

DHARMA FAMILY **JOURNAL**

March 2000 | Volume 1 Number 2



“Zen without bells and whistles.”



March 2000

Relationships, Dependency and Dukka

BY ED WORTZ

Ubiquity of Relationships:

In all human societies everyone exists in a myriad of interdependent relationships. Basically a "relationship" exists only where there is a network of mutual dependencies. If I want something from you or expect something of you I have established myself in a dependent position with respect to you. I have given you power whether you want it or not. I have become dependent upon you to do what I want or meet my expectancies. *A relationship is a network of these mutual dependencies. My dependency on you may be overt or tacit but it must exist, otherwise a relationship cannot form between us.* For example you may be dependent upon me for love and affection, position in society, and for the opportunity to help structure a positive self-image. While I, in turn, depend upon you to think well of me, to assist me in decisions, to help me eat well and dress properly, to see how my hair looks in the back and to enjoy the experience of love. We are dependent on someone to make our shoes; someone to grow food for us; a partner for physical contact and affection; friends and colleagues for sharing experiences, providing feedback, assistance or self definition; the postal system for mail; local government for streets, schools and so on. I am dependent on my clients so that I can earn an income and do the work that I enjoy. They in turn are dependent on me to help them work through some problem. A vast interlocked network of mutual dependence. *"If there is no dependency there is no relationship."*

The Problem With Relationships:

Relationships always provide the opportunity for dukkha (dissatisfaction, frustration, resentment, anger, feelings of being betrayed, etc.). This can occur when our dependency needs are not met. We know, from our previous discussion of the law of large numbers, that there is always going to be something wrong. Someone is not going to have our car repaired at the time we need it, our friend may not phone us when we expect them to, our computer may lose its memory, our child may not perform well in school, the IRS may have lost our tax form, our lover may find someone else she prefers, our husband may leave the house littered—on and on. So the opportunity for our needs and expectations not being met is both infinite and certain. Thus there is always the opportunity to be frustrated. We tend to make the display of frustration when we find ourselves, at least momentarily, unable to get our needs met, i.e., powerless. No one likes having their expectations not met, their needs unfulfilled or being powerless like this. Neither do I. But there it is!

Intimate relationships, especially, provide a fertile ground for dissatisfaction and resentment because *those that we make ourselves the most dependent upon are not perfect* and can not always meet our needs even if they should happen to know what our needs are and even if they make real efforts to meet them. The experience of frustration is inherently uncomfortable or noxious in some way. And our usual attempts at trying to get some resolution focus on externals. This I call the obsessive external focus or OEF. Frequently we blame others for our feelings and attempt to get them to feel sufficiently bad so that they will make certain that our needs are met. For this we can do mini temper tantrums, feeling really badly, and blaming them for our bad feelings, or pouting and not revealing why we are feeling bad. These methods will only work if someone is sufficiently invested in our happiness to make an effort to "correct our discomfort" and bring us back to peace, satisfaction, quiescence and happiness. Also, ***when we blame others for our feelings, we provide them with the illusion of power by offering them the apparent control of our feelings.*** If only they will do what we want we will be pleased and happy. Thus we may "hurt the one we love" in a neat cycle of illusion and dukkha.



The function of all feelings and emotions is to communicate, by physical displays, meanings to others and to ourselves. We learn to make these displays in ways that are socially congruent to the situations in which we find ourselves. We do them spontaneously, efficiently, and automatically, largely unaware of how we actually change ourselves to make these displays. Being unaware, ignorant of what we are actually doing, stuck with an OEF, we erroneously assume that we are dependent on others for our own feeling displays.

It is relatively easy to understand how relationships can be the source of a lot of confusion for us. The principle confusion that traps us is mistaking an apparent dependency as an actual one. We do not have to be dependent on others for our feelings and emotions. We do these events ourselves and erroneously assume they are controlled by others just like other types of dependency.

One common attempt to get outside the morass is to try to be independent. Many in our society highly value the myth of the "totally independent individual." The cowboy depending only on himself, his horse and his tin cup is a good western mythological model. Most of us know of people who have tried to be absolutely independent but it doesn't work very well. All cultures contain examples of individuals and groups who attempt to reduce the confusion and distraction of this vast interrelationship by isolation and independence. Monks, sages, monasteries and nunneries of all persuasions have attempted to reduce the onslaught of the intricacies of mutual dependency with varying levels of success. Gotama Buddha himself tried various austerities, for several years, and was near death from them when his life was saved by a young woman who provided him with milk and gruel. The Buddha dependent? Yes and the monks of his era were dependent on laymen by begging for their sustenance. And yet the Buddha and others lived their lives accommodating to dependency but without dukkha.

How Can We Deal With Our Dependency?

When we are feeling frustrated it is important to know that we are "running a number on ourselves." If I wake up in the morning feeling badly it is one thing but to "feel badly because" is another. "Feeling badly because" is conceptually-based and its function is to provide a meaning to some experience. "Feeling badly because" is something that we may not have to do.

Now there are at least six specific things we can do to keep our dependencies from becoming significant sources of dukkha.

1. Practice meditation in order to reduce the level of confusion by stilling the body, learning to experience events with bare attention, and observe the construction of experience from moment to moment.
2. Recognize and accept the truth that there is always going to be something wrong in our life and our bodies. (The law of large numbers.) Thus we can anticipate and not be too surprised when our expectations and needs are not met.
3. Discriminate between feeling badly and 3feeling badly because.2
4. Learn to relax our OEF, and recognize that we construct our own feelings. We can do this by looking internally for subsidiaries of dukkha in terms of physical experiences like tension, pain , nausea, and other forms of discomfort. It is important to learn how to observe the subsidiaries of various forms of dukkha even if we haven't developed enough skill to alter them.
5. Practice the construction and deconstruction of negative feeling experiences without reference to memories, images, fantasies or external events. As we begin to develop skill at the construction and deconstruction of frustration, for example, we will find that the automatic occurrence of frustration will decrease as our normal



self-regulatory mechanisms intervene.

6. Refuse to accept the illusory power offered by others when they claim that we are the cause of their feelings. This is a difficult thing to do because we like power. Also there is a need for us to be especially compassionate in our response. To deny to others the attribution of power to us can be dismissive of their actual painful experience. Furthermore, we do know the "buttons" that trigger others to produce an experience of suffering. Consequently we need to be considerate of others even when we know that we do not cause their feelings.

In Summary:

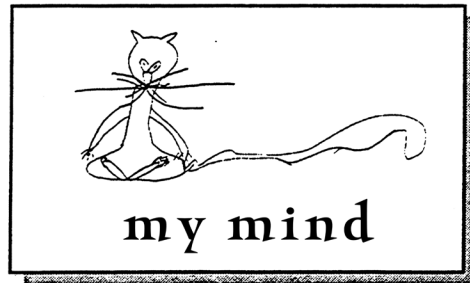
Relationships are networks of mutual dependence.

Dependency leads to frustration, resentment and anger.

Frequently many of our dependency needs will not be met.

The ubiquity of dependency together with an obsessive external focus (OEF) on ways to meet our needs leads to confusion about the source of these negative feelings. It is erroneously assumed that others are responsible for them.

There are several things that we can do to reduce the likelihood of discomfort and confusion that arises when our needs and expectations are not met. 🌸



Glossary

The Law of Large Numbers or The Mathematics of Perfection

It is mathematically impossible for there not to be something wrong at all times. A brief primer of probability is in order here. If we flip a coin, the odds are 50% that it will come up heads. If we flip two coins, the odds that they will both come up heads is the product of the probabilities for each coin, or $.50 \times .50$ or 25%. For three coins, the odds of all three being heads is $.50 \times .50 \times .50$ or 13%. If the odds of one thing turning out okay is 90%, that is pretty good. And if a second is also 90% and a third and so on, by the time we get to 10 events, each with a probability of 90% for turning out OK, the odds that all 10 will turn out okay is only 35%. With 20 events, the odds are 12%. Extending this to our life, casual inspection reveals hundreds or thousands of events occurring each day (in our lives or our bodies) and the likelihood of something going wrong is guaranteed to be almost certain. The law of large numbers applied to living means that there is always going to be something wrong. It is mathematically and physically impossible for there not to be something wrong. For example, if I spent \$100,000 fixing up my house, will I still be able to find something wrong? Of course. If I increase the expenditure to \$500,000, will I still be able to find something wrong? Yes! But do I have to be dissatisfied? Maybe not.



Dukkha

Dukkha (Pali) or duhkha (Sanskrit) is variously translated as suffering, unhappiness, anguish, unsatisfactoriness, frustration, ills, dis-ease; it is transience and all that occurs with the experience of transience as opposed to Sukha (ease and well-being). A more recent translation by Thanissaro Bhikku is dukkha translated as stress.

Dependent Co-arising or Dependent Origination

A key concept that states all physical and mental manifestations are interdependent; that is, they mutually condition each other. We might say that all manifestations occur dependent on the occurrence of other manifestations and have no unique self-nature.

OEF: Obsessive External Focus.

Refers to a habitual process for looking external to the body (toward environmental or purely mental events) in attempts to observe the causes or origins of feelings. 🌸

Erasing the Memory of Pain: A Therapeutic Development from the Study of Meditation

BY ED WORTZ

A woman came to my office for help: because of intense memories of nausea from prior chemotherapy, she was extremely fearful of additional chemotherapy. She wanted to somehow erase her memories of that nausea in order to feel less fear while facing more treatments.

From my experience in teaching and practicing meditation, I had developed a method for eliminating memories of pain, nausea, or other noxious elements, which I could employ for her. This method of sequential “shuttling” of awareness does not attempt to erase the memory of the entire situation...just the “noxious memory element”(NME) of pain or memory within that situational memory.

This is how the session proceeded (T is therapist and P is patient):

- T. We are going to do an experiment with your experience of nausea to see if this process can be of any use to you. I am going to ask you to focus your awareness on your memory of nausea and then I am going to ask you to drop that memory and shift your focus to a sensory experience. We will be going back and forth between the memory and some ongoing physical experience. We may do this as many as 50 times. When you make the shift to the sensory experience I want you to make that experience as vivid as possible. Are there any questions?
- P. No.
- T. Can you recall the nausea?
- P. Yes (grimacing and tensing).
- T. Use your tongue and count the teeth in your upper jaw—make the experience vivid. (~15-20 seconds each). Remember the nausea again (~15-20 seconds each). Let go of the nausea and listen to the sounds that you hear and make your listening vivid. Drop the listening and remember the nausea again. Let go of the nausea and count the teeth in your lower jaw with your tongue. Let go of the counting and try to remember the nausea. Drop the nausea and feel the place where your body makes contact with the chair. Make these



points of contact vivid. Now try to remember the nausea again. Let go of the nausea and count the number of different kinds of birds that you can hear. Now try to remember the nausea.

What's the smile about?

P The nausea is less.

T. Good! Now let go of the nausea and feel the points of contact between your fingers. Make this vivid. Now try to remember the nausea again.

T. (After 5 more shuttles) What is your experience like now?

P It has gotten very faint.

T. (After 5 more shuttles) What is happening now?

P It's gone: I can't find it any more.

T. Good. Now count your toes in your shoes, try to feel each toe, and make that a vivid experience. Now look and see what is there where the nausea was.

P It's just empty. Nothing there.

T. Look around very thoroughly and see if you can find it.

P I still can't find it.

T. (After 3 more shuttles looking for the nausea) I want you to do this shuttle exercise again later today, once tomorrow and once the following day. Can you remember how to do it?

P Yes.

The woman reported that the memory of nausea was extinguished. She also reported that she faced her next round of chemotherapy with much less fear because, as she put it, "the memory had left her" and "she knew how to erase the memories." Some six months later the memory of the nausea was still gone although the memory of the general aspects of the event remained relatively intact.

Consider what concentration meditations feel like: Your awareness is typically focused on an ongoing sensory experience such as feeling the air entering and leaving your nostrils; listening to sounds without labeling them; experiencing the feeling sensations of your body; or observing the glowing end of a stick of burning incense. This same method of concentration can be used therapeutically, even without any special introduction for the patient. For example, I may be talking to a patient who is describing a memory of pain:

T. You say that you're in touch with that pain now?

P Yes.

T. Stay in touch with the pain for a few seconds. Now using your tongue, count your teeth in your upper jaw. Stop counting and come back to the pain again. Now let go of the pain and make listening to sound a vivid experience for you. (after a few shuttles)

T. What is your experience of the pain now?



P I can't find it anywhere.

Sometimes the NME is a very complex aggregate in itself, with many elements. In another example, a woman who recently had a course of chemotherapy arrived at my office. She was anticipating surgery in two days with additional chemotherapy to follow. Her mother and sister had both died of the same form of cancer for which she was being treated. She was fearful and obsessing about "the horror" of the death of her sister. The relevant memory aggregate consisted of the image of her sister in the casket, the normal physiological components of anxiety plus "bewildering feelings" in her stomach that were sometimes "massive" and sometimes "pointed." She repeated many times, "I knew that I shouldn't have looked in the casket."

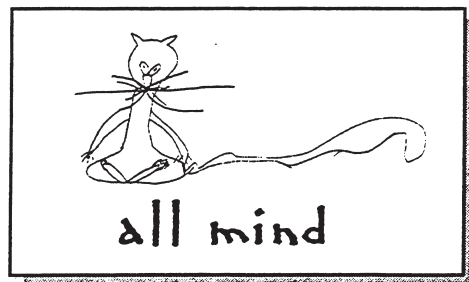
We worked through the shuttle procedure and afterwards she reported that she could "still see" her sister in the casket but that she did not experience the horror or anxiety and that she felt peaceful.

In a follow-up with her, I found that 10 days after the surgery she was cheerful and still recalled her sister "without horror or anxiety."

This method of shuttling is the beginning of deconstructing an experience. The memory event that is noxious (the NME) is the memory of pain or nausea from a particular event (or sequence of events). By focusing on the NME and not on the entire situation, we separate the

NME from the total experience, which leads to the deconstruction, the taking-apart of the experience, thus reducing its power.

The methodology is simple and relatively rapid with the vividness of the NME diminishing fairly quickly. The NME will be greatly reduced by, roughly, 20 shuttles and certainly by 50 shuttles. In most cases the NME cannot be recalled after 30 shuttles.



When I teach concentration meditation techniques, I explain that the salient activities include:

- 1) sitting still;
- 2) relaxing;
- 3) closing the eyes or leaving them partially opened and unfocused;
- 4) focusing conscious awareness on a selected aspect of ongoing physical reality;
- 5) returning awareness to that object of concentration as soon as a distraction occurs;
- 6) making no attempt to suppress any experience that may come to mind, simply releasing it to return to focus;



7) maintaining alertness throughout the meditation period.

For me, the most significant characteristics of this type of meditation are the “letting go” of distractions, returning awareness to the “elected focal experience” and the maintenance of alertness. One might detect a tautology here in that maintaining a focus is letting go. This “returning of awareness” to the elected focus of concentration can be seen as attempts to maintain the vividness of the selected object of concentration while material from a variety of sources outside of this focal awareness (including repressed material) compete for attention. I

have hypothesized that this continuous intentional and effortful emphasis on the “selected focal point” of concentration functions to “discount” the significance of experiences that compete for awareness (including memories). Such “discounting” or “relativization” of an experience could easily function to reduce the significance of an experience. Perhaps the “valence” or emotional charge of “feeling events” within a complex experience is effected. The functional utility of the various features of meditation have not been teased apart to my knowledge.

The work of Michael Polanyi (Polanyi, 1983) and the Buddhist concept of “dependent co-origination” (Streng, 1967) or “dependent arising” (Kalupahana, 1986) provide the basis for the important concept of the dynamic, aggregate and emergent nature of all experience including memories. These sources provide excellent clues for ways of reconstructing experience as well.

Discussion

In attempting to understand how concentration meditations function to produce a psychotherapeutic effect, I have employed this method in my clinical practice since 1985. The responses of these individuals are typical whether the noxious memory is of pain, nausea, or a traumatic emotional experience. The success rate of this procedure with individual clients in my practice is quite high; certainly more than 80%.

This method of pain-memory reduction can be done with groups as well as individuals. I have done three such group sessions at the Wellness Community in Santa Monica and Pasadena, California, with relatively large groups of over forty people. The results were encouraging in that 80-85% of the attendees reported either complete or substantial fading of the noxious memory. However, two individuals in one group and one person in the second group reported an increases in the vividness of the noxious memory. With these groups I was unable to assess how well the instructions were either understood or carried out.

It is clear that the procedures outlined above are different from ordinary experience in several ways. First, the individual is instructed to voluntarily bring the feared material into consciousness over and over again, in a focal way, instead of the usual attempts to avoid the memory. Secondly, it is suggested that other stimuli can be made more vivid than the noxious memory.

There are a variety of corollary observations that may be of interest.

First, it is interesting that the NME can fade while associated aspects of the memory aggregate remain relatively intact.

Second, the experience of actual ongoing (i.e., at the moment) physical pain is impervious to degradation with this method. However, “emotional pain,” and noxious components of memories are susceptible to dissolution. Consequently this method might be employed to help distinguish between physical and psychogenic pain.

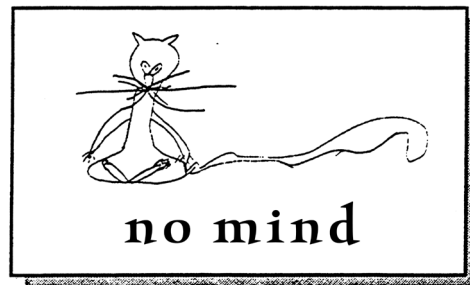
Third, the NME can fade by the simple process of focusing on it; (i.e., using the NME as the object of meditation). An initial, brief increase in discomfort is not uncommon as the individual establishes the initial focus.



The most cogent model of what is occurring is that developed by Michael Polanyi who demonstrated that an experience can be destroyed by examining the particulars that make up the experience. What differs here from Polanyi's observation is the repeated construction and deconstruction of the NME.

Conclusions

Clinical experience with this method of reducing the lingering effects of unpleasant experiences on the lives of individuals certainly warrants both replication by other clinicians and systematic research. Applications of these techniques to psychotherapy as well as to pain management seem obvious. In addition, these observations may provide a step toward the understanding of the functional operations of meditation procedures, the construction of experience, the phenomena of pain, the development of meaning, and the development of additional clinical procedures. 🌸



Tyrannosaurus in the Window

Reprinted from *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out* by Richard Feynman;
submitted by Richard Sedivy

(Feynman is a Nobel Prize winning physicist who was an instrumental part of the development of the atomic bomb. he is revered by physicists for his unique sense of vision and his genius. Later in life he renounced the development of the bomb.)

We had the encyclopedia Britannica at home and even when I was a small boy [my father] used to sit me on his lap and read to me from the Encyclopedia Britannica, and we would read, say, about dinosaurs and maybe it would be talking about the brontosaurus or something, or the tyrannosaurus rex, and it would say something like, "This thing twenty-five feet high and the head is six feet across," you see, and so he'd stop all this and say, "Let's see what that means. That would mean that if he stood in our front yard he would be high enough to put his head through the window but not quite because the head is a little bit too wide and it would break the window as it came by."

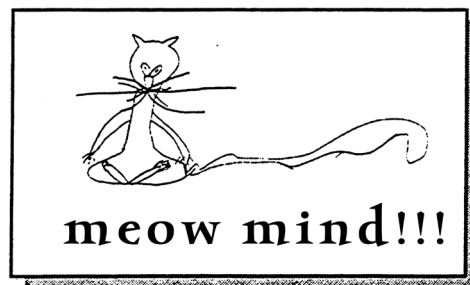
Everything we'd read would be translated as best we could into some reality and so I learned to do that - everything that I read I try to figure out what it really means, what it's really saying by translating and so I used to read the Encyclopedia Britannica when I was a boy but with translation, you see, so it was very exciting and interesting to think there were animals of such magnitude - I wasn't frightened that there would be one coming in my window as a consequence of this, I don't think, but I thought that it was very, very interesting that they all died out and that time nobody knew why.

We used to go to the Catskill Mountains. We lived in New York and the Catskill Mountains was the place where people went in the summer; and the fathers - there was a big group of people there but the fathers would all go



back to New York to work during the week and only come back on the weekends. When my father came he would take me for wold in the woods and tell me various interesting things that were going on the woods - which I'll explain in a minute - but the other mothers seeing this, of course, thought this was wonderful and that the other fathers should take their sons for walks and the tried to work on them but they didn't get any where at first and they wanted my father to take all the kids, but he didn't want to because he had a special relationship with me - we had a personal thing together - so it ended up that the other fathers had to take their children for walks the next weekend, and the next Monday when they were all back to work, all the kids were playing in the field and one kid said to me, "See that bird, what kind of a bird is that?" And I said, "I haven't the slightest idea what kind of a bird it is." He says, "It's a brown throated thrush," or something, "your father doesn't tell you anything." But it was the opposite: my father had taught me. Looking at a bird he says "in chinese it's a..., in Japanese a...." etcetera. "Now," he says, "you know in all the languages you want to know what the name of that bird is and when you've finished with all that," he says, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird. You will only know about humans in different places and what they call the bird. Now," he says, "let's look at the bird."

He had taught me to notice things and one day when I was playing with what we call an express wagon, which is a little wagon which has a railing around it for children to play with that they can pull around. It had a ball in it - I remember this - it had a ball in it, and I pulled the wagon and noticed something about the way the ball moved, so I went to my father and I said, "Say, Pop, I noticed something: When I pull the wagon the ball rolls to the back of the wagon, and when I'm pulling it along and I suddenly stop, The ball rolls to the front of the wagon." And I say, "Why is that?" and he said, "That nobody knows," he said. "The general principle is that things that are moving try to keep on moving and things that are standing still tend to stand still unless you push on them hard." And he says, "This tendency is called inertia but nobody knows why it's true." Now that's a deep understanding - he doesn't give me a name, he knew the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something, which I learned very early. He went on to say, "If you look close you'll find the ball dies not rush to the back of the wagon, but it's the back of the wagon that you're pulling against the ball; that the ball stands still or as a matter of fact from the friction starts to move forward really and doesn't move back." so I ran back to the little wagon and set the ball up again and pulled the wagon form under it and looking sideways and seeing indeed he was right - the ball never moved backward relative to the wagon, but relative to the sidewalk it was moved forward a little bit, it's just the wagon caught up with it. So that's the way I was educated by my father, with those examples and discussions, no pressure, just lovely interesting discussions. 🌸





Samyutta Nikayavil-Akkosasutta

Insult

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rajagagha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrel's Sanctuary. Then the brahmin Akkosaka ("Insulter") Bharadvaja clan had gone forth from the home life into homelessness in the presence of the Blessed One. Angered and displeased, he went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, insulted and cursed him with rude words.

When this was said, the Blessed One said to him:

"What do you think, brahmin: Do friends and colleagues, relatives and kinsman come to you as guests?"

Akkosaka:

"Yes, Master Gotama, sometimes, friends and colleagues, relatives and kinsman come to me as guests."

Buddha:

"And what do you think? So you serve with staple and non-staple foods and delicacies?"

Akkosaka:

"Yes, sometimes I serve them with staple and non-staple foods and delicacies."

Buddha:

"And if they don't accept them to whom do those foods belong?"

Akkosaka:

"If they don't accept them, Master Gotama, those foods are all mine."

Buddha:

"In the same way, brahmin, that with which you have insulted me, who is no insulting; that with which you have taunted me, who is not taunting; that with which you have berated me, who is not berating: that I don't accept from you. It's all yours, brahmin. It's all yours."

"Whoever returns insult to one who is insulting, returns taunts to one who is taunting, returns a berating to one who is berating, is said to be eating together, sharing company with the person. But I am neither eating together nor sharing your company, brahmin. It's all yours."

Akkosaka:

"The king together with his court know this of Master Gotama—"Gotama the contemplative is an arahant—and yet still Master Gotama gets angry." [Akkosaka thinks that the Buddha is cursing him, and thus angry, when actually the Buddha is simply stating a fact in line with the law of kamma.]

Buddha:

Whence is there anger for one free
from anger,
tamed, living in tune -
one released through right knowing,
calmed
and such.



You make things worse
when you flare up
at someone who's angry.
Whoever doesn't flare up
at someone who's angry
wins a battle
hard to win.

You live for the good of both
- your won, the other's -
when, knowing the other's provoked,
you mindfully grown calm.

When you work the cure of both
- your won, the other's -
those who think you a fool
know nothing of Dhamma.

When this was said, the brahmin Akkosaka Bhharadvja said to the Blessed One, "magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what had been over turned, were to reveal what was hidden, were to show the way to one who was lost, or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way master Gotama has—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma and to the community of monks. Let me obtain the going forth in Master gotama's presence, let me obtain admission."

Then the brahmin Akkosaka Bharadvaja received the going forth and the admission in the Blessed One's presence. And not long after his admission—dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent and resolute, he in no long time reached and remained in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realizing it for himself in the here and now. He knew: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world." And so Ven. Bharadvaja became another one of the Arahants. 🌸

reprinted from Access to Insight: www.accesstoinight.org.

Comments on the Akkosa Sutta

BY ED WORTZ

The Situation

In this sutta the Buddha clearly suggests both that it is better not to "take on an insult" and that "not taking on an insult is doable". To put this suggestion into practice it is helpful to examine the process involved in "taking on" and "not taking on the insult". We are told that Akkosaka was displeased and angered. If we take a minute to observe or remember experiences of our own displeasure or anger we are likely to find physical discomfort or tension as an element of these experiences. At least that is what I find for myself. So it is easy to assume that Akkosaka was both energized and physically uncomfortable. It helps to also understand that anger is a secondary emotion and is always preceded by either pain, fear, frustration or some combination of these.



Certainly an unpleasant state. I imagine that in attempting to deal with his discomfort Akkosaka assumed that the Buddha was responsible for his condition. Assuming that the source of his distress was external to himself. In his attempt to relieve himself of the distress, Akkosaka made displays of anger and blame toward the buddha.

How to take on Insults and Anger

In our society we are supposed to feel hurt and offended. This “cognitive consonate” response provides us with the meaning of what is being done to us. This requires us to display hurt, frustration, dismay, fear or anger toward the source of abuse (or when that is not safe covertly to ourselves). We can’t let them get away with that! But in order to “not let them get away with it” we have to make unpleasant feelings. No wonder we dislike insults or anger directed at us. Thus in order to take on insults or anger we must make ourselves feel badly in certain ways and blame the other for what we ourselves have done.

How Not to take on Insults and Anger

In the preceding paragraph we talked about “taking on anger or insults” and began to make some observations about what it is that we do. Taking on anger is essentially a two-person dance that we do our part by constructing unpleasant feelings and blaming these constructions on others. Thus we give up our power to the antagonist. Nobody likes giving up power which just adds to the assault. The principle problems for most of us is that we have been doing our part of the dance for decades and consequently become very efficient at the process. Efficiency at doing something normally means that we can do it automatically, without thought or effort.

The first steps in learning how to “not take on” insults, anger and the like are to:

1. Let go of the OEF, direct our awareness inward and see what it is we are doing, what changes we make in ourselves in response to the assault. This we can most easily do by observing the bodily changes that we make, e.g. tension, pain, etc. Where do these changes take place and what are they?
2. Practice doing our steps of the dance in order to remove them from automaticity. Practice making the fear, tension, frustration or whatever nuances there are to our side of the dance of verbal combat. We want to become skillful here because “we can’t stop doing anything that we don’t know how to do.” Here we want to practice doing the “dance of anger” steps for “no reason” and with no other person. By this I mean, without reference to any situational memory or fantasy, practice bringing our habitual response into existence and then letting it go 10-15 time a day. it should take only one or two minutes to do each each time.
3. If we should find ourselves spontaneously enticed into doing the dance, then as soon as we can get our bearings, we can focus on some physical aspect of our display and exaggerate it. Exaggeration functions to give us some immediate control as well as elucidate further our dance steps so that we know, in more detail, what to practice.

Compassionate Assistance to the Angry

We know that anger is a secondary emotion rooted in fear, pain, frustration or combinations of these three. This understanding can provide the teflon coating that allows us to deal with angry individuals without their distress sticking to us or having to respond to them in kind. it is clear that they are distressed. We may be able to make a compassionate inquiry about what lies behind the anger. Inquiring “who hurt you?”...“tell me about the pain”...“are you disappointed?”...“are you feeling betrayed?”...“do you feel that I have hurt you?” and similar inquiries can cut right through the anger to the “source feelings” of the anger display and possibly provide relief or a sense of being understood and thus reduce their anguish. We may thus facilitate the reduction of distress and return to peace and calm.



However, some individuals do not want any reduction of their anguish. They utilize their anger for the purpose of gaining power and maintaining certain types of meaning about themselves. One of the functions of this anger is to control our actions in the future. The illusion is that we have caused their anger (thereby tempting us with the illusion that we have power over their feelings) which they won't feel if we do what they want. What can we do to reduce their very real anguish and return them to quiescence when they really don't know what is going on? We can only assist them by not yielding to the temptation that they provide us when they insist that we cause the anger while at the same time not explaining away or trivializing their very real feelings. A difficult skill indeed. 🌸

What's a Dharmy?

During January and February of this year, artist Scott Grieger had an exhibition at Patricia Faure Gallery in Los Angeles called "Unamerican Activities". The main part of the show was an art installation titled "Be Here Now". Among the components of the installation were eighty set of zafus and zabutons that he had designed. The meditation pillows were sewn from a wide variety of military camouflage patterns and colors. These military zafus were placed in a large grid on the floor in front of a wall-to-wall mural of a world map painted in primary reds. The room radiated a reddish glow because of re LED lights in a digital clock which blinked the current local time and temperature. The clock was similar to the type commonly seen outside banks and other public buildings. Each of the zabutons had a large label which read DHARMY. According to the artist, "Dharmy" came from two sources which were both a vivid part of his life. As a child he was raised in the military, and as an adult he had been involved with a variety of meditative pursuits. thus the conflation of the words "army" and "dharma". About this he said, "These two influences collided when I considered the issue that I care about—the seemingly almost universal denial of global warming and its urgency. I wished to imprint on viewers of my art installation a suggestion that now is the time to consider our earth in our plans. The Dharmy is literally *thought in concrete form* of a more militant effort at mediation and a more passive military. I think a little of both would help." 🌸

The sets of Dharmy pillows are numbered and signed by the artist. If you would like a set contact the artist, Scott Grieger, at 310.823.5976

