

Dhammapada Handbook  
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### ***Chapter 0: Introduction***

It is far too easy to be swept away in the drama when viewing the daily news headlines. With repeated viewings, one can mistakenly believe that our world is filled with nothing but highly dissatisfied and unhappy souls caught up in their own ongoing emotional and mental tempests. This appears to be a time of harsh judgments and accusations towards the ‘other’. Leadership classes talk how this is increasingly a **VUCA** (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) world with few easy remedies are in plain sight.

But a small yet growing number of determined beings are not buying into this discouraging narrative. They attempt to follow a different path and try quietly and continuously to upright their own lives. Part of this may be some sort of mindfulness or appropriate exercise. It could be part of a spiritual practice. Let no one tell you otherwise. It is hard work to keep ourselves ‘together’ against an everchanging world. Each day, one must start over to sustain whatever breakthroughs that they achieved. Because in one quick moment, all that progress could be easily lost. But that is why it called ‘practice’. Fortunately, we have our relatively short lifetimes to get it right.

This is a constant struggle that I have experienced as well. What has worked for me was coming up with a regular daily routine to improve the mind, body, and spirit. (Something encouraged by Ken Wilber and others.) Whatever insights I have learned, I am sharing here with you, my precious readers.

This is not the first time I have covered this area. To aid in the personal journey, I published previously:

- *Musings* covering some daily practices for inner balance at the office and other topics.
- *Transitions* -- <https://hallettgermanfiction.ml/download/775/> which present Theravada Buddhist teachings through short stories and *Transitions 2* does the equivalent for the Mahayana tradition -- <https://hallettgermanfiction.ml/download/780/>
- *Spiritual Storms* which uses an unusual boot camp to discuss practices for Spiritual Project Management. However, the principles covered also apply well to everyday living.

Which brings us up to this book, the *Dhammapada Handbook*.

One of my personal favorite works is the poetic Theravada Buddhist text called the *Dhammapada*, the Pathway to the Buddha’s Teachings. It comprises of 26 chapters and 423 verses. Many of these were given as advice by the Buddha as a direct response to those seeking him out. But these words are far more than beautiful verses. They are an invaluable guide on the practices for helping us reach ever closer to an awakened life.

Right from the start, the *Dhammapada* grabs our attention by describing some of the distractions and pain points in our lives with the use of clear language. It discusses what our life focus should be and some destructive behaviors to avoid.

The *Dhammapada* was originally written in the ancient language of Pali and has been translated to other languages. Because Pali words can be subject to different interpretations, numerous translations and commentaries exist.

(Buddha, *Dhammapada* 2013) summarizes the challenge of translation:

*There are many different translations of the Dhammapada into English. Since Pali is a radically different language than English, and since shades of meaning are often lost to time, translators have a wide array of choices to make in every verse. Some translations attempt to convey the age and wisdom of the original text by using archaic English. Others try to maintain the poetic form by focusing on preserving the structure, assonance, and repetition of the original. Still others paraphrase the work in order to make it more approachable to a modern audience. The Dhammapada can serve many roles: as poetry, as anthropological description, as philosophical teaching, and as a guide for ethical living, just to name a few.*

Each of these translations help reveal and unfold some new aspect of this teaching.

The *Dhammapada* has many versions already and commentaries. So why is another book needed? Why did I decide to write this?

This is a personally important and meaningful book. I carried one of the three different versions that I owned while traveling on the road for six years. As a lay Buddhist practitioner, it seemed like a good time to share my thoughts on the *Dhammapada*. I have also listened to many spiritually-minded podcasts of all faiths that influenced the words written below.

What sort of tome this would be has changed over time. I remember the original starting point when I was thinking, “Wouldn’t it be cool to do a series of tales based on this writing.” And the original name was “*Dhammapada Stories*.”

Some days later, I saw this book could be much more than that and offer a richer experience. So, I expanded this book’s framework. It became simultaneously both a work of creative fiction and non-fiction that looks at this spiritual classic a little differently. This text uses a variety of approaches to help the reader better understand some of the *Dhammapada* verses as related to the contemplative practice.

For each topic, the book uses this framework:

- Start with selected translations of the verses as determined by Max Müller and/or Wikisource. (While the *Dhammapada* is ‘all over the Internet’, surprisingly few public domain versions exist in English.)

- My reinterpretation/paraphrasing of the verse. (Rather than a formal translation)

- My commentary on the verses. I wanted to keep it informal like you would hear at an evening Dharma/Dhamma talk. Or if I was having a one on one conversation with you.

- One or more original short story/stories based on the ideas of the verses but not necessarily Buddhist-like.

- And end with a few high-level practice activities you can follow to “get/stay on the path.”

This is a unique and consciously incomplete experiment. I hope that the resulting work resonates with your own thoughts and experiences. This is the most involved effort that I have spent creating a book.

Each chapter will be released on completion. The whole book will be released at the end.

From time to time I mention a meditation teacher. They were not consulted about nor have endorsed this book.

If you like what you read, please share with others. I would like to hear about your efforts. A wiki page supplement for each chapter can be found at <https://hallettgermanfiction.ml/book/dhammapada-handbook/>

The translations used are:

Buddha, Gautama. 2013. Dhammapada. September 12. Accessed January 6, 2018. Regrettably, this goes up to verse 79 only. <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Dhammapada>.

Buddha, Gautama. 1881. Sacred Books of the East. Vol. 10, in Dhammapada, a Collection of Verses; Being One of the Canonical Books of the Buddhists, by Gautama Buddha, translated by F. Max Müller. Oxford: Clarendon Press. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm>.

H.G. Williamsburg, Virginia January 2018

### ***Chapter 1: The Twin Verses***

[This is the start of the Dhammapada. As done throughout the book, only selected verses from each chapter are provided. The overall verse and chapter verse numbers are included.]

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0001>

<sup>1</sup> All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

<sup>2</sup> All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

<sup>3</sup> "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,"--in those who harbour such thoughts hatred will never cease.

<sup>4</sup> "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,"--in those who do not harbour such thoughts hatred will cease.

<sup>5</sup> For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule.

<sup>6</sup> The world does not know that we must all come to an end here;--but those who know it, their quarrels cease at once.

#### **Wikisource version**

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Dhammapada#Chapter\\_1:\\_The\\_twin-verses](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Dhammapada#Chapter_1:_The_twin-verses)

#### **1:1 (1)**

The mind is the basis for everything.  
Everything is created by my mind, and is ruled by my mind.  
When I speak or act with impure thoughts, suffering<sup>1</sup> follows me  
As the wheel of the cart follows the hoof of the ox.

#### **1:2 (2)**

The mind is the basis for everything.  
Everything is created by my mind, and is ruled by my mind.  
When I speak or act with a clear awareness, happiness stays with me.  
Like my own shadow, it is unshakeable.

#### **1:3 (3)**

"I was wronged! I was hurt! I was defeated! I was robbed!"  
If I cultivate such thought, I will not be free from hatred.

1:4 (4)

"I was wronged! I was hurt! I was defeated! I was robbed!"  
If I turn away from such thoughts, I may find peace.

1:5 (5)

In this world, hatred has never been defeated by hatred.  
Only love<sup>2</sup> can overcome hatred.  
This is an ancient and eternal law.

1:6 (6)

Everything will end.  
When I understand this, all quarrels fade away.

### **My 'paraphrased' version**

Even though we have our senses to help organize things outside of us, most of our interactions occur inside our minds. Mind is the star and director in our ongoing play starring our thoughts. If I come from a place free from egoistic and judgmental thoughts, then satisfaction will be my lot. If I come from a place clouded in misguided views, then suffering is sure to follow me. 'I am a victim and was hurt by others.' Following this mental trap of 'poor me' will ensure being stuck in a life of continuous self-loathing and hatred. Refraining from this thought pattern brings us ever closer to peace. Each day we see that a fresh dose of hatred will not solve any perceived wounds and scars. Each day we see examples of unconditional love overcoming hate. Once we know that hatred must end, then our internal and external battles will ebb away and cease.

### **Commentary**

Reading these words, I feel the Buddha's warm presence very much alive and surrounding me. Acting through the eyes of compassion, he serves like a good doctor seeking to heal his patient. To those afflicted souls seeking his advice, he discusses methodically their various symptoms and the resulting mental manifestations. From killers to kings, those from all walks of life came to him looking for answers and any sort of relief. Because one guarantee for this life is that some form of suffering and anguish will visit us all. Maybe for a short time. Maybe throughout our lives. And after getting their attention, the Buddha proceeded to calmly offer a cure, a real salve to the pains of their life journey. On hearing these words of salvation as if for the first time, they acknowledge the knowledge gained and typically remain vowed to follow his teaching as followers.

We are creatures captivated by our thoughts, emotions, and judgments. Reoccurring thoughts about the past and what we should have done better. Persistent thoughts about the future and the world that we want to see created where "if only" some condition was fulfilled, then we would be happy. Too often, we feel wronged, or shamed, or hurt. Petty injustices, threatened selves resulting in unhappy beings. And the cycle repeats 24 by 7.

We cannot control when and how often a thought will appear. Sometimes thoughts are so fleeting, that we are not cognizant of their arrival, departure, and power. And there are a million different types of mental formations. Silly thoughts. Song fragments. Movie scenes. Our most secret thoughts and desires. Regrets. Feelings of resistance. Feelings of hopelessness and despair. The desire to be loved and respected. And then minutes or hours later, we awake, released from their grasp. Or they keep coming back to haunt us without any immediate relief.

So, what can we do? Is any freedom possible from the mental straitjacket in this lifetime? Thankfully, the answer is yes. We can recognize the power of being held in a thought stream and

say simply “no, I see what you are doing mind and I’m not playing today.” Or just observe when a notion is born and quietly passes away. Only to be replaced by the next one. And in the watching, the grasping lessens, the mind gets a little quieter and less reactive. We then realize everything including our mind is subject to change and will eventually end. This makes our “thought parades” seem just a little less important. And when we realize the impermanent nature of our thoughts. In time, we learn not to get so attached to the current mind storm. Because another one is following shortly.

A moment may come where we seek a change of pace and follow a new set of rules. This could start by thinking “How may I serve others” and placing them first in our lives.

In the end, these words are nothing that you have not heard before. Maybe you had acted on them and stopped following after a few days. Or, usually we are so entranced “in my mind-only world,” there is little time to pause or reflect on how to do things better. But each day, we can start with a series of small but growing number of choices to secure our unsteady raft called our lives. And with a growing sense of spaciousness and a life of less reactivity, it is a new world. There is no time like the present to begin our practice to freedom. So, take the first steps starting now and be kind to yourself and others along the way.

### **Story: Contracted Mind**

Sigh it is another Monday. All day. And that means spending most of it recording new content for my interplanetary video show. This is a laborious task which gives me no joy in doing every two weeks. In the previous days, my administrative assistant and staff have been busy arranging for guests to appear and be interviewed today. I could not do this gig without them. And often let them know it.

Let me take a gander at the first topics. Hmm. Will need a lot of coffee and other helpers to get me through this.

Several Hours Later

“And welcome to show #1238. Yes, my friends, time for another rendition of Tales from the Hinter Worlds. Each week, we delve into those unusual stories from the edges of the universe that you won’t hear anywhere else.”

“Xkbaur. A desolate planet hosting thirty-three hardy souls. Each long day there is greeted with darkness and cold. This would not be a welcome scenario for most of us. But today’s guest, Mr. Del Torrance has lived there for twenty-two years and has grown a business out of his home. And not just any business. He is a mind mechanic.”

“Greetings of the Day to you Del. Welcome to TftHW. How are you doing today? What is the weather like in Xkbaur?”

“Thank you, Thomas. Our weather is a little on the cold side if we were on the surface. 200 degrees Celsius below zero. Out here there is not much to do at nights. So, I watch your show and replay past episodes. You are always at the top of your game. Every episode is a masterpiece. I try to never miss it if I can.”

“Great to hear Del and appreciate the kind words of praise. So, what is a mind mechanic and did get involved in becoming one?”

“Let me take the second question first. It is a fairly long answer, so please bear me as we go though this.”

“Great. And do not forget that the complete videocast will be available just our special patron watchers. Go ahead Del.”

“For a while I was living on a more populous planet. I’d rather not say which one since I left under pretty mysterious circumstances that those involved may have not yet forgiven me.”

“I was still quiet a young man. I was full of ambition but not direction. Just looking for something to get me ahead. Then one day, I made it to the edge of the city and met a teacher that I will call Castia. She was an elderly woman that was mentally sharp and gave very direct replies. But under that frightening exterior was a kind soul that challenged one to become a better person. And just on seeing me, she knew my life story. Afterwards, she asked me to become her apprentice for at least five years. With no other possibilities looming on the horizon, I accepted.”

“And that’s how I learned the skills of being a mind mechanic. You see, minds are such fragile things. A single doubt or depressing thought can render an otherwise capable person helpless for days on end. It is sad to watch how people self-sabotage themselves. And that is where I come in. I tune people’s minds to run smoothly. “

“I am captivated by your tale. How is your job performed?”

“People in great need ask for my help. Using my patented remote brain interface, I clean out all the negative thoughts that someone may have. It is just a question of knowing the right memory addresses in the brain. I replace it with self-affirming and reassuring thoughts. And never take advantage of being in their minds. Just do the job and nothing more. And my record speaks for itself.”

“And what happens if those thoughts aren’t removed?”

“Well, I will tell you one thing. It is not pretty. The person stays stuck in one place weighed down by their thoughts. And in that cloud of self-imposed shadows and darkness, the light of clarity is unable to shine forth.”

“That’s interesting. What are the self-affirming and reassuring thoughts that you are adding?”

“I try to rebuild the ground under them. Things are never as bad as they seem. If you have faith and persistence, eventually life will get better. No situation stays the same way forever. Conditions and their corresponding causes are always in a state of transition.”

“This sounds all very well and good, Mr. Torrance. But aren’t you and your mentor Castia, simply doing something that people can do easily on their own?”

“I wish it was that easy. Then people could pick up a magic wand and heal themselves. But that takes willpower and follow-up. So many of us are too easily swayed by our thoughts and feelings. They never get started or give up in the middle of some real progress.”

“Some people go against the tide and get their lives in order. Typically, they come to this unwillingly. Usually, a series of events resulting in great personal suffering must first occur. Only then, do they realize that they need a way out. And they find it somehow through reading some words of peace, encountering a teacher of a contemplative practice, or learning on how own how to calm and watch their thoughts.”

“But it is far easier to hire me to clean up ‘your gunk’ and set things in order. Quicker and less painful.”

“Useful information Del. And you do all of this remotely from your home! Any idea on what Castia is doing today?”

“Before we parted, she said that she was going to live a life without any external distractions. So, I expect that she is too is deposited in one of the remote edges of some distant galaxy. I wish her nothing but peace and contentment and thank her for the all of the knowledge that she imparted with me.”

“And before we wrap up, I will give you the opportunity for some parting advice for our viewers.”

“Your thoughts and emotions are just passing phenomena. Do not get sucked into their enticing stories. Avoid the mental quicksand. Let them briefly stop by and then watch them leave. Then you won’t need my services so soon.”

“Thanks, Del Torrance, mind mechanic. Time for a short break and then we will return with someone that will share her predictions for the next twenty years. You won’t want to miss this.”

### **Story: Store Disasters**

*[Mahayana Buddhism has a concept called storehouse consciousness. A simplified way to look at it is where the various mental records of our life journey to date are stored. They only disappear when the associated karmic debt is “paid in full.” However, that has nothing to do with this story.]*

Dagnabbit, that’s it. I’m throwing in the towel at the end of the day. Yes, I had enough so I am outta here by this evening. I quit. Gonesville. This time I REALLY mean it. I am good at doing my job. At the top of my game. It is just those dammed thoughts. If they only would behave, things would be SO much better. Why can’t they do that?

You have to understand. Momma did not raise a complainer. But there are some things that are just too much for one honest soul to bear. Let me take a step back so you can understand where I am coming from.

For six hours a day, this ‘mind store’ is mine to watch over. And with zero breaks. And most days that is far from an easy thing to do. Right now, I am looking down from the manager’s observation post shaking my head. Can there be really be that many disasters in one day? It does not help this is the holiday season and we are short-staffed. And I had just gotten back from a long, well deserved RESTFUL vacation. Now what good did it do? And on top of it all, it will be another nine months before I get another one!

For the next frantic thirty minutes, I was on pure adrenalin and multi-tasking like I have never done before. But that hard work paid off. The waters have calmed down. All problems are resolved. At least for now.

As I was saying before I dived into the madness, I manage each day what is called the “mind store” or “thought store”.

There is one in each human. I am not at liberty to say which human that I am in. But I can say it is a male in their twenties. And they have all sort of roaming thoughts and unsaid desires. My location is where thoughts manifest in the brain. And it is my job to vet and contain them before they transition into a verbalization or a physical act. Given the sheer volume of thoughts that my staff and myself have to manage, our hands are full during the entire shift. This occupation has an incredibly high burn out rate. Before they are booted, these shell-shocked managers end up not caring and let any thought pass by. This is dangerous for the outside world since these will let a series of harmful behaviors transition into reality.

Our store is one of the newer models. Up to twenty aisles from the old fifteen. And in any one of them you may find one or more roving mental creations. And some of those ideas are troublesome, let me tell you. Nothing but pure havoc.

I will begin with those demon-driven souls filled with nothing but a thirst for vengeance and a desire of complete destruction. Like some gleeful ill-behaved children, they rush with their carts up and down each aisle. They laugh when a carefully stacked pile of food is attacked. The



more destruction they cause, the cheerier that they are. For this being, we try to let only the least harmful ones “escape.”

The worst ones are the “sad souls.” You cannot even reason with them. They will stare at the cracker aisle for hours. Or simply block traffic by sitting down in the middle of things. And just sobbing and wailing away spouting nonsense such as “Oh poor me, I am so helpless.” And they are oblivious as to the commotion that they cause and the mess that they leave behind.

Then there are the indifferent beliefs. They do not commit to anything and usually just stay in one corner of the store without any thought as to what they were doing. Takes us hours sometimes after the store closing to get them to move on.

And last, I have to deal with those romantic feelings. They think that they alone see the beauty in everything. Even if there is not any to be seen. They sigh and then create some sort of love offering. When completed, they admire it. Then walk away leaving it behind. This scene is repeated by the hundredfold. So, my long-suffering and overworked staff have to haul these ‘masterpieces’ into the trash daily.

And these dramas are played out with a thousand different variations. Each driving me and my crew into convulsions and convulsions. Just for ten minutes, I would LOVE to be in a peaceful mind or a contemplative mind. Just to see what it is like. It must be nice.

Well I hope you enjoyed your visit. It is time to go. Rebellious and experimental thoughts have teamed together doing something that I have been told that I MUST see in person. Take care. And be kind to your mind and your own ‘store manager’.

### **Story: US versus THEM**

[A prose teaching based on real world experiences.]

I remember the first time I saw THEM.

I was taking a walk through our small town and THEY came into my view.

SOMETHING about THEM immediately drew my ire and aversion

It does not matter what it was.

All that mattered is that it brought up in me a strong sense of dislike.

And consumed my mind.

From that point forward, all I could do was think about THEM.

And the increasing number of injustices that THEY have brought into my world.

My mind was happily plotting countless different means of revenge.

Things were so good because of this.

My time for fulfillment was drawing near.

But as day of my payback drew near, there was an encounter of a different kind.

An elderly woman walked up to me and said,

“I have lived in your shoes and have been filled with nothing but hatred.”

“It was against a person that had done nothing wrong to me or anyone else.”

“One day after many years of strong dislike, I had a sudden realization.”

“I was on the wrong path.”

“The only one that was sensing anything wrong in my life was my own mind.”

“It was providing a drama that I was completely sucked into.”

“It was offering a supposed salve to my alleged wounds.”

“But the satisfaction that it was trying to achieve was empty and false.”

“The other person was barely aware, if at all of my existence.”

“It was time to drop the mental anguish calories and leave it all behind.”

“NOW is the time to do it.”

“Don’t let these feelings grow over the years.”  
“I promise the feeling of being unburdened is tremendous!”  
She smiled, briefly gave a gentle squeeze to my hand,  
And quietly walked away.  
I paused to ponder over her words.  
Had I been enacting mental overkill over a situation that was occurring only in my  
mind and nowhere else?  
A quiet voice inside me said,  
” Yes, that is exactly what you are doing.”  
And with that, I released my hatred, my daydreams of retribution.  
And felt lighter than I have been in some time.

Years later, I looked in the mirror and realized the  
woman that saved me was somehow my future self.  
Was it a dream, my conscience speaking to me, or an alternate reality?  
I never knew the answer to my dying days.  
I never became close to Liza.  
(My former THEM object).  
But throughout the rest of my life,  
I worked hard to send her thoughts of love and light her way.  
And when she passed away.  
I attended the funeral, genuinely sobbing and saying farewell.  
*May all beings be free from suffering.*

### **Practice**

A search for “how to be free from mental suffering Buddhism’ returns millions of hits. Fortunately, there is much advice out there. So, what will work for you? It may take some time to eventually find some of the answers. But there are some simple general practices that can be done today. Below are ten that I have learned on my own or through various sources. Simply add or remove to your “practice tool chest” as needed. Each day and moment are an unfolding experiment to see what approaches will work for you.

1. In times of stress, deep calming breaths to soothe the mind. Joseph Goldstein in his talks mentions saying simple verbal phrases such as ‘it is going to be okay’ helps tremendously. In time, you can feel various muscles in your body release their tensions and relax.

2. Looking at someone especially another driver :-)) and send them loving thoughts. Or think ‘you are real to me.’

3. When dealing with mental affliction in some situation, think “Just as I am suffering, so are other beings. May all beings be free from suffering.” Or just “May all beings be free from suffering.” Repeat frequently as many times as needed until the anguish subsides. Or just think, “heal.”

4. Find a way that works ever briefly or for a lifetime to get away from the mental distractions. It could be listening to contemplative music or mantras. Or a walk. Looking at nature. Or doing tai chi. Unfortunately, these are typically temporary remedies. Perhaps taking up a life of service to others and recharge as needed. There is an approach(es) out there just for you.

5. Be grateful for the riches and gifts that you already have. They are typically more than you know.

6. Truly accept what you are given. Coming from a sense of abundance rather than lack in time brings about in time real contentment.

7. Observe your thoughts without judgement or reactivity. Note when patterns are repeating. See if they are reoccurring because of a sense of lack, a perceived injustice, or some other reason. Calmly and patiently investigate. In time, these thoughts will lose their power and hold on you.

8. For many of us, it would be impossible to do this all on our own. It makes sense for you, find one or few kindred beings or a spiritual community that resonates for you. It may take several encounters with the above to determine if they are right for you. This may be supplemented with online resources/communities with talks and documents.

9. Release the unwanted ‘mental anguish calories’ of ruminating the past, planning for the future, and thoughts of inadequacy, fear, anger, torment, and more. At some point, one comes to a crossroads. You either double down and hold on to these ‘mental movies’, or let go and move on. Just letting go is always an option. But too often, the obvious choice is forgotten or placed in the background. Don’t buy into the drama and get sucked in.

10. Be kind to yourself and never stop growing your practice. Our lives are one ongoing experiment. Think of the long-term view and reflect on the mental progress that you have each day. Learn from recent emotional and mind-numbing setbacks. Our life journey is rarely a straight line. Then when the lessons have been found, forget dwelling on both any further and take the next steps.

### ***Chapter 2: The Wise Being***

[Variations of this verse appear throughout the Dhammapada. Examples includes verses 33, 80, and 145. I decided to use verse 80. There is not a Wikisource version. This verse is very straight forward as is. So while others may have refrained from tinkering or would have modernized it with the occupations of this time. I decided to take the “middle path” of changing the occupations but using those that would have been available during the time of the Buddha. From a Soto Zen perspective, see “*A Teaching from the Tenzo*” in *Transitions 2*.]

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0006>

80. Well-makers lead the water (wherever they like); fletchers bend the arrow; carpenters bend a log of wood; wise people fashion themselves.

#### **My ‘paraphrased’ version**

Sailors steer their ships forward; Cooks measure their ingredients; Wise beings never stop watching and sculpting their minds.

#### **Commentary**

So knowing that the mind is the culprit of our dissatisfaction, what can we do about it? In this verse, we are given real-world examples of mental focus and dedication that we can emulate. In each of our moments, we attempt calmly to investigate our minds. Then having done that, make any needed corrections from what we learned. And that is the homework for our lifetime. Even knowing that that the steady ground under us may not be so secure, we strive forward. Even if our days are filled with people or situations that we find difficult to deal with, we keep practicing. As a wise person once told me, there is no gaining. We keep at it knowing this

is the right thing to do. If persistent, over time, you will see subtle changes. The sense of winning and losing goes away. The beauty of various beings and objects comes sharper into focus. More time is provided to reflect before giving a response. Yes, there will be setbacks from time to time. Learn what you can from them and then resume practicing. Sincere efforts and intentions are all good. Please keep at it!

This topic is covered in more detail in *Spiritual Storms* with chapters on Great Faith and Great Determination.

### **Story: Tough Day**

Here I am in another one of those activities that make up our lives, At the moment this means partaking in the return drive from another crazy and mindless day at work. The hardest part of the trip is deciding which roadways that I will use. Some nights it means taking the highway which is mostly a slowdown except for certain parts. Or I employ a back way which can be faster. That is as long as I do not get behind these drivers that drive slowly.

The long ride gives ample opportunity to think about the things that happened during this particular day. Today was especially hard. Everyone that I encountered seemed angry and nasty. And looking for a quick emotional outlet, they went out of their way to take their 'revenge' on me. It seemed so unfair.

To survive, I have learned to forgive and forget. After all, they really were not angry at me personally. I was just a convenient endpoint for their bubbling frustration. We all get ticked off from time to time. But I confess that letting go and wiping the slate clean can be especially hard some days. Words and emotions from others can still hurt.

To help me cope better with these difficult days, I seek out time with my 'virtual teacher.' It seems somewhat of a dream on how we encountered each other. Maybe I have been searching for them all along.

Some months past, it was a terrible day. Things were spinning out of control and I was moving in and out of each crisis so fast that I do not think that I ever went to lunch or the restroom during my hours at work. Real need to decompress, I hooked into a virtual session online. My string of bad luck continued. Somehow, I had arrived in the darkest of places. It had a one-word name that perfectly described the inhabitants and behaviors within -- MADNESS. For there resided some perfect fine examples of base behavior from a healthy sample of the universe's various riff-raff. It was a world filled with so many morally corrupt souls driven only by their passions and looking out for themselves. The life expectancy in this feared location was very short. Yet still people come here in droves for thrills, profit, and a myriad of other self-centered reasons.

I was the rare being that had gotten themselves very lost and arrived here unexpectedly. Not being a very physically strong person and lacking weapons of any kind, I felt nothing but continuous dread as I tread quickly through the main thoroughfare. Somehow, I had stumbled my way onto a welcome side street. Mercifully, it was quiet. At that the end of the

street, was a large and faded sign that said nothing but the words. PRACTICE WITHIN. I was puzzled after gazing at this unusual advertisement. What exactly would I be practicing? Figure skating? Archery? Cheating at Poker? Or some other devious skill that would surely lead to my death? Curious, and facing an uncertain future, I pushed at the doorway.

Once through, all transformed to another place and time. Virtual worlds can do that. I was in an abandoned building that looked that one time was a heavy machinery factory. This looked to be the highest floor. All of the windows had been long gone. There were sizable chunks of the ceiling and the floor no longer visible. Having no jacket, I was freezing from the frigid temperatures in this unknown location and would be unable to return to my mind and body. If that did not get me, then a sure demise from a crumbling ceiling or the floor breaking open even further was guaranteed. I was resigned to my likely sad fate. Just then, the room gave way and I started falling into sheer darkness. Descending at a rapid speed, my remaining time alive was quickly coming to an end. Then without any notice, my free fall ended. I had landed what was sort of meadow. Unsure how to proceed, I slowly turned around surveying my surroundings looking for an inviting spot. Nothing stood out in any direction. All I could see were fields of dazzling colors from the various alien-looking flowers.

It was too much. There was no exit door out of this world. I was doomed to spend my remaining years of existence in this space. And in the so-called real world, my body would continue in a dream-life state until whatever that I had as a life there would ebb away. Then after that, I hope that all would just cease.

At some point, I fell asleep. And after an unknown number of hours later, awoke under the canopy of a star-filled sky. The time of involuntary rest had refreshed me. However, the grim nature of my difficult plight remained unchanged.

Somehow, I became aware of a small yet steady light in the distance. The unexpected illumination was an offer of hope. Perhaps there was another being, hopefully friendly on this isolated world. Another physical or emotional warmth would be a welcome sight at this time. How did I not see this before?

Mustering up all the remaining energy that I had, my body took over and ran towards this possible sign of life. In time, I saw it. Not that far ahead were the ruins of a house. My heart sank a little. This former abode was lacking a roof and missing two windows. There would not be much warmth to be found there. Undeterred, I kept moving forward. It would still be a place to hide and think things over. I came to the door which was still intact. With a good deal of effort, I pushed it opened, seeking some sort of shelter.

I walked inside. What appeared was a young child with pleasing looks. There was no flame in the room yet somehow it was lit. What was the source of the brightness?

At last they spoke. The words flowed alternating between periods of stillness and calm deliberation.

“When your mind was engulfed with thoughts of helplessness and defeat, you could not see this dwelling. You could not enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the field. You never saw the safety and quietness surrounding you here. Yet here I was, never that far away from you. Sleep stilled the rough mental waters and you could find your way here at last.”

“Whether in the real or a virtual world, it is far too easy to get trapped and be quickly overwhelmed. One falsely identifies themselves as being solely their thoughts, feelings, or body. They delude themselves to think that they are separate from the world. They think it is all personal when none of it is. And that is when the chain of events causing the personal immersion into the shadows begins.”

I do not know if I understood what they meant. But their peaceful demeanor caught my attention. I asked quizzically, “So I am now a complete mess, how do I make things right?”

The child, soon to be my teacher simply said, “Practice within by observing the offering of each moment. They are a true gift and teaching. What you see now as difficult people are really our most precious and needed teachers. Accept and have gratitude on what they give you. In time, the shadows will lose their power to upset and disrupt. In time, the lessons that you sorely need are learned. Then they will recede into nothingness.”

I thanked them, not quite sure what it all meant. They smiled and said, “Time for you return. Please mull over what I said. Practice within with all your diligence. When you return to this virtual world, you will find it easier to find the signs leading you to the portal. Go though that portal. In time you will find me again and we can meet.”

And with that, I was back on my couch. What had just taken place? I thought about what was said. As instructed, I started to practice within. I watched the feelings arise and pass. I saw how my mind so effortlessly tried to stir up trouble. It wanted me to feel alone and hurt -- to be apart from this world. It desired to escalate everything as a personal attack. This was an ongoing delusion of my own construction. Practice within. Non-identify with the mental and emotional phenomena that arise. Nothing to grasp onto.

I arrived in my driveway. Maybe it was not as bad of a day as I thought. I made it to the end with mostly a clear head and not hurting others though words or deeds. Practice within indeed. Time to talk to my virtual teacher on what I have learned and have yet to learn. A true dialog not a one-way conversation. And come away with more words to thoughtfully ponder.

### **Practice**

The practices in Chapter 1 on observing the mind are an important step in taming the mind. Consider as well the following.

1. Practice is a great daily and lifelong experiment. We can try out various tools and techniques and see what works for today. Some techniques may be useful later. Keep on trying and do not get easily discouraged. What you are undertaking is not an easy thing to do. But it is achievable. Thoughts do not go away. But with persistence, the power that they hold over us should recede over time.

2. We all get insights every day. Sometimes, we have to relive certain lessons until they become clearer. The non-judging mind will see the lessons clearer.

3. Consider starting and/or ending your day with a dedication of merit such as the first paragraph of

<http://www.katinkahesselink.net/tibet/blessing.html> or singing

<https://www.urbandharma.org/udharma9/merit.html>

4. As we observe our thoughts and feeling more, what happens? Do we find them to be permanent or temporary? Do we identify with them more or less? Are thoughts solitary or do they start chains of other thoughts? Are there feelings and a growing sense of identification associated with these chains? Is there a sense of wrong and hurt? On further reflection, was this a correct assessment? If we observe others, do we see the same sort of behaviors as we see in ourselves? Does that observation make us more or less compassionate to them?

5. One helpful signpost is when we become aware that we are ensnared in one of these mental trips and traps. Another one is when we can correct our behavior and identification and thus loosen the grip some that these formations have over us. When these signposts occur more often, we are moving ever closer to the mental liberation that we truly seek.

### ***Chapter 3: The Thousands***

Two of the sixteen verses in the chapter are presented below. I tried to do a paraphrase that included more of the intent behind the words based on other Buddhist teachings.

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0008>

100. Even though a speech be a thousand (of words), but made up of senseless words, one word of sense is better, which if a man hears, he becomes quiet.

103. If one man conquer in battle a thousand times thousand men, and if another conquer himself, he is the greatest of conquerors.

#### **My ‘paraphrased’ version**

During each day, we can hear thoughtless and harmful words in our conversations from ourselves and others. Our lives involve confronting clear falsehoods, disruptive vocabularies, hateful speech, and meaningless gossip. Far better is to hear just one word supportive of others,

loving in nature, and offering a welcome sense of calm. On encountering this, the mind becomes more silent.

A general winning hard-fought battle after battle pales in stature next to one that has vanquished the greatest foe, their own mind.

### **Commentary**

Our mind is an incredibly active and creative laboratory brewing up thousands of new mental and emotional concoctions each day. Like a scientist, we need to investigate seriously how it works and make any needed adjustments. One of the many gateways to freedom is monitoring and correcting our words whether in face to face conversations, electronic, written or video sessions.

The Buddha saw this investigation as an important task in our lives. It is part of the Noble Eight-Fold Path to liberate our minds.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble\\_Eightfold\\_Path#Right\\_speech](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble_Eightfold_Path#Right_speech) The Buddha also outlined Ten Royal Qualities which lay people and leaders should seek to follow. [See http://www.kansascity.com/living/religion/article25088344.html](http://www.kansascity.com/living/religion/article25088344.html).

But how one be charitable, honest, gentle, be free from anger, and have self-control if we are the promoters of angry, hurtful, boasting, and harmful speech? How can we be altruistic if we are always saying things just to promote ourselves up and push others down? We simply cannot. Failure to control our speech will hinder any significant spiritual progress.

The honored adage “think before speaking” is a good guideline. Because once we say something awful to someone else, we can never truly take back that hurt. No words of forgiveness ever remove completely the emotional scar that we gave our loved ones and friends. In the back of mind, we are always stuck in that moment. Even if pops up and disappears ever so briefly. Far better to avoid that situation and have a life free of social minefields.

Right speech. It is a tough lifetime homework assignment because there are too many reactive and tense situations in our lives not to make a mistake sometime. But always keep thinking. “Do the best that I can today. Do even better tomorrow.” Because persistence and constancy will ensure being closer to a world of less mental chatter and affliction. And a smaller karmic debt.

### **Story: Cafe Society**

The day was dragging slower than usual. Only two eighteen. That is, if I can try believe the aging clock on the wall. Still, it is just a few hours to closing. Then I have to figure out what to do before shutting down for the night.

I was not always so ‘non-productive.’ You see, it all began some years back. It had happened after one frustrating day of dealing with corporate in-fighting and bureaucratic procedures. I just threw in the towel, no longer cared. And started to phone it in going through the motions. Just got simply tired of hard working. I no longer wanted a so-called regular life. The small conversations. Those moments of awkwardness and vulnerability with my colleagues. Trying to keep up with the constant change. Just not cut out for this.

To prepare for new life, I spent five years saving as much as I can and re-investing. My plan turned out well. At the end of that time, I had accumulated enough to live modestly for years to come. And still keeping some funds invested.

And with that, I walked away from what others might call a successful life. But then I found a bigger challenge -- what would I do with my life? Immediately, the question incensed me. Why should I do anything? I did anything for a long time.



But still, something was required to pass the time. That is when I found Minerva's Cafe. Right from the start, I wanted to set expectations. So, I began talking with the owner and explained my plan. Spend the day there and buy enough food and drinks as not to be kicked out. She thought for a moment and said, "I have a better plan. You see, no one wants to get up early anyone. Rather stay up late at night or be hunkered down near a computer. My help comes just before opening. I had pleaded for them to come in earlier many times. So, become my 'permanent work volunteer' and help me get ready to open up. Then, you can have your meals and drinks free. Stay as long as you wish. Having a quiet, warm body looking comfortable will help sales. You can save your money for something you really need."

I agreed. So next day I was there to help Lee open up. She told me that Minerva had been her mother that started the cafe and left it to her. The owner was very talkative. "I left this town. Went to college. Had a few love affairs. And came back. Life is just calmer here. I'm sure that you noticed that." I told her, "Yes."

It was nice to have a hideout. I spent the rest of the day at the cafe in a strategically placed corner just observing others. All while feigning to read a magazine and never getting past the fifth page. What did I watch? People's vocal tones. Their word selection and reaction to them by others. And what I learned astounded me. Most people don't hold back and deliberate. They just let the words fly. It was mostly words about some famous person or new popular controversy. Or just being insensitive clods Is this all we are -- content conveyors and social chaos creators?

One morning setup, Lee mentioned, you are mulling something over. If you wish, why don't you share what you are thinking. I might be able to help out a little."

Slowly, I explained my 'homework assignment' of observing others and how discouraging it all seemed. She smiled and said simply, "Is that all?" Then she started what would be a long conversation:

"Think of the mind as a book that is very simple and complex at the same time. There are some aspects that you may pick up right away. But others will take many readings. Watching people's speech is a good thing as well as their actions. But you learn just as much watching your own. Just be patient and watch the whole thing unfold. Don't try to change everything at once. Maybe this week you focus on less focus about talking about others. And yes, we do spend a lot of time on others being the subject of our conversation. Maybe another week is spent looking on the timing of our conversations. Or our motivations for what we say. Or the outcomes that we are producing with our words. Are they more about healing or harming? It is like an adventure and you always have something to practice making better."

After she finished, I thanked Lee and said that what she said made a good deal of sense. I curious how she became so smart. Out came a well-worn copy of the *Dhammapada*. She pointed to a chapter called "The Thousands". And I learned how just one day where a person made a concerted effort to tame their mind was more valued than a lifetime of being ignorant of one's words and actions. That stuck with me. And I tried the suggestions of monitoring my mind as Lee laid out ever since.

*Some time later.*

She passed away five years ago and left the cafe and the book to me. I found her a good 'boss' and friend. And I changed the name of the cafe to Lee's in her memory. There is a picture of her placed near the entrance. From her, I learned that a job or life does not have to be a drudgery. Instead, it can be a time of joy. And the daily lessons learned can be a path to growing our awareness of ourselves and others. Well, gotta go. There are customers to serve and I have my reading group in the Library later. This week's session will be on the *Dhammapada* and I am

facilitating. Cannot wait to listen to others and share what I have learned. May there be love and light on your path as there has been in mine. I'm outta here!

### **Practice**

There are many places to check what the Buddha said on Right Speech. This includes but is not limited to:

<https://accesstoinight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca4/samma-vaca/index.html> -- Right Speech

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satipatthana\\_Sutta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satipatthana_Sutta)-- Satipatthana Suta (Foundations of Mindfulness)

What has worked for me is the following:

1. Before speaking, observe what is driving the need to communicate:
  - Is it coming from a place of feeling threatened, hurt, or wanting to heal and help?
  - Am I thinking this because I am mentally and physically exhausted? Do I need to instead sleep, drink, or eat?
  - Am I trying to make myself look clever, funny, and the like?
  - Do I have an urgent need to share news about a certain situation or someone?
  - Do I want to control or take possession of someone/something?
  - Am I sure of the facts in what I am saying?
  - Is this a result of my socio-economic/identity worldview?

Once I understand the motivation of the need to discuss, does it grow or get weaker? Typically, the latter is the case.

Sometimes I start writing something. And on completion, I delete it or look at it again the next day. Then more or not delete/rewrite it.

In doing this, a sense of spaciousness grows over time and one becomes more reactive.

2. By making our primary aim to help and support others rather than breeding an adversarial relationship, the motivations of our talking or writing changes. One starts to listen more and appreciate others' viewpoint. They will start to think more in terms of 'We' instead of 'I'.

3. Monitoring our thoughts even before it bubbles up to words can be a useful tool in vetting our desire to pass on our inner conversations.

4. If you do need to speak or write, do we make sure that it is a right time in the conversation? Because timing can make a big difference.

5. Offer thoughts and actions of appreciation, gratitude, giving and love often. It will achieve more than a multitude of ego-driven equivalents.

6. Many of us are afraid to have silence. But sometimes a pause in a discussion can help all to calm down, reflect, and determine what really needs to be said.

### **Chapter 4: Harming**

In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha reviewed a catalog of the various "mental quick sands" that we can find along the way. And like a good doctor, he offers a steady hand and sure

cure for each obstacle. The chapter title translated usually as Violence. But the verses go into far more than dealing with physical attacks.

### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0010>

131. He who seeking his own happiness punishes or kills beings who also long for happiness, will not find happiness after death.

132. He who seeking his own happiness does not punish or kill beings who also long for happiness, will find happiness after death.

133. Do not speak harshly to anybody; those who are spoken to will answer thee in the same way. Angry speech is painful, blows for blows will touch thee.

142. He who, though dressed in fine apparel, exercises tranquillity, is quiet, subdued, restrained, chaste, and has ceased to find fault with all other beings, he indeed is a Brahmana, an ascetic (sramana), a friar (bhikshu).

### **My 'paraphrased' version**

All seek an ongoing sense of contentment. Those physically destructive to all creatures also desire this. But in life or death, those that threaten or bring harm to others will not achieve this desired end. For they have chosen a path of bringing hurt and death to all beings that they meet.

All seek an ongoing sense of contentment. Those wishing to not hurt all creatures also desire this. But whether in life or death, those with thoughts and actions focused on non-harming will achieve the desired end. For they have chosen a path to bring a sense of ease to all beings that they meet.

Do not speak words of anger at others. For they will be returned to you in equal measure.

Most important is to go about each day in a calm manner. Those that are silent, controlling themselves, not impacted by the dramatic circumstances of this world, holding back on their emotions and thoughts, and avoid seeing the shortcomings of others are indeed practicing well.

### **Commentary**

The Buddha was no stranger to violence in his time. There are various written examples of his encounters with vicious people. In each case, he came from a place of non-reactivity, non-harming, and loving-kindness which won out in the end.

He sadly witnessed the massacre of own clan, the Shakyas. His own cousin hired assassins, tried to kill him by dropping a boulder, and intoxicated an elephant to trample him. But the power of lovingkindness and truth overcame all these obstacles. And coming from a place of compassion for all beings, the Buddha never showed any resentment towards Devadatta. Unfortunately, Devadatta also convinced the son of King Bimbisara to murder his father. The good King was a steadfast supporter of the Buddha. In the very end of his life, Devadatta realized the folly of his actions. He was on his way to say how sorry he was for all of his actions.

The Buddha even met face to face a serial killer, Angulimala. He had killed 999 people just to offer their fingers to his guru for approval. (The guru had set a high goal hoping that his student would be caught or give up.) The Buddha was slated to be his thousandth victim. But after various futile attempts to kill him, the murderer started to listen to the words of the Buddha on how he had stopped wishing to harm others. In the process, he began a new life by becoming a monk. Yet it was not easy for Angulimala as a monk. He did not have to wait for a future lifetime to experience suffering. He was attacked and mocked by the relatives of his former

victims. Others would ignore him as he passed by. Knowing that this kind of suffering was a direct doorway into insight, The Buddha instructed him on how to develop a sense of equanimity. Because of his dedication to his practice, he reached Arahantship where he became awakened in this lifetime. And the experienced Nirvana (Pali word - nibanna) after his passing. To read his story, visit <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.086.than.html>.

Hatred does not end hate. Harsh words return the same in kind. Intended or actual harming of others starts a cycle of suffering in this lifetime for the ones causing and receiving the suffering. But as Devadatta and Angulimala showed, we can change our lives for the better at any moment. This does not guarantee that the suffering will ever end. But how we deal with life's challenges can become completely different. In time with persistent effort, we find an increasing sense of peace and patience. And that is why persistence and consistent behavior along with a real sense of urgency results in a better life for our remaining years

### **Story: This is Calm**

My world seems to offer but destruction.  
Harsh words to others.  
Scenes of senseless murder sprees.  
All of us some sort of victim  
Or knowing someone that suffered.  
We all harbor some level of hatred  
That flame does not get snuffed out that easily.  
But there are other narratives easy to find but hard to follow  
Going against the stream  
Forgiving yourself  
Forgiving others  
Finding the love that has always reside within.  
And now the mind is stilled  
Dreadful thoughts pass by without grasping me  
Now seeing the world with a wider scope  
Relaxed from head to toe  
And so this is calm  
The homecoming that I always wanted  
Finally grinning inside from ear to ear  
My peaceful existence begins.

### **Practice**

Here are some of the things that you can consider to quell the need to attack others whether through words or physical acts.

1. View the handiwork of your past deeds. When King Ashoka viewed the dead bodies of the troops of his armies and those of his enemies, there was not a sense of pride from victory and territorial gain. Instead he had feelings of horror and dread in viewing the outcomes of his actions. He saw the emptiness of his own senseless actions. From that point onward, he began to focus on helping not harming people.

2. Truly see the other person as being interrelated to you instead of being labelled as a *them*. You both share the same planet and sky, the same desires, and the same short life spans. Once you realize that you both have a lot in common, then a sense of compassion starts to arise.

3. Set a goal each day. Kusala Bhikshu talks about saying “today I will not harm a (species to be added).” Start with humans and work your way to smaller creatures. Recognize and respect this intention, Celebrate achieving the goal at day end.

4. Question and Examine your motives. Do they still hold up after review or evaporate?

5. Practice other-centered meditation such as tonglen or lovingkindness (metta). The former you take in and then let go the perceived pains of others. The latter you start wishing yourself good wishes and then you expand to the universe.

6. If you do directly or indirectly cause harm, then examine the set of circumstances that led to that particular situation and vow for it never to happen again.

### ***Chapter 5: Our Actions and Their Consequences***

In this chapter, we continue to look at the beneficial and harmful results of our actions. The verse below mentions three watches. Note that a watch is a four-hour period. So, three watches are half a day or twelve hours. It was during one such three-watch evening period that the Buddha went through the final stages to reach enlightenment. More about what happened can be found in <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/vesak2.htm>.

#### **Müller version**

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0012>

157 If a man hold himself dear, let him watch himself carefully; during one at least out of the three watches a wise man should be watchful.

163 Bad deeds, and deeds hurtful to ourselves, are easy to do; what is helpful and good, that is very difficult to do.

165 By oneself the evil is done, by oneself one suffers; by oneself evil is left undone, by oneself one is purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself, no one can purify another.

#### **My ‘paraphrased’ version**

If a being cherishes their own given short life, then they should use this precious time to observe openly their ongoing thoughts and actions.

Harmful words and actions wound ourselves and others very quickly. Supportive words and actions will be helpful to ourselves and others swiftly. However, they cannot be achieved without a good deal of sustained effort.

We are the creator of our harmful actions and own sufferings. Through one choice, a wrongful path can grow. Through one choice, a path of inner wisdom can flourish. No one else is responsible for our moments of light or shadows in this life. It is up to us alone to find and stay on a path ending suffering and bringing eventual illumination.

#### **Commentary**

The last chapter covered how through our actions we originate our personal variations of heaven or hell on earth. We alone determine how we handle the bumps in the road that life gives us. In a snap of a moment, whatever we have now could be gone or changed forever due to just one harmful or thoughtless action. To avoid that, we must urgently and fervently dedicate our waking and even sleeping moments to watching what our mind does and helping our thoughts, words, and deeds stay on track. As mentioned above, this takes a good deal of effort to keep

afloat. While others can help us grow during our spiritual voyage, in the end, it is our life and our path that no one else can own.

What is your life journey? Where is it taking you? Will be more of the ten thousand joys or the ten thousand sorrows? Cultivating a mind dedicated to non-harming ourselves and others is a choice that we can make. We will then have many moments in our lifetimes to get it right and then get it right again. Use them well.

### **Story: Getting It Right**

I should be thrilled to death having made it through another winter. But my circumstances prevented me from experiencing this time of joy.

You see, my life is a complete mess, totally in tatters. I am not certain as to when it began. Everything was going so right and I had some good friends. Maybe even a hopeful and promising future.

But then it seemed as some sort of ‘bad karma switch’ was turned on and the gradual yet ever increasing decline began. My intentions were always for the best. But that did not matter. Something I was doing was just off and I was not sure how to correct it. My friends increasingly told me that my personality was toxic and started to leave one by one. My words were viewed by strangers as being biting and insensitive. And my actions were seen increasingly as threatening. And the harder that I tried, the worse it got. It was a depressing time.

I looked at this year’s calendar. It said the date was in mid-March. I don’t recall ever having encountered such windy days before. Against my better judgment, I decided to test my strength against those strong gusts. Right from the start, I knew that this would not be easy. Heck, it was a struggle to move forward even a few steps. Several times, those heavy breezes pushed me back. Soundly defeated, I was about ready to call it quits, give up, and head on back home.

But from the corner of my eye something moving caught my attention. It was an elderly man using an umbrella as a barrier against the harsh winds. But a sudden gust became victorious and the umbrella flipped upwards with the formerly stable covering almost perfectly inverted.

Still, he was undeterred in his effort. The gentlemen calmly turned the umbrella downward and it flipped back nearly perfectly. Then he attempted his move forward again. One slow and laborious step at a time.

And then from watching this scene, I got it. A small voice echoed through my head and said simply *get it right*. It took me days to figure out what the words meant.

In time, this is what I learned. Just simply observe what I was thinking, saying, and doing. If it was off, then make the necessary small changes. And never stop doing just this. Because *getting it right* was not just a one-time thing but a lifetime of attentive experience.

### **Practice:**

In the earlier chapters, many things that you could do were discussed previously. However, these additional practices may be of help.

Before speaking or acting, ask yourself:

- If these behaviors are harmful or beneficial to yourself.
- If these behaviors are harmful or beneficial to others.
- What do you think will be your mind state afterwards -- such as being emotionally agitated, feeling superior/inferior, or grateful?
- Are you observing the verbal and nonverbal cues of those you interact with to determine the proper course to proceed?

- Are you interacting the same if these behaviors were harmful or beneficial to yourself in the past or choosing differently? If the same, what was the result from that time?

Again, you have to be continuously observe yourself without judgment. It should become apparent on what minor and major adjustments need to be made. Realize that you are in it for the long-term haul. This is not the typical human approach. Once some progress is made, the student typically feels good about themselves and becomes overconfident. At this point in time, a relapse is likely.

To get it right, be patient and honest with yourself. Admit when a choice did and did not go well. Don't rush the 'process'. As the Tibetan sage said, hasten slowly. Repeat the cycle of observing and making small adjustments. It will likely not be a straight line. Instead, expect a good deal of zigzagging.

Having a sense of humor about your practice will help go a long way. Some may recommend journaling, writing poems, stories, and songs, and more to help record the process. But for others, this may be distracting and result in focusing on things that would be otherwise ignored.

Take it slow and get it right. And a more rewarding life passage will begin to arise. Wishing you well in your practice.

### ***Chapter 6: Our Transitory World and Bodies***

In this chapter, we look at some words the Buddha said about the world and the bodies that we inhabit ever so temporarily. We learn whether or not if either is something to rely on. Verses from two different chapters of the Dhammapada are being used here to illustrate the ties between these two topics.

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0011> -- Old Age

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0013> -- The World

146. How is there laughter, how is there joy, as this world is always burning? Why do you not seek a light, ye who are surrounded by darkness?

148. This body is wasted, full of sickness, and frail; this heap of corruption breaks to pieces, life indeed ends in death.

150. After a stronghold has been made of the bones, it is covered with flesh and blood, and there dwell in it old age and death, pride and deceit.

174. This world is dark, few only can see here; a few only go to heaven, like birds escaped from the net.

#### **My 'paraphrased' version**

How can you enjoy temporary delights in a world caught in the flame of self-suffering? Why do you stay sheltered in the shadows when the light of clarity is so nearby?

Our bodies are always in some state of decline. Illness is the unwanted guest that we can keep away only for so long. A weakened state and the death's arrival is guaranteed at the end.

Some incorrectly view their body as a fortress. But our skin and bones are unreliable guardians to keep out aging, illness, and our eventual demise. Our hardy physical frames will not protect us from our raging emotions and thoughts.

In a world where so many are locked into their own minds and emotions, few are free from self-suffering. Far fewer will live awakened here and beyond.

## **Commentary**

Reading the words above, one could view them mistakenly only about suffering and decline. They discuss a world where so many live in ignorance about the suffering of themselves and others. It unflinchingly deals with the unreliability of the body. Not a pleasant thing to read if you have been avoiding these truths for some time.

But sometimes you need to push a little harder to remove our self-perpetuated illusions and seek the way to clarity. It is a daunting task to attempt. There will likely be many relapses along the way. There will be frequent times that we are frustrated for seemingly having made no progress at all. We will likely forget about these teachings when we need them the most. We may abandon this path and never come back due to lingering doubts and fear. Or return to them many years later. The teaching of aging, sickness, and death is often not a graceful or easy process to deal with. But observing them as we would any other difficult person or a situation is a gateway to finding true calm. Believe that there is a path away from self-suffering. All you can do is work each day to follow the necessary actions to slowly pull you away from the darkness of non-beneficial thoughts and actions. Baby steps to mental liberation now and forever.

## **Story: Solitary Life**

Today, I celebrated my eighty-third birthday bereft of friends, neighbors, and family. And I am the better for it. The woods and nature are all the company that I need. We are respectful of and do not impose on each other. I only take what I need only to survive and replace them each time.

I like being alone with only my thoughts and memories. It was not always the case. My brain used to hold me hostage. It was like having two people inside of me. Myself and that unsatisfied mental/emotional monster therein. But over time, I learn to listen less to its rantings and that side of me became increasingly silent.

Still, it is not now or ever has been an easy life. My back is far from what it used to be. On some days, I feel too weak and cannot raise myself out of bed. On other days, there is nothing but bouts of helplessness and feeling useless. Still, I keep going. I start the day by meditating under a large tree facing the soon arising morning sun. At the end, I feel energized and ready to take on whatever the world hands to me. I end up the doing the same thing with the ascending moon.

When my time finally comes, I will feel at peace having passed away here and not in a location with so many discontented and self-tormented souls. And to have one final use in returning to the Earth to replenish her.

## **Practice**

Many of the suggestions above may apply here as well.

1. During the week I wrote this, I listened to a wonderful talk from Dharma teacher Bill Weber on “Getting Back of the Eightfold Path”. But it also deals with aging. The Gay Buddhist Fellowship talks are funny, honest, insightful, and a good use of time for any planetary resident. [http://gaybuddhist.org/talks/2018.02.11%20Bill%20Weber%20\(Getting%20Back%20On%20The%20Eightfold%20Path\).mp3](http://gaybuddhist.org/talks/2018.02.11%20Bill%20Weber%20(Getting%20Back%20On%20The%20Eightfold%20Path).mp3)
2. Recognize that Old Age, Sickness and Death are just another spiritual teacher and practice.
3. Lovingkindness meditation, Dedication of Merit, and *tonglen* practice allows us to recognize the suffering of ourselves and others. And offer love and light to help others that are suffering from any human condition or situation.



4. One of the freeing realizations that you can have is finding out that you are not alone with your situation. So perhaps doing a meditation dwelling on the following may be liberating.

*Just as I am suffering, others are also suffering. May all beings be free from suffering.*

*Just as I am ill, others are also ill. May all beings be free from suffering while ill*

*Just as I am aging, others are also aging. May all beings be free from suffering while aging.*

*Just as I am dying, others are also dying. May all beings be free from suffering while dying.*

5. There is a saying, “pain is a given, but suffering is optional”. We will always endure some form of physical and mental pains. But how we react to them is up to us.

Wishing you and yours a meaningful, full, and mindful life journey.

### **Chapter 7: Teachings and Practices**

What follows below covers part of a key *Dhammapada* chapter called “The Buddha.” It talks about some major Buddhist concepts. This includes the following:

- *The Three Refuges* of the Buddha (teacher), Dhamma (truth or teaching) and the Sangha (The assembly of monks. But the original meaning has been expanded in common practice to include all Buddhist practitioners.)

- *The Four Noble Truths*. These explain the human condition that includes suffering, its causes, that there is a way out from that fate, and how to escape by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

- *The Noble Eightfold Path*. Eight teaching practices to steer us away from suffering and towards mental liberation.

For this chapter only, there will be no stories but two commentaries.

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0014>

183. Not to commit any sin, to do good, and to purify one's mind, that is the teaching of (all) the Awakened.

185. Not to blame, not to strike, to live restrained under the law, to be moderate in eating, to sleep and sit alone, and to dwell on the highest thoughts, —this is the teaching of the Awakened.

188. Men, driven by fear, go to many a refuge, to mountains and forests, to groves and sacred trees.

189. But that is not a safe refuge, that is not the best refuge; a man is not delivered from all pains after having gone to that refuge.

#### **My ‘paraphrased’ version**

Not performing harmful actions, accomplishing beneficial deeds, and freeing the mind from mental distractions, these are the practice guidelines from the Buddha.

Not injuring though our words or actions, watching carefully over our minds and emotions, balancing our food consumption and slumber duration, seeking time to be truly alone with ourselves, and living in a mindful state, these are the practice guidelines from the Buddha.

During a time of anxiety and stress, the reactive mind will seek high and low for a sanctuary free from suffering.

But such a sanctuary will not be of any benefit for those wishing to alleviate their perceived pains.

#### **Commentary 1: Practices**

The path to our gradual awakening does not begin nor end at the meditation mat. But our “mind watching and mind freeing” time can be incredibly helpful in dealing with the mundane aspects of our life.

The Noble Eightfold Path and the above words show very practical ways to keep balanced. By watching how much we eat or sleep. By not working at a job that take advantage of or harm others. This provides a different way of seeing, speaking, acting than typically is found. It encourages us to be introspective and reflect on all we intend and actually do. It covers those steps we should do to train our minds.

So not knowing how long our lives are for, we should vow today to fight back against our many moments of unskilled behavior and gravitate towards whatever conduct will truly help ourselves. It is both a radical experiment and the best gift we can give ourselves and others.

### **Commentary 2: The Three Refuges**

Some of us are desperate for any sort of refuge. As a result, we escape to nature, try out a new leisure pursuit or a different form of spirituality. And we come more anxious and unfulfilled than when we came in. All because we let ourselves get in the way of the direct experience with unrealistic expectations, self-deceptions, and self-glorification.

There are many fine current and past examples of how to live our lives each day. The Buddha offers one such approach. You can see it in those that he selected as his chief followers. You can read how he did not respond to anyone with threats, harshness, or physical retaliation. He always came from a place of non-harming, compassion, and lovingkindness for others. His teachings did not share all of the amazing insights that he knew, but only those key ingredients to set us on a sure path away from suffering. He told us to experiment to see what works. He asked us to strive on in a practice with a sense of diligence. He provided clear criteria for us to judge if a teaching is true. (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalama\\_Sutta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalama_Sutta).) He gave us examples of how to deal with difficult and harmful people, aging, sickness, and death.

He lived eighty years of which fifty-one was living as a monk of ascetic. Many people that visited him were in various mind states of suffering. He helped each of them calmly right themselves through simple stories or targeted advice. That is all many of us need. Just a few well-chosen words to remove the dust from our eyes. And thereafter, live a completely different kind of life with a positive trajectory.

Meditation experiences are greatly amplified while meditating in a group. Such groups can be incredibly supportive. Some prefer meditation groups of identity close to their own after dealing with ‘identity-ignorant’ Sanghas.

We all human. This means that any Sangha leader or practitioner can get overwhelmed by an emerging powerful toxic personality, enlightened ego, or drives of some sort. While outward espousing not to harm, secretly they exploit others or follow outcomes leading to violence.

The early Buddhist encounters talk only about Buddha and Dharma since there was no Sangha yet. Finding a good and the right Sangha for you takes time and practice. Trust your gut if you feel that a particular Sangha is not right for you. At least for that moment. Given that change is inevitable, the personality and culture for a Sangha may grow more or less favorable for you.

The Buddha’s last words asked his followers to be light to themselves and never to stop their practice. Regardless what you experience from the teachings and teachers, never give up on your particular path. If anything, double down on your effort and increase your resolve. And always be kind to yourself and others. Wishing light and love to all!

## **Practices**

Reflecting on the Four Noble Truths and perfecting our steps on the Noble Eightfold Path is alone enough for this lifetime. However, some other possible suggestions are provided.

Take the time to cultivate patience in our speech, actions, and treatment of others.

See the things that we are grasping tightly to. Reflect as to for possible reasons why.

Take time out of your busy day, far away from the time juggling, and reactivity. It could be something as simple as sitting on a bench looking at the sky, walking slowly and listening to contemplative music, having a cup of your favorite hot beverage, or traveling by foot or car without any apparent goal.

See which daily are not in balance and work diligently to make small improvements.

## ***Chapter 8: Contentment and Difficult Situations***

This is from the Dhammapada chapter titled “Happiness.” But it is just as much about obstacles to avoid along the way.

### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0015>

197. Let us live happily then, not hating those who hate us! among men who hate us let us dwell free from hatred!

198. Let us live happily then, free from ailments among the ailing! among men who are ailing let us dwell free from ailments!

199. Let us live happily then, free from greed among the greedy! among men who are greedy let us dwell free from greed!

### **My ‘paraphrased’ version**

Throughout our days, we resolve to live a contented and peaceful existence. We will not return in kind to those who treat us unpleasantly. Among the discontented, we shall reside, free of what distresses them.

Throughout our days, we resolve to live a contented and peaceful existence. We will not return in kind to those who see us unfavorably. Among the distressed, we shall reside, free of what troubles them.

Throughout our days, we resolve to live a contented and peaceful existence. We will not return in kind to those who believe us to be a threat. Among the afflicted, we shall reside, free of what affects them.

### **Commentary**

These verses illustrate about living in the world but not always identifying with it. If we encounter a situation or person, are we swept away by their powerful dramas or can we keep our mental distance apart from them? In a world of contradictory and spiraling expectations, can we maintain our balance?

In the Buddha’s day, it is said that he encountered his own monks (!) fighting over a minor matter. (Keeping a dipper free of drops of water as not to attract mosquitos.) The monk committing the offense insisted that nothing was done wrong. The other monks wanted to correct his behavior. Both sides thought that they alone were right. Seeking to bring peace and to end the matter, the Buddha met with all parties. He then talked about six qualities to bring about harmonious communities and less arguments. The monks liked what they heard and the situation was settled. See <https://suttacentral.net/mn48/en/sujato> for more details.

But there is another version that is far more interesting. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/lob/lob49.htm>. No matter what the Buddha says, the two sides stay deep in

conflict. One monk even says something like the following to the Buddha, “Those were pretty words. But they are not helping us any. Let us resolve this situation ourselves as we will do at the right time. Please be quiet and find somewhere nice to meditate.”

Many of us might be fuming at this point. But not the Buddha. He realized that even he could not calm these well-set minds. Coming from the eyes of compassion, he still tried to impart some wisdom before leaving.

And so, he departed, perhaps reluctantly. Afterwards, he sought out monks that practiced well his teaching through their lives. And rather than forgetting the whole thing and moving on, he brought the direct experience into his meditation and reflected on it for some time without judgment. Because part of it was likely still on his mind. So, he heeded the call for self-review. In time, he realized that those monks were seeing things through the eyes of ignorance and were held captive by their minds and emotions. Because of their own self-blindness, there will always be others that will treat us unkindly. Shortly afterwards, the same argumentative monks came by asking for forgiveness. Both parties admitted their own mistakes escalating the conflict and promised better follow the monastic rules. Harmony was restored.

The second version shows us that the ‘stuff’ that we encounter in our daily life is not something to easily forget. It needs to be reflected on and worked through in a mindful way. Through this practice, the idea of having a ‘right’ viewpoint slowly evaporates and eventually disappears.

Think about the above situation. Would you return the harshness encountered with like actions and words? Is winning and being right more important to you than inner calm? Would you reflect on something you just encountered that bothered you or forget soon about it? Perhaps thinking that there was no need since it may never happen again. And doing nearly the same thing in a similar situation.

### **Story: The Practice Being**

#### One Path

Darn new neighbors. So many of them. Acting so warm, overly friendly and way too happy. I do not trust them. Not at all. Nope. Clearly something very wrong and certainly suspicious about them. I think they must be *mouth breathers* or belong to one of *those* groups that I just cannot stand and outright oppose. Why did they have to come into my life and move so close? I am really worried now with this new threat. I must do what I can to make unfriendly for them and get them to move way. And darn soon.

#### One Path

So, the six of us just moved in here. Nice place. Parks, shopping, and good schools nearby. And great neighbors. Well one appears to be a little angry and unhappy. But that is what an unsettled mind will do the you. But it is great that I have a new *practice being* to incorporate into my life practice. May they be happy and their suffering ebb away. I always accept and not run away from the many lessons that life gives me. And I shall be immersed in this one as well. Well gotta a lot still to unpack. May peace soon find you and all beings. Especially one very unhappy neighbor!

#### **Practice**

1. Treat everything encountered as a teaching and everyone as a teacher.
2. Do not go blindly from situation to situation without learning the key lessons. Reflect and make the needed adjustments at your own speed.

3. It is in a challenging situation that we need our greatest mindfulness, not afterwards. Observe your circumstances with non-reactivity. Then act in a manner beneficial and not harmful to all parties involved.

### ***Chapter 9: Our Changing Mind States***

This chapter is based on the Dhammapada section called typically “Pleasure” or “Affection.” However, verses 212-216 are more about how rapidly our oceanic minds transition from one mind state to another. 213 is removed to reduce repetitions.

#### **Müller version**

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0016>

212. From pleasure comes grief, from pleasure comes fear; he who is free from pleasure knows neither grief nor fear.

214. From lust comes grief, from lust comes fear; he who is free from lust knows neither grief nor fear.

215. From love comes grief, from love comes fear; he who is free from love knows neither grief nor fear.

216. From greed comes grief, from greed comes fear; he who is free from greed knows neither grief nor fear.

#### **My ‘paraphrased’ version**

Today’s delights may soon pass. Anguish may then arise. Discomfort may then arise. One not seeking desires experiences neither anguish or discomfort.

Today’s longings may dissipate. Anguish may then arise. Discomfort may then arise. One not seeking such cravings experiences neither anguish or discomfort.

Those we hold dear today may soon become strangers. Anguish may then arise. Discomfort may then arise. One not seeking such bonds experiences neither anguish or discomfort.

Things that we seek today may soon lose our interest. Anguish may then arise. Discomfort may then arise. One not seeking to acquire experiences neither anguish or discomfort.

#### **Commentary**

Dhamma is the last of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana Sutta). It is the ever-changing unfolding of our mental and emotional mind states. This ‘process’ has desires and longings quickly entering and exiting our ‘mental stage.’ Nothing sticks around. Nothing is ever solid for us to hold onto. Our thoughts are always dependent on a prior chain of mental events. Any wonder as to why many of us need a mental vacation from ourselves? Any doubt as to why we are so unsatisfied and seek constantly ‘the next best thing?’

But even the links in a chain of mental events can be broken once we become aware of how they begin and then escalate into ‘crises.’ This understanding was central to the Buddha’s awakening. To learn that we are stuck in this cycle of what he discovered twelve highly interrelated steps, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve\\_Nid%C4%81nas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_Nid%C4%81nas).)

Begin to quietly observe the ‘show’ and start to see this that ‘the process’ is not something that you MUST follow. Instead let it pass and it will start freeing its hold on you, little by little. As it most certainly inevitably will. And begin to take your first solid steps to true freedom.

#### **Meditation**

*[Instead of a story this chapter, I decided to add a guided meditation.]*

Choose to lie on your back, walk, or sit. Whatever appeals to you. And start focusing on the transitory aspects of the mind and body. Arising and Passing. Birth, a brief existence, then Death. It could be the inhalation and exhalation of our breath, the rising and falling of our chest or the lifting and placing of our feet. Give time for the mind to slow down. No expectations. No rushing

to some perceived goal such as how long we meditated or breaths we counted. Just be present here and now.

...

By now, you noticed, how the mind quiets some and begins to settle. And because there is less chatter in the way, some thoughts and emotions may begin to spring forth. These mental distractions and companions could be long lingering doubts, desires, and fears.

In the past, you may have let your thoughts and feelings take root and amplify. Then go on a chaotic sleigh ride seizing your mind and haphazardly zigzagging back and forth through our mental/emotional minefields.

...

But today is a little different. You may start to see your thoughts/emotions arise and pass. And you realize why they began.

I am tired.

I am hungry.

I feel threatened.

I feel small.

I want to change my past.

I lost something that I valued.

I did not obtain something that I desired.

And many more such thoughts.

...

Our senses may start off a train of thought.

That smell was pleasant or unpleasant.

That view was attractive or aversive.

That touch was hot or cold.

That taste was sweet or bitter.

That sound is loud or soft.

And many more such realizations

...

And from that one brief instance of reality, our minds and feelings still are stuck in that moment, and we are become distanced to what is happening now to us.

Keep observing without judgment, seeking to understand, and then quickly release and truly move on.

...

It is not always one thought that arises and sticks around for you is it? It may start by thinking about a past regret. Which may soon lead to others. And end up with a sense of total helplessness. Please explore this some more.

But does this cycle of painfulness have to be? Are we truly trapped or does own ignorance of how the mind truly operates that holds us captive? Ponder on that as you continue to focus on how your body and mind changes.

...

After this brief period of mindfulness, you should better understand how the thoughts and feelings that you formerly believed to be so important are impermanent in nature are without any real substance. Having gained this understanding, will you continue to seek their companionship or let them slowly lose their hold on you?

**Practice**

The above parts of this chapter contain already many other practices already. Here are some more.

1. This book is not recommended for brand new students. But reading “The Heart of Buddhist Meditation: The Buddha's Way of Mindfulness” by Nyanaponika Thera has many good practice suggestions. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18654414-the-heart-of-buddhist-meditation>

2. Sometime instead of reading a book before sleeping or just after being awake, watch your thoughts come and go. I find this a helpful practice.

3. Throughout our day, especially during the stressful/busy part of the day, check in with ourselves. What are we feeling? thinking? What is distracting us? What have we learned to do or to avoid?

4. Some recommend keeping a journal of your mental day. But this could aggravate rather than result in realizations. Or they review they same at the end of the day before sleeping. As long as you are not stuck in prior moments, this is good.

5. Some Buddhist Sangha groups have a group that they text or send emails to. Each correspondence is a brief reminder to keep at it. Or an obstacle encountered or overcome.

6. Simply saying ‘my thoughts and feelings are nothing to hold onto’, ‘this mind state will pass soon by’, ‘my thoughts and feelings are temporary’ and the like may be enough to keep us going and stay centered.

### ***Chapter 10: A Life Without Rage***

This chapter is based on the Dhammapada section called typically “Anger.” With just a few verses, it talks about how if left unchecked, anger will rule and destroy our lives.

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0017>

231. Beware of bodily anger, and control thy body! Leave the sins of the body, and with thy body practise virtue!

232. Beware of the anger of the tongue, and control thy tongue! Leave the sins of the tongue, and practise virtue with thy tongue!

233. Beware of the anger of the mind, and control thy mind! Leave the sins of the mind, and practise virtue with thy mind!

234. The wise who control their body, who control their tongue, the wise who control their mind, are indeed well controlled.

#### **My ‘paraphrased’ version**

Do not be trapped by the negative emotions flowing through your physical being. Instead, train your physical being for skillful use.

Do not be trapped by speaking hurtful words. Instead, train your speech for skillful use.

Do not be trapped by the resentments of the mind. Instead, train your mind for skillful use.

Those that guide well their physical essence, words, and mind are indeed skillful beings.

#### **Commentary**

Well ahead of his time, the Buddha understood how negative emotions and harmful mind states could permeate easily throughout our body and tongue. And like a wildfire, they could consume our every pore. In modern times, medical research showed the harmful impact that expressed or suppressed anger can have in shortening our lives. For the sense of good health and a calmer lifestyle, these damaging feelings should be avoided at all costs.

If anger does come visit you, recognize what is happening. Someone once said that you can tell the maturity of a person by the things that make them angry. Anger typically comes from some sense of lack, a 'great' injustice, a perceived threat of status, and many other scarcity-driven reasons. Breathe, observe within, seek to understand why your mind feels so threatened. Start to relax your mind and body. Say "It's okay." Walk away from the situation if you can. In time, you will learn that this emotion is not the real you. It is just a fluid mind state that will quickly pass. Another seemingly innocent story attempting to entrap you.

But some will go down a different path. In their playbook, they are always the 'permanent victims'. Their shallow viewpoint is to see almost all others as someone that already have or will wrong them soon. To deal with this constant 'threat', they attack relentlessly. With harsh words fueled by their emotions and a 'wronged' mind. After all, it is fair if it is 'truly' self-defense. But this approach solves little. Friends will begin to avoid them. Self-satisfaction will be temporary and unsatisfying. Stay clear of these toxic souls.

In this Dhammapada chapter, the Buddha talks about how everyone will get blamed sometime in their lives whether they are silent or speak. In his own lifetime, the Buddha encountered many angry people. But he did not react to them or fuel their negativity. The practice of compassion and equanimity allowed him to distance himself from the actor and the act. He viewed anger as a gift that he was being offered. But though his silence, it was one that he did not accept. So, the anger stayed only with its originator. And did not escalate. This simple story is a powerful lesson that we all can learn from. We do not have to go far to deal with anger. It is always within or a few steps away.

Some may ask at this point, "I understand about 'everyday anger.' But what about righteous anger? After all, aren't there some real inequalities and injustice in the world?"

Yes, the world is not always a fair place. There are those that have lost family members and loved ones, their country and homes, their way of life, and more. But rather than resort to violence and rage, they chose to fuel their emotions into positive energy. One does not have to look far to find many past and living examples that have done this. Learn from their practice. And failing that, read Chapter 1 of this book all over again.

Although beyond the scope of this book, it may help to review the practice of Engaged Buddhism to try to change things for the better. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engaged\\_Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engaged_Buddhism). Your practice does not have to be separate from this world. Instead, it should be very much a part of it.

### **Story: A World of Anger**

Each day, I am surrounded by a world of anger and feel its power.

In myself.

In others.

In our music.

In our news.

At our work.

While driving.

On our transportation systems.

In fact, there are few places where I am immune from its presence.

I see its existence everywhere.

Starting today and throughout my life, I choose another path.

A way of true liberation.



Free from suffering.  
And causing little suffering to others.

### **Practice**

There have already been many previous suggestions in this chapter and book. Some of the following may not be Buddhist-inspired:

1. Walk away or start deescalating the situation.
2. Realize you are in a condition of feeling anger. Understand that it is a “hook” trying to ensnare you and let it grow no further.
3. Practice lovingkindness and *tonglen* meditation.
4. Stop, Reflect. Breathe.
5. Think of something ridiculous to break the pattern and defuse the situation.
6. See how being angry is absurd. Like being manipulated by a small uncontrolled child just to have a few passing moments of feeling good and right.
7. Find a place or way to reflect. It could be just walking. Or just sitting. Or having a hot slice of pizza. Whatever works for you.
8. Simply release after realizing that it will not stay forever.

For many of us, anger will be a visitor that will keep returning. Keep experimenting to see what works well for you to dissipate its hold. It is important to never relent changing ourselves to have one less moment of anger. Or one less day.

### ***Chapter 11: Learned Practitioners***

The verses used below are from the Dhammapada chapter called “The Just.” It reinforces the idea that we are not considered wise by any age, title, or birthright that we achieve. It is our actions alone that determine how our knowledge should be viewed by others.

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0019>

258. A man is not learned because he talks much; he who is patient, free from hatred and fear, he is called learned.

261. He in whom there is truth, virtue, love, restraint, moderation, he who is free from impurity and is wise, he is called an elder.

262. An envious greedy, dishonest man does not become respectable by means of much talking only, or by the beauty of his complexion.

#### **My ‘paraphrased’ version**

One’s wisdom is not shown by how long that they speak. A wise person is deliberate in their speech and actions. They are liberated from worry and disrespect of others.

Those embracing the ethical practices of the Buddha, and are liberated from mental distractions, they may be called a worthy teacher.

Those trapped into lying, jealousy and desiring to acquire will not have a good reputation due to their lengthy speech or sheer good looks.

#### **Commentary**

Buddhist teachings are ethical practices that we can apply immediately into our lives. A summary of some of these can be found at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pāramitā> and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmavihara>. Your homework assignment for life is to practice as many of these guideposts that make sense to you. As a situation arises, ask yourself

- Can I be honest and open with others at this time?
- Can I treat myself and others with compassion?

- Can I treat myself and others with patience?
- Can I truly appreciate the joy found by others?
- Can I radiate lovingkindness at this time?
- Can I be generous with my time and actions towards others?
- Can I be persistent in my right actions and speech?
- Can I be relentless in seeking wisdom?

By self-examination and self-correction, a different, much more open you starts to arise. These are the first steps on our path to self-liberation.

### **Story: Untouched**

Another long Wednesday night on the communication lines. I sighed while entering the front doorway of the ancient building. I groaned while stumbling up the badly lit stairs. And felt burdened as I went through the help line's entrance.

There were the usual evening staff. People that I fail to remember their names or ever made a human connection with. I nodded as usual at them and sat down in my customarily assigned seat. And then I got on the queue for the help line with that fraudulent friendly persona that I always assume during my shift. A call came in.

"Help Line. Klaus here. How are you doing this evening?"

"Doing great Klaus. Glad I got you. I wanted to speak to you specifically."

Now this person's voice did not sound familiar to me. In the five years of doing this to pass away my evenings, NO ONE has asked for me before. Ever. I am puzzled by this whole exchange.

"Excuse Me! Have we ever spoken before?"

"No Klaus. This is our first time."

"Then why did you want to speak to me out of all the people here at the communication center?"

"You have it wrong. I am not asking for you to help me. No, I am here today to help you."

I gave a quizzical look that the caller could not see.

"Okay caller. It is time to go. I am here only to help you. Not vice versa. So, I'm gonna hang ..."

"If you do that, then you will never find the satisfactory life that you thirst for."

A strange vibe was spreading quickly throughout me. What is this person's gimmick? I know that I shouldn't, but let the caller continue.

"Go on. But I warn you, if I don't like where this is going, I am ending this immediately and it is on to the next session."

"Each day, you go out of your way to isolate yourself. Filled with overwhelming fear masked by great indifference. You are impatient with others and are incapable of love or friendship. You get by with sprouting white lies and covering hidden, unexpressed feelings. What sort of life do you truly have if you are only half-alive?"

I turned pale by the words of this mysterious speaker that knew me too well. Almost shouting, I spoke, "I demand to know who are you? How did you learn all these things about me?"

The voice quietly spoke, "You know me well enough already Klaus. I am your own mind, tired of being so unfulfilled."

These words stunned me. This had to be a dream or nightmare right? How could my brain make direct contact with me?

Unable to intake any more, I disconnected the communication, arose swiftly, and left without ceremony.

Deeply torn apart inside, I started to walk around aimlessly. When consciousness returned, I found myself sitting in a small, musty room with some sort of congregation. It was becoming hard for me to tell what was real and what was from my unconsciousness anymore. Then I heard these words from the congregation's leader

*Tonight, all is not well with some of us. I sense someone here lost in a state of utter helplessness. They get by with being tossed about from one situation to another. This unfortunate is too troubled to be honest and open with themselves or others. Each moment passes for them quickly and is viewed as unimportant. So, they use that as a pitiful excuse to bond with no one. They seek nothing and offer nothing. Generosity towards others is an alien concept for them. They wear willingly self-imposed blinders keeping them so far removed from any human bond. They lead a largely self-contained life. However, a life untouched by others is no life to lead at all dear friends.*

I felt the speaker was talking directly about me alone and my comfort level evaporated. I immediately started thinking, 'Threat. Must leave NOW.' And so, I did.

After that, things became fuzzy. What next that I clearly remember was somehow being back at the help line. I was hearing a very puzzled and concerned voice asking, "Hello, are you okay? What is happening to you? I'm worried." All those at the help line had arisen from their chairs and rushing towards me with very concerned looks.

What had happened? Did I ever really leave here? Or did my unconsciousness have an unpleasant episode of striking back at me? I never did learn what the answer was.

However, I was concerned with the whole incident. It was a sign, a real wake-up call. I started to connect with others and life became more bearable and enjoyable. I made friends and became more open in my communications with others. I shared my time and presence with them and those I met. Each day, I sought to learn something to reach a more fulfilled life. Lessons were learned and lessons were returned. And so, I will spend my remaining days, a student seeking a more fulfilled life.

### **Practice**

1. Ask the above questions as others as you go through your day.
2. Focus on one Brahmavihara or Paramita for a given time until you have learnt it thoroughly. Revisit it at a later point as a refresher.
3. Practice lovingkindness meditation.
4. Seek like-minded people or a community that also practice these key qualities. Time away from the "real world" living in such a community may help these practices grow.
5. There are many on-line commentaries and documents on these qualities that may be helpful in providing some insights. I found Zen teacher Robert Aitken's work: "*The Practice of Perfection*" a good read on this topic. See

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/1361/the-practice-of-perfection-by-robert-aitken/9780307817471> for more information.

### ***Chapter 12: The Path to Skillful Understanding***

The seventeen verses of the Dhammapada chapter named 'The Way' cover some of the most profound teachings in just a few words.

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0020>

277. `All created things perish,' he who knows and sees this becomes passive in pain; this is the way to purity.

278. `All created things are grief and pain,' he who knows and sees this becomes passive in pain; this is the way that leads to purity.

279. `All forms are unreal,' he who knows and sees this becomes passive in pain; this is the way that leads to purity.

### **My 'paraphrased' version**

All sentient beings are born, grow old, and soon pass away. Those that observe and understand this take their first steps to liberation.

All sentient beings experience sorrow and discomfort. Those that observe and understand this take their first steps to liberation.

All things exist because of prior causes/conditions. We fail to perceive their true essence correctly. Those that observe and understand this take their first steps to liberation.

### **Commentary**

The Buddha's words seem as fresh today and offer a good understanding as to the true nature of our lives and this world. Commentary on them could be covered in a few paragraphs. Or a few lifetimes. Some of these could be written into several thick books. But here they will be discussed in only a few sentences.

Our world as we know it is always changing. Everything is in various states of creation, growth, stability, and decay. Nothing is as it appears. Apparently healthy people die and seemingly sickly-looking people live. Strong architectural structures fall. New life can appear in unexpected places. Those that appear to be so wise may be very foolish. And the opposite may be true as well.

Our time here is temporary. Many of us allow worldly distractions to rule our days rather than seeing the simple and beautiful things in front of us. We live our lives as if there is no end or no consequence.

Our time here is often painful. Mental and physical suffering accompanies us daily to the end of our days.

Our perceptions of this world are far from correct. We view objects as independent of each other and do not understand their inherent nature.

Our minds are far from empty of mental and emotional traps. They are like a mirror covered with dust, cracks, dirt, and smudges.

Now knowing all the above, what do we do next? Keep on living as we did before or start to "clean our mirrors?"

### **Story: Blinders**

One day I came into being and moved into a 'house'. You would probably call it my body. Once there, I enjoyed my youth. I was young, healthy, energetic, and aimless. I was often in trouble since my emotions ruled my actions. And I still had to learn all the rules and expectations for a well-behaved young adult. It is a wonderful and difficult time.

I reached adulthood and started running my own life. But new fears and anxieties arose. I had to make a living. There were new physical and material urges that I had to deal with. A sense of loneliness and alienation visited me from time to time. It was a wonderful and difficult time.

I now am in middle-age. Part of me regretted having misspent my brief youth. And another part of me became fearful of death coming ever closer. There were new responsibilities and social obligations that were part of my life. I felt ever tired by keeping things together and the money flowing in. It is a wonderful and difficult time.

Old age is now part of my life. Regrets grow stronger with each moment. Friends and family begin to leave or pass away. I start feeling pains and physical limitations never experienced before. It is a wonderful and difficult time.

And now I am in my bed taking final my breaths. Was it all worth it? Was I ever in control or was it just like a raft being tossed unmercilessly from side to side? Looking back, it seemed that I was always deluded on how long my life was and how to live it fully. Every day always had its challenges. Well nothing to do about it now. Maybe I can take the lessons that I learned to the next rebirth. If there truly is such a thing.

### **Practice**

1. Old age, sickness, and death is a practice that we along with others have or soon will experience. Can we learn its lessons without having emotional and mental preconceptions? Can we treat others experiencing the same thing with compassion? Or will we push them away in disgust?

2. The teachings in the later *Dhammapada* chapters have transitioned from discussing individual moments to seeing things as part of an unending cycle. Even if rebirth does not occur, there are many transformations in just one lifetime for better or worst.

The concept of *Samsara* is used to explain this phenomenon of ongoing suffering and rebirth. You can look at it one of two ways. It can viewed as a process that is so impersonal, cruel, and repetitive. Or it can be seen as a wakeup call in this life. *“I need to break the pattern today. By meditating on alleviating the suffering of others, so I begin to reduce my own. I need to think just as I grow old, age, and die, so do all others that share this life. May all of us be truly free of this cycle of suffering and live liberated lives.”*

3. If these teachings resonate with you, then take the time to understand how the Buddha and his followers

- view the self
- view objects
- view this world
- view our lives
- view what the concept of nothingness is and is not.

Some teachings may appear to be contradictory, or too broad or unclear to take in one sitting. Ingest the lessons in small bites. Reflect. Place into action. See what works or not. Read, listen, or watch other Buddhist teachers on the same topic. Repeat as often as needed. And a light of clarity should begin to grow within you.

### ***Chapter 13: Craving***

The seventeen verses of the *Dhammapada* chapter named ‘Thirst’ cover some of the most profound teachings in just a few words.

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0024>

334. The thirst of a thoughtless man grows like a creeper; he runs from life to life, like a monkey seeking fruit in the forest.

347. Those who are slaves to passions, run down with the stream (of desires), as a spider runs down the web which he has made himself; when they have cut this, at last, wise people leave the world free from cares, leaving all affection behind.

348. Give up what is before, give up what is behind, give up what is in the middle, when thou goest to the other shore of existence; if thy mind is altogether free, thou wilt not again enter into birth and decay.

349. If a man is tossed about by doubts, full of strong passions, and yearning only for what is delightful, his thirst will grow more and more, and he will indeed make his fetters strong.

### **My 'paraphrased' version**

The cravings of grasping beings grow rapidly out of control. They seek to have their innumerable desires quenched while moving frantically about from one unsatisfying situation to another.

Those driven only by their numerous appetites are trapped on an unfulfilling path of incessant hunger. Once free of wanting, one is unburdened by the worries and emotions of their earlier life.

Release yourself from the memories of a hurtful past. Release yourself from dilemmas of the passing present. Release yourself from the planning for a perfect future. When one has liberated the mind from such stories, they are unaffected by the transitions of their lives.

If one is tied to constant uncertainty, motivated solely by inner thirsts, and seeking just momentary amusement, then they will tighten their own created restraints until passing from this life.

### **Commentary**

If life ever came with an owner's manual, these verses of the Dhammapada would apply. There are three paths that we can take.

- 1) To be enslaved by our desires and passions.
- 2) To be free of our desires and passions.
- 3) Somewhere between the first two.

This combined with old age, sickness, death, stress, worry, paying bills, raising families, etc. shows that the any existence is an ongoing challenge and hardship. But it also can be a thing of beauty, wonder, and inspiration once we get past the self-generated melodramas.

In Zen there is something called the Ox Herding pictures or Ten Bulls. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten\\_Bulls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Bulls) This is a clear summary of the path to liberation. Are we being driven or driving 'the bull?' Or has the bull transcended?

Each day provides many moments to stop listening to our stories of craving. The demanding mind. The telling mind. The momentarily satisfied mind. All supposedly important visitors that never stay. And once exposed, have no real hold over us. Keep your mental bookshelf empty and uncluttered.

### **Story: The Mental Ocean**

You see before you a video of a very lost soul. That is apparent from the vacant look in my lifeless eyes. I have no idea where or when it was taken. Or how I obtained a copy of it. Perhaps that is for the best. Because it had been during a bad time of being helplessly adrift in the violently energetic waves of my own mind. I thirsted after things. I lusted after others of my kind and imagined overly passionate moments. I hungered for all thoughts of things that were unobtainable just to satiate a fleeting desire. Bouncing here and there. A slave to my senses and ongoing cravings. No relief from this self-imposed life sentence. A hellish existence. I alternated between frustration and depression with myself.

Then one day somewhere I heard the magical words, "*Change your life for the better. Free your own mind. No time to wait.*" Whether they came from deep inside myself, a passerby that was concerned, or the lyrics from a song, I have no idea.

But how and what to change? There was a park overlooking a large lake. It was a sunny day and I sat without expectations under the comfort of a well-shaded tree. I observed the passing clouds, the impact of the wind on the water, and listened to the sounds from nature and park goers around me. Just sitting and observing. As I did this, the waves in my mind receded. This is the first calm that I felt in what seemed to be a lifetime. Rather than bask in it and wanting more, I continued to sit just observing what was happening around me and nothing more. More calm. This was a completely new and alien feeling. I started to smile as I had not in a long time. Something opened a little wider inside of me. And yet, nothing was visibly different externally. Why was this?

And then I understood. *Change myself. Free my mind.* So, I sat some more under that tree. I did not seek answers, enlightenment, or anything. Just observed. The leaves of the tree overhead swaying in the wind. Flyers in the sky and on land. Walkers of old ages. Animals both domestic and wild. No judgments. Just sit. And watch. Just breathe. Just...

The years have passed. And I still sit and observe. Was it worth all of those passing moments? After all, nothing was created or achieved. If anything, something was lost -- the power of being captive to my mental ocean. And for that I am grateful.

### **Practice**

1. Read about the Ten Bulls listed above and reflect on your life.
2. Think about your own 'mental ocean' and focus on improving one 'mental/emotional wave causer.'
3. Spend time outside in nature just observing.
4. Write a song/poem/story or paint your 'mental ocean'.
5. Observe in others the same and jointly think how to change things internally.

### ***Chapter 14: A Mind in Stillness***

The seventeen verses of the Dhammapada chapter named 'Thirst' cover some of the most profound teachings in just a few words.

#### **Müller version**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2017/2017-h/2017-h.htm#link2HCH0025>

363. The Bhikshu who controls his mouth, who speaks wisely and calmly, who teaches the meaning and the law, his word is sweet.

378. The Bhikshu whose body and tongue and mind are quieted, who is collected, and has rejected the baits of the world, he is called quiet.

#### **My 'paraphrased' version**

A practitioner speaking with care and deliberation, and exemplifying beneficial practices through their efforts, is pleasing to others.

A practitioner living with a stilled mind, as a peaceful being, with a restrained tongue, and free from the mental suffering, they are called silent.

#### **Commentary**

We are all in our own unique unfolding life journey. And while we are guaranteed that certain things will happen such as old age, sickness, and death, other events will be revealed at the proper time.

It is very easy to get lost in a lifetime of reactivity. Or have periods seeing all as hopeless and meaninglessness.

Throughout our entire time here, we are given a golden opportunity through our practice. A chance to stay perfectly afloat against the raging waters of our mind, body, and emotions. In each moment of our days and nights, it is practice time. It never truly ends -- the effort to control our mind, body, and speech through mindful observation of our inner/outer activities. Or being kind to others and ourselves. Or discovering what each of us individually need to do to live a mindful and fulfilled life. All we need to do is simply start our practice and keep at it.

*Sending lovingkindness thoughts to all with intentions to practice, those that practice a little a lot or somewhere in-between, and those that have abandoned practice.*

### **Story: Lessons**

I woke up one day realizing that I was not sure why I was here on this planet and what lessons I was to learn. Uncertain where to start, I tried a little of everything and anything. I was hoping that this next best thing would be truly the one to give me the answer so desperately sought for. Sometimes there were insights. But more often, they would be fleeting or forgotten in a flash. Instead, all I had were more questions and aggravations. And after what already seemed to be a good portion of my life, frustration, serious doubts, and depression settled in.

All the time I kept thinking harmful thoughts like

*"I will never find it. This is a worthless quest to even try. It is only something to pass the time. Why am I even doing this? There is NO overall purpose to my life. I am just doomed to wander with any relief in sight"*

And I kept thinking this for some time. While being carried here and there by the currents of my mind. And that is all there was for a long time.

And one day, I saw nearby a Bhikkhuni, a female Buddhist nun. And I wondered why she seemed so composed and yet full of life. It was if she found something that might be helpful to me as well.

So I asked her if she had time to talk. She smiled and said she did. I was grateful and overwhelmed. What would I even ask here? Was it pure conceit to think that I was worthy enough to ask a question?

Sensing my concerns, she said simply, "Sometimes we cannot put into words a proper question. It may be that we are trying to perfect our words before stating them. Sometimes we have so many conflicting thoughts hampering our efforts. But life really comes to two questions. WHO AM I? WHY AM I HERE? Tonight, I will not answer either of them. Because any answer would sound incomplete or unsatisfying. No doubt, this was true for you in the past when seeking answers. So, let us keep it simple. Start focusing your waking and sleeping moments on WHO AM I. Keep probing and inquiring. In time, answers to that and other questions will come.

She arose to leave and I thanked her. I am not sure if I had gained or had learned anything. But at least it was a possible pointer. So, I started living with WHO AM I? In time, learned that

- I was not my thoughts or feelings since they depart shortly after their arrival.
- I was not my body since it performed things some things without my control.
- I was not my circumstances since they were determined by a series of causes and conditions, some quite impersonal.
- The 'I concept' was just a convenient 'place' for 'me' to identify with, to help 'me' feel good, or wronged. But it was never ever satisfied.

And with each of these realizations, my mental load became a little lighter.



There are more lessons to learn. Or really unlearn. And with the arrival of another day they may come. Or they may not. But still I strive each time as an earnest student of my own life discovering what I need to.

### **Practice**

The previous chapters offer various suggestions of practice. Here are some more a few may not be necessarily Buddhist-inspired.

1. Focusing on a question like WHO AM I? can be helpful in determining what really makes up our 'I-identity.'

2. If in a period of doubt and depression, then review what are the causes and conditions resulting in these feelings. Examine what makes these mental fictions so powerful. See if they have any impact of your body. Then say the words right for you designating that they have no hold.

3. Imagine how your life would be if you were confident, fearless, peaceful, content, or any other highly desired attribute. Now work backwards to figure how you can get there. Figure at least one thing that you can do differently. Then follow through on it. Believe and have the determination and faith that you will get there regardless whatever the day may bring

## ***Chapter 15: Final Words***

### **Introduction**

Moments arise and then come to pass. At this very instant, I have started what will become the final chapter of this book. A blank page is staring back at me. I have no idea as to what words will follow or where they will lead me.

Once completed and reviewed, this is it. No overall final edit. No second or third editions. The digital pen is at rest for this work.

What you see before you is in its final form. Yet it is incomplete since not every Dhammapada verse was reviewed. It is imperfect because mere words cannot truly capture the underlying ultimate reality. And like the Japanese ideals of *wabi-sabi*, beauty lies in its incompleteness. From an initial vision of a collection of short stories, this work grew to the present expanded form. The final result is far better than I could have ever hoped for. Thank you for reading any part of this book. I hope that it provides some insights and peace. *Blessings to all of you on your own life journey. May all find the true wisdom that they seek.*

H.G.

### **Commentary**

Whether partaking in a yoga or meditation session, reading a book like this, or taking a vacation, at some point most of us return to some sense of 'normal life'. And that is when the real practice begins. In all those moments that elicit happiness, fear, sadness, anxiety, anger, joy, boredom etc. In each waking or sleeping moment. To us are they just one big blur, a time of incessant sameness and meaninglessness, or a chance to get our act together finally? Your answer will determine how easy or hard will be your life.

Wise Dharma teachers have simply said "*Watch out for the areas of resistance in our lives.*" Because they are the epicenter of our ego's domain and a major opportunity for our own personal growth.

In time, we realize that our mind, body, and spirit need to work together in each moment to fulfill our life mission of taming and then freeing our mind and emotions.

And our planets also being imperfect, contradictory, and evolving. Each of us should find a "small patch of ground" to heal and make peaceful. Maybe today we start with one friend, or one garden. Coming from a place of abundance, there is no expectations, no pushing one's

'hidden agendas' on others, and no rushing to accomplish anything. Just the rewards and richness of being open, deliberate, and performing non-judgmental observing. *So may it be for all of us.*

### **Practice**

At the final practice section, what can I say differently than before? As earlier, these suggestions may not be truly Buddhist-inspired.

1. There are many different translations of the Dhammapada. Reading other translations can give insights. Also Leo D. Lefebure has written some articles and a book on a Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada. Here is a sample of his article <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/522381> and a review of his book <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/522386>

Book information: *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada*. By Leo D. Lefebure and Peter Feldmeier. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011. 379 pp.

2. If you wish to read more on what I have written on spiritual matters, then feel free to download <https://hallettgermanfiction.ml/download/775/> -- Transitions 1 (Theravada)  
<https://hallettgermanfiction.ml/download/780/> -- Transitions 2 (Dhammapada)

Or purchase *Spiritual Storms* at <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/712225> with a book sample available for free reading.

3. Begin and end the day with your own personal ritual -- praying, meditating, singing, or wishing only the best for yourself and all beings.

4. Investigate the "peace fellowships" for your affiliations. One such group for 'engaged Buddhists' is Buddhist Peace Fellowship) -- <http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/> You may also want to read and think about Gary Snyder's "Buddhist anarchism" -- <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/buddhist-anarchism/> which was written back in 1961.

5. There are a lot of books/works on practice. Here are five I found approachable and helpful:

- Janwillem van de Wetering. -- "The Empty Mirror: Experiences in a Japanese Zen Monastery." Practice tip -- Have a general practice schedule so you always know what you can be doing at any time.

- Eihei Dogen. "Advice for the Cook" <https://wwzc.org/dharma-text/tenzo-kyokun-instructions-tenzo> Practice tip: Nothing is Hidden. The path to awakening is right in front of us whether it is through cooking or some other "ordinary" activity.

- Yin Kuang. "Pure-Land Zen, Zen Pure-land" — Letters from Patriarch Yin Kuang. [http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/yin\\_kuang.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/yin_kuang.pdf) This is from a Zen and Pure Land perspective. Unfortunately, the free version leaves out the many insightful footnotes. Practice Tip: Incorporate all the circumstances in your life into your practice.

- Jack Kornfield. "Living Dharma: Teachings and Meditation Instructions from Twelve Theravada Masters." Theravada Buddhist elder teachers share their thoughts on what practice is. Practice Tip: Making small mental notes of whatever you are doing to bring awareness of your activities to the forefront of your mind.

- Ven. Thubten Gyatso. Transforming Problems Into the Dharma Path — [http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/transprobs6.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/transprobs6.pdf) Practice tip: Avoid our aversion to suffering.

6. Inspire yourself and others through your daily example of speaking, thinking, and acting without harshness, judgment, or ill will.

7. Watch for those moments when tired, angry etc. This is when you need to mind yourself *the most* to avoid harmful actions!

8. Joining/starting a small practice support group of a few kindred spirits can help keep your practice on track.

9. Being in silence or “just observing” throughout the day can keep your mind on track. It does not have to be that long a period. Just five to twenty minutes.

10. Avoid emotionally-laden souls and situations as much as you can until you have developed the inner strength to deal with them. Just go a different way.

11. Leave time in your day to explore and experience without an objective in mind.

12. It all passes so quickly and circumstances can change dramatically in just a few seconds. Today is always the right day to do practice and encourage others to do the same.

13. Work especially hard through those moments when you are ‘stuck’ on what happened in the past or planning for the future. Once you understand why you are ‘stuck’ and how temporary it is, the emotional/mental bindings shall free up.

14. When in doubt, step back and breathe slowly. Let the thoughts arise and then pass. And then continue with your day.

15. Finish the sentence on your intention, “Today I choose not to ...” and then follow-up doing just that throughout the day.

16. All beings are not ‘others’, or threats to us. We all live their lives the best that we can just as you do. Once recognized, act through compassionate eyes.

17. Lastly, **never stop practicing**. Each day, you are already being more aware of yourself and avoiding harmful actions “in the heat of battle”. Each day, the sense of non-reactivity and spaciousness grows. Have the faith in yourself and the practice. And as Warren Zevon once said in his final days, “Enjoy every sandwich” whether it is your first or last. Because everything happening to ourselves and others are our precious teachers. Embrace their lessons and then move on to the next moment. For the past will never occur again except in our heads. And if we so choose. *May we all practice well in each of our present, past, and future moments.*

## ***Chapter 16: The Path of Customer Service***

### **Introduction**

This was not originally planned. But after talking with my manager, I promised to do this. Your job life is just as much a place as any to practice the teachings of the Dhammapada. But a career in customer service is even more so.

### **Commentary**

A customer service position offers many opportunities to practice the teachings of the Buddha. You can follow one of these paths:

- Just getting by. Tuning out or tolerating the ‘bad’.
- Overwhelmed or drowning due to workload, emotional customers, reactivity, etc.
- See customer support as important a place to practice as a meditation mat. Because it is dealing with the stuff that arises in our work day that is a clear path to mental freedom.

*Which path will you choose?*

### **Practice**

As you go through the work day dealing with customers, thinking occasionally the following will keep you on the right path,

- “Know who you serve.” Come from a place of service, compassion, and joy. Do not think ‘it is another darn customer that I have to help.’” It will lead to disappointment for both of you.

- “You are just like me. The same mental and emotional formations. The same desire for products to work and not offer any unexpected surprises. The same wish to be appreciated and treated with respect. “

- “I will not rush things along just to resolve an issue. Having unrealistic expectations and forcing an outcome may lead to dissatisfaction for all.”

- Watch how you manage reactivity and your time. Make small but important adjustments throughout the work week. If conflicting priorities come in, are you reactive or reflective?

- Work hard to make a real difference to Your Customer. Your Product. Your Customer Support Team and Yourself. Else nothing will ever change.

### ***Chapter 17: Right Career Path***

I wanted to add a chapter on ‘Right Livelihood’ but could not find a proper location to include it. So, I made it a separate bonus chapter. It is one part of the eightfold path of the Buddhist teachings. The other parts of the path impact the guiding principles of a suitable career.

So, what would be some of the negative guiding principles on careers to avoid?

- Do not harm or exploit anything or anyone in any way. (Such as selling weapons, exploiting the natural materials on your planet, contract killer etc.)

- Do not provide access to any drug, alcohol, or other intoxicants that can confuse or hurt the mind.

- Do not have a career that includes lying, cheating, stealing, or causing others to hate or kill.

- Do not sell or provide sexual ‘goods’ that could excite the mind.

- Do not be a creator of artistic works that could stimulate the mind or bring about certain powerful emotional/mental mind states. (Such as a playwright, artist, musician, or writer).

What would be the characteristics of an acceptable career?

- Something that can benefit others and yourself.

- Something that heals others beings and yourself.

- Something that will heal, sustain, or grow the natural life on this planet.

- Something that removes those that harm, confuse, or exploit others.

These principles are timeless and may lead to a more satisfying career than a short-term focus could. They also can be extrapolated as to what makes up a healthy and unhealthy community or society.

Lewis Richmond has further insights on this topic and sees this as a conscious and very much needed life choice. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/lewis-richmond/right-livelihood-is-consc\\_b\\_832298.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/lewis-richmond/right-livelihood-is-consc_b_832298.html)

### ***Chapter 18: References***

These are various Dhammapada-related references in addition to the two above. I particularly like the Easwaran and Fronsedale translations and commentaries.

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### ***About the Author***

Hallett German is a fiction and technical subject author on various aspects of IT and business. His works of fiction cross multiple genres including children, young adult, dysfunctional corporate mysteries/fantasies, historical fiction, and steampunk. His books offer a unique and original ride into other worlds and lives. He is the author of series (Olivia Plymouth Amazi, Chronicles, In Small Doses, and Corporate Intent) and single books (Combustible Networks, Ghosts vs. Robots, Saving Eddie, Killing Thoreau, Missed Landing, and Command and Control).

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