**WHOLESOME MIND CONDITIONERS, PART ONE**

When I began to study and practice mindfulness meditation, I was at a low point in my life. As my practice developed over the years, my life circumstances improved. Of course, it’s impossible to clearly mark where and how the improvements occurred; I would like to think that mindfulness practice contributed significantly to the positive changes. The last few years, what I’ve been telling folks about my 40+ years of mindfulness practice that *“During the first several years of practice mindfulness allowed me to fend off the demons; since then, I’ve been feeding the angels!”*

Functionally, I believe that as I’ve developed more skills and applied them more frequently, integrating the formal meditation practice into daily life routines, the unwholesome mind conditioners have significantly diminished in potency and believability, while the wholesome conditioners have been more in the forefront in the fabrication of my thoughts and actions. I believe that this progression is what Buddhism has described as “Awakening”.

For a long time, I thought of Awakening is a singular event, a spiritual “dividing line”, marked by the first experience of the unconditioned, Nirvana. I don’t perceive Awakening this way lately. Of course, the first encounter with the extraordinary experience of Nirvana is important. I believe what the Buddha taught is a process that is its own reward, and that life experience benefits from training the mind to not be “enchanted” by the internal narratives that emerge into awareness. Understanding the creative function of the mind conditioners as they operate to manifest a selfing experience fosters the “disenchantment” process.

In previous essays, I described the universal mind conditioners, the particular/occasional mind conditioners and the unwholesome mind conditioners. The universal and particular/occasional conditioners are ethically neutral, that is, they play a role in shaping moments of self-awareness, but their influence is subsidiary to either the unwholesome/unethical or the wholesome/ethical conditioners.

The root causes of dukkha, the Buddhist term for suffering or dissatisfaction, emerge in awareness under the influence of the unwholesome conditioners. This sort of experience represents the demons mentioned above. The wholesome conditioners are the antidote for the unwholesome conditioners, and they represent the angels. Unwholesome conditioners dominate the typical human experience, directed by the untrained mind. Awakening involves the intentional cultivation of the wholesome conditioners.

I also stressed that the reason for being well informed about the individual conditioners is to provide focus points for “deconstructing” the misperception of an enduring, autonomous “in-control” self, thereby fostering disenchantment. By cultivating mindfulness, perhaps the most important wholesome conditioner, in coordination with other wholesome conditioners, the trained mind can actually experience the operation of the self-creating process the moment it is activated!. This is the essence of vipassana/insight practice. Here’s a quote from the Satipatthana Sutta (sah-tee-pah-tah-nah soo-tah) to illuminate this point, translated by Thanissaro:

"There is the case where a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the *five hindrances.* And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five hindrances? There is the case where, there being sensual desire present within, a monk discerns that 'There is sensual desire present within me.' Or, there being no sensual desire present within, he discerns that 'There is no sensual desire present within me.' He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen sensual desire. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of sensual desire once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no future arising of sensual desire that has been abandoned. (The same formula is repeated for the remaining hindrances: ill will, sloth & drowsiness, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty.)

This particular quote is from the fourth foundation of mindfulness, and the formula of noticing “there is sensual desire within me…He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen sensual desire. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of sensual desire once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no future arising of sensual desire that has been abandoned”, and so on, repeated for categories of unwholesome conditioners (the translator terms them “qualities”), wholesome conditioners, the Seven Awakening Factors and the Four Noble Truths.

Here is a listing of the first nine of the twenty-five wholesome mind conditioners with brief comments about their characteristics and functions. The first seven of these conditioners participate in the formation of a moment of wholesome self-organization:

**CONFIDENCE**: The Pali word here is *saddha* (sah-dah), typically translated as faith, particularly faith in the validity of the Buddhist way of life, and represents certainty regarding the benefits of virtue, wisdom and meditative training. It is not faith based on hearsay, but rather grounded in actual results. Buddhist commentary suggest three levels of *saddha*: faith based on logical argument, faith based on the example set by a wise person, and faith based on direct experience. The first two are “shakable”, because they are based on supposition, while the third confirms through the application of mindfulness, investigation and effort. It can only accumulate gradually, through skillful, persistent and consistent practice. The result of this accumulation is the ability to be unshakable regarding applying the acquired skills and the benefit of the outcome, despite circumstances and the opinions of others. Saddha provides the antidote for the hindrance of skeptical doubt. There is a well-known sutra describing the importance of faith, called the Kalama Sutta (translated by Thanissaro, downloaded from Access To Insight):

Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, "This contemplative is our teacher." When you know for yourselves that, "These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness" — then you should enter & remain in them.

**MINDFULNESS**: The Pali word here is *sati*, and is defined as "…recollecting, calling back to mind: the mindfulness that is remembering, bearing in mind, the opposite of superficiality and of obliviousness…". This is probably the most important of the conditioners of the mind. Originally, sati meant being non-forgetful, particularly as regards accurately remembering the Vedas, the holy scriptures of the Brahmins, and perfectly performing the rituals that appeased the gods. The Buddha used this term to describe the process of *vipassana* (vih-pah-sah-nah), usually translated as *insight into impermanence, non-self and the suffering that arises as a consequence of craving and clinging* and is functionally synonymous with sati. As the first of the Seven Awakening Factors, it monitors and supports regulation of all the other mental factors. Its primary function is to support Investigation of Mental Phenomena and Right Effort, i.e., noting the arising of wholesome consciousness and the non-arising of unwholesome consciousness and regulating attention towards wholesomeness. The Satipatthana Sutta, translated as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, is dedicated to the cultivation of mindfulness in all aspects of life, and is regarded as perhaps the most useful sutta in Buddhism. It represents the most applicable of all the wholesome cetasikas for overcoming the five hindrances.

**MORAL SHAME**: This is the antidote for the unwholesome mind conditioner of shamelessness. The Pali word for this mind conditioning function is hiri (hih-ree), and describes modesty, humility, conscientiousness, and scrupulousness. It prevents regret and remorse. It is present at any moment when Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood are applied. Having a clear conscience is regarded as a major contributor to the process of Awakening. It supports the development of the Tranquility Awakening Factor.

**FEAR OF CONSEQUENCES**: The Pali word for this mind conditioning function is *ottappa* (owe-tah-pah) and traditionally is defined as *shunning unwholesome actions so as to not be reproached by others of good character*. This is the antidote for the unwholesome mind conditioner of *anottappa* (ah-no-tah-pah), *recklessness*. We are all inherently social creatures, and unwholesome actions create distrust and disharmony. This factor focuses on the intentional cultivation of Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood so that social support is readily available for Awakening. In the 12 Step groups, there is an apt phrase: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results”.

**NON-ATTACHMENT**: This mind conditioner is termed in Pali as *alobha* (ah-low-bah), and is considered a fundamental root factor for Awakening, along with Non-Aversion and Right Understanding, two other wholesome cetasikas. It is the antidote for *upadana* (ooh-pah-dah-nah), clinging to what has arisen in consciousness as being a self. Traditionally, “It is being detached, like a drop of water on a lotus leaf…" It contributes fundamentally to the wholesome actions of generosity and realizing the reality of non-self. The cultivation of *samadhi/passadhi* (sah-mah-dee/pah-sah-dee), *concentration/tranquility*, which create a “buffer” of emotional nonreactivity that supports the practice of vipassana and the development of the Seven Awakening Factors.

**NON-AVERSION**: This is termed *adosa* (ah-doh-sah) in Pali and is another of the "beautiful root factors". The nervous system is fundamentally organized to give a high priority of attention and action to discomfort or perceived threat. The function of the wholesome mind conditioners is to cultivate the ability to wisely investigate the experience of discomfort and perceived threat and respond in ways that either avoid aggression or skillfully apply it to manage aversive experience. Its manifestation is lovingkindness and compassion. It has the characteristic of gentleness, inclusiveness, tolerance and patience. It is closely associated with another of the Wholesome Mind Conditioners, *karuna* (kah-roo-nah), translated as compassion. Non-aversion is not affection, which is sentimental attachment to an object of attention.

**EQUANIMITY**: There are two Pali words associated with equanimity: *upekkha* (oo-peh-kah) and *tatramajjhatata* (tah-trah-mah-jah-tah-tah). Upekkha is translated as non-preferential awareness, and tatramajjhatata is translated as balance in the functioning of consciousness and that which is reflected in consciousness (The next talk will review more of the wholesome cetasikas known as the “six beautiful pairs” for further reference regarding the effective balancing of mind conditioning functions). Equanimity is the result of balancing energy so there’s not too much, causing agitation and restlessness or too little causing sloth and torpor. It also involves balancing cognition, providing enough detached investigation to interrupt cognitive rigidity, without becoming too skeptical or scattered in function. It is the seventh of the Seven Awakening Factors.