**NURTURING AWAKENING AT HOME**

Awakening involves a developmental process, through which the mind clearly comprehends the distress and confusion that arises due to craving and clinging--wanting pleasurable states of mind, wanting to be rid of unpleasant states of mind, and clinging to provisional, transient identifications in the mind that seem to define a permanent self and expectations about how the world should be. Instead of continuing down that path we redirect the course of life, one step at a time, realizing ways to reorganize the flow of life experience towards waking up from the adverse effects of greed, hatred and delusion. The underpinning of awakening depends on the development of ongoing introspective self-awareness and the ability to better regulate the instinctual impulsive reactivity that drives our beliefs and actions. This is typically best accomplished through repeated intensive meditation retreat practice, accompanied by a commitment to daily meditation when not on retreat.

We plan for vacations, often finding that we require a few days to recuperate from the stresses and strains of travel and the excitement of the changes encountered differing from our normal day-by-day routines and are often willing to go into debt to pay for the experience. A retreat is a different kind of vacation—“vacating” from distress and confusion in an environment that is intended to evoke serenity, not distraction and excitation. A retreat will also likely require some financial expense along with the stress of travel, but with a very different “return on investment”.

Being Diligent, Mindful, and Clearly Knowing describes the characteristics of the intentional process that Awakening nurtures, step by step, throughout the course of one’s life, and the learning acquired during a retreat generates an enhanced ability to cope with the challenges of this stressful era of human history. Daily meditation practice integrates the internal capabilities that retreat experience “imprints” on our personalities. The benefits of a lifestyle that includes this training are gifts that we offer to whoever and whatever we encounter on life’s path.

A key principle in Buddhism is *anatta* (ah-nah-tah), *the absence of an enduring and autonomous self*. As practice matures this will become more experientially understood through careful investigation of anicca, the ever-changing nature of self-state organizational processes. *If there is no enduring self, we are not compelled to re-enact dysfunctional beliefs and behaviors. Since the self is constantly re-created on a moment-by-moment basis, contemplate this prospect: Rather than believing there is a self who is kind, what if the principle of kindness organizes a self?* *Rather than a self who is mindful, cultivating mindfulness and the other Awakening Factors creates a wholesome self.*  Easier said than done, of course--however, cultivating the ability to be persistently diligent, mindful, and clearly knowing the process of creating and sustaining wholesome self-state organizations is worth the time and effort when dukkha is drained of potency! What I’m attempting to do here is to point out various ways the investigative skills of introspection and the empowerment of impulse regulation developed during retreat experiences can be applied at home.

We live within a culture that *imposes* values regarding our choices and actions through exploitation of the normal desire to enjoy life. One of the more significant problems we face these days is the massive ignorance we all are subject to which denies the consequences of self-harming lifestyles. There is a Buddhist term, analoma (ah-nah-low-mah), that can be translated as “against the grain”, which involves nurturing the necessary attentional and self-regulatory skills to reevaluate and counter what we are conditioned to believe constitutes a good life. This reevaluation requires the ability to focus on identifying those beliefs and choices that emerge from craving and clinging, then “changing channels”, renouncing unwholesome values, instead nurturing beliefs and actions that are manifestations of kindness, compassion, generosity, patience and equipoise. This is not to reject the comforts and conveniences of contemporary life, but to make wiser choices about our lifestyles and social interactions. It is extremely important during our lifetimes to make significantly different lifestyle choices to counter the environmental degradation that greed, hatred and ignorance creates for us and upcoming generations of all life on the planet. We can’t separate ourselves from our culture, but we can do our part to make better choices for our ourselves and others within our sphere of influence.

The Buddha suggested that the optimal environmental conditions for cultivating a good foundation for developing the process of Awakening involve residence somewhere not too close or too far from a town, in order to not be interrupted by the activities of townspeople, and yet close enough to allow convenient access to the town for alms rounds. The site should provide shelter from adverse weather conditions, not too much heat or too much cold. There should be a minimal amount of exposure to insects and other animals. There should be an adequate supply of water, and enough clothing and other necessities to be safe and protected from illness. Ironically, we live in dwellings that are air conditioned, with convenient access to food, water and ample clothing, along with reduced sound and security from intrusion behind closed doors, and yet we can’t seem to find the time to meditate. What does this suggest about the value system we are immersed in? There are ample opportunities for busyness and entertainment distractions in contemporary life—what about ample opportunities for cultivating diligent mindfulness and investigation of our selfing process, along with a sensible balance between activity and inner stillness? Our task in this precious life is to find that sweet flow of balance that is Right Livelihood, which I prefer to term Right Lifestyle.

Progress along the path of Awakening is gradual, slowly reevaluating our lifestyle choices, how, where and when we “invest” our studies and discipline, suggested by contemporary trends in what I call Secular Buddhism—not necessarily religious but inclined toward fostering a different approach to realizing our potential for true psychological integration and spiritual development. Daily sitting practice is essential, and the best way to make this real is to determine whether you have more opportunities to create and sustain daily meditation practice—is it first thing in the morning or at the end of the day, just before going to bed? I do both—getting up the same time every morning, drinking a cup of tea stationed on my bedside table, then sitting. I designate a time every night, typically around 9, and go sit on the cushion before getting into bed. I use the Insight Timer app to monitor my daily practice, without including any guided meditation or other offerings suggested by the site—just setting the time, sitting, and letting the bell determine when the sitting is over.

Here are some suggestions supporting this reevaluating and reorganizing process:

**Mindfulness:**

* Using body awareness (breath/body scanning sensations).
* Vitakka & vicara (aiming & sustaining).
* Meditating daily at least 45 minutes to cultivate samadhi/passadhi.
* Four Clear Comprehensions (Sati Sampajanna):

1. Spiritually worthy goal
2. Spiritually suitable means to reach goal
3. Spiritual domain (monitoring body, feelings, mind, mental objects to assess progress or regress)
4. Spiritual integrity (impermanence, suffering, impersonal)

**Cultivate the Seven Awakening Factors:** *Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena, Persistent Right Effort, Joyfully Engaged Interest, Tranquility, Concentration* and *Equipoise/balance.*

**Investigating** *how* self-states arise, *as well as the content* of the self-state.

**Right Effort** (Support arising of wholesome, non-arising of unwholesome).

**Compassionate Awareness:** “I’m witnessing suffering”.

**Equipoise & Patience**.

**Renunciation & Generosity**.

**Studying & talking** about the Dharma.

**Active involvement** in a spiritual community.

**Environmental Spirituality**.

**Right Speech:**

* Monitoring the selfing story
* Careful listening to others
* Considered, respectful, compassionate comments
* Situational appropriateness
* Regular gratitude inventory

**Right Action:**

* Purposeful, helpful action
* Harmonious to others’ needs
* Considerate use of resources & environment
* Avoiding impulsive, reactive behavior
* Routine acts of generosity
* Avoiding addictive substances & behaviors

**Right Lifestyle:**

* Avoiding over-stimulation
* Adequate rest & exercise
* Healthy food in moderation
* Not causing unnecessary environmental harm
* Not causing unnecessary cultural harm
* Time & effort dedicated to spiritual growth
* Proactive health maintenance
* Prudent financial management
* Voluntary simplicity

**Right Relationship:**

* Adequate social contact & support
* Interpersonal respect
* Active support for a wholesome community
* Balance between enmeshment and autonomy
* Making amends when appropriate
* Offering compassion & generosity
* Willingness to be influenced by others

**These are application of Buddhist “skillful means” which support life experience:**

**These are aspects of life experience that are relevant to spiritual development:**