BUDDHIST STORIES FOR TRANSITION IN A STRANGE LAND

Keynote Presentation

by

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Buddhist Stories for Transition in a Strange Land

1. Introduction

Sisters and brothers in spirituality, I want to thank you for inviting me to share with you some stories and thoughts from the Buddhist perspective on the topic of this conference, "Transition in a Strange Land." Some of you have traveled far to be with us today, and we are deeply honored that we got an opportunity to meet with you and learn from the rich experience you bring to this conference. I know it to be way more than my own limited experience. You deal with the rough and the tumble, and I want to congratulate you on the excellent job you are doing under trying conditions. It is my hope that what I have to say adds a bit to your wide conceptual world, but if I have failed to do even that little, I seek your indulgence, understanding, and compassion.

We have one whole hour to be together, and so I thought that before you go to sleep on me as I drone on, you should at least know what you are going to miss! So I will give you a synopsis first. I will begin with the Enlightenment story of the Buddha, one, I am sure, only too familiar to you. Following that, we will relate the story of the pathological mindbody, from the Buddhist point of view, the one you have to deal with daily in day out, using metaphysical analysis as well. We will conclude with the healing story of that pathological mindbody, introducing you to the practice of meditation as well.

2.1 The Enlightenment Story of the Buddha

But what relevance the Buddha story to pastoral care? The relevance is that his is a message, and a practice, of healing. It is not without reason, as we shall see, that he was known in his own life time as "the Great Physician" (mahosadha), a particular term even listing a materia medica of items sanctioned by the Buddha for the purpose of physical healing (Bimbbaum, 89:221). Indeed in one of his previous births1 he was born as Mahosadha the Wise, having been born with a medicine in hand, earning the label, 'medicine-child' (Jayaweerdana, 1990:71). Continuing the tradition, later Mahayana Buddhism has developed concepts such as 'Bodhisattvas of Healing'2 and even a 'healing Buddha' (Bimbbaum, op.cit.). A contemporary therapist in the US, discussing the Buddha in relation to Freud, calls him Dr Buddha!

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2 A 'bodhisattva' (or 'bodhisattva') means a 'Buddha-in-waiting'.

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But who is the Buddha? I shall introduce his story briefly. Born in Lumbini in current Nepal in 566 BCE as Prince Siddhartha Gautama to Queen Mahāsākyā and King Suddodhana, he married at the age of sixteen to Yasodharā. As was befitting a prince, he lived a life of luxury, in his three seasonal palaces, “enjoying the pleasures of the senses”, as he puts it in his own words! But encountering a different kind of reality in the form of a sick person, an old one, a dead one and a wandering ascetic (of which there were many in Siddhartha’s India), set him through a process of reflection. The outcome was drastic. Here’s the Buddha telling his own story:

After some time, monks, being only young, a boy, black-haired, endowed with good youth, in the first period of life, although my parents were unwilling and weeping, with tears on their faces, I set forth from home to homelessness, shaving off my hair and beard and dressing in brown clothes... [i.e., the rags worn by wandering ascetics of the time] (Warder, 1970:46).

The immediate catalyst for the renunciation was the birth their only offspring, son Rāhula.

Upon taking to the new path, the wandering ‘ascetic Gautama’ (as he now was) learns at the feet of two highly spiritual masters of the time, Ājīva Kāliṣa and Uddaka Rāmaputra by name. His mastery of what they had to offer was so complete that he is invited by both of them to take on co-leadership, but turning them down politely, he leaves them, in pursuit of a solitary search:

[Then] Monks, searching for what is good, looking for the unsurpassed, excellent state of calm, proceeding on my journey into Magadha in due course I approached the military town of Uriwaha. There I saw a delightful place: a lovely grove of the forest where the river flowed clear, delightful with good beaches, and a cowherds’ village within reach. I thought it was delightful...and adequate for ‘asceticism’. (ibid. 47)

The Buddha continues:

Meditating at night...I initiated energy, undeterred, attended to self-possession, not distracted, calmed my body, not excited, and concentrated my thoughts, focused on one point (ibid. 48).

Now we continue in Warder’s words in his book, Indian Buddhism, from which I have excepted the above passages.

Gradually abstracting his mind from all attachments he then entered successively on four stages of meditation, attaining a state of perfect equanimity, free from any unhappiness or happiness. In the same night, his thoughts thus concentrated, he exerted himself and acquired three ‘sciences’ or ‘knowledges’ during the first, middle and last watches of the night respectively: he recollected his

3 See Warder (op.cit.) for the original sources.
former lives, he understood the transmigration of beings according to their actions, bad conduct leading to misery and good conduct to a good destiny, finally he discovered the ‘Four Truths’ (Ibid. 49).

Soon after (after seven weeks it is said to be), the Buddha (as he now was) gives his very first exposé of what he had experienced and discovered at the Deer Park in Sarnath (in modern Benares). For the next 45 years, we find the Buddha teaching, helping seekers of all walks of life on to the spiritual path discovered by him (and we shall hear some of their stories later), engaging in spiritual debate, staying off at least one war, and ministering to the sick and the needy.

To end the story of the Buddha’s life, then, we see him now lying on a bed, between two trees in the Upaswarana Wood near Kushinagara. He is lying on his right side, with one foot resting on the other, self-possessed and conscious:

_Then the master addressed the monks: Well, now monks I am addressing you. The forces have the nature of cessation. You should succeed, through care (Ibid. 79)._

This was the last speech of the thus-gone. Then the Master attained the first meditation. Coming out from the first he attained the second meditation, . . . third meditation, . . . fourth, . . . sphere of the infinity of space, and coming out from the sphere of the infinity of space, he attained the second meditation. . . . third meditation. . . . fourth, . . . sphere of the infinity of space, . . . sphere of the infinity of consciousness, . . . sphere of nothingness, . . . sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. Coming out from that he attained the cessation of the experience of perception...

Then the Buddha comes out from that and continues through the attainments and meditations in reverse order to the first meditation, then back through second and third to the fourth.

Coming out from the fourth meditation, the master immediately attained extinction. (Ibid.: 79–80)

This, then, is the Buddha story in brief. We close this story of Enlightenment with the observation that the Buddha both attained enlightenment and passed away in meditation.

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4 These were also, we may note, the stages through which the Buddha passed prior to Enlightenment on that historic day. For details of these stages of consciousness, see Warder, Ibid. 116–8. For a detailed study, independently and also in relation to modern science, see Jayasuriya, 1963.
2.2. The Four Noble Truths as a healing paradigm

It was observed that Enlightenment constituted, at the highest level, the discovery of the Four Noble Truths. We note it schematically in Figure 1 as follows:

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  |  
  2 Arising —— Path —— 4
  |  
  1 Suffering

Figure 1. Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, based in a medical analogy, as a healing paradigm.

The First Noble Truth in this figure is ‘suffering’. Without going into its detailed psychological analysis, we’ll simply take it in its meaning of ordinary suffering: falling ill and dying, separation from loved ones and having to live with unloved ones, not getting what one wants, and so on. The vertical arrow from it leads to ‘cessation’ by which is simply meant the ending of the life-cycle, i.e. nībīna, or, as is familiar to western folklores, ‘Nirvana’. The two-way arrow between the two, as in the other pair of this figure and the next, indicates the reciprocal relationship between the two. To the left of the horizontal axis is ‘arising’, by which is meant the cause of suffering, the destruction of which is what brings about cessation. Again without going into its psychological analysis, we move to what is linked to it on the horizontal axis, the ‘path’. By this is simply meant how to bring about the cessation of suffering.

Even without a detailed analysis, it will be evident that this very foundational teaching is based in a medical analogy: the condition of illness, the cause for it, its treatment and resulting wellness. This renders the Four Noble Truths a healing paradigm as well.

3. The Story of the Pathological Mindbody

We now explore the Buddhist understanding of the pathology of the mind, drawing upon one of the many analyses, the most relevant perhaps to a pastoral care context.

5 The term ‘nībīna’ is the Sanskrit of ‘nibbāna’ in Pali, the language closer in genotype and spirit to the language the Buddha may have used. It will be the Pali terms that will be used here unless otherwise noted.
3.1 The Ailing Mindbody

The main theoretical insight we glean from the Buddha on the topic is that everything about being human is mind-based. A verse in the Dhammapada, well-known for its succinct teachings encapsulated in poetic form, makes it amply clear:

*Maha pabbangamā dharmā, maha setthā manomayaḥ
Manasaṁ cā pavaranna, bhūtāni vā karoti vā
Tato nam nakhavanverti, chāya vā anagāti vā*

*Maha pabbangamā dharmā, maha setthā manomayaḥ
Manasaṁ cā pavaranna, bhūtāni vā karoti vā
Tato nam dukkhamanverti, caikkam vā vahato padam*

To translate:

Mind is the forerunner, foremost it is, mindbased everything is
Something said or done with a good mind,
       happiness follows, like the shadow that never parts company.

Mind is the forerunner, foremost it is, mindbased everything is
Something said or done with a bad mind,
       pain follows, like the wheels the feet of the oxen.

Now, if everything is mindbased, then there are both ‘wholesome’ (kusala), or healthy, mental concentrations of the mind, and those that are ‘unwholesome’ (akusala), or what could be called ‘pathological’. Our interest here, however, is not in the refined breakdown of these basic groups, but rather the 3-way breakdown of the mind in terms of character: wholesome and unwholesome. On the pathological side, then, they are greed (kāma), anger (dosa) and delusion (moha), with ‘non-greed’, ‘non-anger’ and ‘non-delusion’, of course, being their wholesome counterparts.

If the mind can be called a *maha*, to fall short on science, it and the unwholesome character blunders can be together called a ‘pathological mind cell’. Visually, then,
In this figure, we notice that each of the blemishes is in a two-way relationship with the mind. That is to say first that 'greed', e.g., is an archetypal constituent in the mind nucleus. So with anger and delusion. When active, each of them serves to transform the mental direction towards pathology. Second, we note that each of the three blemishes are in a reciprocal relationship, influencing each other.

Relating the blemishes now to a pastoral care context - incarceration, for example, we can show the manifestation of each of the blemishes as follows:

In this figure, we see that murder, e.g., is the pathological manifestation of the archetype anger, and robbery of greed. What that means is that murder falls within the range of anger, at the extreme end as e.g., in the case of a man bludgeoning his former girl friend to death. Robbery likewise falls within the
range of greed, a planned bank heist being an extreme. But, of course, murder could just as well be based on both greed and anger, as in the case of rape-murder, confirming the interrelationship as in Figure 1 between any two blenishes. Likewise, rape could be the manifestation of greed, or greed-but-anger, as e.g., a in a Two-thirds World setting where a man unable to win over a woman might rape her in order to bring disgrace to the family.

Now we come to the third blenish, delusion, with Figure 3 showing 'soul theory' as its manifestation. Now each of murder, rape or robbery could well have been based in a delusion of other kinds - feeling oneself into believing that one can get away with them, not realizing the psychological damage such an action would bring upon oneself, the non-consideration of the social impact of the particular behaviour, etc. But the Buddha is talking here of a delusion that is of a more fundamental nature - the delusion of being the possessor of something called a 'soul', 'self' in philosophical terms, 'ego' in psychological terms, or simply 'I' in everyday language. This, the Buddha would say, is a fundamental delusion, for at least two reasons.

First, it doesn't accord with reality. The soul (given by a God), or 'ego', 'self' or 'I' (secular constructs), is conceived by us as an unchanging, permanent entity that holds one together, keeps one from falling apart, and driving us into our actions and the like. But, of course, we know from science that change is the reality of all phenomena, the Buddha capturing it in the term anicca, literally, 'impermanent'. Each of us, like other animals, plants, rocks, oceans, air and so on, is made up of atoms and molecules, and they have the nature of 'coming to be and passing away' (uppajjhatthā nivojhatthā), having had a life of but a mind-moment. The mind, too, is a flow, a 'stream of consciousness' (viveka sota) as the Buddha characterized it.⁷

If this understanding is correct, that means first that there simply cannot be anything, nothing indeed, that is not subject to the natural law of change. Yet we continue to believe in an unchanging, unflowing phenomenon.

The second problem with the concept of soul follows from the first. It splits the mindbody into a duality - a changing entity called body and an unchanging one called mind. This is a difficult logic for one to understand since our mind, be it understood as raw 'sensation' or as a resulting 'consciousness'.⁸ has to be embodied, that is to say, be based in a body. And so, if the body, namely the atoms and the

⁶ See Sugunan 1991 for a more detailed analysis.
⁷ If this was rendered popular as a literary genre by Jean Paul Sartre, it was introduced to the western world as a psychological concept by William James in 1894 who was well familiar with Buddhism.
⁸ See p. 10, for the basis of these two concepts.
molecules, change, it is impossible that something based in such body doesn't. The Buddha specifically deals with the question:

Some envisage... it is sensation: my soul is sensation, others not as sensation, as 'not experiencing':

Now in the case that the soul is supposed to be sensation it should be noted whether it is happy, unhappy or neither, since sensations are of these three kinds. These three cannot exist simultaneously on the same occasion. In that case one would have to say when experiencing e.g., a happy sensation 'this is my soul'; but when that sensation ceases one would have say 'my soul has ceased to exist!'....

On the other hand if the soul is envisaged as not sensation, not experiencing, one would ask: where experience is completely non-existent, would there be the thought 'I am'? Surely not, so that the other alternative also is unsatisfactory. Even if the soul is described, not as being sensation, but as having sensations, then if the sensations absolutely ceased, would there the thought 'I am this'? (Warler, op. cit.:121-2).

The same argument can, of course be made in relation to consciousness.

The difficulty with such duality is that we are led to believe that there is on the one hand a physical manifestation, or action, and then there is an 'agent' manifesting it, a 'doer doing the doing'. That is to say, e.g., that my talking to you now is done by somebody.

This is certainly how things appear to be, don't they? After all, talking is something done by me as different from walking or eating or listening, and when I am not doing any of these others. But we need to ask the question, "What is it that does the talking?" Is it the mouth - the different parts of it, such as tongue, lips, palate, dental ridge, teeth etc.? Obviously not, because 'speaking' really is producing sounds, and these sounds emerge through the modification of air from our lungs. But, of course, talking is not a mere matter of producing sounds either, but rather giving manifestation to concepts that arise in our mind. So is it the brain that is doing the talking? Again, not so, because the brain cannot produce sounds! When we now consider that we also use eye contact, gestures and body positions and distance from the listener to communicate our ideas, we see that it is not any particular part of the body that is doing the talking. How about the whole body then? But then we have to say it is the totality of the mindbody that is doing the talking. But then we begin to ask a question like, "How does a leg (or hair), talk?" Or "How does the mind talk?".
So it is that the Buddha points out that **it is the talking that does the talking**, walking the walking, thinking the thinking, etc. The process, in other words, is both the doing and the doing, requiring no separate actor from the action, no thinker behind the thought! When you think of the last time you cut yourself, you know that it was not the medicine or the doctor or you who did the healing for you, but the healing itself.

The standard teaching of the Buddha regarding the untenability of a soul goes as follows:

- Body is impermanent,
- sensation is impermanent,
- perception is impermanent,
- mental formations are impermanent,
- consciousness is impermanent;
- body is not self,
- sensation is not self,
- perception is not self,
- mental formations are not self,
- consciousness is not self....

This detailed characterization of the mindbody then shows us the essential delusion about reality we harbour. So if belief in a soul is a delusion, it is, like greed and anger, archetypal.

Now from a pathological point of view, what our 'soul delusion' seeks to do is to keep our mindbody gratified, either by running towards or running away from something. As an example, to please our eye and ear, we watch movies. But someone wanting more excitement would watch a violent movie. Seeking even more satisfaction, such a one may watch movies that include rape or robbery or murder. Next, seeking to make a vicarious experience a personal one, the person may attempt rape or robbery. Murder might be the ultimate excitement such a one seeks.

The ailing mindbody can then be characterized as one in which delusion runs amok, taking greed and anger in its way.

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9 See Epstein, 1995, for an exploration and application of the concept in relation to psychotherapy.
3.2 We're All in It Together

We have seen above that greed, anger and delusion are archetypal. But, even though we have associated these character blemishes with murderers, rapists and robbers, it may perhaps be both disturbing and sobering to recognize that these are part of our own sentience as well. It was noted that we all harbour delusion, no matter what religion. To be concessionary about it, we are at least potentially deluded. Would it then be preposterosous to suggest that murder, e.g., is a potential waiting to manifest in each of us. Let me repeat it for emphasis. Murder is a potential waiting to manifest in each of us. Likewise rape or robbery. Each of us, then, must be characterized as a murderer- or rapist- or robber-in-waiting.

I don't know about you, but that to me is a scary thought indeed! Murderers, rapists and robbers, prior to their specific manifestation(s) of their blemishes, we need to note, started out with mere anger, greed and lust, the very same potential you and I walk with, and carry in our own heads, all day everyday! Let me repeat that too. Murderers, rapists and robbers started out with mere anger, greed and lust, the very same potential you and I walk with, and carry in our own heads, all day everyday!

If this is all scary, there is comfort around the corner, as we remember from our initial characterization of the mind, that 'wholesomeness', too, is part of our sentiency just as unwholesomeness is. That is to say that we are also, each of us, at the extreme of the range of wholesomeness, Buddha-in-waiting, i.e., bodhisattva, possessing all the positive characteristics that the term can be associated with - non-greed, non-anger, non-delusion, or in less metaphysical terms, compassion, love, care, attention. We don't have to go any farther than this audience for evidence. We only have to look at all the committed souls, cops, caregivers! And, of course, we remember the many moments in the life of those in our care in our institutions when these wholesome characteristics have shone through, pushing away unwholesome ones for which the incarceration has taken place, if only for a moment.

The upshot of the realization, then, that murderers, rapists and robbers share the same archetypes with us, good and bad, is to understand the essential relationship between 'us' and 'them'. This, of course, extends to all of humanity, allowing us to see ourselves as, in philosopher Hampden-Turner's (1979) words, an 'individual-in-community'. The story of The Jewel Net of Indra captures this notion of our interrelatedness beautifully for the Buddhists.
There is a net that stretches out from the abode of Indra, the lord of Gods, infinitely and in all directions. In each eye of the net is a glittering jewel and, since the net is infinite, the jewels are infinite, too. If we look at any one of them closely, we will find that all the jewels are reflected in the polished surface of that one jewel. And each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel also reflects all the other jewels.

The basic notion that we would like to leave you with now then is that we're all in it together.¹¹

4. Towards Healing

4.1 Healer, Heal Thyself

If we indeed are all in it together, the obvious corollary is that if we intend to help those that come under our pastoral care, in jails, mental institutions, hospitals and the like, we have to begin with ourselves. What is reflected in all the other jewels is the lustre, or the dullness, in our own. So as care-givers, we have to begin by cultivating our own lustre, healing ourselves, ejecting, as a used up space capsule, from our own system anger, greed, lust, delusion and the like. But can we snap out of them? Can we cultivate our potential as bodhisattvas to be non-angry, non-greedy, non-lustful, non-deluded?

I can give you the Buddhist psychological analysis that indeed establishes this possibility, but sparing you the detail, I shall fall back on the approach at this conference: story telling. There are enough stories in the Buddhist literature that tell us that whoisomness is not simply a theoretical possibility but an actualizable potential. These are stories of men and women who have actually traveled the path of blenished character, but having eschewed them, have successfully set upon a liberation path.

Here is one of them, Mufia by name, speaking, as recorded some 2200 years ago.¹²

I am well-released, properly released by my release by means of the three crooked things, by the mortar, pestle, and my crooked husband. I am released from birth and death; that which leads to renewed existence has been rooted out (Jilina, Verses 11, 1971:2, #11).

¹¹ While there is no God in Buddha's teachings, we find the concept creeping into popular Buddhism, particularly in later varieties (e.g., Mahayana). Indra in this story, e.g., is drawn from the Hindu pantheon.
¹² The teaching of the Buddha upon which this popular story is based is called "co-dependent arising", which basically shows the interdependence of all phenomena. See Maruy (1993) for a study in relation to systems theory.

¹³ This is a book of the Upanishadas, called, Terasaripakhi, being the stories of 11 women who have become nuns, told by themselves, or the Buddha, or some other person of the time. Terasaripakhi (both translated by K R Normam) is the male counterpart.
One of the best known stories of wholesome turned unwholesome is that of Ambapālī, the courtesan. Here is she, discovering "the utterance of the speaker of truth" (i.e., the Buddha), and in her old age now, bringing back to mind each part of her body then, if only to contrast it with what it is now:

My hair was black, like the colour of bees, with curly ends; because of old age it is like bark-fibres of hemp; not otherwise is the utterance of the speaker of truth.

Full of (covered with) flowers my head was fragrant like a perfumed ico. Now because of old age it smells like dog’s fur, not otherwise...

Thick as a well-planted grove, made beautiful, having ends parted by comb and pin; because of old age it is thin here and there, not...

Possessing fine pins, decorated with gold, adorned with plates, it looked beautiful, because of old age bald ...

Then having talked about her eye brows, eyes, nose, ear-lobes, teeth, neck, arms and hands, she continues:

Formerly my breasts looked beautiful, swelling, round, close together, lofty: (now) they hang down like waterless water-bags...

Formerly my body looked beautiful, like a well-polished sheet of gold; (now) it is covered with very fine wrinkles...

Now she talks about her thighs, calves and feet, and ends:

Such was this body; (now) it is decrepit, the abode of many pains; an old house, with its plaster fallen off. (Skt: 28, #252-70) 13

If this is wisdom arising out of getting older, here is a younger courtesan, Virudhā:

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13 Ambapālī's reflection upon her body is reminiscent of a 'body meditation' recommended for practitioners who have difficulty expunging lust.
....Having decorated this body, very variegated, deceiving fools, I stood at the brothel door, like a hunter having spread out a snare,

showing my ornamentation. Many a secret (place) was revealed. I did various sorts of conjuring, laughing at (=mocking) many people.

Today (that same) I, having wandered for alms with shaven head, clad in the outer robe, am seated at the foot of a tree, having obtained (the stage of) non-reasoning.

All ties ... have been cut out. Having annihilated all the ñañavā [i.e., defilements], I have become cool, quencheded. (ibid.:11, #2-6)

Our last story comes from the monk Aṅgulimāla, a former killer who thrust his way into the hearts of one and all by wearing a garland (mālā) of fingers (augadi) of his victims:

I was formerly the infamous robber Aṅgulimāla. Being carried along by the great flood I went to the Buddha as a refuge.

I was formerly the infamous bloody-handed Aṅgulimāla. See my going to the refuge, that which leads to renewed existence has been rooted out.

....[Before that] here and there I stood with agitated mind.

(But now) I lie down happily, I stand happily, I live my life happily....

....I am rid of craving, without grasping, with sense-doors guarded, well-restrained: having rejected the root of evil, I have attained the annihilation of the ñañavā [defilements].

The teacher has been waked on by me, the Buddha's teaching has been done. The heavy load has been put down; that which leads to renewed existence has been rooted out. (Elders' Verses 1: 1965: 83, #877-91)

What these stories - of robbers, courtesans, destitutes, the mentally deranged, and the like, show us is that there is the potential for spiritual growth in each of us, and that regardless of one's past, our potential for
wholesomeness can be drawn out, and re-activated. They also give us hope that those in our care in our penal, mental and health institutions can be helped to go beyond their insanity.

But if these are stories that anger, greed, lust, delusion and the like were overcome, we seek now to answer how.

3.3 Healing Elves at Work

The verse of the nun Subhā Jivakamahavarnāḷī gives us a dramatic way of handling a blemish, namely lust, in a man who sought after her. We begin with the infatuated young man talking to her:

*You are young and not ugly, what will going forth do for you? Throw away your robe. Come, let us delight in the flowered wood.* (Elders’ Verses II 1971: 38, #370).

He then promises her the comforts of a home, but, unable to win her over, continues his entreaties:

*Your eyes are indeed like those of Turi, like those of a kinnari inside a mountain; having seen your eyes, my delight in sensual pleasures increased more* (#381).

Subhā, reminding him of her religious psychological manner with the words, "...my mindfulness is established in the midst of both reviling and praise..." (#388), first responds to the enamoured young man in ordinary language:

*O blind one, you run after an empty thing, like an illusion place in front of you, like a golden tree at the end of a dream, like a puppet-show in the midst of the people.*

Then in typical Buddhist fashion, she gives a cool, objective analysis of the eye with a view to dissipating the lust, a technique often used by the Buddha:

*(An eye is) like a little ball set in a hollow, having a bubble in the middle with tears; eye-secretion too occurs here; various sorts of eyes are rolled into balls* (#384-5).

Still unsuccessful, we see how she then stuns the pursuer:
Removing it [the eye], the good-looking lady, having an unattached mind, was not attached to it;

(She said) "Come, take this eye for yourself."

Straightway she gave (it) to this man.

And then, we are told,

*straightway his passion ceased there, and he begged her pardon.... (8396-7)*

While Thammavaro's approach certainly has shock value, wouldn't you say, it might not work for us today? So we go to Aggadilika, the robber, for a more realistic answer:

*Fools, stupid people, devote themselves to indolence.
But a prudent man guards his vigilance as his best treasure (Elders' Verses I: 84, #883).*

No mincing of words here, and what he says next is more specific:

*...The vigilant man, meditating, attains the highest happiness (#884).*

As we just heard from a now-liberated murderer, then, what a Buddhist would offer as the primary tool in pastoral care would be meditation, an activity of the mind. We remember from our Enlightenment story (2.1) that "the mind is the forerunner."

### 3.4 Sitting for Healing

I am sure that everyone in this august audience is adept at taking control of their mind, but let me invite you to join me at this stage to get a taste of the Buddhist approach to mind-cultivation.

While there are any number of meditation techniques the Buddhist world has developed over the last two and a half millennia, Zen and Tibetan to name perhaps the two best known in the west, what we are going to experience today is what the Buddha says he practiced, and claimed to be the only way (ekhaya maggo) to liberation. It is called *mindfulness* (sati-passuddha), and is made up of two parts, "calming" (samahe) and "insight" (vipassante). The two can run concurrently, or one after the other, but in general, calming proceeds insight 14.

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14 See Thera, 1962 for details of mindfulness meditation.
The basic technique in mindfulness meditation is really very simple. Breathing is something we all do naturally. To 'meditate', then, in the Buddhist sense is simply to be aware of that process, of the in-flow and the out-flow of the breath. The practice thus earns the name 'mindful breathing' (samatha vāca).

Nothing fancy, easy and simple! That is, of course, until you try it! The nature of the mind is to run around. You are away from home, and my mentioning that fact alone is enough to take you back to your home. Or to any other place, event, thing or person in your life, recent or in the distant past. So as one begins to calm one's mind, and to concentrate on the process of breathing, those pleasant and unpleasant memories come darting to the forefront. But paying attention to the breath, however, does not mean that you try to push these out. That would be not to take your attention away from those memories. Instead what we do is pay attention to the mental intruder, gently and invite yourself back to your focus on the breathing. We then continue to focus on it as it goes in and out, in and out, not controlling, but simply observing. Like a gate keeper. He watches tall and short, fit and thin, ugly and pretty people go past him. But he neither follows them, nor does he get attached to them! He simply stays put in one place, and watches them come and go.

In our meditation, too, we focus on the gate, the spot that the air passes through. This is the tip of the needle. From this vantage point, we watch the flow of the breath, again, not following, or controlling, simply observing, observing, observing.

With these few introductory remarks, then, I invite you to sit comfortably in your seat, head up with neck straight, back straight, too, without leaning against the backrest, and feet together. Look around and become aware of your environment... and feeling the warmth and the heat in the room, gradually close your eyes. If you are one of those who is scared to death to shut your eyes, keep them half closed, and fix your gaze at about 45 degrees, but without bending your neck. Now we begin.

[Guides the reader to focus on the breath, observing it without attachment or aversion.] Now that you have been introduced to the technique of mindfulness meditation, we can then practice what is called the 'lovingkindness meditation' (mīti bhāvama). 'Lovingkindness' is simply the way you treat a friend, mita in Pali. Metu meditation, then, is a technique to cultivate a mindset that treats all sentient beings, friend or foe, human or non-human, as our friends. Lovingkindness, Buddha teaches us, is one of four states of mind for excellent social living, the other three being compassion (karuna), altruistic joy (muditta) and equanimity (upekkha). This last, of course, is of particular relevance in helping those who are in institutions, angry as they are at everyone seen to be an authority figure.

The standard lines to remember in the lovingkindness meditation are:
May I be free from enmity
May I be free from ill-will
May I be free from distress.
May I keep myself be happy

If we achieve nothing else from this lovingkindness meditation, we can at least keep ourselves happy. Now wouldn’t that be enough in this world of ours where unhappiness reigns?

We call a meditation a ‘sitting’. But while there is no magic in sitting on the floor, the advantage is that, it seems to be the best posture that allows the free flow of air within the body. But not all meditation is done sitting, or sitting on the floor. So we end our experience of meditation with a walking meditation.

When we sit for long hours, like when we do anything for long, we get tired. So the walking meditation is an alternative to sitting/breathing meditation, but, of course, the goal is still the same: mindfulness. In this walking meditation, we walk slowly, as slow as you body balance would allow. Again, we keep our body straight, with neck slightly tilted down to allow a 45 degree focus on the floor. As we lift our foot, we say in our mind, “lift”, and “move” as it moves. As we keep it on the ground, we say “heel” and then “toes” following the sequence of keeping your foot. By the time your one foot is on the ground, the heel of the other foot will be off the ground, but the toes still touching the ground. And you lift it once the other foot is firmly on the ground. This, of course, is the natural way we walk. So again, we are not forcing a walk but simply watching our walk, the goal, of course, being to train the mind to stay focused.

[walking meditation]

We end with a few final remarks about meditation. We have a time and a place for everything. We eat at a table at a given time or times, we take a shower in the bathroom or at the well, we sleep in our room or in the hallway of our home, or perhaps even outside, and we play soccer in the field when there is light. Likewise, it is desirable to get into the habit of doing meditation at the same time, same place. This is so the mind/body does not have to deal with another variable when it is trying to be mindful of the mind!

This, however, does not mean that meditation is what you do only at that given place or time. Meditation in the sense of mindfulness is something you do every waking minute of your life. Practicing religiousists,

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Christian or other, would understand this well. Whether you are listening to me, or returning to your room, or eating, or talking to someone on the phone or peeling a yam or carrot at home or cooking or washing the dishes or sitting in church, you can practice mindfulness by simply being aware of what you are doing at a given moment in time. Try mindful set to see how much more enjoyable it can be!

4. Concluding Remarks

We hope that the experience of meditation you take away from here will help you help others — those under your care, to cope with their own anxieties. But it is of equal importance that we cope with our own anxieties so that we can do the job of helping well.

We conclude, then, with loving-kindness to all, seeking your compassion if I have not lived up to your expectations!

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