## Buddhist Philosophy as a Way of Life: Two Assignments and Three Examples

The first assignment is suitable for a short module on Buddhism as a way of life. It focusses on the most tangible aspects of Buddhist ethics, the precepts involving bodily action and speech, and requires the student to keep a set of short diary entries for a week or so. Although these two ethical precepts can be practiced without taking account of the Eightfold Path of which they form a part, few Buddhists would recommend separating these elements of *sila*, or morality, from the rest of the set, which involve elements of both philosophical doctrine (*prajna*) and meditation (*samadhi*). Given the importance of “right view” in orienting Buddhist activity, it seems requisite that some introduction to the basic elements of the dharma accompany this exercise. I familiarize my students with the Buddha’s biographies, and ask students to read what is supposed to be the Buddha’s first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattana* Sutta (known in English as “Setting the Wheel (of the Dharma) in Motion”), minimally, before assigning any practice. (See here: <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>.)

An example of a student submission (used by permission of its author) is appended. I have also included a rather more expansive, and perhaps more thoughtful, submission from a student responding to a seven-day assignment along the same lines, but taking the entire Path as its subject. I have included, too, a brief presentation of the main elements of early Buddhist teaching on the purpose and method of practice.[1](#_bookmark0) This may help serve as instructor notes for those who are new to the subject.

The second assignment involves samadhi, the meditational element in the Buddhist path, and takes the form of a meditation log. It is suitable for long-term course modules; I have assigned a month of daily meditation for all students on occasion, with good results.

Students are first instructed by me in the preliminaries of posture, how to focus on one’s breath, and what to expect (or not expect) when meditating, and so on. We begin every class thereafter with a guided meditation of some sort. A short list of free sites for these is provided, and the list is added to incrementally over the course of the exercise, as students discover more examples and learn techniques they find valuable enough to share with others. Emphasis is placed upon practice as habit, and a variety of methods are embraced to add variety and encourage individualization.

Again, an example of a student submission (used by permission of the author), is appended.

Reading these reports teach me a great deal about my students that I might otherwise never discover. The exercises also seem to interest the students in ways that more traditional instructional methods sometimes fail to do. As the subject--- themselves, and their relation to the world--- is a topic about which most students possess an inherent interest, and since assessing the results is largely left to the individual practitioner, I find this a congenial method

1 This material, with slight alterations, is taken from an interactive textbook I authored called “Reaching for the Moon: An Introduction to Asian Philosophy” (Dubuque, Iowa: Great River Publishing), 2019.

of instruction, one that avoids coercing the students while encouraging them to challenge themselves and, I hope, learn more about Buddhism along the way.

-Stephen Leach, UTRGV, June 13, 2019-

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**Assignment 1: *Walking the Buddhist Path* (A Five-Day Exercise focusing on only two of the elements of the Eightfold Path)**

## Instructions: This assignment requires keeping a small diary describing your efforts to abide by two of the moral elements of the Eightfold Path for the better part of one week. The activities fall into two parts, and the third part of the project involves a summary and self- assessment. Once you have read the instructions, set yourself a time to plan your project. Go to your special place for meditating, and reflect upon the requirements: how open are you to making some changes in your daily life? What can you honestly commit to, and how will you go about completing this task? Once you have determined your level of commitment, make a vow to yourself to complete the assignment faithfully and honestly to the best of your ability. Then get going!

***Your task is to do your utmost to practice the two precepts below for the period of the exercise—in this case, for five days. Be sure to list your failures, as well as your successes.***

## Precepts involving Right Action

Remember, the Buddha lists several prohibited activities when discussing what constitutes “right action.” One should *refrain from killing*, from *taking whatever is not freely offered*, and from *sexual misconduct*. The first and second of these precepts do not only refer to human beings; it includes all sentient life, including those animals which you may be accustomed to eat, or whose milk or eggs you may enjoy. Thus, some modification in your diet may be required. You may also wish to consider the place of forced or slave labor in your choice of purchases: are your clothes made in sweat shops? Is your chocolate harvested by child slaves? (Probably the answer to both of these is “yes.”) If you need help determining which products are acceptable and which you should avoid, these web sites may be useful:

## Free apps to help you make ethical shopping

**choices:** [**https://www.causeartist.com/social-good-apps-impact-the-world/**](https://www.causeartist.com/social-good-apps-impact-the-world/)

* **Search for companies that do not test on animals:** [**https://features.peta.org/cruelty- free-company-search/index.aspx**](https://features.peta.org/cruelty-free-company-search/index.aspx)
* **Take a survey to find out how many slaves are working for you:** [**http://slaveryfootprint.org/**](http://slaveryfootprint.org/)

Of course, you will need to be the judge of your own limitations, and interpret these precepts in the way they make the most sense to you. Some choices are not at all obvious. Would playing violent video games count as “killing,” for instance? What about mowing your lawn?

Using the appended calendar template (*not included*), you should detail your successes and failures at abiding by the precepts involved in Right Action: avoiding killing (including avoiding having things killed on your behalf), avoiding taking whatever is not freely offered, and avoiding sexual misconduct.

## Precepts involving Right Speech

The Buddhist precepts regarding speech are to *avoid lying*, to *avoid harsh or hurtful speech*, and to *avoid unnecessary chatter*. Although this is not explicit in its original formulation, it seems reasonable to extend this prohibition to deliberately engaging in activities where such precepts are violated, even if you are not guilty of an actual infraction. That is, you should avoid subjecting yourself to situations in which lying, harsh, hateful, or irrelevant speech is normal.

Much of the media in our media-saturated world falls under this description. Thus, a successful effort at keeping this precept might require turning off such media for the duration of the exercise.

Using the appended calendar template (*not included*), you should detail your successes and failures at abiding by the precepts involved in Right Speech: avoiding false speech, avoiding hurtful speech, avoiding harsh speech, and avoiding irrelevant speech.

## What did you learn?

When you have completed the exercise, you should summarize your experiences during this project in a few careful paragraphs, reflecting upon what came easily to you, what was difficult, and how well you accomplished what you set out to achieve. Did you fall short of your self- determined goals? If so, why, and what do you think you can do to improve? Or were your aspirations easily achieved? If so, perhaps you need to challenge yourself a bit more! What grade would you give, based on your compliance with these precepts? What grade would you give yourself, based solely on the effort you expended?

## Example 1: A Student Submission for a Five-day Version of the Exercise

## Walking the Buddhist Path

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Days | Right Action | Right Speech |
| Day 1 | I put into practice abstaining from sexual misconduct by involving in other activities that would take my mind off any impure thoughts. I felt clean and more able to focus on things like school work and the practice of music. | I lie a lot but, I do it playing around. I am sure that this is not a Buddhist exemption therefore I have tried to stray away from using lies to put make a joke about something and it hasn't been the end of the world. Although it has been a little hard to keep awkward silences I've been ok. |
| Day 2 | I was careful in not harming any living creatures today. I even took it a step further and abstained from walking on grass since there are animals that get stomped on because they are hard to see. | I don't struggle with slanderous speech as much since I try to always connect friendships instead of tearing people apart but there is a guy who has been in my nerves and I've vent about him these past days but today I refrained from doing so and it wasn't too bad. I didn't think about his injustices as much. |
| Day 3 | Mosquitos were biting me and I fought my usual reflex to slap them dead; instead I went inside. This followed the Buddhist concept of intentional killing (taking of life) | I messed up today. I don't usually use harsh speech because I try to respect everyone and it usually wins other's respect but there is this man in the BSM Building here in school who is always getting students out of a room and I told him off a little bit and I know it hurt him. This was totally against the Buddhist way since we should be wise in the times of trouble, not when things are good. |
| Day 4 | I feel a difference in my outlook of my actions. Having these principles in the forefront of my brain have helped me to be more careful towards living beings. I helped a friend today learn a song on the piano even though he could've just looked up the tutorial on the internet, I didn't let a chance to do some good pass by. | What a quiet day it has been! I had no idea pointless chatter made so much of my vocabulary when addressing others. Hardly anything I thought about was worth saying. My thoughts were literally the definition of pointless. |
| Day 5 | Last day went great. I feel like it is getting easier to abstain from doing wrong since those slots are being filled with good deeds. A great example is that I helped clean the church's altar and gave room for dancers from the church to practice in. | I get now why Buddhist are so quiet. I put into practice all of the above methods this day and found myself being asked if there was something wrong with me. But I felt peaceful. No longer did I feel the burden of having to fill silences with my foolish talks or my lies, or my offences, or my opinions about others. It was a good day today, and a great finish to my journey of walking the Buddhist Path! :) |

## Example 2: A Student Submission for a Seven-Day Version of the Exercise

**T*he Buddhist Way***

Before the week begins I wanted to include an introduction explaining how I would like to approach this week as a Buddhist. I am doing this because after reading *The Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Precepts, and Five Mindfulness Trainings* documents, I realized my current lifestyle is different. Knowing this I decided to take baby steps instead jumping right in. To accommodate the difference, I have assigned either an Eightfold Path aspect, a Mindful Training aspect, or both to a day. This will allow me to focus my energy, behavior, and thoughts to each practice. Focusing can be difficult, so I am interested in how this week pans out.

**Day 1: Sunday, November 26**

***“Right” Effort***

From *The Buddhism Primer* by Dhammasaavaka: “Right effort can be seen as a prerequisite for the other principles of the path. Without effort, which is in itself an act of will, nothing can be achieved, whereas misguided effort distracts the mind from its task, and confusion will be the consequence.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Right effort includes the following:

1. to prevent the arising of unarisen unwholesome states
2. to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen
3. to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen
4. to maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen.

Today I tried to focus my mental energy on school work. The last couple of exams for my classes will determine my final grades, so I am determined to really prepare myself for them. Sundays are the best days to do this because my only commitment on those days is to go to church.

I was able to wake up relatively early. I started my day around 6:45 and by 7:30 I was in a pew praying to God. Afterwards I came back to my dorm and gathered all my studying materials and stationed myself in the study room down the hall. An hour or two in and I realized how easily distracted I was by applications like Netflix, Snapchat, and Instagram. In order to limit the distractions, I deleted Instagram and promised myself I would binge watch Netflix at night as an award. After doing this and coming to terms with what I wanted to accomplish that day, I really began to work. I was finally able to construct a rough draft for my Lab Report. I probably finished 34% of it, but I have the rest of the week to build it up. After that I wrote all my pre-labs and compiled my lab pictures into one file to print. By the end of all this it was 5-ish. I left my dorm and ran around the Unity Track 3x. I loved it, but when will I ever do that again? No clue.

I had very little to no interactions with other people that day. I had not moments of envy or aggression. I tried to do away with distractions as much as possible, avoided picking up my phone.

I think I achieved focus that day.

**Day 2: Monday, November 27**

***“Right” View***

From *The Buddhism Primer* by Dhammasaavaka: “Right view is the beginning and the end of the path; it simply means to see and to understand things as they really are and to realize the Four Noble Truths.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

This does not require so much action. So, I am not going to recap or include how my day went today. It is going to be more like a reflective entry.

*The Four Noble Truths*

The first noble truth is that “life means suffering.“ I and the world I have fabricated are impermanent. Sooner, hopefully later, everyone I have loved, and everything I have worked hard for will be gone. I can see how this is depressing and discouraging, but I like the perspective it offers. This reality check kind of gives us the idea that we can really do whatever we want with the time that is given to us. Everything is impermanent, our achievements and our mistakes. Knowing this I really, truly want to live life to its fullest.

The second noble truth is the origin of this suffering is attachment. This one I am familiar with from my Catholic background. I think amongst the buddhist, attachment transcends material objects, it includes attachment to self, passion, and prestige. Attachment of any sort results in the delusion that our “self” is a controlled entity. In order to not suffer as much, there is a need for balance, between what we should care about and how much we invest in it.

The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering is attainable. Like Christians believe there is a heaven, Buddhists believe there is an end to this suffering. This is referred to as Nirvana. Nirvana is the freedom from all worries, troubles, complexes, fabrications, and ideas. But also like heaven, it is incomprehensible to those who have not attained it. So there a goal and a direction in which you should live your life or lives. This direction is known as the Eightfold Path, *aka* the path to the cessation of suffering. A “self- improvement” kind of deal.

Recently I have been consoling in my roommate about how I feel very stagnant. I know I am being educated, but as a person I do not think I am becoming a better person. That was a couple weeks ago. Ever since we began discussing Buddhism in class I have realized even more that I have been missing this direction.

**Day 3: Tuesday, November 28**

***“Right” Intention + Mindfulness Training #1***

From *The Buddhism Primer* by Dhammasaavaka: “While right view refers to the cognitive aspect of wisdom, right intention refers to the volitional aspect, i.e. the kind of mental energy that controls our actions.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Buddha distinguishes three types of right intentions:

1. the intention of renunciation, which means resistance to the pull of desire
2. the intention of good will, meaning resistance to feelings of anger and aversion
3. the intention of harmlessness, meaning not to think or act cruelly, violently, or aggressively, and to develop compassion.

From *Commitments for the Practicing Buddhis*t by Thich Nhat Hanh: “Aware of the suffering caused by ***the destruction of life***, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Today I focused on my relationship with myself and my surroundings. One thing that I realized I had to renunciate was the desire to use my phone. The device and the social media on it really eats up my time, so I had to mentally call myself out. Another thing I worked on to do was how I approach situations. I noticed that I am easily irked by certain individuals. So today when I came across them. I reflected a little, in my heart and mind, so not to be angered by their habits. And I made it a point to listen to them and their needs if ever they asked for help. It was hard, but a much- needed reminder that sometimes all anyone needs is to be heard. So along with resisting anger and aversion, I had to practice compassion amongst my fellow persons.

**\*\*\*From today onwards, past this assignment, I will actively choose not to eat meat.\*\*\***

**Day 4: Wednesday, November 29**

***“Right” Speech + Mindfulness Training #2***

“Right speech is the first principle of ethical conduct in the eightfold path. Ethical conduct is viewed as a guideline to moral discipline, which supports the other principles of the path. This aspect is not self-sufficient; however, it is essential, because mental purification can only be achieved through the cultivation of ethical conduct.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

From *Commitments for the Practicing Buddhis*t by Thich Nhat Hanh: “Aware of the suffering caused by ***exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression***, I am committed to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am committed to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will ***prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth***.[[6]](#footnote-6)

This was the hardest day thus far. I know myself, and I am a harsh speaker. Aside from the swearing, I tend to be blunt and relentless when calling people out for their faults. It is never, ever with the intention of humiliating the individual or plainly insulting them. I like to think I do it to help them realize that there are aspects of themselves they need to improve. I only ever say it when I feel like they are unaware of these shortcomings. I realized that I am not in the place to voice those opinions, because it really is just my opinion.

Today I tried to stay away from using swears and enhancing how I speak by being mindful. By being mindful, I tried to reflect on how every person, animal, plant, even situations offer goodness. And as a person who is trying to walk the path of the Buddha, I strived to offer my time, energy, and encouragement towards others.

It was hard. It is easier to be mean, blunt, and apathetic. Not only in action, but also in speech. And since I am already like this, I really had difficulty not speaking my thoughts. I had to be more mindful.

**Day 5: Thursday, November 30**

***“Right” Livelihood + Mindfulness Training #3***

From *The Buddhism Primer* by Dhammasaavaka: “Right livelihood means that one should earn one's living in a righteous way and that wealth should be gained legally and peacefully.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

From *Commitments for the Practicing Buddhis*t by Thich Nhat Hanh: “Aware of the suffering caused by ***sexual misconduct,*** I am committed to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am ***determined to respect my commitments and the*** ***commitments of others***. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.”

I am assuming that this Eightfold aspect asks me to be honorable. No to deceive or con others in any way. I do not work, so I guess I have to be an honorable student. This is easy and does not really require me to do something I do not already do, or adjust my mentality for.

Today, I made it a goal to go to all of my classes despite recovering my a cold. I did my best to be attentive and write notes. I enjoy most of the classes I am taking so this is not even an issue. I consider myself somewhat honorable, aside from the occasional skip days I give myself, I do not cheat on assignments or exams. My goal as a student is to do what needs to be done, what is called of me, and do them well. I do not like to turn in something I am not proud of, so I try my best.

Organic chemistry is something else, I do not know how to deal with that class….

*“I am committed to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society…. I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct…”* I constantly reflect on topics like this. And as a former youth leader, and practicing Catholic, I am committed to cultivating myself in ways that help me protect the safety and integrity of individuals, families, and society, especially the children. I will literally do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse. I also try my best as a child in my family to help my parents repair their struggling marriage.

**Day6: Friday, December 1**

***“Right” Mindfulness + Mindfulness Training #4***

From *The Buddhism Primer* by Dhammasaavaka: “Right mindfulness is the controlled and perfected faculty of cognition. It is the mental ability to see things as they are, with clear consciousness.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

From *Commitments for the Practicing Buddhis*t by Thich Nhat Hanh: “Aware of the suffering caused by ***unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others,*** I am committed to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

I really like to think that I have been granted or brought up to see things as they are. Though there are times that I act biased, I do my best to avoid distortions. Maybe it is my own distortion that allows the bad times to become good times, but that just proves that bad and good can be a matter of opinion to an extent.

Again, I worked on my speech and compassion. With this mindful training I practiced trying to bring joy to others by simply sharing their suffering for a second. I would like to use my words to encourage others to have more confidence in themselves and their abilities. I tried my best not to spread news, especially the ones I was not so certain about.

Weird enough, it was today that my friend visited me at the dorms to talk about a specific issue that has been bothering her for the longest time. This issue was between her and her closest friends, I did my best to offer advice that would guide her to the solution and hopefully resolve the conflict between the best friends.

**Day 7: Saturday, December 2**

***“Right” Action + Mindfulness Training #5***

From *The Buddhism Primer* by Dhammasaavaka: “The second ethical principle, right action, involves the body as natural means of expression, as it refers to deeds that involve bodily actions.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

From *Commitments for the Practicing Buddhis*t by Thich Nhat Hanh: “Aware of the suffering caused by ***unmindful consumption***, I am committed to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practising mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I am committed to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that ***to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practising a diet for myself and for society.*** I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

I forgot I had to include the weekend. So, this will be a short entry.

I was actually very in touch with my body today. Usually I have a problem with consuming a lot of food at once, but today I broke down my meals in parts and ate small snacks throughout the day. My body was very grateful for the change.

Along with that I went to the park with my friends and spent the day playing frisbee, jumping rope, and biking. It was a very active day.

We did a little of everything, not being completely consumed by one activity.

**Day 8: Sunday, December 3**

***“Right” Concentration***

From *The Buddhism Primer* by Dhammasaavaka: “The eighth principle of the path, right concentration, refers to the development of a mental force that occurs in natural consciousness, although at a relatively low level of intensity, namely concentration.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

I have been literally studying all day. That is it. My concentration has hit a max, and I find myself falling asleep every 4-5 hours just to keep the momentum going. Organic chemistry test is this Tuesday, and I am doing my best to prepare for it. I am terrified. This is what it is like to be motivated by fear. Help.

Now that the week is done, and I am in preparation for an exam that might determine if I am right for the med school route, I would like to sign off by saying that the Buddhist path is a path I would like to further walk. Not committing to anything as of now, but definitely open to the idea of it.

**(END SUBMISSION)**

**Some Buddhism Basics: Notes for Instructors**

*These notes may be helpful, especially to instructors who are introducing Buddhism to their courses for the first time, in setting out the basic elements of doctrine as it is relayed in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion.*

## The Four Noble Truths

The most helpful, if not the simplest, explanation of the Buddha’s dharma consists of the so- called “**Four Noble Truths,**” including the “**Eightfold Path.”** These “truths,” or *Ārya satyas* in Sanskrit, were called “noble” by the earliest English translators of Buddhist texts, and this has been the custom ever since; we will follow it here. However, it is unclear whether the “truths” themselves are what the modifier is meant to refer to, or whether the “noble” (*Ārya*) is actually the one who sees these “truths.” In other words, they may be “truth” as it appears to a noble person (i.e., the Buddha, and those who agree with his insights). The word translated as “truths” (*satyas*) can also be rendered as “realities” in English. Thus, another way of understanding the **Four Noble Truths** is “the four realities of a noble person (.i.e., a Buddha),” or perhaps even “four things Buddhas realize.” The point is that these are not truths in any simple objective sense, like the freezing point of water or the mass of a particular object when measured on the earth’s surface. Rather, these truths demand *appropriation* in some way; our role, if we are Buddhists, is not merely to acknowledge them intellectually (though perhaps we must begin there) but to *realize* them, to make them real for us, and thereby ennoble our own views about the nature of the world, and how best to live in it.

The status of these four realizations in the history of Buddhism is itself a subject for debate. Some scholars consider the primacy given to the four in accounts like the present one to be the result of a colonizing tendency on the part of Western scholars who deliberately or inadvertently attempted to rationalize Buddhism and found this accentuation useful for that purpose. For those scholars, “truths” such as impermanence (*anicca*) or **dependent origination** might be better starting points. We will not attempt to settle this debate here; luckily, it seems possible to collate both sets of realizations with the transformative insight that led to the Buddha’s awakening, and the fact that this account begins where it does should not imply any priority in terms of historical or doctrinal import of the “four truths” addressed here.

What are these truths, though? An early mnemonic rendering in Pali, a language similar to Sanskrit, and perhaps slightly closer to the actual spoken language of Siddhartha Gautama himself, goes like this: “*dukkha samudayo nirodha magga*.” We will take each of these in turn.

***Dukkha*** is usually translated into English by the word “suffering,” and though this traditional rendering is not a mistake, it may lead to a mistakenly narrow understanding of this reality.

*Dukkha* can also mean “difficult” or “unsatisfactory,” and though those terms lack the

emotional resonance of the word “suffering,” keeping these meanings in mind may help us in our own efforts toward realizing the scope of this first truth. It may also help to bear in mind that *dukkha* is the Sanskrit antonym for *sukkah*, meaning “pleasure” or “ease.” In that case, *dukkha* would then mean “unpleasant” or “uneasy.” The claim, then, that is made when the first truth is stated so baldly might be stated this way: existence (or at least existence, when seen from the viewpoint of a normal human being) is unsatisfying (or unpleasant or difficult) just as it is. But why should such a pessimistic-seeming statement be believed? Surely there are many pleasant, easy, satisfying moments to be had in most people’s lives; was

the Buddha uniquely soured on life for some reason, and thus mistook his own depressed view as an objective truth, as happens in cases of paranoia? The Buddha himself explained this in the *sutta*, “Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dharma.” The causes of *dukkha* are varied, but they can all be related to one another. These are as follows: birth, aging, illness, and death are, or produce, *dukkha* (note that three of these are the subjects of the “Four Sights” which first led Siddhartha to leave his home and adopt the spiritual life); contact with what is unpleasant, separation from what is pleasant, or, in short, not getting what one wants, is, or produces, *dukkha* (note that the third sums up the first two, and these two are instances of craving and aversion, respectively); and, the “Five Aggregates (*skandhas*) to which one clings” are, or produce, *dukkha***.**

This list contains both physical and mental kinds of dissatisfaction, and although there is no explicit claim to this effect, it seems reasonable to assert that these are examples which are indicative, if not exhaustive, of the ways in which life can be found to fall short of what we might like.

“Life is full of suffering,” then, says the Buddha. How realistic is this picture? Perhaps it depends on the individual. But it does seem likely that everyone, if they were to consider their lives carefully and honestly, would find examples of both sorts of suffering in our daily affairs. As citizens of a wealthy nation, we are better off materially than many, or most, of the world’s population, who frequently labor without profit or choice, sometimes starve, and regularly succumb to diseases that could be treated by modern medicine; we may have less reason to complain than they that life is hard (especially if we are cold-hearted enough to ignore the plight of others). We should feel empathy for these fellow members of our species, of course, and acknowledge that suffering exists, even if it does not seem to touch us personally in such an obvious way. (If we look further at Buddhist doctrine, however, the notion that we are somehow separate entities capable of extracting ourselves from the suffering of others is quite possibly an illusion.) Even if we close our eyes at imaginary, constructed borders in a selfish fashion, we ought to acknowledge that many of us in the United States also hunger and thirst.

Even were we all well fed, clothed, and sheltered (which is not the case), we know that despite its wonders, modern medicine hasn’t cured all our diseases, nor reversed the aging process, with its concomitant aches and pains, its frustrating loss of mobility, acuity, and the rest. Stress and anxiety prevent us from flourishing emotionally, and many of us react to these factors in

ways, such as alcohol or drug abuse, that promise short-term relief, but often exacerbate our distress in the long run. Even friends and family often become estranged, thus depriving us of the emotional support we want to rely on; and everyone we depend upon, however loyal they may be, is mortal, and may be taken from us permanently and without notice. Given these facts, the Buddha’s pronouncement hardly seems inaccurate.

***Samudayo*** means “source” or “origin” in Sanskrit, and understanding that *dukkha* has a traceable source is part of the process of liberation inherent in the dharma**.** The fact that suffering is causally conditioned is actually good news; if it was merely random, or fated or otherwise decreed by some supernatural agent, there would be no way of understanding the how and why of suffering. Instead, every misfortune would be a bolt from the blue, striking, as Hamlet complains, like slings and arrows of an outrageous fortune. However, if we know the source of our suffering, we are already on the way to finding a solution to it, if one exists (this is an anticipation of the third and fourth of these truths.)

According to the Buddha’s discourse, the source of all suffering is craving (*taṇhā*, or “thirst,” in Pali). The craving, like the suffering, can be of several kinds: craving for the pleasures of the senses, for the pleasures of the mind, such as attachment to viewpoints, beliefs, and opinions, craving to “be”—to live forever, or to establish and maintain a sense of identity, and craving to “not be”—to avoid the unpleasantness in life, even up to the point of self-destruction. Note: avoiding an unwholesome attachment to views ought to include the possibility that even the doctrines of Buddhism, if grasped too tightly and unreflectively, may be an error!

***Niroda***, or “cessation” in Pali, is the realization already glimpsed in apprehending the second truth of *Samudayo* or “source.” If suffering has a source, then eliminating the origin of suffering should eliminate the suffering. Since the source in this case is attachment to impermanent things, this means severing the attachment. As the Greek and Roman Stoics maintained, it is not so much what happens to us that causes us pain, but our attitudes to what happens. Similarly, it is not the arising of desires, however regrettable some of them are, that we should guard against, but the attitude that we must yield to them or, failing that, struggle painfully against them, that causes us to become attached in a harmful way. Although the desires may be hard to eliminate entirely, some desires can obviously be suppressed, and in many cases should be.

Others may disappear of their own accord when their objects are seen in the proper light. Perhaps this “disappearing” of desires, rather than any active suppression of them, is what underlies the curious story which can be found in the *Ogha-tarana sutta***,** as follows:

The Buddha was staying in the famous grove at Jetavana when a devadata, or angelic female spirit, appeared. Bowing to him, she asked, “How did you cross the flood? “(Presumably the flood of *samsara*, and thus of desire, is meant.) The Buddha responded, “I crossed the flood without pushing forward, and without staying still.” “But how,” the spirit asked, “did you cross the flood without pushing forward, and without staying still?” The Buddha replied, “When I pushed forward, I floundered; when I stood still, I sank. So, I crossed the flood without pushing forward and without staying still.” When she heard this, the spirit payed homage to the Buddha, and instantly disappeared!

***Magga.*** The fourth truth lays out the method by which the cessation of suffering is to be achieved, and is called the ***magga***, meaning “path” or “way.” This is the famous ***Eightfold Path***, which will be discussed shortly.

One point worth keeping in mind is that the path is not meant to be understood as a simple set of instructions elaborating what behavior is acceptable, although it can function to determine such questions. Rather, the path described by the Buddha is his description of the elements needed to overcome *dukkha*, as verified by his own experience. Rather than being a liberating process, it is only an idea until it is realized by us in our daily lives. In the ***Dao De Jing***, the famous Daoist text, the opening chapter tells us that the Way that can be walked is not the *true* Way; we might alter that line in this case to say that the path the Buddha recommends only *becomes* the Path through our walking it!

**The Eightfold Path** constitutes the practical pattern laid down by the Buddha; it is not a step- by-step method, but a set of practices which mutually reinforce one another and which, if followed faithfully and mindfully, should lead the practitioner to an eventual escape from suffering and thus to nirvana. The points will be addressed individually, however, for the sake of clarity.

We should also bear in mind that our use of the word “right” to translate the Sanskrit word *samma* is strictly conventional: this is merely the standard English translation when it comes to the Eightfold Path. When we speak of a “right” way to do something, however, the word often also carries a corona of dualism with it--- the notion of “wrongness”--- that we should seek to avoid, lest we mistake the Path for a simple code of “*Thou Shalts*” vs. “*Thou Shalt Nots*,” when in practice it is really a set of ideals to which we should aspire. *Samma* can just as easily mean “complete” or “perfect” and, in this context, it can even be translated as “skillful” or “wise”: in the *Cunda Kammaraputta Sutta*, for example, the precepts are gathered under the three headings of Skillful Bodily, Skillful Verbal, and Skillful Mental Actions.

## Right (or Wise) Views

Right views are, unsurprisingly, those views espoused as dharma by the Buddha and his followers. This includes the Four Noble Truths, the concepts of *anicca* (impermanence)

and *annata* (no-self), and the rest of the intellectual artifice of Buddhist philosophical thinking. In the first chapter of the ***Dhammapada*** it is stated that where the mind leads all else follows, like the wheel of a cart follows the ox that draws it. What we think, in other words, conditions what we will do, so having correct understanding of the world and our place in it is essential for any ethical or spiritual development.

## Right (or Wise) Intention

If right views constitute the intellectual aspect of Buddhist wisdom, right intention applies to our will. By committing to a program of behavior (such as this list of eight), we do more than assert to ethical propositions; we pledge to strive for the right things in the right way. Right intentions include renouncing desire, avoiding or suppressing anger, and developing compassion.

## Right Speech

Speech acts are acts, of course, so correct speech is an ethical issue. Buddhists strive to avoid telling lies, to avoid slander, to avoid harsh language, and (perhaps the most prevalent failing in our age) to avoid vapid, useless speech. In short form, these might be summed up by asking these three questions before speaking: is what I am about to say true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? Avoiding these prohibited ways of speaking in one’s own behavior is only part of the task, however. We should avoid being drawn into situations where we encounter false, hateful, or irrelevant speech as much as possible, given our other ethical commitments. In today’s social media–saturated environment, this often means abstaining from the medium itself.

## Right (or Wise) Action

This part of the path that most resembles a set of commands and prohibitions like those found in Western sources such as the “Ten Commandments,” although these prohibitions differ in that they are not divine in origin and are not static. The practitioner should constantly strive to act according to these rules, and also to deepen her understanding of what these may mean in the ongoing context of their life. The most important prohibition is to avoid taking the life of any sentient being, and to refrain from harming either deliberately or by inattention any creature capable of suffering. (This prohibition covers the same field as the Jain virtue of *ahimsa*, and may be historically derived therefrom.) Of course, animals hunted or raised for human consumption must be considered sentient, so vegetarianism seems mandatory, despite the actual practice of whole communities of Buddhists, such as those who live in the Tibetan regions, where nonanimal food sources have traditionally been hard to come by. Stealing, or taking what is not offered, is also forbidden, as is any kind of sexual impropriety, including, presumably, casual sexual encounters which are not part of a committed consensual loving relationship.

## Right (or Wise) Livelihood

This part of the path deals with how we should, and should not, make a living. Four activities are explicitly forbidden: dealing in weapons, dealing in living creatures, such as human trafficking or the sex trade, butchering animals (or raising them to be butchered), and selling drugs or alcohol. How to interpret these prohibitions in the modern world is a question that requires subtle reflection. Is an exotic dancer pursuing “right livelihood”? What about the bus boy at a restaurant that serves liquor? What about a soldier or immigration agent? Although these cases may count as judgement calls, a good standard is to avoid anything that actively

violates the five basic precepts of Buddhism—no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no use of intoxicants.

## Right (or Wise) Effort

Right effort requires the practitioner to exert herself to prevent unwholesome mental or physical states before they arise, to help weed them out once arisen, to encourage wholesome states to arise, and to help sustain those states when they have arisen.

## Right (or Wise) Mindfulness

To be properly mindful is to be aware of the subtle qualities of the body and mind—sensations, thoughts, feelings, and so on. The main method for attaining this is meditation, of course, along with a cultivated awareness of how these qualities arise and disappear in one’s own experience.

You may wish to read the *Satipatthana Sutta*, available at this

link, [https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/articles/SatipatthanaSutta.pdf,](https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/articles/SatipatthanaSutta.pdf) and practice the instructions found there to foster this sensitivity.

## Right (or Wise) Concentration

The mental focus that comes with mindful meditation should be harnessed and used to bring the practitioner into a wholesome, unified consciousness that Buddhists call “one-pointedness of mind.” Masters of meditation have noted four progressive states of meditative consciousness. In the first, one moves beyond feelings of worry or doubt, while still holding on to mental states and sensations of happiness and joy; in the second, one passes beyond harboring mental states, though joy and happiness are preserved; in the third, joy is transcended (as it is an active state, and so a sort of agitation, however pleasant); and in the fourth, the practitioner moves beyond happiness, and achieves and maintains an equanimity of mind in all things.

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## Assignment 2: A Meditation Journal

## Instructions: Keep a log of your meditation experiences, both inside and outside of class, throughout the semester, using the attached template to record and submit your experiences.

## Journal Template Instructions[[13]](#footnote-13)

A daily meditation journal is an essential tool to help you develop your meditation practice and to keep track of your progress. This template is simply a suggestion, something that seems to work well for others; you might add additional sections that seem relevant to your practice. You can keep your journal in a hand-written book or in a computer file—either way, the single most important thing about this practice is consistency! However, it may be easier to use the template, or your own modified version thereof, when possible.

TIME: Here you list the start and stop times for your meditation session. Remember, consistent practice for shorter times (e.g., 10 minutes daily) is more valuable than long sessions (an hour, say) practiced irregularly. However, you may wish to schedule occasional long sessions for added benefit.

SETTING: Here you write down the location of your session, noting any details, such as lighting or noise levels, which might impact your session.

MEDITATION FOCUS: Here you write about the intended topic of your meditation along with any specific details you focused on that session. In the case of guided meditations, list the source and provide enough information so that a reader could access the same instruction if s/he wishes.

THOUGHTS, INSIGHTS, REALIZATIONS: Here you write about what happened in your mind during your meditation, especially any realizations you had about the object of focus. If you were distracted by intrusive thoughts, it might help to write about those as well.

NOTES ABOUT YOUR PRACTICE: Here you describe the details of your meditation experience. Where you able to stay on the object? Did you experience drowsiness or distractions? Was your posture comfortable? Was the environment conducive to meditation?

## Useful Apps/Downloads

A good app on your phone or tablet can help you with your sessions. A short list of free ones is here: <https://www.mindful.org/free-mindfulness-apps-worthy-of-your-attention/>. (Of the five

listed, my personal preferences are *Stop, Breathe, and Think* (a particularly good place to begin!) and *Aura*; *Insight Timer* and *Calm* are also worthwhile, in my opinion.

The Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA also offers free guided meditations which can be downloaded at <http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>. Be sure to check out their weekly podcasts, too, at <http://marc.ucla.edu/meditation-at-the-hammer>.

Meditation Log

Description generated with very high confidence

**Example 3: A Student Submission of a Meditation Journal**

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| Meditation: | My Reflection: |
| Arriving in Mindful Presence | 01/31  Silence. After listening to this 1- minute guided meditation, I sat in silence. I needed this moment to be silent because I was preparing my mind to face the day.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. |
| 30 Seconds to Mindfulness by Phil Boissiere TEDxNaperville | 02/01  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. The undone shoelaces of my shoes  The streak of light peeking through the blinds The snore of my roommate.  3x3, three things that are in this moment. I focus on this, and my mind rests. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  This was a Ted Talk that inspired me to approach mindfulness in a new way. Phil Boissiere asked us to state 3 things present in the room. My shoelace, the light peeking through the blinds, and the sound of my sleeping roommate. All three were in the moment and by stating them three times, I felt more in the moment. I was not focused on the future, which is what I usually am doing, I was present. |
| Tame the Ego | 02/02  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  What feels humility? What feels greed? What feels entitlement? What feels anguish? What has an existential crisis?  She is Ego. And she needs to leave. At this moment, I do not need such feelings. Goodbye Ego, you are not welcomed here.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. |
| Be Present | 02/03  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. 5 minutes. That is all I needed.  I am always attacked by the fact I am “busy”. It makes me hurried.  It makes me anxious. But I just need 5 minutes  To remind myself to be in the present, the now, *To witness the ever changing scenery in front of me.* Don’t miss out on this, Pia!  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. |
| Sitting w/ Breath | 02/04  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  *My spine was straight. My feet planted flat on the ground. Rise and Fall … my chest Rises and Falls. My mind Rests.*  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  This streak of meditating, and clearing my mind for even 1 minute a day has brought about a lot  of inner peace. I find my mind wanders less, and is present more. I see that my eyes lay on  the simpler objects. My anxiety has reached a new low. Consistent meditation has brought  great things to me.  (THIS SPACE DELIBERATELY LEFT BLANK.) |

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| Mindful Awareness | 02/05  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  To meditate is to acknowledge every thought and every feeling It is not about being empty or mindless  *It is to be mindful*  *I just watch my thoughts and energy move without my intervention. Every thought and everything feeling*  *I try to understand its movement*  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. |
| Podcast: Loving Kindness | 2/06  I am easily irritable but this 20- minute podcast really set the mood for the day. Maybe it is because it is that time of the month, but my perception has been manipulated to the point anything can trigger me to feel upset and irritated.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  After20 minutes of listening to the podcast. I sat in the middle of my room just breathing. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. |
| 30 Seconds to Mindfulness by Phil Boissere TEDxNaperville (in practice) | 02/16  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. The light from the lamp hits the ceiling.  The floor under the body is solid.  The laptop’s fan is revolving rapid enough for me to hear  The three objects/sounds I focused in this moment. My eyes were closed but the awareness seeped through. It took me so long to rest my mind on the object. I gave up.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. |
| Drawing | 02/17  I heard from my art appreciation professor that  “Photography is an immediate reaction, drawing is a meditation”  -Henri Cartier-Bresson  So for this particular meditation I drew my family.  I have not gone home in3 weeks and I am really feeling a gaping hole, a longing to go back to those fools.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. I will see them soon, no need to fret. |
| Arriving in a Mindful Presence | 02/18  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  I stared at a wall for 10 minutes. I have never felt so at peace thinking of nothing. |

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| Podcast: Contemplate- Don’t Think | 03/16  I have actually been irresponsible and not logging in my meditations, even my minute ones. Sorry--- let’s get back into it.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  *“Why do Buddhists contemplate?”* It does not have to be Buddhists, it can be anyone. Why do we contemplate? Why philosophy?  In the beginning of this podcast offered by the Buddhist Society of Western Australia, Ajahn Brahmavamso explains books, doctrines, laws, and those of the like are only containers. They hold the context. *We have to unwrap the metaphors to understand the meaning.*  As I meditated on this podcast, I came to realize the containers are nothing but sign posts. Sign posts exist to point us towards to the direction of the truth, they are not the truth themselves. Nothing is as it is, and there is more beyond these words, there is a complete, ultimate truth somewhere.  *But why do people seek out the truth?*  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  Truth brings about peace. Truth solves more problems rather than brings more. |
| Happiness is all in your mind: Gen Kelsang Nyema at TEDxGreenville | 03/17  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  *“Happiness and unhappiness are states of mind, and therefore their real causes cannot be found outside the mind. So if we have a peaceful state of mind, we will be happy regardless of people and circumstances”*  This past weekend has left me drained. I am not happy, I am unsatisfied, I am confused, and I do not know what to do. I have not felt this way in years. I do not understand why.  *What is happiness?*  I was normal before this weekend, I was happy. But now, I just don’t know how I feel. So I meditated on the words offered by Gen Kelsang Nyema, in search of the truth that I know can be found within.    *This uneasy, restless feeling is not a product of what I did, not directly. It stems from how my actions left others feeling. I was embodying the animosity my close friends had towards me, so I was sad. Because I usually don’t care for people or circumstances, I can go about my days unbothered. But I gave my two friends, whom I cherish a lot, the power to make me feel this guilt. How can I be happy when I may have caused some inconvenience for my friends? So I am sad, and I need to do something about it in order to be happy again. The alternative would be to dismiss the friendship we all worked hard to achieve, but that is not going to happen. So I must do something, because when my friends are bothered, I should acknowledge it with patience.*  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  After realizing this, I no longer felt unhappy and confused. I felt determined and secure, mindful. |
| Envisioning Success, Mastering the Mind | 03/18  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  *I cannot control the air I breathe. I can only control what I want to do with it. I can breathe in. I can breathe out. To an extent I can control my surroundings, but I can always always control my reactions. I can bend at the wind of life, and the only thing that would stop me from bending thereby breaking, is me.*  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. I got this. |

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| Podcast: I do not have to achieve anything | 03/19  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  The Sun radiates heat. The wind rustles the leaves. A bug hums.  What is Meditation? And why do we Meditate? What do I achieve?  Meditation is letting the mind become peaceful. This is not something easy for human nature. At least it not anymore. We have been conditioned to have an end goal, to accomplish tasks with every ounce of our energy and time. We become drained, and at the end of the day do we remember everything we accomplished. We allow life to become a routine, and it can be draining. We then become mindless. This is why we meditate. We break this cycle, in order to remind ourselves of the attitude we should have in our mind.  Be friendly towards the mind, the body, and to life. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  The Sun radiates heat. The wind rustles the leaves. A bug hums. |
| Sleep | 03/20  Sleep is the most needed form of meditation right now. Both my body and my mind are at rest.  I am tired and mentally drained. I want out of this moment.  *Is meditation the escaped of reality? Is meditation an escape from anything? Or is it experiencing reality?*  I just woke up from a 11- hour meditation session. I feel rejuvenated and ready to face reality. |
| Arriving in Mindful Presence | 03/21  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  Today I discovered that the point of life is not something realized after life, but in the midst of it.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  Every step made, every moment partaken in, every breath taken, is done with a purpose in itself  Like a mug, created and molded by many factors, for the sake of being a mug. That same mug is a factor in how and what someone then drinks.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Life is simply this. |
| Podcast: Dealing with Stress, Thinking Outside the Box | 03/23  *Recognize what is in your control. Recognize what is out of your control.*  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  Mysphereofinfluenceissmallerthanmysphereofconcern.KnowingthisIcanempowermyselfbymaking the most out of my sphere of influence.  There is no need to stress about the concerns I have no control over. That is all. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. |
| Arriving in Mindful Presence | 03/24  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Live in the Breath. |

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|  | Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. |
| Mindful Stretching | 04/02  Whenever I start any meditation I go about feeling my body. Whether I am sitting down or laying on my back I can feel sensations everywhere. For instance if I think about my finger in that moment I can feel solely my fingertips, or their presence is amplified.  Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  How wonderful it is to have a body. That all these parts are distinct but somehow, magnificently connected. At the cellular level, one cell’s death brings upon another cell’s existence. |
| Podcast: Unplugged but Switched On | 04/16  I am about to embark on a journey I know has the potential of changing my whole lifestyle  Dr. Paul Saka assigned us to go a day or more without technology, and I modified the assignment with his approval.  In preparation I decided to start meditating again. For today I meditated on this podcast for a whole30 minutes.  Thus far, this is my longest meditation. And my inability to quiet my mind completely shows that I have been really inconsistent in meditating |
| Painting On Separate Occasions | 04/17 & 4/18 |
| Painting has to be one of my favorite forms of meditation. I do not rely on any technology which is really great especially considering the assignment Dr. Paul Saka gave my class this weekend. |
| For a good 2-3 hours I just sat down and painted, something I rarely give myself the time to do. I had no ulterior motives in painting. I did so just for the sake of painting. |
| 4/18  I realized now that my past “meditations” were more moments of silent contemplation. I rode thoughts trains to the ground, rather than let my mind rest and realize only that the mind is a mind and that it did not need to achieve anything. |
| I was reminded today what pure meditation is like. |
| Sitting on a | 04/20 |
| cement platform | Today I actively went out of my way to find a place to meditate outside my room. |
| in the middle of | It was ~7:00 and the sun was not beating down on me too hard. |
| the performance | In the beginning I felt the heat radiate the surface of my skin, but as the meditation continued I no longer |



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| art “courtyard” (silence: 30 minutes) | felt it.  My focus was then on my breath. Inhale. Exhale. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. *Inhale. Exhale.*  Later than I thought, I opened my eyes to a setting sun.  In celebration of 4/20, national weed/marijuana day. I wondered how Buddhist approach smoking weed, drugs in general, and alcohol.  Forums will tell me they are “a waste of time” “not mindful” and “detrimental to an individual’s physical and mental wellbeing,” but I did not find any textual evidence, it was more like a consistent opinion Just a fine discovery I made today outside of my meditation. |
| Sitting on a bench at the education building (silence: 30 minutes) | 04/21  I am getting really into this. Today I found myself in the middle of the courtyard of the Education building. I really liked how the building has one side made of solely windows.  Similar to yesterday’s experience, the heat from the sun felt pretty great on my skin. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.  *Inhale. Exhale.*  Every setting sun is different. |
| Weekend Dedicated to Teachers other | 4/25, 4/27, 4/28  ThisspecificweekendIwentonaretreatwithmyyouthgroup.Itookthisopportunitytointroduce meditation as not only a form of prayer but self-love, and self- reflection.  *Sometimes you what you need is to let your mind be a mind. Free of your manipulation, in other words biases and motives. Meditation is the greatest form of self- love, if there is a self. Maybe it is better to say that sometimes it is best not to do anything for a second.*    (my camp co-leaders) My final entry is this:  Meditation alone, just on the individual level, does wonders. Meditation as a community, can tip the world off its axis. Meditation can change the world is what I am saying. |

# 04/18: I realized late into this practice that a lot of my meditations were becoming more and more directed by questions, and a lot of what I did was not purely meditation at all. Although these questions did not stress me out, and though the process of finding answers was never aggressive in nature, my mind was not at rest. Instead of training the mind to rest by focusing it on my breathe or mantra or some inner space within the body, I would rather think, or contemplate over a train of thought.

*This made me ask the question: contemplation is the search for the truth: why would I need meditation?*

*From today, 04/18, on I will consider Meditation more purely meditation. I will remind myself that Meditation is the most profound level of training of the mind. Meditation is not about having an empty mind, instead meditation should be thought of as a tool allowing the mind to pay attention to the consciousness. Training the mind to be tranquil.*

[*https://yogainternational.com/article/view/contemplation-vs.-meditation-defining-the-difference*](https://yogainternational.com/article/view/contemplation-vs.-meditation-defining-the-difference)

*(There needs to be a Buddhism Club!)*

(END SUBMISSION)

1. Dhammasaavaka, *The Buddhism Primer: An Introduction to Buddhism* (Lulu.com), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thich Nhat Hahn - The Five Mindfulness Trainings, accessed June 11, 2019, http://www.elise.com/q/webwisdom/mindfulness.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dhammasaavaka, *The Buddhism Primer: An Introduction to Buddhism* (Lulu.com), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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10. Dhammasaavaka, *The Buddhism Primer: An Introduction to Buddhism* (Lulu.com), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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12. Dhammasaavaka, *The Buddhism Primer: An Introduction to Buddhism* (Lulu.com), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This template description, and accompanying instructions for using it, is taken in part from Jesse Bowen: **Zen Mind-Body Mindfulness Meditation: Discover The Power To Live Your** Vision (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)