conducive to nibbāna' (M.I,115). He contrasted this with renunciation (nekkhamma) which he realized has the opposite effects and 'is conducive to nibbāna.' He had a similar realization regarding thoughts of ill-will and harming and their opposites.³ With these three kinds of skilful thoughts as the basis, he was able to develop the increasingly refined states of concentration (jhāna) which he experienced as resulting in a happiness far superior to sensual pleasure (S.IV,226f). He referred to this as 'the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of calming, the bliss of awakening' (M.III,233;I, 454), which should be pursued and is not to be feared. When one has experienced the bliss and rapture from jhāna, infatuation with worldly sensual pleasures is broken (M.I,91).

However, states of jhāna are only a temporary respite from the attraction of sensual pleasures. The Buddha did, though, discover a complete 'escape' from sensual pleasures. This is the 'putting away and giving up of desire and lust for sensual pleasures' (M.I,87), which occurs at the third of the four levels of awakening. In brief, the Buddha teaches that the way to experience the escape from sensual desires is to understand 'as they really are' (yathābūtā) the origin and passing away, and the gratification, danger and escape⁴, regarding sensual pleasures. This is called 'the severance of the bond of sensuality' (A.II,11). Thus when one truly understands how unreliable and ultimately unsatisfying pleasures of the senses really are, desire and lust for them completely cease.

³The three 'thoughts' of renunciation, non-ill-will and harmlessness were formulated as Right Attitude (samma sankappa) in the Noble Eightfold Path.

⁴ This threefold formula of gratification, danger and escape is a common expression in the scriptures: the world – A.I, 258; khandhas – S.III,28f;62f;102f; six-senses – S.IV,7; feeling – S.IV,220.66

The key to ultimate freedom from sensuality is understanding it 'as it really is', that is, to the level of ultimate truth. However, it is really a matter of degrees. Understanding a little allows a little respite from sensuality, and the deeper the understanding, the more complete the freedom. As most of us can probably appreciate, this 'escape' is easier said than done. The complete ending of sensual desire is a very advanced level of awakening, so there is no need to worry about it too much. In fact, I would say that we need a certain degree of 'sensual pleasure' in the form of comfort in order to continue to live and pursue spiritual practice. If the body is uncomfortable we have a natural desire to relieve its discomfort or pain, or we succumb to ill-will and/or restlessness, two of the other Hindrances.

The mind needs to experience a certain degree of safety and security before it can be non-defensive and open to new reflections or contemplations. We can, of course, sometimes move outside our comfort zone to some degree, although it is often hard to differentiate between what we need and what we want. Am I obsessing about food because the body is malnourished, or am I bored or lonely? How much are we furnishing our needs and how much are we nourishing our unsatiated desires? It should be emphasized that sensual pleasures in themselves are not hindrances, fetters or underlying dispositions; it is the desire or lust for them that becomes a hindrance, fetter or underlying disposition.

The key element in sensual pleasure is the pleasant feeling, the 'happiness and well-being' (sukha somanassa), which it induces. Pleasant feeling allows a relaxing and even melting away of self-reference with its stress and anxiety; people 'lose themselves' in pleasant feelings. In contrast unpleasant feeling pressures the self to find relief from the perceived threat to its existence; just listen to how loudly the self screams when in pain. Notice what you do when you are emotionally uncomfortable: turn on some pleasing music, watch a movie, look for something to eat, etc.; that is, try to escape into some form of sensual pleasure.

Of all the sensory pleasures, sexual pleasure is the strongest and most complex. It is complex in that it often involves all the senses in various ways, and has a biological aspect to it as well. The desire for sexual pleasure is the specific sensual desire which causes most people the most problems throughout most of their lives. Indeed, the meditation subject which is recommended for dealing with sensual desire is specifically for dealing with sexual desire. Sexuality is probably the most complicated and controversial human behaviour. Its biological function for procreation has been superseded by the desire for sensual pleasure from sex. It has also become intertwined with many self issues, such as identity, self-worth, power, love, etc. When we add to this the diverse socio-cultural views on and endless opinions of the role of sexuality in psychological and spiritual health, we have a very loaded topic.

In various contemplative spiritual traditions it was held that refraining from sexual activity was necessary in order to channel the energy into spiritual practice. In one well-known discourse the Buddha severely rebuked a monk who held the pernicious view that engaging in sensual (i.e., sexual) pleasures was not an obstacle to spiritual life (M. sutta 22).

In contrast to a life of sensuality, the Buddha encouraged the principle of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), a fundamentally different attitude from that of the world. Without wishing to sound too simplistic, the average person usually aspires to find happiness in pleasures of the senses. The renunciant foregoes this 'worldly' happiness in order to experience spiritual happiness and, ultimately, complete liberation from craving and grasping the sensory world.

From The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun of Mahayana Thought Training,
by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Beings who have the Wisdom Eye should be careful that they understand the right way to practise. It is absolutely essential that yogis following the most supreme Tantrayana develop strong renunciation of samsara through strongly and extensively meditating on its sufferings.

One of the greatest Indian Yogic Tantric practitioners, Lu.yi.pa, was instructed by the Vajrayogini—a female aspect of the Buddha – to give up the temporal life and to make the dauntless effort to arouse strong aversion to samsara, for this is an absolute necessity for those who wish to practise Tantricism. According to the Vajrayogini’s instruction, Lu.yi.pa went to a solitary place and through much austere practice received Siddhi. Because of their single-pointed practice in solitary places constellations of yogis have received Siddhi. The great yogis have said in their Tantric Teachings that even the power and possessions of a king have to be meditated on as suffering.

Having the fully-knowing Mind, the great Guru Tzong.k’a.pa said in the prayer of the Tantric Deity, Heruka:

Living beings travel on the right path by having full unshakeable belief in it, thinking deeply on the perfect human rebirth: its meaningfulness, rarity and perishability; on the suffering of the lower realms; on karma; and on the Refuge guiding them.

WHAT IS NIRVANA?

The complete release from samsara—the formation of true suffering and its cause—is Nirvana. To receive Nirvana we must have

1. effortless, energetic inspiration. This arises from
2. strong, effortless renunciation of samsara. This arises from

3. strong aversion to samsara, which depends on
4. deep, clear insight into the true nature of samsara.

Sha.kya.wa said:

The experienced, learned ones fear the upper realms as they do the narak. It is so rare for beings to fear any of the realms of samsara.

Every past realised Indian pandit and Tibetan ascetic Lama was released from samsara by truly seeing the whole of samsara in its suffering nature, like a blaze of fire with no real pleasure wherever we go. For them the mind renouncing samsara generates the energy to become Enlightened and work for all sentient beings until samsara ends.

Furthermore, this fully renouncing mind is most important because all the past Buddhas' Enlightenment was received through renunciation. Subsequently, galaxies of numberless Indian pandits, their disciples and Tibetan monks and ascetics became Enlightened in their lifetimes through a pure, renounced mind. They taught all their experienced methods to their disciples, so the experiences have not been lost. This is why Tibetan monks still have the opportunity to achieve real experiences by developing their minds. Modern Europeans who are fortunate enough to study the Teachings can emulate these meditators and also achieve these experiences. Therefore, we have this present chance and it arose from all the original renounced minds, which have come inexhaustably to us. So, if we really achieve fully renounced mind, it helps in a limitless way for the numberless living beings, until samsara ends.

What has been stopping us from achieving the limitlessly valuable renounced mind? It is the ignorance that uncontrollably sees samsaric enjoyments as happiness. We wallow in the quagmire of samsara, believing completely that it is beautiful, yet hope to receive Enlightenment- an Enlightenment that no-one has ever received in this way- achieving only suffering as a result of greed and ignorance.

For all those ancient Indian pandits and ascetics, the best everlasting psychology was full renunciation. We can prove this for ourselves by living that experience, with pure practice and understanding the nature of samsara... This is why Shakyamuni taught the Four Noble Truths...

From the teachings of Ajahn Pasanno

Renunciation is not about making ourselves miserable. It's about greater and more sustainable well-being.

* * *

Understanding the principles of cause and effect, how different causes lead to different outcomes, then one wants to let go of the causes that lead one to suffering and complication.

* * *

As we pay attention to renunciation, and we start benefitting from relinquishing our own greed, hatred, and delusion, then the result should be a much bigger, clearer heart, that's able to encompass others...

From The Balanced Way, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Over time we will find that the two, (renunciation and compassion) though tending in different directions, eventually are mutually reinforcing.

Compassion impels us toward greater renunciation, as we see how our own greed and attachment make us a danger to others. And renunciation impels us toward greater compassion, since the relinquishing of craving enables us to exchange the narrow perspectives of the ego for the wider perspectives of a mind of boundless sympathy.

Held together in this mutually strengthening tension, renunciation and compassion contribute to the wholesome balance of the Buddhist path and to the completeness of its final fruit.

What is Nekkhamma, by Ajahn Munindo

Nekkhamma literally means “freedom from sensual lust,” but it’s more generally translated as “renunciation.” Traditionally, it comes third on the Theravadan list of the ten paramitas, or “forces for transformation,” after generosity and moral discipline. It’s hardly a coincidence that it’s positioned so near the beginning, as it forms the foundation for all Buddhist practice.

It is sometimes mistakenly thought that gestures of renunciation are only made by those who have “gone forth”- that is, by ordained monks and nuns. It is true that the lifestyle commitment for monks and nuns is a great support for the cultivation of this virtue; however, it’s also important for the lay practitioner. If any of us fail to embrace the spirit of renunciation, the results from our effort in Buddhist practice will largely be limited.

Sila (virtue) is supported by *nekkhamma*, *samadhi* is deepened by it, and wisdom is nourished by it. The ultimate goal for all followers of the Buddhist path is the complete eradication of greed, aversion, and delusion. And as we know, greed, aversion, and delusion are expressions of our confused belief in self. Letting go of this self that we hold so dear is the ultimate renunciation. Cultivation of *nekkhamma* supports this process.

The Buddha himself acknowledged in the *Tapussa Sutta* that initially he did not find the practice of renunciation appealing. However, on reflection, he came to understand that the reason part of him was not drawn to it was because he had not accurately seen the consequences of being lost in sensuality. This is therefore one of the contemplations for wanting to renounce and to let go of compulsive distractions; we look deeply into the consequences that arise from the way we relate to our senses.

Buddhists do not approach the practice of renunciation as something we *should* do. Rather, having considered the principle of cause and effect, we come to see its wisdom. If we cannot release the extra or unnecessary

things in our lives, then surely it will be difficult to arrive at the clear seeing, or right view, that is required to follow the other aspects of the Buddhist path.

Another contemplation the Buddha used to inspire nekkhamma came from his inquiry into the demonstrable benefits that arise directly from being able to truly let go. One of Ajahn Chah's maxims in practice was:

If you let go a little, you will have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace. If you let go completely, you will have complete peace.

Renunciation is not about making our lives miserable- quite the opposite! It is about greater and more sustainable happiness.

At first, the idea of not gratifying our sense desires appears to be a guarantee for frustration. But recall for a moment how it feels to be in the supermarket, faced with having to choose from a selection of fifty different types of breakfast cereal. Imagine how good it would feel to be clearly decisive, not just in supermarkets or when browsing eBay, but in every moment. Since most of our indecision results from misunderstanding the drama of senses, it follows that training in renunciation is very beneficial.

The traditional training for the monastic sangha is contained within its hundreds of precepts. For laypeople, the spirit of renunciation is contained in the eight precepts, which are observed during periods of intensive meditation practice and on lunar observance days. Here the usual five moral precepts are expanded by changing one and adding three more. The third precept about refraining from irresponsible sexuality changes to total restraint from all intentional erotic activity. Then there is the sixth precept of not eating solid food between midday and the following dawn; the seventh is refraining from distraction in the form of games, music, and cosmetics; and finally, the eighth is non-indulgence in sleep.

As Westerners, when we read the above we easily confuse training in renunciation with guidelines for ethical behaviour. Refraining from eating a meal in the evening or giving up listening to music are not ethical matters. The encouragement to give up these activities for a time is intended to increase the intensity and focus in our practice. Since the time of the Buddha, lay practitioners have been encouraged to formally take up the eight precepts on the new moon and full moon days. On these days, the lay and monastic sangha would meet and spend time in formal meditation and dhamma discussion.

Today, the good fortune of such readily available dhamma friends is rare. And most people cannot get the day off work just because it is the full moon! However, we can adjust and create our own forms. But whatever practices we develop, it is worth holding in heart and mind the Buddha's words (as recorded in the *Dhammapada*, verse 290): "It is wisdom that enables letting go of a lesser happiness in pursuit of a happiness which is greater." This mindful and skillful cultivation of letting go bares the fruit of selfless bliss.

From The Craft of the Heart, by Ajahn Lee

People of different propensities gain Awakening at different rates because they differ in the speed with which they can extract their minds from sensuality. Those who awaken quickly have already developed the quality of renunciation (nekkhamma) to a high degree; those who awaken at a moderate rate have developed it to a moderate degree; and those who awaken slowly, to a lower degree.

From Inner Strength, by Ajahn Lee

To see ourself or to see the world, the Buddha teaches us to survey ourself from the head to the feet, from the feet to the head, just as if we're going to plant a tree: We have to survey things from the ground on up to the tips of the branches. The ground stands for the purity of our livelihood. We have to examine the ground to see if it has any termites or other pests that will destroy the roots of our tree. Then we have to add the right amount of fertilizer- not too little, not too much. We have to care for it correctly in line with its size.

For example, how do we observe the five precepts so that they're pure? How do we observe the eight, the ten, and the 227 precepts so that they're pure? What things should we abstain from doing? What things should we do? This is called right livelihood.

If we attend too much to our physical pleasure, we tend not to give rise to virtue, like certain kinds of trees that are very healthy, with large branches and lush foliage, but tend not to bear fruit. If a person eats a lot and sleeps a lot, if he's concerned only with matters of eating and sleeping, his body will be large and hefty, like a tree with a large trunk, large branches, large leaves, but hardly any fruit. We human beings- once our bodies are well-nourished with food- if we then listen to a sermon or sit in meditation, tend to get drowsy because we're too well nourished. If we sit for a long time, we feel uncomfortable. If we listen to a sermon, we don't know what's being said, because we're sleepy. This ruins our chance to do good.

People who are too well nourished tend to get lazy, sloppy, and addicted to pleasure. If they sit in meditation, they tend to get numb, tired, and drowsy. This is why we're taught to observe the eight *uposatha* precepts as a middle path. We eat only during half of the day, only half full. That's enough. This is called having a sense of moderation with regard to food. We don't have to load up or compensate for missing the evening meal. We eat just enough.

‘I abstain from eating at the wrong time’: After noon we don’t have to turn to another meal, so that the heart won’t turn after the world. This is like giving just enough fertilizer to our tree.

‘I abstain from dancing, singing and ornamenting the body’: The Buddha doesn’t have us beautify the body with cosmetics and perfumes, or ornament it with jewelry. This is like giving our tree just the right amount of water. Don’t let the soil get water-logged. Otherwise the roots will rot. In other words, if we get attached to scents and to beauty of this sort, it’ll make us so infatuated that our virtue will suffer. This is like taking scraps of food and pouring them around the foot of our tree. Dogs will come to trample over the tree, chickens will peck at the leaves and flowers, and fire ants will eat into the roots, causing our tree to wither or die. All sorts of complications will come to hassle us.

‘I abstain from high and large beds’: When we lie down to sleep, the Buddha doesn’t have us use soft mattresses or cushions that are too comfortable, because if we have a lot of comfort we’ll sleep a lot and not want to get up to do good. The results of our concentration practice will be meager, and our laziness will grow rampant. This is like caterpillars and worms that burrow throughout the soil: They’ll keep whispering to us, teaching us all sorts of things until ultimately they tell us to stop doing good- and so we stop. This is like insects crawling up from the ground and eating into our tree, climbing higher and higher up until they reach the tiptop branches: the mind. Ultimately, when they eat the tips of the branches, the tree won’t bear flowers. When it has no flowers, it won’t bear fruit.

In the same way, if we lack a sense of moderation in caring for ourself, we won’t be practicing right livelihood. If we don’t have a proper sense of how to nourish and care for the body, our conduct will have to degenerate. But if we have a proper sense of how to nourish and care for the body, our conduct will have to develop in the direction of purity, and the mind will have to develop along with it, step by step.

From the teachings of Bhante Gunaratana

What are the wholesome thoughts we should cultivate? They are nekkhama vitaka, metta vitaka, and karuna vitaka.

These are based on wholesome roots.

Renunciation does not mean renouncing the world, or home, or life. It has a deeper meaning. It simply means any letting go. We can let go of greed, or a piece of chocolate - that is renunciation.

We can let go of an additional pair of shoes when we were thinking of buying them. We can let go of that thought. That is also renunciation.

Renunciation (letting go) covers the minutest thing to the largest thing that we give up.

Renunciation in a deeper sense means having a thought (the mind) that is letting go (or has let go) of things.

In meditation, this becomes extremely practical, useful, and meaningful. When we try to gain concentration, greed can arise. At that moment, even temporarily, we can let go of that greed... That letting go is renunciation. The thought of generosity is based on that.

This is the preparatory, or initial stage, the vitakas, prior to directing the mind (vitaka) to the object of meditation, and setting the mind there.

* * *

In the process of developing generosity, metta, compassion and letting go take root and make the mind very strong, very healthy, very peaceful.

These come under the term that has been translated as 'initial application of thought', and these thoughts initiate the process of gaining jhana.

When the five factors are there as a unit, as a team - one package - you are in the first jhana.

The function of greed is 'to become', in Pali, 'with delight and attachment'.

The nature of attachment is

It likes things here now,
and likes things there then

It is jumping around, looking for satisfaction, first here, then there. It jumps from object to object.

That is the nature of greed, clinging, craving. It is like glue - sticky; attachment is hard to separate from.

It is damaging psychologically, and as far as spiritual growth is concerned, it is counter productive.

Concentration is not like that.

**For concentration, we have to have various other beautiful mental factors.*

{We have to have attention, faith, effort, good conduct, and patience}

**Wholesome concentration has a very special function. Its function is to see things as they really are.*

When we are greedy, we don't see things as they are. The mind of a greedy person is stirred up, cloudy, restless, and unclear. The mind of a greedy person is holding onto illusions.

In concentration, by contrast, the mind is very clear - like water we can see through. It is peaceful and unclouded.

When we have concentration, the mind can penetrate reality.

* * *

Renunciation purifies metta.

Becoming more altruistic, giving up self interest, our own comfort, and pleasures, even receiving appreciation, recognition, respect, for the sake of others - letting go of sensuality and of all this - brings virtue to perfection.

Even temporarily, relinquishment enlarges the scope of our metta.

* * *

The positive thoughts become a wholesome habit that naturally permeates (or perfumes) your jhana (meditation).

The subtle remnants (or resonance) of these conscious thoughts prevent the arising of greed, anger, and fear.

Again, simply cultivate the ground (focus on cultivating the experience of metta, karuna, and letting go), and the seeds grow by themselves.

* * *

More on the mental factors

{In the beginning, more attention is given to removing the impediments of meditation. When the hindrances are pacified for a time, mindful attention to an object (the breath, walking, or metta) becomes much easier.

The reason is that, at that time, we are not working at cross purposes with ourselves.

The initial application(s) of thought, (cultivating metta, compassion, and letting go) become *like a continuous stream*, leading to the growth of a tree.

Seeing them this way also erases the sense of there being a solid barrier between what were thought of before as preparatory practices and the main practice. The feeling of metta or letting go (or having let go) can extend throughout the main practice.

As Ajaan Pasanno said, 'Every time we sit down to meditate, our day to day life is right there.'

This is pointing to the presence or absence of mental factors, and we can gradually lessen and remove (the hindrances) those factors that distract from meditation, and gradually cultivate what supports our practice.

* * *

Make the mind and body calm and peaceful.

Let go of any anger, jealousy, and fear that might trouble the mind...

with patience, compassion, metta, joy and happiness, equanimity and concentration, we proceed.

As far as the goal is concerned, we are one. Along the way, we are all different, and so we try to accommodate these differences, caring for each other in this way.

With altruism, with compassion, with a balanced state of mind, let us proceed with our practice.

We proceed slowly and gradually, to make our practice bring perfect results.

{May all share in these benefits.}

The Toy Horse

We can have experiences sometimes that lead to dispassion, and to letting go. I thought recently an analogy for waking up to the unsatisfactoriness of unenlightened existence, and had to laugh. I saw how it can be like sitting on one of those children's wooden horses that they have sometimes outside of the supermarket. The 'unsatisfactoriness' then is like thinking and hoping and expecting that, after putting a few coins in, we could ride that particular horse to some destination, away from the front of the market, and then getting upset, and irritated, and despondent when all it does is go up and down and back and forth a few inches;

Thoroughly knowing the nature of that wooden horse, as it truly is, we don't hope or expect it to go *anywhere*, except maybe a few inches, side to side and back and forth; we don't get upset, we don't get angry, or irritated, or depressed about it at all - because we know - well, that's just the nature of this particular toy horse.

Depending on things to take us places they are not equipped to take us, we experience what we call 'unsatisfactoriness'. There's nothing in them that is inherently wrong - rather, it's *own own attitude* that determines whether we can enjoy them for what they are, or whether we expect and ask of them what they can't give us.

Things in this world - our bodies, relationships, even traditions have their own nature, and to expect them to lead us somewhere they are not capable of taking us *is just like this*. When we know them though, we don't expect that from them. We look instead to what can actually help us accomplish our aims, that is, our own practice, guided by accomplished beings and their teachings.

Letting Go As a Skillful Means

When it comes to separating from attachment to sense pleasures that bring us suffering as well, Buddhism is very practical. There's a method called simply 'letting go' that anyone can experience the benefits of, which is encouraging every step of the way.

We don't have to give up everything at once, but when we let go even a little, it creates more space inwardly, and some peace as well. In the teachings on meditation, this is a factor that makes it easier to settle the mind, and cultivate clarity.

As Ajahn Chah said,

*If you let go a little, you will have a little peace
If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace
and if you let go completely, you will have complete peace*

A *skillful means* in Buddhism, *upaya*, is what gets us from one place to another. It is provisional. Once we see the benefits of letting go of sensuality, and views, and contention, and find greater peace and well being, it leads onward. I especially like how accessible this practice is, and how we can see the results right away.

In Revisiting the Jhanas I wrote that

Nekhamma is sometimes translated as relinquishment, renunciation, or letting go. Bhante Gunaratana describes this factor as generosity, but also describes it in his talks as *temporarily giving something up. This can be taken all the way up to the renunciation of all of samsara, but there are levels to it along the way that are helpful to know about and to practice.

He says, for example, that we can give up something as simple as a single piece of chocolate, and once we begin looking for attachments, or thoughts

and interests we can set aside for a time, we find that we are creating a sense of space, and freeing up our energy to practice.

Bhante makes clear in his book, *Beyond Mindfulness in Plain English*, that we can consider the setting aside of interest or involvements as something temporary, and provisional, as in, for the purpose of getting us from one place to another.

Until we practice deep meditation and develop insight, we are suspending the activity of the kilesas, or hindrances. We are pacifying them for a time. Their roots are still there in us, and are only removed later. This practice, of jhana, and all that it consists of, is a means to that end, and to the end of all suffering.

Bhante Gunaratana:

Renunciation does not mean renouncing the world, or home, or life. It has a deeper meaning. It simply means any letting go. We can let go of greed, or a piece of chocolate - that is renunciation.

We can let go of an additional pair of shoes when we were thinking of buying them. We can let go of that thought. That is also renunciation.

Renunciation (letting go) covers the minutest thing to the largest thing that we give up.

Renunciation in a deeper sense means having a thought (the mind) that is letting go of things. In meditation, this becomes extremely practical, useful, and meaningful.

When we try to gain concentration, greed can arise. At that moment, even temporarily, we can let go of that greed... That letting go is renunciation. (letting go)

and

Joy and happiness (sukha, well being) arise as a result of suppressing hindrances. It is a joy also to know we are on the right path. Let us try to regain this same joy and happiness.` The basis is letting go of attachments, and greed, and cultivating wholesome thoughts, of metta, and karuna.

The joy and happiness that then arise is temporary, but they are still very powerful. They support our gaining concentration...

This is so much more skillful than wrestling with our negative, destructive emotions. Setting them aside for a time is do-able, and what's more, it introduces us to other before unimagined possibilities, other paradigms, not thought of before.

We need a method that allows us to approach and actualize a new way of being. Letting go works very well here.

Part of the problem, I think, when it comes to transforming the deeper level of the mind and emotions is the identification one some level with one, the I or the ego who has acted or experienced in the past. Even in a subtle way, this perpetuates suffering of a kind. Ajaan Pasanno said

If there is any hint of self, a position is then taken and the whole realm of samsara unfolds.

The practice of simply letting go as a skillful means avoids all this. It's something we can do and feel the effects of almost immediately, of greater peace and well being.

There's another teaching that relates here, on what they call *the nutriments*. If we can practice *the withdrawal of interest and attention* from the objects of our attachment, the feeling fades. We can do the same with objects of aggression. Withdrawing energy brings relief, and allows us to settle down

more deeply. It's like we are withholding the energy these need to grow, and so like a plant we don't water, whatever feelings there are, whether they be of anger, or compulsion, and attachment, whither and then vanish. We can experience this as an enjoyable, temporary liberation, and this is onward leading. It allows for other possibilities.

It's with good reason that modern teachers warn us of what they call spiritual bypassing. This is where a person avoids what is difficult, and maybe even believes they have overcome that problem, only to have it return. Buddhism is deeper than modern psychology though, and only those who meditate know and experience its deeper benefits.

From letting go, as a provisional means, we are able to settle more deeply, touching peace in a new way, and being nourished by that. Beyond that even, by cultivating insight, we are able to uproot the causes of suffering themselves. In *The Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree* Buddhadasa Bhikkhu outlines the progressive method in full:

The Buddha spoke first of nekkhamadhatu (the element of renunciation) as the cause for the withdrawal from sensuality;

Seeing nekkhamadhatu, the element of renunciation, is the cause for the withdraw from sensuality because it is its antithesis. Seeing the element that is the antithesis of sensuality is called seeing nekkhamadhatu. Being unconsumed by the fire of sensuality is nekkhamadhatu. The mind that withdraws from sensuality is a mind that contains nekkhamadhatu.

The Buddha wanted us to completely withdraw from those things, to use nekkhamadhatu as the means to withdraw from sensuality, to use arupadhatu (the formless element) as the means to withdraw from absorptions of the fine-material plane, and finally to use nirodhadhatu (the element of cessation) as the means to withdraw from the conditioned, so that all the manifold types of confusion converge in emptiness. (the wisdom realizing liberation)

This is what is offered in full by taking up the skillful means of letting go.

May all beings benefit.

From The Peace Beyond, by Ajahn Chah

We sit in meditation to establish peacefulness and cultivate mental energy... Insight meditation is sitting in samadhi itself.

At some places they say, 'Now we are going to sit in samadhi, after that we'll do insight meditation.' Don't divide them like this!

Tranquillity is the base which gives rise to wisdom, and wisdom is the fruit of tranquillity. To say that now we are going to do calm meditation, later we'll do insight you can't do that! You can only divide them in speech...

Morality is the father and mother of Dhamma. In the beginning we must have morality. Morality is peace. This means that one does no wrongdoings in body or speech. When we don't do wrong then we don't get agitated; when we don't become agitated then peace and collectedness arise within the mind.

So we say that morality, concentration and wisdom are the path on which all the Noble Ones have walked to enlightenment. They are all one.

Morality is concentration, concentration is morality. Concentration is wisdom, wisdom is concentration.

It's like a mango. When it's a flower we call it a flower. When it becomes a fruit we call it a mango. When it ripens we call it a ripe mango. It's all one mango but it continually changes.

The big mango grows from the small mango, the small mango becomes a big one. You can call them different fruits or all one fruit.

Morality, concentration and wisdom are related like this. In the end it's all the path that leads to enlightenment.

Renounce and Enjoy, from the Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center

In Gandhi the Man Eknath Easwaran, a Hindu meditation teacher tells this pithy story:

One American journalist who had been following Gandhi's work for years with mounting admiration finally asked him with the terseness of a newsman: "Can you tell me the secret of your life in three words?"

"Yes!" chuckled Gandhi, who could never resist a challenge. "Renounce and enjoy!"

Gandhi's response came to mind this week as I was pondering several comments by Thich Nhat Hanh about the Fifth Mindfulness Training, on mindful consumption:

Many of us think that happiness comes from consuming something, from bringing something from outside into us, but in fact, happiness comes from inside. When we can remove the materials of anger, violence, hatred, and despair from our souls, then happiness will open like a lotus flower, or like a rose. The happiness of a flower does not come from outside, the happiness of a flower comes from inside the flower, and our happiness is the same. ...

It's not because we eat a lot that we feel happy, especially when we eat poisonous things that make our body heavier and heavier every day. Our souls are the same: it's not because we digest many films, many books, many magazines that we feel happy, it's because we are able to remove the poisons from our souls. That is what listening to a Dharma talk is for.

Listening to a Dharma talk is to take the misunderstanding out of us, to take the ignorance out of us, to take the craving out of us, to take the anger and hatred out of us. The more we take out of us, the more our hearts will feel light and free, and happiness will be possible.

- From a Dharma Talk on August 2, 1998, in Plum Village, France.

There are three distinctions that help me understand and appreciate both Gandhi's and Thay's teachings.

First, it is useful to distinguish between ordinary happiness, the pleasure or happiness of having our physical and emotional cravings fulfilled, and a deeper, more stable happiness. Pema Chodron, in *The Places That Scare You*, calls it "The joy of happiness without a hangover". It is "a happiness that's completely devoid of clinging and craving." Thich Nhat Hanh, calls it "the joy and happiness that arise from a peaceful mind."

Second, although I can trace out many benefits that come to myself and the environment when I consume mindfully, such as when I eat organic greens, or reduce my carbon footprint, it is not these outcomes alone that nourish my deep, stable happiness. Rather, the deeper happiness arises primarily from the positive intentions and mind-states I nourish in myself, such as generosity, compassion, and love. "Happiness comes from inside."

Third, it is hard to let go of the culturally induced illusions of consumerism. Many of us continue to cling to our desires for something from outside that we believe will bring us lasting happiness, such as an ideal partner, a better job, an inexhaustible movie collection, or better fitting clothes. Or we become accustomed to the comforts we already have and are afraid of losing them. The problem is not necessarily the things we desire, but rather our implicit expectation that these things will bring us "happiness without a hangover."

A radical change occurs when we are clear about the roots of deep happiness. We give less energy to our personal material and psychic cravings and give more energy to nourishing our positive intentions and mind-states.
Easwaran says of Gandhi:

While he was pursuing his own career Gandhi had no access to the immense storehouse of creativity which lies within. It was only when he began to live for others that he found himself bursting with almost unharnessable power.

When we lack clarity, we wobble and act half-heartedly. Like the Hungry Ghosts of Asian folklore, we may feel restless and lost, never quite satisfied.

This Thursday evening , after our meditation period, we will recite the Five Mindfulness Trainings and explore the interconnections between renunciation, joy, and the Fifth Mindfulness Training:

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming.

I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriment, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness.

I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products that contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations.

I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing, and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment.

I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption.

I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society, and the Earth.

On Sacrifice, by Ani Tenzin Palmo

The Buddha said that it's greed, not anger, that keeps us on the wheel. Nobody's chaining us down: we're clinging on with both hands. Many people come to me saying that they want to eradicate anger; it's not difficult to see that anger makes us suffer, but very rarely do people ask me how to be rid of desire.

We have to cultivate contentment with what we have. We really don't need much. When you know this, the mind settles down. Cultivate generosity. Delight in giving. Learn to live lightly. In this way, we can begin to transform what is negative into what is positive. This is how we start to grow up.

* * *

We need to give up something. We can't have it all. We can't try to layer wisdom on top of confusion. The spiritual path is about what we give up, not what we get. We seem to always want to get something- spiritual insights or experiences- as a kind of commodity. We sign up for a retreat and expect that we'll have this or that wonderful experience or this or that special teaching, but don't these wisdom traditions teach us that, in essence, there's nothing to get? *We need to give up what obscures the abiding wisdom and the abiding reality- the wisdom and reality that is already here.* That's the gospel of the Buddha, but I wonder if we're listening to it.

On Contentment

I remember coming across a small booklet on contentment when I was visiting a Buddhist monastery in Thailand, in the late 1990's. I read through it in one afternoon, astonished at some of the ideas that were so readily apparent - essentially that our world has been made crazy by wanting, and that we can *put it all down*, and experience true rest and well being. Why are we not taught this in school from an early age?

I vividly remember the experience I had, even looking back now, all these years later:

It was like I was inside a massive factory, the size of several city blocks, and looking up, I could see that all the gears had stopped. I even heard them hissing, as they slowed down and got still, and saw steam coming off of them. I marveled at the sight of it for some time, and I walked around the monastery grounds with that vision that day. All my plans, and their variations, my hopes, yearning, moving towards and away from people, and events, all my ambitions, all these stopped moving, fell silent, and a big space opened up inside of me, with a whole lot more room, and peace, and clarity...

I realized then that contentment is an experience that has to do with being satisfied with what is enough, and in fact *more than* enough.

Nekkhamma, from Wikipedia

Nekkhamma (Sanskrit: Naiṣkramya, नैष्काम्य) is a Pali word generally translated as "renunciation" or "the pleasure of renunciation" while also conveying more specifically "giving up the world and leading a holy life" or "freedom from lust, craving and desires." In Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path, nekkhamma is the first practice associated with "Right Intention." In the Theravada list of ten perfections, nekkhamma is the third practice of "perfection." It involves non-attachment (detachment) (or, letting go, or having let go).

In the Pali literature

Renunciation as right intention

In the Pali Canon, in a discourse in which the Buddha describes antecedents precipitating his Awakening, the Buddha divided his thoughts between those that impair discernment, cause affliction and deter one from Nirvana on the one hand, and those that have the opposite effect. In the former category, he included thoughts permeated with sensuality, ill-will and harmfulness; in the latter, thoughts permeated with renunciation, non-ill will and harmlessness:

Whatever a monk keeps pursuing with his thinking & pondering, that becomes the inclination of his awareness. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with renunciation, abandoning thinking imbued with sensuality, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with renunciation.

If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with non-ill will, abandoning thinking imbued with ill will, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with non-ill will. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with harmlessness, abandoning thinking imbued with harmfulness, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with harmlessness.

These latter three types of thought content- renunciation, non-ill will and harmlessness- comprise the traditional triadic definition of the Noble Eightfold Path's notion of "Right Intention" (Pali: sammā-saṅkappa; Skt.: samyak-saṃkalpa). For each of the former types of thought content- sensuality, ill will and harmfulness- the Buddha stated:

Whenever thinking imbued with sensuality [or ill will or harmfulness] had arisen, I simply abandoned it, destroyed it, dispelled it, wiped it out of existence...

Renunciation vs. sensuality

Elsewhere in the Canon, the Buddha more finely juxtaposes the pursuit of thoughts regarding sensuality (kāma) and those regarding renunciation (nekkhamma):

There is the case where the mind of a monk, when attending to sensual pleasures, doesn't leap up at sensual pleasures, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or released in sensual pleasures. But when attending to renunciation, his mind leaps up at renunciation, grows confident, steadfast, & released in renunciation.

When his mind is rightly-gone, rightly developed, has rightly risen above, gained release, and become disjoined from sensual pleasures, then whatever fermentations, torments, & fevers there are that arise in dependence on sensuality, he is released from them. He does not experience that feeling. This is expounded as the escape from sensual pleasures.

Renunciation as a bodhisatta practice

As indicated above, in a Pali discourse, the Buddha identified renunciation as part of his path to Awakening. In the Buddhavamsa, Jataka tales and exegetical literature, renunciation is codified as the third of ten practices of "perfection" (pāramī)

Contemporary elaborations

Renunciation's benefit

Bhikkhu Bodhi (1999) elaborates on the various and ultimate benefits of Buddhist renunciation:

"Contemplating the dukkha inherent in desire is one way to incline the mind to renunciation. Another way is to contemplate directly the benefits flowing from renunciation. To move from desire to renunciation is not, as might be imagined, to move from happiness to grief, from abundance to destitution. It is to pass from gross, entangling pleasures to an exalted happiness and peace, from a condition of servitude to one of self-mastery.

Desire ultimately breeds fear and sorrow, but renunciation gives fearlessness and joy. It promotes the accomplishment of all three stages of the threefold training: it purifies conduct, aids concentration, and nourishes the seed of wisdom. The entire course of practice from start to finish can in fact be seen as an evolving process of renunciation culminating in Nibbana [Pali; Skt: Nirvana] as the ultimate stage of relinquishment, 'the relinquishing of all foundations of (samsaric) existence'."

Right Intention as Renunciation, by Danielle

The Buddha taught that Right Intention is three-fold, so today I want to talk about Right Intention as renunciation. I know renunciation sounds harsh. Nobody ever hears the phrase, “I renounce you!” as a good thing. We conjure images of not having any fun, giving up all our possessions, and praying or meditating all day. It feels negative and constricting. So it may come as a surprise to you to imagine renunciation as *the path to freedom*, but that’s precisely what is intended.

The opposite of renunciation in the Buddha’s teaching is desire. When we cling to desire, we suffer - we’re back to that First Noble Truth again. The Buddha says that although the world encourages you to desire things and to go after getting them, he advises the opposite. Try not to need anything too strongly, and when you do have the desire to go get something, try to let it go instead.

Of course, this doesn’t pertain to everything. We need to eat. We need security. Not all desire is bad, but that endless grasping leads us directly to suffering. Because we can’t...always get...what we waaaant. And what we want isn’t necessarily what we need.

When we inspect our thoughts, we realize the difference between empty desire and healthy desire. Our goal, of course, is to let go of the empty or unnecessary desires, but we must go about this work wisely because here’s the thing: desires are very sneaky. The minute we try to let go, desires clamp down with an even mightier force. It’s like telling someone not to think of a dancing dog. Right now, you’ve got the image of a dancing dog in your mind.

So to succeed at renunciation, we have to work with our thoughts gently and indirectly. This is why strict plans- whether diet or exercise or work goals- can often backfire. We come in too strong, and the desire pushes back even stronger.

The intention of renunciation is NOT repression. Repression only pushes our desire down further, where it can- and will, eventually- do even more harm.

So the key to the intention of renunciation is understanding.

When we learn to see those desires in a different way, we may find they don't have the same hold over us. Notice how they lead to suffering. See where it keeps us from freedom. Envision a better desire in its place.

Bhikkhu Bodhi says what we need to use is "wise consideration." In wise consideration, we really investigate the long-term effects, the hidden reasons, the pain or emptiness behind our desires.

He says,

Real renunciation is not a matter of compelling ourselves to give up things still inwardly cherished, but of changing our perspective on them so that they no longer bind us.

When we see how our desires hinder our deeper intentions, often we feel a sense of release around them. Bhikkhu Bodhi says when this happens, *attachments are shed like the leaves of a tree, naturally and spontaneously.*

That's lasting change. That's natural and healthy renunciation.

From Renunciation, by Ani Tenzin Palmo, from *Into the Heart of Life*

Renunciation in Tibetan is *nge jung*. Nge jung expresses the sense of definitely leaving a place. It means *to get out*. Renunciation does not have the same connotation in Tibetan as it does in English, in which there may be pain attached. In English, for example, you would say, he renounced his fatherland; he renounced his wealth; he renounced his patronage. There is always a sense here of giving up, but with a kind of pulling up and out by the roots. In other words, renunciation gives the sense of regretfully turning one's back on something which is desirable. Therefore, in Buddhist circles, when someone says you have to renounce something, everybody makes a face and says, "Uggh!"

The Tibetan sense of renunciation is a little different. For example, if you were to tell your children that they have to give up playing with their toys, they would find it very painful, but as children grow up they lose their fascination for these toys. They outgrow them. Leaving their toys behind does not seem like renunciation to them, it's just a matter of growing up. Likewise, in the spring and summer when the trees are full of leaves, there is resistance if we try to pull a leaf from a branch. But when autumn comes, the leaves spontaneously and of themselves part from the tree.

Renunciation is closely aligned with this sense of parting. Outwardly it may seem like one is giving up something, and there might even be pain, but inwardly, interest in these things has been outgrown. Things fall away naturally.

In the 1960s and '70s there were Westerners who left for India to look for spiritual truths, and on that journey there were those who came from affluent and well-endowed families. They had a lot to give up. They slept in dirty hotels, ate quite inedible food, and with joy, because they were getting so much more in return. It did not seem to them that what they were giving up was of value.

When the Lord Buddha left his palace and all his wealth and family, there was not a twinge of regret. I am sure the only thing he did feel was a pang in his heart for the welfare of his wife and young son, but he was going toward spiritual liberation, which is so much vaster, so much greater than anything he was leaving behind. Even the loss of his small son paled before all that there was to gain, and not just for himself, but for all beings. Some feminists get quite upset with the Buddha for having left behind his wife and small son, but had he not renounced his princely life, then for a start, we would not be inquiring into the nature of our lives in this way.

In our life we have to set values. *What really matters to us in this life?* If we don't ask ourselves such questions, we just meander, we just try to keep comfortable. In order to have a definite direction, we need to set a {clearly defined} purpose for ourselves. We need to ask ourselves, *What would be a life well lived?* Once we have set our purpose, we have to work out what things lead us along on that path, and what things are merely distractions.

Many people ask how enlightenment can be achieved, and a few, very few, ask how they may develop genuine renunciation. Such questions are like asking how one may grow a bodhi tree in one's heart. Now, in order to grow a bodhi tree properly, we need first to prepare the ground. We have a plot of land, and that is called our heart, our heart center. As with any other plot of ground in which you are trying to grow a plant, first you have to protect it.

We may protect the ground of our heart through the observance of five basic ethical principles, or precepts...

So now we have made a fence around our garden, but we must also consider the ground itself. In general, this ground has hardly been worked for many years. It is full of good and bad habits, and it is full of judgments and prejudices which have never been queried. It is full of absorption in *me*, and full of things that are *mine*, and the ground is full of memories that we have never seriously sorted through.

When you want to travel lightly, carrying everything on your back, you sort through all your things. You have to decide what is essential and what is not essential. You have to make clear choices, and so it is with all the clutter and junk that sits in the mind.

In traditional texts, the idea of renunciation of *nge jung*, is closely associated with the idea of leaving one's homeland, because these ideals are based on the traditional Buddhist view that we should go from home life to the homeless life and henceforth Wander. If you read traditional texts, like *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rinpoche, you know that it is regarded as a sine qua non of the spiritual life that the first thing you do is leave your home and wander off. You leave behind home, family, friends, possessions, and so forth, and away you go. Naturally, many people, not least Tibetans, read that and ignore it! The most they manage is to move in to the local monastery and arrange for support by their family, but foreigners when they read these books take such views very seriously and become quite alarmed. Because they have no intention of leaving behind their family, friends, and country, they feel that they have failed before they even started, but it is not things or people which are the problem- it is our attachment to things and people.

The point is not so much outer renunciation, leaving home and family, what we need to work on is inner renunciation. Genuine renunciation comes when we outgrow our fascination with and involvement in worldly things- when we outgrow what had once seemed so important to us...

Disorganized, in total disarray, the garden of our mind contains some very precious plants, but mostly it is all overladen with junk, and so we have three choices: we could live in the garbage dump, and leave it at that. Or we could say, "Aha! Garbage dump," and begin to pull out the pieces of garbage one by one, looking at each piece: "Oh, that is interesting!", but of course this takes a long time, and in fact, since the amount of garbage we have been accumulating is endless, it will take us an endless amount of time to throw it all out, especially as more keeps coming in!

Our third option is to recognize our garbage as mulch, as compost, and in this way feed the precious plants.

In our nunnery we have a lot of vegetable peelings and tea leaves and other material which we need to throw away. The only sensible thing to do with it is to create a compost heap. Initially, when the nunnery was founded, the girls just threw it outside and it ended up as a great big smelly disgusting hill. So we invited an expert to teach them how to make compost properly. The essential points consist of aerating it and putting in little worms, but I won't go into detail here. It makes a good analogy, though, to dealing with the rubbish in our minds. because if we just leave it there, building up and accumulating, we end up living in the middle of a garbage heap, within which we try to make a little space for ourselves to feel at home. And of course our society does not help at all, because practically everything it contributes is just more garbage. So the point is, instead of allowing all of it to become just this solid, compact load of junk, we need to aerate it. If it can be aerated through pure awareness, then of itself, without any effort from our side, the garbage turns into this very friable and highly fertile compost which can then be used to grow our bodhi tree...

The problem is that most people feel cozy enough in samsara. They do not really have the genuine aspiration to go beyond samsara; they just want samsara to be a little bit better. It is quite interesting that "samsara" became the name of a perfume, and it is like that. It seduces us into thinking that it is okay: *Samsara is not so bad- it smells nice!*

The underlying motivation to go beyond samsara is very rare, even for people who go to Dharma centers. There are many people who learn to meditate and so forth, but with the underlying motive that they hope to make themselves feel better, and if it ends up making them feel worse, instead of realizing that this may be a good sign, they think there is something wrong with Dharma. We are always looking to make ourselves comfortable in the prison house. We might think that if we get the cell wall

painted a pretty shade of pale green, and put in a few pictures, it won't be a prison any more.

Traditionally, renunciation is combined with the purification of spiritual motivation known as *bodhichitta*. *Bodhi* basically means enlightenment, and *chitta* means heart or mind. So *bodhichitta* means the thought or the aspiration of enlightenment. There are two basic reasons we follow a spiritual path and look for liberation. One reason is that we want to be free. Let's take the traditional example of a burning house: your whole house is on fire, and you run out from it, but all your family- your partner, your children, your parents, even your pet dog- are all still inside. What are you going to do? You don't just say, "Well, I'm out. So, too bad. Do your best to get out, too." Naturally this leads to the second basic reason for following a spiritual path: we will try to pull them out as well.

Let's take another example: suppose there is a huge swamp, and we are all drowning in it. Somehow, through tremendous effort, you manage to pull yourself out onto dry land. What are you going to do? Do you turn to face your family and your friends, do you turn to everyone still drowning in the swamp, and say, "Well folks, sorry. I am free on dry land, and if you really struggle hard, you can get out too- bye!" Even in a worldly situation, if one were on dry land, one would use that position to try to pull the others out.

Likewise, on the spiritual path, it is understood that to aspire for merely one's own spiritual well-being and freedom is actually inherently selfish. In this light we may find that the only real reason to strive spiritually for ever-deepening wisdom and compassion is our wish to help others likewise gain liberation. This aspiration, this complete turnaround in our whole motivation for striving on the spiritual path, is called *bodhichitta*.

Often people who regard themselves as being on a so-called spiritual path tend to become rather self-preoccupied: *my* practice, *my* guru, *my* path, *my* experiences, *my* realizations. While the spiritual path is intended to lead us to decrease and eventually to abandon completely our obsession with the

ego, very often people use it to inflate the ego. They become very ambitious. Spiritual practice becomes for them just another form of achievement.

Now, it is not just a matter of getting a promotion at your firm, or earning more money, or getting a bigger car or a bigger house. It is also a matter of which high lamas you meet; how many super-secret initiations you receive that nobody else ever receives, all the special inner instructions and realizations which you have obtained; how long your own retreat was, compared with that of others; and how your own retreat site was located in a yet more remote place. *Bodhichitta counteracts all that, because we are not practicing for ourselves but for others.*

Becoming a bodhisattva, a spiritual hero, is not somehow a quick fix. The bodhisattva vow is a total commitment, through all one's lives, in whatever form, to be here for the benefit of others until samsara is emptied...

Of course we cannot start pulling all these endless beings out of the swamp if we are still drowning in the swamp ourselves.

To use an analogy, suppose we want to be doctors. First of all, we have to go to medical school for many years to study how to use medicine properly. You might say, "No, no, no, I can't waste that time; that would be really selfish. I have to go and help these poor people; they are sick, and they need me!" You might grab a bag full of medicine, and a scalpel, and rush off to help. There is a lot of compassion in that, but it lacks wisdom, as you might give the wrong medicine to people, and heaven knows what you might do with the scalpel!

The intention is good, but the point is that such actions may do more harm than good because one lacks skillful means. Whereas if one has patience and goes to medical school, studies hard, and practices under skilled teachers, one can find an infinite number of people out there to help.

Milarepa was a great Tibetan yogi of the eleventh century. One of his students said, "Look here, all these people are suffering. It is very selfish for us just to go away and meditate. We should be out helping people."

Milarepa replied:

For as long as sky and space exist, there will be sentient beings for us to help.

- but in order to help you must first be able to help, and that comes through practice and study. From a Buddhist point of view, as we come back again and again, any knowledge, and especially any understanding or realization that we gain in one lifetime, will be carried over into the next life. This is why meditation and study come very easily for some and not for others.

Bodhichitta should underlie everything that we do. Our life on this planet is not merely for our own sake, our own comfort and enjoyment. Our life is not even just for the sake of our own spiritual progress. We are here to learn and practice and to get into a position to help others learn and practice.

Inherently we are all buddhas. We are completely perfect. We just have to learn how to recognize our true, absolutely immaculate, wise, and compassionate nature. We are not looking to take something from outside ourselves. Renunciation really is just a matter of letting go. We are opening up to what we already have we are, opening up to the fullness within us. We are trying simply to awaken to our original nature.

I carry within me
medicine for the whole world,
but if I don't take it myself,
I'm not going to make it

To recover my sight, and strength,
to be able to continue on this road
to the fulfillment of my purpose

What I would share with all,
I need to practice, and realize

Entering the gate of the Dharma, what exactly are the blessings we are looking to attain in our mindstream when we request a Dharma teaching and then engage in its practice?

It is the renunciation of samsara.

- Yangthang Rinpoche

Notes from Letting go: Nekkhamma Parami, by Ajahn Sucitto

From Parami - Ways to Cross Life's Floods

The previous chapter introduced the renunciation pāramī as one of the first three perfections. I'll add some more on renunciation, because what it entails can be misunderstood, and its value underestimated. Far from being the route to starvation, *renunciation is the path to realizing fulfillment.*

Examining Needs and Wants

If the first three perfections (Generosity, ethics, and renunciation) establish a vehicle in which to cross over the floods, renunciation also takes us further: it pushes the boat away from the ground that the floods break over. It takes the mind to a more stable place, where it can gain access to great ease and clarity...

Feeding on the senses remains a natural inclination for us until we have realized something more fulfilling... That's why true renunciation, rather than repression, can only develop dependent on finding fulfillment through cultivating the mind.

This isn't to deny that material support in terms of adequate food, clothing, shelter and medicine is essential for human life; but to recognize that 'adequate' may mean forty pairs of shoes to one person or a yearly pay of millions of dollars to another. Even then, the sense of 'adequate,' 'enough,' 'satisfied' keeps slipping away from the outreach of the clenching hand into 'another one,' 'a little more.' The reason for this lies in the clenching reflex itself: when we grasp, we tighten up, lose perspective and limit the mind's potential...

On the other hand, cultivating our spiritual potential gradually eliminates the sense of lack and thereby grants contentment and inner strength... To at

least attune to the spirit of this cultivation checks the tide of ignorance: we stop ignoring the evidence of dukkha...

In this psychological domain, renunciation is in two stages: letting go (*cago*) and complete relinquishment (*vossagga*)...

Renunciation in its most obvious sense entails introspective enquiry: to look into one's wants and wisely translate appetite into relevant needs. This *wise discernment* is a vital requirement in the world of the total, round-the-clock, internet market. So keep asking yourself, 'Do I really need this?'

When you enquire into needs rather than wants, you'll find that needs are simple. To me, clarity, balance and the ability to bring forth the good seem to be needs- along with the more relative needs (time to meditate, adequate teachings and material support) that make this possible. {Discerning one's} needs tends to simplify and take you through the jungle of fantasy to a place of value...

Therefore it's important to keep reviewing what is necessary, using reflections such as:

What I get in terms of my mind states is the result of how I act.

To support cultivating the mind, there's a relative need for food, shelter, clothes, medicines and so on, and relative needs change as situations change... *To judge current needs takes an ongoing cultivation of wisdom.*

Therefore, when one looks into the impressions and aims that come up in life, it's good to recollect: 'This seems to be how things are right now, and this seems to be the direction to go in. What is necessary here?, and how much do I want to commit to that?' Then there is an opportunity to bring wisdom into one's life in a down-to-earth way. This process of enquiring into relative needs, rather than denying that there are any, is one of the

hallmarks of the Buddha's approach to renunciation. It's a gentle and reflective practice, not an ascetic ideal. This is an important point...

This entails questioning:

Is holding onto this producing suffering in myself and others?

From what urge, flood or unconscious reflex does it stem?

Can that be let go of?

And how?...

This is the enquiry into the Four Noble Truths, the heart of the Buddha's teaching.

As we enter the turbulence of meeting the floods (of attachments, becoming, and annihilation), often in the direct contemplation of mind, we meet who we seem to be at any given time and check out what that identity is based on... Then it can be addressed. So *renunciation is a doorway to meditation, not a denial or repression.*

Repressing the sensual instinct just by verbally condemning it doesn't go very far. Even when you want to be pure and non-attached, irrational emotions can suddenly trip you up. Instead, rather than focusing on the objects that desire brings up, we can develop the skill of directly looking into and *through* the energy of desire.

Through cultivating the mind, we can steer that energy along channels of goodwill or embodied calm that give it a longer-lasting well-being than the quick fix of sensuality.

Notice in a straightforward way how the energy of the floods tosses the heart around.

Then, rather than react to this, judge it or even to try to fix it, a mind that is attuned to renunciation knows the ‘no-option’ attitude: ‘This is the way it is right now.’ That clear acknowledgment and emotional acceptance also help to shift the focus to a deeper place beneath the floods

So just as these floods manifest in terms of thoughts, emotions and energies, the way of reversing them is threefold: intellectual, emotional and energetic. Having an intellectual understanding of the illusory nature of attachment and the benefits of letting go is a good start, but *you need to have the emotional acceptance of their presence*. That truthfulness collects and focuses the mind and makes it capable of turning the energy of the floods around. You don’t cross over through good ideas alone. Instead, the energy of the floods has to be met...

This is why this stage of meeting the flood with pāramī is so dynamic and transformative...

Being willing to acknowledge and meet the floods takes great heart...

As we witness the limitations of knowing Dhamma through our ideas, we grow in the emotional strength and capacity to relate to the floods. We come to a more measured and patient approach, and we don’t get hung up on being or not being something. Then we can be with the what is happening in a clear but non-judgemental way.

For purity, you have to transcend rather than repress the flood..

The detail of the practice is that letting go is dependent on cultivating strengths and clarity. Release requires relative fulfillment.

*In terms of Dhamma, this fulfillment is the flowering of the seven factors of Enlightenment: mindfulness, introspective investigation, energy, rapture, ease, concentration, and equanimity. This may sound like a tall order, but

these are the factors that start to form as you meet rather than react to, or get swept away by, your personal world.

So when you want to know yourself, rather than affirm, deny, please or annihilate yourself, that interest supports mindfulness and introspective investigation. You bring a steady witnessing to your mental content, you hold it in mind, gently, and enquire into it:

Is this useful; does it lead to my welfare or that of another?

How stable and reliable is this thought or emotion?

This supports the pāramī: you see how certain intentions, such as generosity and ethical clarity are beneficial, and so on. The pāramī then support the Enlightenment Factors, because they give you worthy intentions to keep energising, just as you withdraw from unskilful ones. And this brings clarity and happiness to the mind.

In meditation, when you focus on this happiness it becomes rapture- an uplifted, suffusive energy- and ease, a contented feeling. Focusing on these brings around concentration, and that supports equanimity — an evenness of energy with a spacious feel.

These Enlightenment factors are transpersonal in that the habitual identity, delineated by skeins of thought, mood swings and reactions, is in abeyance. But *the leading edge and the generator of these factors is through the correct handling of the personal world* with its choices, responsibilities and random input. The transpersonal is correctly entered through handling one's personal life in the light of the perfections.

Quotes and Suggestions on Renunciation

Let go of the drive for pleasure. See how it's peaceful to put aside worldliness: then there's nothing you have to hold onto and nothing you have to push away.

(Snp. 1098)

... the pleasure and joy that come through the five strands of sense- pleasure ... are grubby, coarse and cheap ... when, uninvolved with sense- pleasure and unskilful states, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in meditative absorption ... this is the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of non-involvement, of peace and of Enlightenment.

(M. 66.19-20)

They don't grieve over the past, Nor do they yearn for the future;

They live only in the present:

That's why their face is serene...

(S. 1.10)

Renunciation brings clarity with regards to needs and desires. It has a strengthening effect as it offers us the chance to stand free of consumer pressure and status pressure. It is also a tonic for the heart and a requirement for meditation, because it returns our attention to a here and now which is easeful because it's not about having things or being someone special. This present is arising without our making it do so. Letting ideas and moods arise and pass in the present, in the spirit of kindly acceptance, leads to insight and a peaceful abiding.

All that is mine, beloved and pleasing,

will become otherwise, will become separated from me. -

True or false?

*Stop work when, or before, your energy runs out.

Consider the sense of 'not finished yet.' When is it *ever* finished? Train yourself to work within these guidelines; be prepared to leave projects unfinished today, and rather than try to complete them, spend a few minutes tidying up and making it easier to start again the next day or work period.

{foresight is a type of wisdom..}

The Graduated Path, by Ajahn Sucitto

If you had to specify the central feature of the Buddha's teaching, what would you say? Some might say 'liberation' or 'nibbāna'; others might come up with 'The Four Noble Truths'; some might consider wisdom and compassion to be the essential feature of the Buddha's teaching; others might reckon that it all centres on mindfulness. All of these points are important, but what covers everything that the Buddha taught is *a Path*.

The Buddha didn't always teach mindfulness, the Four Noble Truths or nibbāna: not everyone wants nibbāna, or is even clear what that means; we can all be interested in wisdom and compassion but not know what encourages them to manifest; and mindfulness is just a tool that can be used in a number of ways, not all of which take you to where the Buddha was aiming. But *a Path*, a way of consciously getting from where you feel you are to somewhere better, whether that means just being able to give up smoking or drinking, or being more at ease or less anxious – that's always relevant to everyone. It's inspiring to even think that there is a Path, and that life isn't a series of circumstances over which one has no control, and that we can do more than just wish or hope that things will get better.

The Buddha's teachings on his Path – which varied dependent on the interests and understanding of whoever he was addressing – always have that direct and practical slant that means you can put them into practice. They're not just inspired revelations, or beliefs that you have to adopt. Instead they take you from where you are right now through a developmental process to a consistent result. This 'opanāyiko' (meaning 'pertinent' 'furthering' or 'onward leading') quality is a feature of the teachings; and the Buddha specified that they should be taught as a graduated Path:

Teach others Dhamma thinking: I will give a talk on the graduated path. (A.5.159)

That is, teach in a step-by-step way so that people can follow and experience the results for themselves.

Many Buddhists will be familiar with the Eightfold Noble Path, but this is just one example of the Path, one that was given to those whose minds were already prepared through training. For those who had no previous training and weren't committed to his teaching, the Buddha presented something of more general relevance: a way of turning the heart towards its values and strengths. Through taking up this, a person would gain the view and the assurance that there is a way of progress, to be practised in oneself, and that it leads to the well-being of liberation – even if this is the relative liberation of not feeling so helpless.

This initial presentation is called the 'graduated path': it begins with generosity and sharing (*dāna*), and goes on to morality or integrity (*sīla*) and then, through pointing out the unsatisfying and stressful nature of materialism, encourages simplicity, restraint and renunciation (*nekkhamma*). As these values become firmly established, the mind comes out of wrong views and fantasies and is ready for the teachings on the Four Noble Truths.

Although this graduated path may seem to be of a basic nature that we could easily get, or even skip over for more esoteric teachings, I don't think the Buddha wasted his time in presenting soft options. Instead I consider this graduated path to be essential, to be constantly cultivated, and of far reaching significance for the world in general. Even after forty years of practice, I still seek and enjoy development in terms of this graduated path, looking for how I can give and share to people and other creatures, to how I can broaden my field of ethical concern, and how I can live in a way that uses material resources with wise restraint. And as anyone who sees the effect of unbridled materialism will agree, there is a need for all of us to live in accord with these values.

To practise sharing and cooperation and harmlessness and respect to all forms of life, as well as aligning our use of planetary resources to what is sustainable for the biosphere is an increasingly obvious responsibility. Either we put a check our desires or the planet deteriorates and we're in very deep trouble. It's good to see that many people now get it: there are international movements and gatherings that indicate a shift of attitude that echoes what the Buddha meant by *dāna*, *sīla* and *nekkhamma*.

On the other end of the spectrum, with regard to personal liberation and the realization of *nibbāna*, the sensitivity and strengths that the graduated path develop in the mind are a necessity to counteract the push of self-obsession and bias. Liberation means that in any degree, in any circumstance, that push is lessened – even if it's just to the extent that we're less self-critical, or less compulsively busy. Taken as a whole then, there is never a time when the teachings on giving, on non-abuse and on developing a life beyond material self-interest aren't relevant.

Generosity is where this Path begins, because everyone enjoys a chance to be generous. Whether this is through offering things, service, voluntary work, teaching or just attention, generosity makes us feel rich, creative and an essential part of other people's lives. It also implies sharing, because for *dāna* to manifest, you have to connect to other people and thereby establish a basis of cooperation.

For instance in the monastery we live as a community: acting in accord with communal needs, interacting with respect, following communal routines, sharing time and living space – this is a big step for individuals to undertake. And we try to contain that community with reference to something sacred.

Giving is the easiest and most accessible sense for that reference: our daily group meditations begin with an act of offering candles, incense and flowers to the Triple Gem. It's a ritual whereby one person physically makes the offering on behalf of the group, but everyone puts their heart

into an expression of lifting up and honouring the sacred through that ritual. It symbolises what the training is about: you are offered space, facilities, and daily requisites; and in return you share what you can with others.

Generosity is an easy value to attune to: it is the standard expression across all cultures by which people greet, celebrate and take leave, and the development of humanity is in line with the development of generosity to include a wider field of concern. Currently there has never been a time in human history when there were so many philanthropic institutions and organisations offering voluntary service to those in need (including non-human species). Why do people do this? I believe it's a natural part of being human: when we are generous and sharing we experience some of the fullness of heart that is our true potential. But it's a potential that we lose touch with; this is why the Buddha taught it:

If people only knew, as I do, the results of giving and sharing, they wouldn't eat without having given. (Iti. 1.26)

Check it out for yourself: whenever you feel depressed or lost in your problems, any act of dāna is a real tonic. It makes you feel happy in a quiet and satisfying way.

It's much the same with *sīla* – which is based on the recognition that others count, that they are of a value equal to myself. This value is the partner and support to the cultivation of kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity; it is the basis of empathy, of 'to others as to myself', rather than of moralizing righteousness. We may take five, eight, ten or a hundred or more training precepts, but it all comes down to this same principle. We establish full awareness of our actions, recognizing that every action has effects.

Ajahn Chah once summed up the entire Vinaya, the samana's *sīla*, as one thing: to live with conscience and concern (*hiri-ottappa*). His guide and

inspiration, Ajahn Mun, said he himself only kept one precept: to maintain watchfulness over the mind. And you can note, in terms of actions, when and how the mind slides into blurring full awareness, with the mood, 'this doesn't matter', or 'I don't have time to consider', or 'well, everybody does this' or whatever fudge comes with that blurring. So your hand reaches out for a drink ... or it cuts corners, or shrugs off responsibility. Even when there are few effects for others, fudging and shrugging off weakens full awareness and becomes habitual. So *sīla* is not a legal matter, it's based on recognizing our potential to either develop or to lose clarity, self-respect, and a firm foundation for one's own welfare and that of others.

True human development is also synonymous with the growth of this ethical responsibility... So when it comes to values that support your own heart, *sīla* makes you feel strong. You're reliable, a source of confidence for others, and you know it.

'Renunciation' as *nekkhamma* is generally translated, is the consequence of noting that, although generosity and ethical integrity both gain ready acceptance in the sphere of human values, there's a lot of hoarding and *non* distribution of wealth, and a lot of killing, stealing, lying, sexual abuse, and intoxicating going on. The Buddha attributed this to the instinctive pull of the senses, the glow and glitter that craving paints on goods, on bodies, on status and on power. Just to see how liberally and fantastically the world of stuff and prestige is painted – this itself is an eye-opener. The very need for a barrage of advertising in order to keep us consuming more indicates that if we were more attuned to things as they really are we wouldn't buy half the cosmetics, trinkets and clothes that we do.

{or have plastic surgery - the denial of aging and death}

So I admire women who don't dye their hair or starve themselves skinny, or wear make-up: when are we going to accept that human bodies look like they really do? Bodies are bone, skin, meat, fat and hair. They're OK, but do they need to be held as fantasies that you have to spend an hour each day

weaving and pondering over? And even then walk around concerned about how you look? Isn't it more respectful and peaceful to accept bodies as they are?

The truth of the matter is that no material thing, however expensive, is gratifying; none of it will take us past old age, sickness, loneliness, anxiety and all the rest of it. That's actually a great spur to spiritual development! Because in our heart, soul or spirit, there is the possibility of a steady development of ease, richness and beauty, and we can relate to others through that and share some good heart.

But counteracting the pull of the senses takes both the development of that alternative source of well-being, and an understanding how the pull works. Because there's no doubt about it, sensory happiness is real and available. When we get the hit of a luscious taste, or the pull of an alluring sight, bells go off in our nervous systems. We get a lifting effect ... for a while ... and then a come-down... a pattern is established... the pattern of 'be attracted, grab hold, get lifted, (crash and) do it again'...

This is the process otherwise known as addiction. When you begin to see how compulsive, expensive, and from time to time downright degrading it is, you know you want to kick the habit, but how?

The skill of letting go is renunciation. It's not that you don't feel pleasure, but you know how to not take hold of it... Then you don't get pulled away. This skill is developed through stepping back (*viveka*) from sense contact and enriching the inner life.

Much of Buddhist meditation practice, in fact the Buddhist way of life, is about this; about generating happiness from an inner 'heart-base', or *citta*, to counter the attraction of the senses. This happiness is born from *viveka*, (discernment) whereby the mind feels clear, and is amplified by turning attention to a bright theme – such as kindness, or the calm of breathing in and out.

This ease ripens into deep composure or *samādhi*, whereby the mind is steered out of its habitual patterns...

As the mind settles, it starts to feel relaxed and buoyant. You feel good. Then you don't want the rougher ups and downs of the sensory pulls. From that basis you can review the objects of desire more dispassionately. For instance, human bodies: they're useful, and they don't have to be attractive – in fact life is a lot more peaceful when that's the case.

So the glitter and glow of sexual desire is an addition that you don't need, and to help change the pattern, putting in time reflecting on *what's under* the make-up, or *under* the skin – and how unbalanced the mesmerising effect of such superficial appearances can be – that is a worthwhile cultivation. Then as you're dealing with truth, your mind gets stronger in terms of focus and clarity, and your heart firms up.

Meditation on themes like this presents ways to release attachment to sense-pleasure, and as you do so, even for a few seconds, you get a glimpse of freedom.

That's the blessing of renunciation: it shows you what freedom is.

Seeing things as they are also helps us to be clear what we're up against. The ongoing cultivation of meditative attention puts us in touch with the pull of craving and the compulsive tendencies of the mind. You get to feel and know their spin, their voices and their feverish energy, and you notice that if you shift your attention from the 'feel-good' glow of the image or impression that pulls you, to the feeling of being pulled, you know that: 'this is stressful'.

Once you know that getting pulled around is unpleasant, undignified and pointless, you practise shifting focus and noticing this truth time and time again.

You don't waste time or focus in disapproval or feeling ashamed of yourself; you keep the mind clear of such excesses. Instead you note what it's like when your mind and heart comes out of the grip. It feels light and clean.

This then is the first taste of the Four Noble Truths: you see the unsatisfying for what it is, you understand what the unsatisfying is based on, you relinquish that basis and you know how that relinquishment comes about.

There are a couple of misperceptions about renunciation. One is that it is akin to asceticism, or entails a perverse attitude to the senses. This was a mistake that the Buddha made before his awakening, and he repudiated it many times in his teachings, saying that he taught a refined and stable source of pleasure and ease. This is because renunciation in the Buddhist sense of the word entails both wisdom and samādhi. It's not an ideological position, but a *putting aside of a lesser happiness in favour of a greater one*.

This process requires a clear recognition of the limitations of sensory data in guiding your life: how much contentment can arise when the heart is looking for that in transient sensations and their resultant perception and feelings? Necessary as they are for functioning, if the feelings that arise from sensations get clung to, they establish patterns of behaviour that can end up ruling your life, both in terms of providing a source for craving, and also by defining you as a being framed by the six senses, and the world of the senses is bound up with separation, decline and death. So for a meditator, the point is that although we're in touch with the sensory world, we don't have to take it in (or be taking in by it).

Another misperception is that renunciation doesn't really matter, or that renunciation is for samanās (monks and nuns) and that people 'in the world' can't do it. This is lazy thinking. Renunciation is no more a matter of lifestyle than craving is. Whoever you are, if you can't meet and let go of

craving, you're not tapping into the essential power and clarity of the human mind. Less on the surface can mean greater depth.

Whereas samanas have renunciation set up for them by the Vinaya (although unscrupulous ones still find ways to amass wealth) lay people have to take initiative: to put limit on how much TV they watch, and instead spend that extra time with real people or with citta (the mind, self-enquiry, and meditation). You can practise 'no shopping' days; or when you go to the store, to not buy anything other than what you had predetermined to buy.

We can do this; when circumstances require it, when there's a disaster or an emergency, we can drop stuff and let go. Most of the time we don't think we're in an emergency, but we are. Broadly speaking, any of us can die at any moment, and only a strong and uncluttered mind will get past the gates of death unscathed. *Now is the time to learn letting go.*

And even before that great test, every day we're threatened with anxiety, liable to experience grief or malice at the loss of what we're holding onto, and often confused as to what life is about. So we need to have less on the surface of our lives in order to give fuller attention to the depths.

So a wise person is then one who learns to review and separate what they want from what they need; and as they do so, certain truths come home. Wants spin and rush through the mind and multiply, but needs get simpler and steadier. We need food and shelter, friendship, clarity (and whatever other values you may favour), and in this list, you'll notice that a big part of those needs can be met by one's own mind.

Consumerism on the other hand weakens our inner potential. Its message is that through buying the latest stuff we can feel happy and also fit in with the more vibrant section of society. You can see this through the models and examples that are presented in advertisements. Even the act of making a phone call is presented through images of (generally young, good

looking) people laughing in a state of collective euphoria. (ha) In real life, how many phone calls send you into ecstasy?, but the subliminal message gets implanted through the ‘feel-good’ glow. It’s a deft distortion: the focus of consumerism encourages to ignore each other as we really are in favour of images, often on a screen. Yet the hunger to be part of something, and in the presence of friends is so innate that the fake signal of the advertisement is very effective.

**Well, if you want to be in good company, and with people who are friends in human reality, cultivate dāna, sīla, nekkhamma. Taken together they are the basis of spiritual companionship (kalyānamitta), of accessing and offering reliable friendship.*

Rightly referred to by the Buddha as ‘the whole of the spiritual life’, spiritual friendship amounts to more than euphoric phone calls, it is an indispensable foundation for awakening.

In this way, these three elements of the graduated Path are both accessible, liveable and profound. They stimulate cooperation; they allow us to return to the dignity of human nature rather than its defilement; and they create something that can be passed on to future generations:

This is how true humans behave, here is our source of happiness, strength and freedom.

Accordingly it is through dāna, sīla and nekkhamma that the ‘great assembly’ of samana and householder disciples has functioned and sustained Dhamma for over two millennia. If we don’t pass on this legacy, what do we pass on? If we don’t consciously help to create the future, we do so in blindness, fumbling along following a flickering feel-good glow, but if we want to live and pass on the way to a good and awake life, we establish this Path.

Generosity, morality and renunciation bring happiness, strength and freedom; they are for our welfare and lead to nibbāna. This is why the Buddha taught them as a Path, because real life is in the goodness, truth and beauty of heart.

Practicing the One Vehicle

In Praise of the Buddha's Liberating Activity

For the sake of all who struggle and suffer

A Prayer

On The Potential Power of Vows

Refuge, Individual Liberation, and Bodhisattva Vows

Vow

Practicing the One Vehicle - the Vehicle of Awakening

A person meeting the Buddhist teachings for the first time will notice a difference in emphasis in Traditions. In the Theravada, the main focus is on individual liberation, and the in the Mahayana practice is for the sake of all our family, for all beings.

From the outside, there seems to be conflict between these two perspectives, and historically, unfortunately, too often there has been uniformed criticism. Basically, some Mahayanists with a more narrow perspective say the Theravadins are selfish, while some orthodox and critical Theravadins claim the Mahayana is not what the Buddha taught.

We can still have a few doctrinal differences, of course, but if these can be worked through so that they don't get in the way of our learning and practice, then it would be of tremendous benefit to us all.

I recall a teaching on the Lotus Sutra, where Thich Nhat Hanh said: *'There is only one vehicle – the Buddhayana'*, the vehicle of Awakening, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama expresses this very same thought in the book *Tantra in Tibet*. He explains that, in teaching, the Buddha set forth a path appropriate to trainees' abilities. '

The Buddha spoke in terms the situation, and everything that he spoke was a means of eventually attaining the highest enlightenment... Since the purpose of a Buddha's is others' realization of the wisdom of Buddhahood, the methods for actualizing this wisdom are one vehicle, not two. A Buddha does not lead beings by a vehicle that does not lead to Buddhahood; he establishes beings in his own level.'

For me, this idea allows us to hold all Buddhist teachings and wisdom traditions as not only non-contradictory, but as existing in a great harmony with each other. Depending on where we are in our lives, and on our character and inclinations, these different teachings and practices can help us to accomplish our aims.

This is how I have come to understand the different emphasis in the Mahayana and Theravada:

First, at times I can see the continuity between practice and life in the world in relation to others. I've found that:

*One's own individual liberation, the purification of mind,
is the necessary basis that allows for there to be empathy,
more extensive seeing, the ability to live fully, and to work...*

We have to talk about this first, otherwise words such as empathy, love and compassion don't make any sense. They are mostly concepts. What we call compassion, or the dedication to helping others, is the natural response of a liberated mind.

Sometimes it's said that 'at a certain point, the Buddhas awaken the Theravada Arhats and encourage them to enter the Mahayana path.' This can be taken as a metaphor - a poetic way of saying that at a certain point the heart awakens - the Buddha nature within us awakens in response to the suffering of living beings. Then, quite naturally, a person finds himself or herself dedicated to helping others.

Just witness the lives of the saints in South East Buddhist countries: Ajahn Mun, Ajahn Lee, Ajahn Mahaboowa, Ajahn Chah, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Mahaghosana, Dipa Ma, Phra Payutto, and so many others, all exemplary lives of wisdom and compassionate activity.

Another way of speaking about the relationship between practice and our attitudes and actions could be to say that:

*The same life that brings us to birth,
the love, compassion and understanding within us,
brings us to reach for the birth
of all those we see in this world...*

So it is that necessary and appropriate self-interest, even what we may think of at the time as egoistic action, when it produces wisdom always leads beyond itself. There is more to individual liberation than individual liberation alone. There is understanding and the freedom it brings, leading to compassion, and to action.

Then, also, at times when it is necessary for us to focus on 'untying the knot of ego' and resolving afflicted emotions in order to move forward and act in this world, we can say:

*The same life that brings us to reach
for the birth of all those we see in this world,
also brings us to birth...*

It is just here that we can see how true it is- in taking care of yourself, you are taking care of all of us. For everyone this is essential work, and that this too is definitely one form of compassion-in-action.

I remember Thich Nhat Hahn said:

Everything you do, you do for everyone. That is the meaning of Mahayana.

In actual practice there is an organic, seamless continuity- having some freedom naturally leads to sympathy and mercy, and this feeling encourages a person to further wisdom and emancipation.

As Lama Je Tsong Khapa said:

Upon realization, all teachings prove to be non-contradictory

Practicing the One Vehicle - the Vehicle of Awakening

The appearance of two separate paths, those of liberation and compassionate action, actually contain each other. We could even go so far

as to say they are one, because practicing any one approach, with time, necessarily brings out the other factors as well. We find ourselves on the same road. From wherever we are, practicing the Buddha's teaching leads us to the wholeness of being a free and loving person acting in this world.

Everyone benefits from any practice that we do, but sometimes we have to wait to see this:

*Sometimes we have to wait
until the fruit grows
before we know what kind of a tree we have
When an apple grows
we've had an apple tree all along*

Isn't it so?

In this process, of course, each stage is as necessary, and as valuable as every other.

What we need here is a definition of self that in some way includes others, and a definition of others that in some way includes our own self. Then individual liberation and compassionate service are known to be *one action*. {The meaning of the name of my teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh}. Actually, going beyond concepts and labels leads us to the same place.

In reality, we are not separate. This is why we do what we do

At times I hear myself thinking:

*O, my world,
how quiet you are in me...*

Keeping the most valuable and well developed teachings from each tradition we meet, we should recognize their true nature.

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha teaches that Liberation is not the end of the path; that the purpose of our practice is to benefit all beings. I can see now why Thay referred to this sutra as 'A sutra of reconciliation'. By its very nature, practice is for all - there is no separation. This is how things are.

*In every step, the greater world is there
so everything that we do is for everyone
The whole world suffers in us,
we heal the whole world in ourselves
This is known as the interdependence of causes
the interdependence of effects*

And, phrasing it in terms of our responding to living in this world:

*With the thought to awaken the life
that is of the most benefit to others,
consider each activity, including taking care of yourself
as the actual practice of benefiting others.
Generate a parent's love.*

*A great many are with you now, this moment,
and the entirety of this vast field
will be reached, both now and in the future
by the life you live today*

*For all the uncontrollable suffering,
have mercy
generate a life that can heal every sorrow
and end, at last, the trains of hurt that have
been passed on...*

We all know that love is essential, and individual liberation is an integral part of the path of truly benefiting all beings. The buddhayana, then, is what is known as an inclusive path.

This is the one vehicle, complete in its expression.

Long may it flourish!

*May I clearly see that what I and all others need
is ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others through my
realization of this path*

In Praise of the Buddha's Liberating Activity

To the destitute,
you are wealth, and good fortune itself;

To the prisoner,
you are their release,
and walking again under the free and open sky;

To those who have been sick,
you are the feeling of relief when the fever breaks;

To the lost,
you are the main road appearing, at last;

and to the enslaved,
you are the breaker of chains

I praise you endlessly, as supreme,
and as our refuge and protector

All your forms are honored
for the benefit you bring

For the sake of all who struggle and suffer,
 all those who have not yet reached the highest state of freedom and peace,
 to relieve their suffering and to bring them happiness,

I take refuge in the Buddha,
 the Great Compassionate Teacher,
 I take refuge in the Dharma,
 in all the Liberating Teachings,
 and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
 the Enlightened Spiritual Community,
 the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

By this practice,
 just as my teachers before me have done,
 May I realize the state of Peace, Perfect Freedom, and Happiness,
 and Great Love, ~ the Mind of Enlightenment,
 and may I bring all others without a single exception
 to that very same state

{The concerns of all others are my concerns,
 is that not so?

For their sake, then}

May I accomplish this Path,

and,

May all temporal and ultimate aims be fulfilled

A Prayer

May all the suffering we are aware of
only clarify and strengthen our vows

May it cause us to give rise to even greater courage and commitment,
fearlessness in the face of delusion, and affliction,
and power to our limbs and to our thoughts and prayers

May it cause each of us to awaken to the preciousness of this time,
and every life,
and work day and night to heal the sick,
to rescue the lost,
to comfort the stricken,
to encourage the fearful,
to give to the hungry,

to clothe those exposed to bitter elements,
to liberate those caught in addictions of all kinds
to hold a mirror to the beauty of the world
to be a song of remembrance
to rekindle the sense of our innate dignity,
our belonging,
and our joy

May the fullness of love and wisdom manifest in each of us now

May we take up the gifts of our spiritual ancestors

May all our prayers for each other pour forth
May we find every action meaningful,
and may we create the world that from within longs to be born

Tirelessly, compassionately, for all who struggle and are lost,
for all who are closed in on themselves,
and for all those who know only violence,
whose world is already hell

May I go there without hesitation,
forever,
and lead them out

For all who do not know the treasures we hold within
or who do not know the beauty of our children, and our elders,
and our brothers and our sisters everywhere -

May there be nothing less than a full awakening for them

With gratitude for all my family
and for all my near and distant relations

With abundant gratitude for our teachers,
and for all the healers of the world,
for our ancestors,
and for this our natural home

I too dedicate all positive energy today
to the comfort and healing of all who need it.

May peace awaken.
May greater love awaken in me,
and in all my family and friends,
and in all the world.

On The Potential Power of Vows

A vow is a kind of commitment. It can become the strongest commitment you can make. *It can be something you feel with every fiber of your being.*

When they speak of *vow power* in Chinese Buddhism, this is what is meant. It is a sacred commitment that is immutable, fierce, indomitable. It overcomes everything, and nothing overcomes it.

When you make a vow, it's something you think about all day and all night. If you wake up in the middle of the night, it's there, and when you get up in the morning, if not the words of the vow, then the feeling of it is present.

It's that powerful an intention.

It projects forward from where we are now to where we want to go.

There are vows we can make for a set period of time, for example, for twenty four hours, a week, a month, or a year; and those that can last for our whole life, or for lifetimes, until we accomplish our aim.

*Even if the heavens fall,
or the earth opens up,
through conflagrations,
and floods sweeping everything else away,
vows endure, unchanged,
pristine, illuminating the way forward*

If there is no intensity to your vows yet- then keep working.

How do we make our vows stronger, more enduring, unconquerable?
It is through deep reflection, and coming to decisive conclusions about what matters most in our lives.

We distill the essence of medicine in the same way, slowly, in jars or in beakers, under a slow fire, carefully, diligently, with time, maybe weeks or months or years, until what we have remaining is concentrated, potent, life changing.

In vows, there is nothing superfluous. Nothing is in excess, and nothing is missing. They are as straightforward as we can make them, and for that reason they speak to us on a deep level.

They say that vows are the spark of compassion. *They come from knowing what is urgently needed in our life, and in the lives of the world.*

In Buddhist mythology, it's said that Avalokiteshvara, the archetype of compassion, is overcome by the immensity of suffering, and his head splits into pieces from the intensity of his emotion. Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, comes to comfort him, telling him he'll help him accomplish his compassionate aims, and puts him back together in his thousand-armed form. White and Green Tara spring from his tears, and vow to help him liberate beings ceaselessly.

All this comes from the strength of his emotion - from all of his sorrow, from all of his rage, from all of his grief, and principally from all of his insight, great love and determination.

What is the power that overcomes the world, with its individual and collective delusion, and the weight of its history behind it? What could possibly change our hearts and the course of our lives?

Shantideva wrote:

*Just as a flash of lightning on a dark, cloudy night
For an instant brightly illuminates all,
Likewise in this world, through the might of an awakened one,
A wholesome thought rarely and briefly appears.*

*Hence virtue is perpetually weak-
and delusion strong,
And except for a Fully Awakening Mind
By what other virtue will it be overcome?*

This is vow. It is most serious thing we can do in our life. It is also the most joyful, and brings the most energy.

When you love someone, it's natural to want to protect them, and if there is some danger, we do everything we can to overcome it. When there is love, this goes deep, and changes everything.

*May I clearly see that what I and all others need,
{all of these infinitely precious ones}
is ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others through my
realization of this path*

*For the sake of all who struggle and suffer,
all those who have not yet reached the highest state of freedom, and peace,
to relieve their suffering and to bring them happiness*

*I vow to accomplish each of the stages of liberation
and enlightened understanding and activity,
and help bring all others, without a single exception,
to these very same states.*

A vow is then at once both a result, and a cause.

Vows are really potent psychologically.

- Venerable Robina

In this process of making powerful vows, as time goes on, and with experience, we become crystal clear that our aim is truly worthwhile. It is the most important thing in our life, and it is something we yearn for, and are determined with all our heart and soul and with all our strength to achieve.

The word 'vow' then is much stronger than to simply hope, or to have a wish, or an aim, or an aspiration, and here is the key:

In order to make a vow powerful, we must invest it great energy.

We have to have the utmost clarity, and then make our vows with true firmness and resolve. They can become like a diamond, like a vajra thunderbolt.

The Riverside Chan Meditation Group has said that: We must give our vows the full energy of our mind and heart. Never underestimate the importance and the force of a vow...

You must set your mind clearly on your path so that you will continually remember your intention, and provide it with force...

{This is like Don Genero, in the Teachings of Don Juan, crossing a precipice on the strength of one intention}

We must give our vows power so that they carry into the future...

And the Buddhist teacher Jung Hong Lu has said, Vows guide the life of a Buddhist practitioner; and,

Your life's direction is formed by your vows.

We can see how this is true.

An Awakened One has appeared in the world.
He has taught the Way to freedom,
and generations of his followers
have realized his teachings.

Continually, I take refuge in the Buddha, the Light of the World
the Great Compassionate Teacher
I take refuge in the Dharma, in all the Liberating Teachings,
and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
the Accomplished Spiritual Community,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors
May we all receive your blessings
May we all receive your light, inspiration, and strength

From A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path II

In dependence upon higher rebirth,
even if we achieve the levels of a deva or human,
we will still have to experience endless suffering in samsara
because of not having completely abandoned from their root
ignorance and the afflictive emotions.

Therefore, I will look deeply into the nature of all of samsara,
and continuously follow the unified path of the Three Trainings,
of Sila, Samadhi, and Prajna,
the way to peace, nibbana,
true and lasting health and happiness.

Individual Liberation Vows

I vow to free my mind from all suffering and its causes forever

Until this is fully accomplished:

I will continue to cultivate the causes
that will enable me to do this:

wise reflection, keeping pure ethics,
the purification of past negative karma,
great loving kindness and compassion, for myself and for all others,
renewing and strengthening my vows, further study, and meditation

I will maintain and increase each of these as much as needed;

and continue to cultivate my understanding and direct insight

In this way, realizing the Buddha's Path,
I will perfectly accomplish my aims

Verses for generating the mind of enlightenment

May I think all beings with great love and compassion,
and generate the supreme awakening mind...

May I think of them all as my family,
and care for them all as my own.

May all beings have happiness
and all the causes of happiness flourishing...

May all beings be completely and permanently free of all suffering
and all the causes of suffering...

I celebrate all that is beautiful and right in the world,
I rejoice in all kindness, virtue, and positive action,
and in all success, happiness, and good fortune...

and abide in the impartial love...

May I clearly see that what I and all others so urgently need
is complete liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others
through my realization of this path

May I always cherish all living beings,
with the determination to accomplish for them the highest good
that is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel

Especially now, seeing the world of sentient beings,
so full of suffering, I will follow the bodhisattva's way.

An Awakened One has appeared in this world.
 He has taught the way to freedom,
 and generations of his followers to this day have realized his teachings.

Homage!

{The Bodhisattva Vow}

Just as all previous Buddhas first awakened the precious bodhimind -
 the aspiration to enlightened understanding and activity,
 and just as they then carefully followed each of the requisite stages of the
 Bodhisattva disciplines,
 in the same way, for the sake of living beings,
 I will awaken and cultivate the bodhimind,
 this all embracing intention,
 and train in every one of the essential disciplines of a Bodhisattva.

I take refuge in the the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly,
 and raise this Thought of Enlightenment
 By the merit I have accumulated by practicing Generosity and other
 Virtues,

May I swiftly accomplish each of the stages of liberation and enlightened
 understanding and activity,
 and help bring all others, without a single exception, to these very same
 states.

With my heart going out with great compassion
 in whatever direction the most precious teachings have not yet spread,
 or, once spread have declined,
 there may I bring this treasure of happiness and aid!

Limitless is the extent of space,
 and limitless is the number of sentient beings

Limitless are the karmas and delusions of beings
Such then are the limits of my aspirations!

For as long as space endures,
and for as long as living beings remain,
until then, may I too abide,
to dispel the misery of the world

May the supreme jewel, bodhicitta,
arise where it has not yet arisen,
Where it has arisen, may it not diminish,
May it ever grow and flourish...

Vow

From this point forward,
I dedicate myself to removing the suffering of all living beings,
and to bringing them happiness

I dedicate myself fully to their healing and awakening;
to their all having comfort,
strength of body, mind, and spirit,
most excellent nourishment, health, longevity
every level of protection,
shelter, food, clothing,
the best of all medicines, education,
leisure, joy, and wisdom

In order to accomplish the needs of living beings
in the most effective way,
I will develop my wisdom and compassion
just as my teachers before me have done
I aim to become free of all faults, and complete in all qualities
and, day by day, hour by hour
to always offer as much help as I can

In this way, I will make a gift of my life
In this way, my own life will be fulfilled

I dedicate myself fully, leaving nothing out,
to the complete healing, fulfillment and enlightenment
of all living beings

No matter how long it takes
no matter how difficult it may be
no matter what it costs

With all my heart and with all my strength,
I vow to always serve all living beings
in every way that is necessary for them
and in every way that will bring each and every one of them
true and lasting health and happiness