

Buddhism and human flourishing – key ideas and motifs

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The central thrusts of Buddhism have been:

- To learn to live in a more generous, ethical and kindly way, so as to have a more harmonious and happy life here and now, helping others to do likewise, and go on to a better rebirth.
- To directly understand and appropriately respond to what are generally translated as the ‘four Noble Truths’, and to compassionately aid others in this.

‘Noble Truths’ is a common translation of the *ariya-saccas*, though I think a better translation is ‘true realities for the spiritually ennobled’, or ‘Noble Ones’ Realities’. These are four key dimensions of existence that those who are spiritually developed by the Buddha’s path of practice are keenly attuned to. One can describe them thus:

1. *Dukkha*: ‘the painful’ – obvious or subtle feelings of pain, unhappiness, distress, unease, disappointment, stress and frustration, and the grasped-at processes of body and mind that involve these: ‘Now *this*, monks, for the noble ones, is the painful (*dukkha*) true reality : (i) birth is painful, ageing is painful, illness is painful, death is painful; (ii) sorrow, lamentation, (physical) pain, unhappiness and distress are painful; (iii) association with the disliked is painful; separation from the liked is painful; not to get what one wants is painful; (iv) in brief, the five bundles of grasping-fuel [that make up body and mind] are painful’ (SN V 421)
- 2. The origination of the painful: clinging, driven desires – craving and grasping, greed and lusting after, attachment to an identity, and desire-to-repel, in the form of hatred, – along with the deluded misperceptions that feed these.
- 3. The cessation of the painful: letting go of craving etc, so as to experience a non-clinging state which does not feed the arising of stress and frustration etc, which enables a balanced equanimity in the face of the ups and downs of this life, and which ultimately brings to an end the driven-ness that leads on to further rebirths, and prevents experience of the unconditioned, Nirvana, beyond all *dukkha*.
- 4. The middle way of practice that goes to the cessation of the painful: a ‘noble’ way of being that is a pathway of action with eight factors:
 - Those of understanding and, in time, wisdom: 1) a right way of seeing that accepts the ethical principle that ‘what you do matters’, and which sees reality as a flow of conditioned, impermanent processes, and then gains direct insight into all four of the Noble Ones’ Realities, 2) a right resolve for peaceful non-attachment, kindness and compassion,
 - Those of ethics: 3) right speech, that is truthful, fostering of harmony, kind and unharsh, and helpful and to the point, 4) right action that avoids intentional killing of any being, theft and cheating, and causing distress through one’s sexual actions, 5) right livelihood that does not depend on bringing death or harm to other people or beings,
 - Those of meditation: 6) right effort that works to undermine negative, unwholesome states of mind, and cultivate wholesome, wise ones, 7) right mindfulness, in the form of bearing in mind wholesome qualities and a balanced observation of the arising and passing away of bodily actions and processes, feeling-tones, good and bad mental states, and patterns in experience such as the Noble Ones’ Realities, 8) right concentration, in the form of deep states of mindfulness-based inner stillness and joy, as a basis from which to gain a clearer view of ordinary experience and its limitations.

Dukkha can perhaps be seen as equivalent to non-flourishing. From the Buddhist perspective, the important thing is to *fully understand* this aspect of human experience (though it also pertains to the experience of any sentient being). Having understood the other three True Realities, one needs to come to *abandon* the factors that originate *dukkha*, *experience* the cessation of these factors, and *develop or cultivate* the path to this.

The Buddha sometimes summed up his teachings as simply ‘*dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha*’. One can say that the Buddhist approach to life is about practising generosity and non-harming, so as to benefit others, not harm them, and experience the inner happiness that all this naturally brings, and the cultivation of mindfulness and inner stillness, to better enable one to observe negative factors in the mind, and learn not to feed them, and observe wholesome, skilful factors and learn how to strengthen them. It is a path of self-observation and self-transformation that is supported by and enhances better treatment of and relationships with other beings.

An important principle is that there is a basic goodness to people, but that we need help in uncovering this and acting on it: ‘This mind is brightly shining, but it is defiled by visiting defilements’ (AN I 10). That is, through inept awareness, we allow the mind to be captured by the allures of greed, hatred and delusion, more fully enumerated in the list of five obscuring ‘hindrances’: desire for sense-pleasures, ill-will, dullness and lethargy, restlessness and worry, and vacillation about what is truly wholesome.

That is why mindfulness – *sati* – is so important. Mindfulness involves ‘standing back’ from the processes of body and mind and calmly observing them, with full presence of mind, alert attention, mental clarity, being wide awake, fully with-it, vigilant, not on ‘auto-pilot’. It is particularly associated with Buddhist *Vipassanā*, or ‘insight’ meditation, but is equally important in *Samatha* or ‘tranquillity’ meditation (Harvey, 2013a: 321–25). To understand and change ourselves, we need to develop a clear awareness of how the mind works, based on direct experience. We also need to bear in mind – another aspect of mindfulness – what we have already learnt and cultivated, so as to keep it alive and deepen it by further application.

Wholesome states of mind

For Buddhism, actions or states of mind are termed *akusala* – unwholesome, wrong, ethically unskilful or uninformed by wisdom – if they make other beings suffer or bring genuine harm to oneself, and if they arise from greed, hatred or delusion. *Kusala* or wholesome actions and states of mind spring from the opposite of these: generosity and non-attachment, kindness and compassion, and wisdom (Harvey, 2011).

In the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, a compendium of Abhidhamma or systematic psychology and mental analysis, there is a list of twenty-five ‘beautiful’ or wholesome states (Bodhi 1993: 76–113):

- *7 qualities present in all wholesome mind states*: trustful confidence; mindfulness; a sense of moral integrity; regard for consequences; non-greed/generosity; non-hatred/lovingkindness; and equipoise.
- *6 pairs of qualities, of mind and the mental ‘body’, that are also present in all wholesome mind states – they are aspects of a mental enlargement, and have no counterparts in unwholesome states, where the mind seems smaller, with parts closed down*:
 - tranquillity: a natural stilling or becoming quiet;
 - lightness: buoyancy, lack of heaviness, as when there is ease of action.
 - malleability: when body and mind are pliable and receptive; opposed to fixed views and self-importance.
 - readiness/workability: when body and mind are workable and wieldy, like refined gold.

- Proficiency or competence: being mentally healthy, fit for any task; opposed to the fifth hindrance, vacillation.
- rectitude or straightforwardness: simplicity, directness, uprightness; opposed to unnecessary complexity, or craftiness, or deceit.
- *6 qualities which may be present in any wholesome mind states, strengthening and deepening it*: right speech, right action, right livelihood; compassion, empathetic joy; wisdom.

The importance of ethics in applying Buddhism

The blog associated with this conference alerted me to this idea: ‘Might there be Buddhist responses to Slavoj Žižek’s accusation that western Buddhism shores up capitalism by presenting itself as a remedy to the stress caused by it?’ Having only heard of Žižek but never read him, I found a transcript of a rather rambling talk by him on the web, ‘The Buddhist Ethic and The Spirit of Global Capitalism’. In this, he says:

you may have noticed something, how western buddhism presents itself as the remedy against the stressful tensions of capitalist dynamics allowing us to uncouple from this frenetic and frenzy rhythm and retain inner peace and enlightenment, but I claim, and do you know what take me to think this? When I read ... an interesting analysis of let’s called it if not religious, spiritual trends among top managers, businessmen of today, and to cut a long story short, 80% are what they claim tibetan buddhist or whatever you called it, practicing so called, ehm, meditation, and I can understand it because in so far as, if you are really engage in modern capitalism at its craziest – you know, like it is really as one of the top managers claimed, that when he studied buddhist ontology the way he understood it, the idea of being ... the fragility of existence, all are fleeting phenomena everything can fall apart at every point ... He said but that this is our market today, you know? One rumour, everything falls apart. So he got it correctly this manager ... he said if you really want to be fully engage in this market you get crazy, so what you need is a kind of an inner distance which tells you OK it’s the crazy market, to teach you how to participate in it without being fully existentially engaged in it, that’s why businessmen like this bullshit you know? Even if I speculate all day it is just a cosmic play for me, I’m aware of the nothingness of it, it means nothing. It functions perfectly, which is why, to conclude this first point, I think that if Max Weber were to rewrite his legendary book on capitalist protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism today the title of the book would have been, I’m sure, the taoist or buddhist ethic and the spirit of global capitalism, or something like that.

Having read this, I was struck by both Žižek’s apparently shallow understanding of Buddhism and, if he reports things correctly, how Buddhist-type ideas and practices can be taken up in a shallow and one-sided way. On the one hand, I am happy if businessmen, managers and city traders can draw on Buddhist-related practices to de-stress. On the other hand, I am alarmed at the suggestion that some people take meditative practice as ethically neutral, and as related to seeing the world and our actions as a meaningless play of neutral forces. Meditation should not be only about non-judgemental observation. It should include recognition of harmful and helpful, unwholesome and wholesome, ethically unskilful and ethically skilful ways of thinking, speaking and acting, and adjusting one’s behaviour accordingly. True Buddhist mindfulness is not ethically neutral. It cultivates wisdom, which helps one discern the difference between the unwholesome and the wholesome. To be unable to do this is delusion. This would also show one that *any* economic system involves stress, albeit some more than others.

One Buddhist discourse says that a businessman or trader should be two-eyed, not blind in one or both eyes. He should have an eye to profits, yes, but he should also have an eye to the ethics of what he is doing (AN I 129–230). One is also reminded of the work of Brian Victoria, in books such as *Zen at War*, on how some Japanese Buddhists bastardised Buddhism into supporting the nationalist war efforts of Japan in the early 20th century. They bent the idea of non-Self to mean that one should ‘selflessly’ do whatever the emperor and political leaders told you to (forgetting that these too lacked a permanent essence). Some may also have sometimes used meditation to be more calm and concentrated while killing. Presumably a sniper needs something of this kind of concentration, too. In Buddhist terms, this would be ‘wrong concentration’: a mental collectedness without mindful alertness to what is unwholesome. This kind of thing should alert us to the fact that the ‘engagement’ of Buddhism in socio-political matters is not always a good thing. What is being ‘engaged’ with the world needs to be true Buddhism, not pseudo-Buddhism, and the form of engagement needs to be wise and compassionate.

Helping others

Some observers of Buddhism might see it as too focussed on inner subjective states, ignoring the realities of social injustices. The approach of ‘Engaged Buddhism’ emphasizes that to see such a disjunction is to mis-read Buddhism (Queen and King, 1996; Queen, Prebish and Keown, 2003). Work on oneself can better equip one to help others, and should certainly not insulate one from their suffering, for Buddhist practice aims to make us more aware of the many forms of suffering that we all share to some extent.

The Buddhist idea of all beings as having had countless past rebirths is relevant to how we view and treat others. Firstly, it is said that every kind of suffering one may come across will have been experienced by oneself in some past life (SN II 186), so one should not think another’s plight has nothing to do with oneself. We are all, at the end of the day, ‘In the same boat’. Secondly, it is said that it is difficult to come across a being who, in some past life, has not been one’s mother, father or other close relative (SN II 189). Hence one should bear in mind their past kindnesses to one, even if currently they are causing one problems. This should be a good reflection for those involved in ethnic conflicts: no-one has an essentially ethnic type, we have all been reborn in various ethnic groups.

In one Buddhist discourse, the Buddha tells a story of two acrobats. One says that each should guard the other. The wiser one says: no, we should each guard ourselves. The Buddha uses this story to make the point that in cultivating mindfulness, guarding oneself by the cultivating of wholesome states guards others, as one inevitably treats them better, while guarding others by patient acceptance, harmlessness, lovingkindness and compassion guards oneself by the inner benefit of such states, and the more harmonious relationships they bring (SN V 169). It is also said that a person who is ‘stuck in the mud’ of unwholesome states cannot help someone else out of that ‘mud’ (MN I 45). That said, one does not need to be ‘out of the mud’ to be kind, generous and helpful to others to some extent.

The uses of mindfulness in ‘Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction’ and ‘Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy’

In the USA, the approach of the Insight Meditation movement, as well as Korean Zen, is drawn on in the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn (Seager, 1999: 213–14), who established the approach of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction in 1979 as a secular therapy. He published many books such as *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (1994), and in 1995 founded the University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society (umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx). This is part of a two-way interaction of Western Buddhism with

aspects of Psychology,¹ as also reflected in books such as Mark Epstein's *Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective* (1995) and Harvey B. Aronson's *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground: Reconciling Eastern Ideals and Western Psychology* (2004), and the work of the Mind and Life Institute, that has organized seminars involving the Dalai Lama and brain scientists.

Building on the work of Kabat-Zinn, Mark Williams and John Teasdale, from the UK, and Canadian Zindel Siegel developed Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy. In 2004, this was recognised by the National Health Service's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence as a recommended treatment for recurrent depression, and there are now MAs or MScs in the discipline at Oxford University's Mindfulness Centre, the University of Wales at Bangor, and Exeter and Aberdeen Universities.

The above has led to the development of eight-week courses in 'secular' mindfulness, which use mindful observation of body and mind as a way to reduce stress and learn more skilful ways of dealing with negative mental content. Some Buddhists have criticized these as using a narrow and stripped-down version of Buddhist mindfulness. To this, my reply is: yes, but how much would a person, new to meditation, learn in only eight weeks of Buddhist meditation? Such courses are to be welcomed as introducing people to some effective tools for enhancing their well-being (Williams and Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Gilpin, 2008). It would, though, be problematic, if they, or their teachers, then think that they have extracted the 'active ingredient' from Buddhism's practice, so that the rest can safely be ignored. This would be as if Buddhist practice could be reduced to a 'one-fold' path of 'mindfulness', and a mindfulness that includes only the 'present-moment awareness' aspect of *sati*.

Tse-fu Kuan, in his *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism* (2008: 41–57), has shown that *sati* has four aspects:

- 'simple awareness ... conscious registering of the presence of objects ... non-judgemental observation and recognition' (p.41–2), such as knowing one is breathing in, or being aware of the passing sensations arising when lifting an arm, or changing feelings. It observes without preferences, without habitual reaction, but clearly acknowledging what is actually there in the flow of experience, noting its nature. It has been described as a kind of 'bare attention' which sees things as if for the first time (Anālayo, 2003: 57–60; Nyanaponika, 1997).
- 'protective awareness', which adds a presence of mind that naturally brings restraint of unskilful reactions to sense-objects.
- 'introspective awareness', which identifies unskilful states that may nevertheless have arisen, and calls to mind, and thus calls into play, counteractive qualities.²
- 'deliberately forming conceptions', which recollects and notes such things as the qualities of the Buddha, *Dhamma* or *Saṅgha*, or of lovingkindness, or the ingredients of the body, its stages of decomposition, and the inevitability of death, all of which help to undermine unskilful states and cultivate skilful ones.

Of these aspects, the first is the basis of the rest. It is what is emphasized in secular mindfulness courses, but these perhaps neglect the other three aspects.

The use of mindfulness in prisons

David Loy claims that a common feature of judicial systems in countries where Buddhism has been the predominant religion is that 'the only acceptable reason for punishment is education and reform' (2000: 149). On Tibetan practice, he cites (p.159) Rebecca French, 'The goal of a legal proceeding was to calm the minds and relieve the anger of the disputants and then – through catharsis, expiation,

¹ Prebish and Tanaka, 1998: 228–37; Prebish and Baumann, 2002: 348–64.

² As in the *Sutta* on the removal of distracting thoughts: MN I 118–22 (*Bodhi*, 2005:275–8; Gethin, 2008:152–5; Soma, 1981).

restitution and appeasement – to rebalance the natural order’ (1995: 74), while Virginia Hancock cites Samdhong Rinpoche as saying , ‘[p]unishment is a training to transform a person’ (2008: 121).

Karma brings appropriate results for crime – what some might see as retributive punishments, but Buddhism sees as unfortunate natural results, such that ‘the Buddhist theory of crime is first and foremost a theory of reconciliation and rehabilitation’ (Hancock, 2008: 127). Moreover, Hancock sees Buddhism’s non-acceptance of a permanent self as undermining a retributive basis for punishment, ‘The justifications for retribution are arguably based on the premise that the person is stable, unchanging and – most importantly – real. Buddhist doctrine holds the opposite’ (2008: 124). The important thing is not to exact revenge on a person for an act expressing an indelibly evil nature, but to help them change in a better direction.

The idea of the Buddha nature, or the earlier idea that ‘this mind is brightly shining, but it is defiled by visiting defilements’ (AN I 10), point to a potential for good deep in everyone, no matter how it is covered by negative mental states. This can be seen to represent a potential for reform in all. A famous case of rehabilitation is that of Aṅgulimāla (MN II 97–105), a robber who used to kill and collect the fingers of his victims (cf. Loy, 2000: 149–51). Tamed by the Buddha, he gave up his way of life and ordained. King Pasenadi accepts that as a precept-keeping monk, he would respect him, rather than seek to drive him from his kingdom (MN II 101). Once reformed by the Buddha, the king sees no reason to punish him as, ‘there is absolutely no reason to punish someone who has already reformed himself’ (Loy, 2000: 150). Aṅgulimāla later became an *Arahat*, and the Buddha commented that some injuries he gained from things thrown at him while on alms round were karmic results that were preferable to the hellish rebirth he would otherwise have had. Of course, in the UK, the Buddhist prison visiting organization is called the Angulimala Trust.³

As an aid to help prisons be more reforming in their regimes, a form of *Vipassanā* meditation, as taught by S.N.Goenka, is being used in selected prisons in India and Nepal, and to some extent in Thailand, Taiwan, New Zealand, the UK and USA (Hetherington, 2003: 110).⁴ In India, this began in Central Jail, Jaipur, in 1975. The largest and most effective course was held in India’s largest prison, Tihar, New Delhi, by S.N.Goenka himself. This came after Mrs. Koran Bedi was appointed Inspector General of this jail in March 1993 and wished to change its poor conditions and harsh regime, which were not even deterring prisoners from returning. Bedi wished to change the jail into a reform environment, not one of punishment, feeling that the prisoners were just ordinary people who had lost the balance of their mind. Hearing that *Vipassanā* could help deal with prisoners’ emotional problems, at first she had some of the prison officers take a ten day course in it. The beneficial effects of this led to courses for prisoners, with one for 1000 in April 1994. Two 1994 scientific studies have assessed the results of such courses for prisoners. Anomie, personality, attitudes to law, and psychiatric illness were assessed before the course, immediately after it, and three months later (Chandiramani, Verma and Dhar, 1995: 5). Depression and anxiety were seen to decrease, and a third study on helplessness and hostility showed that more prisoners admitted they had committed the offence for which they were imprisoned: 48% as compared to 24% previously. Many wished to change their ways and become good citizens. Mrs. Bedi stated:

It actually changed people. It made my prisoners weep. It made them cry. They had realized what life actually could be. They had looked within. And within themselves they had seen the feelings of revenge, they had seen anger, they saw the disrespect and hurt they had caused to family and society, and they wept. And they wanted to be different (Menahemi and Ariel, 1998).

³ Angulimala Trust: <http://www.angulimala.org.uk/>

⁴ My thanks to Emily Bird, whose 2006 Newcastle University undergraduate dissertation, ‘An Examination of the Uses of Vipassana Meditation’, were the sources of my references in this section.

One prisoner, who had killed three people in a gang fight, felt so much remorse that he asked for forgiveness from his victims' families, were accepted by them, and sought to look after one of them (Menaheimi and Ariel, 1998).

Other results were a significant decrease in anomie (separation from society), not immediately after the course, but three months and even six months later, and a reduction in the desire to take revenge on those who had accused or convicted them (Dhar, n.d.), the subjects became less aggressive (Chandiramani, Verma and Dhar, 1995: 16), and addiction to drink and drugs reduced (Marlatt, n.d.).

A preliminary study of the effects of Vipassanā meditation courses in King County North Rehabilitation Facility, Seattle, shows that 44% of inmates who have done a course have not returned to the jail, compared to 24% of other inmates there (Murphy, 2002).

Buddhism and economics

The Buddha had various teachings related to economics. In the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda Sutta*, he emphasized that it is the responsibility of a country's government to help prevent poverty, otherwise crime will increase and both moral standards and security will decline (DN III 64–68). In the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, he told a story of an adviser to a past king who counselled economic investment in various sections of the economy as a way of overcoming an outbreak of thievery and rebellion (DN I 134–36). It is also said that the Buddha once delayed the start of one of his sermons until a tired and hungry late-comer had been fed and rested, so as to be in the right state of mind to be able to listen to and benefit from spiritual teachings (Dhp-a III 262–63).

While Buddhism does teach that living an ethical life will help lead, as a karmic result, to being better off, it does not teach that all good and bad fortune is due to past karma, as it teaches that there are plenty of ordinary, non-karmic causes for these, too (SN IV 230–31).

A Buddhist community self-help movement in Sri Lanka, the Sarvōdaya Śramadana, or 'Sharing of energy for the Awakening/uplift of All' is noted for helping villagers to work together to identify and address common problems, such as the lack of a decent road to a village, or the need for a co-operative to bring better income to farmers (Harvey 2000: 225–34). It is influenced by the ideas of Gandhi, and also by many Buddhist teachings, such as the story of Magha (Dhp-a I 264–72). Living in a village where people were rough and unpleasant, he determined to bring happiness to it. He therefore set to cleaning the village and improving its road, gradually drawing others in to share in his efforts, building a community hall and rest-house, and acting with great kindness and patience in the face of those whose jealousy made them oppose him. He brought great improvement and on his death was reborn as Sakka, chief deity in one of the heavens.

Buddhism and Western Philosophy

There is an increasing willingness of Western philosophers to engage with Buddhist ideas, and of Buddhist scholars to explore the philosophical implications of Buddhism (e.g. Emmanuel, 2013; Siderits, 2003). This is certainly to be welcomed, though the whole process needs time to mature. One danger to be avoided is reducing Buddhism to its doctrinal dimension, so as to underplay its practice aspect, and how this is both informed by and feeds into its doctrinal aspects. Another danger is to engage with only a narrow band of teachings, so as to miss the interplay with ideas from other aspects. A related danger is to assume that all the different Buddhist schools are saying the same thing.

A more general problem in the Western exploration of Buddhism and its implications, is that of translation and understanding of deeply nuanced ideas. This certainly applies to deep doctrines such as those on *anattā*, literally non-Self, where people can tie themselves up in knots conflating and confusing different Buddhist, and different Western ideas of 'self'. Even within just Theravāda Buddhism, there are several kinds of use of the language of 'self' (Harvey 2013a: 57–62):

- i) there is the changing, empirical self – ‘oneself’–, a specific stream of impermanent and conditioned processes of body and mind (the five *khandhas*), within which no permanent Self (self with a capital ‘S’) can be found;
- ii) yet one of the processes among the volitional activities is the “‘I am’ conceit’ (*asmi-māna*) – the gut feeling or attitude, based on deluded mis-perception, that one is or has a real Self, a substantial I. This conceit, which one might see as the ‘ego’, is expressed in various forms of self-importance or self-centredness, in which one compares oneself to others as superior, inferior or (competitively or complacently) equal;
- iii) as a person develops spiritually, their empirical self becomes stronger as they become more centred, calm, aware and open;
- iv) in this process, awareness of all factors of personality as non-Self – empty of any permanent Self or what belongs to such a thing – undermines grasping, and so makes a person calmer and stronger, yet less self-centred;
- v) at the pinnacle of spiritual development, the liberated person is free of all the causes of *dukkha*, and thus lacks any ‘I am’ conceit yet is said to have a ‘great’, well-developed empirical self.

Here, the empirical self is real, the “‘I am’ conceit’ or ego is real, but based on a delusion, and the permanent Self is an illusion. Sensitivity to the above variation in self-language should help one avoid incoherence in presenting ideas relating to the non-Self doctrine. For example, students sometimes say odd things such as: ‘Buddhism teaches that there is no self ... The self is the five *khandhas* ... but these are to be seen as not-self’. While Pali and Sanskrit lacks capital letters, the use of them helps signal the difference, clearly implicit in the *Suttas*, between an accepted empirical self and a metaphysical Self which is never accepted. To complicate matters, though, East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly Zen, sometimes talks of the Buddha-nature – one’s bright potential for enlightenment – , when seen as a hidden actuality of enlightenment, as one’s ‘True Self’!

As regards the central Buddhist teaching of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, which I think is best translated as ‘Conditioned Co-arising’ (Harvey 2013a:65–73; Harvey, 2013b), I think the Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa makes a point that is important both for understanding this and understanding causality more generally. He says:

Here there is no single or multiple fruit of any kind from a *single* cause (*kāraṇa*); nor a single fruit from multiple causes ... But one representative cause and fruit are given in this way, ‘with spiritual ignorance as condition are the volitional activities’. (Vism.542)

The idea that nothing has a single cause is worth bearing in mind when reflecting on various differences of opinions in society, and sometimes in science: one side holds that ‘x causes y’, the other that ‘no it doesn’t, as there can be cases of x yet no y’ (e.g., smoking for years yet no lung cancer), or ‘no, y is caused by z’. It may be that y depends for its arising on both x and z (along with some other conditions), so the crucial question is not really ‘what is *the* cause of y?’ – though it may be useful to focus attention on a particular condition, especially if it is a necessary (if not sufficient) condition for y, and is one that can be altered. In general, what is decided on as ‘the cause’ of something is simply the last condition for it that falls into place. If one thing on its own could cause something else, then that thing would be producing that effect *continuously*, rather than only sometimes, dependent on other conditions. One way of summing this point up in a slogan is ‘there are no causes, only conditions’.

Bowing: a simple practice very conducive to human flourishing

To end, I would like to recommend a practice that is useful in helping one to let go of negative emotional states and associated physical tensions: bowing. If someone has developed a commitment to Buddhism, this is good to do before a Buddha image placed on a simple shrine-table, as a way of expressing respect for someone who fully embodied the kind of qualities that meditation develops. But bowing is in any case helpful apart from this aspect. It is best done three times, while kneeling,

and with one's palms placed together in front of one's chest then forehead and then chest. One lower one's head to the floor and lays the hands palms down. At this point, it is good to imaging any negative energies within one as like a fluid that then runs away into the floor, leaving one with a calmer, clearer, inner space. Doing this with each bow, if there are noticeable remaining negative energies before the third bow, one images squirting water into the top of the head to help flush away negative states when doing the last bow. This is a good practice to do immediately before a meditation sitting, but it can also be done at other times, when needed.

Abbreviations

- AN *Āṅguttara Nikāya*. The best transl. of this is by Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom, 2012.
- Dhp-a. *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, commentary on the *Dhammapada*. Translated by E. W. Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, 3 vols., Harvard Oriental Series, Harvard University Press, 1921; reprinted London, Pali Text Society, 1995.
- DN. *Dīgha Nikāya*. The best transl. of this is by M. Walshe, *Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 2nd revised edition. Boston, Wisdom, 1996.
- MN *Majjhima Nikāya*. The best transl. of this is by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom, 1995.
- SN *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. The best transl. of this is by Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom, 2005.
- Vism *Visuddhimagga*, transl. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, Onalaska, WA, BPS Pariyatti, 1999. This 884 page book is also downloadable from the Access to Insight website:
<http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/nanamoli/PathofPurification2011.pdf>
- Good anthologies of texts from the four *Nikāyas* are:
 Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2005. *The Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*, Boston: Wisdom.
- Gethin, Rupert. 2008, *Sayings of the Buddha: A Selection of Suttas from the Pali Nikāyas*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press.

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