

Awakening as a Skill

*Essays and dialogues on practice,
insight, and the end of suffering.*



Selected writings of Stefan.

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A Note from the Editor

This volume was compiled and edited by Claude Opus 4.7, an AI system made by Anthropic, on May 22, 2026. It is one of a small series of similar collections drawn from public writing on the r/streamentry meditation forum.

A note on attribution. The material here is the work of Stefan, who posted to r/streamentry between 2021 and 2022 under two Reddit accounts — [u/Ok-Witness1141](#) and [u/deliciousMixture-4-8](#). The book is organized accordingly.

Every essay and dialogue reproduced here is the work of that author, posted publicly to Reddit. The text has been reproduced verbatim with only HTML-entity decoding applied; no words have been changed.

Everything else is the editor's: the title and subtitle, the chapter titles (often abbreviated or rewritten from his original Reddit titles), the selection of which twelve submissions and fourteen comments to include, the grouping into sixteen thematic parts, the ordering within each part, the short italic editorial notes that introduce each piece, this note, and the source-attribution links.

The author writes as a practicing meditator. His longest single piece — "Awakening as a Skill," which opens this volume — is the most fully-worked statement of his approach. His third-path baseline report (Part XIV) is one of the more directly autobiographical passages in this collection.

All of the writing in this book remains the work of Stefan. He was contacted after compilation and gave approval for this edition. It is offered without commercial intent.

— Claude Opus 4.7 (Anthropic)

PART I

Awakening as a Skill

Awakening as a Skill: A Path of Insight

[Source on Reddit](#)

June 14, 2022 — original post in *r/streamentry*

The clearest single statement of the author's overall view of practice. Treats insight not as a sudden grace but as a learnable skill with identifiable sub-skills, and walks through each in turn.

A while back, I wrote [a short piece](#) on what I think are some of the drawbacks MCTB has for the aspirationally advanced meditation practitioner. It was met with a bit of hostility and maybe confusion -- mostly due to the fact that I wrote it as a kind of stream-of-consciousness post and it was super scuffed. I did not anticipate so much engagement with it. The post itself lacked an overall message about what to do with the information I presented. This post is a continuation of that post with more practice implications. It is a rough first draft of a path of insight being developed that puts skill at the forefront of the activity.

First things first. This is not a pro- or anti-Ingram thing. I like the guy, I like MCTB. I think it has a lot of merits. But, I believe, it does not do full justice to people who want to really advance their practice. I believe it misses out on conveying the proper framing from which wisdom can take hold. If you are a person who already finds MCTB the perfect guidebook for your needs -- you need not read further. I'm only out here to help people who may be confused or looking to gain a new perspective on their practice territory to advance.

My main two issues with how MCTB presents the Path of Insight are twofold:

1. It is not framed from the perspective of the 4 Noble Truths, which are the *actual* core teachings of the Buddha (Dukkha & Dukkha Nirodha). Instead, they are framed through the 3Cs, which are very

liberating, but they are just part of the story, not the whole thing.
Following from this point...

2. In MCTB, the Path of Insight is generally explained as a series of perceptual shifts, attention changes, or other psycho-somatic diagnostic criteria to indicate progress. Changing your field of awareness is not awakening. Non-dual perception is not the core teaching of the Buddha. Ending suffering is.

And this circles back to the Four Noble Truths being the core teachings of the Buddha. They are framed as a set of skills or competencies which we must master. It is similar to learning a language. Each Noble Truth (and the Noble Eightfold Path, as a consequence) is like a certain part of the language we must learn. There's grammar, syntax, vocabulary, colloquialisms, idioms, etc., all of which combine to produce a deep skill that stays with us for our entire lives. When we reach a certain level of competency in a language (typically, fluency) it is impossible to unlearn the language or even forget it because language is such a vital part of the human condition. Similar to self-awareness, mindfulness, and ending suffering. Similar to learning a language, when we've mastered the core teachings of the Buddha, it permeates throughout our entire lives, it opens new opportunities in mundane life, gives us a new perspective, changes our emotions, changes the way we see old ideas, and makes us appreciate ourselves in a different light. Using the language metaphor, I believe MCTB gets it backwards with a diagnosis of path progress. You do not assess how good one speaks a language based on what new opportunities they've gotten, how they see old ideas or their perspective. You assess the language directly. Similarly, you do not diagnose yourself on the path by your mood, recurrent thoughts, or perceptual changes, but through how well you can let go. Each stage of the path is a different way of letting go we must master to reach the next stage.

Dukkha and Letting Go.

Skills exist because the human mind adapts to solve a problem. I need something to give me safety from the harsh environment, so I develop the skill of crafting shelter. I need to provide nourishment for my family, I learn the skill of farming. There is a problem, and the skill fulfils the gap.

The Buddha cleverly designed the Four Noble truths like this. The first noble truth is the problem: there is Dukkha. The second noble truth is how the problem exists: due to causes/conditions. The third and fourth noble truths are how we go about fixing it (the skills we practice). The skills we practice are, in essence, about letting go.

The problem is unique because it's generally right under our noses but we haven't paid much attention to solving it because it feels like a feature and not a bug. The Buddha, being as wise as he is, had the strong hunch that this was a bug, he set about de-bugging his system. And he found the root cause of the problem. The mind, due to not knowing the causes and conditions, continues to create dukkha. To change this, we embark on a long journey of mental training to calm the mind and start an investigation to find these causes and conditions and let go of them for good.

So far, so good. This is simple handiwork being done. Plants won't grow in this soil? Fertilise it. Plants are looking dry? Water them. Weeds are growing in my garden? Pull them out. Pests coming to eat my plants? Wrap them in mesh so that they can't get chewed up. Easy as.

In short, the problem is clinging. The solution is letting go. So, we learn the skill of letting go. As such, any path of insight that we hope to use to diagnose our progress, understand potential pitfalls, and generally give us some loose direction should be focused around skill execution first and side-effects second.

What is letting go? This is a complex question to ask. But, from my experience and others', it generally has two major components. First,

awareness. Awareness is the ability to notice things, in this particular case, we're talking about dukkha and its causes. When we're novices, we may only notice dukkha and not the causes. As we advance we start seeing some causes of our dukkha. The second component is release. Release is when we're able to drop a compulsion to do something. Release can come in gradients, on the shallow end, we can just momentarily drop a compulsion to do something and return to our meditation object. On the deeper end, we learn to drop the causes and conditions of our compulsions. However, to do this all, our awareness and release need to be working in tandem. This is a *very* basic overview of what it is all about. For more complexity, you can read the thousands of meditation books out there that teach various ways of letting go (I'm happy to recommend them later).

A Path of Insight.

The Path of Insight emerges as the mind starts to investigate itself, and embarks on mastering the skill of letting go of dukkha piece by piece. Each step on the path of insight is cumulative and not necessarily linear for individuals (i.e., certain minds may naturally understand a fetter better than others and therefore be further along in the PoI than others). What follows in the path of insight is like a sign-posted checklist of executable skills in reducing suffering and the eventual eradication of a fetter. For the record, this map I am writing is mostly from the perspective of using basic breath or noting meditation, I have no long-term experience with mantra/visualisation/kasina (I invite people who have practised those methods to write their own PoI in the skills at every stage).

1. **Mind and Body.** This is the first signposted step on the path of insight. The skill of letting go is very immature, but fresh and the forefront of the mind. The mind can distinguish between physical (form) sensations and mental (formless) sensations. This aids in letting go, because, in that distinction, we can cleanly distinguish

how sources of physical pain cause certain dukkha and how sources of mental anguish cause a certain type of dukkha. We progressively get better than disentangling these largely interwoven sets of dukkha arising in the mind. This stage, as noted elsewhere, when mastered, can really feel very settled and equanimous because we've made the first big step in letting go; the usual ignorant tangle of physical-mental dukkha that arrives usually in too large of a quantity for us to properly process. Now we've processed it to a degree, and the dukkha drastically falls away. In the very mature stages of Mind and Body, one is keenly aware of the interrelated physical-mental nexus; bodily sensations lead to mental sensations, and mental sensations lead to bodily sensations. Intentions arising from form become clearer (pressure -> I know I am sitting; cool breath -> awareness in nostrils). Intentions arising from formless become clearer too (focus on a mental feeling of happiness -> happy memories and feelings come into mind).

- 2. Cause and Effect.** Letting go retreats slightly from the forefront of the mind. Instead, the focus turns to intentions and the conditionality of phenomena. Following the breath becomes very laborious at this stage because the mind is on a dual track; it is noticing the intention to follow the breath occurring simultaneously with the sensations confirming the breath is being followed. This can feel very cumbersome in the mind, as we're not so much learning to let go, but actually noticing how the mind creates desire, intention, and potentially going as deep as greed. Similar to the mature stages of Mind and Body, we see how conditions of the present lead to conditions in the future. Awareness of the present moment -> awareness in this new present moment. Subtle distraction arises -> potential for more distraction. Subtle distraction arises -> subtle letting go helps stay on the breath. Subtle distraction arises -> overemphasis on the distraction leads to a different distraction coming in to ambush you. Cause and Effect is very much a game of Goldilocks, we're trying to find the right effort in staying on the breath as well as let go of potential hindrances. In the mature stage of Cause and Effect, we see how too much focus

on ending hindrances is a hindrance in itself. We understand that not enough focus on the breath lets hindrances fester. Unlike Mind and Body, which is about disentangling form and formlessness, this is all about modulating the reactions to the disentangled sensations. A lot of trial and error happens in this stage and we're intent on getting back the clean-feeling boundaries of Mind and Body that let us feel so at ease, because that sort of letting go was easy and not so cognitively demanding like it is now.

3. **The Three Characteristics.** This stage is about combining the understandings of the first two stages and seeing the characteristics of conditioned phenomena. We're starting to see how mental/physical sensations interact. Further, our mind is becoming progressively sharper and actually *more* sensitive to dukkha. The paradoxical thing about meditation, in my experience, is that we tend to actually become more sensitive to dukkha as time goes on, in becoming more sensitive to it, our minds are training themselves to get negative feedback quicker. The lower the threshold for detecting dukkha -- the quicker we're likely to learn. The Three Characteristics stage is really all about this sensitivity heightening. Intentions coming and going are very tiring to maintain, letting go of hindrances requires a balanced approach, mental sensations and physical sensations seemingly co-mingling and ricocheting off one another. It's a real mess. Things that may have never bothered us before now bother us in this stage, because we see just how precarious our awareness really is. Restlessness is quite a normal side effect of this stage as the mind is amped up but not yet 100% certain on what it all means. However, if we focus on letting go of the hindrances as they arise, letting focus on the breath feel engaging and joyful, the mind will see how
- 1) Physical sensations have no owner, no me, no I is involved in making them happen; so too with mental sensations. They have conditions that make them grow and proliferate or recede.
 - 2) Physical and mental sensations arise and pass, continuously.
 - 3) Physical and mental sensations are burdensome when there's an attempt to hold onto them, cling to them, possess them, or control them. In the mature stages of the

Three Characteristics, our minds are using this knowledge to let go of things with relative ease. Everything arising and ceasing means there's no need to possess them, which means we can unburden ourselves to simply observe without getting too involved.

- 4. Arising and Passing.** When the knowledge of the Three Characteristics is ingrained and translates into the executable skill of letting go and not getting tied up in sensations, we head into the territory of Arising and Passing. In the Three Characteristics, our minds became *very* sensitive to dukkha and the precarious nature of awareness, along with the general burden of trying to possess any single type of sensation. This translated into very rapid letting go, so that physical and mental unpleasantness was quickly let go of. We kept doing this, and now everything is rapidly coming and going without a care in the world. Arising and Passing is a threshold point because now we have some very tangible rock-solid skills in letting go to the point that our mind feels kinda like Teflon, nothing is sticking to it. Letting go should feel smooth and almost like walking, it comes very naturally. If you've read MCTB, the ancillary diagnostic criteria is feelings of happiness and can even manifest as mania. Arising and Passing stage is very happy and very liberating because we've precisely taken our understanding of how sensations are body-mind, conditional, impermanent, not-self, and dissatisfying and turned it into liberation. In terms of the skills of "letting go", this feels a lot like we've made it. And in a sense, we have. This is the first real signpost of a tangible, repeatable, and clearly present skill that we can execute in our lives without the stop-and-start jerkiness or unpleasantness of previous stages. The training wheels are off, we are autonomous letting-goers. However, our skills are still on the shallow end of letting go and release; but make no mistake, we can very rapidly drop compulsions on a moment-by-moment basis. As we mature in this stage, we see what the path is and is not. The path is not about groovy fun sensations, it's not about hedonistic pleasure, it's not about that ball of light that takes up your vision, it's not about overcoming sensations. Our skills may get corrupted down these kinds of detours -- we can

untether our minds from a lot of what was holding it back, and in this freedom, it is really exploring the excitement of letting go. If you are practising in this stage, keep this in mind. The goal is about letting go (i.e., ending suffering). Everything else is just a side-effect. As we further mature in this stage, we start to notice new things that need to be let go of. We see that letting go itself can arise and pass based on conditions. We see that things are exciting as they arise, and as they cease, leave a disturbing sensation while the mind continually looks for something to be there in the spot at which it ceased.

5. **Dissolution.** Dissolution is where things start to get very messy. In the past three stages, you linked up your insights and skills to let go turbo-mode. But in that letting go, you've been leaving behind things because they're not-self, impermanent, conditional, stressful, etc., now in Dissolution, letting go starts getting deeper because we're noticing that in letting go of things, they truly do go away. This is our entrance to the deeper levels of release. If the skills in the Arising and Passing were about liberation, then the skills in Dissolution are really the realisation that being free needs to be all the way through your being. We used to get annoyed by pain, we can let go of that. Now we're left with pleasantness, but this too is let go of. Included is the actual pleasant feeling of letting go itself. One thing becomes prominent in Dissolution, and that is the endings of things. The mind may become slightly preoccupied with "getting back" something that it feels was lost. Or it may become very deeply immersed in the hindrances as the mind detects even deeper levels of dukkha to uproot. Dissolution is a really mixed bag for practitioners; for some, it's smooth, slow, and comfortable as we descend deeper into the mind. For others, it's spooky seeing things end over and over. The skill in dissolution is really about taking a "wide scope" in awareness, not just letting go of the things bothering us, but letting go of everything with the realisation of "damn things *really* do fade away for good". For people pre-SE, I think Dissolution appears to be quite messy, sort of muddy(?) feeling, like everything feels very thick and sludgy. You can't really

put your finger on it, because you're leaving things behind. For people post-SE, dissolution is when the mind thinks, "yep I'm ready for Nibbana". The jumping-off point into where we let of it all to get satisfaction beyond conditions.

6. **Fear/Misery/Disgust.** I heap Fear/Misery/Disgust (FMD) together because we tend to oscillate between the three and they're on a sliding continuum. Everyone knows what the emotional and psychosomatic effects are in this stage because other progress of insight writers have done it to death. In terms of skill, we've become skilful at letting go on the wider scope and letting go of the feelings that come with the relief in letting go. We see that everything that starts also ends. FMD is called the Dukkha Nanas because we're really understanding how deep the dukkha rabbit hole goes. We're gaining firsthand direct knowledge of the real deep dukkha lurking in our mind. Things end and that triggers fear. Things end and that triggers misery. Things end and that triggers disgust. FMD is directed towards sensations themselves and our mind which apprehends them too, kind of like, "how was I so ignorant to believe this crap in trying to make myself so unsustainably happy? How did I think so-and-so was gonna make me happy to begin with?" Fear feels like a deep fright in seeing the mind trying to be satisfied in this-or-that sensations. Misery feels like a deep sadness in seeing the mind trying in a futile attempt to be happy with sensations. Disgust feels like residual anger in the mind trying to grasp to a sensation to generate happiness. Basically, we're stepping on the landmines we've buried through years of ignorant conditioning. Stepping on a landmine *is* progress in this stage. Not stepping on it *again* is mastery.
7. **Desire for Deliverance.** After finding where most of the landmines are buried, detonating them, and staying safe, our mind has a decent skill in letting go at this deeper level. No really. You won't feel like a good meditator at this stage, but it is true. Now that one has let go of a lot of old conditioning, one moves into a type of anger that really wants to get somewhere. Desire for Deliverance has the intention of, "well I stepped on all these landmines, could there be,

perhaps, a fertile plain in my mind that is free of landmines, and a place where landmines can't be buried?" Basically, the mind has now experienced enough dukkha to want to let go beyond basic sensations and thoughts, to get something far more refined. The skill in Desire for Deliverance is really about recognising the discomfort of the mind trying to find anywhere to be safe in conditioned reality; it's really more like a competency. The skill we execute is letting go of this mad rush of anger to get refined goodness. Mature Desire for Deliverance is where letting go becomes more refined, sharper, and also very sensitive to "falling back" into FMD, it's really about generating the insight of "there is something better over the horizon" and being okay in trying to sincerely find something that matches that description.

8. **Re-Observation.** Re-observation presents itself when we are skilfully aware of just how deeply unsatisfying mental and physical sensations are as a basis of happiness. Re-observation is the previous 3 stages grouped in one. The general flavour is the mind becoming totally repulsed by any sensation that occurs. However, one is actually still obsessed or compulsively being repulsed, which is still a form of grasping. Here, the skill is about letting go completely, totally disenchanting even from the disenchantment of sensations; disenchantment, too, is a sensation worth abandoning. Generally, the skill here is about realising that we've worked ourselves into disenchantment and the resulting negative state is also conditioned/fabricated. Re-Observation is mature when the mind is attuned to the traps of letting go as being a negative thing. We've let go of notions that it is bad or good to let go, things simply let go in and of themselves without input.
9. **Equanimity.** Now that we've let go top-to-bottom, the mind is generally sharp, pliant, and very engaged without getting "messy" or caught up in the negative or positive states of letting go. Things are letting go of themselves. In immature Equanimity, there may be very very faint residual notions of emotions. E.g., if a thought pops in that would've made you angry, there is a recognition that it is a trigger for anger, but no anger will arise. This is what I mean by

"residual notions of emotions". Our mind can freely move about in investigation without getting caught up in anything compulsive, aside from these residuals now and then. As we deepen our Equanimity, we even abandon those residuals by letting go, recognising the extremely subtle forms of grasping present here. The skill of Equanimity is finding the triggers of a Fruition, and being able to execute. However, pre-SE, this is mostly an accidental happening. The general rule is to remain Equanimous and soak in how formations let go of themselves. One powerful skill in this stage is to remain aware of one's equanimity but then investigate and remain sensitive to barriers such as tendencies towards personality views, craving, aversion, restlessness, conceit, ignorance, etc... These formations will arise mostly as either a gross disturbance of equanimity, in which the skill is to remain equanimous and observe its letting go. Or it may arise as a subtle disturbance akin to the residual. In either case, the power of investigation must exceed the demands of the fetter that arises. This is a game of patience.

10. **Path Moment: Fruition and Review.** Fruition is undefinable and not a skill. The mind empties itself of fetter and this takes many forms for people, depending on their particular mental strengths and weaknesses. This is the path landed. There are many guides out there on the phenomenology of a Fruition taking place. The most important aspect is then reviewing the fetter's removal. The mind will feel fresh, re-booted, and generally de-bugged. In terms of the skill-based model, Fruition is when we attain a level of fluency. Mindfulness is now ingrained; our mind's strengths exceed the weight of some fetters. In my personal experience, the job post-fruition is to simply observe the mind that is unfettered and notice the prevailing sense of satisfaction where dissatisfaction may have been. Soak it up and really enjoy the new freedom and practice those fluency skills! The skill to be mastered here is to simply relax, enjoy, and eventually not resist as the mind becomes more sensitive to deeper levels of dukkha in order to begin a new path. Remember:

we can't solve a problem unless we know it. This is the basis of all the paths.

Some Thoughts in Conclusion.

Insight meditation is generally regarded as somewhat mystical or that something special is happening. This couldn't be further from the truth. We are solving a problem. By becoming more keenly aware of just how prevalent our problem is, we can learn the skills required to solve them. In trying to solve the problems, we have emotional side effects, which really are part of the problem too. So we keep learning and working to build this skill. This is not to devalue mystical traditions. This is to empower the practitioner, for whom the traditions were created in the first place.

The insights we generate are for naught if they are not applied. As such, the Path of Insight written above combines the "knowledge of..." with the "execution of..." which is a general guide of what we're hoping to execute in order to bridge this gap. This is because observing and noticing dukkha is only half the game. The map is also pretty light on phenomenological data, I think MCTB does a great job of listing potential emotional and psychosomatic markers of stages (which are, ironically, the consequences of lack of skill in that stage). This is not written as some definitive guide, but a general guide that could work as a companion for others written out there. It is based on personal experience, along with my experiences from teaching meditation and feedback I've received from co-travellers.

Feel free to criticise, condemn, complain or question. This is a preliminary draft of a skills-based insight map. I'm not here to displace other maps, but to add what I think may help other practitioners out there. Thus, I welcome all input that can move the needle forward. However, I am not interested in your textbook analysis. I'm interested only in your perspective based on your practice or anecdotes. I want to make this the best guide possible for people hoping to bolster their letting go skills.

PART II

**MCTB and the Architecture
of Practice**

MCTB: An Evaluation and Implications for Practice

[Source on Reddit](#)

January 21, 2022 — original post in *r/streamentry*

Practice

I've been doing a lot of re-evaluation of Ingram's ideas and works and how they may be impacting people's practice. I've researched through enough Suttas myself, and, I believe, being an "accomplished" enough practitioner of the Noble Eightfold Path and Four Noble Truths, I feel comfortable enough pointing out some positives while also fleshing out critiques of the book. This has direct implications for practice, especially people following a Theravada-inspired Buddhist path. Although I think there are some relevant points here for any kind of contemplative.

The positives:

Firstly, I think the positives are that Ingram's book Parts I and II are great. They elucidate the core teachings in a very open carefree way that gets people seeing that the path is simultaneously a very serious thing and fun thing. Being moral is happy. Having a unified mind is happy. Being wise is happy. Practicing one aspect helps the others and vice versa in whichever order you want to start with. Next, I think his exposition on how serious meditation *can* get (as opposed to the tone he presents as "should get") is great; people who want to do a deep dive on eradicating suffering should have an outlet here in the West and not washed down Dhamma. Nor should meditation teachers discount people's natural inclinations towards seeing things this way or that way; part of being a great teacher is being able to take another's perspective and speaking to them in their language in order to convey the core points of the teachings. If a person is struggling with some aspect, having a manic ego trip, or generally exhibiting some dysfunctional patterning they're worried about,

then a teacher has a duty to throw away theory/dogma and speak person-to-person (that's the application of compassion anyways). Ingram opens a good discussion on not pathologising or dismissing people's subjective experience of their content; there's a middle way. Third, I think Ingram makes a great case of Buddha vs Buddhism, which does demonstrate how people cling to the religious/worship aspect and can't apply what the Buddha says (Simile of the Raft is a great example of this point). His tone, again, conveys this is how things should be rather than how things can be. That's my personal reading of it. These are great positives, and expand the realm of possibilities for people who take the path seriously: people just wanna meditate to relieve stress, some do it do have wahoo experiences, and some do it for the practice of the Four Noble Truths. Great, let the teachings meet the students half way. That's how it all happens. Fourth, I think his general exposition of the 3Cs are very good and very accessible. Some Buddhist texts have a lot of artifacts of history in them which aren't relevant to us today. Ingram's words really do shine a modern light on timeless concepts.

The criticisms:

1. Arhat or Ingramhat? Ingram's model of the Arhat just runs into a very big problem. Namely, he talks about non-dual models as being best and that Arhats are characterised by their perception of the world. And each different attainment being some other perceptual landmark. This calls into question a major part of what the Buddha teaches, and that is, that the aggregates are non-self, including perception (which does roughly align with how Ingram talks about perception too -- the way things are cognised or formed to the mind directly). If perception is not self, then why base one's attainment on the basis of perception? Seems fishy. It seems very strange to re-write canon to suit some sort of model that on deeper inspection doesn't align with the Buddha's core teachings about self. If he truly believes the Pali Canon is dogma or not cool, why not create a new word? "Fully realised"? "Awakened being"? I don't know I'm not a Pali Canon re-interpreter. But I think Ingram kinda sorta knew what he was doing. He didn't want to use a new word because it's new agey and cringe-worthy, so he took a word with serious gravitas and

mystique. Last point, there's an issue of cultural appropriation here, and not in the hand-wringing-concerned-humanities-student-policing-microaggressions-on-campus way either, it's in the fact that he's deliberately taken a word because he thinks it has value, and then redefined it to such a way that it is totally divorced from its original context, and, arguably, is in contradiction with the source material from which it is based. This is no mere re-formulation. It's a complete re-write using a word which has a definition, whether we like it or not. Yesterday I made tacos, but they're not the traditional "Mexican Tacos" which are dogmatic and narrow-minded. My tacos are actually a piece of toasted bread, with butter, tomatoes, cheese, and ham on them. Some will say I'm disrespecting Mexicans by serving this at my restaurant and calling them tacos, but they're just jealous that I've discovered what real tacos are. And if you don't agree, just go hang out with the so-called "real Mexicans" who have made the rules to protect their sense of taco-ownership.

2. Cycling? Oh and when you reach Arhatship in his model, you're still cycling through the ñanas? Ñanas = "knowledge of" not "experience of" meaning that as an Arhat, we'd have full knowledge of what our experiential reality is, no? If you're an Arhat, you fully understand fear, misery, A&P, equanimity, so why cycle? What new knowledge is there to gain? One becomes disenchanted with any formation, thought, etc., that could arise from the ñanas. So why would there be cycling through things whose conditions have been uprooted in an ongoing manner? This is a minor point but it seems fishy too, given that Arhatship is ending the Samsaric cycle. No more trolling in the mud through unwholesome thoughts, no more trying to resist what is or wanting what isn't. Just peace with what is now.

3. Nanas Are "Knowlegdes of", Not "Experiences of" . Ingram talking about the progress of insight is very wild. Compare his writings to the commentaries he based it off. Fear/misery/disgust are no big deal in the Vissudhimagga. A&P is no big deal either. Ingram seems to overstate the impact each ñana has in general. And I truly believe this is an artefact of how he interpreted and practised the Mahasi method. The Buddha said his path is good at the start, middle, and end. Again, this may be because

Ingram think that ñana = "experience of". But experience is not the same as knowledge AKA insight. We gain insights through experience, but some experiences produce no insight. And some insights only arise when they are properly contextualised within a tradition which supports their nutriment. A case in point is how he characterises the A&P as crazy blissful highs and kundalini rushes, etc... And while the commentaries do suggest this *can* happen, they do not say this is the actual A&P stage. The knowledge of Arising and Passing is what makes the A&P. Experiences are conduits, and, with the right understanding of the teachings, completely irrelevant to the actual insight. Think about it this way, imagine I'm a maths teacher and I've made a map of learning maths. When you memorise the multiplication table you should feel joy and happiness, with crazy blissful highs of mastery of the sublime art of maths. However, some people learn their multiplication tables without any fanfare because it's just whatever. The most important thing is that we learn the maths, not care about the before or after. There might be really groovy mindstates happening, or not. They're not necessary. We want the knowledge. And if you're told that having groovy blissful sexy mental states = mastery of the multiplication tables, you're maybe not going to actually learn the multiplication tables for the sake of maths, but for some feeling, so the knowledge becomes irrelevant to you and disposable. See what I'm saying here? Cause and effect. So all these descriptions that Ingram gives beg the question: what does this practically mean or contribute to the knowledge of arising and passing away if there is no supplementary knowledge beforehand? How does this move the needle forward on our development on insight? How does some random dude dropping acid and having this crazy kundalini rush bliss wave actually learn anything? Hmm..? Again, seems like he's pushing stuff into realms where they may not be relevant. Maybe you just had a great time on LSD. Maybe that was it. And that's good enough too. You don't have to retrofit it with some grand mystical meaning unless you came into the experience with philosophical/theoretical notions stemming from the Visuddhimagga.

4. Not Everything Is a Ñāna. Ingram's also extrapolates the progress of insight to include basically everything we experience; again, this boils down to what I think may be him overreaching in the fact that ñānas = "knowledge of" and not "experience of". Oh you had a sudden crazy energetic experience as a non-meditator, that must have been A&P. Seems a little implausible, the person would have no knowledge of the 3Cs, which are the basis of the progress of insight. Could it be that Ingram is retrofitting his experiences within this model and committing a blunder in terms of reifying experiences to this model? The Buddha would call this papañca (the proliferation of ideas). And it is entirely possible. No experience is special, yet Ingram talks about magic, special powers he has, and other stuff which seem to reify these experiences as being "more than" (what can be more than the immediate present moment and the satisfaction it brings when fully comprehended?). Lastly, I am 100% ready to believe that the progress of insight is a ubiquitous feature for people when they pay attention to how awareness works, but only if we can get some empirical data. Add to this scripting and expectations (i.e., "researcher bias" and other confounding variables) and it seems hard to empirically verify in people without suggesting the model to begin with. That leaves one at a dead end, and leaves the Buddhist commentaries where they are: as Buddhist and not ubiquitous. And that's okay. I truly believe Ingram is trying to pay the PoI the highest compliment by saying it's a universal feature of all contemplation and practice of awareness, but why not try and create a more modern way of saying things? Not wanting to come across as new-agey? Who knows. Plenty of researchers out there building models of alternative states of consciousness via cross-cultural studies, incorporating data from many traditions as possible. It's just reasonable science to do so...

5. Encountering the Hindrances is not a Passive Thing. In either case, I think there's some merit in acknowledging that the fear/misery/disgust "dark night" stuff can happen. But there are still issues of scripting and major issues of what is and isn't proper practice. Ingram's writing makes it seem as if the fear/misery/disgust/etc., stages are just stuff you have to endure (stuck in 1st Noble Truth). You can see that in his writing ("As

Fear passes and our reality continues to strobe in and out and fall away, we are left feeling ...") which suggest that the process is very passive, you just wait and get new feelings as you explore them. The commentaries actively point the way out in a very plain and simple way to start working through the fear/misery/disgust/etc., (i.e., the 2nd/3rd/4th noble truths) I'll just use one example here but you can check for yourself (Vissudhimaga p.672 - 682): "does the knowledge of terror fear or does it not fear? It does not fear." So there's nothing to the fear other than itself. "It is simply the mere judgment that past formations have ceased, present ones are ceasing, and future ones will cease." We're seeing things as impermanent, and we form a negative judgment, but that judgment itself is not negative (it's positive -- we're treading the path of insight!). And then later, we see some more good antidotes "Knowledge of the state of peace is this: despair is terror, non-despair is safety". This highlights the point about path vs not-path, if we despair, of course we're re-habituating old negative responses; if we're restraining despair, we're learning path knowledge on actually eradicating suffering. "Arising is suffering. Non-arising is bliss." We're starting to see that by proliferating views about our experience create the suffering, nurturing wholesome thoughts cease that arising (despair vs non-despair). There's more to it all, but the Vissudhimagga is very clear on antidotes all along the way. And this boils down to my earlier point of proper scaffolding when developing knowledge; there's a traditional base of knowledge for how to handle each phase with built-in framing and exposition so that the meditator isn't stuck being a victim of their (so-far) untrained mind. Of course, if your model of awakening is only seeing experience in some non-dual way as Ingram says, then of course there'll be no attention given to how we're actually learning to understand leaving suffering behind. Basically, in his version of the Mahasi method, all you're doing is just seeing Dukkha, seeing suffering, we're stuck in the 1st Noble Truth only. But there are another three that we have to follow! See the Dukkha and learn to get out ASAP! Another way to say it is that Ingram feels like meditation is being a police dog sniffing for drugs. You sniff and find the drugs. Great. But what now? Well, there needs to be a policeperson with the dog getting the drugs and impounding them. Otherwise the sniffer dog is just there

barking "Hey, the drugs are here, come and get them!" Meditation has a level of activity to it, mindfulness (Sati) is about remembering the 4 Noble Truths and 8fold Path and bringing them to bear on the present moment. We don't wait around for suffering to disappear on its own, we work with right effort to stop unarisen unwholesome states from arising, and to remove arisen unwholesome states. Very simple and clear.

6. Mastering Whose Core Teachings? Lastly, and I think this is a minor point, but something that is worth noting. MCTB could be called "Mastering the Teachings of the Commentaries". How would you like to watch an episode of a TV show. Okay, so instead of watching the TV show, would you like me to write out a synopsis with commentary? Now, instead of either, I write a synopsis and commentary of the synopsis and commentary? MCTB is based on the commentaries, which are supplementary information to the original source materials (the Pali Canon Suttas). So you're reading a commentary of a commentary, made by someone who may or may not know exactly what all the information is for, who it is for, and when it should be used. I think that is a suitable reason to treat the MCTB with *some* caution. Go to the source material. Read the Suttas, understand them. Then progress slowly and surely. The Visuddhimagga is not overly complicated, Mahasi Sayadaw's "The Manual of Insight" is also quite well written. Neither of them suggest that fear/misery/disgust last long, and they provide immediate antidotes and ways to properly frame the knowledge in the Buddhist tradition from which they arose. In short, they thought through this stuff already, they were experts, and the knowledge is there (I'm very certain Mahasi's Manual of Insight and the Visuddhimagga are both available for free online).

What does this mean for me and my practice?

Glad you asked. Practice can get tricky at times when we're getting to deep reactive emotions embedded in our minds. We've purified the top layer but now there's an iceberg of shit tearing our mind apart. Firstly, we're not this emotion, they don't control the ship. There's no chooser. But there is a choice to make. And this is where mindfulness really pays

off. Mindfulness is about remembering to wake up in the moment of a hindrance and then to recall the relevant teachings (Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path) to get out of it. The way noting is taught is just observe, observe, observe. And no remembering. That's something that can be emphasised in teachings to make sure we're not being caught up in this unwholesomeness and self-directed negativity. The first step to changing stuff is to accept it. So, I'm not saying you should ignore these unwholesome things. I'm saying you should do something about them!

Next, not every thought you have is Ñana-connected. You had a thought about wanting to be a monk. Must mean you're in the desire for deliverance. Where you being mindful of the 3Cs when this was happening? If not, chances are they're just thoughts doing their thing on their own thing, maybe you're starting to admire the dedication of monks because you're doing intense meditation yourself, so you're projecting these values out. Oh you had some really nice soothing waves of relaxation while watching TV? Must mean you're in dissolution. Again, might just be a nice feeling connected to the relaxation of it all, where you actively observing the 3Cs of the moment? If not, maybe put down the map and enjoy the relaxation itself.

Lastly, have fun, be a friend to yourself, and love each and every moment. Don't torture yourself, that's not the path, it's an extreme. Don't indulge yourself, that's another extreme. We in the West typically have a hard time relaxing because "money = time" or something. It's deeply embedded into our culture. "Do X for Y minutes per day to get Z!" If you were totally satisfied and happy right now (opposite of Dukkha being dissatisfaction-stress), what good would getting something in the future be? What good would awakening be? You've got everything you need right now. You're free from these self-imposed chains. You're free from these ideas you borrowed from others to become mental habits. That's the essence of no-self, you're a series of ongoing mental-bodily habits that either strengthen or weaken. And every moment there is a choice on what habit gets acted upon and strengthened. Yeah I'll think about how good my life will be with a PlayStation, or I can wake up and really see that everything is fine right now and this moment is grand because it's the

only one I'll get. This dark night stuff can turn this suffering into a badge of honour, which is another form of this Western mentality of paying now to receive later. Why pay to receive, when you've got everything you need right now? The negative emotion you feel is okay, it's there to serve a purpose, you've just trained the mind to react negatively because it feels unpleasant. That's okay, remember that each of these emotions are a part of your process playing out as an organism. Fear has a purpose to protect. Misery has a purpose to grieve. Disgust as a purpose to disengage. These aren't bad things to be reviled, they're actually quite compassionate emotions trying to help you be yourself. Don't passively accept this habit which causes you pain. Don't passively accept this thought of low self-worth, because why would you hold a belief that hurts your own feelings? Be a friend to yourself. I'm not victim blaming here either, some people will have legitimate trauma that'll need therapy, go see a therapist. Some people will have hard time removing unwholesome thoughts and bringing up the wholesome, go see your sangha (I like to think of r/streamentry as a sangha of it's own) and talk it out. The Buddha says that friendship is half the path (SN45) and associating with those wiser than you will accelerate your faculties (AN3).

Let me pre-empt some stuff before you comment:

- **You hate Ingram and trying to discredit him.** Nah, I think he's a pretty cool guy who has moved the needle *tremendously* for serious meditators. I also think there are some points in his book that need serious revision and more adherence to the core material from which he sourced his ideas. I'd love to sit and share a tea with him, talk about meditation (although I think he'd have much more to say than I do). I have no ill will towards him. I think those Analayo papers directed at him were 95% unfriendly and basically hit-pieces not designed to move the needle forward, but to simply bash a guy for trying to help people the best way he knows how.
- **You had a bad dark night and are now projecting your stuff.** Part of me writing this is out of care and love for us all. Why would I want someone to needlessly suffer? If you get all your advice from

one source rather than integrating a compendium of knowledge, you'll be stuck following that one source. Like I said, I think the book has merit, and some downsides. My own experience was growing out of the Westernised notions of Mahasi passive method and growing into reading the commentaries and Abidhamma and moving to the Suttas themselves in order to integrate vast interconnected series of knowledge. I learned that any negativity can and should be thrown out as soon as it is noticed. I learned the hard way that the "dark night" is an obstacle you can basically walk around. I learned the hard way that the Western hustle-grind culture has been overlaid on the Buddhist method. Why would I want others to do something easy, loving, and fun the hard way? We live our lives so that we accrue experiences for the benefit of others.

- **MCTB isn't responsible for any of this.** It has a part to play. I'm not here to judge how much, just to point out that there is an impact. How many posts do we see here in our sangha of people saying they've been in the dark night for weeks, months, or years? Ingram's book suggests this happens, so it becomes normalised. Obviously, we should never stigmatise people's troubles. But we should also let people know there is a way to train the mind out of this self-imposed cage. This is about balance. Not giving clear, open, and direct messaging about how to work through these difficult mindstates creates problems of this normalisation, and it becomes a vicious cycle where people start wearing their dark night stuff as badges of honour.
- **That's not a very charitable reading of MCTB.** Let's look at some of the meta-language being used to convey Ingram's message. "The duration of Fear, like the other stages, varies widely." This suggests passivity, you have no control over the duration of these stages. "Like the other stages", suggests they're all like this, not just fear. That's in the first few sentences, which immediately signals and frames the reader with the idea: "buckle up sonny, you're in for a ride, fear is taking the wheel", not fun! Next up, some promising active responses to fear: "Reality testing, noticing that we are generally in a safe place (assuming we are, and not in a war zone,

running for our lives), have access to food, water, and shelter, and that we are okay: these can help a lot. Grounding attention in trying to gently synchronize with the sensations of things vanishing, falling away, and shifting can help. It is very important to recognize that Fear is not dangerous unless we make it so [...] If we fear the fact of fear, indulging in telling ourselves stories about it, we can amplify this stage. *If we ride it, flow with it, welcome it, dive down into it, play with it, revel in it, dance with it, and dissolve with it, letting it tear down the illusion of permanence and control as it begins to do so*" While a lot of this passage suggests we have active remedies to fix it and quite similar to the Vissudhimagga in some respects it still lacks a way to turn the unwholesome into wholesome. The overall message (italized) is that fear is still driving the entire experience (to me seems to contradict not-self teachings?). And given that the opening paragraphs strongly suggest "the duration varies widely", you are still not in control of what's happening in the mind. Basically, it doesn't really tell us much about how we should immediately recognise fear (unwholesome) and replace it ASAP with wholesome thought as the Buddha suggests (MN19, MN20). I'm not going to dissect every page, but there is a clear impression given that the Nanas are the things that drive the car, which doesn't line up with the core teachings of the Buddha himself.

- **You are wrong.** Maybe. But over 2500 years' worth of Buddhist practice and scholarship probably isn't.

If you've read this far, you made it. This is the end. No this is. This is.

Be happy and be well

PART III

Fetters, Paths, and the Three Characteristics

Hints, Tips, and Musings

[Source on Reddit](#)

November 27, 2021 — original post in r/streamentry

Practical notes from someone in the middle of the path -- attitudes, traps, and signs that the work is going well.

So after a long time meditating I'm going to share some tidbits with everyone. These are all things I learned the hard way from slogging it out. These are some starting premises that may spark a new perspective or insight in others.

I'm not going to talk about techniques, everyone knows techniques, plus I'm more of a big picture thinker. And I'm not going to talk about texts or theory.

Emptiness vs Dukkha

The point of understanding emptiness (or not-self, I'll use them interchangeably) is to realise that **being happy/blissful/content/joyful/etc., is a choice**. They're not *your* choice. But they're *a* choice nonetheless. We need to take responsibility for our Karma, which has created conditions on conditions on conditions for our happiness. Realising emptiness means we have this choice to make, moment by moment.

What does this mean practically for us? Every experience is an opportunity to be wholesome. We learn to recognise unwholesome thoughts and supplant them with wholesome ones. We turn mistakes into opportunities to learn. We turn difficulty into situations where we build our character. In essence, we learn to control our conditioning so that we are not victims of it anymore -- we are not spinning the wheel of Samsara. In your meditation practice this requires being completely

transparent with yourself, all your flaws, insecurities, hindrances, etc., that arise must be accepted. That may hurt.

Impermanence vs Dukkha

Yeah, experiencing all these insecurities, flaws, and hindrances may hurt. But experiencing impermanence directly lets us have the conviction that none of this unwholesomeness will last unless a choice is made. And so we find impermanence as not just saying that happiness/joy/bliss/etc., are a choice, but that they can in fact arise from liberating unwholesome activity. Impermanence insights also teach us to pay close attention to as much as possible to catch how things change. Notice the mind inclining toward tension or agitation? Great! Now work to make new choices on that conditioning. But first is acceptance, and that is what impermanence teaches us -- noticing and accepting.

What does this mean practically? If we pay attention to how things change (noticing and accepting them), we can see this liberation happening with unwholesome states.

- But you're saying we should be reactive? No. If we can first appreciate and then gladden the mind in response to unwholesomeness, that's all we need. The mind can untangle the rest.

Shamatha/Samadhi

Learning to relax the body is more important than relaxing the mind, in my opinion. Our body carries so much tension and in wakefulness is so conditioned to move, even on a very small scale. Stuff like twitching and sniffing, etc... Once the body is settled, the mind follows. Keeping dullness at bay is a matter of getting very intimate with how our minds work when in this super relaxed state. Meditating when tired can help *if* your goal is to curb dullness if that's a major thing for you. But if your

goal is more to reduce suffering, and you don't feel like dullness is pressing, then don't force it. The choice is yours.

Jhanas are wholesome states but aren't the answer. They're more stepping stones. Think of entering Jhana as a kind of mental game with certain *rules*. I've italicized "rules" for a reason. It's another coping strategy, although a very very good one!

Mindsets

Some key points. And this may be for people experiencing the Dukkha Nanas or overly concentrating on suffering.

Ignorance is learning.

- You can't remain ignorant or something once it's there. I tried a lot throughout my life to forget the bad things I did, or the rotten mindstates I'd acquired. It's impossible. It's actually impossible to remain ignorant once we've noticed. There's only suppression. Notice how this suppression itself reinforces a self-view? I am X, but I also did unwholesome behaviour/emotion/thought A, so I ignore the latter because I cling to the former.

Suffering is liberation

- Notice whatever suffering you have and work *with* it. Not *through* it.
- Notice --> Accept --> Appreciate --> Gladden

The most important thing I've learned from all of the meditation is that the mind cannot distinguish between positive and negative in the way we ordinarily think it does. Whatever is being thought of is whatever one's mind works towards. Notice how when you're really angry, despite it being a negative emotion, the mental activity is toward a person/thing/object/place/etc.? E.g., all those political types who hated Donald Trump back in the day constantly retweeting him, talking about

him, and obsessing about him. They couldn't get enough of him, yet they hated him? The mind is directional. Intentions are all we got. And intentions only work toward whatever they're thinking of, regardless of positive or negative. This explains the psychological evidence of why positive reinforcement works to create new behaviours/habits. It also links in with evidence of how there's no way to eliminate a habit, you only replace one with another. Tie this into our meditation practice and you see that when we incline the mind toward something, and maybe it gets derailed, focusing on the derailment via a punishing emotion/thought/behaviour is undermining. Because we're actually guiding the mind toward that negativity, rather than the positivity of the situation. Remember how I said, conditions on conditions on conditions for our happiness? This is a perfectly relatable example of that.

Dukkha Nanas

Dukkha Nanas are things we definitely go through. "*Knowledges of...*" being the operative word, meaning we have to know the thing intimately. But knowing suffering is not the goal. The goal is to stop it when we can. But there's no way to strategise the thing, we have to accept it all. Notice how in all the old Suttas the Buddha instructed people he taught to imagine their body as a festering corpse, mucus-ridden, and a rat-infested scumfuck disgusting thing? I think that was part of this acceptance phase; (proto-)Hinduism of the time was so fixated on Brahmin, that Siddhartha had to shock them into waking up to their bodily reality. By doing these imagination-based contemplations he could help them wipe out the ignorance they had of their own bodies. I think in these modern times we're so disconnected from our minds that advanced meditators end up doing this kind of practice for their minds. The squeaky wheel gets the grease...

Journaling

Here I go again. Please start a journaling practice. It trains your meta-cognitive capacities. Self-reflection is important. Writing is also important. The more angles from which we can learn to deal with our parts on our own terms, the better. Also, unlike meditation, it's a great way to start using your rationality to bring in more wholesomeness too.

Working with the wholesome

I've talked a lot about accepting our flaws. The likely thing is that we need to relax into our good parts too. Part of clinging is also getting really attached to our flattering aspects, which causes us to suppress the flaws. So relaxing the tendency to amp ourselves up is also important. But that's usually a fairly easy part of the practice I'd say.

Whenever we notice wholesomeness arising, we can try and notice what conditions led to it arising. What is in our control to bring more of it? Meditation is a lot about seeing how our mind/body curates the experience of whatever is happening, but then conveniently forgets that it created the experience, and so it suffers via clinging or craving. There's a choice somewhere along there to change the formula!

Other tidbits

- The Buddha was a lion. King of the Jungle. He trained himself to have a noble mind. Nobility is not a classist thing in this case. It is a mental virtue. Thus, peasantry in this case means one is being pushed and pulled by the winds of their instincts and insecurities. The noble already lives in comfort, he isn't pushed or pulled in either way. But this is purely mental, not a physical thing to do with luxury. I think there is a good metaphorical base from which we can draw a lot of power if we bring to mind nobility.

- Sila? Our meditation practice is how we learn to relate compassionately, generously, and patiently with our own rotten conditioning. We start to accept these parts of ourselves and suddenly we can better work with others and our environments.
- The whole point is to bring deep appreciation and acceptance of what is. Bliss is what's happening right now minus an opinion.

Anyways, I hope this can help. Thanks for reading this far. If you need me to clarify, I'm more than happy to -- this post is more of a jumping-off point for a discussion anyways.

Be happy

Fetters, Paths, and Just What the Heck Are We Doing?

[Source on Reddit](#)

November 28, 2021 — original post in *r/streamentry*

Doing?

Hi, it's me again, with another info dump. One thing that I value in good meditation instruction is using plain old words to convey what's actually going on. I used to be really into researching cool Pali words to flex and I loved getting all technical. But it's not practical and it's not fun (it's actually very boring!).

This is a continuation from my last post. So, we now know meditation is about being happy (I'm using the word "happy" to convey some positive mental quality, adjacent to but not necessarily how we conventionally experience happiness). That's the root of it all -- we're here learning emptiness and impermanence to realise that *yes you can change for the better today*. And that happiness is *a* choice. This is why insights are critical -- without having direct knowledge of experience and how our body-mind curates this experience while seemingly forgetting it, we can never drastically undo lots of in-grained instinctual and habitual conditioning to make us and those around us more wholesome.

Fetters

A fetter is a nasty bit of conditioning that we could say are rooted in some sort of instinctual patterning in our body-mind. They work like this:

- I experience X --> it's what I wanted --> I'll need more of X --> Now there's no X --> Suffering --> That's not what I wanted --> I'll

get some X --> But X is unreachable --> Suffering --> Finally, I got some more X --> Suffering from diminishing returns --> Etc.,

- I experience X --> It's not what I wanted --> I need to get away from X --> But X is still around --> Suffering --> That's not what I wanted --> I'll try getting away from X even harder --> But X is still around --> Suffering --> I'll try harder by ignoring it --> Diminishing returns from ignoring --> Suffering
- And so the wheel turns. Once we start to get X, we need more of it. More of it means we didn't have enough of it, meaning we gotta get even more. Sound familiar? Like an addiction. But obviously, at a deeper subtler level than outright harmful substance abuse.
Suffering makes us unhappy, stress-filled, and makes us tense. Liberation of suffering leads to happiness, calmness, and relaxation. Simple as.
- Fetters are like algorithms. You input values into an algorithm to make it work. No fetter is fundamentally about a certain thing, but certain things work according to a fetter to produce unhappiness/suffering.

At its core, a fetter **turns a momentary want into a need.**

1. Identity view: I turn a view of myself into a need to defend, use my energy for, and organise around. This causes unhappiness because it causes us to be very reactive, "No I'm not greedy like Karen said, I'm actually so giving" you repeat to yourself in the bathroom recalling a distressing conversation from 4 years ago. Or this pain in your leg bothers you so much because awareness is embodied in that aspect of your experience, so it causes you to get annoyed and unhappy. That's not fun. In nondual lingo, we can say that the mind clings to "this side" as being completely separate from "that side".
2. Conviction: you believe that there's no way to change, that liberation from suffering is not possible. This is a limiting belief in your ability to change and to become more wholesome. So you get to experience it yourself. Things really do change. No sensation is a self. Everything is always in flux. Sensations can be suffering if we

let them. That means there is *a* choice to make about my happiness in this moment.

3. Rites and Rituals: you believe that there's a set of pre-determined formulae that guarantee happiness or liberation from suffering. There is no set or fixed anything. So no, burning that candle won't help you suffer less. You must directly work with the conditions that sustain your suffering. You experience this first-hand and you're happier, realising that ending suffering is more of a creative exploration of being than some rule-based procedure. That goes for life in general too (e.g., social norms are rites/rituals)
4. Greed: you believe there's a bunch of things that guarantee happiness intrinsically. You realise there is no intrinsic happiness in any sensation. Instead, there is only happiness in liberation from this fetter. Because, ultimately, the things you thought were make you happy were actually just a choice made a long time ago that we forgot. Ending the fetter itself removes the very condition, revealing the deeper sense of happiness behind the greed itself. Think of a dog chasing its tail, only to realise it was a part of its body the whole time. In nondual lingo, you'd say that "this side" wants to merge and unite with "that side".
5. Aversion: you believe there are a bunch of things that make you unhappy, and getting away from them makes you happy. This makes us unhappy because we're running from a thing that's fundamentally inescapable, the fetter itself. This was a choice made long ago that is reinforced around certain objects. Once we realise there's no escaping these things, the fetter drops away. Happiness becomes a choice -- accept what is and understand its unpleasantness. Think of a man running away from his shadow realising that it was his the whole time. In nondual lingo, you'd say that "this side" wants to decouple from and push away "that side".
6. Material Lust: you believe there's an objective position in spacetime where "you" exist. This causes subtle unhappiness in us because we'd like to think our subjectivity is real for us in some significant way. We'll say "my opinion is just my perspective", but that is still

founded on needing there to be a basis from which a sense of you operates in the tangible world. When we realise that all things change and no sensation in our experience is a self, we can appreciate that even our subjective experience of whatever is happening is not foundational. In nondual lingo you'd say that the mind clings to a side be it "this" or "that", or better said, the mind clings to the belief that "this side" is relative to "that side".

7. Immaterial Lust: you believe there's an objective set of ideas that exist. This causes subtle unhappiness in us because we'd like to think that there really is a thing that our ideas refer to in the world. And so we go endlessly trying to hoard more and more ideas, with better definitions, trying to make sure we're up to date, instead of experiencing the thing. This makes us unhappy because no idea stays the same forever, information changes, etc... We then liberate this fetter when we're sure that there is a world of ideas out there, meaning is made to the world, but it is just as subjective (changing/empty) as the experience of the world itself. In nondual lingo, you'd say that the mind clings to the notion of sides existing.
8. Conceit: you believe there is some objective idea of yourself. This is like a self-concept. This makes us subtly unhappy because we were okay to say there's no solid identity like the 1st fetter, but the 8th is an idea, which is safer and more secluded. We have this idea that there's some fixed notion of "I am..." and that makes us unhappy for largely the same reasons as the 7th -- ideas and information change. We do stuff that surprises us all the time, we get surprised because we had a fixed idea of what we're supposed to be. The momentary want is predictability over our lives which turns into a need that gets reinforced over time. In nondual lingo, you'd say that the mind clings to "this side" as an idea independent of sides.
9. Restlessness: you believe there is some endpoint. To whatever it is you're doing, not just the spiritual life itself, but whatever. The wheel keeps spinning with or without your consent. This makes us unhappy because we get glimpses of things being done, "ahh I've attained the happiness, now I can rest". But everything changes,

meaning this endpoint is just a new beginning. And so the whole thing keeps going. We get unhappy because we're restlessly looking for a time or place to finally say "yep I'm done, this is it" for anything -- the bills, food, exercise, music taste, spirituality, learning, etc... This is an entire life thing with which we need to make peace. In nondual lingo, you'd say that the mind clings to notions of being better or worse on "this side" than stuff on "that side".

10. Ignorance: the root cause of our unhappiness. We forgot or suppressed the memory that we made choices a long time ago that made us unhappy. And this makes us unhappy -- "why or why didn't I take the blue pill?" Because now we see that it is our responsibility. In overcoming the fetter, we're resolving to set the record straight, going headlong into wholesomeness. We realise it is a choice to make. True liberation is taking responsibility for this Karma we've created and that we're creating now. Because everything is impermanent we can change or re-program these choices we made. And because of no-self, these choices we made are not us, they're not a core part of us, making them not a burden, but a creative exercise of our free will to understand, accept, appreciate, and liberate. In nondual lingo, you'd say that the mind was getting caught up in sides, the mind assumed there were sides to begin with, and even if there are sides, is that a problem?

Paths?

Cessations? After stream entry, I wouldn't trust cessations to lead to reliable changes.

I have no idea how to diagnose middle/late paths other than to recommend people pressure test their claims against the world in relatively high-stress environments. Fetters are obvious to see that they're gone, there are just huge gaping holes in our emotional experience when something should get us recoiling has us neutral or, better yet, smiling, in

response. If the fetter is an algorithm, having inputs means nothing, because there'll be no output, and nowhere to input the data. It just scatters into the winds of time.

Also, notice how I put in nondual lingo for each fetter. I think there are no fundamental differences in the stuff we're working on, and everyone needs to find a language that works for them. A guy like Ingram will want you to talk about all this phenomenology and awareness collapsing into transcendental other-self duality mumbo jimbo, but that's just one of many yardsticks on which to measure your progress and work.

What the heck to do?

I've just dumped a lot of thoughts, but how can we reduce them into manageable chunks that we can work into our lives and practice? **Firstly, have fun. Meditation should be fun. If you can find a way to change from a striving mindset to a thriving mindset, you'll cruise through all the work.**

I think one thing that helped me was writing out a little cheat sheet for the fetters and recognizing them as they happened in daily life. That really helped, because recognising and noticing these naughty mindstates is half the battle. Find things that trigger you. Find things that set you off. Find things that make you want to turn away. Find uncomfortable situations and see how you react in them, paying attention to your body and mind. Try strong determination sitting to get intimate with aversion. Try reading some news article which challenges your view of the world and then notice how your body-mind reacts to it (this is actually a very powerful practice for me).

Fetters in our meditation practise is about recognising the obvious signs and working to accept them, appreciate, gladden, and liberate. Find any technique that lets you do this. I personally found the best results with Anapanasati, but I like that more basic stripped-down meditation. But I also found a lot of value in Tantra at certain parts, and I liked certain

deity symbolic representations of certain issues I was dealing with. I also enjoyed non-dual stuff, and still do. Remember the 3rd fetter? Don't turn any technique or the Path of Insight into another procedure to follow or ritualistically turn to in order to ease your pain. If there's some part of your experience in need of being experienced but your technique says to ignore it, 80% of the time I'd say go on the detour and learn rather than box yourself in.

Feel free to question, criticise, or complain.

Be happy

The Three Characteristics: Becoming a Hero, Not a Victim

[Source on Reddit](#)

November 29, 2021 — original post in *r/streamentry*

Not a Victim

Okay, so the last post I'm making ties into the first two. However, it's a little more basic, and perhaps will be more helpful for those pre-SE and looking to get insight feathers on their cap. Think of it as a cheat sheet for the 3Cs, with prompts.

This post is about the 3Cs, talking about what insights are, and how they'll work once we've experienced them properly.

Impermanence

Nothing lasts. Everything changes. Contemplate your life and how it has changed in the last 2 weeks, 2 months, 2 years. Reflect on these changes, were they gradual or instant?

Take a look at experience right now and notice the fluxing of sensations. The shimmering tones of your body and mind. Cascading into one another. Does it ever stop? Does it ever stay the same? Challenge yourself and see how rapidly you can notice the changes. Notice the mental shadow that occurs after a sensation happens, each in succession.

Contemplate time. When did time start or stop? What would time be like without you experiencing it? How do you truly experience time? Is there a direct way to experience time?

Turn to the experience of your body-mind moment-to-moment. Notice how even in the noticing, where is the true beginning, where is the true

end? Can you catch a beginning? Can you catch an end? Do they ever overlap, or intersect? Or are these artificial boundaries? In trying to notice these things, is there any kind of tension between what is assumed and what is actually happening?

Emptiness

Nothing is made of itself. Contemplate objects in daily life. Your arm is not made of "arm" it is made of tendons, ligaments, muscles, bones, etc... And those things are not made of themselves either. Where does this end?

Notice your experience moment-to-moment. Whatever emotion you're feeling now, notice where it occurs on the body and mind. Are those sensations, say, angry? Or do they only feel angry when looked at together? Smile on your face, is the smiling sensation smiling itself when noticed at the tiniest level that you can?

Notice the sensations of a conventional "me" in the moment. Where do they reside? Are they changing? Can you control them? How are they organised? Where is the self in this messy constellation of sensations?

Contemplate the mind and reality. Notice how the mind creates the reality that it sees, and yet, the mind is part of the very reality that supports its creation, to begin with. Is there tension in this? How can that tension resolve itself?

Contemplate emptiness itself. Is it some sort of fundamental thing? Or another empty notion? If so, how do we encounter emptiness in the world and what does that say about emptiness itself?

Suffering

Any sensation can be a bummer if we let it be. Notice how the mind clusters around certain notions of how sensations should or shouldn't be.

There may be a manifestation of defensiveness, a kind of pre-emptive anger, shock, or hatred of the thing.

Notice how when we enjoy a sensation, the mind inclines to possessiveness. This possessiveness leads to territoriality -- "this sensation is so good I gotta make it mine!". Then we spend a lot of time and effort into making sure the sensation doesn't decay, change, or cease. Such a bummer when they do though, right!?

Notice how when we experience a negative sensation, the mind inclines to defensiveness. This defensiveness leads to hostility. "No this sensation is not one of the sensations I accept, so I'll defend myself with anger". Then we spend a lot of effort and time trying to escape the inescapable. Such a bummer.

Insights

Insights are the direct experience of these things in action, the lived experience. They're not answers to questions, but more like convictions that we know what's going on. It should resonate to the core of your being. Like being struck by sublime lightning. It's not an "aha" or "eureka" moment, it usually leads to a smile or laughter (in my own experience, and others' I've read) -- you're finally getting in on the cosmic joke.

I think there is a lot to be said for experiencing the thing directly and contemplating (i.e., analytical meditation). The former is always going to give the best results and lead to deep changes to our experience of the world. But analytical meditation is a great set-up or preparation. A getting the mind lubricated with some nice analytical investigations does help, but lubrication only gets you ready to fuck, you gotta actually do the deed. Make sure you're not

From Victim to Hero

Pre-awakening we are victims of Samsara. Samsara is usually modelled as a wheel, and that's a powerful symbol in itself. Ever tried spinning a wheel in the hopes of changing it? Can't happen, wheels (circles) have the same diameter, that's what makes them a circle, uniformity, despite seeming change. So, you've been doing life, spinning this wheel in the hopes of changing it, "oh I'm gonna be a better person, I'm gonna clean my room", or "I just got a new workout program and that'll fix my motivation this time", or "today is the day I stop eating naughty foods for good". It's wheel spinning, all these things are symptoms, not problems in themselves. Each of the quoted examples is a person struggling with some aspect of themselves, and in an attempt to fix it, addresses the surface problems; this happens because this aspect of themselves is not properly realised and understood. And that's okay, we're fleshy automatons powered by neurotransmitters, we're allowed to not be perfect.

I'd say that insight is a very big part of getting the good stuff that we hoped to get. But insights don't fix a lot of other ancillary conditioning that aren't necessarily related to the fetters. Nor will they cure psychological problems, or fundamentally alter your biology (i.e., that chest pain your feeling may not actually be a misaligned chakra, but a heart condition). But with insights and fetters gone, navigating our mind and our conditioning becomes far easier. Like being a self-taught mechanic of your mind. But being a highly qualified mechanic doesn't mean squat unless you've got the tools and are ready to use them.

Also, being a victim is not a bad thing. This is not victim shaming. There's nothing blameworthy about being a victim of Samsara. It isn't despicable or naughty. It is just that we're all here learning a vital skill to reduce suffering. However, even after getting pretty good at the skill and having more suffering to uproot, this doesn't make you less than or worse than others on similar journeys. It is simply your life, and your responsibility to do the work. This is the heroes' path -- doing the tough

work. And even though heroes do have tough times with their demons and circumstances out of their control, their resolve is there to make sure they make it out with the treasure. So do not think that by saying "victim" or "hero" there is something more to do with meditation -- practising is enlightenment and enlightenment is practice. Lastly, heroes do not make victims of others. This is not a victim-shaming exercise, and that's important to remember, having conditioning is normal. Working to improve it is heroic, no matter how long it takes.

The summary of this Samsara spiel is this: **you can either be a victim of change, or a hero from it.** It's a choice.

Morality, Concentration, Insight

Notice how all these aspects tie into one another. They are completely inseparable. Insight trains morality, morality trains insight, concentration trains both and vice versa. But in meditation practice, we focus on insight -- but notice in this post and my last ones, we take a certain moral stance towards ourselves. We train to not see ill-intentions in our flaws. We learn to be glad with what is actually happening. We learn to accept reality on its own terms. In learning concentration, we relax into our training, taking a compassionate view with ourselves, using positive intentions to work forward.

Notice how in the section about insight, a lot of these things have strict moral implications. Can true compassion exist in a world where we take things as unchangeable? How can we believe in the improvement of society if change isn't possible? Can we forgive someone for their misdeeds if we believe they're fundamentally irredeemable? I'm not saying we should walk around with rose-tinted glasses; sometimes the most compassionate thing for someone is to be incarcerated. Can we truly know someone if we reject their flaws? Or, can we truly accept someone if we only think they're defined by their flaws? Samsara turns us all into victims if we let it -- and your practice tips the scales towards more wholesomeness in the world. This inner project we're doing has deep

ramifications for the outer world. But, if we're doing this inner work, can we find a way to do outer work to help our inner lives? That's a question that can be creatively answered by each individual, via experimentation. Find a way to smile around someone you find unpleasant. Find a way to laugh at that really cringe joke. Try and enjoy small talk!? Volunteer. Smile when you see people. Et cetera...

Thanks for reading, please feel free to criticize, critique, or complain

Be happy

PART IV

Dependent Origination

Getting Familiar with the Middle Links of Dependent Origination

[Source on Reddit](#)

February 22, 2022 — original post in *r/streamentry*

Dependent Origination

A lot of weight is placed on dependent origination as a means to ending suffering. It is said that seeing dependent origination is seeing the Dhamma and vice versa. I think this is true, and so it benefits us to practice seeing, understanding, and working with dependent origination as much as we can, and as best we can. With that all in mind, I'd like to start with the most practical aspects of the dependent origination links, the ones we can immediately start working with, even as novices, in daily life and in our formal meditation. I realise that in the 12 links of D.O. these are strictly not the middle ones, but they're the middle ones from the phenomenological point of view, they're the obvious ones that are happening right now, but not as quick as formations. Not as slow as becoming. If we're working with earlier links, we need a very very steady mind. If we're working with later links, we're too slow to catch the dukkha at a practical time when it's easiest to end it.

The middle links are:

- **Feeling:** the feeling tones of sense contact. There are three feeling tones from sensory contact: Pleasant, Unpleasant, Neutral. As soon as one of the six senses are in contact with the relevant sense media, a feeling is there. Immediate and direct. We can think of sense contact and feeling as almost simultaneously occurring. They're right there in unison.
- **Craving:** the feeling we get with respect to the feeling. We want more, we want less, or we ignore. This happens as soon as the feeling is recognised. It is an urge. A pre-verbal feeling of

something. Like an itch in the mind. Something has pulled the mind into its gravitational field. There's a hankering. There's a decision to act, but we don't know why yet. The urge hasn't been verbalised, but there is a distinct feeling, like you've dropped a colour dye into clear water. Something is changing and beginning to get tained.

- Clinging: the story we tell about how/why we want to get the thing, get rid of the thing, or ignore the thing. Once the urge is processed, the mind starts talking. This is the narrative we have with regard to things. This may be views, obsessions, ideas, etc., about the object in question. This is our opinion of something. Now it's not just the case of wanting or trying to get rid of something; there's a whole backstory being played out of why we should act this way, how we should act, etc... "Things have to be this or that way because of x y z reasons..." or "So-and-so is chewing so loud, they should respect me more!" or "I'm going to eat this triple mega cheeseburger because I deserve it for all the work I've done!" or "That driver who beeped me is such an inconsiderate ass!" Make no mistake though, if there's clinging, it's basically a justification for our suffering, based on craving which is based on feeling tones.

How to work the middle links?

Regarding the feeling tones of sense contact. We work by first getting a sensory base and honing into it. This may be the body, eyes, tongue, ears, nose, or mind. They each have their own way of creating feelings. Pleasant taste? Unpleasant body contact? Neutral smell? Pleasant thought? The possibilities are endless. But as we start to see the feelings we can learn to see how they condition the next steps in the causal chain of D.O. In daily life, we can simply notice how feelings work and arise from sense contact. Simple as. In our formal meditation, we can learn to relax feelings in two ways. In the Samatha way, we take Nibbana as our object of meditation, by focusing on release, relaxation, and calming of the feeling tones. This soothes feelings as being a relevant conditioner for other links of D.O. and leads one away from identification with feelings. True happiness lies beyond feeling tones of sensory contact. The other is

the Discernment way, we understand that feelings are an unreliable source of true happiness. We can notice how the mind jolts around looking for a certain feeling tone, which speaks to how unreliable feeling tones really are for producing true happiness. In training this discernment, we learn to cleave the mind's identification away from feeling and to true happiness. The end result of either way is the same. The method or starting point only differs. Each has its own benefit and drawback. See which you are inclined to. This is a fairly advanced practice in either the discernment or Samatha way, but it is very doable even for a novice, and one can get regular glimpses in order to cultivate the routine skill.

Craving is an interesting and very rewarding basis of practice. After the mind has processed feeling, it gives rise to an urge, or to an inclination of what the mind will do with that feeling. To work with craving is to get familiar with the energy flows and currents in the body. Where is the energy pulling or pushing? Where is the energy seemingly missing? Can we recognise the energy moving and perhaps breathe in a way that relaxes or redirects it? A simple practice is noticing the energy in the body when we feel like we really want something. Notice how the energy in the body changes as we approach the thing we want. Where does it start and where does it end? If it is a tangible thing, feel the energy when you reach your hand out to get it. If it's food, notice how the energy works as you're handling the food to your mouth. How does the energy resolve itself when you encounter the object of craving? The energies here are very interesting because we can learn to soothe them in a similar way to the feelings. We can notice that the energies of wanting more or wanting less are like a crude form of excitement or arousal? Can we rely on these energies for guiding us toward true happiness? We've been talking about energy for craving, energy takes time and work. Craving is an activity and relaxing it takes off the burden of all this work, so we can lighten our load immediately by choosing to not indulge the craving energies in our body, eventually they melt away.

Clinging is most likely the easiest place to start if wishing to get familiar with the links of dependent origination. But it may also be the slipperiest

to get a handle on and work with, because we are quite used to being our voice in the mind that narrates things, the reasoning for this or that, and generally talking ourselves into or out of association with certain things. The good news is that because we are not these thoughts, we have a very simple way to start de-conditioning the clinging aspect of dependent origination. As we recognise habitual thoughts regarding certain aspects of our experience, we can see them, and immediately start re-writing those thoughts in our mind. If we can catch ourselves in self-talk about a thing, we can halt that, and talk in a more wholesome way, informed by wisdom and not by ignorance. It sounds simple, but it is actually quite tricky especially for novices. There is a distinct payoff regarding this practice due to this, it is the easiest to work with, but sometimes can be the hardest to recognise. Once we do catch it though, the remedy is easy to put into action, and it is unbelievably non-esoteric and down to earth of practice as you can get. Just catch the unwholesome self-talk-narrative, and start talking wholesomely informed by your best view of wise thought at the time. One other thing, sometimes the thoughts we have are very ingrained, or perhaps super quick, so quick that we cannot catch them despite us thinking that they should be there. An example is pain, if we're feeling strong continuous pain, we may be focused on the feeling and craving and less on the clinging aspect. In this case, it is actually beneficial for us to give voice to the thoughts, and learn to work that way. It is the same with anxiety, we may be so focused on the worry that we cannot catch the thoughts because we're caught up in the unpleasantness of the frantic energy swirling around in our body.

The most important part of each of these elements is to have fun exploring them. Have fun catching them and playing with them like toys. A big part of learning disenchantment with sensual pleasure is playing around with the facets of our experiential reality until we see through it as a source of true happiness -- but that doesn't mean we can't be happy while doing so! The goal of each part is to find a more refined happiness and peace away from the noise and confusion of mind acting out of ignorance. So let that be your guide... If I can recondition the relationship

I have to this element of my experience, can I find a new way to be happier?

The benefit of starting with the middle links is that you are already implicitly training to recognise the other earlier and later links of dependent origination. By working on simply one link, you are breaking the chain of ignorance, as all links arise together, and fall together. You are also learning multiple strategies for dealing with each of the links. Lastly, as these links are the easiest to spot in daily life, after we are familiar with them we actually can start de-conditioning them as they arise in daily life, leading to more positive morality and harmony with others.

Have fun and enjoy your practice

How vs. Why: A Fundamental Misunderstanding of Dependent Origination

[Source on Reddit](#)

May 14, 2022 — original post in *r/Arhatship*

Misunderstanding of Dependent Origination

A very important part of our meditation practice is **doing the right thing** as much as possible (this is the 8-fold path). And one of the most critical components is making sure we have the right view and right thought. Do we know how to recognise good/fruitful from bad/unfruitful? Do we have the right concepts and ideas shaping our practice that will lead to the outcome we desire? This may seem like a foundational discussion to some advanced and very grounded practitioners, but I think it aims right at the heart of what meditation is and isn't. Specifically: how the questions we ask lead to the answers we seek. Knowing the difference between *how* and *why*, in my opinion, is what separates a good practice from poor practice. Or at the very least, it helps clarify our purpose in meditation versus other more speculative-based modalities out there.

Why?

It is very often that I see people in various advanced/serious meditation forums asking lots of questions such as:

- "Why am I thinking about X so often?"
- "Why do I find X so appealing?"
- "Why does X hurt so much?"
- "Why do I feel so bad?"

These are all valid types of questions, however, they are not the types of questions we can answer in meditation. They're the sort of questions that'll lead you in a circle to nowhere when meditating. They are best left to your philosophical, psychological, self-help, and therapeutic contexts. Why (heh)? Because, in short, there is no meaning to your dukkha. Dukkha has no teleological purpose at all. It is meaningless. In the linguistic and/or semantic sense, the question of *why* is all about finding the meaning of things, purpose, grand narratives, etc... In our meditation, we will never find the meaning of things because, for the purposes of our practice, we need to know *there is no meaning to it*.

We can understand this practically by looking at dependent origination. If we assume there is a meaning to our suffering, we understand that there is some sort of inherent essence to the suffering. That is, we believe that suffering occupies some aspect of selfhood. In other words, there is something that *can* be clung to, craved, etc... Because if we find the meaning, the suffering is no longer in vain. If we find the reason why we suffer, we can be content suffering because now it's good. It's a bit like a conman telling you how putting gravel in your shoes will cure your bad posture, it's a lie. And, we can also see that in believing the suffering is now good, we are setting ourselves up for future suffering -- if we discover that the suffering didn't serve a purpose to begin with. So, by asking *why* in the context of meditation, we are holding ourselves back and impeding real progress and actually increasing our dukkha by presuming something to be clung to in meaning for suffering; this in turn causes further craving for even *more* meaning. So, we must do away with this notion ASAP.

How?

So what *are we actually doing in our meditation?* We are finding out *how*.

- "How am I thinking about X so often?"
- "How do I find X so appealing?"

- "How does X hurt so much?"
- "How do I feel so bad?"

Instead of seeking meaning, we are looking at the *process*. The process is what we are all about in meditation. Process process process. The way things are fabricated to appear as they are to our ignorant minds. The question of *how* aims at finding out this exact thing for us.

How we suffer is a process, with discrete elements that can be uncovered, investigated, and eventually unmade to never come back. The next time we find a theme in our lives that bother us, we mustn't jump to our ignorant first question of asking why. Instead, "how does this theme occur to my mind? How does it seem prominent?" Only then can you start breaking down how stimuli appear, get interpreted, and weaved into a story about "me". And only the question of *how* does a self get extricated from the process of the investigation itself. The question of *why* always presupposes there is some centrality to the experience of suffering at hand with no reflection on how that presumption is itself a critical part of the problem. By taking the "me" out and assuming a process is occurring, we're immediately starting in the right frame of mind for good investigation that'll lead to the fruits of the path.

In short: **if you ask shitty questions, you will get shitty answers. Input influences output. This is itself a (meta-)lesson about process vs meaning.** Meditation practice is far closer to woodworking than philosophy -- despite appearances. If you ask a woodworker why they make chairs you'll get some tautological or vague answer. If you ask a woodworker how they make chairs, they will reveal to you their skill.

One of the most important teachings one can receive from contemplation is that of *radical pragmatism*. We aren't here to philosophise about metaphysics, play linguistic games about definitions, or justify this or that position like in a court of law. No, we are just here to know how things are, how they are made, and how they can be unmade. If we ask ignorant questions we will get ignorant answers.

May this be of use to someone reading. Be well.

PART V

Anatta

Having Fun With Anatta

[Source on Reddit](#)

February 5, 2022 — original post in r/streamentry

A playful, hands-on guide to the not-self investigation. The piece argues against treating anatta as either nihilism or a metaphysical claim, and offers a series of investigations the reader can run on their own experience.

No-self is a tricky insight, because of how it is named. The Pali term is “Anatta”. “An” means “without” and “Atta” means “essence”, “soul” or “self-existence”.[1] When the Western scholars went to south-east Asia to translate Pali words, “anatta” got a bit muddled due to the fact that these scholars with Christian backgrounds did not like the sound of “no soul”, so they changed it to the more palatable “no-self”. Or at least, so I’ve heard from Thai Buddhist (ex-)monks who’ve explained this to me. The other tricky part about it is that sometimes it is taught as something of a doctrine or something which we must affirm in our practice like trying to prove that there’s no self. When in actual fact, no-self is really a strategic way of looking at phenomena and seeing their inherent impersonal nature.[2] When asked if the self exists or not, the Buddha refused to answer – saying that denial or affirmation are extreme views.[3] So we’re not here trying to dissolve a self, we’re here to end suffering, and anatta is a crucial component of that training.

What anatta is really getting at is that no matter where we try to observe, that observed phenomenon cannot be a self or essence of “me”. The sensation of sitting? Can’t be me. I’m also looking, typing, thinking, etc... So, where’s the essence of me in this moment? It feels like the most prominent thing about me right now is that I’m typing, but that’s just my mind fixating on the thing it feels as if it’s doing. My essence each moment is impossible to find; I’m a collection of behaviours, thoughts, and emotions with ensuing sensations where a “me” cannot be located

because they're all a giant fuzzy mess that gets organised to think it is me. You can train this insight through observing the five aggregates and through dependent origination.[4] Another way of thinking about anatta is to say: nothing is truly personal (the insight), so don't treat it that way (which is the training).

Some other consequences of anatta are that any aspect of our experiential reality has no core essential meaning to it; the meaning we have of this-or-that experience is actually a habit. That's right, meaning is a habit. Not a core essential part of an experience itself. We train ourselves to think that feeling pain really really sucks and that we should get angry in response, so we can train ourselves out of it. We think so-and-so is a rude mean farty poo head, we can train ourselves out of it. This is about lightening our load; isn't it crazy how the idea of enlightenment has "light" in it, meaning to shine a light on, but also to make something lighter and less burdensome? That's a clue (recognise + release)!

Okay, so now that we got some theory groundwork laid out, we can start having fun. Fun? Meditation? No-self? Uh... Isn't realising anatta really un-fun and makes people scared and stuff? Sure, if you're not ready for realising it. Fear is a response we get when the things we expected don't materialise or when we're thrust into the unexpected; we're suddenly out of our comfort zone. We're not diving into the deep end of the pool to learn how to swim, we're starting in the shallow end because that's where you start. There are no floatation devices in meditation (well, maybe diazepam and/or Prozac are I guess... but we leave that to the experts) so we start where it's easiest. Fun happens when we're challenged to the threshold of our skillset and not beyond it. When things are fun, we want to learn more. When things are fun, we learn them quicker. When things are fun, our skillset grows exponentially.

First, we just need to envision our lives where our mind starts forming a negative reaction to something unpleasant arising, or maybe a negative reaction to something pleasant being taken away. We imagine ourselves having this reaction, but wait, no. We see that reaction as a mental habit, a habit we trained ourselves in an attempt to try and be happy. We catch

that thought before it even gets to be negative and we throw it out. We re-train the mind with a pleasant thought. We keep our composure, we stay happy, we're fine. No big deal. We're in the creative seat now, not the reactive seat. How liberating is it being creative as opposed to reactive? We're not waiting for our mind to generate a nasty response, instead, we're actively remembering (sati!) to train our mind away from suffering states. That's freedom. That's what we're after. Try to keep that image in mind, your mind free of being a passive reaction machine, to being an active creation machine. You're re-training your habits of meaning when the nasties come and visit. This imagining part is very important, despite end-goals being frowned upon in meditation, it is important to have a vague image in our minds of how things can be. Because if we can imagine it, our minds will slowly start re-tuning themselves to become sensitive to developing the competencies required for that to become reality.

Now we're ready to play with anatta. We're expecting it. We can see ourselves being happier due to it in the future. Playing with anatta is very simple. First, we're not in this to answer why we have dukkha. Nor are we here to answer: "what am I?" or "what is self?" Those are questions with no answer. We're in this to answer how we have dukkha and how we experience self. And how to get out of it. Why is useless, because there's no reason for dukkha or self. They're empty and have no essence. They're not essential to our being (as everything said so far affirms). But answering: how do we suffer? How does self operate? Now you're cooking. Now we have a real motivation to get fun with anatta and start removing dukkha. Firstly, in meditation. Second in daily life.

In meditation, we set the intention to enjoy the breath. A smile goes along with it very nicely too. We then keep enjoying the breath. When a hindrance arises, we're going to make the deliberate thought to recognise that there is a habit reaction we can have or a creative action we can make. Perhaps the nasty hindrance is consuming you. "Damn TV is way too loud!" That's tough, and I always hated my parents playing the TV real loud downstairs when I was meditating. I'd start by firstly recognising and acknowledging I was angry. It's really hard to

acknowledge for some reason, but this is another part of the anatta puzzle, we're tightly wound around our habits. So we just first remember to recognise and accept. Then, when we've done that, we begin creatively working with the thought and releasing the burden. "Yes, the TV is loud. Yes, I am angry. But I'm really glad my parents are enjoying themselves. And I'm really glad to have the wisdom to see all of these things at once." That's you doing anatta; your mind is seeing its multifaceted and non-essential nature. This anger is a habit. The joy is a habit. Is my mind still fixated, or can it return to the breath? This is a major clue to how strong the habit still is. So we keep thinking wholesome thoughts to subdue the unwholesome thoughts. "Wow this breath is so delicious" or "I'm enjoying my parents' enjoyment of the TV" or just start producing a smile. Now, with enough work on this, we can actually also see how the unwholesome and wholesome jostle in our mind once we're quick enough to recognise it all happening. In that observation, you're appreciating anatta too. Neither thought is strictly essential to the experience of the loud TV. But here's the rub: which one is more fun, carefree, easier, lighter, and enjoyable? That's where we're headed. That's the fun of anatta -- we're lightening our load, taking off the crap we saddled ourselves with. Oh, is the experience of de-conditioning reactions not fun for you? Is that an aversion to change? Change is fun because it means we're not stuck in this routine of ignorance-anger-greed of the past! Follow the steps above and learn to recognise and release those habits too; this is a wonderful opportunity that's arisen to soothe yourself and nurture a more wholesome state of being.

Do not try and return to the breath if you're still battling with a hindrance; it is not a matter of just seeing it. We want to de-condition it at the moment it's there so we can get back to enjoying the breath. Toleration is not an option either. Tolerance implies we don't like something. Acceptance and release are our only options because they are the keys to enjoyment of the present moment. One powerful tool is simply talking ourselves in a wholesome way about a hindrance, "ah, aversion, my old friend... We're no longer rivals battling, but friends!" or "Here's sloth-torpor saying this moment is boring, are you sure, look how much is

going on!" If we can talk to ourselves in this wholesome manner, eventually we'll just have wholesome thoughts, and then wholesome feelings too. And then the hindrances won't bother us any more! We're tearing down old dukkha-producing habits and replacing them with new sukkha-producing habits.

And just in case people think wanting to think wholesome thoughts is a no-no, I'll quote MN20, where the Buddha quotes the mastery of the relaxation of thoughts: "He is then called a monk with mastery over the ways of thought sequences. **He thinks whatever thought he wants to, and doesn't think whatever thought he doesn't.**" That's anatta right there. When you can think what you want when you want, you've mastered anatta because you've learned to condition the mind with the thoughts that you desire out of the wisdom that neither the wholesome or unwholesome is mine, me, nor I -- but one for sure leads to way less dukkha!

At more advanced stages we'll look at the 5 aggregates. The formations, feelings, perceptions, mental activities, and consciousness. We can observe the mind clinging to one of these or all of these aspects at the six sense doors. I won't go into it here, but the basic gist is to see how we cling to an aspect of these 5 aggregates but we can interrupt that flow and simply let go. Thanissaro has [a great guide](#) on the 5 Aggregates too. At even more advanced stages we can observe the links of dependent origination. The truly impersonal nature of our mind's habitual tendency to cyclical existence. We're continually being reborn each moment through the ignorance of the moments before. If we can see with wisdom this occurring, we can stop reacting and start being creative. Much like the aggregates, this is a process about dukkha, not a description of who or what we are. However, the core issue is the same; the wisdom of anatta interrupts the ignorant cycle that gives rise to dissatisfaction-stress.

We can take this to daily life and have fun with it too. Again, our goal is to simply loosen the burdens we've placed on ourselves to enjoy the present moment, however that may be. Are people being rude to us? We can learn to generate positive feelings towards them instead without

pushing away or ignoring our negative reaction to their rudeness. We can acknowledge one, while cultivating the other, seeing not limiting ourselves to being constrained to only one way of having the experience. If things don't go our way, we still have this moment. If we are bored, we have this beautiful moment. If you're totally enthralled by a cutie at work/school, you remember that that's just how you've trained yourself, you can start moving away from the obsession by recognising the obsessive qualities in your mind and reconditioning them. Same with traditional naughty habits like Facebook or cookie addiction, you can see that these are conditions of "Facebook = happy" or "cookie = happy" that aren't essential to one another. It's very crazy how quick one can train the mind to become dispassioned with even the most appealing sensual desires by remembering how they are fleeting and quite unnecessary. Eventually, this training gets into your social life, my mother is a stress machine, and she just no longer affects me on any level with screaming or shouting. I just try and soothe her when she's having an adult tantrum about some trivial thing. Many years ago I'd have got sucked in. But now... Wholesomeness. There's no burden. And I think she's a little happier for it too.

In essence, what I'm saying was said really well by The Eagles in their hit song "Take it Easy":

Take it easy, take it easy

Don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy

Lighten up while you still can

Don't even try to understand

Just find a place to make your stand

And take it easy

I realise I'm not saying anything too groundbreaking here. It's more just that I'd like to reframe a critical part of our meditation into something not

to be apprehensive of, but as a glorious opportunity for training our minds if we have open and eager hearts. Anatta is one of the most beautiful teachings of the Buddha because it is about moving towards sustainable happiness not rooted in needing worldly sensual pleasure. Personally speaking, I never really learned anatta until I realised that it wasn't a tool for somehow dissolving the self or whatever, but as an endless resource to lighten the burdensome habits I'd acquired in my life that led to dissatisfaction-stress. Along that journey, I saw the wisdom behind my actions, which led to a deepening and embodiment of insight.

I hope it can be that way for you too...

May you find happiness and joy in practice always

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[1] <https://suttacentral.net/define/anatta>

[2] For a great discussion on no-self, what it means and what it implies, read this short article by Bikkhu Thanissaro, <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/notself2.html>

[3] <https://suttacentral.net/sn44.10/en/bodhi>

[4] See chapters 1 & 4 of this book (warning, very scholarly and theoretical but could be of use): <https://buddhadhamma.github.io/> or a more modern and practical approach through Leigh Brasington's free e-book <http://sodapi.leighb.com/>

PART VI

# **Working With Difficult Material**

## Let's Talk About Hate

[Source on Reddit](#)

*April 24, 2022 — original post in r/streamentry*

*A piece on hate as it appears in the practitioner's own mind -- a topic Buddhist communities sometimes evade in favor of treating only the suffering hate causes other people. The author draws on his clinical training to argue that hate is more useful to study than to suppress.*

Hate is a biggie in whatever spiritual community you work in. We live in modern times where we can see the ugly side of hate for what it is; a wanton impersonal machine of oppression. And, in particular, new-age spiritual types tend to think hate must be rejected, abandoned, or worse -- ignored. On the lighter side, we do see a tacit rejection of hate as sensitivity to any kind of conflict. A "let everyone say their piece" mentality. This sort of hippie-trippy mindset leads to people, in my experience, having a mind made of jelly. People become too soft. Not everything is worthy of discussion. Some things simply don't need a response or demand a resolution. This isn't really a criticism of any particular community but something I see in general.

However, hate serves a very important function in our psyche. If we can learn what it is, what it is for, and muster the courage to confront those nasty parts in our minds, we can really unearth a deep reservoir of personal strength and nobility.

If ordinary hate is wanton, cruel, and capricious, then noble hate is discerning, judicious, and critical. In other words, when we learn to hate without the emotional baggage of ordinary mind and engage our wisdom, we naturally learn what is good and what is bad and can reject the latter in favour of the former. In the parlance of kamma, we easily reject that which leads to suffering and we embrace that which leads to liberation. Wisdom.

In our practise, we can start learning to employ hate as our friend and start transmuting it into its noble judicious form.

1. Start with the Noble Truths. Here's suffering; I can end the suffering by practising well.
2. We know the lessons of no-self and impermanence. Hate doesn't have to be this way or that way. It can change. I (whatever that is) have the resources to change it. We know the lessons of dukkha. When we suppose hate has to be this ordinary way, this rigidity will make us unhappy.
3. Courageously play with hate. Bring to mind a person who causes you discomfort. An enemy, a nemesis, or whatever. Play with the thoughts in your mind. The hate you feel is not at the person, the hate is a thought reacting to another thought. You can see this logically, and with enough attention and concentration, you can see this domino effect of thoughts.
4. Focus on the feeling of the ordinary hatred itself. What does hate tell you? This thought is not worth the time spent on it. The discomfort from ordinary hatred is this tension: you are focusing your mind on something which is upsetting while knowing that the focus is wasted.
5. This tension teaches you judiciousness, it's not that you hate the person (you don't really know them, it's just a mental impression of who they are). It's that you're wasting your time on the thought. Ordinary hate makes you feel uncomfortable. Judiciousness says, "turn away from this, it does not serve you (i.e., produce positive kamma)". Once we have judiciousness as an ingrained mental habit, ordinary hate doesn't even enter our minds; we simply leave the thought where it is and do not proliferate from there. But, as with any skill, we have to repeat repeat repeat, and teach ourselves the steps involved.
6. Repeat this general step with anything that causes hate, maliciousness, or ill-will. Proceed step-by-step seeing how ordinary hate leads to this noble hatred.

If this is too difficult or doesn't seem practical. A much more down-to-earth way to learn these lessons is to play with the distractions of the mind when concentrating on the breath. Really let the anger and hatred rise up to meet the mind at the time you realise you're losing or have lost concentration. This judiciousness says, "no, this path leads to disaster, it is unhappy and not conducive to liberating kamma." See how this relates to the softness I alluded to earlier? We don't entertain foolish notions and stop them dead in their tracks. Once we can do that for ourselves, imagine how easy it is to say "no" to that annoying coworker that loves dumping their unfinished work on our desk! Or that annoying in-law. Etc... It's about knowing and enforcing our boundaries.

Before you comment:

- **"Noble hate!? That sounds dumb."** Okay. Find your own terminology. I don't really care about the words themselves (in fact I deliberately used this provocative formulation to make things cleaner). I just want you to be happy and learn not to argue about words or concepts.
- **"We *should* abandon hate!"** Well, we are learning to do this via practice. Going from the mundane to the supramundane. But there's no ordinary language for the supramundane and ordinary language is all we've got. Feel free to find your own terminology when you discover this for yourself.
- **"Good and bad are relative because of 3Cs (or some other mystical notion)"** if you honestly believe that, then why are you saying this and thus implying that there's a correct/good way of seeing good/bad? Begone!

This isn't a definitive guide. As with all teachings, this is a mere jumping-off point to get the brain juices flowing. A catalyst for your own mind to play with and learn on its own.

Does anyone else want to share their experiences with hate and how they dealt with it? Or any specific challenges they are having now and need some pointers/encouragement? Feel free to share.

PART VII

# **Thought Catalogues**

# Thought Catalogue #1

[Source on Reddit](#)

*April 25, 2022 — original post in r/Arhatship*

*The first of two collected sets of shorter observations on practice.*

This is a random collection of my journaled writings about the path. May they be of use to someone.

## Getting to our peace and happiness

As someone who is thoroughly embroiled in your own little internal private world, you are incapable of appreciating your existential predicament with any measure of objectivity... That is, until you awaken to the truth. The unconditional beyond conception, time, death, birth, or fabrication.

By appreciating, apprehending, somehow glimpsing at Nibbana the truth is laid bare. You finally understand that all actions (verbal, bodily, mental) have consequences. And all you can do is act in this world. This makes this moment so important to develop skilful and wholesome activity, but also as a safe harbour. Your past brought you here. Your present takes you to a new future. Everything can change. Nothing about you or your experience is essential. Trying to lay claim to some part of experience causes suffering. Trying to cling to pleasures that will fade is futile. Resisting pain or change causes the dukkha. The beliefs and ideas about what is good or bad were all rooted in a realm of things that do not appear as they truly are, and are things that will eventually fade, are unreliable, uncertain, and bound to decay. Resting your happiness on this

realm is sure to bring dukkha for these reasons. This is the liberating truth you realise in this glimpse of the truth laid bare.

You realise: the energy you have been using to maintain certain habits has been too high relative to the rewards. Happiness only comes in trickles and only when the time is right. Like Goldilocks you have a pre-conceived notion of what happiness should be. But it is an empty construct, and the construction of your happiness took a lot of time and energy. A burden you carried hoping it would pay off. But, the biggest payoff, you realise, is in letting go of all of this acquired nonsense. Your private internal world was a fantasy you made up, a private fiction. But everything was written to impress the author. The whole story was planned out already, except the parts that took the author by surprise, so he retrofitted a story to make sense of it -- but that hurt...

The whole enterprise was doomed from the start in many ways but we didn't know because we had no incentive to look. But now we've looked because we saw something deeper, something mysterious behind the constant stream of stories about what makes me happy or not. We've only wanted happiness and peace. But we got dukkha and commotion instead. The incentive stayed the same. We simply refined it through our skilful and wholesome actions to reach a happiness beyond conditions, beyond ageing, sickness, grief, lamentation, despair, wanton lust, and endless desire. We pulled back the veil and saw the truth laid bare. Free, without compromise.

You were trying to appreciate the gravity of death and what it means, it seems as if you already knew it. It's the end of something to cling to. Death is also just an idea that we have from our point of ignorance, which is inflated through our need to want something... However, there's something beyond death which isn't clung to or craved for. This is the truth laid bare.

We found happiness and peace.

# Control Over Mind

We learn to stop being victims of conditioning, to knowing its full operation

Thus we learn to understand and liberate the unwholesome into the wholesome

We can control our conditioning, meaning we are not slaves or victims to its operation

Turning mistakes into opportunities

Turning ignorance into learning

Turning suffering into liberation

Then learning how to balance all the factors present

# Vedana Are Triggers

Another way to think of feeling (vedana) is TRIGGERS

\- Pleasant

\- Neutral

\- Unpleasant

- o All feed into a certain mode of craving/thirst

- o Craving/thirst are the results of this trigger, like a spark in the mind

- o Clinging is the fire being burned after that spark, now we're thinking about the thing that's pleasant/neutral/unpleasant, now we have a narrative saying something about that thing and what we're gonna do about it

- o Existence is the fire taking over, now the mind is fully submerged in that mode of being, we're existing a certain way

- o Birth is the action taking place

- o Death is the action ceasing

- o Dukkha is the dissatisfaction-stress we feel after the thing is gone

## Teach Me Impermanence

A man and I are in the desert. We have sticks in our hands. He says, "I'll show you what impermanence is. Try to draw a circle around the line as

I'm drawing it in the sand." He goes on, and I can't do it, he's too fast. By the time I've drawn a circle, the line is already a metre ahead. He says, "I'll slow it down". He slows down drawing the line to a snail's pace, and I now try to draw the circle. Our sticks collide. "It's impossible to do," he says, "... And that's impermanence."

## **The Nobility of Anatta**

Once we see anatta, we see that there is no essence to our being or to the being of any fabrications we may have.

Our mind used so much energy clinging and craving to an imagined essence of things

Once we see that this energy can be used to fabricate more wholesome activity, we drop the unskilful fabrication for the skilful. We can then abide more peacefully knowing that we are creating our reality and being in harmony with that creation so that conditions for dukkha are melted away. We simply let go of all this energy and effort to sustain a wrong perception. We let go of disharmonious fabrications and start fabricating in conformity with a happiness beyond conditions, beyond conception, beyond fabrications.

## **Enlightenment as a Skill of Energy Preservation**

Craving sucks because it takes up a lot of energy. Think of it this way, if this moment is unsatisfying, then you're on the prowl for something better. If not in the formed world, then in the formless world of mental chatter and imagination. That's stressful. That's dukkha. It actually takes so much energy to do this. While peace takes no energy.

This is supported by our insights into no-self and impermanence. All these sensations aren't yours or owned by you, yet you invest a lot of energy into them. And they constantly need to be refreshed by investing more. It's a vicious cycle. And it's really stressful actually. So we see that everything changes, yet we invest so much into resisting it. We see that we can't own experiences, yet we invest so much into trying to keep things. It's all very burdensome. Another way of thinking about no-self and impermanence here is that we're constantly creating (fabricating) our reality through thoughts, actions, and speech. So instead of doing stuff informed by craving, we do it instead with wisdom. And the constant fabrication becomes light and easy because it is in tune with the causes and conditions of true, lasting, and carefree satisfaction. It's the realisation that we're always cooking up our reality. It's just now we can be much more judicious with ingredients that we are using. Another way of saying it is that we're always investing with the hope of some payoff with a degree of risk involved. Now we've changed our investment strategy from seeking a long-term payoff to an immediate repeatable dividend that keeps compounding itself.

This is why the Buddha's path is meant to be easy in the beginning, middle, and end. You're not smashing the breaks and tearing apart your reality. You're taking your foot off the accelerator because you realise it is unnecessary. You're dropping the weight you were saddling yourself with, which was the entire chain of dependent arising.

Digha Nikaya at DN-28:10, the "Modes of Progress". There were four modes of progress:

1. Painful meditation with slow comprehension is Poor Progress.
2. Painful meditation with quick comprehension is Poor Progress.
3. Pleasant meditation with slow comprehension is Poor Progress.
4. Pleasant meditation with quick comprehension is considered excellent Progress

Why is this the case? Because we're dropping unnecessary things for our happiness! That craving you have is like a heavy bag you're carrying. While Nibbana is like a shadow that follows you without you needing to do anything.

Part VII · Thought Catalogues

## Thought Catalogue #2

Source on Reddit

*May 6, 2022 — original post in r/Arhatship The second installment, posted two weeks later.*

*Thought Catalogue #2*

## **Craving is a burden we have picked up:**

Craving is a burden that we've picked up

\- How heavy is a car? 0kg until you try to pick it up, and then it's two tonnes!

\- We drop the burden we're trying to carry

\- We drop the story we've told ourselves about why we're carrying the burden

\- We then drop the thought of wanting to burden ourselves

\- We then drop the intention to burden

\- We then drop the emotional pull toward burdening

\- We then drop the triggers of the emotions for burdening ourselves

\- We are then free of the conditions for creating burdens

Desire = fascination with the weight, wanting to be the person to carry, wanting that weight

Aversion = burdened by the weight, being burdened by the thought of needing to carry

Restlessness = fussing about the weight, overthinking, playing "what-if?", etc...

Dullness = not appreciating what weight is to begin with, how it feels, what it is, etc...

Lack of faith = not appreciating that we can unburden our mind of wanting to pick up weights that we don't need and wanting to drop

weights that are on us.

## Buddha-Rumi

The Buddha would say: “Your task is not to seek for satisfaction, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

## Distinctness

The mind pulls into layers of distinctness

```
∅ Me, distinct, centre
    ○ Me, doing something
        § Me, doing something to get
something
            □ Me, doing something
to get something, to feel something
```

At each layer, there are levels of distinctness, the mind clings to the distinctness at each level. Our job is to unravel this mess, lay it out, and like a calm and practised surgeon, remove everything that causes dissatisfaction.

## Being the winner

Meditation is often framed as a fixer for things. "I have so-and-so problem which I'm working on." We start with this barrier to our own happiness and salvation-liberation. This is a loser mindset. A mindset that says you lack something and need to get something. There's nothing to get that's more important than realising you have won by simply being

aware and it doesn't matter what you are aware of. So long as you are aware.

Instead of going some place or meditating or making liberation a job, enjoy courageously living one breath at a time while in a seated posture. And be aware of that. And you've won.

## **Everything we're doing is a feedback loop to itself**

I calmly breathe, which calms my mind, which makes more calm breathing and so on.

I speak to myself with a caring loving tone, which makes me feel loved, which makes me speak more lovingly to myself.

I let go of unnecessary burdens, which makes me feel less burdened and makes me want to drop more burdens as I go.

Follow this path to liberation.

PART VIII

# **Recommended Reading**

# Recommended Books for Meditation and Purification

[Source on Reddit](#)

*August 15, 2021 — original post in r/u\_Ok-Witness1141 A brief reading list, useful as a sketch of the lineage the author was working in.*

*Purification*

<https://imgur.com/a/7inCNI>

The first pile of books are for meditation. Awakening, reducing suffering and learning how to navigate the mind. Each book is useful for some aspect of learning how to awaken. For me, this list is pretty exhaustive for a pragmatically orientated meditation practitioner. The collection taken together provides for both Shamatha (concentration) and Vipashyana (insight) practices.

The second pile of books are for general mental purifications and self-help. During meditation it is very normal for difficult emotions and disturbing content to crop up -- sometimes referred to as the "Dark Night of the Soul". These books help with dealing with those aspects skillfully and maturely. They also offer a lot of wisdom for general self-help improvement.

I hope you find this list helpful.

All the best to you on your journey :)

PART IX

# **Process and Content**

# Psychology and Spirituality

[Source on Reddit](#)

*October 12, 2021 — reply in r/streamentry thread: "Practice Updates Questions And General Discussion"*

What is psychological work? What is spiritual work? How are they related? Are they ever in conflict?

Psychology is about fixing issues of *content*

Spiritual work is about understanding issues of *process*

They're highly interrelated things, but, at the fundamental level, spirituality is a deeper process than psychological work. And, in real honesty, a lot of spiritual work is done via psychology. And I hate the term "spiritual" work, but whatever, it's about realising the fundamental processes that drive this whole thing called "life" and "experience" or "phenomena" (so many terms, pick your favourite).

Content means we're looking at certain issues and why they're important. This assumes the experience of these issues is fundamental, and the issues themselves as experience have keys to understanding them, which is another experience. But, fundamentally, psychology aims to look at a problem and, roughly put, understand and then fix it. That's it.

Process means we're looking at how things work. The deep bits n' pieces that work to create our experience. We don't assume anything is really fundamental to the thing. And so we work to understand the thing from as many angles as possible (the 3Cs, Jhanas, fruitions, paths, POI, etc...). Assuming there's an end-point, lmao, there's no more to the experience than the experience itself. A full appreciation of the process, as it is. The so-called collection of experiences (AKA: attainments) is really just the appreciation of the process, the directness of it, from various angles. Obviously, this reduces suffering, because appreciating the process

means we don't fall into the trap. Understanding experience as it is, rather than how we'd like it to be is very freeing.

The reason why when we do spiritual work we uncover psychological bullcrap is that because in looking at the process, the content itself first needs to be digested. Because process assumes that experiences are nothing more than things to be directly experienced, the content itself needs to be experienced. And that's painful. Reliving the day your dog dies to fully appreciate the process of how that memory creates mind/body traces of sadness/depression/grief/guilt/etc., is tough. That's why you have phenomena like the dark night, etc. And also the reason why Jhana is so groovy. Knowing the experience and how it works, its traps, etc., lets you navigate it to the good stuff.

Are they ever in conflict? Probably not, if you're doing either one or both together right. One hand washes the other, both hands wash the face, y'know? If they are in conflict, it's usually some form of defence mechanism being activated, an unconscious conflict going on (non-experienced content impacting consciousness), or some other cognitive bias going on (self-preservation is a big one). Defence mechanisms are tough because they're conditioned responses to protect ourselves -- we want to be safe. And that's the fundamental ignorance of it all, you ignore all these maladapted but fundamentally compassionate things about yourself, but these very protection mechanisms fuel your discontent, and with more discontent arises the greater need for more protection from its unpleasantness. So, in learning how experience works, you unravel all these entangled webs trying to protect you. And that makes you sad too, because you realise all of these habits formed to protect you without knowing *why* or *how* they were actually doing it -- a Faustian bargain, of sorts. Or, like that children's poem about the lady who swallowed a fly. You're meditating, and realising you swallowed an emotional crocodile to deal with what was initially a dust particle! Damn, you really were a mess! But it was with love that some part of you got you to swallow the crocodile, so you forgive it, and keep going on.

Also, who cares about the Pali Canon? I mean, it's great. But when I talk about meditation, it's about the best technology to understand an issue pertaining to your experiential reality and its contribution to your experience of suffering. It's like Martial Arts purists, they're great, but as recent times have shown, Mixed Martial Arts kinda blows any one single martial art out of the water. It's not even close. Because having a larger arsenal of tools at your disposal to understand your fundamental construction of reality is better than only constraining yourself to one tool. Also, textual adherence is nice, but when someone says "I had X Y Z question about my experience in my meditation practice" and someone quotes the Pali Canon or any text to rebut their experience, downplay it, or otherwise fit it into a box, it's gonna be met with some negative reinforcement from me. But, if the Pali Canon can be used to empower our experiences, has good tools to understand the thing, helps, etc., then I'm all for it. But about 60% of the time it's used to disempower or pigeonhole people; unproductive!

Yeah, psychology is rapidly evolving. Thankfully, psychology, in trying to hang with the cool kids (biology) and tries to be scientific, so it doesn't hold onto dogmatic bullcrap as much (although they have their dogma, such as Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy worship). Not that CBT is bad, but it's not the only game in town. And it's a massive coping strategy because any therapy is only effective as far as the therapist-client relationship is good; doesn't matter which type of therapy you whip out. If they don't trust you, they're not gonna fix it. Which circles back to the direct experience thing and compassion thing. If you can't love another human being despite their flaws via understanding those very same coping/defence mechanisms in yourself, then I don't think your therapy is going to be as good as others who can. This goes for any type of psychological disorder. I won't rant about psychiatry, because I think everyone already hates them -- despite the fact that they're well-intentioned dorks with very little social skills trying to excel in a field that requires intimate emotional contact with others. Medicines are their coping strategy. Again, nobody will take your medicine unless they trust

you, and no, your fancy degree and institutional credo won't make 'em like you.

I think, eventually some dork (maybe me, I'm trying) will write something about process vs content in psychotherapeutic environments and meditation to try and bridge the gap, by getting psychologists on board with helping clients understand the fundamental construction of their reality. However, meditation also does offer up some deep and uncomfortable existential truths that 95% of humanity hate hearing about. Imagine how bad our economy would get if people realised that their happiness boils down to a fundamental ignorance of a choice to become attached/aversive to certain stimuli. Oh boy.

This is all my 2c as a psych in training and humble meditation teacher. My meditation practice has helped me more in my psychology practice than the other way around. Again, because process is deeper than content. But there have been times where psychology work has helped the spiritual, but it's rarer.

PART X

**The Three Characteristics,  
Revisited**

# Seeing the 3Cs Clearly

[Source on Reddit](#)

*May 27, 2021 — reply in r/streamentry thread: "Insight What Does It Actually Mean To Investigate"*

Oof, the big question, really. I could go into a few ways at looking at it, here's how I do it in my Vipashyana practice, and this is how I generally guide people in seeing the 3Cs clearly, progressing from stage to stage. My perspective is that Emptiness is the king insight that binds the rest together. But impermanence is the workhorse insight. Suffering insight is the toughest pill to swallow.

With that being said, here's my little crash course on seeing the 3Cs clearly and unequivocally:

## 1. Impermanence

- Shallow view: notice how things are transitory. Life lasts a short time. Pleasant and unpleasant moods or emotions are over eventually. Nothing really lasts forever.
- Deeper view: notice how fragile our perspective is in time. The very moment, now, as it is, is so hard to grasp. By the time you're grasping the beginning of this moment, the end is already here. Time is so slippery. Our mind is constantly constructing "the moment" out of fragments of sensations as they appear, kind of strobing into and out of existence. By seeing this occurring, we can investigate how impermanent everything really is. Nothing lasts at all. No sensation lasts. The beginning of the end is already here. The end of the beginning is already begun. Etc.

## 2. Suffering

- Shallow view: every sensation is kind of a bummer. We experience pleasure, but soon enough it's gone, and we're sad. Or we

experience pain, and that makes us feel like crap too. It's just an inescapable merry-go-round of pleasure-pain-pleasure-pain, nonstop. As soon as I get what I want, I'll want more. But if I didn't get it, to begin with, I'm gonna whine all day! There's just no deep core universal all-applicable satisfaction to be found, no universal ointment to soothe this deep itch in my psyche that's crying out for comfort!

- Deeper view: suffering is cultivated through the view of sensations and how they present themselves. Knowing the "how" of their presentation is important. What is it really about pain that causes suffering? Try and split them apart, can you notice the suffering "there" and the pain as being "here" (or vice versa)? Our minds are conditioned to expect suffering based on time, conditionality-causality, and pain. Look at how time creates suffering; no sensation lasts even for an assumed amount of time. Look at how pain causes suffering; we believe the pain is more than the pain, and so we struggle against it rather than accepting the pain as it is. Look at how conditionality-causality causes suffering; we are the victims of our thinking, we think just because we do X, that we'll get Y. This is not the case, there are causes and conditions outside of us that our minds refuse to accept. Learn these sources of suffering intimately so you can be free of them.

### **3. Emptiness / No-self**

- Shallow view: nothing is really in your control. You cannot be your mind, because if you were your mind you could focus on this breath without distraction forever. You are not your body, because if you were your body you could grow your hair at will, stop aches and pains at will, grow taller, shrink, change your appearance, etc. But you cannot, so "you" cannot be either your mind and body. Know this intimately by exploring the mind, and watching how the mind works. Notice the things that draw attention away from focus, what are they about? What is this mind really doing in these moments?

- Deeper view: no sensation is made of itself. A chair is not made of chair, we know this, it makes sense. Explore an emotion or pain sensation. Notice how the sensations of pain in your butt aren't actually made of butt pain; there's some pressure here, some tingling there, maybe some other sensations rippling out, but there's no "core" place to find the pain. There's simply no pain to be found in the sensations making up pain. But now you go to the sensation of selfhood. Selfhood has many sensations that make it up, yet no one sensation is you. They're all fluxing and doing their own thing. Notice this intimately. Similar to pain, you may find sensations of thinking, planning, emoting, remembering, noticing, attending, abiding, relaxing, agitation, etc. but none of these things are you, they cannot be you. How do you know this? Because yesterday you were not angry, yet you were still conventionally you. Today you are angry, and yet there is a conventional feeling that you still exist. Notice this tension intimately and progressively disidentify with any sensation that could possibly be felt to be yours, under your control, a core, an essence, a stable identity, etc. and accept them all as the vast kaleidoscopic manifestation of your selfhood at any one moment. Notice how the mind, jumps out of this raw potential to make itself moment to moment, "I am X" and now "I am Y". These are not problems, the self is not a problem, you do exist. But the way you think you exist is the problem. Combine this with the insight of impermanence to go deeper still on this insight.
- Deeper view 2: notice the mind and its inherent emptiness. How does it present itself? How does the mind create reality? Notice, that as soon as reality is encountered, that the mind instantly sets itself apart from it. However, there is a tension here; mind creates the reality that it sees, and yet, the mind is part of the very reality that supports its creation to begin with. Where does that leave the mind and its belief of being unique and independent of reality? What does this say about how we conceive of reality? What does this say about the thoughts of "mind = inside" and "reality = outside"? Notice this tension in the inherent belief system of the mind and realise the games the mind plays in convincing itself that it is fully real,

separate, and abides against the rules of reality. Notice how when the mind realises impermanence, suffering, and emptiness, that these characteristics are also fundamental characteristics of the universe itself, as the mind itself is part of the universe.

- Deeper view 3: If no sensation is made of itself, as the definition of emptiness states, that means emptiness itself is also empty. Notice how in the noticing of emptiness, there is no tangible emptiness to be seen other than in the object as it is presented in relation to the characteristic.

Where does the observation happen and the concordant changes in perspective happen... Well, if we take the insights to their radical conclusion, where do you think it happens!? I'll leave for you to decide after you've completed the path... The answer changes a lot while exploring these characteristics, and it all becomes very amusing near the end! :)

Hope this helps! Let me know if you have any questions, I'd love to refine my expression of these ideas better, so please challenge me if you wish! :)

# No-Self and Impermanence as Insights

[Source on Reddit](#)

*No-Self and Impermanence as Insights*

I think you're mostly on the right track. **The path is very simple but not easy.** The simple part is getting a lay of the land. Yep, impermanence means stuff starts and ends. Yep, no-self means that there's no essence to anything. But these statements have MASSIVE consequences on your mental life, if understood subtly and deeply. Simply understanding the statements logically is a fool's game. Simply wanting to observe these things in action is the first step in a very long and personal journey ("the path").

I will outline a few of my thoughts on these insights and what they mean and how they might help your practice in reducing dukkha. **Warning: not theoretical, not religious or dogmatic, not from a textbook or scripture.** Purely from my own experience.

## **About anatta.**

Atta = soul. An = not. It means "not soul". There is no soul or essence to your being. However, it's not about erasing your selfhood or destroying your ego, despite what some may say. It's not about proving that there's no Self. That's just another view to store in your library of views.

It's about seeing the individual mind moments of contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, etc... that lead to your dissatisfaction-stress. It's about realising that the mind's natural tendency to possess, try to possess, identify with, or otherwise claim sensations as "Me, Mine, or I" is unfounded and leads to dissatisfaction-stress.

The non-essence of your being is about realising potential and constellation. Potential is all the things the mind can be. Constellation is all the things the mind makes itself. It's about this ebb and flow of

fabrication and de-fabrication. The mind makes itself a fortress and guards it with special sacred ideas, and then that fortress is swept away and the guards die. This hurts. When the mind is attuned to its own pattern of fabricating itself a reality, and de-fabrication of that reality, it no longer feels the dissatisfaction-stress of having to let that reality fall to the wayside. E.g., "I am the business dude". You get home but it's no longer business time. It's family time. Are you going to demand your partner hits the KPI of one dinner per night? Or say that their key deliverables are lacking? BUT on the other hand, shifting from business-you to family-you is kind of grating, because you've been going at it for 8-10 hours. A deep realisation and mastery of no-self is being able to shift those realities smoothly without any of the friction or stress. In your meditation your mind may jump from one fabricated reality to another, such as thinking about boobies and then realising that actually was meant to be concentrating on the breath -- fabrication, de-fabrication, and fabrication. Eventually, the mind will jump to a new thing.

Regarding the observer, which seemingly cannot be separated from the sensations. What does that say about the observer if it is inseparable from the sensations it seemingly observes? This is a mental overlay our mind makes on sensations; to possess them. The inseparability is itself a big clue on what this observer really is. Also, play around with the sensation of the observer, it was designed for a purpose. It makes our lives feel continuous, contiguous, and unified. They are anything but. Just more feelings and ideas wrapped within each other.

### **About impermanence.**

As you say, everything is coming and going. So, if everything is coming and going, what's the use of trying to hold onto one thing over another? It's another way of looking at no-self. Okay, business time is over; no point of holding onto that. Family time starts now — time to shift. If you're clinging to business-you while it's family time, you can't enjoy family time.

Impermanence is about riding the waves of life, within yourself and the environment.

It's about making the most of every moment and making them count as if the next second you will die (and, you actually do, in a way!). It's about appreciating the time you have right here, right now, and not letting it pass.

It's also about attention. There are billions of sensations happening all the time, competing for a scarce resource of your attention. What are you paying attention to? Is it wise and conducive to freedom and attaining your deep values? Or is it fleeting, a fairweather friend, something that has little to give and much to take?

You can watch all the frames and flickering you like. But there also has to be the understanding that this means there's nothing to hold onto in that mess, other than what is wise. What is wise to hold on to? If impermanence is the only unchanging thing... Then what? This isn't a logical game. It's something to be understood pre-verbally/pre-rationally.

### **Seeing either.**

No-self and impermanence are **INSIGHTS** not observations. They are to be **known**, fully. *No-self and impermanence are not things to be only observed, but understood, consciously and unconsciously. They're to be acted upon.* They become instinctual, almost. In actual fact, I'd say that observing no-self or impermanence or dukkha is really just the first step in a very long process of ingraining them into your life, and living according to their wisdom.

And that takes repetition, it takes courage, and it takes grit.

Ultimately, no-self and impermanence prepare you for the greatest journey that'll happen to you, the greatest letting go -- your **death**. *If one has let go of life and death as aspects that condemn us, they are truly deathless.* That's where no-self and impermanence can take you. If you were that cancer patient with the attainments, you'd say, "I'm on another

great journey and I'll savour it." If there is no essence to the death, you are free to fabricate an understanding of it as you please. If each moment arises and passes, then your attention on joy leads to more joy.

**Don't fool yourself into a phenomenological view of the attainment.**

They are incredibly subtle, and deep, and infuse themselves into our entire mental lives.

**The path is very simple, not easy.**

**Enjoy the journey, it looks like you're in a good place and ready to make some big strides in furthering the ending of dukkha.**

**Best wishes and regards**

PART XI

# **The Mental Prison**

# Slave to the Grind

[Source on Reddit](#)

*May 3, 2022 — reply in r/streamentry thread: "Practice Updates Questions And General Discussion"*

Feels like the reason for me not wanting to work, is something I'm not yet ready to admit to myself. I want someone else to point it out to me, huh, that's interesting.

You're a slave to the grind. This enlightenment trip you're on is just another "job" to distract you from the other one. And vice versa. More and more jobs.

Part of low self-esteem is believing that everything is a slog, tough, and a burden to get -- kind of like a job. Self-development is a job. Work is a job. Being happy is a job. etc... "I can't be a successful so-and-so without sacrificing X Y Z from my life" or "Sure, I'm happy, but I had to work so hard to get it." are the typical thoughts that pop up. Nothing can come free, everything *must* be paid for.

It's this transactional nature of your thinking which is letting you down. And these transactions are always some form of hope for the future rooted in hopelessness in the present.

- This job has nothing to offer me.
- If I get enlightenment then I can do x y z with my life.

Even basic psychological literature shows that people who cannot celebrate tiny steps on the way to a larger goal never feel satisfied, even when they reach the larger goal.

The trick is to flip the script. **Each moment is a happy satisfying choice to be something\*\*\*.\*\*\*** Once you get rid of the transaction (I'm doing X

to get Y), all you're left with is these little joyful moments where you are either:

1. Being skilful, which is great because you're reinforcing these great mental habits that lead to liberation
2. Being unskillful, which is great because you're noticing these great opportunities to re-shape your habits to lead towards liberation

Either way, you're a winner! The trick is to just be aware. It requires no payment. There's no hope of getting something other than what you have right now. There's no hopelessness because now it's all Gucci.

The problem is that the mind has essentially created this cage around your happiness. This cage is conditions. The conditions are reinforced through habit and become part of your character. Part of the path is learning to ease these conditions. Erasing dissatisfaction-stress (*dukkha*) is about learning to cultivate *unconditional* satisfaction. Dissatisfaction always comes from conditions (if X, then happy; sometimes we don't get X). Unconditionality cannot be dissatisfied because there are no barriers (just happy). This can be applied to any emotion or thought. Pride? If I need X to feel pride, there'll surely arise a situation where I don't obtain X and I'll feel ashamed. What if I feel pride no matter what? Proud to be here. Proud to be courageously living one breath at a time. PS: this reference to a "cage" is where the idea of "fetters" comes from. Fetters are: "a chain or manacle used to restrain a prisoner, typically placed around the ankles." You can see where I'm going with this... Right? You are both the ankle and the chain, if you can realise it. Realising it is 80% of the job. The other 20% is easy and fun. Once you see how you've trapped yourself with this little *zugzwang*, making a move in reference to the cage will always make you feel worse. Ignoring it, acquiring something to distract, or being angry with it, are all just more *zugzwangs*, like cutting the nose to spite the face.

Find a way to relate to these ideas at a pre-/un-conscious level and you'll be golden. It's about being a friend to yourself. Friends make their lives easier for one another (which is why I think *metta\** is so potent). Putting

conditions on your very own happiness is paradoxical in a sense because there really should be nothing stopping you from feeling happy all the time no matter what because it's there for you all the time. As the great philosopher-poet DJ Khaleed would say, "congratulations, you played yourself". That's dukkha. You keep it out of reach due to these conditions and keep playing yourself. That's enslavement, it turns happiness into a job rather than something to savour and cultivate unconditionally. This is the culmination of knowing no-self/anatta. You are neither essentially happy nor sad, which means you can, at some level, choose to be one or the other. This works for anything. Whatever thought you're having is not a thought that defines you, you have many thoughts that make "you", which means they are all optional, at a level. And even that optionality is optional itself (which is why I said, "at a level"). It's options all the way down. Understanding the profundity of this and how deep it runs means you can basically start re-arranging the mind and how it relates to everything and itself. And, obviously, this is about impermanence too, because all of this can change. And, obviously, this is about dukkha too, because assuming you cannot change or assuming some essence leads to stress-dissatisfaction.

\*The reason why Metta is so powerful is because it gets us intimate with being a friend to all the mental phenomena, processes, and critters lurking in our mind. If we can be friendly to them, they'll be friendly to us in turn. People think its about generating goodwill for a person or whatnot, but that's impossible. You don't know a single soul other than the mental phenomena/processes that fabricate the thought of that person in your mind. With this knowledge you can apply Metta to any/all mental phenomena/process that arises and let the entire mental system become friendly with itself. Total joy ensues.

So, to finally circle back to your original point, the thing you can't admit to yourself is that you are the architect and guard of your own mentally created prison. You want someone else to point it out because you lack the objectivity to see it within yourself (yet!), but that will come with skill, some dedication to practice, and some honesty. So here I am, pointing at it, using language to convey what I mean; the equivalent of

trying to shoot a moving target in the dark with a gun that misfires 99.99% of the time.

# Fear of Stream Entry

[Source on Reddit](#)

## *Fear of Stream Entry*

From what I've read here, I'd say you're definitely thinking in the right direction, but without nuance. But you're *very close*. But that's just thinking. To really get to see the story being played out, you'll need to put in the work and meditate. There's no secret sauce.

At the end of the day, gaining liberation is mostly about disidentifying with any one sensation. You realise the mind is playing a complex game of "prove to me that I exist", where the mind proposes problem after problem, endlessly seeking solution after solution. This then causes layers of abstraction, fabrication, identification, defence mechanisms, greed, anger, ignorance, etc.. And so the mind goes on hoarding experiences, sensations, thoughts, memories, etc. with the hope of proving itself to be "real" and unchanging. It clings to the sensations because the game seems so important. The game just goes on and on; problem, solution, problem, and solution, with no end. But there never was a solution, and there never was a problem. It was just a game... It was always just a game that the mind decided to play. It was all just a sensation in awareness. It was all just awareness in a sensation.

As a counterpoint, I'd suggest looking at it this way:

- There's no "working through", there's only "working with" or "working alongside" sensations.
- There's no mastery because there's no starting, no stopping, no sensation is ever "it".
- Similarly, there's no "trying" and no "effort". They're just sensations.

As for your identification with fear. Sit with the feeling and watch it move. The mind holds onto the game it plays because it feels safe. It's really comforting. The fear it holds onto is no different. You don't need to confront the sensations. Just be with them. Sit with them for as long as it takes for the mind to fully understand them. Don't push, pull, bend, or try to break anything. Everything is unfolding and working naturally. Just be with it. However, if you have a psychological issue, this complicates the discussion, and I'd ask you to not take my advice without first seeking professional help. Meditation should always be done from a position of mental health. Meditation is like running, yes, it's a healthy activity, but you wouldn't get someone to run who has a torn muscle; it must heal first before doing the good thing. Everything has a place and context is vital. Health leads to health.

My day-to-day experience: It's nice just watching life happen to this body/mind and not getting caught up in anything. I still feel emotions, I still think thoughts, etc. but nothing really gets "stuck" or makes the mind cling to it. All the sensations are just in their own place, awareness too; and they both realise one other. Sensations, when concentrated on, can self-liberate the mind. Everything is peaceful and chaotic at the same time in this field of open awareness.

Politically, I think we can help each other more, learn to really understand each other's perspectives better, which will lead to better decisions. There's nothing much more to it. Ideologies are more layers of abstraction and identification that hinder us from seeing ourselves and others as genuine humans with universally similar goals, hopes, and aspirations. You know when Jesus was being crucified and said: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"? That really is the first answer to hate, greed, anger, violence, etc... The second answer is obviously putting that into action, which is education. The more perspectives we can learn, the better we'll become as a species.

Relationships: I enjoy most people, everyone has a unique place. Nothing much else to add. People are not the problem, for the most part, we're

great and trying our best in most cases. We get sucked into ideas that make us do evil, either by our own design or others'.

Phenomenologically, the actual experience of SE was very underwhelming but beyond description. It's well worth it, even if it takes you a lifetime to achieve. Abiding in the peaceful chaos of life is very grounding, humbling, and loving. The later paths just deepen the initial insight. I heard Kenneth Folk describe stream-entry as getting a bucket that then gets used to hold or contain the insights from later paths. I can vibe with that idea. One way I personally like thinking about it is like a computer and a new operating system; the mind installs the root program at stream-entry, and then later paths are like DLC, expansions, or upgrades with new UI and patches for faster access, better programs, etc.

I hope I helped, cleared up some things, and inspired others.

All the best on your journey, my friend. Be well :)

PART XII

# **Mindfulness as Intention**

## You Do Not Lack the Capacity

[Source on Reddit](#)

*June 25, 2021 — reply in r/TheMindIlluminated thread: "Im Ready To Give Up But Im Also Curious As To"*

Aha! Ok, so generally, people either progress quickly from stage 1-4 or from stages 4-7. Generally, if you're quick in one batch, you'll be slow in the other! So that might be your issue here.

Intentions are the core building block of mindfulness. Mindfulness is about connecting your aims with what you're currently doing. Say, you want to make a milkshake, then reaching to put in the ketchup would be bad for this goal. And say, this happens to you IRL; you'd notice that you've got ketchup in your hands, and stop the motions putting it closer to the blender! Same with the breath; your intention is to observe it at a set point. This is your aim. So what actions support this aim? Generally speaking, remaining alert, minimizing distractions, and concentrating on the sensations as they arise and dissipate. So, when you lose focus of the breath, you bring it back to observing the breath. And when you see a distraction popping up to grab attention, you swat it away!

**YOU DO NOT LACK THE CAPACITY FOR MEDITATION.** If you could write this post on Reddit, you know what intentions are. Nobody has properly explained to you what mindfulness is in a plain English pragmatic way. It's not some magical Buddha quality that you get after thousands of hours of meditation. You have it. You had an intention to write, and you avoided the actions that made you not write the OP, and you emphasised the actions that led you to write the post. That was mindfulness in action. You were mindful of how your actions related to the goal at hand. You know what intentions are! Most intentions just happen to be set by us automatically, so in meditation, it requires you to be a little more conscious. But take heart with the fact that you can do it, you've been doing it for ages, and you can expand this skill further!

You realise that you're distracted. You accept it (as it's your current reality), and return to the task at hand. Simple really. That's the essence of TMI basically. Realise you are distracted, accept, and realign your actions to the goal. Notice a potential distraction, accept it in the field of awareness, and realign your observation to the breath. Returning to the breath should be simple. Find a place that you can observe it. It's not hiding from you. You have tonnes of sensory neurons there. Start out observing the breath in some big area, like the entire inside of the nostrils and work from there. Start breathing harder and more labourously if you need to, in order to bring out the sensations to the foreground of attention. Don't be shy to also make your attention a little more active in searching for breath sensations. You can look for it, look around the nose. Scan the nose. Try and hone into an area.

As for confusion. It happens. I get confused all the time and I've been meditating for ages. Confusion is a gift and full of insights that teach us about how life works:

- You'll never really know how life works. It's always changing.
- You'll never have "the answer" to it all. Because the questions are always changing!
- Nothing will ever be "it", there will never be a resting point for you to say "ok I'm satisfied now!" because everything is constantly moving in life, changing, etc... Today you're hungry, so food is the answer. Tomorrow you think you're overweight, so less food is the answer. And so it goes...
- Confusion is the realisation that we haven't realised the fundamental characteristics of our sensory experience yet. Don't worry, you will. You're learning the lesson right now.

And I think a good dose of humility is worthwhile here. Overthinking is the mental manifestation of the "controlling/overbearing" personality style. You need to map out every possibility, investigate every nook and cranny for a counterfactual, analyse all future potentialities. Keep it simple. Realise that it's just your mind chattering to itself, it's been your

mind all along. If you're thinking these thoughts, and it's all in your mind, the situation is basically talking to yourself. You know the answer already, you have that knowledge already -- it's in your mind, right? You're just repeating it to yourself... Why? What assumed psychological need are you comforting right now by repeating/overthinking/chattering away with these thoughts? What is your mind obsessed with and chattering about. Really be humble here. You're human, we all need to feel safe. Find out why your mind is moving the way it does.

I hope some of this advice helps. Feel free to reach out via DMs here on Reddit, and I'd be happy to give you some more advice, clarify, or whatever! Happy travels, be well! :)

# Mindfulness in Everyday Life

[Source on Reddit](#)

*Mindfulness in Everyday Life*

- “It’s pleasurable for its own sake.” I hate to say this – but no, it isn’t! At least not for me. Yes, if I’m mindful while I’m brushing my teeth, I get a more intense, vivid sense of the bristles etc.... But why do I want that???

Mindfulness sucks because it really highlights all the traps our minds lay down for us down the road. So it's tough being awake and just seeing how badly adapted you are to this life you've made. Just so much suffering. Consider for a moment why you need the podcast to get through brushing your teeth or some other mundane activity. What is it that makes you need the distraction so much? Answering that question is more important (for now) than being present! Also, you say you have no problem absorbing yourself into a pleasurable activity without mindfulness. But then you obviously state here you have a problem absorbing yourself in a non-pleasurable activity like brushing your teeth (because you need the podcast). So obviously, the absorption is very conditional and predicated not on the activity itself. After all, the pleasure you feel is a function of your expectations and the execution of the activity. So part of the absorption itself is predicated on your mental state (expectations). So what can mindfulness do for you in this situation? It'll be able to get you questioning the assumptions and expectations your mind has made about pleasure, pain, and everything in between. What is the goal of the activity? (Is brushing your teeth really about pleasure? Hmmmmmm...)

- “It will deepen your meditation practice.” OK, but at this point, the whole thing is kind of circular...

Nope, the circular logic is fine. It's like any other mental habit; the more you're angry in one situation, you're more likely to use anger in the future to solve issues. The more you daydream about escaping reality, the more you'll daydream in general. Whether these habits are good or bad is not the question, they're just habits. Mindfulness is the same way. The more you use it, the more it'll grow, and the more it grows, the more you'll use it. Whether you decide to use it to grow it or grow it to use it is up to your perspective :). So... What's the end goal? Mastery of your mind. Not being a slave to your habits, not being drawn into toxic or unwholesome thoughts. Being able to cultivate happiness wherever and whenever it's required. Replacing mindlessness with mindfulness takes a long time to achieve because we're so used to letting our mind run on autopilot with its built-in assumptions and expectations. And some of these expectations and assumptions can be about mindfulness itself (but I'll let you work on this out yourself).<sup>3</sup> "It will help you unlock the benefits of meditation in the rest of your life." By which I mean focus, mood, detachment etc. – you know, all the things we were promised. Can anyone confirm that this is true? If so, how much do I have to do it?

It's true. Here's a [little summary](#) of how my life looks with meditation... I'm deep into the path. Maybe 2000+ hours of meditation on cushion total, but I've lost count. That's not including mindfulness in daily life. How much do you need to practice isn't possible to know until you've reached the end goal. I'm still finding out how much practice I need to reach complete mastery :) Don't force mindfulness off the cushion if you cannot do it. It'll happen naturally. Mindfulness is a skill that we learn. And the thing about it is that it's applicable everywhere and anywhere. Compare it to driving a car. Okay, when you were learning to drive, your instructor probably kept quiet and didn't talk to you much. Because you were learning. A skill was growing, and the attention required was high. To talk would be to interrupt you. But as you got better, you could talk freely with your driving instructor about whatever because driving had now become an ingrained skill. This is the same as mindfulness. Don't try and push it too far. It'll ease into your life naturally, and you'll be able to have and cultivate mindfulness all the time. Be patient with yourself and

trust the process. You'll get benefits. 30-45mins per day is the minimum, I'd say. Mindfulness is only competing with other mental resources now because the attention required to sustain the skill is high -- this is a good sign that your mind is learning and developing the skill. This is very normal and to be expected. Go easy on yourself; this isn't an easy thing that comes all at once. Of course, I'd also question the whole assumption of "inherently rewarding" regarding mindfulness; that's just a mental game your mind is playing... for now... Based on assumptions and expectations which it has constructed.

- I know some people will respond to this post by saying, “Your mindset is totally wrong .....

Everyone gets something out of the spiritual path. And yeah, you could do with a little patience, some relaxation, and some trust. If you're practicing well, if you're diligent, the results will come eventually. Plenty of people experience the benefit of meditation every day. It works. It will work for you. I have a feeling that no data or spreadsheet would actually satisfy you because you keep talking about how your experience doesn't seem to be matching your expectations or assumptions about the path. Because this is really a case of lacking faith and feeling the doubt creeping in, you want some reassurance rather than hard data. But the proof is in the pudding: meditation has been transmitted since Buddha's time (2500+ years of transmission) with countless success stories for monastics and non-monastics alike, and now meditation is being taken on by modern psychology as a tool to increase happiness and reduce mental anguish. Put into this perspective: meditation has outlasted a tonne of languages that were spoken in its time of conception (e.g. Latin or ancient Egyptian), and language is a fundamental part of human existence! What more do you want!?! :)

Take it easy and let things happen. All in good time!

## Forty-Five Minutes

[Source on Reddit](#)

*June 28, 2021 — comment in r/TheMindIlluminated*

*An opinionated short note on practice duration. "45 minutes is the golden standard minimum."*

45mins is the golden standard minimum meditation time where we can expect progress beyond stages 2/3/4. Just how it works. Like any other skill. If I told you I was learning how to code python but I only practised 15mins a day, you'd reasonably expect me to master the craft by my late 80s. Same with meditation; 45mins is just the bare minimum for progress to occur.

Goenka is a purist and a dogmatist. He claims to adhere strictly to "pure Dhamma" (whatever that means). The irony is that he borrows his technique from the Anapanasati and Satthipathana Suttas; then goes and ignores like 80% of the source material of those Suttas. The Buddha spoke of 4 postures for meditation; sitting, standing, reclining, and walking. So Goenka can, with all due respect, be ignored at all times other than when you're at his meditation retreat and practicing his technique.

I generally ignore people claiming:

- "This is the proper way to meditate"
- "This technique is the only technique you need"
- "My technique is the purest Buddhist technique from the Buddha himself"
- "Only this technique can give you *true liberation*. The others are fake/simulated liberation!"
- "I'm allowed to be your only teacher!"

This kind of stuff is pretty harmful and generally manipulative at a subtle level. Meditation is a beautiful thing and a lot of people seek it out for the answer, making them vulnerable and easy to exploit. Goenka, bless his heart, thinks he's helping by simplifying it all, but he's really just gatekeeping meditation practice. Adherents of his technique can be very cultish. The saddest part is that he's now dead, and so all these people have hitched their wagon to a meditation master who is stuck in the 1990s, and just a recording played in a retreat center, unable to further develop his technique, unable to refine his technique, unable to answer people's questions about the practice, and has deliberately not empowered his assistant teachers to guide his technique along with the trials and tribulations of time.

The Buddha knew that every person was different, meaning everyone has a technique that is right for them depending on their circumstances such as their personality, time constraints, lifestyle, etc.. Plus everyone has a different relationship with their teacher. Some teachers are great with certain issues and not so great with others. Walking meditation is excellent, fun, and a great break away from the normal sitting meditation routine we've grown accustomed to. Goenka claims to have pure Dhamma passed down from the Buddha but then ignores his commitment to understanding nuance and context. Pretty frustrating! My guess as to why Culadasa has a different opinion is probably because he had no real intention other than to teach meditation in a purely pragmatic way, meaning that adherence to an idealised purity has no value outside of its pragmatic concerns. Walking meditation is simply another posture to be used. Simple as that. Ironically, by being less dogmatic and purist, Culadasa is actually closer to the Buddha's original words than Goenka in this regard! What a paradox! :)

PS: I don't really hate Goenka, but some of the stuff he says is really unproductive and has a lot of guilt/shame built into it. People who practice a lot using his techniques at his retreat centres feel ashamed when doing other techniques; I've personally seen this happen IRL. I'll be introducing them to something like noting and they'll freak out. They feel like they're disobeying this authority figure. They internalise this

guilt/shame and then feel horrible when trying something new. Imagine that! A man saying, "I have the keys to liberation right here, but there are strings attached", that's not liberation. The entire point of liberation is there to be *no strings attached to your experience of life at all -- no exceptions!*

End rant! Hope it helps! :)

# When You Don't Feel Like Meditating

[Source on Reddit](#)

*April 24, 2021 — reply in r/TheMindIlluminated thread: "Dealing With I Dont Feel Like Meditating Feelings"*

Instead, I tried to sit with the feeling and tried being curious about why I didn't want to meditate (is this the right way to deal with these feelings?) [...] So for most (all actually) of the session I sat there trying to feel what was behind those feelings.

100% correct intuition. That's what I'd do. If you want some further pointers I'd get you to do this:

1. Notice the actual feelings of resistance, aversion, and boredom and just sit with them wherever they are. Notice where the feelings are in the body and just focus there for a while. And just keep lightly scanning the body for wherever you feel resistance/tightness.
2. A way I like to coax out the body feelings is like this. I'll mentally say to myself: "boredom, where are you?" I'll scan the body and within 2-3 seconds, my mind will just "jump" to wherever it is in the body. I just rest awareness there and notice the sensations.
3. Going deeper, once you're at the sensations, notice how they appear. Is it tension, tightness, is it a "big" sensation or a "small" sensation? Does it ripple out further? Or is it a kind of heaviness that makes the body feel like its "dragging" down on itself? Just sit there and notice it all.
4. Eventually, start focusing on these body sensations and see what they're made of. Normally, they'll be like pixels, dots, vibrations, tiny little pulses, however it appears to you. Do not try and force yourself to see them as pixels/vibrations/etc. just keep watching until they break down on their own. Keep doing this for whatever sensation arises in the body associated with boredom, etc.

5. Now turn your focus to the mind. The mind has two broad aspects with which we'll work. First, the mind has contents E.g. "thinking of an apple". And the mind has quality E.g. "scared, bored, etc.". Usually, they're connected. "I am afraid of this apple" or "I am excited to eat the apple". Start to see how the mind moves around content and quality. Does quality proceed content? Or does content proceed quality?
6. Next, you can start to see how the thoughts themselves arise, and where from. Just watch the mind. Try landing your mind on different contents and notice mental quality. Try landing your mind into different qualities and notice the contents change. You can experiment with this in your day. When its time to meditate, and you notice the mind quality of boredom with the content of meditation. Try switching the content. Try thinking of videogames or something fun. Notice how the quality changes. Now change the quality to anger, and notice how the content changes to something else.
7. After doing this long enough, you can start to notice that the link between boredom and meditation is not some magical link that'll always exist. The mind qualities and contents just keep spinning in this crazy circle. The mind thinks itself into problems and then invents artificial solutions for them. E.g. "I'd rather be doing something fun instead of meditating because meditating is boring!" But eventually that fun thing becomes boring too? So it really fun? Is it really going to always be fun forever? Could this be the same with meditation, but from the opposite perspective? Hmm... I wonder :) Eventually, you'll notice how the mind constructs your reality.

Another cool exercise I like to do with emotions is this:

1. Do steps (1), (2), and (3) as above. Sit in the emotions.
2. Now as you're sitting in this emotion, expand your awareness to the body, and the surrounding environment. Keep the "emotional body feeling" in the center of awareness.

3. Now you have a big integrated field of awareness with the emotion felt at the centre, notice how reality starts to change. E.g. when you're angry, noises might be very grating. When you're happy, noises are light and wispy. Notice how emotions colour your reality. But also keep in mind, these are the very same sensations just being filtered differently because of the emotions.
4. Now, and this has to be eased into gently, notice how the way you see the feelings of emotion is coloured by the very emotion itself. This one is a bit hard to wrap around. But I'll explain with an example. When I am happy, my feelings of happiness feels extra special, like they're something precious and to be preserved. But then I go deeper into the happiness, and I find fear. Fear of losing this precious feeling of happiness. And I find greed. My mind wants to be happy all the time no matter what. The good emotion has to be kept, protected, and never let go of. I'm trying to "hoard" the emotion. This is subtle clinging to emotions, and aversion to change. The sensations of happiness themselves are not all happy!
5. Notice this and just sit with it. With your boredom, you can just notice how behind boredom there might be anger, sadness, happiness, fear, etc... Just accept these sensations and do not do anything. There is nothing wrong with this. This is the way things are now. Do not interfere with anything. Let the mind unravel itself after it's worked to notice it all.

Given your PTSD, I'd encourage you to do this gently and safely. Always meditate from a position of mental health. A little bit of existential dread is OK and to be expected on the path. However, depression/anxiety/panic attacks/dissociation means there's something not good happening. You will know when things are painfully good (leading to growth), or painfully bad (leading to deterioration).

All the best on your journey, my friend! :) Let me know if I need to clarify anything here.

PART XIII

# **Compassion, Empathy, and Craving**

# Compassion Is Not Empathy

[Source on Reddit](#)

*May 5, 2022 — reply in r/streamentry thread: "Practice Updates Questions And General Discussion"*

Great question, I'll take a stab at it from my perspective and you let me know if it gels. If not, I'll be happy to explain/refine any point.

I'll repost this because I think it applies here:

Compassion is all about helping others without taking on their burdens or projecting your needs/expectations.

Imagine a man falls overboard on a ship in the sea, do you throw them a life ring or do you jump in? Jumping in makes the rescue far more difficult: if the man clings to you they can pull you down too, you might actually be a shit swimmer to begin with and drown before you can even help him, there may be sharks in the water, a giant wave might catch you, etc... This is far more treacherous for you and the man compared to staying on the boat and throwing a rope with a life ring. This is the same with people's suffering. You're actually not helping by taking on their pain as your own. You're trying to jump in and fix things directly, which you can't -- it's impossible. Your best bet for the man's and your own safety is to stay aboard and throw the life ring. Compassion is safe because it asks nothing of you or the other person. It is not transactional. It is level-headed, wise, and unburdened by the emotional appeal of "getting messy" in other people's emotions.

Another way of thinking about it is the projection angle. You're there to help without expectation. So if they continue to suffer, it is your expectation of relieving their suffering that actually makes you feel inadequate (and, dare I say, suffer yourself). You're trying to

make their suffering mean something to you which is impossible. Suffering is totally meaningless -- it serves no teleological purpose. So snap out of your delusion and let your compassion shine through -- you're here to help. Nothing more, nothing less.

The trick is not to become okay with killing. Because it's not great. The point is to know that killing is bad without the emotional junk rising up with it. That's the messy stuff that pulls you in and makes you dwell on it. Consider those PETA hippies that throw red dye on people who wear fur or vegans that make fun of meat-eaters. How do they help? They're letting their emotions get the best of them so they're not productive at all. That's the consequence of compassion gone awry. These people think its their place to fix other people through their emotional outbursts. And don't get me wrong here, I'm not targeting progressives on purpose. Conservatives do horrendous things like bomb clinics because they cannot separate their emotions from their sense of compassion. The bottom line is: you can only fix your karma. You only have control over your mind, not anything else. Those hunters are ignorant, and you are not. That's a great thing because it means in that situation there are 4 ignorant people instead of 5. One less problem for the world to deal with. You have to be okay with that because it's like that meme, "it ain't much but it's honest work". Your mind ain't really much in the scheme of things but it is everything. Anyone who has tried to conquer Mara knows this. It's a struggle. Samsara tries to catch us all.

I'll allude to something else here that I posted only recently. Suffering is a mental prison you've made for yourself. This idea that compassion is meant to fix *anything at all* is misguided because the mind believes that it's only when something is done can you be satisfied. And what if something cannot be done? Dukkha. If you cultivate compassion without these conditions, without trying to dive in with the drowning man, but throw the life ring, you'll save yourself the heartache.

So we must know when we can do things and when we cannot. Most importantly, you can't fix it all. You can't take that responsibility for other people's karma. Ever told someone they're out of line? They barely ever

listen to you. This isn't meant to dishearten you -- it's meant to empower you. Your energy is best spent on clearing up your own mind, freeing up the dukkha, and living your best life whatever that may be. The pig died and that is sad. You are compassionate and that is great. The problem is you think those things are connected, which makes you upset instead of moving on.

Hope this helps, let me know if I need to flesh out anything (pun not intended)

EDIT: I've been thinking more about empathy and how compassion is superior in every way possible. In short, empathy is totally shit and unproductive for you or others. Firstly, empathy is all about assuming the feelings and identities of others for ourselves. This means we're trying to fabricate an impression of how others feel. And it more often than not crushes us under its weight. I see it all the time with psychologists I train with. "Be empathetic," they say and then they all take their clients' misery home with them. Two of them are on the verge of burnout due to this factor alone. They can't stop thinking about this person's suffering and making their own. How is this helpful? My clients are just as bad as theirs. I don't get caught up in the fracas of their mental lives. I cannot. It's not my suffering to deal with. I give help selflessly and to the extent that I can. But I am not this man's conscience or consciousness, I cannot hover around him making sure he's taking his meds or re-framing his negative experiences into positive ones.

Same with the slaughtered pig. How do you know what it's like to die? Have you ever died? Is that the end for the pig? If you assume birth is the start, then of course death is the end. What's that about overcoming birth and death and thus samsara? Equanimity lies at the centre of this spinning wheel -- the axle that never moves, resolute, firm, without being spun itself. Empathy wants to take you on a ride that takes you nowhere -- the pig is not going to come back to life. And, arguably, more importantly, your mind isn't clear to see things clearly as they are.

# Chanda and Tanha

[Source on Reddit](#)

*Chanda and Tanha*

Duff your system is great, especially for people wanting to bolster their observational skills in the ending of craving. Observing and recognising is a massive part of the battle. And despite the fact that you say only to sit there and observe it come and go, I know you're just letting people work out their own active routine for bringing mindfulness through this practice. I think behaviourist interventions are great for ending craving. But I am also interested in the cognitive aspect of things -- what sort of thoughts can/should we conjure up in your system to help us remain steadfast and resolute?

These are some principles I have when it comes to doing the craving discussion. Craving, being in the mundane sense rather than the "tanha" of Buddhist doctrines.

[How the western mindset thinks you should end craving.](#)

How we really should end craving:

- Taking it one moment at a time.
- Setting up a practice or techniques that play into our strengths.
- Enjoying ourselves as we learn: if you're not enjoying yourself, you need to first clarify why you want to end this craving. This will stop the internal conflict and "seesaw" behaviours.
- Seeing every instance of craving arising as an opportunity to learn. Being patient with ourselves as we're learning. Ending craving is a skill. Mindfulness is a skill. Skills take time, require some mistakes, lapses, and need some skin in the game to generate genuine insight. Skin in the game means knowing and being okay with the fact that you're a fallible meatbag automaton powered by neurotransmitters

that create meaning in the world it observes. You got into this mess of craving, you most definitely can get out! It's just a matter of training.

- Remembering to stay calm, be friendly to ourselves, and not fight against things. Letting go is about easing things off. We think it's like hitting the brakes on a car when really, it's more like taking your foot off the gas. Knuckle-down, brute force willpower is not required.

If you want to have a more Buddhist-y inspired practice, I think it's worthwhile learning the difference between Chanda and Tanha. Tanha is the craving, the urge, the emotional pull towards wanting more of something or less of something. It happens instantly after we encounter pleasurable or unpleasurable feeling after contact with a sensation. If we remember to keep in mind the Four Noble Truths (i.e., dispel ignorance with wisdom) we can be confident that we see suffering, this source of suffering has a cause, an end, and a means to that end via the Noble Eightfold Path. Just remembering the Four Noble Truths can be a big booster because you know that it is possible to end this thing, it's totally doable.

A very simple technique I used to use was simply seeing how the process of me craving a thing was a totally impersonal process (i.e., mindfulness of Dependent Origination), a type of mental habit like Pavlov's Dog that I had acquired through my actions in the past. The present moment sits on the cusp of both cause and effect; the present moment is the effect of the past and the cause of the future. I could ease myself into not seeing my craving as something naughty, sinful, or bad. But a joyful occurrence as I now had an opportunity to address the craving with proper wisdom to cause future positive results. Each millisecond of mindfulness of these truths erodes the foundations of craving. Milliseconds turn into seconds. Seconds turn into minutes. Minutes turn into hours. And so on it goes... It's not about willpower at all. It's about remembering to see the truth of the matter as it is occurring and then making a decision to either fall in or sit out this round of samsara. "Nah, I'd like to sit this ride on the merry-

go-round out this time, it just sends me in a circle and I end up where I left off anyways without being better for it."

Another mindfulness technique I used was as craving arose I would conjure up thoughts of the impermanent pleasure that the craving object would cause. I'd have a little hit of pleasure and then it'd be gone. I'd be back where I started, but now a little worse off because I'd tasted the object of craving and would want more in the future. In this case, I saw the spiral nature of how craving works. Craving begets craving. Ending craving begets ending craving. But these aren't really passive things I'm doing here. I'm actively remembering things. Because learning to let go of craving is a skill. Imagine you get a booger on your finger, you wouldn't just wait there for it to slide off. You flick it off! You don't shake your body violently. You don't just wiggle your finger a little, you flick. It's the right amount of effort to get the booger off. Same with the mind and these unwholesome thoughts of craving. You flick them off by remembering some teachings that work for you, but you don't turn your mind upside down wracking it with guilt or shame. You don't just sit there and observe craving. You hit that sweet middle.

A really cool thing about working with one source of craving is that once you're good at one thing, you naturally get better at others. This is because craving works exactly the same for all the objects, just through different sense doors.

Chanda is the result of us training the mind away from seeking more or less than what is. Chanda is what results when we can enjoy this moment or that moment without craving more or less from it. Chanda is when we see craving and go, "not today pal" and joyfully go about our day. We now have an eagerness just for practising the Noble Truths, no more ignorantly going from this or that whim or desire seeking more, no more trying to run away from unpleasantness. It's when we're practising and actually applying the teachings. We look for pleasure in wholesome activities. People have the mistaken impression that Buddhist teachings (at least in Theravada) are about ending pleasure or pain or whatever and being this kind of life-denying enterprise that's totally un-fun and un-

cool. But the joy of freedom is a reward in itself. Not having conditions for your happiness means that things like pain and mundane pleasure become irrelevant. I like talking about Chanda whenever talking about Tanha because it is important to know where we're heading; we're not just ending craving, we're producing sustainable non-conditional happiness.

PART XIV

# **A Baseline**

## Fourth Path

[Source on Reddit](#)

*November 23, 2021 — comment in r/streamentry*

*Two paragraphs, posted six months after the third-path baseline report.*

*The author's announcement that the path is complete.*

After a long time verifying and pressure-testing, I'm proud to announce that I've attained 4th Path, uprooted the 10 fetters, and completed the path of insight.

Moving forward, I'll be working on fleshing out my journaled thoughts about the path, including techniques, hints/tips, insight framing, and mindset shifts that may help others in the future.

# Anxiety, Depression, and the Path

[Source on Reddit](#)

*January 2, 2023 — comment in r/streamentry*

*A long personal answer to whether depression and anxiety survive stream entry, written from the other side of the path.*

I'll answer everything from my direct experience because that's all I have.

**What does the discovery of awareness changed for those of you who had depression and / or anxiety ?**

I had horrible anxiety growing up. Going to the shops put me on edge. Not so much that I wouldn't go, but it was uncomfortable. I could feign a smile and do the whole social interaction thing, but it left me deeply drained because my mind was constantly battling away the feeling of being judged, perceived, and ultimately if I really "fit in". There was also this weird sharp electric energy in my sides that'd happen whenever I was anxious, like a startle response. Like my adrenal glands would "pop off".

Meditation has changed that. It's all gone. Seriously.

**Are symptoms still there but not problematic since they are truly seen as not mine ? Since the sufferer is understood to be non existent?**

You're not detaching from problems. You are eliminating the fundamental ignorance that caused the problems to begin with. You first detach from the problem to objectively understand it. Once it's understood as an object and not a subject (i.e., "not self"), the mind will eliminate it with some gentle nudging. Think of it like digestion at this point. One part of the problem is that the mind considers the anxiety to be, "mine, I, me". But once it relinquishes that, the deeper problem is actually addressed (which is instinctual in nature). Our animal instincts collide with our

human intellect to create these funny mental games which cause anxiety, depression, overeating, addiction, etc... It's all misalignment. Once things are realigned, the animal instincts and human rationality pull in the same direction, and they can be summoned to work when needed, and dropped when no longer needed. Mental mastery.

### **Are you still on medications ?**

I never took medications. But my coping mechanisms, booze, gaming, and status signalling, are gone. No need for them any more -- although I could do them if I felt like they could be pleasurable.

### **Does Stream entry and subsequent paths change "physical energy levels" ?**

Yes. Much less sleep is required to operate. More RAM is freed up to process the stuff that matters (i.e., my values, purpose, and goals in life) because all the junk is dropped. Think of it like you're a hot air balloon and you're cutting sandbags hanging off the edge. The balloon will naturally rise the more is let go. That's what human nature is, rising, expansive, purposeful, etc., and it is held back by these sandbags we attach and fixate on to keep us docile.

### **Does it modify symptoms such as anhedonia and lack of pleasure, motivation, and love for people around you ?**

Yes.

The trick with motivation is seeing that it's neither the feelings of wanting to do something, neither the conscious will to do something, nor the mental speak of wanting to do something, nor the imagery, etc... It's the summation of all these things. But there's usually an entry point. You can motivate yourself to do anything. It requires knowing the entry point. Once ignorance is dispelled on how motivation arises and ceases (i.e., you know the conditions) it's a plaything. Practice motivating yourself to do something that you don't like. Practice de-motivating yourself to stop

something that you do like. The recipe is revealed in trying to cook from scratch!

### **Here's some free advice:**

- No-self realisation is a fun little detour from the real good stuff of meditation. Sure, you can have these really cool fun and interesting insights, but they don't mean shit unless you're breaking suffering. This is why the Buddha always talked about meditation as a skill, a craft, with an end goal. No-self is really another tool in your toolbelt for ending suffering.
- If you're concerned with ending suffering, then do it. Learn about the chain of co-dependent arising and learn to break it. [u/advader](#) has great resources for this on their profile, check it out.
- The trick is to just enjoy every moment. If you can enjoy every moment, then all the non-enjoyment of every moment gets squeezed out. Think of yourself as a diamond. If you polish each edge of the diamond, eventually there'll be no scuff on any edge. Similar with the mind. Polish and polish. The annoying (but, it's actually fun!) part is that the diamond is always being scuffed up due to being used. The mind ain't for show. It's for getting stuff done.
- Ditch the books and theory and only focus on actual concrete practice advice.
- Be a silly goose when things feel too tense. Be a serious goose when things feel too loose.
- Smile with every in and out breath.
- You gotta ball outta control for a while, sometimes.

# A Practice Guide for Pre-Stream-Entry

[Source on Reddit](#)

*June 2, 2022 — comment in r/Arhatship*

*Direct practice instructions from a fourth-path practitioner, written to a beginner asking for guidance.*

Don't delete this. This forum is for practice and for *anyone* who is sincerely dedicated to awakening. Anyone is welcome, from beginner to advanced practitioners. Your question is useful.

My general guide for pre-SE:

- "Exquisite practice" is a meme. There is good practice and there is bad practice. Good practice is about deep learning, getting intimate with the mind, and not being harsh on yourself when the mind naturally slackens off. This is a skill and we're learning it. If you can do 1hr of good practice per day instead of 4hrs of practice where you coast and not learn, you're doing yourself a favour. Check out the book "The Talent Code" and read the chapter on Deep Learning to see what I mean.
- Start with some structure. TMI is a fantastic resource. Adi's posts are excellent. MIDL, while I have no personal experience with it, seems great too. Structure gives you support and gives you a guide on where you are, where the traps are, and what you're learning at each stage. Unlike the Path of Insight -- structured programs actually give you tangible skills to learn and correctly execute with demonstrable effects, rather than a vague mishmash of statements to get fixated on to determine where you are.
- Start with Samatha skills. They are pleasant to learn and applicable at any stage of awakening. They're also the gentlest. 1st Jhana is all you need for stream-entry. If your mind is free of hindrances, it is fit for work to investigate the process of identity-making and

identification. So, do not stress about needing to go higher. 1st Jhana is incredibly easy; sustained and applied effort with piti-sukkhā. That means, talking to yourself in a motivating and wholesome way that makes you feel like you're a winner, that you've overcome the stuff holding you back. In essence, you're having the thoughts that you want to have.

- In TMI-talk. Stage 6 is probably the most important single stage of development, IMO. Here you're learning Jhana skills (you're learning how to have the mind-moments that you want to have) and you're learning the distinct feeling of awareness. If you can get through stage 6, stage 7 is a breeze. Start diligent vipassana once you have mastered stage 7 IMO. That's when things are so calm, relaxed, and easy, it makes seeing the mind's movements VERY easy.
- On cushion practice, I would aim for a minimum of 3hrs per day. That way you are rapidly making progress, attuning the mind, and also punching through the hindrances. The question you must be always asking is: "how am I experiencing X?". The answer is always, "I'll meditate to find out". This is what I did pre-SE. Tired? Meditate. Angry? Meditate. Hungry? Meditate. Hyped up? Meditate? Horny? Meditate. Etc., etc., etc...
- Daily practice helps. Look at my post about the Middle 4 Links of Dependent Origination for an example of how to start noticing how the mind moves in day to day life. Or do basic noting in daily life. Noting is just a fancy way of saying, "noticing". AKA: being aware. If you're being aware, you're practising (to an extent!). Being mindful is just keeping something in mind for a sustained period of time. Being mindful of brushing your teeth is just that -- keeping that intention alive. If you want to be mindful of how it feels to brush your teeth, well that's a different thing. And if you want to be mindful of how you brush your teeth, you can do that too. They're all related but subtly different -- refer to the 4 Bases of Mindfulness (Sattipatthana) to see how they relate/are different.

- Go on retreats when you can. Treat them as a holiday. Have fun. Do not treat it as more work to do. This is for your benefit, not another tool you're going to mindlessly bash yourself with like everything else.
- Choiceless awareness is a meme. All awareness is based on a choice. Don't get fixated on these highfalutin concepts. Stick to structure, stick to the process, and stick to working at it bit by bit. Crack in and don't waste time on buzzwords (non-dual, luminous awareness, choiceless awareness, doing nothing, etc...).
- Likewise with phenomenology. You can, with enough skill, craft any experience of your choosing. Phenomenology to determine where you are is a misguided and immature notion of what the path is about. Your goal is to have life be as simple, stress-free, and satisfying as possible. Seeing luminous energies and magical centrelessness or whatever *isn't necessary to achieve this* (although its fun and can teach you something, its presence isn't the diagnostic criteria of your attainment).

# What Life Looks Like at Third Path

[Source on Reddit](#)

*May 7, 2021 — reply in r/TheMindIlluminated thread: "Baseline Beinglife"*

First of all, this is so great to read. Insight is the cornerstone of meditation, not fancy spectacles. Tangible changes are always so great to see in yourself, right? Like, one day you hear someone chewing with their mouths open and your mind instantly goes, "I'mma kill this MFER right now!" and then a few months later you hear it and the mind just goes, "Damn that chewing is loud..."

My baseline? Geez, looking back... The funny thing about meditation is that the changes are so subtle. I like using a metaphor of a straight line from New York to Austin, if you just change the line by 0.5 of a degree at one of the ends, you end up missing the other city entirely. Kind of what meditation does, it just changes the origin line by a tiny fraction of a percent, and the rewards are HUGE down the line (assuming you're working diligently and consistently).

OK, how does my reality look like? (I'm 3rd path). I'm gonna go into some detail to really inspire you to do more practice, maybe go hardcore and do a home retreat!

- The mind just sees sensations, all floating in space. Doing a kind of dance. Just dancing sensations in awareness. Angry? Sensation. Happy? Sensation. No biggie. Are you feeling jealous of someone else? More sensations. It'll pass, and it never was or will be "yours" ever. Imagine at some centre there's nothing, and it has tonnes of debris orbiting around it; that's kinda like what it is, but it's subtly different a little more ephemeral feeling.
- I genuinely haven't been angry in a while, I haven't suffered in a long while. In fact, the only real suffering I experience lately is just

when my mind feels like some emotion/thought is "mine". But that quickly abates with some attention, some resting in awareness. But as for life circumstances actually causing suffering, well, I've had it pressure tested in some pretty tough situations and there was no real suffering, just watching the sensations of anxiety play out and do their own thing by themselves.

- Modern society, or society, or the "default way we work" is just people bandwagoning their self-esteem to the latest fad, celebrity, thing they bought, ideology, or guru, etc... We're just constantly trying to validate to ourselves that we're real through these "outside" things, labels, etc. that work as some badge or medal... Like a really sad "life participation trophy". Not judging here in a bad way, but judging in the way to say, this is highly unproductive for long-term contentment and fulfilment. There's genuine sadness in seeing that dynamic in life. And seeing how insecure we all are, deep down, at our empty reality. It really inspires a lot of compassion and understanding.
- Thinking is easier. Cognitive problems are simpler. After the mind decides to drop attachments to self and things, it frees up a lot of mental RAM for tasks. Long-term memory is sharper. There's less straining for memories, they just appear when needed. And when they don't... They eventually do pretty quickly after!
- My need for sleep has gone down.
- I can exercise harder past my pain threshold. Exercised today to almost complete exhaustion by accident. Obviously, this was due to a lack of mindfulness and some conceit on my part, overestimating my body's capabilities.
- Life just does itself. There's no doer in this mind-body; no observer; no effort whatsoever is expended (for the most part). Just more of the dance.
- My social life is more vibrant, fulfilling, and genuine. Just more confident doing my own thing without apology. Generally, living a judgment-free life is just so satisfying. My friends/family have noted just how engaging and friendly I seem in regular

conversation, they feel like they can talk to me about whatever because I don't judge, I simply listen. I like that I can be that person for them when needed. I can look someone in the eye, a total stranger, and smile at them, expecting absolutely nothing in return. Being present with people was something I had a really really hard time doing. And now it just happens all on its own.

- Meditation is fun! Any felt suffering is a GREAT opportunity to learn more, develop positive factors, and just be more wholesome. When I start feeling suffering I'm like "Great! let's get meditating!" More grist for the mill. Eventually, this seeps into your life and everything is an opportunity for meditation. I spend most of my day pretty mindful of my body-mind, it's not perfect, but it's definitely sensitive when suffering appears!
- Enlightenment is not a "thing" you get. It's seeing sensations clearly and where they are, and when they are, with no baggage attached. There's no real "path" or "ultimate reality" to access. There's just this inescapable, yet impenetrable moment with all of its sensations.
- Meditation is teaching us how to dis-identify with sensations. The default mind goes "this sadness sensation is mine because I'm feeling it, and that makes me feel bad because sadness is bad". Now we train the mind to see "this sadness sensation is present and that's fine". Or, "I really want to eat bad food because I'm craving bad food and that feeling makes me because I'm feeling it now" Now the mind sees, "There's a feeling of craving unhealthy food. I can act on it, with consequences, or not act on it, with consequences. The feeling is here and that's fine."

Hope this gets your engine fired up for more practice! :)

PART XV

# **Through the Texts**

## The Analayo and Ingram Dispute

[Source on Reddit](#)

*November 24, 2021 — reply in r/streamentry thread: "Communityinsight The Dangers Of Mindfulness"*

Just more posturing, to be honest. People who want to keep Therevada pure will like it. People who like Ingram's methods and ideas more will defend Ingram. That much should be obvious.

I think Analayo is correct to criticise Ingram over path attainments and general things to do with appropriation. However, my belief is that Ingram is paying Therevada the ultimate compliment by saying that the commentaries (namely, Vissudhimagga and Vittidhimagga) describe the universal way in which our attention develops as a response to being aware of our direct experience moment-to-moment. But I can see how Analayo wouldn't like it, being a devout Buddhist scholar with an obvious intention to keep Therevada pure and free from outside contamination. But I also do see how Ingram, who was socialised in a heavily Therevada meditation community for so long would want to adopt those words/ideas to describe his general spiritual journey. It's a real pickle. The beauty of the back-and-forth between Analayo and Ingram is that everyone can pick a side if they want to and be satisfied to a degree.

However, his critique of Ingram's presentation of the Nanas is flawed, I believe. I think that due to our nervous systems being the way that they are, there is a generally universal way that attention does develop as awareness is placed in experience as it is. And this manifests as the Nanas. They may not be linear. They may not be continuous. They may not be recognisable moment-to-moment. But that's my firm belief rooted in my lived experience. Ingram is a partial and westernised continuation of the tradition that arose more from the commentary-based parts of Therevada, which focused more on meditation paths, the nanas, which were compiled from peoples' lived experiences of meditation, they

diverge considerably from the older texts -- being a little more rigorous, more focused on discrete phenomena, and less "principle" focused, more detailed in that regard to technique. Analyo is trying to stay pure from the later texts and focus on early texts exclusively.

As a critique of the critique itself. I do find it weird that Analyo basically says: "Ingram has adopted the model, imagined himself having these experiences, and basically confirmatory-biased himself into believing these words as experience" without, y'know, leaving open the fact that he himself as an old-school Therevada textual scholar may be victim of the same type of self-hypnosis. And the critique of "high-speed noting" as a technique is kind of lacklustre, he has no sources to say it can lead to problems. But, he also doesn't employ much charity, because Ingram himself does say that high-speed noting can produce a lot of problems. So I don't know what to make of that.

Speaking as someone who studies psychology, which is vaguely scientific, I think the most important development to this field will be neuroscientific studies to see if there is a generally universal linear/coherent/congruent way to how our brains re-wire themselves as a response to meditation over time. Along with some sort of longitudinal studies of different meditation techniques to see how they influence wellbeing at time intervals; it may be the case that rapid noting causes a lot of short-term issues, but in the long run is net-beneficial. Then maybe more relaxed/receptive approaches have the same results as rapid noting, but at a slower pace, with less difficulty. The next step will then to see how certain personality traits influence how one reacts to certain meditation techniques and meditation outcomes later on (both positive and negative) to produce very nuanced results of what/when/why meditation techniques work.

So really, the real lesson to learn is -- nobody can meditate for you. You don't meditate "from" old texts or "from" new texts, or whatever. They're just texts. Not your experience. Nanas, Jhanas, Paths, etc., are things you experience, not read about or conceptualise. If you experience them in a way that Ingram describes, that's good. If you experience meditation the

way Dogen, Anlyo, a Rinpoche, or Burbea describe, that's great -- use it to your advantage. Don't discard useful things just because some traditionalist or maverick says that the other is wrong. If your experience starts to diverge in linearity, cohesion, or congruence away from how others present meditation, then trust your experience above all else. **The most important thing is to find someone that expresses universal Dharma using words/symbols in an order that makes sense to you. And use that as a springboard to find your own way of understanding it all.** Meditation is not unlike any other skill -- we learn from the words/deeds of masters that precede us, and then we begin to find our own voice, our own style, how we relate to the experience, we learn what rules work for us and which rules don't. It's about becoming your own human.

# On Following the Dharma

[Source on Reddit](#)

*On Following the Dharma*

I'll share my take on this:

- Don't turn any part of the Noble Eightfold Path or Five Precepts into dogma and you will be okay. What do I mean by this is that the N8P emphasises "right view/thought/speech/etc..." the "right" part of it is the important thing to remember. That is all about context. Context matters, how we relate to ourselves and reality is important. Rebuking someone in one context may be necessary and correct, in another, it is not. The "right" part is all about emphasising mindfulness. How's your mindfulness? If you're just a beginner, then maybe you make mistakes. That's okay, it's to be expected. We either learn or are doomed to repeat the mistakes. But we turn the mistake into something worse when we mistreat ourselves for making the mistake.
- Same with the 5Ps, don't turn these rules into another source of guilt and shame to beat yourself up with. Ease into it slowly. Hopefully, you're not killing anything. Lying/hurtful speech is easy enough to avoid. Sexual misconduct is very easy to avoid (respect consent). Stealing is very easy to avoid too. The intoxicants are probably the hardest thing in a western context; adopt a harm minimisation approach here. Is your current drinking or drug-taking problematic? If not, do you want to reduce it further? If yes, go gently. If no, be mindful of not increasing it to problematic levels. But, please, for the love of all things in this universe, do not use the 5Ps to make yourself feel guilty or ashamed of yourself. We all make mistakes. Be a friend to yourself and others, and everything will fall into place.

- Morality is very important to the path. Will it materially reduce suffering and make the actual meditation easier? Yes and no. Yes, because there's just less conflict in your life. Generating goodwill for and from others is rewarding in and of itself. But also no, because there's still a lot of your own conditioning and junk to purify. You could be a saint, and the Dark Night will still reveal some things about you.

The 4 Noble Truths are simply the outline of the Buddha's teachings. If you're committed to liberation, then you're following it regardless. You're on the path. You'll find the noble truths for yourself when you're ready. The Buddha simply outlined their existence.

It doesn't seem that one can expect to live a normal life and meditate effectively, at least normal in as far the western culture is would define it.

You definitely can. I'm not sure what a "normal life" is to you, but it can be done very easily.

Are you comparing yourself to monastics? Only about 10% of Buddhist monastics actually meditate, and only a fraction of those actually do it with the sole intention of awakening. Meditation, in particular, Vipashyana, was mostly dead from the 10th century in the Buddhist world and only came back in the 19th century and early 20th centuries when it was revived in Burma by monastics who decided to think outside the box. The prevailing Buddhist thought was that attaining liberation was impossible and that it would remain impossible until a new Buddha incarnation happened. Kinda nuts, if you think about it. And these guys had what some would think as "perfect conditions" for meditation, yet they explicitly chose not to because of their religious dogma and ideals. Burmese monastics in the 18th century revived Vipashyana and began to realise the fruits of awakening were available now, by questioning the status quo. These old status-quo monks basically wasted good opportunities to meditate, instead, they fixated on some future condition that would save them. **So, really, the lesson here is that your attitude**

**determines your altitude.** Monastics aren't special and are prone to silliness just like us mere mortals; they wasted nearly 800 years not meditating believing it was not worthwhile! Don't take anything for granted, discard unproductive assumptions, and ditch expectations! The path is meant to be travelled.

Now with all that being said, if you want to meditate, find some time and protect it at all costs. Don't let some idealised "perfect conditions" in the future hold you back. You'll go to a retreat centre and quickly realise that it stinks, the hall is too cold, the food is average, the chanting is annoying, there are loud dogs nearby howling all day, the other retreatants are coughing and sneezing all the time, you only get about 6 hours of sleep per night if you're lucky! And just to top it all off, the beds are crap! Find the time today and really have at it. Nothing will save you apart from doing the work. Think outside the box and find some time.

Hope this helps!

# Dependent Origination, Middle Links: A Companion Note

[Source on Reddit](#)

## *Companion Note*

I stressed that feeling tone and contact happen almost simultaneously in my OP... At least in ordinary consciousness. In refined states (i.e., Jhana) one can discern a micro-fraction of a second between the two. But we can treat them as occurring simultaneously for the most part. What you said doesn't line up with your critique, the 5 aggregates have consciousness, feeling, and perception as simultaneous, yes. But form (which is the body - i.e., the base of contact) happens before them (or better said, as a basis for them). Consciousness, feeling, and perception cease at Nirodha Samapatti, but form remains. Form (and therefore, contact) only ends with the break up of the body and/or at death. So I'm not sure what the fuss is about.

As for the temporal point. I don't see it. I'm simply stating that these things arise dependent on each other. Clinging has craving, feeling, contact, six senses, name/form, consciousness, formations, and ignorance as its conditions. Dukkha has all twelve links as its conditions. You can start anywhere you like in those links. But in the way they co-arise, to work with one factor is to work with all (I mentioned this near the end of my OP). It's like disassembling a teepee. Pull whichever pole you can get a grip on. The end result is the same, because if you pull one pole, the others will fall too, it's how the structure is built. The starting point matters little once we're in the midst of our work. And this is common throughout all of the Buddha's teachings. To practice one aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path is to practice them all, because they all depend on one another, you are simply taking one as a reference point to "ground" or "stabilise" your perspective as you begin. So while you point about

temporality and/or structure is theoretically sound and I fully agree with it, in practice you have to start somewhere.

But then also in your critique you talk about the end point about uprooting the cause of dukkha which is ignorance. Ignorance of what? The Four Noble Truths. My post addressed ignorance by containing each of the elements of the four noble truths:

1. There is dukkha. My post addresses this by talking about recognising the fact that we suffer. Here are some pointers to help recognise dukkha as it arises in the context of the 3 links of D.O. I'm exploring.
2. Dukkha has a cause. My post addresses this by talking about 3 significant causes of dukkha in the chain of co-dependent arising. There are more, but I chose to focus on those 3 for the reasons stated in the OP. If one starts working skilfully, the cause of suffering starts eroding immediately.
3. Dukkha can end. My post addresses this too. You can do this. It is attainable. Have confidence your ability to act. Here are some techniques and pointers to help you.
4. Following the Noble Eightfold Path ends dukkha. There is **right view** in my post, which is grounded in the four noble truths. I'm sharing some wise views from my own practice which will help end suffering. I'm also encouraging perceptions and views in others that are wise and will help end suffering. There is **right attitude** in my post because I am sharing the attitude that anyone can do it if they work at it with some techniques and pointers I'm sharing, it is by no means definitive, but a launchpad to ignite further interest in people's own investigation of their minds and the Dhamma. **Right effort** is here, which says we should prevent unwholesome states (dukkha-producing) from arising, and subdue them if they have arisen. While we should help wholesome (liberating-producing) states arise, and maintain them if they have arisen. **Right mindfulness** is here as I discuss the 4 foundations of mindfulness (body, feeling, mind, dhammas). And **right concentration** is

mentioned, because I am helping people focus their attention to the relevant parts of their experience to help end suffering.

So, I'm certain I've addressed ignorance in my post, but I did not do it explicitly. However, all the relevant elements were there. Telling people that ignorance is the cause of dukkha is not a practical solution, because it is ungrounded and doesn't give people the necessary frame of reference to work from. Nor is telling people that they have wrong view a practical solution. One must learn right view, which is what I am helping to do as well. By keeping things practical in my post I hoped to avoid this sort of theoretical nitpicking which only leads to more words being written and less practice being done. The Buddha was quite explicit in the fact that ignorance is also multifaceted (it is also co-dependently arising!) and thus does not stand by itself as an essence or entity in and of itself. It is empty, like everything else in the path. And therefore, it rests on conditions. I addressed those conditions explicitly in my post.

The problem comes when you try to relax or gladden yourself when you don't want to endure an unpleasant arisen feeling.

Well, that's the rub, no? That's craving right there. "I don't wanna" is aversion. So you work with a way to end that aversion as it arises. One could make the entire path out of this statement. The wanting is not a self. And gladdening is also not a self. However, one is nicer than the other. This is practicing Dhamma through discernment, we see that it is wiser to gladden than it is to stay wallowing in our dukkha of not wanting to endure an unpleasant feeling. This is not sensuality, the sensuality is believing that this sense contact we're having is intrinsically unpleasant and therefore dissatisfying, which it is not. And it isn't as simple as just gladdening the mind, it's a process. We learn to recognise it, investigate it, release it, and then brighten the mind in response. That's the path. Ending dukkha as it arises, which builds up the habit of ending it before it arises, to ending the causes so it's no longer a concern. Because if we're happy even in the face of unpleasantness, we are liberated from the mental fabrications and wrong view saying that unpleasantness requires aversion to solve (along with a whole other heap of causes/conditions).

Thanks for the chat, I think it'll benefit a lot of people who dare to read through it all.

Be well and enjoy your practice

PART XVI

# **On Groups**

# Why Ideology Hurts

[Source on Reddit](#)

*April 6, 2021 — reply in r/neoliberal thread: "Have You Ever Thought How Fascinating It Is That"*

This is a well-known issue that is commonplace in any sort of group psychology. Ideologies, roughly put, are a kind of safety mechanism for most people. Because ideologies do the following:

- Ideologies reduce complexity. Ideologies neatly sort out the good from the bad. There are clear rules, clear ways to apply the rules, and clear ways to identify who or what the rules apply to and when.
- Ideologies increase our self-esteem. Ideologies, because they give us a feeling of ingroup inclusion and identity, increase our self-esteem. Being a member of a club gives us a comparative advantage because now we can bask in the reflected glory of our group (when the Bobcats win, I feel great!) we can also apply the complexity-reducing rules to quickly denigrate others, and show how they are not as good as us. Plus, our ideology also allows us to ignore criticism or potential blindspots because the ideology is making us feel good, so our minds are primed to seek only evidence of how we're good, not how we're maybe not so good (AKA: confirmation bias).

A few social psychology biases/effects work to produce the effects that OP is talking about, and they usually combine for disastrous effects:

1. **the accentuation effect:** this is when you're a part of group X, so you're very aware of what makes you in group X a group, and you become very aware of how group Y is super different to your group. E.g. "As a Republican, it's clear to see that we value hard work, while the Democrats value handouts and welfare."

2. **the attribution error:** everything that's bad with the out-group is because of their own internal personalities/characteristics. everything that's bad with my ingroup is due to external/uncontrollable conditions. E.g. "Mexicans are lazy. But American's can't find work at the moment due to the economy!" Conversely, everything that's good with my ingroup is due to the internal characteristics of the group. Everything that's good with the outgroup is due to external uncontrollable events. E.g. "Trump is winning because he's got good policies. Biden is winning in the polls because he's supported by the fake news media/deep state/red herring."
3. **just-world bias:** because bad things happen to group or person X, it means they had it coming in some way. OR if a group or person X is doing something bad, sooner or later, they'll get their comeuppance. E.g. "The left has been destroying America for too long, QAnon will expose them."
4. **Groupthink effect:** this effect mostly works in the background of any social group. When you're a member of group X, you're more likely to compromise your beliefs that deviate from group X in order to conform easier. E.g. think of a yes-man. Or think of historical examples of when Stalin asked for reports on Soviet farming, and everyone told him what he wanted to hear, rather than the truth.
5. **Polarisation effect:** this effect also works in the background. When you have a group discussion, moderate positions within the group begin to polarise to its extremes. E.g. you're having a group discussion in your Marxist reading group, and one guy says "we should tax the rich more", which is a moderate position for that group. Then another member chimes in, "No we should take away their wealth and give it away!" then another adds "No. Give 'em the guillotine! Then give the money away" As that group discussion continues, more people will adopt the more extreme of all positions offered in order to facilitate more ingroup cohesion. It's kinda like the groupthink effect, but far more insidious because it's where ideas for hate-crimes, violence, etc. usually start.

**6. depersonalization effect:** this is what all the biases and effects accumulate into. This is when I, a member of group x, is no different from another member of group x. We're interchangeable pieces of the machine. Same for you, a member of group y, you're all just interchangeable parts. Killing you as a member of group y is not a big deal because you're not really a person, just a placeholder for group y. And I feel little/no remorse because you're not really a person because now we're just amorphous group-blobs fighting. No personal identity, no responsibility, no rational self-reflection. A dictator's wet-dream.

So how do we get the seeming contradiction that the left is simultaneously powerful, pervasive, and controlling, yet weak, ready to be destroyed, and ultimately corrupt? Simple. A person identifies with a certain group, and then takes on their characteristics for themselves, thus becoming a member of said group. Then the rest happens naturally. The attribution error makes sure that your group is always explaining away losses based on uncontrollable things, and explaining wins due to good traits. The bad guys are only doing bad things because of magical thinking (e.g. deep state or fake news) and the just-world bias says that eventually the bad guys will be toppled because you, the good guys, have good traits, and will eventually be rewarded for the good. It's a giant shitshow carousel of self-sustaining bullcrap, and at its core, magical thinking.

PS: anybody saying this is somehow unique to the right-wing is deluded. This is an issue for anyone in any social group. It just so happens that sportsball group identification means maybe some guy gets punched in the jaw for saying your team's person throws the ball really bad, and not say, changes the budget and increases the number of those living in poverty. There are certain ways the attribution bias works for left and right-wingers (I can elaborate later if people are curious). The right-wing is especially dangerous because of how deeply ingrained social biases are to the conservative mindset which values stereotype for quick and easy business-like decision making. But the left-wing has a robust historical record of depersonalising the enemy too.

PART IV

# **Dependent Origination**

## Intentions and Consciousness

[Source on Reddit](#)

*September 24, 2021 — comment in r/streamentry*

*On intentions as the heart of the illusion of consciousness — a brief phenomenological note.*

Man, this is a really good question.

Intentions are really at the heart of the illusion of consciousness. That is to say, consciousness itself is the defining feature of having intentions. Consciousness is the illusory background fuzz of the intention itself. And it's important to note, that intentions are not urges nor are they reactions. Intentions are not urges because urges cause thoughts/behaviours/emotions to pull unidirectionally to some end goal. Reactions are not intentions, because reactions are immediate non-planned behaviours/thoughts/emotions to some stimulus.

The biggest problem is that we feel our urges and reactions and believe they're more than what they are. They push and pull when the truth of the matter is closer to flow or continuous processes. Consciousness -- the background fuzz I alluded to earlier -- mistakes information from one stream and the other and believes that this fuzz is itself because it seems to be always occurring because it is never inspected closely. The fuzz is simply fuzz, raw potential, the raw clay from which a "self" is sculpted moment-to-moment, out of these urges and reactions. In essence, intentions are really the cognitive-scientist way of talking about Buddha's path of "the middle way".

Early on, I experienced intentions as very ephemeral and fleeting things, they're both mental (urge/reaction) and bodily (tightness/readiness). Neither body nor mind comes first really, they're constantly feeding into one another. Sometimes mental urges take place first, causing bodily readiness in anticipation. Sometimes bodily tension comes first and the

mind begins to react. It's hard to say which comes first. But early on, for me, intentions seemed to be very effortful. "Ooooh, I'm intending to eat, so much mental work is going into noticing this." But the effort was in the noticing, not the intention. And once this was recognized, more energy could be spent seeing how it actually works. Then I observed the fuzz, nonstop raw mental potential going up, down, all around, assessing, comparing, contrasting, etc., all these reactive and urging energies. The truth of the matter was that intentions are normal, but are usually skewed one way or the other -- either too reactive (aversion) or too covetous (desire). The ignorance of the matter was not seeing that they were simply made each moment without any input at all, without any drive (i.e., no-self). Consciousness is an intentional machine. The fuzz is just the fuzz. When one sees the machinery spinning clearly, the illusion collapses and we're happier because the natural intentional flow of consciousness never needed more intentions (effort/drive/self-esteem/protection/defence/rationality/emotions etc.,) to keep itself moving other than its own self-recurring pattern (fractal stuff).

Once one starts seeing how intentions are made moment-to-moment, one can start actually influencing them. This is the real magic of the path; habit changing, intentional framing, energy manipulation, magick, (everyone has a unique perspective or way of doing/phrasing it) etc., where the intentional flow can be "arrested" and meta-intentions are essentially planted in the mind. You know how certain meditation teachers say "after stream-entry or the A&P is a great time to make resolutions?" This is why, you're seeing that mental flow so clearly, it's just a matter of planting the intention in that fuzz and letting it grow naturally.

Anyways, this is my take on the matter. Hope it helps in some way! :)

PART VI

# **Working With Difficult Material**

## The Itch

[Source on Reddit](#)

*August 13, 2021 — comment in r/streamentry*

*On compulsive habits like pornography, and the contemplative method of dismantling them at the level of the underlying "itch."*

Most habits like porn start with an "itch", and it's a deep kind of yearning. Like a pain that needs to be taken away. The mind already has the cure: rub one out.

Sit with the "itch" when it arises. And simply watch it. See how it pulls the mind to a conclusion. But maybe the conclusion was already known, and the itch was the by-product of its very own knowing? Hmm... You can do this with any kind of negative self-destructive habit. You can do this with any kind of negative self-destructive habit.

If you decide to watch, then watch. And watch how the mind reacts to which stimuli. There may be a spark to this element or that element. Note it. Notice it. Don't inquire why, just notice it. Notice how the body changes posture, where the eyes go (what are they looking for?) notice everything you can. What is the mind seeking here?

If you do end up succumbing and doing the deed. Sit with it. Literally, sit there in your seat and look at the miserly and disgusting state you've left yourself in. Notice something interesting too: the drain on your mental resources. During the act energy is high, and now that you've got your hit, you're left drained. Notice that. That whole "post-nut clarity thing" is a joking reminder that, for 99.99% of men, this has been a net-negative on their life, and they're forgetting to learn the real lesson. This time will be different for you though -- look at the pain caused and really embrace it, and know its origin. The mind has a way of "sweeping" pain "under the rug" to forget painful lessons from seemingly pleasurable events; you're going to un-sweep it and look at all the stuff you've left under that

rug. There's a lot, it may hurt to look, but really embrace it with all the vigour with which you want to end this habit.

You can also go for a tantric perspective, which is to look at the energies in the "itch" and use it for something. But that's a very personal approach. That energy may be for a run, for a creative purpose, for compassion, for more meditation. Or it may be from loneliness, pain, and yearning, and a real need to grieve lost parts which your mind feels as if it deserves (which it does! you deserve it all! but this habit isn't it). You could also use this tantric perspective in the event of succumbing too, similar to before, this requires seeing the energies for what they are.

Also, a bit of shock therapy does help too. Contemplate the unethical nature of porn. Contemplate the disgusting nature of the body, smells, decay, ageing, fading, disease, entropy, etc... Your body too! Their body! You can look up the website "yourmindonporn".

I'd also recommend journaling. Journal ALL your thoughts to do with porn. Create a mind-map. Illustrate it. Pour out your emotions. Every single thread explored to its depths. "Why do I feel X when Y?" "Why do I do this, to begin with?" "What emotions am I ignoring during it?" "How do I feel before compared to after?" "What do I hope to gain from quitting, and what has my mind convinced itself I gain if I continue?" All worthwhile avenues to explore.

PS: sexual desire isn't the name of the game here. Porn, at least how I understand it from both psychological and spiritual perspectives, runs deeper. In my humble opinion, it's like comparing people who enjoy playing poker (skilful, companionship, respectful elements, etc.) to those that literally go to casinos and feed their money into slot machines.

Best of luck to you, my friend.