



Buddhist Prison Ministry

P.O. Box 426

Orcas, WA 98280

October 19th, 2024

Dear Michael Manjeet Singh!

I am proud and honored that you have completed the Introduction to Buddhism Course. Thank you so much for your responses! Wow you put so much into it! Thanks too for the compliments. I'm glad you liked the chart! I also LOVED the 'compassion' synchronicity! May it continue.

Here is your certificate of completion. I'm sending you part 1 of our 2nd workbook in a separate envelope.

Your integration question answers have been sent to one of our amazing volunteers, so you can expect a response from them sometime soon.

Once again, I am ever so grateful that you took the course. Please know that we continue to hold you and our greater sangha in our prayers.

May your spiritual life flourish!

Susan and the BPM volunteers

*we only offer our two workbooks, cannot send any other materials... sorry!

Buddhist Prison Ministry

proudly issues this

Certificate of Completion

to

Michael Manjeet Singh

For Successfully Completing

Buddhist Prison Ministry's First Workbook

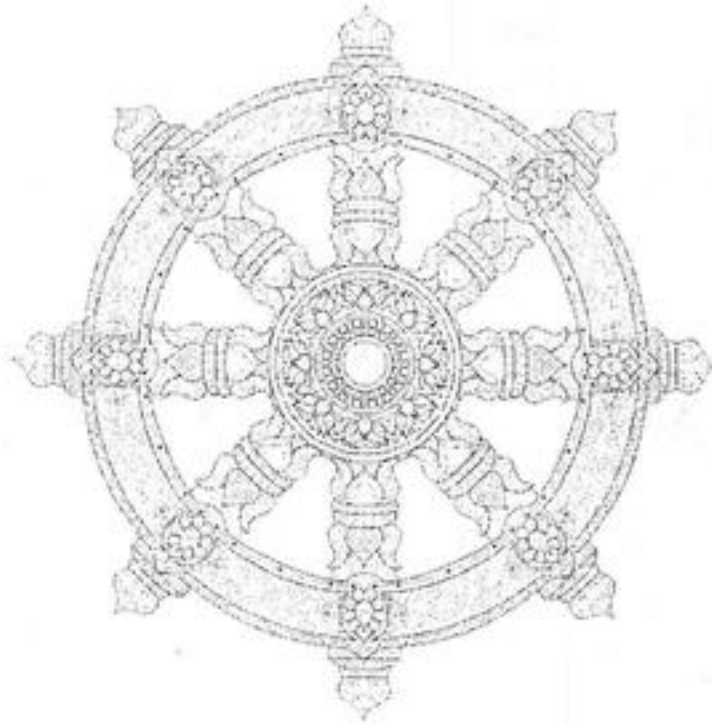
Bodhicitta Behind Bars: An Introduction to Buddhism



Rev. Susan Shannon, M. Div., BCCC
Director, Buddhist Prison Ministry

October 19th, 2024

Buddhist Prison Ministry/ PO Box 426/Orcas, WA/98280



The thought manifests as the word;

The word manifests as the deed;

The deed develops into habit;

And habit hardens into character;

So, watch the thoughts and their ways with care,

And let them spring from love,

Born out of compassion for all beings.

As the shadow follows the body,

as we think, so we become."

~ The Buddha

Hello Michael,

I read your answers to the BPM homework, and found them to be very profound. It shows that you are dedicated to your practice. Indeed, hardships make us grow. Without them, we cannot develop better compassion and understanding for others. I tremendously have love for Buddhism, and of course, all of it's teachings on dharma, and how to be a better person.

I agree, the many Buddhist schools there are, have a lot of similarities and definitely some differences. I am most attracted to Zen, and Nichiren, but really like all the schools. Buddhism has made me a better person, mentally and otherwise. I feel that I speak better to others, have better compassion for others, and just realize that we are all going through good times and difficult times, albeit in varying degrees.

Very good responses on how Buddhism started in India, and moved to other countries like China, Japan, etc. The great thing about Buddhism is how well it adapted to other cultures, and the fact that its basic message stayed the same. But it's true that there are differences between these schools too. Very well said about how the tenets of Buddhism are laid out. I find it very organized too, in such a way that it is not difficult to follow. It keeps me in check, in life, for sure. Going into Buddhism changed my life forever; I cannot imagine how my life would have been, without it.

All of the aspects of Buddhism you speak of, such as interconnectedness, peace, compassion, tolerance, etc. These are so very much at the heart of Buddhism, and realizing our Buddha Nature. It's the reason I am in Buddhism myself. Impermanence, as you speak of it too - it helps us keep a very clear mind, not expecting too much out of ourselves, or others.

Because this expectation and demand of others, becomes higher when we become attached to ourself too much. Buddhism wonderfully teaches us to reduce this attachment, so that we indeed show greater compassion for others, and a better understanding of what others go through.

Among so many great things you said, thank you for sharing your experience with your correspondence with the former NBA player. And compassion is indeed the unification of one's Awakened Body, Speech and Mind. It is true awakening indeed.

Superb work on the homework packets. Terrific insights, that you have shared. Keep up the great work and great practice. You will continue to be a better person and benefit greatly from them.

Wishing you all the best,
Chris
BPM Volunteer

*Lesson One, p.13

Q1 - What purpose do you think the roles of hardship & austerities played in Buddha's attainment of enlightenment? How have hardships factored into your spiritual maturity?

Q1 answer (a) Driven to attain enlightenment, he underwent 6 years of severe austerities & extreme fasting. He abandoned these extreme practices as they hadn't led him to enlightenment, just to near starvation & death. (b) Hardships have factored into my spiritual material in the following ways: 1) It has made me be more concerned with other peoples plights 2) Made me 'give back' & be a positive factor in the community I live in - as I do free ^(write) grievences etc for those around me who need help i.e. people w/ mental health, lack of education or non-english speakers - to help them obtain medical care & file to assert other rights, etc & obtain/fulfill other needs/issues pending before them.

Q2 - (a) What roles, relationships & identities have you had during your life?
 (b) Which have ^{dissolved} stayed, & which have stayed with you?

Q2 answer (a) Roles, Relationships & identities I've had during my life include but aren't limited to: ^{grandson, brother} son, big brother, ^{college student} youth advocate, ^(various positions) community leader, people helper, bank teller, clerk, t/A, ^{basket ball player} teacher/coach, mentor, tutor, project leader etc.
 (b) The dissolved ones: ^{basketball player} grandson, bank teller, clerk, bank teller, clerk, teacher, coach; the ones that have stayed are: son, big brother, youth advocate, college student, community leader, people helper, advocate, teacher assistant tutor

Q3 In the Third Turning of the Wheel, Buddha taught about Buddha-nature, the seed of enlightenment that is alive & latent in all beings. What is the equivalent of this in your chosen faith tradition if not Buddhism?

Q-3 answer: The equivalent is much of the same for me - in Hinduism & Sikhism is the journey of the soul (atman) through reincarnation. Like when an enlightened soul comes back in a new body to educate & assist those around, to help people understand we are all one through connection of humanity through time and other forms of life as well. Us waking up makes us more giving, mindful to help others & get less attached. This sentiment can be found in a statement I've heard many older people say, "money isn't everything" because it's not about material things. The best things in life are free.

*Lesson Two, p. 19

Q1 Looking at the many schools of Buddhism, the angles of study & practice, which ones drew you in & which did not?

answer Q1 In Theravada, Chan, Zen, Tibetan, Pure Land (Gedushu), I was drawn in by the similarities in Elements of Practice & the similarities: 4 Noble Truths, 8 Fold Path, Wisdom, Virtue, Concentration & Impermanence - because these are shared in each one, the similarities in all the schools of Buddhism.

Similarities drew me in because that's the prevailing theme! What didn't me in were the differences. Knowing similarities can bridge different segments of people to help understand & study all of it.

In Nichiren "Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō" stood out to me. The first time I remember hearing it was in ^{movie} "What's Love Got to Do With It" - Tina Turner's life story. At the lowest point in her life when Tina Turner visited her best friend, she was introduced to this by that best friend who practiced it. From that point Tina Turner changed her path & the rest is a well known story. That's why it was put in the movie.

Lesson Two-CONT'd, P.19

Q2. What stood out for you as you study the Comparison Chart?

answer Q2- What stood out for me ~~was~~ were the number of them. I've heard the name of most of them - remembered as I read, but there were quite a few I didn't know. Also, how it traveled from its Origin in India to China^{1st}, then Korea^{2nd}, then Japan^{3rd}. To an outsider it's mainly all the same. However if one is Chinese, the distinct differences stand out from Korean & Japanese, same scenario applies to all 3 - that the variations of the other 2 stand out. It also made me think of Sri Lanka - 2004 Tsunami, Singapore, Mongolia, Taiwan - all the other ^(countries) places where Buddhism has spread out to over its inception.

Q3. How many of the differences do you think are cultural & how many historical?

answer Q3- Differences culturally occurred from Buddhism spreading from India - to China, Korea, then Japan. Each country - although Asian, has its unique identity & differences from others. History shows how meanings of words & their usage change over time. So I think both culture and history had an equal effect of / on differences. After all Buddhism didn't simultaneously spread to other places at the same pace. Wars, migration, world events played a part as to when ~~when~~ ^{changes} occurred. Differences in culture occur over time & at various paces. This is why I think differences can be equally attributed to both culture & history.

Q4 - Thinking about Buddhism's spread across cultures, would you say Buddhism is an adaptive faith tradition? Do you think the other "main" traditions are as adaptive? Christianity, Islam, Judaism.

answer Q4- I would say yes & no - to it being an adaptive faith tradition; yes because it is a faith & has adapted over time in various countries, the same can be said for the 'main' traditions Christianity, Islam, Judaism as all 3 are umbrella terms to sects with philosophical differences, yet ~~now~~ ^{retain} the main tenets.

The 'no' part of the answer is the faith tradition Buddhism has kept the main tenets despite centuries of war, travel & variations. Like Theravada, the book says, "Many American traditions emerge from the Theravada schools. So the further you go back in time, the less disparities exist."

* Lesson Three, p. 28 (Lesson 3 & 4)

Q1 - The Eightfold Path is a set of guidelines for transforming our lives. Which of them is easiest for you? Which is the most challenging?

Answer Q1 - The easiest for me is Right Speech. I say this as it is what I use to advocate for myself & others. It helps me address what's going on now & try to fix it or take the best path. It also ^{helps me} help others. The most challenging is Right Mindfulness - b/c as stated "When Right Mindfulness is present, the 4 Noble Truths & 7 other elements of 8-fold path are also present." It ends with "hurt people, hurt people," perhaps more tolerance & understanding can increase in our divided, wounded world.

Q2 - Most of us are tired of rules. Is it challenging for you to see these morals & ethics laid out like guidelines? If so why, if not why? No not challenging to see it laid out like this. Rather it's quite refreshing & seeing it written in an organized fashion makes me feel like it is easier to achieve because it serves as a constant reminder of what one should & want to achieve. Almost like a formula or recipe of various ingredients necessary or even when I write it out, feels like I write it into existence. To see it, serves to remind, serves to think, feel, & act.

(cont'd)
* Lesson 3, p 28 (Lesson 3 & 4)

Q3- Most faith traditions have guidelines of moral & ethical behavior. Can you think of some? Of your list, are interconnectness, peace, compassion, tolerance & patience at the heart of their intention? If not, then what is? Orderliness, fear, lawfulness?

answer Q 3 There's quite a few - i.e. the golden rule, karma / you reap what you sow, value life, don't steal, don't lie. Of this list - interconnectness, peace, compassion, tolerance & patience are ^{definitely} at the heart of their intention - because all are good/positive. As for as orderliness - yes because it all keeps people in some form of orderliness & on the right side of order; fear - no b/c it is a negative trait & if its not love at the heart of their intention, then its no good. Lastly, lawfulness - yes, because it is good to keep 'law & order' in some form or fashion, b/c without it full chaos/anarchy will explode & good society can't have that.

Q4- How & who have you 'othered'? Is this othering rooted in hurt, fear or shame?

Did you inherit this bias from your family of origin? What do you gain by holding onto it? What might you gain by letting go of it?

I 'other' - self separate - as I am now writing this course. In the dayroom I sit alone at a table & work w/o socializing & simply focus on the task at hand. This othering is not rooted in hurt, fear or shame - it is rooted in wanting to become a better/improved person. This 'bias' I'll call work ethic & yes I inherited it from my family. As a kid to now I saw my parents work long hard hours & I learned hard work matters & creates results. What I gain by holding onto it are the results of hard work I put into understanding, growing & learning. Letting go of a positive, solid work ethic will cause me to 'cease to exist' in the sense that I'll cease to be positively busy, occupied & achieving. So I 'other' the useless drug addicts ^(separate self) around me & stay focused on achieving good results.

* Lesson 5, p. 38

Q-1 As you learned, the depiction of the Wheel of Life contains an entire cosmology, an entire theology Buddhism. Name a few things that stood out for you:

answer Q-1 • Yama, Lord of Death represents impermanence

- inner meaning - entire process of cyclic existence - SAMSARA IS TRANSIENT = IN CONSTANT CHANGE all w/in wheel is
- CROWN of 5 skulls = impermanence of 5 aggregates/emotions - anger, attachment, ignorance, jealousy & pride
- Third Eye: understanding impermanence
- Four limbs (clutching wheel) = sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, death
- MOON = liberation from sufferings of samsara (ignorance, attraction, aversion, suffering)
- Tiger skin - symbolized by fearfulness

Q-2 What was the belief of the Cycle of Life & Death that you were raised with?

answer Q-2 I am Indian (like India), in my house is Hindu & Sikh religions. The belief I was raised with is that the soul (atman) ^{Has/is} reincarnation; once a person passes away, their soul comes back in a different form (body) body. To respect all forms of life - human or animal, also that we can/will pray for a loved one's passing & that their soul has a safe journey. This is one reason - these prayers last approx. two (2) weeks. During this two week period, no food is to be cooked in the home of mourners; food will be brought by extended family, relatives & other loved ones. The mourning house continues to pray.

Q3 What is your belief now? If different from what you were raised to believe, what changed it?

answer Q-3 My beliefs still the same. As a matter of fact, my beliefs have gotten stronger. When I was twenty, my maternal grand mother passed & I saw & started to fully understand as I first hand saw it all as I was the oldest Grandchild. As I age, I understand more firmly the concepts and explanation behind all of it. This history (of Hinduism/India) is where Buddhism originated.

cont'd

Lesson 5, p: 38

Q4 In what way does having one's own theology about Life and Death help one integrate & make sense of life? OR does it?

answer Q-4 Having one's own theology about life & death allows one to see more of the larger picture of not just life but the entire universe. You see life itself differently and how it works in conjunction with everything else. How when avatar has finished its life cycle, the soul journeys on - continuing to reincarnate. Having this theology also improves people's behavior. It also serves to aid you in difficult times (pray & see higher power in mind) so you can rely on it for strength, support & hope.

* Lesson 6, pg. 41

Q1 - How have you understood karma in the past?

answer Q1 - My past understanding ^{& current as well} of karma is what's expressed like, speech or action that initiates ripples in time (both this life & future lives). I don't think this can be isolated to only this life or future lives, I believed & still do, that it is both. After all - only one's death bed - can one even attempt to say their karma balanced out - ~~even~~ then, it's still not for sure.

Q2: Do you believe in the idea that anyone's karma can be transformed by changing one's acts of body, speech & mind to the positive, no matter what has occurred? If not, what are your reasons?

answer Q2 Yes, I do believe in the idea that anyone's karma can be transformed by ^{positively} changing one's acts of body, speech & mind no matter what has occurred. What we currently endure is from past karma; what we currently do is future karma. Talking about attachment & separating from things, this is how we separate ourselves from bad karma. Redemption comes in many forms and how we speak, think & act carries a great weight for a positive transformation. This is karma, not a caste system where you're forever locked in one area.

CONT'D

Lesson 6, pg. 41

Q3

^{Buddhism}
Buddhism is not a condemning tradition. There is no devil. In Tibetan, the word for negative (afflicted) emotions is the same word as demons. Buddhism gives us agency in transforming our negative emotions, or "demons" through the steps of the Eightfold Path. We have the agency to change ourselves, as opposed to praying to an outside force to save us. What are your thoughts about this?

Q3 answer

I believe we do have the agency to change ourselves, as opposed to praying to an outside force to save us. Even in Hinduism, where Buddhism originates from, one of a few methods to improve your karma is from the work you do from the here and now. The past cannot be changed, but our ^{course} of behavior in the present can definitely be changed for the better now, to elicit better karma from the future. The "do whatever you can" realistic advice allows everyone trying to improve themselves to just put your best foot forward w/o any feelings of guilt. Developing kindness, good heart & compassion now can be purified the karma. Perhaps most striking is when Milarepa & Angulimala saw their own true nature reflected back to them by their teachers or victims is when they ceased their negative acts immediately.

Q4

Do you feel ^{there's} a difference in applying this idea of karma to yourself as opposed to applying it to others? Think about those whom harmed you. Do you find it easier to wish them healing, or wish them hell? This is a good question to contemplate frequently over time.

Q4 answer

Yes, there's a difference in applying it to myself because I can control only myself but I cannot control anyone else, so that's where the focus of change must be aimed at - the person I see in the mirror. I find it easier to wish healing to people who have harmed me because it completely drains one's energy to direct hate toward others. I've hurt that hate is like taking in a drink of poison expecting it to hurt others when all it really does it hurt you. It's easy to not want good things for someone who has hurt you but weighing that improvement on self by not hating others gives you more energy for good.

cont'd

Lesson 6, pg 41Q4 cont'd
answer

So this way of thought helps you improve yourself & allows you to find it easier to wish healing to one who has harmed you. This is a good double-whammy!

Lesson 7, pg. 44

~~Q-Q~~ ~~Some things we're attached to are beneficial to us such as healthy self-care habits: spiritual practices, physical exercise~~

Lesson 7, pg 44

Q-1 Can you remember your 1st realization of the impermanence of life? Often this is related to the death of a family member, or friend or beloved pet. What was it like for you?

Q-1 answer I think I was ten (10) in 1985-86 & my Uncle's Dad passed and we were at funeral home, then all cars drove to the cemetery (like a million) w/ funeral sticker on every car. It was a long drive to cemetery & kinda raining. The body looked so different w/o the life force. I recall my cousin (like 3) kept yelling, 'I want maama, where you taking him?' It was eye opening to see it all for the first time. Before ^{that} I couldn't picture it in my mind what a funeral was; after ^{that} all my picturing ^(in my mind) of what people would say re: a funeral was referenced by the pictures in my mind. Like I knew what all was going on but there was so many people it was all so surreal; everyone there was more serious faced than I'd ever seen them before at family gatherings.

Q2 Some people mistake impermanence for meaning that nothing they do matters, good or bad. They become indifferent to the deeper meaning Buddhism holds for us - that of letting go what is inherently impermanent & getting in touch w/ our eternal one-ness, the Ground of Being, our Buddha-nature. Do you find meaning in your daily life? Do you feel your life matters?

Q2 answer I do find meaning in my daily life. I help reeducated, illiterate & people w/ mental health issues file paperwork, grievances for medical care etc. I do it for free & take joy in ^{being} better than the inmates who charge \$ & exploit vulnerable inmates. I do feel my life matters, because I make a positive difference on a daily basis. At other times, I feel futile, & wonder what's the point.

Lesson 7, pg 44

Q2-answer At other times, I feel like I'm a hamster on a wheel, running fast but going nowhere. Without personal choice a lot of a person's humanity feels less. "All phenomena arises & dissolves" so I hope my feelings of my life not mattering dissolves. They do dissipate and in contrast to positive feelings, the negatives is much less. That is what I do in fact take solace in.

Q-3 The goal of the teaching on Impermanence is to get in touch with our eternal one-ness our Ground of Being, our Buddha-nature so we can recognize the causes of suffering as being attachment to a fixed sense of self. Some people feel this one-ness through music, art, love, nature, prayer, meditation, sports. Others get a glimpse, albeit distorted, through the use or misuse of certain substances. Have you felt this one-ness?

Q3 answer I do see, "causes of suffering as being attachment to a fixed sense of self," so when a change happens, we find our selves in despair because it's not like it was despite the fact that I know, that ^{the} only constant is change. When I was younger I played sports, ^{when} I was "in the zone" felt like "one-ness" of you can't do anything wrong, at times through music, love a lot. Through prayer - not really as I've been in here since 21, now 49 so more of my life ^{has} been spent incarcerated than free, so I often wonder why me? when I ^{will} go home? etc. I know that when I do return home, it home, neighborhood, trees etc will all be different (^{28 YRS+} dramatically) to me. It's weird because when I do something so much i.e. workout in a "spot", I feel one with it, like I can't do it correctly unless I'm in "my" spot. Sustained war of conquest (of myself) is where I always feel like I am at. When I go to class, I'm attached to "my seat" same spot all the time.

Lesson 9, pg 53

Q1 Most of us know what it feels like to start out w/ a positive intention & have it go bad. Can you think of a time when your intention was positive but the end result was not? Through the lens of the topics we've studied so far: suffering, identity, attachment, aversion do you see that situation differently now than you did at the time? Please explain.

Lesson 8 pg 47 (1-3)

Q1 - Somethings we are attached to are beneficial to us such as healthy self-care habits: ^{spiritual} practices, physical exercises, good hygiene, education etc. Exploring attachment in the Buddhist sense means to recognize the impermanence of all the above. Once we recognize the impermanence of all those things, & the impermanence of our own identity, we will find the still point that exists despite our desires & aversions. Is there anything you do, or have done, that allows you to find that place of ^{ps. 9} nonduality, that place of timelessness? Examples are art, music, basketball, knitting, reading inspirational literature, etc.

Q1 answer - This incarceration ^{@ 21, IN 1996} (my first ever) has taught me alot, that place of timelessness is when I am doing my advocacy &/or college work, I go into the zone and it makes me glad b/c then I am mentally distracted from my current incarceration. Since I am on a wheelchair I can't really do the exercise, but I do do spiritual practice & hygiene & also (education & advocacy) which aids me greatly. Also when I am on the phone w/a loved one - especially Mom. So basically my advocacy using law and talking to my Mom on the phone bring me to here. I get lost reading the case law, then using it as mechanism for advocacy for self & others. Chronically, one of my classes is Art (History) so I do enjoy looking at, analysing art. Reading really changes the dynamic of time, as a book has no commercials & puts you in a mentality of relaxed mindset - where one ^{wants to} ^{keep reading} ~~is~~ ^{to finish the} book & enjoy the journey more than if not equal to the destination.

Q2 - Letting go is hard for us, especially in our western culture. As an incarcerated person, you have a Ph.D in letting, as there is very little predictability in prison life. You could teach us all outside people something about letting go. If you had the opportunity to tell the outside world what you have learned about letting go, what would you say?

Q2 answer: Letting go was forced on me when I was forced into prison; when you have no choice you must simply accept & adjust. Letting go is hard, b/c you want it to remain but it don't, like my memories of home & neighborhood of 1996 when I just got arrested vs now 2024, 28 yrs later, it ain't the same. What softens the blow if you will, focus on what's in front of you now that you can control otherwise the stress of what you don't control will consume your energy. I'd also say the only constant is change. No matter what, stay true to yourself in doing the correct thing even when no one is looking. Despite it all, push yourself to rise above your ^{circumstances} ~~circumstances~~. Whatever you let go will provide you relief, instead of the stress of fighting to hold onto it, as holding on is the hard part.

Q3 - Letting go can lead to the experience of grief & loss, but can also lead to experience and renewed passion. One man I worked with in prison said to me: "I been down 24 years. I'm amazed when people I knew on the streets come to prison: big homies, people who only knew street. Drugs, guns, violence. They never left the streets til they came to prison. A few years after being locked up they become gifted poets, artists, musicians, whatever."

Lesson 8, cont'd
Pg 47 (1-3)

cont'd Q3 I really feel that if EVERYONE IN THE WORLD could just stop for a bit, they might get in touch with the gifts they came in to offer & we'd have a more peaceful world. Do you have any thoughts about this?

Q3 ANSWER - Well I've been down 28 years. I'd never left home til I was in prison (the streets to me). This world is worse than the streets, 9 o.d. deaths in 7 days (of pentamy) is what I see as well as corruption so bad, at every level that a Federal Judge had to mandate the placement of cameras - both on the wall & guards body cams, as disabled inmates were the target of staffs wrath. The gifts seen in art, music & crafts are born by need of an outlet so we don't implode as we endure this draconian environment. Think about it, if you don't create an outlet for yourself, no one will. The 6 figure earning guards, most are lazy - spending time watching t.v., internet or on the phone w/ staff from another building. Prison isn't just a stop that guy must've been a low level lifetime deal maker. Caprisons & guards union CCPA run the show & behind the scenes, their misconduct allows inmate misconduct. A descriptive quote is, "All that's needed for evil to prevail is for good men to stand by & do nothing!"

* LESSON 9, pg 50 (1-3)

Q1 The core of the 4 Noble Truths outlines knowing, & not knowing. Knowing means understanding that your identity is composed of numerous external causes and conditions. Knowing is at least glimpsing & trusting in your own Buddha-nature, Christ-Consciousness, One Love, One Heart, knowing the unchanging nature of consciousness. Not-knowing, or Ignorance, is thinking that we ARE, in a finite way, our attachments, aversions, roles, relationships. The author Kathleen Dowling Singh suggests the idea of an ego-ectomy. If you were going to give yourself an ego-ectomy with the goal of getting to your pure essence, what would you remove?

Q1 ANSWER - I would remove: moral injury, PTSD's spiritual pain, the triggers of power dynamics and authority issues. When I first came in, I was a 21 y/o happy go lucky kid; 28 yrs later I question corrupt authority & advocate for those who are illiterate, have mental issues, &/or don't speak English. Because I've been injured (broken ribs) by staff, unless they prove themselves to be not corrupt, I assume they are corrupt, because even the silent ones - who condone it by not reporting - allow it to prevail. I would also remove my cynicism from the equation as I feel it hurts relationships before they're even formed. I would remove any hindrances to my enlightenment, compassion and patience. I know that staying busy keeps me positively occupied with college courses & this helps me progress. I shouldn't be here, but I am. That's created a lot of dislike from me towards this corrupt system. There's cameras now.

Lesson 9 cont'd p50

Q2 Once someone understands their interconnectedness with all beings, there's a loosening of the othering that so easily happens, & an ease of compassion & connection with other beings. What can you do as a daily spiritual workout routine, to insure that you can continue seeing through that lens of connection?

Q2 ANSWER - I know when I practice ^{RANDOM} acts of kindness, I feel great! It causes me to do it even more. Random so it doesn't become a habit w/ the same person who will then expect it. Random is no obligation on my part, the positively surprised look on the recipient's face & the inner goodness I feel. The finger pointing thing makes me think of Michael Jackson's song, "Man in the Mirror" & its like, "I'm asking him to change." So for a daily spiritual workout routine to ensure I continue seeing through that lens of connection is: I can read positive affirmations daily, I can verbalize positive affirmations daily w/ the goal to do it 30 days in a row to then create a new daily habit. To continue practicing daily acts of kindness & continue my free legal work/advocacy for that special segment of the population consistently as I have been.

Q3

There are parts of all of our personalities that we like: friend, artist, poet, musician, father, Grandfather, etc. Upon entering the path of spiritual transformation, identities shift. I've heard from dozens of guys whose identity was all about being hard. Upon starting their inner spiritual journey, they'd find themselves weeping at a commercial or a cheesy T.V. movie scene. There was not a day in my 10 yrs of leading groups in the prison when someone didn't openly weep due to releasing trauma, or being seen & heard for the first time as the beautiful human they were born to be. We had a saying, "God's Water on God's Land." Quite often others would shed tears as well. As one of my mentors used to say, when one does their inner work, we all benefit. There's numerous stories in Buddhism of violent offenders who later became great saints & teachers by simply looking into an awakened being's eye & seeing their own true nature reflected back to them. Can you look at your reflection in the mirror & believe that you are the most important person for you to see? Have you ever reflected back to another person their true essence simply by your allowing them to be who they are? Please allow yourself to be vulnerable as you ponder these questions. Bob Marley knew the truth of this. One Love, One Heart. Thank you for your willingness & courage to contemplate these questions.

Q3 ANSWER

I can look in the mirror & know I can only change if I make myself the focus and point of my attention. I do focus a lot on things outside of me as a way to keep myself positively occupied. So yes I can look in the mirror & believe I am the most important person to see. Yes I have reflected ^{back} to another person their true essence simply by my allowing them to be who they are. It is a good feeling when one is around a great spirited person because that atmosphere elevates me up, my inner spirit to a whole new positive level. I believe the more people like that that I'm around, the better I feel. However, that's hard to do in here because a majority of people ain't like that here.

M. Singh, T-22165

14/19

Lesson 9 contd p 50

I know it takes love to overcome hate and I feel like that's what I need to do to the person in the mirror - before anything happens let alone a change. And by "reflecting back" I mean absorbing the goodness inside of me and then reradiating it back to originator, eventually creating a perpetual cycle, circular energy. Unfortunately it takes a lot of energy to find the right people, so I guess here's where I focus on the man in the mirror. Look back at self is an ironic theme. When we have disciplinary hearings, if it were a fight, then we're allowed to see the video evidence. I've seen my self on video, it's quite interesting and I see a lot of flaws & a lot of things that can be improved. I need to figure out. I did show great restraint & compassion, as when I had the guy down (I didn't continue, I simply defended self) then ceased & backed away. There's also things that take priority i.e. I call home daily & speak w/ my Mom, I value that time & communication a great deal. I hope I've reflected enough vulnerability in answering this particular question. I know I was all over the place - but that reflects the very scattered brain that I.

Q1 - Most of us know what it feel like to start w/ a positive intention & have it go bad. Can you think of a time when your intention was positive but the end result was not? Through the lens of the TOPICS we've studied so far: suffering identity, attachment, aversion, do you see that situation differently now than you did at the time? Please explain.

15/19

M. Singh, T-22165

Q1 ANSWER One time my intention was to help two friends. I came in between their argument & tried to help each one "compromise", each one thought I was "helping" the other when in fact I honestly was trying to help them come to a fair conclusion. In the end, they patched things up with each other but I was the odd man out momentarily. Through the lens of suffering identity I do see it differently as it was not my "role" to broker a deal/reach a compromise. It was my job to be a friend. Through lens of attachment - I see money as the root of much evil due to the attachment it causes. As they say money makes the world go round. Through the lens of aversion - I should've avoided even getting involved between 2 other peoples conflict. It was not my business & despite my good intentions, a famous saying, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." That says it all because you can intend "good" but then there's the law of unintended consequences - variables outside of you that you can't control.

Q2 - On the other hand, can you think of a time when someone else's intention was well-meaning but for whatever reason you didn't interpret it as they meant it & you acted out negatively? How did it resolve?

Q-2 ANSWER As I thought about it later, I saw the context it was meant in & felt bad. I don't know why sometimes the brain is slower to interpret certain things. When I saw that I was wrong, I went back and apologized. I was being given good advice re: a problem I had, advice I would benefit from. Due to the dilemma of the moment, I thought he was trying to benefit himself from my moment of distress. I was suspicious for no reason. I'm here (in incarceration) makes you suspicious and question peoples motives. Friendship is a very hard thing to come by b/c you don't know if people are actually your friend or if they are after a material thing of yours. There's so many things going on all at once & very quickly & at times it makes it hard to decipher between what's in your head & what's real.

Q3 - On a more existential level, do you think the Universe, Cosmos, Creator, God, or however you label That Which Is Larger Than Us - has a unified intention? For example, love, wholeness, healing, enlightenment etc.

Q3 ANSWER - I'm still deciding this. If Karma is to be the leveler of the playing field, then its undetermined. If we have free will that determines future karma, then it is not "as it is written" - future predetermined. I still struggle with questions of fate & free will & God's purpose type of things. I'm still angry at being incarcerated (next page)

Q3 ANSWER CONT'D | This is also where I think there is a unified intention but I just don't know what it is. I do believe love, wholeness, healing enlightenment etc. have very important roles. I hope people get enlightened & heal to become whole again & that love is used to overcome all hate. I love looking at nature, i.e. the birds & bees, how animals adapt & evolve & how all of the above are interlocking pieces of a larger mechanism are part of a larger, unified intention.

Lesson 10, pg 53

Ms. SINGH T-22165

Q1 ANSWER Thinking of a time when intention was positive but end result was not: I remember the quote, "The road to hell is paved w/ good intentions". One time 2 of my buddies had a disagreement, I stepped in as a "mediator"; boy what a mistake that was - as each one thought I was siding with the other & BOTH got upset with me & in doing so caused a bigger rift. Through the lens of suffering identity I see when younger I was very much attached to 'friends'; now I see those friends are no longer there & family (parents & brother) remain. The lens of ~~attachment~~ ^{attachment} then was partly made through my friends were & my thoughts depended on what they thought. Now - I am older & standing alone is more a source of strength than the fear of being alone is to us as young kids. I was attached to materialistic views. Now, I avoid getting "in between" people's conflict & have the thought to let them work it out among themselves, this way my bond of/with each of them won't suffer adversely.

Q-2 On the other hand, can you think of the time when someone else's intention was well meaning but for whatever reason you didn't interpret it as they meant it & you acted out negatively? How did it resolve?

Q-2 answer

CH10, Q4 pg 53

Q4 Why do you think that the Buddhist idea of karma is propelled by intention rather than result?

Well, the definition of Karma ^(beg. of book): The RIPENING of virtuous or non-virtuous acts, that happen over lifetimes. Karma - we can almost visualize it, as it delivers the consequences of what the soul reaches out for, cause & effect & determines shape, influence, effect on the principle of REINCARNATION. I ~~believe~~ ^{believe} the Buddhist idea of karma is propelled by intention rather than result because that's the seeds of result - like - Intention on the page before; "Intention, the thought manifests as word, the word manifests as deed, the deed develops into habit, and habit hardens into character, So watch the thoughts & their ways w/ care, and let them spring from love, Born out of compassion for all beings, as the shadow follows the body, as we think, so we become"; The Buddha; That symbolizes, it's an element of the 8-Fold Path: & our intention generates the kind of karma we create, also Right Aspiration, Right Intention. Karma is the beginning that ultimately determines path. As stated, "In the teachings of karma, what carries forward between lifetimes is our intention more than the acts, b/c the heart & mind are one. Because intention sets (starts you off on) the right path. I think the Buddhist idea of karma is propelled by intention rather than result. Because intention is the start (cause) of the action (effect).

Lesson 11 pg. 57

Q-1 Have you ever had an experience of interconnectedness? Some people have experienced this in the many kinds of altered states of consciousness produced by meditation, creating art, prayer, or other ways. If so please describe? If not, what can you imagine it would be like?

Q1-ANSR: Yes, I have had experiences of interconnectedness. This has taken place in more than one way. Those ways have included & not been limited to: meditation, writing poetry, PRAYER, POETRY, also via music, working out but mostly from talking with family on the phone because it provides me mental comfort, peace of mind, sanity. Kind of like real life "runners high" except w/ something else i.e. ^{the Aforementioned} music, poetry, writing, prayer & get a mental interconnectedness high. It's like you have a peace of mind because you're "in the zone" & you forget the dynamic of time kind of like lost in thought when you ^{are} reading a really good book. I hope I explained it right. Like an endorphin rush (dopamine) inside of your brain except it is interconnectedness. When I'm on the phone w/ loved ones I feel "normal" & no judgement coming or going & I'm the real me, the 21% kid I was when arrested. If this is not ^{all} the right answer then this is how I imagine it to be.

Q-2 If you have familiarity w/ another faith tradition, what verses or scripture can you identify that lift out interconnection?

Q2-ANSR - I know in the Bible it says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", and different words same theme, "You shall reap what you sow", "The Golden Rule", The Bhagavad-Gita, "Caring nothing for the fruit of the action", "He shall cast a stone 1st, if there's no plank in his eye" and in Judaism, "I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love," in Taoism, "There is the globe, The foundation of my bodily existence, It wears me out with work & duties, (Chung Tzu Confidence in face of death) It gives me rest in old age, It gives me peace in death, For the one who supplied me what I needed in life, will also give me what I need in death." (R.L. Reichel's translation of the 25th ch of of the Tao Te Ching in his Meditation & Piety in the Far East. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954) 102.

Lesson 11 pg. 57

Q-3 When you think about the current events of our world right now, can you identify main themes of interconnection? Do you see the factors that comprise your example as positive, negative or neutral?

Q3 ANSWER - Even though there's wars going on right now "Ukraine v Russia & Jews & Muslims (Palestine/Israel) which is very bad, some good interconnectedness happens with the Doctors w/o Borders helping all of the hurt & injured, all the people who transport / ship off the the donated foods / supplies, all the people who donate money, food & supplies. Here in the U.S. on a daily basis - free soup kitchens pass out donated food by people who donate their time to cook & prepare the food & premises it will be served. The average Joe on the streets who gives a few bucks to a homeless person so he can have food to eat. I see factors of positive anytime people are helping people. No matter how small - remember as stated below, "Never underestimate the power of even the smallest act when done with the idea to benefit others!" by Patrul Rinpoche

* Thank you all for offering this program.

* Lesson 12, pg. 63

Q1 - Some of the new studies in neurobiology show that the area of our brain that lights up when feeling compassion is not even accessible when one is having to deal with basic survival on a day to day basis, in which case is the amygdala, that part of our brain that signals "danger" is stuck on like a screaming smoke alarm. When one can ^{begin to} feel safe, & one's nervous systems calms, then access to compassion can often be established, for the first time. I have heard from many inmates that they never heard the word compassion until they came to one of the self-help classes that were offered in prison. Can you remember the first time you heard the word compassion? Where were you? What did you think about it? Did it seem real to you?

Q1 ANSWER - I can't remember the 1st time I heard the word compassion. I do remember a guy who used to say the word alot - a positive, calm, smart good person. When I would hear him say the word "compassion", I'd think, "what a deep word that is". I thought - then that the word means "to show kindness to others, w/ humility, humble etc."

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Q-3 CONT'D ANSWER

II) This occurred at a prior facility I was at. Me + the fella became very good friends. This was like 12 years ago. He was a former NBA player, 6 ft 10 inches tall & a really good motivating guy. III) Without knowing this would be asked, I wrote what I thought which was, "what a deep word that is" & thought it meant, "to show kindness to others with humility, humble nature" ^{ADDING HERE} a word of graciousness. IV) It did seem real to me. We were talking about the staff & there was a professional, compassionate staff. He could both do his job & treat us like people. He could still garner respect from his colleagues & the general population. He was one of the guards at the facility. I used him as an example because it fit w/ story which ~~seem~~ ^{seemed} real to me.

Q2 Compassion is said to be the unification of one's Awakened Body, Speech and Mind (to use Buddhist terminology!) When an awakened person performs an act, the energy released from that act affects our world differently than the same act done by someone with selfish reasons. When you think of great spiritual thinkers and leaders who have influenced your life, who comes to mind?

Q2 ANSWER- When I think of great spiritual thinkers & leaders that have influenced my life, the person who comes to mind is my Mom. Ever since I was a little kid, I remember her always doing the Hindu Pujas, hands pressed together eyes closed w/ a lit Kapoor. Then afterward, she'd bless us w/ making our (me, Little Bro, Dad) foreheads. I can truly say my Mom is a compassionate (unification of Body, Spirit & Mind). The energy released from her most definitely affects our world differently & in a most positive, loving, & humble way. She is also a great ~~leader~~ ^{leader}, having come to the USA in early 70's from the Fiji Islands & raised me & my Bro w/ us 4 (incl. Dad). She always was main bread winner. She is extremely wise & smart in business affairs & in dealing with people of all ethnic ~~backgrounds~~ ^{backgrounds}. She has always positively influenced & guided me. My strong work ethic comes from her (watching her ^{SINCE} as a kid). When I was down she always lifts me up, motivates & inspires me. That is also why she's a great spiritual person knowing Hindu Epic stories, committed to prayer and amazingly humble.