

The Missing Peace: Freedom From Disturbing Emotions

By Venerable Master Sensei
Jusan DaiKai Madika
KC WarEagle

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I also developed and teach a form of Qigong called "Awakening Stillness Qigong" that uses many
of these techniques.

To schedule workshops and talks you can contact me at venkwareagle@yahoo.com

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Introduction by Susan Abbott

Through her practice and teaching, Venerable KC Madika has one simple goal--to end suffering. The open forthrightness with which she matter-of-factly states this is quite remarkable. One of the main things I love about Venerable is the clarity, directness, and generosity of her teaching. Her teaching style is plain-spoken, often humorous, with a delivery in a what -you-see-is-what-you-get kind of way. She makes the teachings readily accessible and available to all.

The questions of “Why can’t we all just get along? Why aren’t people happy?” have been on Venerable’s mind since childhood. Venerable describes growing up in a fundamentalist Christian church and observing much discontent in that community. For a curious and earnest person concerned with such questions, it is no accident that she eventually found answers in the teachings of the Buddha.

Venerable KC Madika upholds the conviction that it is possible to end suffering for each and every one of us in this very lifetime. How to do this is quite simple--unplug and drop your story! The beauty of this teaching is that it is that simple. The challenge is that, for most of us, this is not easy. I have seen this for myself when in the thick of disturbing emotions in a disagreement with my partner.

This unplugging and dropping of the story are about recognizing attachments and letting go of them. It is not about denying a feeling or thought. Rather it is about engaging the way our minds “work” an emotion by telling stories that often escalate the disturbance. *The Missing Peace* is a guide to the compassionate care of the mind. Like I said, the idea is simple, but to take effect, it requires the on-going vigilance and determination that comes with practice.

Venerable KC Madika makes it abundantly clear that none of this is a quick fix. At the same time, the realization that you can choose to steer your mind in the direction of happiness only takes an instant. *The Missing Peace* highlights the qualities of generosity, compassion and wisdom that we must recognize and develop in order to engage life’s challenges in a wholesome way.

For all her teaching about dropping your story, Venerable KC Madika skillfully draws on a variety of poignant teaching stories from Buddhist tradition as well as from her own life experiences. My favorite is the story about the Buddhist monk accused of fathering a child--read on, you’ll see. May you open to Venerable KC Madika’s invitation to unplug and drop your story using some of the strategies described in this book. Enjoy. I guarantee you will be happier and more at peace for your efforts.

Susan Abbott

Chapter 1

Why I Wrote this Book and Developed ‘The Freedom From Disturbing/Destructive Emotions Workshop’

This book will tell you what I discovered to stop the suffering I felt from disturbing emotions. I took what I learned and put the teachings into easy to understand practice. I teach a ‘practical’ way of ending disturbing emotions. This is a daily practice and a way to end suffering in this lifetime. The instructions are easy, but it takes great determination to put them into practice. This book is written in simple, easy to understand terminology. Short forms of the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path and Dependent Origination are at the end of this book for those interested in the Buddhist terminology and where this practice comes from.

Background Information

I was born and raised around Green Bay, Wisconsin in a fundamentalist Christian family. My dad was a Closed Plymouth Brethren pastor and also worked full-time at the local paper mill. As a very young child I asked dad, “Why can’t people get along with each other? Why are so many people suffering and so unhappy with life?” He, of course, stated, “It’s because they aren’t Christian,” and to be more exact, “They aren’t Closed Plymouth Brethren Christians.” I did not believe this answer, so began my search for ‘truth’ and the end of suffering.

When I was about seven years old my father saw me preaching to the neighborhood children. He stood out of sight and listened to the sermon. After I finished, he approached me and said, “You gave a fine sermon. It’s too bad you’re not a boy because you would make such a wonderful preacher.” I told him, “I am going to be a preacher when I grow up.” To this he responded, “The best you can do is to marry one and support him, because women are not allowed to preach.” I remember looking up at him and saying, “That ain’t gonna happen.”

I was very disappointed and confused. I asked “Why can’t I be a preacher when I grow up?” and he explained it was because Satan deceived Eve. I asked him, “Whom would you rather have preaching? Eve who was innocently deceived, or Adam who purposely sinned because he wanted to be with Eve?” He didn’t take kindly to my question. I asked many questions that went unanswered over the years because my father and the elders in the church would only respond with, “You just have to have faith.”

When I graduated from high school, I continued searching for answers by joining different denominations of Christian churches. I attended college as a religion major and that only brought up more questions. That first year of college was very traumatic for me. By the end of that year I was a pagan. Everything I believed in was turned upside down. I didn’t know what to believe but I knew I would not find my answers in any form of Christianity. I graduated college with even more questions.

Eventually I went back to college, for computer forensics, and there I met a Buddhist. I asked him so many questions he told me to read the *Idiot’s Guide to Buddhism* for more information. I couldn’t find that so I read *The Idiot’s Guide to Zen Living*. After reading this book I felt like I had finally found something that made sense to me. I read about the Four Noble Truths that

stated: 1) everyone is discontented with this life and suffers; 2) this suffering is caused by attachment (taking things personally and not understanding that everything is impermanent); 3) there is a way to end that suffering, and; 4) to end suffering you follow the Eightfold Path (see end of book). I found a Zen center and eventually ordained as a Soto Zen Buddhist nun/priest.

I then moved to a women's intentional community. Living there was a great challenge and many disturbing emotions arose day after day. It was so bad that we had to have meetings after the community meetings because everyone would get so upset. I decided that either I was going to figure out how to end disturbing emotions at this intentional community or I would disrobe and find my answers somewhere else. I started doing research on how to end that suffering. I read books by Zen, Theravada, Tibetan, nuns, monks and lay teachers. I also attended talks given by nuns, monks and lay people.

I learned the principles of Buddhism and how to meditate. I read that if you could keep 'coming back to the breath,' or 'letting go' you could end suffering. I tried these techniques but I just couldn't 'come back to my breath' or 'just let go.' I realized I was too caught up in the disturbing emotion to take this advice. There was a piece missing, I needed another step that would help me to 'just let go.'

I had read about the studies done with the Dalai Lama's monks in Madison, Wisconsin on meditation and the brain. Researchers observed a split-second pause in the monk's brain before reacting to any situation. So, I thought, how could I create this split-second pause in my brain? I couldn't find a teacher or book that described how to create that split second so I started to experiment creating different techniques. Some of my students also experimented with creating this split second before acting. This book focuses on creating that split second which had been the missing piece/peace needed to transform my disturbing emotions.

Through this study and experimentation, I developed the "Freedom From Disturbing Emotions" workshop. When giving the workshops people asked for my notes or a book. This book has been seven years in the making to fulfill that request.

After some years as a Zen priest/nun I was ordained as a Theravada nun/monk. I continue to give talks and workshops on "Freedom from Disturbing Emotions."

How Long Does this Process Take?

People often ask me, "How long before I can learn to let go of disturbing emotions?" I always answer, "It depends." I surveyed students and they told me that it usually takes about three months. This means that in three months time they are able to recognize the disturbing emotion and unplug from it.

I gave this workshop over a five-week period at a meditation center. We met on Tuesdays and Thursdays for forty minutes. I handed out homework assignments included in this book and we saw dramatic results in just four weeks.

Like anything else, the more you practice the better you get. The longer you practice the easier it gets. This practice takes determination. It is not a quick fix. We have spent years developing our responses to emotions but the good news is that it only takes a few weeks to recognize that there is an alternative to suffering.

Chapter 2

Definitions

In order to be clear, let me define some terms used frequently. My experience with communication is that we require a clear definition of words and terms. At different times words take on different meanings. Also, people use words differently. Below is a list of definitions used in this book.

Disturbing Emotions: A disturbing or destructive emotion is an emotion that prevents the mind from seeing reality as it actually exists. When we act on that emotion it leads to suffering for others and ourselves. Examples of destructive or disturbing emotions include: anger, anxiety, boredom, craving, depression, discomfort, discontentment, dissatisfaction, envy, fear, frustration, grief, guilt, hate, helplessness, hopelessness, irritation, jealousy, lust, outrage, possessiveness, pride, rage, resentment, restlessness, sadness, shame, stress, unhappiness, worry, and a general feeling that something is missing or just not all it could be; always wanting more or something better; not satisfied or content with what you have. The terms ‘disturbing’ and ‘destructive’ emotions are used interchangeably throughout this book.

Feelings and Emotions: The terms ‘emotions’ and ‘feelings’ are also used interchangeably. In Buddhism they may not necessarily be interchangeable but for purposes of this book we are discussing practical matters and not philosophical ones. Feelings are described as pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant (what some would call neutral). According to Webster’s dictionary “emotions are any strong feelings.” Understand that there are no good or bad emotions in the absolute sense. It is our attachment to these feelings and emotions that cause the suffering.

Story and Storyline: Our storyline is the narrative of events that reflects our judgments, preconceptions, ideas, views, perceptions, what we think, say and how we do things; how something affects ‘me’ as separate from everything else. Attachment to this storyline actually causes the suffering and discontentment we experience. When you learn to drop your story, you don’t suffer.

Attachment: Attachment is a craving and clinging that causes suffering. You know you are attached to something when you are dissatisfied or suffering. Evidence of attachment shows up when you go out of your way to get what you want or to get rid of something you don’t want. You know you are attached when you insist that your way is the only correct or right way. This includes ideas, concepts, judgments and actions. You can test yourself to see if you are attached to your own story. Do you get irritated, frustrated or angry if someone disagrees with you? If the answer is yes, this is attachment. Getting upset with someone else’s beliefs is also attachment, e.g., when you discuss topics such as the death penalty, abortion, politics, or religion and insist that your way is the only right way to view these subjects. It is the attachment that causes the suffering and discontentment.

Unplugging: Unplugging from a story is like unplugging a radio, tv, or computer. Unplugging gives the mind a split second, the missing peace/piece, to act instead of react. An unplugging technique allows the thought/feeling/emotion to abide without suffering. It is a means whereby the attachment of the mind is released. Unplugging allows wholesome thinking to replace unwholesome thinking. Unplugging is not resisting, ignoring, forgetting, denying, escaping, or burying the thought/feeling/emotion. The unplugging technique will not get rid of the pain but it will get rid of the suffering. You will know that you are doing this correctly when the mind and body become relaxed. If you are tense in mind/body you are not unplugging rather you are resisting. Resistance only leads to more suffering.

Living in the Moment: Living in the moment is also called beginner's mind. This is an open mind without attachment to judgments, preconceptions, comments, ideas, concepts and comparing past experiences. There are no thoughts about the past or the future. There is no storyline attached with the present moment. You experience the moment rather than think about the moment.

Happiness: Happiness means peace, true inner peace, clarity, equanimity, and stability of mind. It does not depend on outside circumstances. Happiness is brought about by the mind. The difference between happiness and pleasure is that pleasure depends on outside circumstances while happiness depends on the attitude of the mind. Happiness and equanimity are used interchangeably.

Pain vs. Suffering: There is a difference between pain and suffering. Pain is a physical sensation or disturbing emotion and suffering is the story we attach to that physical sensation or emotion. There will always be pain in your life but you don't have to suffer from it. Physical and emotional pain will arise but suffering is always optional. This practice is not a way to eliminate pain but a way to end suffering.

Delusion: A belief sustained as true despite clear evidence to the contrary. To end delusion one can use the methods presented in this book.

Ignorance: Lacking knowledge or awareness.

Unwholesome: Unwholesome thinking, speech or action creates suffering or discontentment. It is created by attachment to likes or dislikes (our storyline). Unwholesome = suffering.

Wholesome: Wholesome thinking, speech or action is brought about using generosity, compassion and wisdom. It ends suffering and discontentment by not attaching to a storyline. Wholesome = peace of mind, serenity, happiness, equanimity.

Chapter 3

What are Disturbing Emotions?

As previously stated, labels we commonly apply to disturbing emotions include but are not limited to: anger, anxiety, craving, depression, despair, discomfort, discontentment, envy, fear, frustration, grief, guilt, hate, helplessness, hopelessness, irritation, jealousy, lust, outrage, possessiveness, pride, rage, resentment, restlessness, sadness, shame, stress, unhappiness, worry, and a general feeling that something is missing or just not all it could be. They could also be rapture, longing, ecstasy, conviction, passion, craving, or love. These are just labels. The actual feelings we experience are not that different from one person to another but the stories that support these feelings can be very different.

Disturbing emotions prevent us from seeing reality. Acting on disturbing emotions through thinking, speech and action cause suffering for others and yourself. Disturbing emotions destroy happiness, well-being, and life itself.

Positive emotions can also keep us from experiencing reality. They can cloud our perception and block discernment. For instance, you have been dating someone for three months and you are in love with that person. Your story about that person is that: You know that there are a couple of habits that irritate you but you overlook them because you are in love. You are ecstatic and this wonderful feeling makes you sure you can overcome all obstacles or hazards. You believe this emotional high will last forever, that it is permanent. You don't see the persona as they truly exist. You see them for the story you have created about them. You have heard the saying 'love is blind.' It is blind because of the story you create about another. Then when this person leaves you or you leave them you create another story. When you are happy with that person, they are wonderful, when unhappy with them they are terrible, or so the story goes.

Are Feelings/Emotions Bad?

Understand that feelings or emotions are neither good nor bad in the absolute sense. It is our reaction to the unpleasant or pleasant feelings that can create suffering. We can live life fully and experience any feeling or emotion deeply without being ruled by it, without being harmed by it, and without harming others because of it. The feeling or emotion is not the person. It is not the feeling or emotion that creates suffering it is the story we attach to that particular feeling or emotion that creates suffering.

Why We Have Problems with Disturbing Emotions

Survival Mind

The mind's number one job is to protect us from danger. The mind takes in data, analyzes, categorizes, and explains it by comparing this to past experiences. The mind attempts to predict what may happen (can it harm me?); and judge (like or dislike). It does this to protect us from lions, tigers and bears, oh my! I call this Survival Mind. We use this information to help control the world outside of our bodies. BUT it doesn't work for dealing with emotions/feelings!

We need air, water, food and shelter to survive. Our Survival Mind works hard to make sure that we have these necessities. It tends to go overboard when it tries to stock up for the future. Most of us know that the more we get, the more we want. We can no longer distinguish between necessity and want (greed). When Survival Mind becomes the only way we perceive the world, we no longer see reality as it actually exists. We don't want to get rid of these instincts or Survival Mind but we don't want them to control our every move either.

Here's an example of Survival Mind at work. Driving down the road approaching a stoplight, you see a truck coming from the opposite direction. It's going too fast and will not be able to stop in time for the red light. Your mind takes in all this information, truck, red light, going too fast; and makes the decision: I need to stop. The mind takes past experiences, includes third hand information, adds that to the present, judges the situation and informs you of danger.

You stop the car. That is the end of the event. Survival mind has done its job. What usually happens next is that you begin to tell your story about the event. You may even say out loud, "Stupid truck! What the heck is wrong with that guy? Probably talking on a cell phone, smoking a cigarette, or drinking while driving." You carry on and on, replaying the event over and over. Then you start telling your friends about the incident creating even more suffering for yourself. If you learn to unplug from the story you can stop the Survival Mind from going into overdrive.

Controlling Emotions

Another reason we have problems with disturbing emotions is because we believe we need to control emotions. We have been taught that we should be able to control our thoughts and feelings. We are told, "Don't think that, don't cry." The reality is, we can't control our feelings or thoughts. For instance, if I tell you **not** to think about a yellow jeep, you would start thinking about a yellow jeep. The more I tell you not to think about a yellow jeep the more you think about it. It can't be helped. That is how the mind works. You can't force it to stop thinking or to stop emotions from arising. What you can control is the reaction to the thoughts and emotions. You will learn to use the unplugging techniques to unplug from the thoughts and disturbing emotions. The more you practice the less these disturbing thoughts or emotions will arise.

Sometimes it appears that controlling our unwanted thoughts and feelings works in the short term. When we force ourselves to stop thinking for a little while we seem to get relief but then the thoughts come back even bigger. It is much more effective to acknowledge the thought or feeling, thank the mind for doing its job and then proceed with an unplugging technique.

Other People

The vast majority of people don't show their emotions in public. This does not mean that they are free from suffering. If you asked anyone on the street if they are one hundred percent happy, I doubt they would say yes. They might give an answer like I would be if I didn't have to go to school, work, or if I had a better job, partner, etc. Unless you have reached total equanimity (*nibbana*) in every situation you are discontent with life and suffering to some extent. You are not in this alone. There are very few people on this earth that have reached total equanimity but with this practice you can be one of them!

Constant Messages

We receive constant messages that happiness depends on the absence of difficult experiences or pain. Advertisements tell us we have to have new and bigger or smaller things all the time --a new car, a new home, a new partner, a new job, a new computer, a new phone, etc. We get the message that it takes something outside of ourselves to make us happy. This is just wrong. The only way to be happy is to accept the circumstances that you are in right now. Accept reality for what it is. Attitude is everything, and we can learn to change our attitude.

Blaming Others

We tend to blame everything and everyone around us for our predicament. We have the power to take action and make what is wrong for us right. If we put as much effort into fixing ourselves as we put into blaming others, we would soon run out of things to complain about. We and only we have the power to make ourselves happy or unhappy. Our minds are the source of our happiness or suffering.

Habits

A habit forms each time you act in the same way in a given situation. When you respond to a disturbing emotion by telling your story you create suffering. When you respond by dropping your story you end suffering. With each event in your life you decide what path to take; one that creates more suffering or one that ends suffering. Each action either creates or lessens a particular habit. We can create wholesome habits using the instructions in this book.

Forest Fire

Our emotions start out with a slight spark, and then we start to feed it with our story. Take a forest fire for example. A forest fire starts with a small spark but if we see the spark and put it out, it will not turn into a forest fire. It is the same with our emotions. They start out as a small spark. If we can catch them and put out the storyline there won't be anger, rage, stress, etc. but if we don't put the fire (emotion) out immediately or when it is small enough, it rages out of control. The longer we tell our story the bigger the fire and the harder it is to put out. Telling your story over and over to yourself or others is like trying to put out a fire with gasoline. It only adds more fuel creating an even bigger fire.

Tinted Glasses

I was riding in the car with a friend on a cloudy day and she said, "What a beautiful day." I couldn't figure out why she thought it was so beautiful. Then she said, "Oh, I think it is because of these sunglasses." She had on yellow tinted sunglasses. She gave them to me and sure enough everything brightened up and I could see the clouds in a different light. It was beautiful.

We all wear glasses that alter our perception of reality. When we attach to our views, our own way of doing things, and to our life experiences, we cause suffering.

Triggers and Buttons

An emotional trigger or button comes from past associations that set off an intense disturbing emotion. We have all heard the saying, “That really pushes my button.” A feeling or emotion may or may not have a trigger. Outside stimuli may trigger different feelings and emotions in us but that is not always the case. Sometimes feelings or emotions just arise. They seem to come out of nowhere. This means there is nothing to fix, nothing to do but allow it to be.

Outside stimuli can trigger happy or sad feelings in a very limited sense. Our minds create the stories that fuel the experience of happiness or suffering. When a trigger brings up an unpleasant feeling you can acknowledge that you have been ‘triggered’ and allow the feeling to abide. Don’t attach a story to the trigger and the suffering will not arise.

It’s All in Your Head

Pleasant and unpleasant feelings that occur as a result of our six senses are not as powerful as pleasant and unpleasant feelings that arise as a result of our mental attitudes. True happiness and peace of mind can only be brought about on the mental level. You can be in heaven and your mind is in hell or you can be in hell and your mind is in heaven. It is not the location of the physical body that determines happiness or suffering it is the attitude of the mind.

We can be surrounded by people who love us, have financial security or be world famous but still be miserable. On the other hand, we could be the poorest person in the world, have no friends and be the happiest person in the world. If you are having a ‘good day’ and get a flat tire, you don’t think it is so bad. But if you are having a ‘bad day’ and get a flat tire, you think it is the worst thing in the world. Same event, different response.

Experience and Perspective

We see what we expect to see, and hear what we expect to hear based on the context of our experience and perspective.

The Mountain

For example, a person lives on the north side of an enormous mountain. Its massive face of towering cliffs can only be climbed with technical assists. Another person lives on the south side where the summit approach has long rolling pastures, mountain lakes, and is an easy walk on a beautiful path all the way to the top. A third person lives on the east side with tall forests, thick undergrowth and a few cliffs that you can get around pretty easily. A fourth person lives on the west side, where waterfalls and steep slopes make travel pretty rough. The point is, if you were to ask someone living on the north side what the mountain looks like they would have a totally different perspective than the person living on any other side of the mountain. The person on the north side knows how to climb with ropes and has to bring all they could eat and drink to reach the top of the mountain. The person on the south just needs a good pair of hiking boots to reach the top. It is the same mountain but each person has a different perspective and experience with the mountain. We all are born, live and die but our experiences and perspectives in life are very different.

Mood

On an individual level our perspective changes from moment to moment. If we are in a happy mood, we see things from that perspective. If we are in a bad mood, we see things from that perspective. In the “Practice of Taming Disturbing Emotions” we learn to see things as they exist without acting on our mood. We recognize mood but it doesn’t influence our thinking process.

Take physical pain for instance. When you participate in your favorite activity you don’t notice physical pain. You are in a good mood and having a good time. And if you notice the pain, you don’t let it bother you. Say you are sitting cross-legged playing a video game and your foot falls asleep. You may not even notice it and if you did you wouldn’t move because you are so engrossed in the game that you don’t care about the physical pain. Now let’s say you are listening to a boring lecture and your foot starts to fall asleep. You will probably notice it right away and move your foot. The same intensity of pain was present in the body. It was your state of mind that determined if you were suffering and needed to move.

Some people go so far as to continue to play their favorite sport with an injury. But ask them to do something they don’t want to do when they are in a bad mood and they will point out that they can’t do it because they have an injury. It is their mood that determines their response.

Hot Enough for You?

When I was a Zen monastic, we had to wear many layers of robes. One summer the heat index was over 105 degrees and I complained about the heat. I walked from the farmhouse to the Zendo in my kimono. As I approached the Zendo one of the men commented that in Japan the kimono is considered underwear and I was therefore walking around in my underwear. I yelled at him, “I don’t give a D** what they do in Japan, it is too hot to wear all these robes.”

I went inside to get into my robes for the meditation period. While sitting there I realized not only had I not used right speech, but I also was not using right thinking or right action. I decided not to complain about the weather after that. I also apologized to everyone for my outburst.

A couple of days later the abbot and I stood in the shade talking. Eventually the shade moved placing us in full sun. He didn’t move and I didn’t complain. I noticed it wasn’t so hot when I stopped complaining. The temperature was actually hotter that day but with a changed attitude the heat no longer bothered me.

After a while he smiled and said, “I notice you aren’t complaining anymore.” I realized when I stopped complaining about the weather, I also stopped complaining about a lot of other things. Complaining wasn’t helping me to cope with the weather. It made the situation worse. Why? Because when you complain you solidify the situation. You add to the story making it more solid and therefore more difficult to deal with.

Oops

Our perception is not always correct. While working with Kathy one day I noticed she seemed upset. I figured she was upset with our co-worker Jon. I began to feel sorry for him, thinking, “Oh, poor Jon, wonder what he did to upset Kathy?” All day I was extra nice to Jon because I could tell Kathy was upset with him. I was also extra nice to Kathy knowing that she was having a difficult time with Jon. When we got home Kathy said, “I can’t believe you did such and such.”

I said “What?” She stated that she had been angry with me all day, and here I thought she was angry with Jon. My perception of the situation was way off.

Facts

There are no hard and fast ‘facts.’ One of my favorite sayings is, ‘Nothing is written in stone.’ Everything constantly changes, everything is impermanent. We claim to have historical, medical, psychological, religious, scientific, and spiritual facts but over the centuries many of these have changed. Scholars come to us with new information at a rapid rate these days. What was ‘fact’ yesterday is no longer fact today. And today’s facts may no longer be facts tomorrow.

The world was thought to be flat and now it is thought to be round. One plus one equals two. That is also only one perspective. Take an orange and cut it in half, we now have two pieces. Put the pieces back together and we have one orange. Therefore, one piece plus one piece equals one orange.

We know that history is written by the winners and from a very particular perspective. Archeology is written from the perspective of the archeologist. Another person looking at the same dig would explain it differently. In the histories of religion there were no gods, then there were many gods and then only one god then back to no gods, to many gods and on to only one god. The atom was thought to be the smallest particle of matter not so long ago, today many other particles even smaller have been demonstrated to exist. Even Pluto lost its status as a planet. Attachment to ‘facts’ creates suffering.

Concepts

Concepts were created so that we could communicate with each other. For example, we agree on the color ‘blue’ and ‘white.’ The actual objects are not actually blue and white. We have made up those words so that we can communicate. If I ask you to pick up the blue socks you know what I’m talking about because we have named an object ‘socks’ and their color ‘blue.’ But in reality, there isn’t a color blue or socks. It is important not to get caught up in concepts. Use them only to communicate with one another but remember that what you call a sock or the color blue may be understood differently by someone else.

Imagine if we went to a different world and the language was English but the meanings of the words were reversed. Hot means cold, angry means happy, black is white. Take the difference even further where dog means car, airplane means water, etc. We would find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to communicate because the aliens and we would be speaking the English language (if English is your native tongue) but the meanings of the words wouldn’t contain the same concept. Attachment to words and concepts make it difficult to wrap our minds around alternative meaning. Attachment to words and concepts also causes suffering.

Our concepts and perceptions are wrapped up in our past experience and education about those concepts. Don’t assume anyone has the same meaning for words or concepts as you do.

Our interpretation of a sentence can be very different. You and I both read the sentence and we come away with different understandings of that sentence because of our life experiences and backgrounds in education. Both yours and mine are valid understandings and interpretations. One is not right and the other wrong.

Eyewitness

When working in law enforcement one of the first things we were taught is that eyewitnesses are the worst source of information. Each person sees from their own perspective and offers information about an incident that contradicts another's information. To illustrate this point the professor conducted a classroom experiment. While we listened to the professor, a person came into the room yelling at the professor. The person yelled for about ten seconds and left the room. The professor turned to the class and said, "I want everyone to write down what the person looked like and what that person said."

The twenty-five people in the class handed in their reports and no two reports matched. It was amazing how differently we each saw and heard the event that took place. Not a single person got the full description of the person correctly or what was said correctly. Some people actually described the person as wearing a hat and a beard (there was no hat or beard). We saw what we expected to see and heard what we expected to hear. There are four sides to every story: his side, her side, the reporter's side and then what really happened! Keep this in mind when relating events. Understand that it is only your perception of the event and not necessarily what actually happened. If we are attached to our account of events we suffer.

You Didn't Say That

When traveling with my first Buddhist teacher one of the most important lessons I learned was that people hear what they want to hear. After she gave her talk people gathered in a large room and lined up to ask her questions. One woman said that she really got a lot out of the lecture particularly about a certain topic. The teacher had not even touched on that particular topic. When we were in the car I asked her about this. My teacher stated that was one of the first things I needed to learn, that people hear what they want to hear and don't correct them if it helps to end their suffering.

Pain and Suffering

Pain is a physical sensation or disturbing emotion and suffering is the story we attach to that physical sensation or disturbing emotion. Pain can be measured and suffering can be measured. You can have intense pain and little suffering or you can have intense suffering and little pain. What you do with your mind determines if you suffer from the physical sensation of pain or disturbing emotion.

Lab Experiment

In the years 2010 and 2011 I participated in a yearlong study at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. This is the research center where the Dalai Lama's monks participated in meditation and the brain studies. This particular study focused on meditation as it related to physical pain and emotional stress. They attached a device to me that delivered electrical shocks to my fingers and another device that delivered extremely hot water to my forearm. The researchers told me there were legal limits to the amount of pain they could administer and that limit could not cause any physical damage. The first test was to test my pain tolerance and rate my feelings toward that pain on a scale of one to ten. I withstood the top limit of the pain test because I knew no physical

damage would occur. The scale of feeling the pain was also low because I knew that there would be no physical damage to my body. After I left that first session of tests, I realized that I went to the highest legal limits of pain they could administer because I knew these limits existed.

The next test visit I related that information to the experimenters. If I hadn't known that they could not harm my body, I would have stopped the test half way on the scale. What happened was that Survival Mind kicked in at about half way telling me I needed to stop the pain. On a scale of one to ten my Survival Mind was saying stop at level five because level six will physically harm the body. Higher mind knew that the body could go to level ten without physical damage. This was a very good lesson in a controlled environment that proved to me that Survival Mind could not accurately determine the amount of pain that my body could withstand before causing physical damage.

Car Door

Pain is experienced at different intensities. Our perspective of pain changes with the situation. Take a person that slams their hand in the door. If you ask them how much pain they feel at the time on a scale of one to ten you would probably hear them say between seven and eight. Change the situation a bit; let's say there is a child about to run into the road. The person starts yelling at the child and ends up slamming their hand in the door. Ask that person what was the perception of pain in the hand then and most people would say none because their mind was not on the pain but on the child. The context of the situation determines the amount of suffering you would feel about the pain.

That Doesn't Hurt

It is the same with pain experienced when you are enjoying an activity. When you participate in a sport you enjoy and there is pain involved your perspective of that pain is not one of suffering. You allow the pain to be there because you are enjoying yourself. The pain is now an accepted intense physical sensation without the suffering.

We can sit for hours in the same position watching a movie or playing video games but try and sit in that same position for ten minutes in meditation and you notice the discomfort and want to move. The longer you make yourself sit in meditation without moving, the more painful it seems to become. The more you fight it, the more painful it becomes and you begin to tell your story about the pain. "I can't sit like this, this is killing me, and I have to move." The story creates the suffering. But if you drop the story the pain may stay but the suffering leaves.

Emotional Pain

Emotional pain is an unpleasant feeling. This pain can occur because of contact with outside stimuli such as smell, seeing an object, or it can arise only in the mind without outside stimuli. You only suffer from this type of pain when you attach a story to that emotional pain. Recognize that there is pain by being aware of it arising, abiding and departing in meditation and through mindfulness in daily life. Know that it is not you, it is not permanent.

Attachment to Personal Preference

Any attachment to a personal preference is identification with “I.” It is not wrong to have personal preferences. Desire is not the cause of suffering. It is the attachment to personal preferences and desire that cause suffering. For example, someone offers you an ice cream cone, vanilla or chocolate. You choose chocolate, but then find out the chocolate is all gone. Do you feel disappointed or get upset? If you answer yes, that is attachment. It’s not the preference that caused the suffering. It’s the attachment to the preference. After all, there’s still vanilla (though we all know that it is not as good as chocolate!).

The Number One Reason for Disturbing Emotions

The number one reason for dissatisfaction with life is taking our emotions, feelings, and thoughts as our actual identity. We identify with the label. For example, “I **am** angry,” “I **am** sad,” “I **am** so stressed out.” This is one of the biggest hindrances to happiness, actually identifying and believing that “I” am an emotion, feeling, or thought. We are not these feelings. We experience them but they are not ourselves.

Chapter 4

Change Our Way of Thinking

How Is That Working for You?

One of the main reasons we continue to suffer is that we keep doing the same things over and over again expecting different results. If we act in an unwholesome manner from a disturbing emotion it can only bring on suffering. Acting out of anger can only lead to more anger. Acting out of sadness can only lead to more sadness. Acting out of stress can only lead to more stress. It is time to come to the realization that what you have been doing does NOT work. We can choose to act differently when these emotions arise. We work to form new habits. In Buddhism this is called “purifying the mind” or “retraining the mind.”

Intention

Dropping your story is a way of “purifying the mind” or “retraining the mind.” You first have to realize that you have a story. Your storyline is the narrative of events that reflects your judgments, preconceptions, ideas, views, perceptions, what you think, say and how you do things; how something affects ‘me’ as separate from everything else. Attachment to this storyline actually causes the suffering and discontentment we experience. Come to recognize that every thought you are attached to is your story. Once you understand that you are suffering from this storyline you use ‘intention’ to start the transformation from disturbing emotions to equanimity. Intention is to want to even drop that storyline. To recognize that what is causing the disturbing emotion is just a storyline. This intention is to have wholesome thinking, speech and action. We train in generosity, gratitude, compassion, gentleness, effort, patience, and discipline. When we make a mistake, we don’t judge ourselves, we don’t beat ourselves up, and we don’t punish ourselves. We don’t criticize ourselves harshly. Instead, we acknowledge that we made a mistake and move on with kindness.

Counterintuitive – Driving on Ice

We can train our minds to accept reality, as it actually exists without the overlay of expectation. A common action that may seem counterintuitive is steering into a skid. When I was a kid my parents taught us how to drive on ice and snow. They took us driving out on the frozen lake where we jammed on the brakes and learned to steer into the skid to straighten out the car. This took a lot of practice until it became habit because it's natural to turn the steering wheel the other way, away from the skid. Some of the techniques presented here may seem counterintuitive but I guarantee that if you use them you can free yourself from suffering and discontentment with life on every level.

Another example of a counterintuitive move: if someone has been impaled with an object you shouldn't pull it out of the body, as much as you may want to the object must remain in the body. It should be secured so it doesn't move until surgical intervention is available. If you pull the object out you may cause further damage or the person may bleed to death. The object may actually be keeping the person alive at the moment. It is similar with disturbing emotions, you can't yank them out. You have to allow them to be there and use a gentle unplugging technique. The emotion will remain without causing suffering or harm and will eventually leave on its own.

All You Need Is a Split Second--The Missing Peace/Piece

We can learn to create distance between the emotional thought and the reaction. Even a split second can make all the difference. This split second is obtained by meditating and practicing mindfulness (the homework assignments presented in this book). That distance doesn't come in a day or a week or even a month but gradually after weeks, months and years. Daily mindfulness and meditation create a change in the brain structure and chemistry that brings a measurable time period in which negative reaction ceases. Don't be daunted by the time required, some practice is always better than none. Understand that training now prepares you for the challenge that arrives when there is no time to prepare.

The Present Moment

Another way to train the mind is to learn to live in the present moment by looking 'at' thought, rather than 'from' thought. What matters is noticing the thought--not acting on it. We learn to watch how the mind operates, how the mind 'thinks.' The *why*, the content of the story, is not important. It's the *how* or the habitual engagement of the mind that we make ourselves aware of. Learning to live in the present moment also consist of allowing thoughts of the past and the future to flow through the mind without engaging in them.

Self-Preservation

The story we tell others and ourselves is what makes us feel safe, secure and right. Self-preservation can be destructive when it is the only way we look at the world. When we accept that there are many stories for any experience, and go further to allow each one an equal standing then we lessen our attachment to the 'One, True Reality' as we see it. This lessens the suffering surrounding any experience.

Chapter 5

Four Steps to Dealing with Disturbing Emotions

We have four opportunities to deal with disturbing emotions:

1. After acting out
2. After the emotion has arisen and is abiding
3. At the time the emotion is just beginning to arise
4. Before the emotion arises.

1. After Acting Out

That Didn't Work Too Well

This is where we have to start. After we have acted out of a disturbing emotion, we recognize that our actions did not work out so well for us. For instance, you raised your voice, told someone off, hit a wall, pulled out your hair, kicked the dog, slammed the door, and told your version of the story over and over to yourself and others, nagged, complained, went on a spending spree, or stayed in bed all day. All of these actions created more suffering not only for yourself but for others as well.

We ask the question, "How did that work for you?" We can say to ourselves, "Well, that didn't work out too well." The first step is to recognize what you have been doing is not working for you or others. It is not ending the suffering.

Consequences

Acknowledge the consequences of your actions. How much harm did you cause yourself? Is this a habit? Has this affected your health? Your relationships? Your work? Recognize that every time you act out on disturbing emotions the worse they actually get. The more you act out the more upset you get. A small fire is now blazing out of control and you can't seem to stop it. When you continue to react in a negative way the next time the same situation arises you are more likely to react in the same way. Recognize that this pattern has to change.

Also consider what happens to the person that witnesses your negative reaction to a disturbing emotion? You create defensiveness and that person will not be able to hear what you are saying. You create fear and they can become fearful. Recognize that disturbing emotions also affect you. You become narrow and close-minded. Any chance of understanding or perceiving another person's point of view is shut out.

At this point all you can do is recognize what happened and resolve to act differently next time. It may take you weeks or even months to recognize what is happening and many more months to both recognize and resolve to act differently. This is not a quick fix. It takes diligence and practice! Lots of it! But you can do it if you persist with your intention to be mindful. After acting out resolve to have the intention to unplug from that disturbing emotion the next time it arises. In the beginning having this intention will start you on the way to happiness.

No Defense

Avoid defending your actions. This is a waste of time. Getting defensive just cements the story. Gently move on.

Don't Tell Your Story

Don't go telling your story to others; this only adds fuel to the fire. When beginning this practice, you may find this impossible to do. If that is so, tell your story once and only once to one person and then be done with it. Don't try to defend yourself and don't judge yourself or others. This includes talking to a therapist. Spending a lot of money on a therapist to tell your story over and over again is not going to end your suffering. In fact, you will strengthen the suffering because you are solidifying the story, which leads to more suffering. *The more you tell your story the more you suffer.* It is time to let go of the stories and live in the present. It isn't important why the disturbing emotion arises; it is what you do with the emotion that is important.

The time to tell your story is after the disturbing emotion is gone. Most of the time there won't be a story to tell anymore. At the monastery a nun and I were talking about this. She said it's like stirring the pot. The more we tell our story and others add to that story the pot fills up till it finally boils over. We then wonder why we have a mess on our hands. Stop adding to the pot! Stop stirring it!

The Past Is No Excuse for the Present

You don't need to investigate *why* you acted out, or why someone else has acted out. Looking to the past to justify your actions is not an acceptable excuse, nor will it resolve the behavior. For example, I could blame my behavior on the fact that I didn't get the Visible Woman for Christmas when I was a kid. This was a model of a woman with removable guts and organs, blue veins and red arteries, and a transparent shell for skin. I asked for one every Christmas and never did get one. A few years back my mom was visiting (I was 47 years old) and I asked her why she never gave me the 'invisible woman' when I asked for it every year. She said that she did--but it was 'invisible.' That day we went to an antique mall and she found a Visible Woman and bought it for me. She handed it to me and said, "Now quit complaining!"

We tend to use the past as an excuse for our actions in the present. And it can be something as ridiculous as not getting a particular Christmas present. Acknowledge that we live in the present, not the past. Never blame present behavior on past events. It is time to own up to your actions in the present.

The past is not always what we believe it to be. We have false memories and our memories are inaccurate. How many times have you insisted that you remembered an event a certain way and someone has shown you that it was a false memory? A memory is just your story about a past event. A memory is also your perspective of an event. It can be very unreliable. Remember that a memory is filled with our perception and judgments about reality. Several people can experience an event and each account of that event will be described differently. We see this often in families. An event happens and one person relates their side of the event and another family member relates their description of the event. As a third person listening to these two stories you would never guess that it was the same event. We each put our own spin on the story we tell.

Patterns and Habits

Realize that each time you submit to a disturbing emotion you set up a pattern of being a servant to that emotion. If you tell someone off and then apologize, you may feel that you have gained a bit of relief and fixed the problem. This is not the case. Not only did you set up a habit of becoming angry, acting out and then apologizing, you also set in motion a pattern that allows anger to arise faster the next time. You also tend to get more irritated more often and then start to blow up at the least little thing. And even if you apologize this never fixes anything. Apologies cannot erase the past or undo the harm done. Apologies do not erase the habit that is forming. This doesn't mean that you don't apologize. It is extremely important that you acknowledge the fact that apologies don't patch up harm already done.

Realize that the more often you act in an unwholesome manner, the harder it is to act in a wholesome manner the next time. As stated previously, the more you feed the fire the harder it is going to be to put it out. If you strike a match and blow it out immediately you will find it easy to extinguish. If you strike a match and add fuel, that fire will get bigger and bigger. The more fuel you add the more effort and time it will take to put it out. The same occurs with feelings and emotions, the more you tell your story, to yourself and to others, the bigger the story and the longer it takes for the feelings and emotions to pass.

The formation of unwholesome habits starts with allowing a disturbing feeling or emotion to overwhelm you. This is the moment you give into the feeling and lose perspective. You start to spin your story about the emotion that engulfs and overwhelms you. The disturbing emotion at this point can quickly change to destructive behavior aimed at yourself and others. Acting on a disturbing emotion shuts off any ability to act in a rational way. You have closed your mind, put yourself on the defensive and are incoherent. At this point the best strategy is to forgive yourself and drop your story. Then don't allow yourself to get sucked back into the story.

Whenever we decide to act, it is like coming upon a fork in the road and choosing which path to take. If you choose to embrace an unwholesome action this will lead to other unwholesome actions. If you choose a wholesome action that will lead to more wholesome actions in the future. Don't judge yourself or others. Don't try to defend yourself. Don't rehash past experiences. Don't go on telling your story. Try to drop the story as soon as possible. This will end suffering.

Intention Is the Key

At this stage it is extremely important to determine to act in a different manner next time. This doesn't mean that you will be successful in acting differently, but you will have the intention to do so.

2. After the Disturbing Emotion Has Arisen and Is Abiding

This is when you are in the midst of the disturbing emotion. The feeling is present and you are already telling your story of why it is there. You don't want it there and you don't know how to get rid of it. You are caught up in the habitual pattern of reacting. This is the time to acknowledge that the disturbing emotion is abiding in full force. You can turn to an unplugging technique to free yourself from the suffering caused by your story about this emotion.

Don't act on the feelings. Recognize the emotion but don't act out. No yelling, no screaming, no

whining, no complaining, no blaming, no venting, no hitting a pillow, no driving like a maniac. Don't slam the door and don't spend the day in bed. Don't smash the dishes or pull your hair out. Don't try to escape, just accept the feeling and emotion. Don't feed into the feeling. If you tell the story, that's feeding the emotion. Don't add fuel to the fire. Don't do anything to fan the flames. Walk away and unplug.

Don't tell your story to yourself or another. Don't judge, don't analyze, and don't defend yourself. Don't find fault with the other person. Don't rehash past experiences of like kind. Remember that your past reactions didn't end suffering. When the story comes up, as soon as possible, let it go using an unplugging technique.

Don't try and talk it out. Don't try and work it out. After the emotion has arisen you cannot see or hear clearly. Walk away before you start that same old argument over again. This may be a difficult step to take but it must be taken. Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is the definition of insanity.

Realize that this emotion is temporary and impermanent. It will pass. This will probably be the most difficult part of changing the way you relate to disturbing emotions. Once you attach a story to the disturbing emotion it feels like it may last forever. You can't imagine life without this feeling. You can't imagine that it will ever leave even if you live to be one hundred years old. You also start to convince yourself that you have always felt this way. You believe this is the end of life, that you will never be happy again. Recognize that this is a delusion! Delusion is a belief sustained as true despite clear evidence to the contrary.

Reactions to disturbing emotions are based on how you have reacted in the past. How you act in the future is based on how you act at the present moment. When you choose to act in a way that ends suffering instead of reacting in a way that creates suffering, you can change the pattern.

Use an Unplugging Technique

An unplugging technique is a method that helps you let go of your story. Your story is your narrative about the attachment to a disturbing emotion. The best unplugging technique is one that makes you laugh. This book gives several examples but it is good if you can come up with some of your own. This way you can remember to use them in the midst of disturbing emotions. It is best to have several different unplugging techniques, this way you have more tools to deal with all kinds of emotional situations.

The purpose of using any of these techniques is to disconnect from the storyline you have associated with the emotion. You are not unplugging from the emotion itself but from the storyline. It is the storyline that creates suffering, not the feeling or emotion. The telling of the story is the problem, not the emotion.

Often the moment to unplug is exactly when it feels most intolerable to do so, because we get so caught up in our story about the emotion. Suffering does not occur unless you have a story to go along with the painful or unpleasant feeling. Up to a point the same degree of pain can cause suffering or pleasure depending on the story applied to it.

Unplugging from a story is like unplugging a radio. When you unplug a radio that has no battery, it doesn't go on and on, it stops immediately. Stories have a tendency to come up over and over again even within seconds and minutes of dropping them. So we unplug over and over again. To

unplug means to let go, stop, break the connection, cease and desist from the storyline.

This is not about emotionally ‘shutting down’ or ‘avoiding the issue.’ We allow the disturbing emotion to go through the body without reacting in a negative way. We allow the emotion to abide without resistance, clinging, tension or attaching a storyline to it. The unplugging stops the negative behavior and suffering. It is very important to remember that the unplugging stops the negative (unwholesome) reaction not the disturbing feeling or emotion! The feeling/emotion may remain but the suffering ceases, guaranteed.

Stay in the Situation for One Minute

Don’t react to the feeling for one entire minute. Notice what your mind/body does in that one minute. It will seem like a lifetime, so time yourself. Use a watch and observe the seconds tick away. Count out loud or to yourself as the seconds pass. See how you feel after one minute. Now use another unplugging technique if the suffering hasn’t subsided yet.

Ride the Wave!

Ride the physical sensations of the disturbing emotion. Feel your blood pressure rising, feel the sweaty palms, feel the butterflies in your stomach. Ride the wave! Know that you aren’t going to die from this feeling or the physical sensations. A woman once told me that she had horrible panic attacks. She would start to shake and couldn’t stop. She was constantly afraid of the next attack. I asked her, “Have you died from these attacks?” She looked at me funny and said “No.” I asked, “Are the attacks permanent?” She said “No.” I told her to ride the wave of the feeling. She said she didn’t like the feeling and wanted to get rid of it. The harder she tried to get rid of it the worse it got. I told her that the feeling is going to be there, so she may as well just observe it without getting caught up in it. Don’t try and push it away because it will only make it worse. Just remember to ride the wave of those intense feelings. A week later she came back and told me she had another attack and was able to ‘ride the wave.’ It was much shorter and not as intense as the other episodes she experienced.

Impermanent

Recognize that the feeling will leave. A feeling or emotion is never permanent. In fact, nothing is permanent. There is no such thing as job security. Being married does not mean you won’t lose the spouse to divorce or death. Money is spent or lost as fast as it’s made. There is no such thing as security in outside circumstances. Everything including all feelings and emotions are impermanent. If you can remember this in the midst of a disturbing emotion you can unplug from it. You can wait it out. Don’t play into the feelings and emotions. Let them run their course. The only true security is training the mind to be calm in all circumstances.

Separate Entity

Treat the emotion as a separate entity. Imagine that the disturbing emotion is actually an alien trying to invade your body. If you don’t feed it by telling your story it cannot cause you suffering. You don’t try and get rid of the alien, allow it to be there, just don’t feed it.

Develop Imagined Shields

Use your imagination. Surround yourself with a protective bubble. Imagine you are inside this protective bubble and nothing can harm you. You can stay inside this bubble and watch the activity of pain around you and be protected. You can also use a soft warm fuzzy blanket to wrap yourself in. You can send this bubble or blanket to protect and calm others.

“DROPS”

Don't Resist Or Push, Soften. To soften is to acknowledge the disturbing emotion. When you are aware of the disturbing emotion you are able to open your mind and experience the full impact of that emotion. This means you don't exclaim, "I shouldn't feel this way." You acknowledge the feeling and allow it to abide. Don't resist or push it away: don't try and get rid of it. Again, allow it to abide. Feel the physical sensations that continue with the emotion: e.g., rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, sweaty palms, etc. Allow the emotion to abide without your story attached to it. It is impermanent and it will leave.

In Three Days

I know a woman that tells herself: "In 3 days I will tell him off." When she gets angry with someone, she does not act on it immediately. She allows herself three days before taking action. By the second day she usually has forgotten the event. By the end of the three days she never tells anyone off because she has fully calmed down by then. Now this technique would not work for anyone that has a problem holding a grudge. It is important to pick a technique that will unplug you from immediate and future action.

Don't Identify with the Feeling

Acknowledge that you are in the midst of a painful feeling and let it go. Try not to use the word 'I.' Don't say, "I am afraid" instead say, "Fear has arisen, fear is abiding and fear will pass." Don't identify with the feeling or emotion. It is not 'you.' Say, "This is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself." Disengage, disentangle your identity from the feeling.

Crazy Person

When you engage in a disturbing emotion your mind becomes overwhelmed so you can't think clearly. Your logic becomes fuzzy and untrustworthy. You can put your hands in front of your eyes and over your ears to experience that clouded mind.

We can become crazy at the moment a disturbing emotion arises and abides. You acknowledge, "I am not in my right mind." When we see someone else acting out, we think, "Wow, what a crazy person." If only we could see ourselves and realize, "Wow, what a crazy person!" and accept the situation as it is. Don't try to change the situation--you can't. You can only change your story about the situation. Do not make decisions during that overwhelming time. Don't try and have a conversation with anyone. Get to a place where you can calm down and use an unplugging technique.

Write a New Version of the Story

Some therapists advise you to write out your story, crumple the paper and throw it away or burn it. This only solidifies your story. A better and more beneficial exercise would be to write out a new story. Rewrite the past so you have a happy experience and a fantastic new outcome.

I know a person that rewrote her childhood experience. She wrote that she was raised by bears and wolves and now has a wonderful childhood past. So if you insist on writing out a story make it a wholesome story. This would also apply to your future. Write out a wonderful future.

The Third Nose

Don't try to figure out another person's story, whether it's about you or something else. Don't wonder whether it is true or not. It doesn't matter, it is their story. At a workshop I gave the example of the third nose on your face. I asked the audience, "Would you get upset if someone told you that you look funny with that third nose on your face?" People laughed and shook their heads no. They said, "No" because it wasn't personal to them: no one had a third nose and so they weren't concerned with that comment. Then I asked them, "Would you get upset if I told you that you need to change the way you practice Buddhism?" Their body language became tense. They leaned away from me and folded their arms. Why? Because they took that statement personally. People did have a practice and they felt threatened by my comment. In fact, it was no different than my comment about the third nose because that is all it was, my comment about them. Notice that no one tried to defend himself or herself about the third nose; no one pointed out that they didn't even have a second nose.

Remember that you don't have to respond or defend yourself when other people tell you their story about you. Don't take someone else's story about you personally. This is extremely difficult in the beginning but it can be done. You can train yourself to have compassion for that person instead of being offended by their story. A helpful unplugging technique is to say, "It is none of my business what others think about me."

You Can't Get Hit with the Arrow if You Don't Make Yourself the Target

The very first time I experienced this idea of not making myself a target was when I lived in an intentional community. One of the rules was that if you had a problem with another person you had to try and work it out among yourselves. If you couldn't do that you went to mediation. One particular woman was having difficulties with me. She stated in a community meeting one day, "I hate you, have always hated you, never liked you from day one, and want you out of here." I said, "I didn't know that, what can we do to change that?" She said, "Nothing, you need to move." We ended up in mediation.

Before the scheduled day of mediation, I practiced compassion meditation (explained later in the book) for several weeks. When the day arrived for mediation, I felt ready. As we sat in the mediation she talked first. I listened whole-heartedly, without judgment or defensiveness. As she spoke, I felt my consciousness leave my body and enter her body. I actually saw my body sitting across from her. I could feel her emotions but I wasn't attached to them so they caused me no harm while I was in her body. This went on for about twenty minutes and then my consciousness returned to my body. As she continued to speak, I saw her words turn into arrows that passed right

through my body without doing any harm. I did not make myself the target. Practicing compassion meditation opened my heart and mind and enabled me to hear her story.

When she finished, I told her I understood why she didn't like me. It actually didn't have anything to do with me. She said I reminded her of cops who had beaten her up on several occasions. She stated that every time she looked at me it brought up that memory. How can you change someone's mind about you when it is not you that they are really angry with?

I said to her, "Wow, I wouldn't like me either. I think I should just move." She responded, "Don't you think we can work this out?" We talked for another hour and at the end of that hour we hugged. When we got back to the land, we were on good terms for about two days and then another story arose. Compassion meditation helped me to realize that her story was exactly that--her story. I didn't try to defend myself but simply accepted that this was her story.

At the second mediation I realized that mediation alone was not going to change the situation. After each mediation session we would resolve the issues but new stories came up. After three mediation sessions the community and board had to vote if I would be allowed to continue to live in the community. The community and board voted to allow me to stay. I ended up moving after eighteen months, but not out of hate or anger. It was just time to move on. If you don't make yourself a target nothing can harm you. You will not suffer from the stories that others have about you.

Foreign Language

When someone is angry with you, yelling at you, or treating you badly and you can't walk away (for instance a boss) pretend that they are speaking in a foreign language and you can't understand him or her.

Test of the Emergency Broadcast System; This is a test, this is only a test ...

I flew to Madison, Wisconsin to participate in a study on the brains of mediators at the University of Wisconsin. The study organizers had pre-arranged and pre-paid for the motel. When I arrived at the motel, they had a reservation for me but no record of payment. The clerk requested a credit card. I declined to give it because it was my understanding that the room was already paid for. We called the three phone numbers of the study contacts but since it was after six PM no one answered. I ran some errands and came back three hours later. The clerk said she couldn't get in touch with the study contacts and asked for a credit card again. Knowing that part of the study was about stress, I asked the clerk, "Is this part of the test?" She seemed frazzled and said, "I hope not, because I don't know what to do and I'm pretty stressed out right now." I laughed and said, "This is a test. This is only a test. There is nothing to be upset about." She laughed and then I gave her a credit card. The next morning when I checked out, the bill had been taken care of by the University.

When I arrived at the testing facility I asked if this check-in scenario had been arranged as part of the stress test and was told no. Because of the practice of not taking things personally, I was not upset. I told others how it seemed likely this situation had been staged so that the stress could be measured. However, this was just coincidence and now the story has become a good unplugging technique. 'This is a test, this is only a test,' can work wonders in a stressful situation.

Hold Your Finger

The Touch Of Healing by Alice Burmeister demonstrates Korean acupressure points (Jin Shin Jyutsu) to relieve the sensation of the emotion. Wrap the fingers of one hand around the finger related to the emotion on the other hand. It does not matter if you use the right hand or the left hand. Another person can hold the finger for you just as effectively. If you are really upset hold your entire hand! The meridian associated with the emotion ends in the finger described, holding that finger helps clear the energy pathway.

Thumb: worry, anxiety

Index finger: fear

Middle finger: anger, frustration, and irritation

Ring finger: sorrow

Little finger: trying too hard, pretense

You can also take a piece of paper and with a pen, pencil, or crayon trace the outline of your hand. Now label each finger and thumb with the emotion it is linked to. This will help you remember which finger to hold. Stick it to the refrigerator, near the bathroom mirror, near your pillow, or somewhere you will see it throughout the day. You will become familiar with which finger to hold when a disturbing emotion arises. It may be difficult to remember to hold your finger when you are in the midst of a disturbing emotion but if you do you will notice a difference almost immediately. It may also be difficult for you to even want to hold your finger because of the disturbing emotion but you should tell yourself you will try for at least one minute. Give it a chance.

Do the ‘Turtle’

The turtle is a gesture in which you cross one arm over the other arm across your chest and hug yourself. This is a very effective method for calming yourself down. A pre-school teacher showed very small children to do the turtle whenever they felt a disturbing emotion. One of her three-year old students who learned this method saw that her own mother was extremely upset. She told her mother to do the turtle. Her mother looked around and since no one was there to see her she tried it. Her daughter began to laugh which made the mother laugh. The mother felt better and so did the daughter. So you can see that the mother ended the suffering of two people by doing the turtle.

Energy Point

Another acupressure point that helps re-center your energy is to hang your arms straight down, loosely at your sides. Extend your thumb out from your hand toward your hip. Where the thumb-tip touches the hip is an acupressure point that will help you (or someone else the same height) re-enter the physical body from wherever the story has taken you. The contact point may be quite sensitive or it may be numb. Pressing the site with a fingertip until you can feel it pulsing or it is no longer sensitive or numb will re-center yourself or another back inside the body. This is generally calming.

The Six Senses

The six senses can be used to unplug from a storyline. The senses center you back in the present when you stimulate them. When using the senses be careful not to add stories so much as changing and dropping sense objects to refocus the mind.

Smell: carry a small vial of scent

Touch: carry a stone, amulet, something with texture

Sight: picture or an object

Taste: gum, toothpick

Sound: bell, dog clicker

Mind: mantra or chant, a joke or an image.

Come Back to Your Breath

This is an advanced practice because of the difficulty of remembering to do it when in the midst of a disturbing emotion. It works if you can remember it. One way to remember it is to count to ten and take ten deep breaths. By taking deep breaths you slow down the breathing process, which calms your body. This unplugging technique is helpful when the emotion is just beginning to arise. Practicing breathing meditation, which is explained later in the book, can help with this technique.

Repeat a Compassion Mantra

Repeat the mantra, "I am free from suffering and live in happiness." Or you could expand this compassion to others by saying, "May all beings be free from suffering and live in happiness." Repeat this over and over. This is replacing unwholesome thinking with wholesome thinking.

Analyze (only if you insist)

When I say analyze I don't mean by telling your story about the emotion. I mean for you to understand the root cause of suffering which is always attachment or aversion, taking events personally and not realizing they are impermanent. One hundred percent of the time it is because you are attached to your story. End of analysis. And I mean end of story!

The Arrow in the Chest

Once upon a time a young hunter was shot through the chest with an arrow. Friends carried him to the healer, the arrow was removed and he survived. If the hunter had insisted on knowing who made the arrow, who shot the arrow, who the parents of the shooter were etc..., before he would allow the arrow to be removed, he would have died. We don't need to know who made the arrow; we don't need to know who shot the arrow. We don't need to know what the parents of the shooter do for a living. The lesson is that we don't need to analyze the past, we don't analyze why we feel the way we feel, we just let the storyline go. Don't dredge up the past and don't fret over the future. We can't say, "I'm angry because I wasn't given a chemistry set on my twelfth

birthday.” We can’t even remember where we park the car let alone what our distant past was. Don’t make excuses of why you can’t take the arrow out of your chest. Don’t look for the reason for the trigger. Just accept that you have been triggered and use an unplugging technique.

You Are Not the Feeling

You don’t say, “I am the flu.” You say, “I have the flu.” You can also do this with feelings and thoughts. Rather than say, “I am sad,” you can say, “There is sadness here.” You can also say, “Sadness has arisen, sadness is abiding.” This helps you to understand that the feeling is not ‘you.’

You don’t know where the flu came from; you just know that you have it. The same with thoughts and feelings, you don’t necessarily know where they came from you just know that they exist now. It is not necessary to know where the flu came from to cure it. So it is with feelings and thoughts, you don’t have to know what triggered them, just allow them to be and they will leave on their own. You don’t identify with the flu as being a part of you; and so it is with feelings and thoughts, they are not you.

My Story about That

You can unplug by coming up with a short phrase such as:

“My story about that is...” you do not fill in the blank, you leave it hanging. This cultivates the realization that you can drop the story here. By saying, “My story about that is. . .” you acknowledge that this is only ‘your story’ about a situation. It is your judgment, your analysis, your opinion, your perception, and your version of reality. This allows you time to drop your story, just by saying these words.

Cut the Fuse

You may be able to defuse the situation before a disturbing emotion arises. Once I drove in a parking lot and accidentally cut someone off. Immediately I put my hands in gassho (palms together and looks like you are praying) and nodded at the other driver that I was sorry. She was surprised and motioned for me to take the parking space. I motioned, “No, you take it” and she motioned back, “No you take it.” I took the parking place and she drove on smiling.

We both left the scene happy. This had a ripple effect on others. We were both more likely to be kind to others. Had I responded in a negative way neither of us would have been happy and we would probably be negative to others during our day.

However, we act to a situation, it carries over into our next few moments. We can choose to make those moments of less suffering or more suffering. These moments build on each other and become habits. The wholesome reaction becomes the new wholesome habit.

Piece of Wood

There is an old Buddhist saying: When you have an angry thought become as a piece of wood. This means that you become silent. You don’t tell your story.

Judge Judy (My Personal Favorite)

I used to watch Judge Judy when I had a TV and still do when I have the chance. Judge Judy provides a great opportunity to watch people tell their stories. We hear how they truly believe that they are right and others are wrong. We can stand by as outside observers and see the insanity. If we can only see ourselves as others see us, we can see how ridiculous we can sound telling our story.

My unplugging technique: In my mind I prepare and present my case before Judge Judy. She always rules in my favor. End of case, end of story! Don't go on and on or you will lose. Sometimes my mind would say, we have further evidence, or I missed a part of the story. But then I remember an episode that went like this.

Judge Judy asks the defendant for his side of the story. When he finishes, Judge Judy asks him if he is sure of the facts of his story and he says yes. Judge Judy turns to the plaintiff and declares that she wins all the money she has asked for. This plaintiff wins her case without saying a word. Instead of being happy she insists on telling her side of the story. Judge Judy tries to explain to the plaintiff that she has won all the money she has asked for and doesn't need to tell her side of the story. The plaintiff keeps insisting that she wants to tell her side of the story. Judge Judy finally allows her to tell her side of the story. When the plaintiff finishes her story Judge Judy looks at her and asks, "Is that what really happened?" The plaintiff says, "Yes Ma'am." Judge Judy says, "OK I believe you, you lose." The plaintiff lost her case because of the new information she provided by telling of her side of the story.

Judge Judy turns to the defendant and asks him if he has anything to add. He responds, "No Ma - am." Though his story contradicted the plaintiff's he knew not to tell his story again because he would lose the case! This demonstrates how much people are attached to their own story. They are willing to tell their story no matter the cost.

I call this the Judge Judy technique. This was one of my favorite techniques. When my Judge Judy scenarios played out in my mind, I would acknowledge that I had won my case. When that story would arise in my head again (sometimes two seconds later), I would think of that episode and say, "I better not add to my story because then I will lose." This is true because I would lose my equanimity and peace of mind. I recognized that I had told my story and won and now that was the end of it.

If you use the Judge Judy technique use it only one time per story. You've heard the line: 'It's my story and I'm sticking to it.' Be aware that this attitude can cause a great deal of suffering and loss. Judge Judy will always rule in your favor especially when you drop your story. Judge Judy rules!

Life's Not Fair

I gave a talk at a juvenile detention center filled with teenage boys in Appalachia, Ohio. The first thing I said to them was, "Ya'all got caught, didn't ya?" They answered, "Yeah." I said, "And your friends didn't." They shouted, "Yeah." The tense faces of the counselors sitting in the back showed that they were a bit nervous. I'm sure they were thinking, "What have we done? Did anyone screen this speaker?" The next thing I said to them was, "Life is not fair." And they shouted, "That's Right!" and then I said, "Now get over it." The counselors looked relieved. I gave them several examples of how life is not fair but it is our attitude about the situations that

determines if we are going to suffer from them.

One of the examples: I told them that I had a van and just last week the water pump went out. I asked them, “Now is that fair?” They all said, “NO, because you are a nun and living a good life. Nothing bad should happen to nuns.” I responded, “Ya’all are right, it isn’t fair, now I have to get over that and get the water pump fixed.” I also told them if I didn’t own a van I would never have to worry about a water pump blowing up. It was a pleasure to see their eyes light up because they understood.

I also explained to them that I was raised being told that if I just did the right thing no harm would come to me. If I just behaved myself, I could never be hurt. It didn’t take me long to see that those statements weren’t true. Life isn’t fair. No matter how good you are, bad things can still happen to you. I used ‘Life is not fair, now get over it,’ as an unplugging technique for a long time.

I know a nun that was driving her car and was pulled over by the police for speeding. She asked the officer why he decided to pull her over and not the car in front or behind her, since they were all speeding. He said that he had to pick someone so he picked her. There was no reason, she was speeding and got caught. She told him it wasn’t fair and he said, “Yep, you are right, it isn’t fair” and proceeded to write the ticket. Life isn’t fair, now get over it! Sometimes you are pulled over and given a ticket and you weren’t even speeding. If you take things personally that is when you suffer.

We Choose Our Situations

I love it when people come to me about problems about their significant others. I ask them, “Was that a shotgun wedding? Because if it wasn’t what are you complaining about?” This is one of the best examples of how our choices have consequences. People choose to be in relationships with each other. They choose their friends and the person they marry the job they work at. Relationships change over time and they become unhappy with those changes. We are always responsible for our own actions. We live with the consequences of these actions. You can always change your circumstances and then live with those consequences. When you change your relationships remember you may be jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

Go Cut the Grass

You can go cut the grass, wash the car, or play solitaire. The idea is to remove yourself long enough from the situation so that you can use an unplugging technique. Do not use it as an escape. You are not running away or leaving in a huff from the situation. If another person is involved you can tell them that you can’t talk right now, you need to leave. Try to keep your voice calm and don’t give parting shots as you walk away. Give your mind a break from the insistent chatter going on in your mind.

Leave the situation because you cannot fix it. A lot of times people think they have to fix something now, but they are not ready or prepared. For instance, if your best friend were dying of a brain tumor, would you operate to save them? Of course not, unless you are already the best neurosurgeon around. Same for disturbing emotions, you train, prepare and practice before you can succeed in the moment. So the best thing you can do is walk away and use your unplugging technique.

3. As the Emotion Is Arising

You cannot stop an emotion or thought from arising. It can't be done. Allow the thought and emotion to arise, abide, and let it go without your storyline attached to it. By allowing the thought and emotion to arise you may feel pain but you don't have to suffer from it. The only way not to experience suffering is to drop your story about that thought or emotion.

Let's try this little experiment here. Right now, do not think of a yellow jeep. Do not think of a yellow jeep with four doors and a roof rack. How's that working? No yellow jeep, right? As you can see you are thinking of a yellow jeep right now. You can't help it. What you put in your mind can arise at any time. You don't have control over what arises but you can have control over your action to any thought. This takes practice. You can also substitute one thought for another using an unplugging technique.

Blame the Body First

Blame the body first because the body can affect the mind. Watch to see if you are tired, hungry, sick, or in physical pain. This is not an excuse. Recognize that your body is not at its best and therefore will affect the mind. You know from experience that if you are tired, hungry or sick that emotions seem more solid and more difficult to deal with. You can say, "Blame the body first." This causes you to be aware and then use another unplugging technique.

Watch Out!

At times there can be signs that a disturbing emotion is on the way. Learn to recognize these signs. For example, every time you go to the dentist fear arises. Be aware that in certain situations you have triggers. Don't use them as an excuse, be aware of them and then use an unplugging technique.

Arise, Abide and Depart

Allow the feeling to arise and just watch it arise, abide and depart. Don't try to stop it from arising and don't push it away once it has arisen. It is very important not to try to stop it from arising. You cannot stop it, and if you try to stop it, it will only get stronger. Allow it to arise, just watch it be there and then notice when it departs. We can know intellectually that the disturbing emotion is impermanent but the actual experience of being aware of its departure will strengthen your resolve to continue this practice.

Don't Stand on the Tracks

Trying to stop the emotion from arising would be like standing in front of a train to stop it. You know you can't stop the train and if you stay on the tracks you will be killed. The same with feelings and emotions. Don't try to stop them, get out of the way. When you see the train coming just take two steps to the side and let it pass. You can count the cars (thoughts) and not get involved with them. Just allow them to pass without comment, without jumping on the train.

It's Just There

The goal is not to 'feel' better but to be able to experience the disturbing emotion without reacting in a negative way. Allow it to run its course. Remember it is impermanent, it is illusory, it's not real, and it's not you. Allow it to abide without a negative reaction. For example, when you are crying, just cry. It will run its course. It is impermanent. If you don't attach a storyline you will not suffer.

No Fertilizing

Again, don't allow your story to grow. Don't feed it. Use a phrase or action that prevents your reaction. Unplug from the story. The goal is not to feel better but to open to the feelings, to accept and acknowledge the emotion, but not feed or buy into the storyline.

10-10-10

Use the unplugging technique of 10-10-10. Will it matter 10 days from now, 10 months from now or 10 years from now? I was giving this example at a talk and an elderly woman stood up and said that she used the '100' method. That is: Will it matter 100 years from now? We tend to take life way too seriously. Most of the problems we think we have won't even matter 10 months from now, let alone 10 years from now and certainly won't matter 100 years from now.

Here is an example: I know two people who wanted to get married. They were trying to pick out the color of the wedding invitations and could not agree. Finally, one person came to their senses and exclaimed, "Will it matter 10 days from now? Well, yes it would. Would it matter in 10 months? Not so much. Would it matter in 10 years? Certainly not." So they stopped arguing and allowed the mother-in-law to pick out the color. That put an end to everyone's suffering.

You Are Not Alone

There are at least one million people on this earth feeling exactly the same way you feel right now. They may have a different story related to the feeling but they feel the exact same thing. Do a compassion meditation for them (explained later in the book). Take on their suffering. You are suffering anyway so take theirs on so that they don't have to feel this way. You will be amazed at how quickly your suffering leaves when you do this. Again, the pain may still be there but the suffering will leave.

Body Language

Watch your body language. When you feel sad don't slump. Don't sigh or roll your eyes. When we were building the house for the hermitage, I had a difficult time. It was hot, I was tired, and I just plain didn't want to be building. I wanted to be studying and meditating. But we had to build this house or we wouldn't have a place to live (we were living in a tent). I complained a lot and was clearly miserable. One evening Cleo asked, "Could you not complain so much as it is making it difficult for me to work?" I never considered that my complaining caused so much pain for her. I decided the next day to use unplugging techniques so that I wouldn't complain. I used the unplugging techniques and I didn't tell my story to her or myself.

Each time I started to get frustrated I unplugged. At the end of the day I was so proud of myself. I asked her, “Well, how did I do?” I knew the answer was going to be one of praise. But she said, “You might as well have complained because your body language shouted how miserable you were.” I never would have figured out that body language could speak so loudly if she hadn’t pointed it out to me.

The next day I decided to work on my body language. The next morning, I awoke early and I felt tired and knew it was going to be another hot day. When I got out of bed, I didn’t drag myself, I just got out of bed. When I went to work, I could feel myself slouching and would straighten up. Each time the pail of gravel felt heavy I used an unplugging technique and it actually got lighter. I stayed mindful the entire morning and worked without suffering. Each time I changed my body language, it changed what emotion would arise. By the afternoon work session negative emotions no longer arose. Be aware of body language, it can affect your mind. When you catch yourself use an unplugging technique.

Food, Water and Air

You can survive several days without food, about three to four days without water and only about four minutes without air. The next time a disturbing emotion arises remember food, water and air. If you don’t allow your story to breathe, eat or drink, meaning, you don’t tell it to yourself or others it will leave in minutes.

4. Before the Emotion Arises

This is where the majority of the work happens. We develop new habits. We retrain our minds to act in a beneficial way. Habits can be beneficial. They allow us to act without thinking and so to respond quickly. However, frequently they do not produce the most favorable behavior because they do not serve reason, or a careful, alert mind, but a Survival Mind.

This is not a quick fix. Catching an emotion before it arises takes attention and diligence. We can start with mindfulness practice and meditation practice.

Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness practice can best be described as awareness of the mind’s activity at all times. Seated meditation helps because at that time distractions are limited and it becomes quite clear that mind is busy and follows familiar or habitual lines of thinking. But if you can’t tolerate sitting meditation you can practice mindfulness. Even if you can tolerate and enjoy seated or walking meditation, mindfulness practice is essential.

Mindfulness is one aspect of the Eightfold Path in the mental development division. Awareness is the area of your mental focus. For instance, if you lift up your right hand and look at it, that is where your awareness will be. If you now lift up your left hand and look at it, this is where your awareness will be. You can shift your awareness at any time by focusing at different parts of our body. Mindfulness or awareness of the mind involves being aware of any thought that arises, abides and leaves. This includes positive and disturbing emotions.

A student once told me that he did mindfulness practice every time he drove home from school.

When he got into his car he started driving and was mindful of each and every moment. He did not look way ahead on the highway or think about what he passed by on the road. He just drove in the present moment. He stated that each time he started thinking about what was up ahead and what he just passed, he missed what was in the present moment. This is a powerful way of developing mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness practice helps you stay in the present moment and makes you aware that all things are impermanent. This practice also gives you an opportunity to see things consciously without the storyline attached.

Try to be aware of your thoughts at all times. When any thought arises, watch for the storyline to come up. This is the primary practice that offers so much teaching. You will begin to see how everything changes depending on your attitude, your story and how mind affects body. You can change dramatically from moment to moment depending on what you think and how you respond to those thoughts. You are not the same from moment to moment or from year to year.

Be mindful of the postures of your body and your thinking when you assume these postures. When you sit, know that you are sitting. When you stand, know that you are standing. When you lie down, know that you are lying down. When you walk, know that you are walking. What happens with your mind when you are in these particular postures? Another way to obtain mindfulness is by allowing your body to be in a posture without thinking and without commenting on the feelings you experience. When you are sitting, standing, lying down, or walking, just sit, just stand, just lie down, or just walk without the inner conversation. Understand that the body is just a body; this is not a personal 'you' separate from everything else. Don't attach to this body. It is not yours. You are not it. When you become possessive of this body it creates suffering. Drop your attachment to this body and suffering comes to an end.

Be mindful of feelings. Know what feeling is abiding, unpleasant, pleasant, or neither unpleasant or pleasant. Do not get involved with your feeling or push the feeling away, just acknowledge it and recognize that a feeling exists. Do not attach a story to the feeling and you will not suffer from it.

Develop Compassion

For the purpose of this teaching, compassion is the wish for others to be free from suffering. Compassion can be altruistic as consideration for others well-being, or it can be derived from an empathetic understanding of what another being is feeling. We simply state, "May all beings be free from suffering and live in happiness." To develop compassion, we use this phrase as a greeting or when departing. As a nun, people often ask me to give a prayer or blessing and I like to say: "May you be free from suffering and the causes of suffering which are attachment to your likes, aversion to your dislikes, and delusion, which is attachment to your story and taking things personally. And may you live in happiness and the causes of happiness which are generosity, compassion and wisdom."

Venerable Kalyana said that after the tsunami in Japan and the tornado in Joplin (2011) she imagined pulling up with a semi-trailer loaded with blankets, the softest, most comforting kind of blankets possible and went out wrapping the survivors in these. This sent compassion to them. She could not go in person but she could do this and since she had felt better when others did this for her, she believed this helped them.

Develop Generosity

Developing generosity accomplishes two things: 1) it makes us less selfish and enables us to let go of our attachments, and 2) the more generous you are, the more open-minded you will be. Generosity may include thinking, speech, or action. This includes but is not limited to possessions, time, ideas, etc.

Generosity of thought is being open-minded, able to listen to others, and not insisting that your own ideas are the only right way to view the world. You can share your happy feelings with others by sending them out with the out breath. The mind can only think of one thought at a time so if you think generous thoughts unwholesome thoughts cannot arise.

Generosity of speech includes being kind to others. Say something nice to someone, how they look, what they are wearing, etc. Compliment them on a good job. Like my mother used to say, "If you don't have anything good to say then don't say anything at all." Keeping quiet is also generosity of speech.

Generosity of action is being flexible, not insisting on your own way of doing things. Allow others to do things their way. Generosity could also include giving of your time working for the benefit of others.

Generosity of possessions is not being attached to what you own. The more you own the more you seem to want. You always want something bigger and better or smaller and better. Very few people are satisfied with what they have now. When you finally get that new computer, car, house, etc..., how long does that 'happiness' really last? And when was the last time you saw an expensive alarm system on an old broken-down car?

The Story of the Forest Monk and the City Monk

The forest monk and the city monk were good friends. The forest monk came to visit the city monk. As he toured the monastery, he commented on all the beautiful and wonderful things the monastery had accumulated. He then invited the city monk out to the forest to meditate because it would not be so distracting. The city monk accepted the invitation and they agreed on a time and a place to meet. They met at the appointed time at a fork in the road. The forest monk asked the city monk where were all of his belongings. The city monk arrived wearing only his three robes and carrying his bowl. The forest monk had his robes, bowl, blanket, pillow, and all the allowables he could carry. The city monk stated that all the stuff in the temple belonged to the temple he was just the caretaker. The forest monk was humbled because he realized that just because he only had a little, he was still attached to his possessions.

Giving

In this society we are taught to share. We take from our surplus and share with those we consider to be worthy of our gifts. I believe this to be a big mistake. Teaching children (and adults) how to give would be more skillful. To give is to see a need and then fill that need. We use generosity and wisdom to know when to give. When we teach someone to share, we are telling him or her, "This is mine and I will share." When we teach someone to give, they will see a need and give what is needed. When we share, we hold back, when we give, we give all.

It is the attitude of giving that is important. There are three forms of giving. The first one is called

beggarly giving in which you give because you think you have to. For instance, you give only because other people are giving and you don't want to appear selfish. Another example is the exchanging of Christmas presents.

The second form is called friendly giving in which you give because you will receive something in return. An example would be people that give a large amount of money and want to be publicly acknowledged. We have all seen the checks that are five feet by three feet with two people holding it up and the press taking pictures of the check. Another form of friendly giving includes giving for the purpose of a tax break. Even expecting a 'thank you' would fall into this category. How many times have you told someone, "I love you" and expected him or her to say the same back to you? This also is an example of friendly giving.

The third form is called altruistic giving in which you give anonymously. You do not want or expect anything in return. You give because you see a need and fulfill that need. In the Zen tradition of giving you usually leave cash in an envelope near the altar.

We need to develop wisdom in generosity. Without wisdom you could give the wrong thing at the wrong time. We have to know who to give to, what to give to them, the correct time to give, and not regret what we gave. Once you develop this wisdom you will know what is correct speech, action, and the correct amount to give. You can actually create a great deal of harm if you don't use wisdom in giving. You might either humiliate someone or enable their unwholesome habits. You must develop wisdom in generosity to avoid doing harm.

Another way to develop generosity is through generosity meditation described in the chapter on meditation.

Develop Wisdom

Wisdom is the ability to know when and how to take action or non-action in every situation. Wisdom means not taking things personally, knowing that nothing is permanent; that equanimity is possible, is obtainable and all it takes is dropping our stories. Identifying the roots and causes of suffering and happiness is essential to wisdom. Wisdom can be developed by practicing mindfulness, practicing meditation and doing the homework assignments.

Develop Patience

To develop patience, you allow events to take place without intervening. Frequently, the more you try to control a situation the worse it gets. Learn to sit back and allow the universe to work. Stop, Look and Listen.

A friend of mine had just gotten a very small and timid Chihuahua puppy. She said she could not get it to stop barking. I went over to her house to help train the dog. It had a big kennel that it slept in and ran into it barking whenever a person came over to the house. I sat down next to the kennel with some treats in my hand. At first the dog (which I named Taco Bell) would stay in the back of the kennel barking. I just sat on the floor and talked to my friend ignoring the dog. Every once in a while, I placed a treat inside the kennel. Taco Bell came to get the treat and ran to the back of the kennel. After a while she sat near the open door. Again, I did not look at her or try to pet her but kept putting treats by the open door.

Eventually she laid down at the open door. I kept talking to my friend and held a treat in my hand

near the opening of the door. Taco Bell came and got it out of my hand. Slowly I kept giving treats nearer and nearer to my lap. Eventually I placed a treat in my lap and Taco Bell came into my lap. I stayed there about another half hour petting her and she fell asleep. The point of this story is that if you have patience you can achieve a great deal. Treat yourself in the same way. Give yourself time, allow lots of room, and don't push too hard. Let calm and insights come to you slowly. Don't try to change, change will come of itself. Allow what is, to be. Watch what is happening and become an observer. Speak only from stillness, act only from calm.

You can also develop patience through meditation discussed in the chapter on meditation.

Make a Deal

Make an agreement with those you love and respect. When a disturbing emotion arises make a pact that you will not talk it out. For instance; you can tell your partner, I know when I'm upset, I can't hear or see clearly; I am going to remove myself from the situation. The next time we start to argue I'm going to say, "I can't talk right now" and leave the room. Sometimes this means leaving the room or leaving the house for a while. Don't say, "I can't talk to **you** right now" this is putting blame on them. Just realize that you can't deal with the situation just now and walk away. The more you develop this habit the less time it takes to calm down. By the time you do calm down you realize that you just wanted things your way.

Make this agreement before the frustration arises and stick to it. We all want to fix things. We don't want to be upset with each other but the best thing you can do is walk away. Make sure that you don't give each other parting shots either. Once you calm down you will probably realize that you were just attached to your own story.

Also be careful of going under the fence. I was to the point in my practice that I could walk away without saying anything when irritation arose. But, after a couple of days I would approach the person I had had a problem with and state, "I'm so glad I have this practice because three days ago I was upset with you for doing. . ." This is what I call going under the fence. I would wait three days and then tell the person how they had harmed me. This is also telling your story which causes suffering. Drop your story and don't get sucked back into it. Use an unplugging technique as soon as it starts to arise again.

No One Can Make You Feel Anything

Understand that no one can make you feel anything. They cannot make you happy or sad. It is all in your head, it is your story that brings on the suffering. If you can just drop your story about a feeling you will end the suffering. No one, and I mean no one, can make you feel bad, it is all up to you. This is a very difficult and advanced practice. The more you come to understand this, the less suffering you will have in your life.

Beginners Mind

We can set up new habits of perceiving the world around us. Try looking at the world as a child. See everything for the very first time. We are inquisitive and nonjudgmental. Look at an object and see it for the first time. Don't assume you know what something is. For instance, I attended a workshop and the instructor held up a pen. She went around the room and asked everyone, "What

am I holding?” Everyone except me stated that she was holding a pen. Most everyone stated what the pen could write, such as a novel, poetry, or a grocery list. When she got to me, I said that she was holding an object that could be used as a weapon, to hold the window open, and if it had ink in it you could write with it. Beginner’s mind allows us to take common objects and see them in a fresh manner. We don’t limit ourselves with conventional approaches to life.

Chapter 6

Homework Assignments

Start the homework assignments by practicing them for an hour, work up to half a day, an entire day, a week, a month, a year, for the rest of your life. You must practice them in order for them to work.

Limit Sensory Input

Unplug! Literally unplug! No watching TV, playing games, listening to the radio, playing an instrument, idle chatter etc. Turn off the cell phone. No reading, including Dhamma material. Try not to distract the mind. Stay in the present moment. Find a comfortable place to sit and just sit. This is not meditation. It is just being. You are not trying to do anything--just be.

What’s Your Preference?

Notice any preferences that come up. I gave this assignment to a group of students to practice for one week. The following week one of the students came bouncing into the meeting and said, “I don’t have any preferences.” I asked, “What did you eat? How did you dress all week?” He still didn’t get it. He insisted that he still didn’t have any preferences. I pointed out that he chose certain foods over others and certain clothes over others. Finally, he said, “Mmmm, I did go shopping yesterday and picked these shorts and not the ones hanging next to them to buy. I also picked out the food I wanted to eat, and then I got my hair cut a certain style. Oh, I guess I do have preferences and lots of them.”

We tend to be oblivious to our own preferences. Just about anything we do is personal preference. From the clothes we wear, the food we eat, where we live, the jobs we have, the people we choose to have as friends, just about anything we do in life. We are always comparing one thing to another. Is this one better than that one? Do I want this or not?

When you are familiar with your preferences, test them to see how attached you are to them. Can you just let that preference go? As you learn to drop your story you will notice that preferences will not seem too important anymore. You will not need to go out of your way to get what you want. Attachment to personal preferences creates suffering. Personal preferences are identified with I, me, and mine. Watch when this causes suffering such as dissatisfaction or frustration. It is the attachment to the personal preference that causes suffering. Preference itself is not harmful, it just is, and that is ok. Desire just is, and that is ok. We suffer when we can’t let go of the object of desire or accept something other than what we prefer. Watch how often personal preference invades your life. If something is not to your liking and not up to you to change, try saying, “This is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself.”

Who Am “I”?

Who am “I”? This question can only be answered when we train our Survival Mind. Whenever we try to answer this question in words, we attach labels and are no longer that person. Stay open-minded. Train yourself to resist all labels. When we attach to a label, we try to define ourselves and we lose who we really are. Most of the time we are not consciously aware that we like or dislike certain things.

If I am attached to the idea of being a ‘nun’ I will no longer be a nun. I have to let go of all ideas of what a ‘nun’ is. I must keep an open mind at all times. Some nuns insist that you call them monks because they want you to realize that they are equal to male monks. But this is an attachment if one gets angry when someone calls them a nun.

It would be better to disrobe than to be attached to any idea of what a nun should be. This is why it is important that we don’t judge others by our standards. Our standards remain flexible. If they are flexible then you have to realize that tomorrow they could change. There are no rules, no ‘right’ way, and no cookie cutter answers. We free ourselves from attachment to our judgments and opinions. Another unplugging technique I have used is, ‘drop that opinion.’ This leaves my mind open to hear others and not to be attached to my own story about myself or others.

Practice Not Judging

I have given this assignment many times and, next to compassion meditation, it is one of the best exercises you can practice. Go to a restaurant, store, park, garden, museum or mall. Find a comfortable spot to sit and sit down. As you watch people go by, send them loving kindness. Notice if you like or dislike them but don’t pick up that story and hold onto it. As each person walks by say, “May you be free from suffering and live in happiness.” You can also say, “You are free from suffering and live in happiness.” You will notice that you don’t have time to judge them because they will have walked past by the time you finish the mantra.

I would pick a place in front of a window. That way by the time I said, “May you be free from suffering and live in happiness” they would be out of my line of sight. I wouldn’t have time to think about them because another person would arrive in my line of sight and I would repeat the ‘mantra.’

This is an excellent way to drop your story about others. The more you practice this exercise the easier it is to meet people without judging them. You form the new habit of loving kindness instead of attaching a story about them. Practice this as often as you can. You will notice that your reactions to people will change over time. You will no longer judge people by their looks. Your new wholesome habit will be to wish them happiness.

Fixer

Be aware of the fixing mind. Notice how you try to fix things when others tell you a story or complain to you. Do you come up with solutions for them? What happens if you just clear your mind and listen? Can you just sit by without responding? Try this and see what happens. Can you allow problems to exist without a fixing mind? Remember everything is impermanent. Sometimes the best solution is to do nothing.

Pocket Pal

Using the back of a business card or a scrap of paper write down a couple of unplugging techniques that appeal to you. Put the paper in a place such as a wallet or purse so that each time you pay for something you see the card. Carry this with you so you can pull it out and read it when a disturbing emotion arises.

Mental Floss

Choose a ‘mantra’ or chant and memorize it. Repeat it over and over every day for a week. Repeat it to yourself when standing in line, when exercising or showering. Make it part of your mental hygiene like mental floss. When a week is up change it out for another or keep it for another week.

Here are some short “mantras” you can use as unplugging techniques:

The space in my head is not for rent ...

This is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself

Just another day in Paradise

That’s my story and I’m sticking to it (realizing that this causes suffering which makes you drop the story immediately)

My story about that is ... (end it here)

Just so, this is good enough

DROPS: don’t resist or push away, soften

If you can’t say something nice, then don’t say anything at all

It’s all in my head, It’s all in my head . . .

I’m going to keep my eyes in my own ballpark

Because It’s all about me ...

If everyone would just do it my way . . .

Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional

Earth to (your name) Earth to (your name)

Send no money now

Cause I said so and I’m the boss

Woulda, coulda, shoulda

Clear, All Clear, oops—DNR: Do Not Resuscitate

This is just a dream, it is only a dream It is what it

is

Life is not fair, now get over it

They have me mixed up with someone that hurt them in the past

Beam me up Scotty

Wheeeeeee

One of my students came up with this.

Sensei's SUDS: See, Unplug and Drop Story

Discover What Is Wholesome

Wholesome thinking, speech, and acts come from a mind that practices generosity, compassion, loving kindness, acceptance, and contentment. We develop these through mindfulness and meditation. You can also come up with wholesome thinking such as, "I am free from suffering and live in happiness."

Cultivate a Flexible and Open Mind

This is an extremely important exercise. Practice this as often as you can.

When engaged in any activity or conversation can you remain open and flexible? Watch your mind to see if it tenses up. This will be an indication that you are starting to become narrow-minded. Have the intention to be open and flexible at all times. Try to see the other person's perspective. Read a book that you don't agree with and try to see if you can remain open. Go to a lecture and don't allow your mind to agree or disagree with the speaker. Watch for bodily actions that would indicate that you are agreeing or disagreeing such as nodding your head yes or no.

Understand that there are many ways of seeing things. Even though things seem to contradict each other it may be just a different perspective. Don't insist that your view is right, allow the other person to have theirs. As soon as you start to justify your own opinion you become aware that you are attached and this is what causes suffering.

Test Yourself by Asking Questions

For instance, if someone came up to you and said, "I'm an alien from planet X" what would be your first thought? Could you be open-minded enough to hear them out or have you already judged them as crazy and not worth listening to? Could you be open to all possibilities of reality including those of others? Stretch your limits, talk to people with different views than yours. We tend to surround ourselves with people that agree with us. The closer knit the group the more narrow-minded we become. Be aware of how narrow your list of friends becomes. Be careful that you don't start attacking other groups with your language and actions.

Practice Awareness of Arising, Abiding, and Departing

Most of the time we aren't aware of a feeling or emotion arising. We are usually in the midst of it before we even realize that it is present. With this practice we want to train ourselves to see it coming. Most of the time we don't notice it departing, again we want to train to be mindful of it leaving.

Practice saying, "_____ has arisen _____ is abiding and _____ has departed." For

example, fear has arisen, fear is abiding and fear has departed. Start out with being aware of a feeling arising. This is very difficult and will take a great deal of mindfulness. Try to see it coming. If you are in the midst of the emotion you can acknowledge that you missed seeing it arise and say, "Sadness arose and now is abiding." You make the intention to catch the next feeling as it arises. As the emotion is abiding you can say, "Sadness is abiding." You can also say, "Sadness is abiding and sadness will depart." It is important to recognize when the emotion departs. This helps to see the impermanence of the feeling.

When we are in the midst of an emotion the biggest fear is that it will never end. Realize that the emotion is impermanent. You can also practice this with 'happy' and pleasant emotions. See them coming, abiding and leaving.

Take a day and practice watching as many feelings and emotions as you can. Watch them arise, abide, and depart. Be sure to acknowledge them with a statement such as discussed above. When you do this practice, you realize that all feelings and emotions are impermanent. You also come to realize that there may or may not be a trigger.

The first time that I ever saw an emotion arise, abide and leave I was sitting minding my own business and I saw sadness start to arise. I actually saw it coming like you would see a car in the distance approaching. At that time, I got excited because I could actually see it coming. I watched as the feeling got closer and closer and then it was on top of me. It was extreme sadness. Nothing had 'triggered' this sadness, it just arose. I didn't put a story to the painful feeling of sadness, I just watched it abide. It lasted two weeks! Two weeks later I was teaching a class and Venerable Kalyana walked in the room. I looked up at her and said, "I felt it leave about an hour ago." The students said, "What left?" I told them that intense sadness had been abiding for two weeks. They said that couldn't be true because they had seen me on several occasions throughout the last two weeks and I didn't act sad. I told them that was because I was using the unplugging techniques and not acting on the abiding sadness. I never tried to come up with a reason of why the intense sadness was there. I acknowledge that it was present without a storyline. This demonstrates that one can be in the midst of an extremely disturbing emotion and doesn't have to act out on it. It can continue to abide but it can't cause any suffering without a storyline attached. The pain of the sadness was present but absolutely no suffering was involved.

Practice Never Meeting the Same Person Twice

There is a saying that you never step into the same river twice. This is because the water is always moving downstream and renewing itself making it impossible to step in the same water twice. We can use this principle to practice never meeting the same person twice. How many times do we say that a person is 'never' on time, honest, happy, or sad, etc..? If a person has harmed you do you expect to be harmed again? If yes, you will always be on the defensive. Instead you can adopt the perception of not meeting that person again. You can give people the benefit of the doubt every time you see them. If you treat a person expecting a certain result, good or bad, that will be your experience with them. You could take an innocent action and turn it into a horrible thing or take that same action and turn it into a neutral or good thing.

Don't make assumptions based on previous actions. This doesn't mean that you become careless in your dealings with people. You take into consideration how they have acted in the past and not make a big deal out of it. For instance, if a person has told a lie about you and made your life difficult you don't have to ignore them the next time you see them. You acknowledge that you

got burnt but you don't act on that knowledge. You send loving kindness their way and treat them anew, like you would want to be treated. You take the high ground and give them another chance. Develop wisdom to know when to use this technique and when to walk away from a situation.

Write down names of people you are having difficulties with. Next to their name write down a positive characteristic of that person. For instance, she is a good cook; he is a hard worker, etc. If you feel the need to judge people at least make it a wholesome judgment.

Survival Mind

Survival Mind is concerned with protecting this body. Don't allow it to go overboard. Learn to live in the present moment. No past, no future, just the present. Don't try to control reality, don't fight with reality, and accept reality as it is right now. If you learn to live in the present moment without judgment without your storyline you will be happy. Learn to be content with what you have. Are you always wanting more or less of something? How much money do you really need? How big does your house have to be? Security does not mean job, money, car, a significant other, children, house, retirement fund, or a savings account. Real security is equanimity. Equanimity is being able to face every situation without becoming upset. Don't forget how to be generous. Learn when to listen to the Survival Mind but don't allow it to go overboard. Listen to generous and compassionate mind. Use wisdom in all circumstances. Learn to distinguish between real harm and an overactive Survival Mind.

It is important not to fight with the Survival Mind but to reason with it. Develop a dialogue with the Survival Mind, to explain to it that you are not in danger, not to react out of fear or anger, etc. Anytime you try and fight with Survival Mind it will only get stronger. This is also true of any situation that you find yourself in. Fighting will never be the answer. We learn to drop our storyline and allow ourselves to see reality as it actually exists.

Practice: Who Is It that Wants Me to Do This?

You don't fight with the Survival Mind you work with it. Allow it a place in your life but don't let it overwhelm you. Tame it. Put a leash on it. You can do this by talking to it and using unplugging techniques. I have used, "Who is it that wants me to do this?" I had an experience while sitting meditation at Zen Columbus one day. I started to get pain in my knee and back. I thought, maybe I should move. It occurred to me to ask, "Who is it that wants to move?" I had a sensation of a huge black cloud looming over me. A great fear started to arise. I looked at the fear and said, "I'm not afraid of you, I just want to know who you are." The cloud spoke back and said, "You have to be afraid because I'm in control." I responded with, "But I'm not afraid, I just want to know who you are." It answered, "You can't ask me that because I'm in control." I stated, "I don't want to take control, I just want to know who you are." We went back and forth with this for a while and then I realized that my knee and back were no longer hurting.

I still wanted to move so I said, "Now why do you want to move." The voice stated, "Cause now we are bored." I started to laugh and said, "No, I think we can wait until the bell rings for the end of the sit." The voice went away and I continued my meditation. I think the important point here is to question those feelings and thoughts. Where do they come from? Do we really need to respond immediately?

Practice ‘Maybe Yes, Maybe No.. .’

During the Civil War a young man lived with his family on a farm. It was harvest season and time to bring in the crops. While riding his horse he fell off and broke his leg. Everyone said that was bad. The father said, “Maybe yes, maybe no.” The next day the army appeared at their door demanding that all able-bodied men join up. Since the boy had broken his leg, they left him behind. The people said, “That is good” and the father replied, “Maybe yes, maybe no.” The story goes on and on with situations arising that seem bad and turn out good and seem good and turn out bad. Practice saying, “Maybe yes, maybe no’ to all situations for a week.

What Goes In Is What Comes Out

If you watch a lot of scary movies don’t be surprised if you have nightmares and are jumpy. What you put into your mind is what will arise as thoughts. Be careful of what you put into your mind. This would include anything that you see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. What do you use as entertainment? What do you read? What kind of foods do you eat? Where do you go during the day and the night? Are you practicing wholesome or unwholesome activities? What kind of speech do you listen to? Each person will have to decide what is wholesome or unwholesome for their self. There is no cookie cutter answer to as what is wholesome or unwholesome for individuals.

If you watch a lot of violence those are the thoughts that are going to arise. If you attend dhamma lectures and read dhamma books those are the thoughts that will arise. The busier your life is the more thoughts you will have.

Practice Impulse Control

To practice impulse control, you can start out with any of the meditation practices. When you are practicing sitting meditation and you have an urge to get up, keep sitting. If you have an urge to scratch an itch, wait thirty seconds then scratch. If you start to feel an uncomfortable feeling in the body wait thirty seconds before you move. If you make a determination to sit ten minutes sit the entire ten minutes.

When you go to the store and want to buy something on impulse, wait a couple of days and see if you can even remember what you had wanted to buy. Make a practice of watching to see what you do and say on impulse. Can you wait a couple of minutes before speaking or acting?

Practice with the Towel

At a workshop I gave in North Carolina I asked someone to get a towel. I then asked for a volunteer from the audience. A young woman stood up and came forward. I asked her to pick a disturbing emotion and pretend that the towel was that emotion. I took the towel and said, “OK this is fear. What are you going to do?” She grabbed the towel with both hands and we started to struggle pulling back and forth. The harder I pulled the harder she pulled.

Finally, I said, “What else could you do with the fear?” She pulled harder on the towel. Someone from the audience said, “Just let go.” She looked at them like they were a bit crazy, and said, “How can I let go?” I actually had to pry her hands from the towel. Then I told her that I was

going to take the towel and put it by her head and she should not grab it. I started to put the towel near her and she backed away. I said, “No, don’t run from the fear, just stand there and let it abide.” I then put the towel in her face and she started to back away again. I said, “No, just stand there. This is fear and it has arisen. Don’t try and make it leave. Just acknowledge it and allow it to abide. Know that eventually it will leave: it is impermanent; and I can’t stand here with this towel all day.” You could tell that she was very uncomfortable with the towel (fear) in her face. When her facial expression changed to acceptance, I took the towel away.

I continued on with the lecture and suddenly put the towel back up and in her face. At first, she turned away but then turned back to the towel and kept looking at it. When her facial expression changed to acceptance, I took the towel away. I did this about five times until I could raise the towel without her flinching. The next day she came back to the workshop and stated that when a disturbing emotion arose, she used the image of the towel and it worked to unplug from the storyline. She didn’t suffer! Others at the workshop stated that they also used that image at home and it made a vast difference in their reactions to their disturbing emotions.

Letting go is NOT pushing the feeling away, not saying, “I don’t want it to be here.” Letting go acknowledges that the feeling abides, is uncomfortable, unpleasant and that it will leave of its own accord. The feeling will leave if we don’t tell our story about it. It is impossible for a disturbing emotion to be permanent. Don’t say, “Get that out of my face.” When a disturbing emotion arises put your hand in front of your face and remember the towel. You can’t see so don’t react. Wait till the disturbing emotion leaves to make decisions.

Practice No Comment

Take a day and practice no comment. When people are talking don’t join in. Sit back and just listen. When people ask your opinion tell them you are taking a day of “no comment.” You are learning that you don’t have to give your opinion.

Practice “I’m Not That”

Find a comfortable place to sit. Go around the room looking at objects and say, “I’m not that.” Pick an object such as a table and say, “I’m not that.” Don’t add a storyline such as “I’m not that table because I don’t have wooden legs.” Just say, “I’m not that.” Do this for about two to five minutes. Now close your eyes and allow thoughts to arise. When they arise say, “I’m not that.” By doing this practice you will be able to see that you are not your thoughts, feelings or emotions. How many times do we say, “my car, my wife, my child, my husband, my significant other, my house, my dog, my cat, and my job?” Using ‘my’ can signify attachment. You can tell when you are attached to ‘my’ or ‘mine’ when you get upset when someone says something negative about your car, etc.

Take a week and practice using ‘we’ or ‘us’ instead of ‘I’ or ‘my’ whenever speaking. Say, ‘our car, (maybe not our wife), our child, our house, our dog, etc.’ Survival Mind catches on to this language and you will not suffer because of a false sense of possessiveness.

Here’s an example how this works once it becomes your new way of relating to objects and people. We were driving to Asheville, NC and turned off the highway to get gas. As we turned toward the gas station a small truck came speeding and swerving from that gas station straight at

us. When we saw it coming, I looked at Cleo and said, “That guy must really be upset.” He swerved and missed us by inches. When we pulled into the gas station people rushed up to us and asked if we were ok. We said, “Yes, that guy must be really upset.” We weren’t thinking about ‘our car’ or ‘our lives’ we were thinking about how upset the guy must have been to be driving like that. If I had thought about ‘my life’ or ‘my car’ I would not have been able to have compassion for that person in the truck. I would have been blinded by ‘my’ stuff. But because of this practice I saw the entire situation in a different light. We practice nonattachment from objects as well as from emotions. Not taking events or possessions as personal saves us from a lot of suffering.

Carry It with You

Write down the emotion you are having a problem with on a slip of paper and put it in your pocket. Notice it throughout the day. You are carrying this emotion without reacting to it. It is not a part of you. When the emotion arises take out the piece of paper and notice there is not storyline attached to it. There is just an emotion present. Do not add a story to the emotion. Take the paper and put it back into your pocket. Without a storyline there can be no suffering.

Gate Keeping

This assignment takes awareness and persistence. The way to increase the attentiveness is to make it fun, a game, a challenge, or a contest and then congratulate yourself or celebrate when you are successful. Make the reward a wholesome one. Practice this by pretending that you are a guard at the gate. Watch every thought and feeling as it passes through the mind without engaging it. Keep it light. Watch as the thought arises, abides and leaves. A guard at a gate doesn’t stop everyone entering and going through the gate. They observe people but they don’t question them. A guard observes as one enters, abides and leaves. Get in the habit of noticing what the mind is doing. Can the mind just observe without telling a story about the event.

Irritation

Notice what irritates you about others: one who points a finger has three fingers pointing back at them. This means what irritates you in others may be what you dislike in yourself. When irritation arises make a decision to use an unplugging technique. If you can unplug at this point it cannot grow into frustration, anger, hate or rage. Also notice when events begin to irritate you. Catch this irritation and unplug.

Judging Mind

Become aware of your judging mind. Remember Survival Mind’s job is to keep you safe. After it has done its job don’t allow it to go into overdrive. Don’t add a story to the event. Be attentive to that fine line and don’t cross it. Become aware of how often you judge others and even yourself. It doesn’t matter if the opinion is positive or negative, just watch the judging mind. At times we have to make judgments but be aware of the judgment.

Got News?

Just notice: do you inflate your sense of self with news or gossip? Do you look forward to being the first to tell someone some item of significance? Do not judge or rebuke yourself for doing this. Take notice and learn to keep silent.

Impermanence

Notice how an emotion arises, abides and departs. Be aware that attaching a story makes that emotion more solid. You can use this with disturbing emotions but it is also important to use this process with other emotions as well. Train yourself to see that all thoughts, feelings, and emotions are impermanent. In the midst of a disturbing emotion it may feel like it is permanent, that it will never end and has always been this way. We must recognize that everything is impermanent. The challenge is to see the emotion arising and departing. We are not normally aware of either the arising or departing only while we are in the midst of the emotion.

Perspective

Notice whether or not you have a different perspective than the person you are speaking with. Are you nodding your head yes or no? Are you using the same words but have a different meaning? Do you look at things differently? Ask others if what they said is what you thought they meant. Put yourself in their shoes.

Planning

How many times do you make elaborate plans and they don't come to fruition? What if you didn't make plans? Do you enjoy making plans just for the sake of distracting the mind? How much time and energy do you use making plans? Does planning take away from your awareness of the present moment? Try limiting your need to plan every event in minute detail. Notice your attachment for control. Don't be concerned for the outcome of your plans and you will not suffer.

Silence Is Golden

Take one half day, full day or better yet a week and be silent. Sometimes this is called noble silence. Speak only when absolutely necessary. Don't participate in idle chatter. Idle chatter is a sure path to suffering.

The Stranger

Treat everyone you see as a stranger especially those closest to you. How do you treat them as a stranger? Here is an example. You are with a group of friends walking down the sidewalk. A stranger walks up to you and shouts, "Your hair is ugly." Do you get mad? No. You don't take what the stranger said personally. But if one of your friends tells you that your hair is ugly you get upset. Why? Because you took their comment personally. You can use this as an unplugging technique. When a friend shouts at you, consider that this person is a stranger to you. Don't take what they say personally.

Enjoy the Moment

We can also practice with what we consider positive feelings and emotions. For instance, when you watch a sunset, just watch the sunset. Don't comment on it just allow it to be there. Don't talk about it to anyone. Allow it to penetrate your being without words. This is the true experience of a positive emotion. As soon as you put it into words you have lost the experience. Reality is about experience not the explanation of the experience. Don't compare it with other sunsets that you have seen. We have a tendency to be constantly analyzing and comparing our past experiences with our present experiences. This analyzing and comparing actually takes away from the present moment experience. Learn to enjoy the moment in the moment.

Drop the Labels

Experiment with looking at objects without naming them. Start out by sitting comfortably and looking at objects in a room. As you look, try not to attach a label. Try to experience the object by allowing the mind to remain blank. When looking at a chair don't think "chair" allow the chair to be in the mind without a label. This will be difficult at first but with practice you will be able to observe objects and people without labeling. Once we attach a label to objects, we tend to put them in a box and throw away the key. We take the label as being the reality of the object. For instance, a chair can be used for many things besides sitting. You can use it to prop open a door or stand on it using it as a ladder. When we get so narrow-minded that we say a chair can only be used to sit on we lose reality. This is true for all objects and people we try to pigeonhole.

Change the Focus

When you are upset with someone, try to think of something good that they have done for you. If you can't recall something good then know they have the potential to do something good either for yourself or others. Remember that everyone has done something good in this life. Every time you think of the person you are having problems with bring to mind a positive and wholesome thought about them. This works better if you do a compassion meditation for them first.

Having compassion for someone will transform the anger into compassion. You find that your new habit has developed to the point that things that used to bother you don't anymore. At this point you realize that irritation, frustration, and anger can only arise with a wrong perception of reality. It is not caused by outside circumstances these emotions can only arise with a storyline.

Learn to Listen

Learn to just listen. Go to a lecture and just listen, don't ask any questions. When questions arise in your mind let them leave and just listen. Don't nod your head yes or no. When you start the internal dialogue, you are no longer listening you are judging. Don't have an opinion. Don't judge. Don't compare. Don't respond in any way, by body language or by voice.

Stop the commentary you make about everything that happens throughout the day. Don't have an opinion about anything. Go one entire day or week like this and see what happens to your thought process.

By learning to just listen you will really be able to hear what another person is saying. Most of us

are preoccupied with how we are going to respond to the speaker once we get a chance to jump into the conversation.

When I lived in the intentional community, I learned this lesson well. There was going to be a meeting between the board and the residents. The meeting was about me. Half of the people liked me and the other half did not. They were going to meet and discuss the pros and cons of my residence. I asked if I could attend. There was some discussion and they said I could attend the meeting on two conditions: 1) I could not say a single word or show any body language or facial expressions during the meeting, and 2) I could never speak to anyone after the meeting about anything that was said. I agreed to the terms and was allowed to attend the meeting. It was the most amazing experience!

In the first five minutes of the meeting I noticed that I was really listening to what was being said. I had to be fully aware of all body language so I wasn't nodding my head in agreement or disagreement. I had heightened awareness of everything that was going on around me. I was able to truly hear everything without judgment. When the people that didn't like me were talking, I could feel what they were feeling and when the people were talking that did like me, I could feel what they were feeling. I didn't judge or try and defend myself. This is difficult to put into words but once you experience just listening for yourself you will know what I'm talking about. Give it a try.

Practice Right Speech

Eliminate harsh or malicious speech. Be careful when using sarcasm, teasing, and cussing. Even though superficially amusing and entertaining at the base they can cause hurt. If you can't take it you shouldn't dish it out. When using sarcasm and teasing what is the intention behind it, to get a point across or to harm?

Be aware that any word indicating possession such as 'I', 'me' and 'mine' can create a false idea of 'us and them.' At times we need to use these words but try not to be attached to them. Use them sparingly. Practice using 'we' instead of 'I' as often as you can. This is a first step in beginning to move away from the possessive 'I.'

An interesting thing about how we identify with things as ours is when people get a flat tire, I hear them say, "I got a flat tire." They didn't get a flat tire; the car got the flat tire. We can get so wrapped up in our stuff that we will use language that makes it seem like our things are ourselves. Be aware of how often you use the words: should, shouldn't, must, need, and have to.

Practice Being Content

Simplify your life. Be content with what you have. Possessions only bring a temporary satisfaction. When you satisfy one desire another will arise. Are you always looking for something bigger, smaller, and more efficient? You don't require a bigger house, car, job, a better partner, etc. What you are really looking for is peace of mind and that can only be gotten with contentment.

Contentment does not mean that you wouldn't have motivation. Contentment has a quality of acceptance and not always striving for something. It means that you don't become greedy, taking more than what you actually need. Contentment possesses an attitude of appreciation and

gratitude.

All we really need in life is air, water, food, and shelter. When Cleo and I hiked the Appalachian Trail, I learned a very good lesson in how little I actually need. I started out with what I thought I absolutely needed for the hike. My pack weighed thirty pounds without food and water. After the first week of hiking I got rid of some things. After another week I got rid of even more stuff. By the end of the first month I had my pack weight down to my absolute minimum. My pack now weighed fifteen pounds without food and water.

When I hiked, I just put one foot in front of the other. I didn't think of anything, I just hiked. The biggest concern was if there would be water at the next watering hole. The valuable lesson I learned from that hike was that I didn't require a lot of stuff to make my hike a good hike. In fact, the less I had the easier the hike.

The more you have the more you feel a need to guard it. Don't get caught up in possessions. If you think of possessions as 'yours' you will create suffering. You can tell if you are attached or not by your reaction to when you lose something or it is broken. If you get upset you know you were attached. The more attachment the more suffering occurs the less attachment the less suffering occurs, no attachment no suffering.

Lifestyle tent or mansion? What can you live without even for a very short time? What do you carry in your car, pocketbook, and pockets? Are these things really necessary? How much stuff do you own? How big is your house? Your car? Are you attached to these material possessions? Go through your stuff and ask yourself, "Do I really need this?" How upset would you be if you lost these things? The more attached you are the greater the suffering, the less attached you are the less you will suffer. If there is no attachment there is no suffering.

Acceptance

Acceptance does not mean that you become a pushover or a doormat. On the contrary you will learn the right (correct, wholesome) most beneficial action you can take in any situation. We accept the world as it is right now because that is how it is. This is true acceptance. We can only change ourselves, we cannot change anyone else. When you accept this, you can then actually make a difference in the world. Accept the present moment for what it is without your storyline attached. When you don't like a situation, you don't try to push it away, you recognize it for what it is, the way things are. If you don't like the situation are you able to change it or at least change your attitude about it? If you can change it, change it, if you can't, let it go.

Get Out of the Way

We put obstacles in our life by trying to control events in our lives. The more control we try to exert on life the more suffering we will encounter. Allow life to happen. Notice how many times a day you are trying to control the situation.

Hush the Storyteller

Notice the voice in your head. What stories is it telling you? When a story comes up, drop it. Just close that book and put it down. Return your attention to the present moment.

Noble Friend Practice

Engage someone else in this practice with you. Ask that person to read the book and discuss it with you. Form a study group. Use the homework assignments together. Meet once a week and pick one homework assignment to practice for an entire week. When you meet again discuss your successes.

When you have gained some wisdom in this practice you can allow someone to point out when you are telling your story. When you or someone you are working with gets caught in a disturbing emotion, suggest an unplugging technique. Apply a physical unplugging technique. Notice and point out the resistance that arises. Notice the relief when the unplugging technique is used. Congratulate yourself and others when the practice is effectively used.

Noble Friends support your personal growth and commit to their own growth as well. Nobility implies selflessness; this goes back to the days when royalty gave up their lives to benefit the people, a mutual exchange of service for leadership. Noble Friends are selfless in their willingness and effort to be honest and frank yet are compassionate and kind as well.

Part of this practice is to be humble as well as generous: to accept criticism with an open mind and be aware when defensiveness arises, acknowledge it and let it go. This leads to openness, flexibility, and a sense of ease. Along with this comes freedom from arrogance, self-indulgence and thoughtlessness. When you make a sincere effort, there is no loss of self-esteem when making a mistake, instead there is acceptance.

Pointing Out Practice

If you want to progress quickly with the practice of uprooting disturbing emotions, allow someone to point out your habitual tendencies. You probably won't have any problem finding a person who is willing to point out your 'faults.' Make a pact with them that you are allowing them to point out your 'faults.' Make sure that you agree upon a signal to indicate that's enough for now and a signal for when they can start pointing them out again.

When I first started this pointing out practice, I could only hear so much before getting really defensive. I then signaled the person that I needed a break. After calming down I was then ready for another round. When irritation or despair arises, allow the person to remind you that this is just your story. Use every disturbing situation as a learning experience.

Watch your response to the criticism. If you get defensive you know that you are attached to your story. If it rings true, change your behavior. Remember that changing your behavior starts with intention. The intention turns into new habits, which in turn turns into new behavior patterns. If you don't agree with the assessment of your behavior then don't worry about it. Don't correct anyone that criticizes you and never talk back to him or her about the situation, ever.

Understand that you will make mistakes. Mistakes don't define us. Ignorance (a lack of knowledge) is not a fault. You can gain knowledge through mindfulness and meditation. Delusion on the other hand (a belief sustained as true despite clear evidence to the contrary) leads to suffering. Delusion is attachment to your storyline and believing that the emotion/feeling is actually you.

Chapter 7

Introduction to Meditation

What is meditation? It is cultivation of a calm abiding and aware mind. Meditation is the training and care of the mind.

By practicing meditation, we learn to watch how thoughts come and go. We experience a direct knowledge of impermanence. We also learn that we are not the thoughts arising and passing away in our minds. They are just ‘thoughts’ and not to be taken personally. By observation we learn how the mind works. We train to stay in the present moment, not thinking about the past or the future. We also learn to observe our thoughts without attachment to our storyline or judgments about the thought.

We can return to a pre-verbal mode of looking at the world, intuition and knowing. We leave behind the judging mind and open ourselves up to reality. When meditating you realize you don’t have to act on every thought. If you get hungry you don’t get up to eat, you just sit. If you have an itch, you don’t scratch right away, you just sit. If you have pain you wait one minute and then move, you learn that you don’t have to react immediately. This helps you to create that split second in your mind before acting out of impulse.

You will notice there is overlap in the instructions and description of different meditation techniques. Differences can be very subtle in discussion but are much more noticeable through experience.

The mind is like a bowl of muddy water. As long as you are moving, it stirs the mud. When you meditate, you still the mind. The mud settles and you can see through the water, clear to the bottom. Then the mind rests.

Meditation Has Many Benefits

If you have a peaceful and clear mind, this will enable you to be more effective in any activity that you undertake. Meditation offers numerous health benefits, including but not limited to:

- Relieves depression, insomnia and headaches by boosting serotonin production

- Helps the physical healing process

- Alleviates chronic conditions

- Strengthens the immune system

- Decreases hospitalizations

- Lowers oxygen consumption

- Reduces pain

- Improves blood flow

- Fewer trips to the doctor

- Lowers blood pressure

- Lowers stress and anxiety

Increases concentration

Increases intelligence

Increases productivity

Increases creativity

Deepens relaxation

Purifies the mind

Increases memory

Venerable Kalyana says, “Meditation for me is like going to the woods. I have backpacked and gone camping since I was a child. You might choose a different environment to compare it to. I walk into the woods and sit down quietly. I’m very, very still. No talking, no moving. As long as I remain still the woods will come alive. Sights, sounds and scents will appear. Creatures will emerge. But if I move, they all disappear again. A calm mind allows emotions and thoughts to move through my mind with ease. They arise, abide and depart without confusion or suffering unless I grab on to them.”

Meditation Terminology and How Meditation Works

This description of meditation comes from my experience of Buddhist practice and teaching. Many books have already been written in great detail what meditation practice is. This book seeks to describe the practice in plain English and answer questions that have come up in teaching over the years.

In Buddhist teachings, ‘calm abiding’ (*shamatha*) and ‘insight’ (*vipassana*) are descriptive terms used as informative labels for different aspects of meditation. Calm abiding and insight meditation are like two sides of the same coin, both exist dependent on each other. When you pick up the coin you have both sides. You look at one side and see the calm abiding but you also have insights. When you look at the insight side you also hold the calm abiding. You can look at one side, focus your attention on one side but you always have both. They are inseparable and fused together.

This is not about body scanning or direct mindfulness of the body. The insights that interest us are about how the mind works. Not **why** anything is felt or thought, but **how** feelings and thoughts can give rise to craving, clinging and action.

Calm abiding, stillness, concentration and one pointedness, is not about rigid focus, it is about **relaxing**. The goal is to return to a natural state of equanimity. We allow thoughts to come and go without attaching a storyline to them. Gentle persistence in returning to the point of observation of mind’s attention results in a calm abiding. This opens into a limitless space where insight, *vipassana*, understanding, and direct knowledge are available. Pleasure, joy, delight, bliss, and rapture are experienced wonderfully in this state. This is the one pleasure with no drawback, no harm, and no inevitable suffering results. One can experience true happiness and equanimity with the practice of meditation.

Meditation Instruction

Find a relatively quiet place to sit. It doesn't matter what time of day you decide to sit but the same time most days helps. When first starting out sit for one minute and work up to ten minutes. If you decide to sit longer be sure that you stick to your schedule. If you decide to sit for thirty minutes and then get up early this reinforces a bad habit. It is better to sit for ten minutes than to say you will sit for thirty and get up before the thirty minutes are up. After you work up to ten minutes a day try to sit at least ten minutes a day every day if possible. If you are going to sit ten minutes don't sit for fifteen. The point is to stick to a schedule. You can schedule non-timed sitting periods but that shouldn't be your everyday practice. If you cannot sit still, practice the walking meditation described below.

Wear comfortable loose clothing. **Sit comfortably.** You do not need to sit in full lotus, half lotus, or even with your legs crossed. Sit with your back erect but comfortable. Sit with your back supported if that is what you are accustomed to, as in a chair. You do not have to sit on the floor. You can sit in a comfortable chair as long as you don't get sleepy. You want to be able to breathe easily, which is not achieved by slouching or being bent over. You can also meditate while lying down if it doesn't make you sleepy. Place your hands in your lap or you can put them in the cosmic mudra, which is the right-hand palm up in your lap and the left-hand palm up on top thumb tips touching. You can also just rest your hands on your thighs. Place the tongue on the roof of the mouth with the mouth gently closed. It is very important to relax the body and the mind. Take a deep breath to align your spine and head. With the out-breath relax your shoulders. When your body is relaxed your mind will follow. Your eyes can be closed or open. Close them if your surroundings are too distracting but keep them open if you tend to fall asleep. Breathe through the nose. Feel the rise and fall of the breath with the abdomen. Do not try and control the breath, just breathe naturally. Notice that when your body is relaxed and your mind starts to settle, your breathing regulates itself naturally.

If you become uncomfortable due to posture, position, heat, cold, whatever--wait one minute. Observe the sensation and the mind's reaction to it. Pain that arises when meditating can be either a distraction or a warning. If it is a distraction it will disappear. If it is a warning that the body is overtaxed or coming to harm it will not go away. Wait one minute and then move in a way that will relieve the pain. **Do not sit with the pain.** Do not discipline yourself to resist or not move; when you do this, you are no longer meditating you are in pain. This only produces disturbing emotions. If the pain is not causing you to suffer you will be able to sit with the pain without moving. You will know when this happens because you will not feel the need to move. You will not be suffering because of the physical sensation of pain. You will be able to continue to sit in equanimity with the painful feeling. But until this happens do not force yourself to suffer with pain. Meditation is about calm abiding.

Allow external disturbances to come and go without naming them. Do not label them. Do not try and block them out; just hear, see, smell, feel them arise, abide and leave without judgment. The point of meditation is not to focus narrowly but to open up. Open up without thinking (putting two or more thoughts together), without judging, without the story. Be in the present moment. When you lose your object of meditation return to it with gentle awareness.

Learning to meditate helps you to see that don't have to react to every thought that arises. You are not your thoughts and ideas. Your mind is not the personal I that you have so long strived to maintain as an individual. This practice will change your life.

Be Reasonable

I was once in retreat with a large group being led in meditation by a lay dhamma teacher. I was new to Buddhism and abided by the strictness of this particular teacher. We were instructed not to get up from meditation under any circumstances. As I sat quietly, I thought I could hear someone yelling for help over and over again. No one else appeared to hear the call for help and I questioned whether I was hearing it. I struggled with the idea of getting up and helping the person or staying in my seat. I kept thinking if it was me yelling for help, I would want someone to look for me. I was thinking the teacher and others in charge were not getting up and who I was I to break the rules? I did not follow my gut feeling to get up from the meditation and get help for the person yelling. I remained seated with everyone else in the room.

Not very long afterward, at the end of the meditation I found out that a person had gotten lost in the woods. He had been wandering for almost two days and was near the retreat center. He had no food and water and may not have lasted another night in the woods. Fortunately, the caretaker of the retreat center happened to be outside and heard the person yelling for help. The caretaker found the lost person and brought him back to the center.

I had not followed my better judgment, which was to get up to help instead of relying on someone else to respond to that cry of help. I will **never** do this again. Take responsibility. Set priorities and stick to them. Safety of self and others is number one. Rules and acceptance by others come way down the list. When choosing a time and place to meditate make a habit of first establishing that you are safe and secure.

Remember to RELAX the Mind and the Body

When you lose your object of meditation do NOT beat yourself up, gently return to your object of meditation.

RELAX and ENJOY

Compassion Meditation

If you only learn one form of meditation let it be either what is called loving-kindness (*metta*) or compassion (*karuna*) meditation. The Dalai Lama teaches that this type of meditation helps you one hundred percent and the person(s) you are doing the meditation for fifty percent. This is a win-win.

Start all meditation sessions with the wish for all beings to be free from suffering and live in happiness. Do this every morning and every night. Let arise in your mind a happy thought. For example, I use the way my dog jumps when she wants to play. Then say, "I am free from suffering and live in happiness." You can also make up a phrase that relates the same idea. Do this three times. Then move on to your immediate family, either as a unit or naming each person in your family, depending on how much time you have for the meditation period. The next group is all beings known to you, again as a unit or as individual names arise in your mind. The next group includes all beings unknown to you. Then move on to all those that perceive you as an enemy or just plain don't like you. I usually add Mother Earth and 'the Universe and beyond.' It is important to end the meditation with, "May all beings be free from suffering and live in happiness."

Compassion Meditation for a Person You Are Having Problems With

This compassion meditation works wonders. There are two ways of doing this meditation. One is to start with the meditation described above. Begin with yourself and move out to others. Next you picture the person you are having problems with in front of you, in your mind's eye. With each in breath you take on their suffering. With each in breath you imagine their suffering coming out of them and flowing into yourself. Different words may come to mind as you do this such as, pain, sadness, fear, insecurity, etc. Keep taking on their suffering until you feel that all has been drained from them. You then imagine a lightning bolt that explodes and transforms your self-centeredness and their suffering into loving kindness. You then take that loving kindness on each out breath and surround that person with it. You take that loving kindness and go above them, below them, around them and through them. Each time you exhale, you exhale that loving kindness into them. Words may come to mind such as happiness, serenity, etc. When you are finished you end with, "May all beings be free from suffering and live in happiness."

The second way of practicing compassion meditation is to take in that person's suffering with one in-breath and with the out-breath give them loving kindness.

Compassion meditation can also be used as a greeting or when saying goodbye. I like to use, "May you be free from suffering and the causes of suffering which are attachment to your likes, aversion to your dislikes and delusion which is attachment to your story and taking things personally. And may you live in happiness and the causes of happiness, which are generosity, compassion and wisdom."

Compassion Meditation in Action: Peggy

This challenge took six weeks. I was living at an intentional community where they have a campground. One day this huge RV pulls into the driveway and two women get out. I looked at the first one and didn't like her. This is unlike me. I usually am neutral when I first meet people. I couldn't understand why I didn't like her. Walking back to our cabin I told Cleo that I was so excited because I didn't like Peggy. This was going to give me an opportunity to practice what I preach. Cleo said, "Well I like her, I can't understand why you don't." My first reaction was to get defensive but I caught that feeling, dropped my story and let it pass.

I knew it would not be beneficial to try to figure out why I didn't like her. That would just be a story and wouldn't really help the situation in any way. I did compassion meditation for Peggy every morning, every afternoon, and every evening. When I saw her walking on the land, I watched what arose in my body and mind. Sometimes it was an intense dislike and sometimes a neutral feeling.

I remembered the importance of putting this practice into action, so when I didn't have a negative feeling, I would approach her and ask her if there was anything I could do to help her. When a negative feeling would arise, I just went home. At our mandatory community meetings, I tried hard not to give my opinion about anything she said. Sometimes I was successful and sometimes I wasn't.

After six weeks something happened. I was doing the compassion meditation in the afternoon and I felt something shift. I thought, "OK, I'm ready." So I walked over to her camper and she was sitting outside. I sat down and started to have a conversation with her. I thought, "Hmmm nothing irritates me anymore. I wonder how long this will last?" I went home and told Cleo about my

great success and said, “There is no longer a dislike for Peggy.” This went on for a couple of weeks with no change.

A few days later Peggy came over to our cabin and I told her about the compassion meditation I had been practicing. I told her that most of the time when I practice compassion meditation, I can see the suffering just flow out of people but with her it was like having to pull it out of her. She told me that when she prayed it was her practice to give her problems to God, but that she had then taken them back. She then noticed that she felt the problems being pulled away again.

Her practice and my practice were working together. We talked about my initial feelings toward her. She said that she felt great discomfort in me when I was around her but noticed a change a few weeks back. She said that even though the other eight women on the land liked her, she felt unwelcomed because of her awareness that I did not. Now that we got along, she finally felt welcomed on the land.

The compassion meditation transformed the irritation and frustration into loving-kindness. There is no faking whether you like someone or not. They can tell this by body language and tone of voice. Compassion meditation transforms all disturbing emotions into loving-kindness. I have done this with others and it can take as little as one minute for this transformation to happen.

You may feel resistance to generating loving kindness for someone you don’t like but if you have the intention to transform those feelings you can eliminate suffering.

Intention

The most important aspect of compassion meditation is your intention. You may not be able to remember the phrases of compassion meditation at the time that you need them. For example, a student worked at a retail store and most days at the beginning of her shift a rude woman would come through her line. This ruined her entire day. After giving the compassion meditation instructions she had an opportunity to use this technique. She said that when the woman showed up and started complaining she remembered she could do the compassion meditation. She forgot the phrase so she started to say in her own head, “Compassion, compassion, compassion.” She asked me if that was OK? I asked her, “Did it work?” She said, “Yes,” she was able to drop her story and have a good day. I said, “Yes, then it was right.” The reason it worked was because of her intention to have compassion.

Generosity Meditation

With generosity meditation you give your happiness and prized possessions away. Sit in a comfortable position, back straight and breathe through your nose. Take a couple of deep breaths and relax your body and mind. You may want to start with a short compassion meditation first. Then move to possessions that you have always wanted to give away but just didn’t have the time to sort through them. Next, turn your mind to one of your favorite possessions. This can be a book, jacket, car etc. You can also offer a sunrise, or a song of a bird. You can give away everything you see, hear, taste, smell, and every object that you enjoy. Imagine giving this to a person that you know really wants to have it. Imagine the delight when you hand it over to them. Imagine the joy they get by using this possession. This accomplishes two things, it makes you less selfish and you learn to let go of your attachments.

Breath Meditation

The breath is always with us and so is a very common starting place for meditators. Many forms of breath manipulation are suggested by ancient and modern yogis for the production of altered states of consciousness. That is not what we are interested in here. We use the breath as an ‘object’ of meditation.

To practice breath meditation, you focus on the breath. As you breathe in, notice where you first feel the breath, either on the upper lip or just inside the nostril. Center your focus here on the sensation. Notice each in-breath and out-breath at the location of the sensation. Notice that thoughts arise. This is OK, it is normal and appropriate that thoughts arise. Allow them to arise, it is very important not to try and stop them. Interfering with the thought is not the objective of meditation. When they arise just notice them. Watch them, you are not the thought. Don’t label the thoughts, let them go and just come back to the breath. Don’t tell your story about them. Allow them to arise, to abide and depart. Relax and return to your object of meditation, the breath.

The more you practice returning to the breath, the faster you will be able to catch yourself thinking (putting two or more thoughts together) and telling your story. In the beginning you may use some techniques to help concentrate the mind on the breath. Here are some helpful techniques to get you started with breath meditation. The first one is counting the breath. There are several ways to do this. One is to count to ten. With the in -breath you say, “one” (to yourself) and with the out-breath you say, “two.” You can also count quickly by saying, “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10” on the in-breath and the same for the out-breath. You can shorten this to 5 on the in-breath and 5 on the out-breath.

It doesn’t matter if one thousand thoughts come up in ten minutes. What matters is that you catch those one thousand thoughts and come back to the breath. You can set an egg timer to avoid constantly checking the clock. **It is important to relax your body and your mind.** If you start to feel pain, wait one minute and then move slowly to adjust your posture. This is not an endurance test but a practice of meditation. If you are in a great deal of pain it interferes with meditation. Once you learn to meditate, then you can deal with physical pain. For now, just learn basic meditation. Learn to allow thoughts to arise, abide and leave without a storyline attached. Stay with the breath by experiencing the breath, not by thinking about it. After a while it may seem that you have lost the breath or are not breathing. At this point there will be no thoughts arising. Remain relaxed and allow the mind to remain calm.

Non-Thinking Meditation

Thinking is defined as putting two or more thoughts together. Remember to keep the body and mind relaxed throughout this meditation. Your focus and object of meditation is the physical place in the body where you feel the thought arising. Where do thoughts come from? Where in the body can you ‘feel’ them arise? Focus on that part of the body. For me that physical place is in the brain. For others this can be in the stomach or the chest. This meditation is like a guard standing at a door. The guard watches the people come and go. The guard does not follow the person (thought) or question the person (telling your story about the thought), the guard just watches. As soon you see a thought arise, watch it. Allow it to come but don’t entertain it. Don’t give it a storyline. If you don’t entertain it, the thought will leave very quickly. Don’t categorize or label the thought. This practice will help you see that you are not your thoughts. You don’t

have to entertain and respond to every thought that arises in your mind. Allow the thought to leave without interacting with it. Thoughts leave when you put your awareness on them. Like shining a light in a room, the darkness cannot penetrate the light.

By not telling your story you will not be thinking. This is called ‘non-thinking.’ An example of non-thinking is: the thought arises, “I’m hungry.” Non-thinking is just coming back to your object of meditation. Thinking or telling your story about that thought is, “I’m hungry. I wonder what I could eat.” There will be many times that you will catch yourself thinking. It is OK when this happens. The point of this meditation is catching those moments as soon as possible and then returning to your object of meditation.

Thoughts can be like logs in a river. You sit on the bank of the river and watch them go by. You don’t get in the river and mess with them. Just allow them to float by. Thoughts can be like clouds in the sky. You watch them float by without trying to make pictures out of them. Thoughts can be like bubbles arising and passing away. They can be like animals in a herd, wandering about, grazing. You, the shepherd, do not interfere, do not pick a favorite, just watch them graze.

It’s All in Your Head

I experienced this at a monastery during the third day of a seven-day retreat. Ten minutes into the meditation I was thinking, “This is so cool, I really like this. I will be doing this for the rest of my life. I am so very happy and content with my life. This feeling will never change.” In the next ten minutes the feeling changed and I was thinking, “My back hurts, I wonder when this will end? I can’t believe I’m going to do this for the rest of my life. What on earth was I thinking?” The next ten minutes the feeling changed again and I was thinking, “This isn’t so bad. This is all right.” I wasn’t really excited and I wasn’t upset. I was experiencing equanimity. The next ten minutes I realized that all of this was happening in my head. I went from being really happy, to becoming really upset, and then to full equanimity. Within forty minutes I traveled from one extreme to another all in my head. No outside stimulus caused these thoughts to arise. For the first time I knowingly experienced impermanence of thoughts, feelings and emotions. I learned that it wasn’t outside situations that created suffering or happiness, but what happened inside my mind. I learned to see that all thoughts are impermanent. And all I was doing was sitting looking at a blank wall.

Practice Meditation with Different Focus Points in the Body

Relax the body and mind. Drop all judgments, beliefs, stories, goals, ambitions, and open up your mind. By moving your focus (the center of thought) a new perception of the situation occurs because different body areas supply different types of energy.

Focusing on the head brings analytical thinking. Focusing on the heart area brings a compassionate view. Practice switching from the head to the heart in different situations and observe how your view changes. I did this with a person with whom I had a problem. I used my head area and became more distressed over the situation. I then took my awareness/mindfulness and focused on my heart area and my view changed immediately. I now could have compassion for this person instead of telling my story about the person. My head wanted to jump back in so I had to practice bringing my awareness/focus back to the heart area. After a while it got easier to focus on the heart area and to let the story go. Along with dropping my story the problem ceased.

Four areas to focus on are the:

Head: this brings analytical awareness

Heart: compassion and loving-kindness

Chest: imagination

Hara: (located three fingers widths below the navel and in the center of the body) courage and centering. If you are thinking too much bring your awareness here.

Focus on one area or move back and forth between the areas observing how the mind creates different thoughts associated with these areas. When a disturbing emotion arises focus on the heart area to bring about compassion.

You can also use this as a technique for problem solving. When a thinking about a solution to a problem first use your mind then move the question down to your heart, chest and hara. You will notice your perspective of the problem changing with each change of the area of focus.

Clock Meditation

Use the ticking of a clock as your meditation object. When you notice that you are thinking and not paying attention to the tick of the clock gently bring your awareness back to the sound of the ticking clock. I have used this technique and found it very helpful. I could really tell when my mind wandered.

Senses Meditation

You can use any of the six senses as an object of meditation. These are sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, and mind.

You can focus on a flame, a stone, the sound of water, the movement of air, the taste of chocolate, the odor of a rose, an image or a concept following the instructions above. Whenever you lose your object through thinking, gently bring yourself back to the object. Relax your mind and body.

Mantra Meditation

Choose a short mantra and repeat it over and over. You can do this not only with sitting meditation but carry it with you throughout the day. For instance, you can say, "A" on the in-breath and, "wake" on the out-breath (awake). You do not have to use the breath, for example you can repeat, "All needs met, all needs met."

Walking Meditation

Choose an area about twenty feet long that is free of obstructions. You can also walk in a circle or try walking backwards. If walking backwards make sure you do so in a safe area so that you don't trip over anything. Walk back and forth using any of the above objects of meditation.

QiGong Meditation

You can use any form of martial arts or exercise in this meditation. I practice *Awakening Stillness QiGong* meditation every morning when I first wake up and every evening before I go to sleep. I go through the entire series of movements in my head. If I lose my place I start over or pick up where I left off, if I can remember that place. This is an excellent meditation technique because it is very obvious when your mind has wandered off. Be gentle with yourself. Practicing this type of meditation will improve your physical well-being and concentration skills.

An experiment was performed where researchers divided people into three teams. The first team didn't do anything (the control group). The second team practiced free throws on the basketball court and the third team practiced free throws only in their mind. The second and third teams both improved by twenty five percent.

Chapter 8

Relationships and Clear Communication

Acting Out of Anger is Never Appropriate

I am often asked if anger is appropriate. My response is always absolutely not! Before you get defensive with this answer read the reasons why I say this. Reacting out of anger always creates suffering.

Anger destroys our capacity for discriminative awareness. We cannot discern between right and wrong when we have anger. It is impossible. When acting out of anger we are making decisions with an insane mind. We become angry because we believe we are 'right' and can't see any other perspective. There is no such thing as righteous anger. We don't need anger to see that something needs to change. When my ex -husband beat me and put me in the hospital I didn't get angry with him. I didn't need to be angry to do the right thing and leave. I used wisdom to get out of a dangerous situation. Anger would have only caused me to suffer.

Some people resist the whole idea of giving up anger. We may have been taught that anger is energy we can use to create change. Unfortunately, most of the energy actually gets burned up in the anger. Anger can become an addiction. The anger defends itself. Acting out of anger always causes suffering.

To get to anger you experience irritation, frustration and then anger, which can then lead to hate, rage, violence and murder. The earlier you unplug the less suffering you experience. Try to be aware of the irritation and frustration before it reaches the anger stage.

We have to remember that others do the best they can do. We don't have to give our stamp of approval for their behavior. We don't have to sanction it and we don't judge it either. Getting angry at other people's behavior can only result in our suffering. They are suffering beings. Good and bad seeds exist in everyone. Focus on the good and leave the bad unspoken.

This practice is about ending our suffering. It is not about correcting others. It is about working on you. And if you take care of yourself and end your own suffering, that can help end other people's suffering. If you avoid getting irritated, angry, or stressed out then others can be calmer.

Never Ask Anyone to Tell His or Her Story

When you see someone upset don't ask, "What is wrong?" Do a compassion meditation for him or her. You cannot solve anyone's emotional problems. It is their story and they have to deal with it. It is extremely tempting to try and help but no matter how loving or concerned you are for another person, you cannot help them overcome their story. By allowing them to tell their story you only solidify their suffering.

Offer the non-verbal communication of caring by simply being present, sitting nearby, making eye contact if needed, and allowing the situation to exist without interfering.

You can give encouragement only when you have the wisdom to know when it is appropriate. I cannot express this enough: you must have wisdom before attempting to help anyone. Realize that talking about the problem never solves the problem. Talking only solidifies the problem and creates more suffering.

Negotiating and Compromise

When negotiating with someone, remember that compromise rarely works. When you compromise you rarely feel like you got the best end of the deal. Think about it, if you received ninety percent of what you wanted you would still fret over the ten percent that you didn't get (e.g., negotiating a price of a car). This is a result of Survival Mind going overboard. It can also be called greed. Use compassion and wisdom in all decisions.

A lot of students have asked about compromise in a relationship? We have to give and take. The magic words are you 'give' and 'take.' 'Giving' and 'taking' are not compromise. You truly give or take. Letting go is not compromise – it is letting go.

It is rare that we really see the other person's side of a story. We don't have the same life experiences. However, we can train to listen. If either of us starts to get upset it is time to be quiet and stop talking.

Approaching Others with Whom You Are in Conflict

It is impossible to see the world as others see it. You can never know all of the experiences of someone else's life. You can't possibly know what another person is thinking. You have not lived their life therefore you can't know them. They may expect you to know them, but that is their delusion. Be careful not to set yourself up as judge and jury.

Nevertheless, it is helpful to try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Hear what they have to say. Open your mind to their way of thinking as much as possible. The only way to do this is to let go of your own ideas and ways of doing things.

When talking to someone, if you start to get frustrated, end the conversation. Neither one of you can communicate when you become frustrated. Take a moment; use an unplugging technique and then return to the conversation after you have calmed down. Raised voices, becoming louder, sarcastic speech, talking faster, and repeating the same thing over and over again are signs of defensiveness. When this occurs, stop talking and walk away. Use an unplugging technique described in this book and do compassion meditation.

Here are the guidelines for approaching someone in conflict as taught by the Buddha:

1. All anger must be completely gone. This includes irritation and frustration. All ideas that you are 'right' and they are 'wrong' must be completely gone. You cannot fake this as it will show up in your tone of voice and body language.
2. Have complete, sincere compassion for that person. There is never an emergency where you have to approach another person. If you don't have compassion you walk away from them.
3. In the process consider these questions compassionately: Will that person be able to really 'hear' what you say? Will it be a positive outcome? It doesn't mean that the person will not become upset at first but that the long-term consequence will be positive. This takes wisdom.
4. Approach the person one on one.
5. If the person becomes agitated and can no longer hear you, stop. Don't insist on your way. You can tell if that person starts to tense up or starts using defensive language that he or she can no longer hear you. Stop and walk away. If you start to become defensive you must stop and walk away.

Sometimes you have to just leave it alone.

Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. Often 'it' will sort itself out. It takes wisdom to know when to just leave it alone. You can have compassion for the other person and know that you don't have to be right. Ever hear that saying, "You can be happy or you can be right?" This is it. Don't offer your opinion (end of story).

Notice what your story is about the situation. Recognize that it is just that, your story. Imagine other ways of looking at the situation. Most of the time we just want to get our view across because we think we know what is good for everyone else. Don't give free advice because no one wants it. Don't intervene in other's affairs. This doesn't mean you allow harm to come, but that is not the same as harmful potential. Harmful potential does not need intervention, actual harm does. The line between the two is a grey area without clear definition and requires wisdom to identify when it is crossed. Acquire that wisdom by meditating, and practicing mindfulness. Begin now, don't wait.

Individual Perception and Perspective

We have to understand that our perception is just that--'our perception.' Our perception of the world comes from our personal life experiences. These experiences are unique to each individual. No one on this planet has had the same exact experiences. We therefore, have our own unique perspective of the world.

All of our judgments and decisions in life come from our own point of view. For example: We moved to an intentional community because we read their literature and agreed with it. One of the biggest draws was their stance on non-violence. The literature stated that violence was prohibited on the land. The first couple of weeks that we lived there they gave a workshop on how to defend yourself against an attacker. In this workshop they used knives and taught women how to kill their attacker. We asked how could such a workshop happen on the land with their stance on non-violence? Several women told us that killing your attacker is not violence! Again, it is perception. They truly believed that it was OK to kill someone if that person was attacking them and that it was not a violent act. In our understanding it is still violence, in law it may be called self-defense but it is still a violent act. We do not share their perception about violence. We never considered

even asking them what they meant by the word ‘violence.’ We thought all people had the same understanding, but we were wrong.

Everyone Just Wants to be Happy

The bottom line is that everyone on the face of this planet wants to end the suffering and be happy. Without the knowledge of this practice or another that can end suffering, people get caught up in suffering. They are ignorant of how to end that suffering. Avoid getting caught up in their story. Understand that they may not have the tools to end their story and are just doing the best with what they have.

But I Didn’t Do That

Never defend yourself. You will only dig the hole deeper. Let it go. People will believe what they want to believe about you. People have different experiences with the same person you are having problems with. It took me a long time to learn this lesson. I constantly defended myself and the situation only got worse. When you defend yourself, you are only telling a story about yourself. This is a really difficult lesson to learn because we want people to like us. We want people to believe our story about ourselves.

Is That So?

One of my favorite stories deals with this situation. There was a monk who lived just outside of the city limits. One day a couple came to the temple. They were very angry and had a baby with them. They told the monk that their daughter had just given birth and insisted that the monk was the father. Since it was his he could take care of it. The monk put out his hands to take the baby and said, “Is that so?”

Three years later the couple came back to the temple. They asked how the baby was doing and the monk said, “Good.” The couple then started to apologize to the monk. They told him that their daughter had finally confessed that it was the child of the boy up the road. They came back because they wanted to take the baby back. The monk handed the baby back to the couple and said, “Is that so?” The monk did not try to defend himself at any time. He knew that no one would believe him so he did what needed to be done by taking care of the baby. He knew if he hadn’t taken the baby in it would have been left outside to die. Because the people thought he had fathered a child he did not get much support from the city. Monks rely on laity to feed them and so he didn’t eat much in those three years.

There were all kinds of good reasons the monk could have defended himself but he knew it wouldn’t do any good. Because of his actions he now was highly respected in the community. It took three years of hardship but eventually the truth came out. My favorite part of the story is that the monk wasn’t a man, she was a nun. When you have those robes on it can be very difficult to tell if a person is a man or a woman. So you see, from the beginning she could have proved she wasn’t the father of the child!

She knew by telling her story that it would only harm the mother of the child. She was willing to have compassion and wisdom in this situation to help another and live the consequences of the mother’s lie.

I Agree

A lot of the time when someone asks you a question, all they want is for you to agree. Be careful when responding to questions you don't agree with. It is not necessary to speak, not necessary to agree or disagree, just listen. They want confirmation that what they are doing is OK. They don't come to you to hear what you have to say. If you disagree with them this can cause defensiveness in yourself and the other person. Don't fall into the trap of defending your view.

If It Can't Be Fixed--Let It Go

Worrying or fretting over a problem won't change it so let it go. Why try to fix someone else? Because we think that will end our suffering. Realize that is not the case. We can only fix ourselves. What you can fix, get busy--fix it. If you can't fix it let it go.

When we are attached to our views, we think only we are right and we feel a need to correct others. We feel a need to defend ourselves; someone may think we are bad or not doing a good job. If we don't correct their view of us, we may lose our job, our significant other, and others' approval.

Beach in Mexico

People deal with situations differently. While we were building our house, we lived in a tent on the land. It started to get pretty cold. I would look at Cleo and say, "It could be worse." She would look at me and say, "We could be on a beach in Mexico." When she said this, I would start talking about how we could rent a van and move to Mexico. My way of dealing with what she said was to say, "Let's go." Finally, one day, after I said, "It could be worse," she asked me, "Are you trying to hurt my feelings?" I didn't know what she meant by that. She told me that when she said, "We could be on a beach in Mexico," it made her feel warm and she could deal with the cold. When I said, "It could be worse," it made her feel colder and worse. We looked at each other and realized that we were coping differently with the cold. This became an unplugging technique for us. When we can't see each other's perspective, we turn to each other and say, "Ah, it's a beach in Mexico."

Communication and the Written Word

Our interpretation of a sentence can be very different. You read a sentence and I read the same sentence and we each come away with a different understanding of that sentence because of our life experiences and backgrounds in education. Both yours and mine are valid understandings and interpretations. One is not right and the other wrong. Be aware of this phenomenon at all times. Even when the emphasis in a sentence changes, the meaning will be different although the words are the same.

Try this: "I didn't say she stole the money." Emphasize each word in turn and see how it changes the meaning. For example, "I didn't say she stole the money." Change the emphasis to "I didn't say she stole the money," and then to, "I didn't say she stole the money," and then to, "I didn't say she stole the money" or "I didn't say she stole the money." Without being present to hear the inflection of the voice we cannot know what is intended by this sentence.

With the use of the internet, email, social networking media such as Twitter and Facebook, we can easily misunderstand what a person is saying. Don't assume that the first time you read something that you have read it correctly. Also don't assume you know what the author intended. When I read an email that seems offensive, I often ask someone else to read it and see if they get the same meaning. Phone communication is better but still it misses body language. It is useful to verify that what you think you heard or read is what the other party meant.

Rely on Yourself--Do Not Rely on Anyone Else

The Buddha, on his deathbed, gave this advice to the monks. Take everything that you hear, read and see and question it. Experiment with it. Does it work to end suffering? If so continue to practice in that way. Does it cause more suffering? If so, stop practicing in that way and find another way. Develop compassion and wisdom and you will grow more confident in yourself. No one can do this practice for us and we cannot do it for another. No one knows what we need for our growth and happiness the way we know it for ourselves. We cannot know this for another as they know it for themselves.

True Love

True love is loving without attachment. One of the most frequently asked questions about attachment is, "How can you love someone without being attached?" As soon as you become attached to a person you no longer love them. You are trying to own them, to make them into someone you want them to be. You want them to satisfy some desire in you. True love is seeing that person as they actually exist, without your ideas about them. True love is accepting that person as they exist in the present moment. Attachment is control and jealousy. When a person is jealous or controlling, they do not love.

Right or Skillful Speech

Before speaking ask yourself whether what you are going to say is true and beneficial. A lot of time something may be true but not beneficial to say. A way to judge whether it will cause suffering or not, is to think it through before you speak. Ask, "Will this cause harm to yourself or to others?" If it wouldn't cause harm, then it is OK to say it. The only way you will know if it will cause harm is by practicing compassion and wisdom. Be aware of what you are saying while saying it. If the other person starts to get defensive, then you stop talking because now it is causing suffering and they can no longer hear you anyway. So stop!

Blaming others for your suffering by saying you have 'triggers' or "You're doing that, makes me feel . . ." will not end your suffering. For example, you tell your partner, "When you leave your clothes on the floor that makes me feel like you don't care about me." You may have a trigger, a button, or an issue, but it has nothing to do with another person. It is your story. When you learn to drop your story, you will end suffering.

I have had students say that since we are responsible for our own triggers then in reality we cannot 'trigger' or push someone else's buttons. In a sense yes, that is true. But if you have compassion and wisdom you will realize that the other person still has these triggers and will not push their buttons on purpose. Use skillful speech in all conversations.

Chapter 9

Making Decisions

No single question about life can be answered with an absolute ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ So many variables exist in any situation that it is impossible to know one correct answer other than ‘it depends.’ There are no cookie cutter answers to life’s questions. The best decisions are based on wisdom obtained from this practice. We develop wisdom through the practice of compassion and generosity. Please note that it is through the practice of these fundamental ways of being that wisdom develops, not through the intellectual understanding of them. It is only by doing, by implementing the practice that real change through direct knowledge can occur.

Our minds have a habit of accepting labels as knowledge. The label is not the thing itself. Even knowing this is not enough, it must be lived, experienced over and over. Decisions based on generosity, compassion and wisdom do not require knowledge or ‘facts.’ This wisdom is sometimes referred to as a ‘gut’ feeling or intuition.

So many times, people will ask ‘what if’ questions and expect a definitive answer. There is never enough information to qualify a ‘what if’ question, therefore, it can never be answered except for ‘it depends.’ The time to prepare for answers is now, using skills you develop with this practice. When the situation arises, you will have the answer as it is needed. You will know when and what to say and when and what to do in every situation.

We have rules and regulations to help us make decisions and give us guidelines. But be aware that there are exceptions to every rule! What is appropriate or right in one situation may not be appropriate or right in another. Train to discern what leads to happiness and what leads to or causes suffering.

Tradition

Reliance upon tradition can lead you to delusion (a belief sustained as true despite clear evidence to the contrary). Anytime you use “God said,” “Buddha said,” or “It is written,” to prove your point as the final word, you are deluded. Using the statement, “We have always done it this way” in a defensive manner can lead to defensiveness on both sides. We can learn to remain open-minded and realize that other people hear “God,” “Buddha,” or interpret the “written word” in different ways.

Tradition can be a good thing but when it is used to justify your opinion, it becomes a weapon of mass distraction. It clouds your mind and can cause defensiveness in those that disagree with you. When someone is defensive, they cease to hear your perspective.

Tradition changes over time. A teacher once told me a story about her experience with tradition. She said that she went to another state to help start a new Zen center. When she arrived, they didn’t have the bells, candles, or proper altar materials. She came up with substitutes for these things so that she could teach them how to set up an altar and how do the chants. After a couple of months, she returned to her home. A couple of years later she took a trip back to the new Zen center. When she arrived, she asked why they were using a certain piece of equipment for the chants. They told her that it was an old Japanese tradition. She told them no it wasn’t, that she substituted that piece of equipment because they couldn’t afford the proper bell. Now that they had the proper bell, they didn’t need the substitute. They insisted that it was tradition to use this

particular bell. They had convinced themselves that what they were doing was an old tradition even though the person that substituted the bell told them otherwise. She could not convince them that it wasn't an old tradition. This is an example of how attached we can get to our ideas.

Chapter 10

Specific Emotions

Anger

Anger as defined here is wishing harm or hardship on oneself or others. Anger has several steps. First an unpleasant feeling arises, you get irritated, then frustrated, and then anger. Anger can then lead to hatred and rage. There are three opportunities to unplug before you even get to anger. Anger arises because you take things personally, you don't get your way, or you are attached to your story.

When I was giving a talk on anger, I stated that one could overcome anger completely. One woman got very angry with me. She said that getting rid of all anger was impossible and she didn't know of anyone who could do that. I stated that I had achieved that goal. I still get irritated and frustrated but that I do not get angry. (Anger is defined as wishing harm or hardship on oneself or others.) This made her even angrier. She started to swear at me and said that I needed to disrobe because I was a liar and a horrible teacher. She was extremely upset. She finally stopped talking and the people around her tried to settle her down. I told them that at this point she was so upset she could not hear what they had to say. I continued with the lecture and at the end of it she exclaimed that she still didn't believe me.

Nine of us went out to eat lunch and after we were all seated each person declared that they couldn't believe that I didn't get angry with this person. I asked them if they believed me that I had uprooted anger and they said, "Yes" but they still couldn't believe that I hadn't gotten angry. They had a difficult time believing what they saw. I told them that there was no reason to get angry because I didn't take what the women said personally. Each person at the table explained to me that I should have taken it personally and repeated what she said to prove their point. This shows how difficult it is for us to break the habit of taking what others say personally. They then spoke of their surprise when I didn't get frustrated or even irritated with the woman. Again, I explained that with this practice you learn to let go of habitual patterns of taking things personally. When you let go there is nothing to be angry about.

Feelings About the Past

The past has already happened. Recollecting the past is just that, feelings and images are pulled out of the files and tied together with a story about that event. Unless repeated frequently and verified independently the story will be lost. It may fade and sharpen as time and other stories degrade or strengthen it. Each person has their own perspective of events, their own recollection. Several people can experience the same event and yet each account of that event will be different. We can't change the past; it is no longer here. We can change or drop our story about the past and choose to live in the present. If we made mistakes in the past, we can use that information to improve our own actions now.

I have a student/friend/teacher that stated she had a horrible past. Instead of rehashing that past she made up a new one. Each time she thought of her upbringing it was pleasant and wonderful, filled with joy and love. Why not?! Make up a new past, a wholesome past. There is no need to keep something that does you harm or is unpleasant. Keep what makes you happy. Leaving an unpleasant experience behind does not mean it wouldn't happen again. But you don't have to suffer from it.

My ex-husband was a violent man and put me in the hospital three times. That is reality. I don't use that as an excuse or a reason why I have troubles in life. It is a reality and I acknowledge it and go on. He was only doing the best he could with what he had. I don't condone what he did but I also don't put a storyline to it. It doesn't cause me suffering because I don't take what he did to me personally. I use this as an example of how something terrible can happen to you and you don't have to suffer from it for the rest of your life. I have compassion for him. I wish him the best.

Whatever has happened in the past, or you think has happened, either to you or by you, is done. When thoughts of the past come up, remember how unreliable those stories are. Drop them and you will never suffer from past experiences again.

Anxiety and Worry

Worry never accomplishes anything. Mental distress or concern for some impending event is a common problem and it seems so reasonable. Worry is like paying interest on money you haven't borrowed. There is never a good reason to be worried.

Have you ever noticed that the things you are most worried about almost never come to be? And that if an event comes about that you were most afraid of, it was not as bad as you thought it was going to be.

I used to have an overwhelming fear of having a flat tire. Every time I drove the car, I would have to pull over several times during a trip to check the tires. Eventually I got to the point that I needed to stop driving or get over this phobia. I decided to get over it. I refused to pull over. After a few months I finally could drive without worrying about getting a flat tire. And yes, you guessed it; that was when the car got a flat tire. I pulled over, got out of the car, changed the tire and went on my way. I realized that getting a flat tire was not as bad as I thought it would be. It is amazing what our minds can do to us if we allow it.

Worrying about a situation will not change it. The situation will change on its own. It will either get better or it will get worse. Get out the toolbox and choose an unplugging technique. The physical unplugging techniques circumvent the story, the mind and the attachment. Hold your thumb to break the hold of worry. Wrap the fingers of your other hand around the thumb you choose and hold on until the throbbing or pulsing is regular and even. Do the turtle by placing the palms of both hands on the opposite shoulders, giving yourself a hug.

Verbal unplugging techniques unplug from the emotion by providing an alternative perspective, making you laugh. Think of some phrase or punch line that relates to the story but turns it on its head. Use 10-10-10; is this going to matter in 10 days? In 10 weeks? In 10 months? Substitution unplugging techniques work well, turning the attention to something else. Do something that engages your attention and takes time, knowing that as time passes so does the intensity of the story. Most important, substitute unwholesome thinking with wholesome thinking. Do

compassion meditation, wish someone well, come up with a pleasant story.

Fear and Pain

When I was a child, I knocked out my front tooth while sledding. I was taken to a dentist who put the tooth back into the socket. He performed experimental dental work but while lifting me off the seat shoved the tooth in too far. This caused me a great deal of pain. I had repeated visits to this dentist and repeated pain. Because of this I developed a terror of dentists.

When I was an adult, I learned that I had periodontal disease and needed dental surgery immediately. Without it I would very likely lose all of my teeth. Also, an infection was making me ill. So I looked at this as an opportunity to do my practice. I quickly did some research to see what kinds of surgery were recommended. I found a dentist near me that could do it with lasers and made the appointment. I was pleasantly surprised that I didn't feel any fear in this process.

The day of the appointment arrived and I sat in the waiting room. My mind was at peace but my body wasn't. I could feel the sweat pouring out of me. I allowed the physical sensations to continue and noted that my body had a physical response to being in the dentist's office. I told the people there about my past experience and they assured me they would be gentle. I told them that my blood pressure was going to be high but that I was OK.

They had to take measurements with a metal probe. At first, I gripped the chair and tried not to flinch, then I remembered the practice. I allowed my mind to flow with the pick as it hit the gum and beyond the pocket of the tooth. I allowed my mind to feel the pain, not resisting or trying to push it away. I thought to myself, so this is what pain feels like. I was aware of the pain but I did not suffer from it. I was able to release my grip on the chair and physically relax.

The next visit meant three hours in the chair. Again, I had no fear or sense of impending doom. I came back to the present moment each time the thought of the dental visit emerged in my mind. At the appointment I was able to flow with what was happening without my mind being disturbed. Whenever fear started to arise in my mind, I would watch it, allow it to abide and watch it pass. My focus was on the procedure and what was going on around me. Again, there was pain but I didn't suffer from it.

The next visit was to be another three hours. Again, I had no problem with the wait. When I arrived at the dentist office my body was reacting to fear. I was sweating and I could feel my body tense up. I sat in the chair and felt huge waves of terror arise. I allowed them to come and rode the wave like a surfer. All at once I started to cry. The assistant asked if I was ok and I told her, "Yes, this is just a physical reaction to the extreme terror I am experiencing. It will be over in a minute." In about fifteen seconds I felt the terror leave and stopped crying. I told the assistant, "OK, now let's get to work." Every once in a while, I felt the fear arise, allowed it to abide and it left quickly. I was able to face my terror with this practice.

Grief and Despair

Grief is a very confusing emotion. It can be selfish to indulge in grief when a life ends. I was about seven years old when my grandfather died. At the funeral everyone was sobbing. I marched up to my grandmother and demanded to know, "Why are you crying? Grandpa is in heaven. He is a lot better off than us." My father snatched me away from her and took me out of the room. I

really couldn't understand why anyone was crying because everyone there was a Christian and believed that grandpa was now in heaven. My father explained to me that they were all crying because they would miss grandpa. I said, "Well, that's pretty selfish isn't it? You should be happy for him. He is no longer suffering and is in heaven with Jesus." I couldn't convince the rest of the family that they should be happy. It was very frustrating for me because that was what they taught me, yet they did not practice it.

Grief comes from attachment. It does not accept the reality that everyone dies, everything changes, and nothing stays the same. When we live in denial of impermanence, we set ourselves up for grief and suffering.

Story of Isis' Death

I had a German shepherd named Isis. There is a meditation practice in Buddhism in which you use a dead body to reflect on. I decided to use Isis's body for this practice. We lived in a large wooded area in which I could lay her body out on the ground.

Isis got very sick and we took her to the vet. We nursed her back to health and she seemed fine. She was back to her normal self for a week and then got sick again. I came home about 9:30am and she came out the dog door to greet me. When I went into the house, she didn't follow me, which was unusual. I went back outside and called her. She was still standing by the car. She came back into the house but had trouble walking. She lay down next to the couch. This was unusual as she usually lay in her bed. I was extremely tired so I ended up lying down on the couch. I noticed that she didn't seem to be breathing right. I petted her and watched her as she tried to get comfortable. She tried to get up and lean against the couch and seemed unable to stand.

At about 12:30pm she seemed worse. She was not comfortable in any position. I asked if she would like to go outside and she tried to get up. She had great difficulty, took four steps and collapsed. I called the vet and we took her in. We carried her because she couldn't walk. The vet said that she had internal bleeding and would die that day. The vet advised us to put her down. As I was kneeling next to her, I told her, as I often did, that she was the best dog in the universe and beyond. I told her she was dying and not to be afraid. I talked to her as she took her last breath.

The entire time I was watching my mind. I had a heightened awareness of everything that was going through my mind and what was going on around me. I would start to cry and then realize that I was attached to 'my' story and was taking her death personally. As soon as I realized what was happening, I dropped 'my story' and stopped crying. I cried for five seconds each time before I caught my story and dropped it.

We carried her out to the car and started to drive home. We ordered a pizza, picked it up and started home again. Every once in a while, a huge wave of sadness came over me. When I attached a story to that sadness I started to cry. As soon as I dropped that attachment, I stopped crying. I would cry for about five seconds and then catch my attachment to my story and was able to drop it right away. It was an amazing experience.

When we got home, we carried her to a spot in the woods and laid her body on her favorite blanket. I stood there looking at her and many thoughts started to go through my mind. A great sadness started to arise and I understood what other people felt when they lost someone they loved. The thoughts that went through my mind: What is life all about? Why is it so short? Why

must we suffer the loss of those we love? What is my life all about? Can I go on living without her? How could this happen? Where does my practice fit into this? Why do I feel guilty? Now that she is dead, I can travel. Why do I feel guilty about this? This is surely impermanence. If I drop my attachment, I'm not sad. I'm standing here looking at Isis's body. Who was Isis? This body? Is there some kind of spirit in the body? Who am I? Where has she gone? She was such a good dog, surely something of her goes on. I don't know. I can love her without attachment. I can understand now why people go ballistic when someone they love dies. But it doesn't have to be that way. I stood there and watched the thoughts come and go. All of these thoughts happened in just a couple of minutes. I did not ponder them. I allowed them to arise and pass away without entertaining them or trying to answer them. I was able to let go and feel the emotions rise and fall. When I cried it was in short bursts of about five seconds and only when I took the story personally.

I went to bed that night, woke the next morning and did my morning meditation. I felt OK. I didn't feel sadness. I was determined to watch my mind. I got dressed and went to Isis's body in the woods. I looked down at her and a great wave of sadness hit me. I asked why? I started to personalize her death and that made me cry. I lay down next to her body hugging her and petting her and telling her how much I loved her. After about a minute I remembered to drop the attachment to my story about her. I did and stopped crying. The sadness left. I got up and knelt next to her noting how stiff her body had become. This dead body was the body of Isis. I then remembered the Buddhist technique of watching a body decay. I looked at Isis and started to realize that decay was taking place. The next thought that arose was that I too would one day be lying dead and decaying. I felt a great peace for both of us.

I stood up and continued looking at her body. She sure looked like 'Isis.' At times I swore I saw her breathing. I continued to watch my mind. I watched feelings come and go. I was amazed at how I could stand in this one place looking at this dead body and have so many different thoughts and feelings arise; sadness, happiness, guilt, no guilt, that these thoughts could arise and pass away so quickly. Nothing was changing outside of me, I was standing next to her body and only my mind was active as feelings and emotions washed through my body.

I went back into the house and sat on the couch and again the same thing happened; thoughts, feelings and emotions swept through my body. After a few minutes I got up from the couch and stared to get ready to go into town. I had errands and a QiGong class to teach. As I went to the car, I remembered how Isis would come outside whenever I was leaving. I would say, "You better run," and she would start to run. A tear came to my eye and then I remembered to drop my attachment. I was then able to remember the same incident with much love and no sadness. I realized at that moment that I could remember the good times without any sadness arising. I could catch the attachment before it started to arise and keep the happy memory.

I also understood that this sadness and attachment was coming from 'change.' My life was now going to change a great deal without Isis. We had many interactions and habits we had built up over the last eleven years. All of those were now gone. That felt like a hole in my heart. I now understood how other people felt in a similar situation. I also knew that over time that hole would close. This was a fact of life. If someone is born, they will die.

I didn't need to fill that hole with anything. I recognized that a big change had occurred. Isis was dead. Our relationship was over. She lived a very good life. She was the best dog and friend I had ever had in my life. That was now gone and nothing and no one could take her place. I could look

at that memory and be happy.

To see reality as it exists without making it personal can free you from the pain of sadness. You can love, truly love when there is no attachment. It is not a pushing away of the sadness; it is a recognition that the only way sadness can exist is if you personalize an event that isn't personal. When there is birth, there is death. Don't dwell on the past. Don't dwell on the future. Take the present moment and live in it. You cannot control what thoughts arise but you can control how you will respond to them.

Chapter 11

Recap

Begin by learning how the mind works. Then develop and use skills that form wholesome action instead of reacting in an unwholesome way. We are retraining our minds.

There are four times you can deal with disturbing emotions.

- 1) After you have acted out on a disturbing emotion: Acknowledge the damage it has done to yourself and others. Create the intention to respond differently.
- 2) After a disturbing emotion has arisen and is abiding: Acknowledge it and use an unplugging technique, a phrase such as "This is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself," Or "10-10-10." Do the turtle or open the energy pathway by holding the fingers as described earlier in this book.
- 3) At the time the emotion is arising: Don't try and stop it. Allow it to arise. Ride the wave. Use an unplugging technique to release you from the suffering. Substitute unwholesome thinking with wholesome thinking. This will stop the suffering; the pain may still remain but the suffering will leave.
- 4) Before the emotion arise: Practice generosity, compassion, mindfulness, meditation and other homework assignments.

Don't give up and be persistent!

It all comes down to learning how to drop your story. The more you drop your story the less you will suffer. The more you are attached to your story the more you will suffer. It is that simple! It may not be so easy but it is simple.

Replace unwholesome thinking with wholesome thinking. This is done using generosity, compassion, gratitude and wisdom.

To bring peace we live peace. We drop our stories and see reality as it actually exists. We look at each moment with beginner's mind (no story), with generosity and compassion. Peace can only happen in your own mind. When you are peaceful others may become peaceful. It has a ripple effect. Understand that acting out on disturbing emotions in an unwholesome way also has a ripple effect.

The problem with laying out these techniques is that now you may think you have the answer. In Zen this is called "the finger pointing at the moon, it is not the moon." This is only one way to approach the ending of suffering and dissatisfaction with life. There are other ways but this way that works for me and for many others.

This practice can only work if you work it.

You cannot be an armchair practitioner. You can study all the books and videos and become an expert on the art of swimming but unless you get into the water and do it, all that knowledge will not do you much good. So it is with this book, if you only read and study and don't practice, don't apply it to your daily life, you will not end discontentment and suffering anytime soon. If you practice you can end discontentment and suffering in this very lifetime.

You have the answer in yourself. I have given you some of the techniques that my students and I have used to end suffering and dissatisfaction with life. Your job is to find your way with mindfulness and awareness. Take the techniques and experiment with them. Change them to fit your circumstances and then change them again to fit other situations. This book offers suggestions to investigate for yourself. Experiment. Your job is to go inside and investigate what is your answer. You have to find a way that is going to work for you, that you will be able to remember in the midst of disturbing emotions.

The answer for you can come through sitting meditation, compassion meditation and/or mindfulness practice; through using some of the tools shared in this book, like watching things arise, abide and leave. Learn to quit telling your story about any emotion including happiness and allow it just to be. Learn to be in the present moment rather than thinking about the past or the future. Remember, be in the present moment without your judgments or storyline.

This is not a quick fix. Practice all day long, every day. You cannot wait till the next emergency. Use every chance you get to practice. Daily life presents us with many opportunities to practice. Take advantage of them.

Reread this book to familiarize yourself with the different techniques. Write them down so that you can review them. Post them where you will see them frequently. When you are in the grip of the disturbing emotion or as time passes, you will have difficulty remembering the techniques unless you have reviewed them.

If you want to know how your practice is going watch what happens when a disturbing emotion arises. Equanimity can be yours!

It May Seem to Get Worse before It Gets Better

It will seem to get worse before it gets better. This is because whenever a disturbing emotion arises you either act on it or try to escape from it. Most of the time we are unaware of our feelings. We live on autopilot until something upsets us. Then we react in an unwholesome way. We don't even realize there is an alternative to this destructive behavior.

When you start to recognize the emotion, it is not actually getting worse, you are just seeing the emotion for the very first time. Now you have the opportunity to practice. You have never watched fear, anger, sadness, worry, or stress, you have only reacted to them. It is time to stop, look and listen and change that reaction to a wholesome action.

When you start to calm your mind and notice what you are actually thinking you may feel like things are getting worse. This is not the case. This happened to me at a monastery. We had to get up at 4:30am and I am not a morning person. On top of this it was my turn to make sure that the dead flowers were taken out of the vase before the morning meditation. That meant I had to get up even earlier. I walked into the meditation hall and someone had put his stuff in my place! Keep

in mind that this meditation hall is about 40X40 feet and there were only three people there that day. I had staked out my place and that is where I wanted to sit. I moved the other monk's stuff and sat down. The other monk came up behind me and asked, "Didn't you see my stuff there?" I said, "Of course I did, and didn't you see that I moved it?" During that morning meditation it occurred to me that I was prideful of owning very little stuff. But the stuff I did have was 'mine.' In my mind I was becoming worse instead of better. Then I realized I had always been this way and was just now seeing it.

After the morning meditation I apologized to the other monk for being so rude. I also accepted the fact that as I continued with this practice, I would see things about myself that I would not particularly like. That was OK, I would hang in there and learn to drop my story which would end even that suffering. Don't give into the temptation to beat yourself up. All bad habits will drop away with time. Just keep doing this practice.

The Curve

The practice is like a curve. On a graph it appears to go up and down. In the beginning you will not feel like you are making much progress but hang in there. The more you develop the new habit of letting go of your story, the easier it gets. You will experience greater lengths of time with equanimity. Situations that used to upset you will no longer arise. Be patient with yourself.

When I first developed the practice of unplugging, I lived in an intentional community. It was a very difficult place to live but a great place to see if these unplugging techniques were really going to work. I would go to the grocery store in town and usually run into a friend there. She would ask me how it was going in the community. I would tell a long story of how bad everything was. I would then get in my car and realize that I had told this huge story. I would acknowledge that I had messed up and made an intention not to do that the next time I saw her.

A week later I went back to the store and did the same thing. Again, I didn't beat myself up over it I made the intention not to tell my story the next time. The next week I saw her and did the exact same thing. It is important to remember not to get down on yourself when you fail. This can be a long process but if you stick with it you will succeed.

The next week I was in the middle of my story and I realized what I was doing, telling my story again. I caught myself in the middle of it but I finished telling the story. I got into the car and realized that I had caught it in the middle, congratulated myself on that, and made the intention to stop the story the next time.

I saw her the next week and was able to catch myself at the beginning of the story. I told my friend, "You know I don't need to tell my story." The first thing I noticed is that she looked relieved. I then realized that whenever I told my story it was also unpleasant for her. Telling my story was not only hurting me but also hurting her.

The next time I saw my friend she asked me how was it going and I said, "OK." She said, "Really?" and I said well, "I'm just not going to tell my story today." She looked at me and said, "Oh that's good."

The next week I saw my friend and I ended up telling her two stories. The point is that eventually I was able to drop my story entirely but it took time.

The Practice Is Like a Roller Coaster

It takes a lot of energy to get the car to the top of the rail of the roller coaster but once at the top, it lets go and you get the ride of your life. It doesn't matter that you are turned upside down and thrown against the sides of the car, that you hit the curves at breakneck speed. Now life is fun! People stand in long lines and pay good money to have this experience.

It takes a lot of determination to keep an open and flexible mind. To be aware of what the mind is doing at all times. The longer you practice, the easier it gets until one day you reach the very top of the roller coaster. You accept reality as it exists and you ride that roller coaster. You can approach all situations with equanimity.

Deeper Teachings

People always ask for deeper teachings. Deeper teachings can only come from experience; they do not come from books or lectures. Use what you already know, which is to unplug, drop your story and don't take anything personally. Continue to read books and attend lectures for new inspiration and a different way of looking at things. Take this knowledge and apply it to your daily life and the deeper teachings will reveal themselves. Deeper teachings never come from outside of you. No book or lecture can transmit a deeper teaching unless it is already there, on the threshold. We can share our experiences but you will never 'know' true practice without experience. This is when the teachings become real.

The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha means the Awakened One, a title, an honorific. This exceptional person gave up a life of privilege to find a way to end all suffering and then spent the rest of his life offering it freely to others. Here are the teachings in a nutshell.

The Four Noble Truths

1. There is *dukkha* (a Pali word usually translated as suffering). This word can also be translated as anger, anxiety, boredom, craving, depression, disappointment, discomfort, discontentment, dissatisfaction, envy, fear, frustration, grief, guilt, hate, helplessness, hopelessness, irritation, jealousy, lust, pride, rage, restlessness, sadness, shame, stress, unhappiness, worry, and a general feeling that something is missing or just not all it could be. Always wanting more or something better. Not satisfied or content with what you have.

2. *Dukkha* is caused by attachment or aversion. When we are attached to our likes and have aversion to our dislikes this is what causes suffering. Attachment to our thoughts and storyline creates suffering. The more you try to get rid of a feeling or emotion the worse the problem gets. The more you are attached, the more suffering you will experience. The more you can let go (unplug from your storyline) the less suffering you will experience. Drop your story entirely and you will never suffer again!

3. There is a way to end *dukkha*, this discontentment with life, to end all suffering in this lifetime.

4. The way to end suffering is living the Eightfold Path. This includes:

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Understanding, Thinking, Speech, Action, Livelihood, Effort,

Mindfulness, and Meditation.

When we practice this path, our living is in balance with reality. We don't fight with reality.

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Understanding:

Understanding reality without our storyline attached. To see life as it actually exists without our judgments and misconceptions. Understanding the Four Noble Truths. We come to understand how *dukkha* arises and then how to eliminate *dukkha*.

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Thinking:

The intention to see reality as it actually exists without our storyline attached. We continue to keep the attitude of compassion and loving kindness towards others and ourselves. Substitute unwholesome thinking with wholesome thinking.

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Speech:

Abstain from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, from harsh speech, from gossip, from slanderous and malicious speech, and from idle chatter. We don't use these wrong kinds of speech ourselves and we don't hang around listening to it either. When we do speak, we consider if it is appropriate, wholesome, timely, beneficial, and is the one we are speaking to able to listen?

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Action:

Abstain from killing with malicious intent and out of irritation; abstain from stealing, robbery, fraud, deceitfulness, and dishonesty and from misusing sex.

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Livelihood:

Avoid occupations that bring harm to oneself and others. Is it appropriate, wholesome, timely, and beneficial?

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Effort:

1. Avoid unwholesome states of mind from arising. This is what we put into our minds. You can't have an unwholesome thought arise unless you have subjected yourself to that thought in the first place. For instance, watching violence on TV would allow thoughts of violence to arise in your mind.
2. Overcome unwholesome states of mind already present. This is where the unplugging techniques come in handy.
3. Cause wholesome states of mind not yet present to arise. This is created by meditation on the breath, generosity meditation and compassion meditation. Reading wholesome books and watching wholesome movies also create this. What you put into the mind is what the mind is going to think on.

4. To maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen. We do this by being mindful and aware at all times. Be aware of what the mind is thinking at all times. Don't let it just wander without observing it.

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Mindfulness:

Be aware of your thoughts, feelings, speech, and actions. These are observed without our storyline attached thus we are able to see them as they actually exist.

Right/Skillful/Harmonious Meditation:

Train the mind to be steady and calm in order to realize the true nature of things through meditation. This is achieved through various objects of meditation.

The Eightfold path is practiced as a whole. Each fold or facet is dependent on the others. These are not separate but one, a continual circle.

Every action of mind, speech and body either creates suffering or lessens suffering. This can motivate us to think, speak and act in a way that won't cause suffering for others or ourselves. Every moment of every day we make these choices.

Dependent Origination

How Disturbing/Destructive Emotions Arise

In the recorded teachings of the Buddha, over and over again, the steps of Dependent Origination also called Dependent Arising are taught to explain why there is suffering and how it comes to exist. Here are the twelve links in the chain: (from *Paticca-samuppada-vibhanga Sutta*, SN 12)

1. Ignorance: not seeing reality as it actually is.
2. Formations/constructions: thinking, speech and mind.
3. Consciousness: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.
4. Name and Form; the labeled realm. How we label and take that label as reality.
5. Six Senses: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.
6. Contact: with eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.
7. Feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, neither pleasant nor unpleasant (neutral).
8. Craving: for forms, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, ideas.
9. Clinging: to sensuality, views, rites and rituals, an idea of self.
10. Habitual tendencies: related to sense perceptions, things and ideas.
11. Birth of action: acting out.
12. Aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair (suffering).

We are mainly concerned with 7-12. This is where the unplugging techniques are effective. If we unplug any time after stage six none of the other steps can arise. This means the end of suffering!

Human beings have six senses: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch and mind. When these come in contact with an item that is capable of eliciting a sense, feeling arises which is pleasant, unpleasant, neither pleasant nor unpleasant (neutral). At this point we decide whether we like it, don't like it or are not concerned with it. Next craving arises; if we like it, we want to keep it; this is called attachment or clinging. If we don't like it, we want to get rid of it, this is called aversion. If it is neither painful nor pleasant the craving or aversion does not arise.

Then habitual tendencies take over (how we usually act in a given situation), giving birth to action, which inevitably leads to suffering. At any of these stages we can unplug. The earlier we unplug the less suffering we have to endure.

Dhammapada 1,2:

This comes from the Dhammapada (a Buddhist text).

“They beat me, stole from me, cheated and abused me, in those who cling to such thinking, hatred is sustained;”

“They beat me, stole from me, cheated and abused me, in those who **drop** such thinking, hatred is relieved.”

Ovations

I came to the practice over two years ago, at that time I was 25, just starting graduate school and unsure about most aspects of my life. I also was a rather angry person who had no interest in religion or in the usual 'one right way to live self-help crap' and was rather vocal about that lack of interest. I was skeptical to say the least, as a matter of fact my first words to Venerable were, "What are you doing here? Is this religion if so, I'm out of here," Thankfully Venerable laughed, and invited me to sit and listen to my first Dharma talk. As an artist it was natural for me to extend my discipline into a new kind of practice: a practice of unplugging from disturbing emotions, one of dropping my story, and most importantly a practice of quieting my mind (a skill I thought was unachievable). Before I started working on my practice I was plagued like most people with worries about finances, family, future and when I wasn't worried, I was angry citing years of abuse as a child as the source of my anger. Now, through meditation and my practice I have learned to quiet my mind, I can control what I choose to analyze and what's of concern to me. I also learned through my practice to let go of the past, to move on from the years of hate and anger. I later realized that I identified with these emotions on such a base level that at one time I thought I was hate and anger. Now I understand that my mind and my efforts are much better spent living in the present, rather than wasting so much of my time firmly planted in the past, or worried about the future. Most importantly this practice becomes what you need. You create the practice that will work for you. Again, there is not one right way to live or to practice. You work at it and find what works best for you. If you need religion you can find that here. If you are looking, like me, for a philosophy to help you live a happy life free from suffering that is here too. This practice is like a road map, how you use it to guide your trip is your decision. The path you choose to get there is entirely up to you but in the end our destination is a life free from suffering. The practice can help get us there.

Kimberley S. Crum

I spent many years looking for something that was not there. I perceived a hole in my heart and tried to fill it, with no success. Using the techniques explained in this book, I learned to drop my story about being incomplete, and find a joy that is deep, resilient, and was there all along, just waiting to be discovered. May you find yours,

Jim "Rajju Pandu" Goodrich

Even though I know that "if I do the practice, it works," I am still amazed at how different this pregnancy has been from what I expected. All of the women in my life who have been pregnant around me have fulfilled the stereotype of what a "pregnant woman" is, but I have really been able to recognize the disturbing emotions and let them be and let them go without having them effect my life. The hormones are strong and I need to remind myself to let go of things that are out my control more often than usual. Jonathan has told me that I have acted no differently pregnant than I did pre-pregnancy. My friends do not notice any change in my personality and are always remarking on my patience and rationality. They tell me that even "pregnant Laura" is calmer and more easy-going than they are. I just love how much the practice WORKS! I hope that one day the fears and anxiety and frustration never arise at all, but for now I am so ecstatically happy with how rarely they come and how easily they go.

Laura Allen

After 4 weeks of a 5-week Disturbing Emotions workshop, 2 hours/week, the community I lived in experienced a remarkable change. Positive, smiling, helpful people were emerging from the egg-shell walking, negative, dark pile of ashes that was our norm. I learned how to drop my story, and to use my own unplugging technique, to take the emotion out of any confrontation, and to focus on what was needed right now to be helpful. If I was not going to be helpful, get out of the way and do something else, or nothing at all. Great Stuff!!!

Anagarika Cindy Hughes

Laura did very well during the unmedicated labor (this is Jonathan, by the way) - no screaming or cursing. Laura says she used not only watching the breath during labor but also remembering that the pain was impermanent, and that by being fully in the moment, she was able to surrender and give up control, to which she attributes her safe and speedy labor. After only 4 1/2 hours of labor at the hospital, we had Charlotte in our arms. Charlotte sleeps well at night and rarely cries for no reason. She's very strong, but needs some more training in dealing with disturbing emotions...

I personally have been putting your teachings to good use daily because without them I would be a wreck navigating this emotional period. I had no idea monkey mind would be cranked up to 11 during the pregnancy and infant care, but you have given me the tools to deal with the worry and dread that arise so frequently. It has helped me every single day with living in this foreign culture where I don't speak the language very well and don't always understand what is going on. Now without a moment's hesitation or worry arising at all, I find myself doing things that I would have worried endlessly about doing three years ago. I'm really excited about the book and I'm glad that your teachings can reach a wider audience.

Jonathan

Contact Information

Venerable KC WarEagle

740-591-2778

venkwareagle@yahoo.com

www.jediyana.com