

FRUITION OF THE PATH

*'All know that the drop merges in the ocean,
but few know that the ocean merges in the drop.'*
Kabir

Skilful Living and Action

One of the consequences of the awakened mind is the enhanced ability to act selflessly and compassionately in all circumstances of life. "To offer no resistance to life is to be in a state of grace, ease and lightness. This state is then no longer dependent upon things being in a certain way, good or bad. Life flows with ease."

As soon as you honor the present moment, all unhappiness and struggle dissolve, and life begins to flow with joy and ease. When you act out of present-moment awareness, whatever you do becomes imbued with a sense of quality, care and love – even the most simple action. So do not be concerned with the fruit of your action – just give attention to the action itself. The fruit will come of its own accord. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the oldest and most beautiful spiritual teachings in existence, non-attachment to the fruit of your action is called Karma yoga. It is described as the path of "consecrated action." When the compulsive striving away from the now ceases, the joy of Being flows into everything you do. The moment your attention turns to the Now, you feel a presence, a stillness, a peace. You no longer depend on the future for fulfillment and satisfaction – you don't look to it for salvation. Therefore you are not attached to the results. Neither failure nor success has the power to change your inner state of Being. (1)

It is impossible to control or foresee the results or consequences of our actions in the world. All that we can do is focus our attention on the reality of the present moment. "Plunge your whole life into what you are doing at that very moment and live that way. Whatever you do, whatever the task at hand, your whole life is there at that moment."

Silence in action is a doerless doing in which you *just* wash the dishes, just vacuum the floor. The ego is not present. Typically, whatever we do, we bring an "I" to it, attach to it as me or mine. But silence is the place where there is no ego, and silence in action involves acting in the world without making the action me or mine. In the process of uniting with the particular activity, we at least temporarily forget the self and are intimate with the vividness of what is there. Various traditions come at this truth in different ways. In China, one answer to the question, What is enlightenment? was: Eating rice and drinking tea. Actually, you can eat and drink anything, but *just* eat and drink. The preoccupation with self goes into abeyance, and you are

manifesting the depths of silence in the ordinary world. You can do the same thing with any action. That is what Zen means by No Mind or Clear Mind. You step away from your past conditioning and are fresh, alive, and innocent in the moment. (2)

The way in which we interact with the world, with all its complexities and challenges, is a reflection or mirror of our inner development. Adyashanti: "The challenge of enlightenment is not simply to glimpse the awakened condition nor even to continuously experience it. It is to be and express it as your true self in the way you move in the world."

Q: What motivates a liberated person to act in the world? It seems that without the motivation of desire, even the desire to help others, there would be no motivation to act at all.

A: In Liberation you are in that state which is prior to any causation. Therefore, actions happen without any motivation for doing them. You are not doing for yourself or for the love of others. You are prior to any motivation. Actions simply happen. From the outside, such actions may be viewed as loving, kind, and wise, but to the liberated one, all happens spontaneously and free of any motive. Actions arise out of the most natural, primordial state. (3)

Spiritual practice, when properly carried out, leads to a richer, more complete engagement with life. Our actions become less ego-driven and more appropriate to the actual situation and circumstance. We become more skilful, more effective. Gurdjieff: "There are no limits for self-perfecting, and so each attainment is only a temporary state. People in their outer life can play any social role, fulfil any job, have any occupation that occurs in life." Zen teacher Maurine Stuart provides a Buddhist perspective of this spiritual unfolding in the everyday world:

How does our Zen training help us change? So simply. It helps us to do what needs to be done, whether it's cleaning, sitting, sleeping, or eating. When we are completely engaged in our activities, we are creating some stability within the ever-changing world in which we live. There is a feeling of being rooted in this simple practice. We are no longer pulled here and there in a tug-of-war. We sit, and in our sitting, we experience the eternal, this Buddha-mind, or Buddha-nature, within the changing scenery. And through our practice, we maintain this mind as a presence in our lives, no matter what happens – storms, disappointments, illnesses – whatever happens, we find nourishment and stability. We are ready to face whatever it is clearly. (4)

When there is a fundamental shift in our perception of and attitude toward the vicissitudes of life, we can overcome our conditioned emotional and mental reactions and deal with whatever challenges come our way in a healthy and effective manner. "It is possible to expand our vision and give fearlessly to others. In that way, we have possibilities of effecting fundamental change. We cannot change the way the world *is*, but by opening ourselves to the world *as it is*, we may find that gentleness and bravery are available, not only to us, but to all human beings."

When we are flexible, able to adapt to the demands of even difficult situations, we become effective in whatever we do. We constantly learn and change. Rather than forcefully pursuing our goals, we bring a light, fluid quality to each action that allows us to achieve our aims with ease and enjoyment. As we discover that we have the ability to accomplish whatever we set out to do, we begin to wake up, to see more of the possibilities in life. We become our own teacher, guiding ourselves into a flowing interaction with our environment and with the world. As we continue to open to the nature of existence, we are able to share with others, and to participate in actions which bring benefit to all. (5)

Selfless action, without concern for oneself, is the highest manifestation of altruistic love and all-embracing compassion. We are able to meet every situation in life with intelligence and skillful responsiveness, fully present in the moment with an awareness that is open and free. In the words of Chögyam Trungpa: "Being open means being free to do whatever is called for in a given situation. Because you do not want anything from the situation, you are free to act in a way genuinely appropriate to it."

We can nourish a powerful awareness that can eventually cut through our deepest assumptions and help us to live awake and in truth. We can find the freedom to choose an action that takes into account the circumstances present at any given time in any given situation – doing *what best serves life*. Taking action that best serves life means to take action that comes out of being as aware as possible of the many conditions present in any situation. It is action based not on our self-centered view of life but one that considers whatever other conditions our awareness holds in the situation. It includes but is not limited to how the conditions affect us. (6)

Right action arises from a state of calm, conscious presence devoid of personal or subjective motivation and intention. "The consciousness out of which actions emanate can be either the reactive force of the ego or the alert attention of awakened consciousness. All truly successful action comes out of the field of alert attention, rather than from ego and conditioned, unconscious thinking."

Presence is a state of inner spaciousness. When you are present, you ask: how do I respond to the needs of this situation, of this moment? In fact, you don't even need to ask the question. You are still, alert, open to what *is*. You bring a new dimension into the situation: space. Then you look and you listen. Thus you become one with the situation. When instead of reacting against a situation, you merge with it, the solution arises out of the situation itself. Actually, it is not you, the person, who is looking and listening, but the alert stillness itself. Then, if action is possible or necessary, you take action or rather right action happens through you. Right action is action that is appropriate to the whole. When the action is accomplished, the alert, spacious stillness remains. (7)

Freedom and Nonattachment

There are many different indications suggestive of spiritual attainment and maturity. When asked what are the signs of progress in spiritual life, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj replied, "Freedom from all anxiety, deep peace within and abundant energy without." Other spiritual teachers concur. Charlotte Beck: "Joy increases; peace increases; the ability to live a beneficial and compassionate life increases. And the life which can be hurt by the whims of outside circumstances subtly alters. We have a sense of growing sanity and understanding, of basic satisfaction." And Jack Kornfield: "Spiritual growth leads to freedom. It leads to living more in the moment, fully experiencing what's there, seeing things clearly as they are. It leads to the letting go of attachments and therefore to less suffering, to less selfishness which means more love and joy, more compassion for other beings and a more gentle flow with what is."

When we abide in our natural state of openness and pure awareness, lesser desires and emotional distress of all kinds fade away:

You will recognize that you have returned to your natural state by a complete absence of all desire and fear. After all, at the root of all desire and fear is the feeling of not being what you are. Just as a dislocated joint pains only as long as it is out of shape, and is forgotten as soon as it is set right, so is all self-concern a symptom of mental distortion which disappears as soon as one is in the normal state. (8)

We are in touch with our natural state of pure awareness and presence when we become more open and our natural innate intelligence is operating optimally. "We find that we are functioning more surely, more clearly, more joyfully, more energetically in our daily life, and above all, we have a better connection with all human beings with whom we come in contact."

We tend to see clearly. We tend to know how to balance things out and what to do in a particular situation. We tend to remain calm, because we're not upset by every little thing. We tend to be more playful. We tend to be spontaneous. We tend to be more cooperative. We tend to see others more fully, instead of viewing them as things to be manipulated. (9)

Inner work leads to self-discovery and self-knowledge and a level of awareness which gives us control over the direction and purpose of our lives. There is a fundamental reorientation to how we view life. Zen teacher Susan Murphy: "When we want nothing, we begin to notice and truly appreciate each thing that the universe offers us. It is a state of awake openness to the very moment of being, a natural awareness that nothing is lacking. It is an objectless, nameless gratitude for sheer being, a most simple happiness." Tibetan Buddhist teacher Tarthang Tulku echoes this heartfelt sentiment: "Every moment in life is an opportunity for learning, every experience enriches our lives. We are the directors of a magnificent play, and it is up to us to see that every moment in our lives is enacted with the uplifting quality of true inspiration."

All of our actions reflect a natural cheerfulness, and life and work take on a light, enjoyable quality that sustains us in everything we do. Life becomes an art, an expression of the flowing interaction of our bodies, minds and senses with each experience in our lives. We can rely on ourselves to fulfill even our innermost needs, and thus we become genuinely free. Inner freedom allows us to use our intelligence wisely; once we learn how to use it, we can never lose the clarity and confidence it brings us. This freedom and vitality are available to each one of us. Knowing ourselves better will prompt deeper insight, more understanding, and a sense of peace. We will grow healthy in body and mind, our work, family and relationships will become more meaningful. When we gain inner freedom, we will discover a deep and lasting enjoyment in all that we do. (10)

Only when we fully accept life as it is can we enter the mystery of Being and understand the depth of meaning embodied in even the smallest, seemingly insignificant, manifestation of the living reality of “that which is.” Byron Katie gives voice to this insight:

The wonderful thing about knowing who you are is that you’re always in a state of grace, a state of gratitude for the abundance of the apparent world. I overflow with the splendor, the generosity of it all. And I didn’t do anything for it but notice. The litmus test for self-realization is a constant state of gratitude. This gratitude is not something you can look for or find. It comes from another direction, and it takes you over completely. It’s so vast that it can’t be dimmed or overlaid. When you live your life from that place of gratitude, you’ve come home. (11)

Jesus spoke of a “peace that passes all understanding,” a numinous state free of fear and suffering, grasping and clinging. It is revealed when we move beyond limited viewpoints and conditioned beliefs and embrace the totality of life and experience. “There is a common element in the ability to see beauty, to appreciate simple things, to enjoy your own company, or to relate to other people with loving kindness. This common element is a sense of contentment, peace, and aliveness that is the invisible background without which these experiences would not be possible.”

True salvation is fulfillment, peace, life in all its fullness. It is to be who you are, to feel within you the good that has no opposite, the joy of Being that depends on nothing outside itself. It is felt not as a passing experience but as an abiding presence. In theistic language, it is to “know God” – not as something outside you but as your own innermost essence. True salvation is to know yourself as an inseparable part of the timeless and formless One Life from which all that exists derives its being. (12)

The teaching of nonattachment lies at the heart of many spiritual traditions. Overcoming our conditioned attachments to people and things of the world can be truly transformative. “Nonattachment is the experience of flow, of allowing life to move and unfold without control or censure. Whatever happens within ourselves and our environment occurs without disturb-

ing our attunement to the radiant stillness of fundamental consciousness. Nonattachment is the full, direct experience of life at the same time as we experience the unchanging ground that pervades our life.”

The practice of nonattachment is not the same as “detachment”; it does not suggest that we avoid having preferences, nor does it require that we renounce all our possessions or the aspects of daily life we enjoy. Instead, it points the way for changing *our relationship* to our experiences. When we no longer grasp or resist the various aspects of our lives, our eyes are opened to the magic of what is. We realize that our efforts to control the endless flow of life are futile. The untiring human determination to control things, to get and keep what is pleasant and avoid or eliminate all that is not, flies in the face of reality. We have no control over the way life unfolds. Accepting the natural unfolding of life, we learn to be present with what is . . . When we accept life as it is, with an open gentle spirit, we are able to taste the true flavor of reality. (13)

Egolessness is another attribute of the awakened state of consciousness. Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön describes it in metaphorical terms as similar to the rays of the sun radiating outward and bathing all they touch with non-discriminating light and warmth. “Generosity of the heart wishes happiness to all beings, both oneself and others. Loving-kindness fills the heart with benevolence and seeks the welfare and benefit of all.”

Wakefulness naturally radiates out when we’re not so concerned with ourselves. Egolessness is the same thing as basic goodness or Buddha nature, our unconditional being. It’s what we always have and never really lose. Ego could be defined as whatever covers up basic goodness. From an experiential point of view, what is ego covering up? It’s covering up our experience of just being here, just fully being where we are, so that we can relate with the immediacy of our experience. Egolessness is a state of mind that has complete confidence in the sacredness of the world. It is unconditional well-being, unconditional joy that includes all the different qualities of our experience. (14)

Compassion and love flower when there is no division or separation between oneself and others. “Individuals no longer blinded by the conceptual boundaries between self and other can support those who are suffering. Help is offered before it is even asked, with nothing expected in return. It is giving for the sake of giving, and it comes naturally to those who know that, in truth, there is no difference between themselves and others.”

True wisdom develops when our circle of awareness grows wider and wider and perceives the inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of all things. The result is selfless love and compassionate action. In the words of Buddhist teacher Namgyal Rinpoche: “Realize that the universe is boundless, loving, and good, that finiteness is merely an illusion of the ego. The question is not whether God is loving, but whether you are loving. Plant infinite seeds of virtue

because every moment of giving is a little death of the little self; only then can you be an affirmation of unity.”

Timeless Awareness

As the spiritual journey progresses, our narrow conditioned outlook on life is replaced with a more panoramic awareness and enlargement of our horizons. The inner consciousness undergoes a process of refinement and purification; intuition and inspiration replace old patterns of thinking and mechanical emotional responses. Zen teacher Maurine Stuart describes this deepening of awareness and perception: “We become more in touch with everything. Literally and figuratively our senses become very keen, we smell, taste and touch with a new kind of awareness, and the intuitive mind becomes more sensitive as well. We find that there is less confusion in our lives, that we are more wide awake. By accepting everything just as it comes, we become free, more open, more alert, more vividly alive.”

Pure timeless awareness is intrinsic and infinitely available, but “it is camouflaged, like a shy animal.” Self-realization is not a gaining of something new but rather a natural dropping off of previous self-imposed barriers to the expression of our true nature. “In Zen the point is to *be* – more aware, loving and self-reliant. As your conceits, resentments, and stubbornness fade away, your innate pure, unstained nature will reveal itself.”

Having read many books about Zen prior to enlightenment, I had the illusory notion that if I would attain enlightenment I would acquire supernatural powers, or develop an outstanding personality all at once, or become a great sage, or that all suffering would be annihilated and the world become heaven-like. These false ideas of mine, I now see, hindered the master in guiding me. Before awakening I was very much worried about my physical condition, about death, about the unsatisfactory condition of society, and many other things, but after enlightenment they no longer upset me. Nowadays whatever I do I am completely at one with it. I accept pleasant things as wholly pleasant and distasteful things as completely distasteful, and then immediately forget the reaction of pleasantness or distastefulness. I feel that through the experience of enlightenment the human mind can expand to the infinity of the cosmos. True greatness has nothing to do with fortune, social status, or intellectual capacity, but simply with enlargement of mind. (15)

Many teachings stress the importance of an undivided attention and open awareness grounded in the present moment. Gurdjieff: “When you do a thing, do it with the whole self, one thing at a time.” And Vipassana teacher Joseph Goldstein: “As awareness becomes steadier and concentration stronger, the quality of bare attention begins to reveal deeper insights into the world and into ourselves. We begin to cut through the stories we tell ourselves about experience, living less in thoughts about things and increasingly in the direct experience of the moment.” For Buddhist teacher Namgyal Rinpoche, wisdom flowers with the

growth of awareness: “You are involved in the development of awareness; insights arise automatically when awareness is present. Awareness of the small moments in daily life leads to the knowing-awakening, the effortless perfection of wisdom.”

Nondual teachings such as Advaita Vedanta recommend focusing on the sense of ‘I am’ as a doorway to higher states of consciousness:

Hold on to the sense ‘I am’ to the exclusion of everything else. When thus the mind becomes completely silent, it shines with a new light and vibrates with new knowledge. It all comes spontaneously, you need only hold on to the ‘I am.’ Just like emerging from sleep or a state of rapture you feel rested and yet you cannot explain why and how you come to feel so well; in the same way on realization you feel complete, fulfilled, free from the pleasure-pain complex, and yet not always able to explain what happened, how and why. You can put it only in negative terms: ‘Nothing is wrong with me any longer.’ It is only by comparison with the past that you know that you are out of it. Otherwise – you are just yourself. Don’t try to convey it to others. Be silent and watch it expressing itself in action. (16)

Advaita Vedanta teacher Jean Klein describes his experience of awakening in mystical terms:

My Master explained to me that this light, which seemed to come from outside, was really light reflected by the Self. In my meditations I was visited by this light and attracted by it and it gave me greater clarity in action, thinking and feeling. My way of listening became unconditioned, free from past and future. This unconditional listening brought me to a receptive alertness and as I became familiar with this alertness it became free from all expectation, all volition. I felt an establishing in attention, an unfolding in fullness to awareness. (17)

As consciousness expands and matures, the seeker begins to directly experience the oneness and indivisibility of all life. “The dimension of fundamental consciousness never changes. When we realize this most subtle aspect of ourselves, we experience a vast, unchanging stillness pervading our body and our environment. We feel that we ourselves are fundamentally timeless and changeless.” In Zen Buddhism this profound experience is sometimes expressed by the phrase, “I have never moved from the beginning.”

When we no longer identify with the surface content of the mind – thoughts, feelings and sensations – we are able to perceive the underlying ground of being or pure awareness. In the words of Toni Packer: “If you are established in this timeless presence, if you are in touch with it, you don’t have to navigate and negotiate. You’re just here, and a response will come out of this intelligent or wise presence. If there is this timeless quality in one’s perception, one simply sees what is and responds.” Buddhist teacher Ken McLeod elaborates on this idea:

What we are – pure being, empty awareness, Buddha nature – is obscured by the presence of habituated patterns of perception, feeling and thinking. The practice

of mind training takes the raw ore of awareness and experience and refines it, progressively eliminating the impurities that cloud perception and trigger reactions. As impurities are removed, direct open awareness manifests more and more clearly. The sense of separation created by the subject-object patterns of perception begin to subside, and we enter into the mystery of being. As the sense of separation diminishes, we know what arises in experience fully and completely. Our relationship with what we experience moves into balance, a movement that has two aspects: compassion and emptiness. Emptiness refers to knowing what experience is – groundless, open and indefinable. With this complete and accurate knowing, we are able to perceive balance and imbalance precisely. What we do is not based on personal agendas or the need to maintain a sense of self. Instead, what we do arises from the direct perception of the direction of the present. At this level, compassion is the natural manifestation of awareness. The unity of compassion and emptiness is awakening mind. (18)

Spiritual practice eventually leads to a non-dualistic experience of life in which there is a perception of unity and wholeness rather than separation and division. Zen teacher Charlotte Beck describes this experience in the context of sitting meditation:

Good practice is simply sitting here – it is absolutely uneventful. From the usual point of view, it's boring. Over time, however, we learn in our bodies that what we used to call "boring" is pure joy, and this joy is the source, the feeding ground, for our life and actions. Sometimes it is called *samadhi*; it is the very nonstate in which we should live our entire life: teaching a class, seeing a client, taking care of a baby, playing an instrument. When we live in such nondual *samadhi*, we have no problems because there is a nothing separate from us. As our mind loses some of its obsession with self-centered thinking, our ability to stay in nonduality increases. (19)

Tibetan Buddhism speaks of an open, panoramic awareness that reflects the reality of *what is* in the present moment. Tarthang Tulku: "Natural awareness is simple and direct, open and responsive. It is immediate and spontaneous, without obscuration. 'Natural' means 'unfixed,' to have no expectation, no compulsion, no interpretation, or predetermined plans. There is no need to progress, since everything moves on in the natural state of reality."

One has to develop a panoramic awareness, and all-pervading awareness, knowing the situation *at that very moment*. It is a question of knowing the situation and opening one's eyes to that very moment of newness, and this is not particularly a mystical experience or anything mysterious at all, but just direct, open and clear perception of what is *now*. And when a person is able to see what is *now* without being influenced by the past or any expectation of the future, but just seeing the very moment of now, then at that moment there is no barrier at all. (20)

Pure awareness is beyond method or practice or striving; it is a letting go into the timeless and unknown. "In the open space of awareness, experience arises and subsides, but what

arises is not separate from awareness. Presence is resting in awareness, knowing that mind nature is empty, clear, and unimpeded, and knowing no separation from what we experience.”

There is no going anywhere, nothing to practice, no beginning, middle, or end, no attainment, and nothing to attain. Rather, it is the direct realization and embodiment in this very moment of who you already are, outside of time and space and concepts of any kind, a resting in the very nature of your being, in what is sometimes called the natural state, original mind, pure awareness, no mind, or simply emptiness. You are already everything you may hope to attain, so no effort of the will is necessary and no attainment is possible. You are already it. It is already here. Here is already everywhere, and now is already always. (21)

Natural, open awareness is mirror-like, objectively reflecting what is in every moment of life. “Pristine or intrinsic awareness is completely open. This universal level of awareness includes everything – individual consciousness embraces all consciousness. Nothing is rejected or excluded.”

Reality is all-encompassing: the absolute nature is one. Although we may feel separate from the original uncreated reality – whether we call it “God” or “enlightened mind” – through awareness we can contact this essential part of ourselves. Awareness forms the pure ground of our experience, it supports every aspect of our world with perfect equanimity. Its light can illuminate our experience and bring us complete understanding. Like the smooth surface of a mirror, awareness reflects the sights and sounds of daily life. Just as a mirror and its image cannot be separated, pure awareness is not apart from everyday experience. Awareness infuses even the concepts and dualistic conditions set up by the mind. All apparently separate things are manifestations and categories within awareness. Seeing only the images playing on the mirror’s surface, we forget their origin; accepting as solid the elements of our world – thoughts, feelings and perceptions – we lose sight of the underlying stream of awareness. But by focusing and slowing down the mind, we can begin to soften these rigid structures. Interesting new experiences may be discovered as awareness wells up to the surface. (22)

The enlightened state is felt as a pure, all-encompassing presence, beyond time and space. It is the ever-present reality of *what is*. Tony Parsons: “Enlightenment is our natural and ordinary way of being. Nothing in particular changes in one’s life except the perception of everything. Simply rest in the lap of ‘what is.’ And then it is possible that your eyes will open and a huge gratitude will fill you.”

When there is presence, the whole being relaxes into its embrace. There are no more questions and there is no more striving. The mind departs its throne, the body relaxes, the breathing evens out, and the perception becomes global. I rest in that which never comes and never goes away. When there is presence, there

is total intimacy and the senses are heightened to a degree previously unrecognized; I see and touch in innocence, I taste and smell for the first time, and hear a new sound that is vital, fresh and unknown. There is a subtle feeling of risk and serenity in presence. It is the first and last step. It moves beyond time and self-identity and provides the ground in which the discovery of what I am is made immediately and directly available. When there is presence, all that is illusory falls away, and what is left is real, vital, and passionately alive. This is life full on – not my life, not anyone else's life, but simply life. (23)

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