**INTEGRATING AND LIBERATING THE SELF**

Awakening is an ongoing process during which the transitions from one self-organization to another evolves, beginning with the obstruction from recurring internal conflicts through a phase of self-state integration and on to self-state Liberation. What I want to accomplish with these notes is to explore what happens as the process of Awakening unfolds, using the development of the seven Awakening factors and the four noble truths as the supportive context for practicing the process that supports the cultivation involved with Awakening.

First, here is my current thinking about what it means to awaken. In our current culture, the term “enlightenment” is typically used to describe the transcendent process that the historical Buddha realized and taught. It is meant to be the translation for *nibbana, (*Sanskrit *nirvana).* The term nibbana literally means that which remains when the fuel for clinging that provides the heat of craving is extinguished. An excerpt from Wikipedia on the term “Buddhist Awakening” says:

“Robert S. Cohen notes that the majority of English books on Buddhism use the term "enlightenment" to translate the term *bodhi*. The root *budh*, from which both *bodhi* and *Buddha*, are derived, means "to wake up" or "to recover consciousness". Cohen notes that *bodhi* is not the result of an [*illumination*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illuminationism), but of a path of realization, or coming to understanding. The term "enlightenment" is event-oriented, whereas the term "awakening" is process-oriented. The western use of the term "enlighten" has Christian roots, as in Calvin's "It is God alone who enlightens our minds to perceive his truths". [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightenment\_in\_Buddhism downloaded 10/13/14](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightenment_in_Buddhism%20downloaded%2010/13/14)

These notes describes the process of self-state conflicts and the process of self-state integration as I understand it as a person whose career involved the study and practice of psychotherapy. Self-state conflicts are the normal sorts of dilemmas we experience as “the human condition”. A simplistic, but useful way to describe this process is the seemingly inescapable difference between the “ideal self-state” and the self-state that actually emerges through thoughts, emotions and behaviors. The ideal self-state can be either fabricated around a positive ideal or a negative one. A positive ideal would be a person who *never* makes mistakes, even though it might be evident to others that they do, and a negative ideal could be a person who *always* makes mistakes and therefor *is* a mistake! In either case, the ideal is a complete mental fabrication, because, after all, an ideal is an imagined self-organization and can’t be realized. This is a way to understand what is called the neurotic personality. One description goes like this: “A neurotic imagines their idealized fantasies about how to be in the world, while a psychotic lives in these fantasies.” From a Buddhist perspective, the human experience is organized in a neurotic way, and our practice involves seeing the entrapment of idealization and reorganizing our lifestyles in ways that minimize the frequency, intensity, and duration of unwholesome self-state personality structures.

This could also be considered as a psychologized description of karma. In the Buddhist sense, karma manifests in three ways: as thought, word and action (or sometimes inaction). I see karma as our personal history, that is, the accumulated memories that are accessed and activated in order to make sense out of current sensory experience. When karma is considered as thought, I regard this to represent what is called the preconscious or subconscious, which involves the process of self-creating which occurs at the verge of consciousness as the thought-form emerges into fulfillment. Our task is to investigate this formative process skillfully and have the ability to redirect the energy of attention away from neurotic patterns toward a more adaptive and harmless life.

It is quite important to mindfully monitor the urgency of the emotional or feeling tone that is part of the formative process of emerging thoughts and actions. This feeling tone, which in psychological jargon is called *affect,* has a degree of impact on the process of thinking and subsequent behavior. The feelings can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, and the characteristics of affect embedded in the memories drives toward identifying “this is myself—this is the world”. The associated memories strength depends upon how frequently the memories have been reinforced, combined with how early they started to be accumulated.

When the process of memory recall and the associated affective pressure causes a thought to emerge into internal narrative awareness; acting on the narrative is where the self-state organizing phase of karma arises. I prefer to call this the *selfing story--*an ongoing stream of internal commentary--or as a mental fixation on a particular ideal self or that of another being of another being, whether human or otherwise; this also creates a rendering of how the world should be. The affective impulse is equivalent to craving, and the idealized expected outcome is clinging. The contemporary social psychology term that fits this process is *confirmation bias*. Because prior events may have enough similarity of feeling tone it cues, an overriding bias towards the previously stored memory associations.

There are different manifestations of self-states. There’s an idealized version, that is, *how things should be*, and this is normally in conflict with what actually happens*.* For example, an ideal self-state might be: “When I do the right thing, others will appreciate me and honor me for my accomplishment.” This view has several possible alternatives:

1. I don’t actually do the right thing, either because of lack of skill or misperceiving what the right thing is.
2. I do the right thing, but unexpected conditions prevent the right thing from achieving the intended outcome.
3. I do the right thing, but no one notices.
4. I do the right thing, but I’m criticized for doing the right thing (a problem that “whistle blower” employees encounter).

There are probably other outcomes that are also less than ideal. The point is the discrepancy between what the expected outcome is and what actually occurs and the resulting dissatisfaction with the discrepancy. This is what I call “self-state conflict”, and this distress and confusion constitutes the experience of dukkha.

The action phase of karma is manifested by behavior, which can either be acted upon or inhibited. To summarize: Thought karma begins to form largely outside of awareness, verbal karma emerges from internal self-talk, and behavioral karma is external speech, overt behavior, or the inability to speak or behave overtly.

The process of self-state integration involves:

 1) Recognizing dukkha--a direct awareness of subjective distress and confusion.

 2) Investigating with direct intentional awareness of what’s emerging in consciousness, particularly the felt sense of like or dislike (called *affect approach* or *affect avoidance* in psychological jargon), and the degree to which the mind becomes “enchanted“ through confirmation bias, that is, clinging to the accompanying self-talk.

 3) The experience of becoming “disenchanted” with the affect and self-talk, which is the process of awakening in its first manifestations. Disenchantment is not numbness or denial regarding what is being investigated, but a calmly detached observation of the process of the enchantment as it forms.

 4) Diligently and persistently applying the ways and means described as the Noble Eightfold Path that foster the process of Awakening, that is, Right Understanding, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Reviewing the Seven Awakening Factors:

1) Mindfulness (Of the body, feelings/affect, conscious awareness, and mental phenomena/self-talk.)

2) Investigation of Mental Phenomena (At this stage, aiming attention at what emerges into awareness and sustaining that awareness long enough for Right Effort to act).

3) Energy/Persistence/Right Effort, which functions in coordination with mindfulness and investigation to interrupt emerging unwholesome self-states--the five hindrances--at the potential verbal and behavioral karma levels, and then notice and foster emerging wholesome self-states at the verbal and behavioral karma levels).

4) Joy/Enthusiastic Engagement (At this level, a willingness to continue the practice diligently; as the process of awakening develops, this feeling becomes a heightened interest in investigating what emerges in awareness, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and whether the emerging self-state organization is in alignment with confirmation bias or offers a more wholesome process).

5) Tranquility (During the process of self-state integration, tranquility is relatively weak and inconsistent and is likely to not be clearly in awareness or misperceived; it is also likely out of balance with energy, resulting either in sloth and torpor or subtle dullness).

6) Concentration/Unification (The first goal of this level in the development of awakening is to interrupt the emergence of the hindrances and cultivate a stable flow of attention, that is, ongoing breath/body awareness).

7) Equipoise/Balance (At this level, there is enough stability of attention and tranquility through practicing mindfulness of breathing that there is a reduced reactivity to craving and clinging—a “buffer zone” of detached, investigative awareness. This balance enables one to develop and follow through on actions that are in alignment with Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood even when being virtuous is not advantageous in a worldly sense but promotes spiritual development).

The application of the seven Awakening factors plays a key role in reducing self-state conflict and the result is the flow of experience that I call “self-state integration”. Self-state integration is the significantly reduced “friction” between self-states. There’s still a preferred outcome, but it’s not idealized, and there’s no aggravation or despair when the outcome isn’t realized. Using the example above, the initial self-state might be “I will do the right thing because it is harmonious with wisdom and virtue.” This view also has several alternatives, but the stress of conflict between what is wise and virtuous is absent. This view also has several alternatives, but none of them produce stress:

1. I don’t actually do the right thing, due to lack of skill, but there’s a realization that the right thing is based on virtue and competency rather than an idealized outcome, combined with a benevolent determination to improve the ability to have the skill to do the right thing—more practice is necessary.
2. I do the right thing, and even though unexpected conditions prevent the intended outcome, I’m at peace through the activation of virtuous intention and the support of equipoise.
3. I do the right thing, and it doesn’t matter whether anyone notices, because the peace and clarity that comes from Right Intention is already satisfying.
4. I do the right thing, even if I’m criticized for it, because there’s enough equipoise that I don’t take the criticism personally.

The skillful application of the seven Awakening factors operate to first create enough awareness that is not afflicted by the hindrances, allowing for a person to function at a higher level of clarity and satisfaction, whether expectations are met or not, accepting the limitations of oneself and of others. This is Self-State Integration, which creates the conditions suitable for the development of Self-State Liberation, that is, spiritual Awakening.

**SELF-STATE LIBERATION**

When I let go of “This is who I am”

There is the opportunity to become

“Who I might be”—Lao-Tsu

For the purpose of differentiating the difference between Self-State Integration and Self-State Liberation, let me describe how Western psychology describes the difference between a *state* and a *trait*. Generally speaking, a *state* represents a transient, circumstantial state of mind, which can involve particular thoughts and moods. A *trait* represents a consistently operating series of states which often describe a person’s character or personality. Another way to describe this difference would be that a *state* can be somewhat unique to a situation; to the extent that a state might recur in a more or less similar series of situations could be considered the manifestation of a *trait*. A person might experience a *state* of situational anxiety when confronted with a specific stressful experience; when this sort of anxiety occurs frequently or predictably in a variety of experiences that might not be particularly stressful, this could be termed *trait* anxiety.

Buddhist concepts address this differentiation with some useful clarity. A moment of *selfing* is equivalent to a *state*, while the misperception of a sequence of states as a *trait* represents one of the characteristic causes of dukkha, i.e., clinging to the *trait* idealas an enduring, substantial self.

The first stage in the process of moving toward liberation from dukkha requires a clear awareness of the characteristics of a wholesome, well-integrated personality that persistently responds effectively to environmental stimuli. This awareness is characterized as *namarupa* (nah-mah-roo-pah), with *nama* representing the mind’s momentary, fabricated interpretation of the stimuli that *rupa* stimulates. Rupa is sensory stimulation, that is, light and seeing, sound and hearing, etc. The fulfillment of the realization of the process of namarupa is called *the insight into arising and passing away* and involves the immediate awareness of the moment-by-moment formation and dissolution of the self-states. *This realization diminishes the tendency to misperceive that which is impermanent as permanent, and it is a doorway to liberation.*

An important quality of mind to be cultivated to liberate the namarupa discernment process involves the ability to directly experience the body-mind process of anxiety as simply the manifestation of a natural phenomenon as an embodied experience, without attributing it to “my anxiety”. Additionally, there is a clear awareness that the internal narrative, nama, associated with the feeling of anxiety, is fabricated from prior, somewhat similar experiences. This narrative may be beneficial when it is organized around the intention to respond with compassion, generosity, tolerance, and patience. The cultivation of Right Understanding and Right Intention, the two components of Wisdom within the Noble Eightfold Path, fosters this insightful process.

There’s a story that Jack Kornfield relates in one of his books about a trip he made with his teacher, Achaan Chah, through the mountains of Thailand. The road was narrow, with steep drops and blind corners. The driver was apparently quite reckless, and Jack became very frightened. Jack felt ashamed that his fear would prove that he wasn’t as spiritual as he could be, and he wondered what was going on for Achaan Chah, who also looked quite frightened. At the end of the journey, as they watched the driver leave, Achaan Chah commented “That was quite interesting, wasn’t it!?” Achaan Chah was mindful of the fear the circumstance generated, but regarded it as something to investigate, to *not make into a self*. It was a situationally appropriate *state* of anxiety rather than a *trait*.

Another story involved Achaan Chah, this time with another Western monk, Achaan Sumedho, when he was quite young. A group of nursing students visited their monastery, and some of them were attractive. After they left, Achaan Chah asked Sumedho what his reaction was, and his reply was “Like, but don’t want!”

How does the practice of mindfulness of breathing support this liberating capability? The key to understanding experientially how this works is to focus on the transition from feelings and perceptions into the fabrication process. Fabrication occurs when sensory input is associated with prior experience, creating a meaningful, ongoing rendering, out of which the transient state of self-organization emerges. With enough training in mindfulness of breathing meditation, particularly when the Seven Awakening Factors are highly functional, it becomes possible to be immediately, clearly aware, with great detachment, of the moment-by-moment transitions from one state to the next, as this meaning-making process transforms the data input into a self-state. It can be experienced as an inner awareness of a “flickering” sort of like being in a dark room with a rapidly flashing strobe light. Another experience could be the sense that all the fabrications that emerge into awareness are dreamlike, transparent, with a diminished attachment to perceiving the resulting sequence of self-states as convincing manifestations of reality. Instead, the awareness recognizes the provisional and transient quality of what is experienced.

**THE PROGRESSIONS OF INSIGHT AWARENESS**

In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, there are various stages representing progress towards liberation from craving and clinging. There are many commentaries on this process; these notes represent a summary. Some of the insights I’ve personally experienced; I’ve heard about or read accounts describing those I haven’t experienced. The preliminary insights focus on the establishment of an ethical and balanced lifestyle—self-state integration into wholesome personality traits. This is established with the support of well-developed and maintained “trait mindfulness” (This term has become part of psychological research terminology). The following comments pick up at the stage of differentiating the difference between physical experience (rupa) and what the mind makes of the experience (nama).

**NAMARUPA:** This insight involves direct realization that ones’ mind and sensory stimulation are separate processes operating in conjunction but not necessarily reliably adaptive to current circumstances. The eyes are stimulated by a certain visual pattern; it’s just light in a variety of shades and configurations—the mind conjures up the assumption “It’s a snake!”, while further processing reveals that it’s just a piece of rope. The cultivation of the Awakening Factors supports a “buffering” effect that reduces the urge toward impulsive interpretations and behavioral reactions.

**UNDERSTANDING THE LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT:** This insight reveals through direct awareness the power of intention. An intention organizes the various conditioning functions of the mind towards a conclusion and action. When the organizing function is distorted by craving and clinging, distress and confusion (dukkha) manifests. When the organizing function of intention is motivated by Wisdom—Right Understanding and Right Intention--liberation from dukkha is manifested. Right Understanding informs the self-organizing and decision-making functions, and Right Intention manifests kindness, compassion, generosity, and equanimity.

**CLARIFICATION OF THE TRUE PATH TO LIBERATION:** This insight follows on the insight regarding cause and effect. As the Energy Awakening Factor of the Seven Awakening Factors is freed up, extraordinary awareness emerges, which can be exhilarating and distort progress towards Awakening—these momentary, often pleasurable experiences are called the *corruptions of insight*. At this point, breath awareness and ongoing investigation are necessary to further the process towards liberation. There may be too much enthusiasm, as the functioning of the Awakening Factors is unbalanced, and the Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena and Tranquility Factors must support increasing development of the Equanimity Awakening Factor. The mind can become enchanted by vivid inner processes that produce luminous mindsets, beautiful sounds, strongly pleasant body sensations.

**INSIGHTS INTO THE DISSOLUTION OF SELF-STATE ORGANIZATIONS:** At this stage, a series of insights reveal the reality of impermanence and the absence of an enduring, controlling self. There can involve clear awareness of the rapidly arising and passing away of thoughts and images, the “flickering” described above. There are flashes of momentary sensations and thoughts that are fragmented and somewhat chaotic. The ability to make sense of what happens is significantly disintegrated, that is, *the integrative capacity of the self-organizing functions can’t get traction, as if slipping and sliding on ice*.

This realization is often accompanied by a sense of revulsion, even panic, with direct awareness that craving and clinging to the believe in a self as an ongoing process is unreliable and untrustworthy—there is no inner guide or organizer in charge of subjective experience! Confidence in the benefits of the Path can dissolve, as it can seem that life is meaningless. At this point, faith, and the support of a well-informed guide can be of crucial importance.

With continued investigation, there is a realization that the problems of life emerge as the result of craving and clinging, and there is a growing desire for release from the distress and confusion created by the belief that there is an enduring/autonomous self that must be defended or gratified.

When mindfulness of breathing and investigation of mental phenomena is still practiced diligently, the futility of craving and clinging to the belief that there is a permanent, controlling self becomes very evident, and there is a total release from craving and clinging. This act of relinquishing self-identity is called *stream entry* and confirms impermanence and the absence of a separate, autonomous self. The totality of interdependence is realized with insight into the immense complexity and mutuality of existence—In Buddhist terms, this is Nirvana. In the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, this might be rendered as God-consciousness, “Love your neighbor as yourself”, “I and my father are one”, and “Inshallah, as God wills it to be”. In the Taoist tradition, a person is “One with the Tao”.

After this extraordinary release from normal human reality, the Four Noble Truths are confirmed, and there is utter conviction that the Eightfold Path is valid, particularly as regards the value of Right Understanding, Right Intention, and the manifestation of virtue: Right Speech, Action and Livelihood.

**REVISITING THE EIGHTFOLD PATH**

The eightfold path has, of course, eight elements, divided into three categories: wisdom, virtue, and mental training. When the practices presented in the eightfold path are sufficiently mature, the category of wisdom is “revisited”, that is, what was originally understood conceptually is actually realized. What is conceptually called Right Understanding is now termed “Right Knowledge”. What is conceptually called Right Intention is now called “Right Release”. Here’s what Gil Fronsdal has to say about these realizations:

“…As a continuation of the Eightfold Path, Right Knowledge is knowing firsthand the benefits experienced through living the path and the suffering experienced when we don’t live the path. The benefits include greater peace, compassion, well-being, integrity, and spiritual freedom. The suffering includes agitation, fear, conceit, greed, and hostility. The more strongly we experience the benefits, the more clearly we see the differences between being attached and being free, having ill will and having goodwill, having ethical integrity and not having integrity. As we begin to make different choices, the contracted and agitated states of clinging begin to lose their appeal and power over us and we learn that they are neither hardwired nor necessary. As we see and experience healthy alternatives, these painful states begin to diminish in strength and frequency.

“…Right Knowledge also includes recognizing that letting go of clinging is reliable and trustworthy. It is not something we need to fear, even if what we are releasing is our most precious and tenacious attachments to self. Freedom from clinging doesn’t diminish us. Rather, it leads to some of the healthiest and most beneficial states of mind humans can experience.

Through the mindfulness and concentration factors of the Eightfold Path, Right Knowledge shows us how all our perceptions and conceptions are constantly in flux. With their fleeting appearance and disappearance, they are not stable and thus cannot provide the fullest experience of peace. They cannot be the basis for a liberated mind. Instead, the basis for liberation is release.

“…Right Knowledge sets the stage for Right Release by helping the mind relax and appreciate the process of letting go. Knowing the tangible suffering of clinging brings a disinclination to cling. Knowing the peace and well-being of non-clinging teaches that letting go of clinging is letting go into peace.

Right Release differs from ordinary letting go by being more impactful and lasting. It is a ceasing of clinging so clear that Right Knowledge then becomes a knowing that is always available to us. Just as one is no longer fooled by a magic trick after being shown how it is performed, so we begin to see through the tricks of the mind as we release ourselves from clinging.

For most people Right Release includes a gradual process of becoming free in more and more areas of their life. The Buddha described these areas in terms of beliefs, biological drives, and subtle mental tendencies.

Because freedom does not come from beliefs, Buddhism is particularly sensitive to the problems of holding on to beliefs, interpretations, and stories. An important part of living the Eightfold Path is loosening the grip on our views, including views about ourselves. A significant experience of release shows us that we don’t need to be defined by any self-concept or identity.

More tenacious than clinging to beliefs is the clinging that stems from the biological drives of sensual desire and hostility. Even when we know that such clinging causes suffering, it can be difficult to let go. Even the wisest people can easily succumb to it. This is where practicing the Eightfold Path is especially important. It provides a satisfying sense of well-being that is an effective alternative to desire or anger. Our strong biological drives can relax and fade away when we are experiencing something better…” Downloaded from: [*http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/from-the-eightfold-path-to-the-tenfold-path/*](http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/from-the-eightfold-path-to-the-tenfold-path/) *10/15/14*

The path towards Awakening is gradual, with subtle shifts in perspectives and values. There can be dramatic changes along the way, but the trend is towards a more integrated personality and a desire to be of more service to all living beings. I hope this information supports your efforts in this direction. I wish you well.