

Self-awareness: the Neglected Essence of Life

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There are so many exciting things in life that each and everyone of us wishes to explore and experience. They are all basically based upon what we perceive and appreciate through the ***Six Sense-organs*** of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and consciousness, as those exciting and stimulating sights, sounds, smell, taste, touch, and thoughts. They would result in the ***Eight Worldly Phenomena*** or 4 pairs of positive and negative aspects as, fortune vs. misfortune, honor vs. dishonor, praise vs. gossip, and happiness vs. unhappiness. They have always been the power players in the lives of human beings, as well as the major influential factors in the history of mankind.

We all work hard to acquire the ***Four Basic Necessities of Life***: Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Medicine. These are things necessary to maintain our lives: Food to nourish our bodies and maintain our strength; Shelter for safety and security of ourselves and our families; Clothing to protect our sensitive skin and keep our bodies warm; and Medicine to cure our illnesses whenever we get sick.

But the Eight Worldly Phenomena are what make life more colorful, and everyone thrives for them. They lure people to crave and cling to the positive or pleasurable aspects, and try their best to avoid the negative impact or painful experience of such Worldly Phenomena.

Nowadays, with so many new phenomena generated all the time through innumerable new innovative technology and latest inventions in electronics, videogames, cellular phones, cable and satellite TV, internet, faster cars, bigger houses, etc., they have played important roles in setting up the new standard of living. They have become the essential things in life that one needs to acquire to maintain an up-to-date, high-minded, sophisticated image or status in an advanced and developed society, such as the United States. They have become the fifth basic necessity of a modern living or lifestyle.

So, we keep reaching out further and further all the time for materials, fame, and fortune, equating them as pleasure or happiness in life. The more one reaches further outwardly, the less one is in contact with reality or the true nature of one's own body and mind, as one is neglecting the true and very essence of life, i.e., Self-awareness and Mindfulness. In fact, by reaching further outwardly trying to grasp and hold on to things, it turns into the cause of conflict, stress, imperfection, unsatisfactoriness, dis-ease, suffering, or Dukkha. It blinds oneself, making it impossible to see things clearly as they truly are, as one keeps creating reality or perceiving things with biased thoughts, instead of facing and accepting reality as it is. One keeps on tainting one's own mind with hidden agendas or biased thoughts, that would please or benefit oneself, rather than living a simple truthful life with the right perspective, and seeing things in reality as they truly are, i.e., with insight.

Such biased thoughts, filled with sensual desire, like, and dislike, give rise to craving and clinging. They, in turn, become disturbing thoughts and obsessive thoughts, dictating and pressuring us to seek for more materials and gather more wealth, etc., blinding us from seeing the truth. They basically enslave us with our own biased thoughts.

As the great Thai meditation master, Luangpoo Doole Atulo, put it together as a simple explanation of how problem or suffering arises, and how it ceases, in one's mind, as a simplified version of the ***Four Noble Truths***, as follows:

1. *Suffering* or Dukkha - is the result of mind reaching outwardly.
2. *Cause of Suffering* or Samudhaya - is caused by mind reaching outwardly.

3. End of Suffering or Nirvana (Nirodha) is the result of mind seeing mind clearly, i.e., mindfulness and self-awareness seeing mind or thought clearly.

4. The Middle Path to end suffering or Magga - is basically mind seeing mind clearly, i.e., mindfulness and self-awareness seeing mind clearly or catching thought as it arises.

*Yet, there are still hidden truths to all phenomena, for both living and non-living things, discovered by the Buddha through his enlightenment. It is based on the fact that everything is *not long-lasting*, and it is *under constant stress and keeps changing all the time*, therefore *not truly ours*. Clinging to them would result in suffering. The Buddha pointed this out as a summary to the first Noble Truth, that "To be born is suffering. To age is suffering. To die is suffering. Sorrow, lamentation, uneasiness, sadness, or stress is suffering. To encounter what one dislikes is suffering. To depart from one's loved one is suffering. Not getting what one likes or wants is suffering. In short, 'The Five Aggregates of Clinging is suffering'".*

The **Five Aggregates or Groups of Existence** (Khandha or Skandha) are the components of a person, as body, feeling, perception, thought formation, and consciousness. Clinging to them as belonging to "self" is the root of the problem, as "self" is but a phantasm or a self-image hologram, and therefore there is no true long-lasting "self" existing or to cling to.

These are the very basic truth of the **Three Universal Characteristics of all existence**, which bears the nature of Impermanence (unstable, yet obscured by continuity), Imperfection/conflict/suffering (unbearable, yet obscured by movement or motion), and Not-self or insubstantiality (uncontrollable, i.e., not truly belongs to oneself, yet obscured by bundling or cohesiveness).

Mankind has known the first two facts, of impermanence and imperfection, very, very well, and has tried to find ways to slow, avoid, or escape them. From the time of earliest recorded history, mankind has been seeking for an eternal life by trying to find ways to preserve one's body from degenerating and decaying after death, e.g., with mummification, etc., trying to convince themselves that there is an eternal life, but to no avail.

In fact, nature has been more realistic and more successful than mankind, as it is ahead in term of accepting the reality as it is. Therefore all living beings would *reproduce* to ensure their presence in the next and subsequent generations through genetic codes that they would pass on, as well as preserve their own species from extinction. A good example of this phenomenon can be witnessed in salmons swimming upstream to lay eggs, which will be fertilized by sperms. Then both female and male salmons will die right away once their jobs have been accomplished. Subsequently, the fertilized eggs will hatch into the young salmons that will swim downstream to the ocean, to live their lives there. They in turn will swim upstream to lay eggs and fertilize them like their parents, which they never met, did.

As for themselves, there is a process of programmed cell death or 'apoptosis', to get rid of old, unhealthy and constantly dying cells, and replace them with young and healthy cells, in billions daily. Yet, all of them would follow the same path of the Three Universal Characteristics or Marks of Existence.

Nowadays, scientists are still searching diligently for the 'immortality gene'. Some success in genetic manipulation of the microscopic '*Caenorhabditis. Elegans*' roundworm (1 mm long) has been accomplished, which resulted in doubling the lifespan of those genetically engineered worms.

Meanwhile, we have been trying to reshape ourselves against all sorts of degenerative processes, and to keep our appearance to be as close or similar to our prime time, e.g., with the help of plastic surgery, cosmetics, hair transplant, hair dying, vitamins, etc. (each of which as multibillion dollar industry).

Ironically, it is because of impermanence to be thankful for, that we all can grow up from our infancy, but unfortunately we also age at the very same time as well. All these are but 'name' and 'form' or 'mind' and 'matter', that we all cling to, against the relentless force of nature, yet to no avail. *It is the not-self or insubstantial nature of life that mankind has failed to realize (until it was rediscovered by the Buddha), therefore plagued with ignorance (of not seeing the truth as it is), and kept on resisting and clinging to.* Instead of facing the truths directly and accepting it truthfully, we frequently blind ourselves with biased perception to ignore the truth, ending up with more stress, conflict, unsatisfactoriness, and suffering.

*It requires **mindfulness and self-awareness** or bare attentiveness, or direct and pure perception, cultivated through Insight Meditation, to realize and witness not-self or insubstantiality, the true nature of all phenomena. It demands a pure mind, free from bias, for Intuitive Wisdom to surface and blossom. One would realize the sequential, cause and effect nature of one's mental activities and thought process, i.e., Dependent Arising of all mental phenomena and thought concepts. One would then see beyond 'name' and 'form,' or 'mind' and 'matter', and would let go of one's biased thoughts, freeing one's mind from clinging to the 'self' concept, the root of suffering.*

"One suffers out of one's own thought."

- Luangpor Teean

As Huang Po, the Zen Master, put it ("Zen Teaching of Huang Po")

"If you can only rid yourselves of conceptual thought, you will have accomplished everything."

In Buddhism, **Mind** is a combination of *Consciousness, Feeling, Perception, and Thought formation*. The last three are **Mental Activities** or movement of the Mind. Together with *Body*, they form the Five Skandhas (Khandha) or the **Five Aggregates or Groups of existence of Clinging** (Upadanakkhandha). Attachment or clinging to the five skandhas causes personal conflict and suffering, as it generates the 'self' concept, resulting in craving with greed, hatred, and delusion, to satisfy this 'self.'

*"As long as there is the belief in the skandhas,
There will come from them a belief in a self.
When there is a belief in an ego (self), then there is karma.
From this, there will come (re)birth."*

- Nagarjuna

Nowadays, even neuroscientists with their 'breakthrough discoveries', e.g., Dr. Alan Gevins of the Advanced EEG Laboratory of San Francisco, concluded from the result of his experiment that through our own bias, *"We interpret the world through our mental models. In a sense, we **create reality** in our brains and our minds. To a large extent, **we see what we expect to see, and hear what we expect to hear.** There is an interaction, a negotiation, between our expectation and what's really going on out there."* (Restak, R.M.: The Mind. Bantam Book, 1988). Basically we create reality to meet with our own need (instead of seeing reality as they truly are).

Such statements echo what the Buddha warned about the danger created by the biased 'self' concept, and advised everyone to realize and experience the truth as it is, *antedating modern science by over 2500 years*, as follows:

"To see is just see, to hear is just hear, to perceive (through one's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, bodily contact, and mind/thought) is just perceive, and to realize (it is but a thought) is just realize.

"If one can see is just see, hear is just hear, perceive (through one's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, bodily contact, and mind/thought) is just perceive, and realize (it is but a thought) is just realize, then the so-called 'you' can no longer exist.

Without 'you' (or 'self'), then 'you' will not exist in this realm, the future realm, or between those realms. That is the end of suffering."

With those plain and simple, yet profound remarks, an ordinary person named, Pahiya, attained enlightenment instantaneously in front of the Buddha.

The Buddha pointed out that the 'you' or '**self**' **concept is the root of all the problems resulting in dis-ease, stress, conflict, unsatisfactoriness, and suffering.** He also emphasized that **biased** perception through the *Six Sense-spheres or organs* is where the problem arises. Without *hidden agenda or biased concept*, one can experience the true nature of things upon contact with *pure perception*. With hidden agenda to benefit oneself, one would blind oneself with biased perception, and would *create reality*, through *mental impulse, thought concept or imagination* to meet with one's own need or advantage, replacing the actual reality that one is experiencing. This is what the Buddha emphasized in the first Noble Truth that, *"In short, the Five Aggregates of Clinging is suffering."*

"I-tag" 'self-image' hologram & not-self:

Classically the Buddha taught this as "**Dependent Arising or Dependent Origination**", which also explains the circuitry of how suffering arises, as well as how it ceases. Consciousness is defined "according to the condition through which it arises". The continuity of experience by impersonal conditioned elements supports the *not-self (Anatta) or voidness (Sunnata)* hypothesis. Consciousness is not a permanent, unchanging self, but rather a condition created by its environment. The process happens extremely fast and runs successively continuously, and one would perceive it as a "self" entity (or a *hologram* of "self-image"). It appears as if it were a solid steady stream of water pouring out from a hose, but in fact they are successive droplets of water rushing out of the hose, which can be witnessed with the strobe photography.

"Body, O monks, is not the self. Feeling is not the self. Perception is not the self. Thought formations are not the self. And neither is consciousness the self.

Perceiving this, O monks, the disciple sets no value on the body, or on feeling/sensation, or on perception, or on thought formations/mental constructions, or on consciousness. Setting no value on them, he becomes free of passions and he is liberated.

The knowledge of liberation arises there within him. And then he knows that he has done what has to be done, that he has lived the holy life, that he is no longer becoming this or that, that his rebirth is destroyed."

- The Buddha

The Buddha did not find any eternal soul. Consciousness depends on body/form/matter, feeling/sensation, perception, and thought or mental formations, i.e., together as the *Five Aggregates* of the psycho-physical life, and that it cannot exist independently of them.

"Brain is no longer seen simply as a thinking organ, but as a Feeling organ that thinks." - Professor Antonio Damasio, M.D., Chairman, Neurology Department, University of Iowa, USA. He also noted that "In parallel with generating mental patterns for an object, the brain also generates a sense of 'self' in the act of knowing."

Brian Lancaster, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Liverpool Polytechnic, England, similarly observed about the sense of 'self' or 'I-tag' that, *"Memory images come complete with their 'I-tags'. Each 'I' is a product of Imagination, an image generated to meet the moment's need."*

Neuroscientists have found that the right hemisphere is the seat of "I" or self-recognition. Only humans and the higher apes (chimpanzees and orang-utans) can distinguish their own face in the mirror. Other monkeys can learn to interpret mirror images of others -- turning to see a person enter a room when they spot the reflection in a mirror -- but cannot learn to recognize themselves (except for those that were taught sign language). This is believed to reflect the fact that parts of the right hemisphere (the fronto-temporal cortex) evolved only very recently. Indeed,

even humans do not begin to show compelling evidence of self-recognition until they reach 18--24 months old -- which is when the prefrontal cortex begins to mature.

Julian Paul Keenan and colleagues of Harvard Medical School concludes, *"It is conceivable that a right-hemisphere network gives rise to self-awareness which may be a hallmark of higher-order consciousness."*

Gordon G. Gallup, who works on self-awareness in animals at the State University of New York also agrees, that *"Self-awareness, consciousness and mind are an expression of the same underlying process. At about the time that children learn to recognize themselves, they begin to show other evidence of self-conception, such as using personal pronouns, smiling after mastering a task and engaging in self-conscious play."*

Not only human has a larger brain with superior and higher perceptive power than animals, mankind can also see their own thoughts and self-image, as well as capable of cultivating Self-awareness and Mindfulness. Just simply think of a suppositional name of 'Tom' or 'Joan', one can see the person's face in one's thought, though he or she may be a friend or a foe, based on the past experience with such person. Mindfulness and Self-awareness will intervene and let one realize that it is but a biased thought, preventing one from indulging in such thought, therefore free oneself from subsequent anger, frustration, or desire, lust etc. that would have followed.

Mind & Consciousness:

In fact, it has been over 100 years that scientists have tried to locate where the 'self' or consciousness is hiding in the brain. Yet so far there is no special or unique instrument to directly probe or study the mind. What have been known mainly are related to which parts of the brain and what pathways are active on certain mental activities, through studying with various instruments, e.g., EEG (Electro-EncephaloGram), MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) Scan, PET (Positron Emission Tomography) Scan, etc.

[Consciousness: awareness; person's conscious thoughts and feelings as a whole.
Conscious: awake and aware of one's surroundings and identity; knowing, aware (of actions, emotions, etc.), realized or recognized by the doer. – *Oxford Dictionary*]

"Buddhists have a 2,500 years history of investigating the workings of the mind. Over the millenniums, many practitioners have carried out what we might call "experiments" in how to overcome our tendencies toward destructive emotions."

"For centuries Buddhists have believed that pursuing such practices seems to make people calmer, happier and more loving. At the same time they are less and less prone to destructive emotions."

"Dr. Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin, has been using imaging devices that show what occurs in the brain during meditation, Dr. Davidson has been able to study the effects of Buddhist practices for cultivating compassion, equanimity or mindfulness. He found that Mindfulness meditation strengthens the neurological circuits that calm a part of the brain that acts as a trigger for fear and anger. This raises the possibility that we have a way to create a kind of buffer between the brain's violent impulses and our actions."

"Dr. Davidson told me about his research with people working in highly stressful jobs. These people - non-Buddhists – were taught mindfulness, a state of alertness in which the mind does not get caught up in thoughts or sensations, but lets them come and go, much like watching a river flow by. After eight weeks, Dr. Davidson found that in these people, the parts of their brains that help to form positive emotions became increasingly active."

"Experiments have already been carried out that show some practitioners can achieve a state of inner peace, even when facing extremely disturbing circumstances. Dr. Paul Ekman of the University of California at San Francisco told me that jarring noises (one as loud as a gunshot) failed to startle the Buddhist monk he was testing. Dr. Ekman said he had never seen anyone stay so calm in the presence of such a disturbance."

"The implications of all this are clear: the world today needs citizens and leaders who can work toward ensuring stability and engage in dialogue with the "enemy" – no matter what kind of aggression or assault they may have endured."

"It's worth noting that these methods are not just useful, but inexpensive. You don't need a drug or an injection. You don't have to become a Buddhist, or adopt any particular religious faith. Everybody has the potential to lead a peaceful, meaningful life. We must explore as far as we can how that can be brought about."

- H.H. the Dalai Lama (New York Times, April 26, 2003. The Monk in the Lab)

The Buddha discovered that mind has within itself the knowing element or nature, with cognitive function, externally and internally, towards the world, environment, or mental objects or phenomena through the *Six Sense-organs* (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, physical contact or tactile, and mind). If trained to be mindful and inwardly observe, it can become aware of one's own body and mind. Mindfulness and Self-awareness can serve as a diagnostic probe to understand the mechanism of action and function of body and mind, as well as an alert guard or gate-keeper to restrain body and mind at the very same time. Self-Awareness or Wisdom-in-action, with pure perception and bare attentiveness, can differentiate right from wrong, unbiased vs. biased, reality vs. imagination, and guard against biased perception through the Six Sense-organs. Mind can see mind itself clearly, i.e., Mindfulness and Self-Awareness are seeing and experiencing the mind, and realize its true nature, that in reality it is but void of 'self' (or not-self, soulless) and there is no true permanent 'self' entity, as the Buddha stated:

*"Traveling afar, solitary, incorporeal
Lying in the body (cavity), is the mind.
Those who subdue it are freed
From the bond of Mara (The Evil one of the Tempter)."*

- The Buddha, Dharmapada 37

*"Hard to perceive and extremely subtle is this mind,
It roams wherever it desires.
Let the wise man guard it,
A guarded mind is conducive to happiness."*

- The Buddha, Dharmapada 35

The Buddha discovered and realized that the true nature of mind is not-self (Anatta), i.e., void of a permanent 'self' (Sunnata). He thoroughly realized the mechanism of action of the mind which kept wandering around or reaching outwardly to the external world through the Six Sense-organs, resulting in craving and 'clinging'. Not seeing and realizing its true nature would result in suffering, as being led by one's own biased thoughts and feelings, arisen from clinging to materialism, concepts or supposition that one is exposing to or subscribes to.

Nagarjuna

Nagarjuna, the Buddhist sage born around 709-739 B.E. (B.E. = Buddhist Era, i.e., about 1800 years ago), and the founder of Mādhyamika School of Buddhism, considered by some as the "Second Buddha". He propounded the Doctrine of **Middle Path** as well as the concept of **Sunnata (Sunyata) or voidness, emptiness**. It has been observed that the voidness he was referring to has much in common with the picture of the universe held by modern astrophysicists.

Nagarjuna also described the true basic nature of things, e.g., hot, cold, hard, soft, etc., called "**Sava-Lakkana**". Nowadays, scientists are emphasizing the very same thing about the basic quality of each phenomenon, called "*Qualia*", e.g., the painfulness, the heat, the light ray within the spectrum of the whole light form. It is thought that one needs to understand "qualia",

before one can understand consciousness. This is exactly what the Buddha emphasized on perceiving the true nature of things, without bias, instead of being trapped or conditioned by biased thought concepts or mental impulse (Samkara), supposition (conventional truth), through biased perception (Sanna-Cetana) rooted in the self concept (atta).

Nagarjuna emphasized “**Savasam-Vedana**” or the fresh and simple, basic, unbiased feeling upon coming in contact with nature through any of the Six-Sense organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, bodily contact, and mind, with *pure perception or Self-awareness and Mindfulness*. This will keep one’s mind clear from mental impurities (of greed, hatred, and delusion), allowing one’s Intuitive Wisdom to shine and see things in reality as they truly are, i.e., with Insight, without bias (ignorance - Avijja, or ego - atta), freeing oneself from suffering.

Universe: consists of 3 main parts, as follows

1. Visible matter: We are all but a tiny fraction (nano-fragment) of the visible matter (of planets, stars, and dust) which only makes up to 4% of the Universe.

Yet, the majority of the universe is invisible. They consist of:

2. Dark Matter- making up to 27% of the Universe, which tugs on the 4% that is the visible matter of stars, planets and dust. Researchers have spent decades searching for particles that could make-up dark matter, so far to no avail.

3. Dark Energy - More elusive still is dark energy, a force that makes up roughly three-quarters of the Universe and is pushing the cosmos apart.

The Absolute, the Primary Point, Universal Substance:

The true nature of things is the ‘*Primary point,*’ beyond ‘Name’ and ‘Form’ or ‘Mind’ and ‘Body’. Everything is but ‘*Universal Substance.*’ It is the ‘*Absolute,*’ pure, void, and empty. It is the flow of the pure form of uniform energy of the original universe. It is beyond ‘time’, beyond ‘the Big Bang’, before any formation of galaxies or consolidation into gases, elements, stars, planets, i.e., transformation of energy into mass or matters, as solids, liquids, gases, etc. *It is beyond ‘concept’ and nomenclature.* Yet, with limited human’s power to convey, names and labels have been given to such ultimate reality, according to the roots of various social, ethical, spiritual, religious, or scientific backgrounds and concepts, as Nirvana, Moksha, Jehovah, God, Kingdom of God, Kundalini, etc. As soon as one puts labels to it, one would have lost it into the concepts again.

The absolute truth is beyond time, timeless, or not dependable upon or related to time. The truth is always there, readily to be rediscovered whether the Buddha exists or not. Whenever one perceives things in reality as they truly are, one would be free from all the attachment, craving and clinging to the ‘self’ concept, and would free oneself from suffering.

An ordinary person may attain enlightenment or be awakened to the absolute truth, which will free oneself from bondage and suffering. Such capability, known as *Buddha Nature or Buddha seed*, resides in everyone, regardless of age, sex, race, literacy, dialect, profession, or even religious belief.

“Let go of the past, the present, and the future, transcending the state of becoming. Mind once liberated, birth and aging would happen no more.”

- The Buddha.

“It is the self-existing, ultimate basic reality, or universal substance (Vatthu, Svabhava). It is the experiencing, the ultimate (Paramattha).

It is but the flow, the vibes of independent, pure uniform energy (Aghan).”

- Insight Meditation Master Luangpor Teean

Bodhidharma (the First Zen Patriarch) firmly believed in being one with the Real Substance of the Universe in this life!

Mind and that ‘substance’ do not differ one bit - that substance is Mind.

They cannot possibly be separated. The moment of realizing the unity of Mind and the 'substance' which constitutes reality may truly be said to baffle description.

Nirvana

Nirvana, the ultimate peace and happiness, is the common goal of spiritual practice in all branches of Buddhism. It is the state free of suffering, death and rebirth. It is the End of Suffering. Nirvana is unconditioned; its characteristic marks are absence of arising, subsisting, changing, and passing away, or the state of unborn, ungrowing, undying, unchanging, and unconditioning, beyond any worldly concept or supposition.

Nirvana requires complete overcoming of the three unwholesome roots - desire/greed, hatred/anger, and delusion, which blind people from seeing the truth (Ignorance). It ends egoism (Atta), and self-conceit (Mana).

“There is no other happiness beyond Nirvana”

– The Buddha.

Nirvana is the ultimate freedom, Intellectual and Emotional freedom, beyond Physical and Social freedom. The mind is totally free from being captured and imprisoned by unintentional and biased thoughts.

Buddhism is therefore an awakened way of life to wake up people from such ignorance rooted in egoism.

Nirvana can be realized through Enlightenment. It means getting rid of all mental impurities. Enlightenment can be achieved, with one's own effort, through practicing the Middle Path and Insight Meditation.

Enlightenment is the resonance between the voidness of the pure mind and the emptiness of the original universe.

“Mind is luminous, but tainted with transitory mental impurities (greed, hatred, and delusion)”

- The Buddha.

No longer burdened by greed or desire, hatred or anger, and delusion or egoism, sneaked in with the thoughts, getting *rid of by Self-Awareness and Mindfulness*, the mind would resume its true norm of equanimous, luminous, pure, liberated and free nature. No longer clouded by mental impurities, Intuitive Wisdom would be able to shine or mind would be luminous, gaining Insights, capable of seeing things in reality as they truly are.

Aiming at ending or extinguishing suffering, i.e., Nirvana, therefore the whole Buddha's teaching is geared towards freeing oneself from the cause of suffering.

“Volition (intention or motivation), oh monks, I declare is Karma (action). Having willed, man acts with deed, word, and thought (according to one's intention or motivation).”

– The Buddha

Core or Heart of Buddhism:

The Buddha taught 3 main messages, namely:

1. *Avoid doing bad deeds (Morality),*
2. *Do good deeds (Mental Discipline or Concentration), and*
3. *Purify one's mind (Wisdom through practicing Insight Meditation).*

These three practical aspects are **the Three Fundamental Principles of Morality, Concentration, and Wisdom**, all of which are implemented by *Mindfulness and Self-awareness*

to be effective. On the other hand, it is the progressive method of cultivating, advancing and strengthening one's Mindfulness and Self-Awareness.

Yet, the Buddha stressed that,

“You yourselves must make the effort. The Buddhas only pointed out the way.”

I. Avoid doing bad deeds (Morality) is being practiced through restraint according to the observed Moral codes or Precepts. Theravada monks observe 227 precepts suitable for and complementary to a celibate life to advance rapidly in their mental discipline. For laities, ***the Five Buddhist Precepts*** or moral codes are mainly observed namely 1. *Do not kill (both human and animals)*, 2. *Do not steal*, 3. *Do not practice sexual misconduct*, 4. *Do not lie*, and 5. *Do not take any intoxicant (which may dull one's mindfulness)*.

These Five Precepts are the qualities that make mankind true human beings, superior to all other animals. They are the 'golden rules' that preside over human societies and allow them to live together as peaceful social animals, reassuring their success above and beyond other animal species. Human beings thrive for happiness (and avoid unhappiness) through Craving (for sensual desire, wanting, or disengage from not-wanting) and clinging to their own biased Opinion/View/Thought concepts, frequently at the expense of other beings. These Five Precepts would prevent them from committing any form of violence, criminal acts, lying or falsifying information, harming or endangering other beings, for personal gain, based on greed or desire, hatred or anger, and delusion or egoism.

Four of these Five Buddhist precepts, along with the similar practice cited in the Ten Commandments of the Judo-Christian-Islamic traditions, have been adopted and incorporated into ***A Global Ethic*** by the leaders of the major World's religions at the *Parliament of the World Religions* meeting in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. back in 1993. They are 1. *Commitment to a Culture of Non-violence and Respect for Life (No killing)*, 2. *Commitment to a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order (No stealing)*, 3. *Commitment to a Culture of Tolerance and a Life of Truthfulness (No lying)*, and 4. *Commitment to a Culture of Equal Rights and Partnership Between Men and Women (including No sexual misconduct)*.

II. Doing good deeds (Mental Discipline or Concentration) is the way to heighten one's mindfulness and self-awareness. One engages in ***the Five Ennobling Virtues***, namely 1. *Loving-kindness & Compassion (beyond no Killing)*, 2. *Right Livelihood (beyond no stealing)*, 3. *Sexual restraint (beyond no sexual misconduct)*, 4. *Truthfulness and honesty (beyond no lying)*, and 5. *Mindfulness and Self-awareness (beyond no intoxicant which dulls the Mind)*. Loving-kindness and Compassion can be further reinforced by Sympathetic or altruistic joy, and Equanimity, which form the Four Holy Abidings.

Through *Morality*, mindfulness will constantly guard one's mind and intention from negative and unskillful means, not to commit oneself to any immoral act, or participate in any form of violence. The *Ennobling Virtues* of Loving-kindness and Compassion will further enrich the mind by replacing all the ill-will and violent thoughts with positive and skillful qualities, bringing the mind back to its norm of equanimous, neutral, open-minded, kind and sincere nature.

III. Purifying one's mind (Wisdom) is the key training in Buddhism. It is being practiced through ***Insight Meditation***, which will allow one to see *things in reality as they truly are (Vipassana)*. It is based on ***the Four Foundation of Mindfulness*** through *self-observation or self-monitoring* of one's own Body, Feeling, Mind, and Mental Phenomena. It will cut oneself loose from clinging to all the thoughts, worldly concepts, or conditioned phenomena.

With Mindfulness and Wisdom, the mind would revolutionize itself, i.e., enlightenment, and become totally free from craving for sensual desire, wanting, or not-wanting, which are ***the Cause of Suffering***. Mindfulness and self-awareness can be cultivated through practicing ***the Middle Path or the Noble Eightfold Path***, namely 1. Right View or Understanding, 2. Right Thought or

Impulse (1 & 2 are **Wisdom**), 3. Right Speech, 4. Right Action, 5. Right Livelihood (3, 4 & 5 are **Morality**), 6. Right Effort, 7. Right Mindfulness, and 8. Right concentration (7, 8 & 9 are **Mental Discipline or Concentration**).

Insight Meditation when well practiced will perfect one's *Mindfulness and Self-Awareness* and catch one's own thought as it arises. It allows one to witness how a *biased or egoistic* mental impulse can lead to a *positive or negative* thought process, resulting in craving, clinging, becoming and birth into the thought concept, until it ripens and ceases or dies down, before indulging the next and successive thought cycles. Such births and deaths of thoughts occur innumerable times a day. This is **Dependent Arising or Dependent Origination**, the underlying key mechanism of how *Suffering arises, how it lingers on if not realized, and how it ceases when one is awakened by perfected Mindfulness and Self-Awareness, which would catch and freeze one's own biased thought as it arises. Greed, hatred, and delusion can no longer sneak in with the captured thought.*

Dependent Arising basically represents the Wheel of Life, the Cycle of Birth & Death, the Arising & Ceasing of Thought, or Thought Process. It comprises of 12 sequential components, namely, 1. Ignorance (self delusion) → 2. Mental Impulse/Thought formation (biased) → 3. Consciousness (biased) → 4. Thought (Nama-rupa) (biased) → 5. Six sense spheres (biased) → 6. Contact (biased) → 7. Feeling (biased) → 8. Craving → 9. Clinging → 10. Becoming → 11. Birth (into the biased thought and concept) → 12. Aging/Ripening, death/ceasing (of the biased thought), sorrow, lamentation, depression, and suffering.

"Since the Essence of Mind is the embodiment of all Dharmas (the Truth), it is called the Alaya (Repository) Consciousness (3). But as soon as the process of thinking (4 - Thought) or reasoning is started, the Essence of Mind is transmuted into (various) vijnanas (consciousness). When the six recipient vijnanas come into being, they perceive (7 - Feeling) the six sense objects (6 - Contact to sight, sound, odor, taste, touch, and thought) through the six 'doors' (5 - Six sense spheres/organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). Thus, the functioning of the eighteen dhatus (The 18 dhatus, or factors of consciousness, are the 6 sense objects, 6 sense organs, and 6 recipient vijnanas - consciousness.) derive their impetus (2 - Mental Impulse/Thought Formation) from the Essence of Mind. Whether they function with an evil tendency (1 - Ignorance) or a good one depends upon what mood - good or evil - the Essence of Mind is in. Evil functioning is that of a common man (8 - Craving) (9 -Clinging) (10 - Becoming) (11- Birth) (12 - Ripening/Aging, ceasing/death, sorrow, lamentation, depression, and suffering), while good functioning is that of a Buddha (Wisdom). It is because there are 'pairs of opposites' inherent in the Essence of Mind that the functioning of the eighteen dhatus derive their impetus."

- The Sutra of HuiNeng (The Sixth Zen Patriarch)

"This physical body of ours is a city. Our eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are the gates. There are five external gates, while the internal one is ideation. The mind is the ground. The Essence of Mind is the King who lives in the domain of the mind. While the Essence of Mind is in, the King is in, and our body and mind exist. When the Essence of Mind is out, there is no King and our body and mind decay. We should work for Buddhahood within the Essence of Mind, and we should not look for it apart from ourselves. He who is kept in ignorance of his Essence of Mind is an ordinary being. He who is enlightened in his Essence of Mind is a Buddha."

- The Sutra of HuiNeng (The Sixth Zen Patriarch)

"You observe thoughts. Don't try to do anything to thoughts. Don't go into thoughts. Don't stop thoughts. Just be aware of thoughts. And things will be revealed automatically and naturally."

- Insight Meditation Master Luangpor Teean

Dr. James Austin, a neurologist, theorizes that parts of the cerebral cortex and the inner brain, including the thalamus and the amygdala, work together to generate each person's sense

of "I-me-mine."

- Austin, J.H.: Zen and the Brain. 1998, MIT Press

Eleanor Rosch, a psychologist of University of California, Berkeley and Christine Skarda, a neuroscientist, postulated that initially people perceive the world through their sensory organs as a seamless whole with no separation of self from surroundings. As people employ the perceptions that the brain wrests out of a web of interconnected sensations, they become conscious of looking at the world as separate beings. If the brain indeed fashions a sense of self and of external objects from a seamless fabric of sensations, then *the moment of "no-I" as ascribed to enlightenment* may signal the recovery of a larger reality, as it initially picked up by our senses.

Science News: Feb. 17, 2001; 159: 103 - 106.

Four Foundation of Mindfulness (Satipatthana) – The Practical Aspect:

Thoughts and concepts are the major factors in our life and how we perceive our world. It is the basic principle of *Dependent Arising or Origination*, illustrating how one's biased thoughts of desire, like, and dislike arise. It is filled with greed, hatred, or delusion, as *cause of suffering*, with its result as *suffering*, if one does not catch the arising thought in time before the devastating damage is being done to one's mind. This requires training and practice to gain one's mindfulness and self-awareness to be efficient enough to catch the arising thought. One can successfully acquire such quality through practicing *Insight Meditation* advised by Buddha as the **Four Foundation of Mindfulness (Satipatthana)**, which is a simplified, yet perfected technique, applicable to one's daily life, representing *the Middle Path to end suffering*.

The Buddha proclaimed that the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is *the supreme path for purification of all beings, for transcending grief, sorrow and lamentation, for getting rid of suffering, anxiety and depression, for understanding the essential truth* (i.e., the *Noble Eightfold or Middle Path*: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration), *and for realization of Nirvana* (the ultimate peace and happiness).

It is based upon *self-observation or self-monitoring* of one's own **Body, Feeling or Sensation, Mind** and its movement or activity or thoughts, and **Mental Phenomenon, event, or object**, witnessing how greed, hatred, and delusion arise, sustain, or cease, and how they sneak in with the thoughts. As one's Mindfulness and Self-Awareness strengthen, one would be able to catch the thought as it arises, and freeze those unwanted, sneaky, or unintentional thoughts, preventing them from doing any damage to oneself and one's mind. Without thoughts as its vehicle, greed, hatred, or delusion can no longer express itself. One's mind would resume its true norm and natural state as neutral and equanimous mind, without biased thoughts or concepts. Such a mind will be free from suffering, i.e., *end of suffering*. The mental activity or thought that arises would be neutral, guarded by mindfulness, bare attentiveness, pure perception, and intuitive wisdom. Free from biased mental impulse, *one would be in control of one's thought, speech, and action*.

Only when this 'self' concept or self-image hologram is shattered, through awareness with pure perception, transcending 'name' & 'form' and supposition, then there will no longer be any mental impulse based on the 'self' concept. The pure and formless mind energy, void of 'self' concept, will equilibrate with the true essence nature of the universe, which is but a limitless ocean of voidness and emptiness.

Meditation All the Time:

One can practice Insight (Vipassana) Meditation all the time, not necessary while you sit meditating during the Formal Meditation session. If one understands the principle, one will be blessed with the greatest bargain of one's life, i.e., living an awakened life.

The Informal Meditation practice is even more important, as one lives the majority of one's life or the real life situation in a blurry and unclear perspective, being clouded by the endless flow of biased thoughts. The whole purpose of Insight Meditation is to cultivate *Self-Awareness or Sampajanna (Wisdom-in-action or Clear-comprehension)* which is basically the root of Wisdom, yet not being emphasized sufficiently, beyond the commonly emphasized *Mindfulness or Sati* (which leans towards Tranquility meditation). Whenever one lives one's life with Self-Awareness, one also gains Mindfulness as a part of its accompanied quality as well, though the opposite is not true, as one may gain Mindfulness without having Self-Awareness at all, e.g., a thief is quite mindful not to trip the laser security light, but he is full of delusion overwhelmed by his greed, so totally lacking Self-Awareness that he is committing a serious crime with a bad consequence.

Self-Awareness – The Neglected Essence of Life:

Self-Awareness can be experienced through the "fresh" feeling at the "flesh" (body) level, similar to the same sensation when one is circling one's thumb and index fingers together, or open and close your fist, or gently rub all ten fingertips together with both hands (just try it now). It is this self-awareness that awakens one's body, that we all possess already but totally neglected or taking it for granted. Yet, *Self-Awareness is the most powerful and invaluable tool we already have within ourselves, once it is activated by experiencing the fresh and neutral feeling through bodily movement (including the movement of the breath body without moving the whole body as one is sitting in meditation with Mindfulness with Breathing)*. Body as the largest Sense-organ in one's body with the most abundant sensory perception (as tactile sensation) can be transformed into an invaluable tool to one's insight Meditation. As one can experience Self-Awareness all day long through the usual daily activities, which are always accompanied by bodily movement (even when one is sitting or standing still, as one still blinks and breathes, etc.).

As this Self-Awareness heightens its sensitivity, it will catch one's mind movement, which is one's thought, not allowing greed, hatred, delusion to sneak in with the thought.

With self-Awareness, one can be aware of oneself *externally* (at the surface of your Body and Feeling/sensation) as well as *internally* (at one's inner body, e.g., one's breath body traveling into one's lungs, one's heart beating, etc., as well as one's Mind and Mental phenomena/event/object), as if one is standing at the entrance of a cave, capable of seeing everything that is going on outside the cave as well as inside the cave.

Self-awareness (or Wisdom-in-action), in the practical sense, covers both Mindfulness (Sati) and Self-awareness (Sampajanna), and it is the Self-Awareness that is more important as it is Wisdom-in-action. So in conveying the message, Self-Awareness and Mindfulness are frequently being referred to as one under the word "Mindfulness" or Sati.

Insight Dynamic Meditation is a simple yet powerful and effective method to cultivate Self-Awareness. It is being practiced with one's eyes open in the formal session, therefore avoid being trapped in one's own thoughts (as soon as one closes one's eyes, thoughts would naturally pop up, esp. for beginners). It is based upon embedding Mindfulness into the bodily physical movement, and cultivating Self-Awareness with fresh feeling through such movement, e.g., sensing the hand waving through the air. It is easily applicable to one's daily living, utilizing ordinary movement as a tool to nurture Self-Awareness, as one moves all the time throughout the day. Once well-trained, Mindfulness and Self-Awareness will automatically be aware of all activities and will catch all movements, physically and mentally (i.e., thoughts).

"Being aware of one's body awakens one's body."

"Being aware of one's mind awakens one's mind."

- Luangpor Teean

Simply embed one's Mindfulness and Self-Awareness into one's daily activities, i.e. bodily movement, one would begin to awaken one's body (and mind) readily, shaking and unearthing the root of wisdom, allowing it to surface.

When one is aware of one's own body and mind, unawareness or self-delusion, i.e. ignorance, disappears. One would be wise, through pure perception and not being blinded by premeditated biased thought. One would be in control of one's thoughts, and no longer be the slave of one's own biased thoughts as it used to be. One would be free and totally aware of what one does, says, and thinks, as having the unearthed wisdom within oneself at all time.

Not being lured by one's own biased thoughts, one would live a happier life by simply activating Self-Awareness through bodily movement and mind movement, and be in control of one's life. At the very same time, Mindfulness will also be nurtured within Self-Awareness as well. Unawareness or delusion will disappear, as mind can only dwell in one mental state at each moment.

Being Aware of all 4 Aspects of Body, Feeling, Mind, Mental Phenomena:

Lack of unison between one's own *Body, Feeling, Mind, and Mental Phenomena/events/objects (the Four Foundations or aspects of a person)* would result in chaos and suffering, as each of them would work towards its own way in different directions. For example, one is driving to work as the ongoing physical or *bodily* activity, yet one's *mind* is concerned with the problems at work as one's ongoing thought that one dwells into, instead of watching the traffic. As a result one feels tense, resulting in tension headache or abdominal cramps as one's *feeling*. One's mood is full of anger and frustration, and even becomes absent-minded. One may unintentionally be driving very fast and may even cause an accident.

Embedded Mindfulness will chain them together, while Self-awareness cultivated through Insight Meditation will keep pace with and be totally aware of one's own body, feeling, mind, and mental phenomena at the very same time. This will allow them to work together in unison, moment to moment, allowing a person, with all of the Four Foundations together as a whole, to be more efficient and perfect in what one is doing, saying and thinking.

Without experiencing all Four Foundations of Body, Feeling, Mind, and Mental Phenomena at the same time, one may readily sense one of the four aspects than the other, and only see the problem at that particular aspect. So one may end up attempting to turn off the problem at various levels or foundations, e.g., at the Feeling or sensation where one may sense tension headache, muscle spasm, or stomach cramps, which is but the end-product of the sneaky and biased thought. One may attempt to unwind the stress and tension with massage, hot pack or transform anger and frustration to relaxation, similar to unwind the light-bulb to turn off the light. But it still does not get rid of the culprit which is the thought, that one would need to turn it off at the light-switch.

Once self-awareness is heightened with increased sensitivity, keen and swift enough to catch and kill the biased thought, the root of the whole problem, as it arises, i.e., it will automatically turn off the light-switch of one's Mind embedded with own biased thought. It is more effective and more radical way to turn off the light than unscrewing the light-bulb at each Feeling or Vedana which is but the end-product of such biased thought.

Yet, one may experiment with actual experiencing of the neutral feeling or sensation, the true basic feeling, by simply emptying out all the feeling or sensation right now, by letting go of either pleasurable feeling or unpleasurable feeling at this very moment. Even pleasurable feeling is a burden, as it has to depend upon other factors to continue on pleasing oneself, e.g., beautiful flowers, nice scenery, beautiful voice, etc.

Just try emptying out all feeling right now, and one will come to experience the neutral and peaceful feeling within oneself. It is self-sufficient, self-fulfilling, and does not have to depend on any other factor at all, i.e., an independent kind of feeling as self-existing serenity and peace.

This is called "Niramisa-sooka" (True happiness independent of any material or other factors), the simple and true peace within oneself (arisen from within yourself). It is more profound and quite different from the "Amisa-sooka" (Superficial happiness or comfort dependent upon other materials or external objects) that people struggle for, which needs and depends on materials or other factors to support them.

The real test, or more precisely the real practice, is the real situation in one's daily life, the ordinary mundane activities while one faces the Ups and Downs of Life, conditioned by the Worldly Phenomena (Fortune vs. Misfortune, Honor vs. Dishonor, Praise vs. Gossips, Happiness vs. Unhappiness), that every worldly being subscribes to. In other word, the worldly subscribes to their Craving (Tanha: craving with sensual desire, like, and dislike) and Ideation or Concept (Ditthi: one's own bias or egoism), for their Happiness and Unhappiness. One is no longer in the training camp, but in the actual ring, one needs to be fully aware, alert, and guard oneself against the opponent, as one may be hit or even bitten by one's biased thought, if one is not aware of his moves.

Through perseverance, Self-Awareness, and Mindfulness (Atapee Sampajhano Satima), one can learn the trick of surfing the tidal waves of the Ups and Downs of Life, without being drown under the waves (of biased thoughts).

With *Mindfulness (Sati)* and *Self-Awareness (Sampajanna)* continuously guarding and catching one's thought as it arises, one would gain *Insight, i.e., seeing things in reality as they truly are (Vipassana), with pure perception (without biased thought)* and *Wisdom (Panna)*. *Liberation of one's mind (Nirodha)* is bound to happen, as no longer being trapped by one's own biased thoughts and concepts. One's mind would be perfectly free from dis-ease, stress, conflict, unsatisfactoriness and suffering, as one would no longer attach oneself to any worldly phenomenon, nor be blinded by greed, hatred, and delusion, sneaking in with the thought. One would be perfectly free, calm, peaceful and happy, in this state of *unborn, ungrowing, undying, unchanging, and unconditioning of Nirvana*.