

ABANDON HOPE

All ye who enter here

*All conditioned things are
impermanent*

*All conditioned things are
unsatisfactory*

*All things whatsoever are
devoid of unchanging selfhood*

An illustration of the Spiral Path – to read aloud

(adapted from *The Wheel of Life*, Kulananda, ch. 12)

John has just been dumped by his girlfriend Jenny, and is thoroughly unhappy. Since then, he has been finding life to be more and more unsatisfying. It is not just that he has no girlfriend – he knows he could get another one in time. There is more to it than that. It is just that ever since Jenny left him, he has been wondering what his life is all about.

Yes, he has a few pleasures – he likes fine wines, tennis, music; and yes, he is good at his job, and paid much more than his father ever was; but where is it all going? What is life all about? Surely there must be more to it than that?

Idly leafing through a What's On magazine, John notices a small ad in the listing section: "Free Buddhist Meditation classes". Hmmm... there might be something in that. John remembers once, when he was still at school, he sat down in the break and somehow fell into a deep reverie. He seemed to become much calmer, quieter and happier.

So John goes to his first meditation class. He likes the people he meets, enjoys the meditation, finds it really making a difference to his life, and he gets more deeply involved in it all. As he learns more about Buddhism, he takes up the five precepts of Buddhist ethics.

As time passes, John increasingly feels the benefits of his practice of ethics and meditation. He feels so much clearer and he has a light easy conscience. He just seems to grow happier and happier. In fact, sometimes he finds that joy just wells up inside him almost for no reason. It is good just to be alive.

Now John is convinced that Buddhism & meditation are for him. He commits himself to going off into the countryside on a long meditation retreat. Here, in the context of a silent retreat, he finds his meditation going deeper and deeper. At times, thrills of rapture rise up his spine, undoing all the old knots of tension. Then, still meditating, still concentrated, the rapture seems to expand and radiate outwards. It spills over into a vast still lake of meditative silence, where it is absorbed, pacified, and transcended.

John passes for a time into a state of profound serenity. Out of this serenity, feelings of intense bliss well up from the depth of his being. Now he is fully present, fully integrated, fully concentrated. His whole psychophysical organism is completely one-pointed.

With a mind that is now concentrated, purified, bright, pliant, malleable and imperturbably, John begins to allow thought and feelings to arise within him. "All conditioned things are impermanent", he reflects, "they are insubstantial and ultimately unsatisfactory". Deeper and deeper he penetrates into the reality of what he is saying. It is so true, so true. How could he ever have thought otherwise? John begins to laugh, great rolls of laughter. He has begun to see things as they really are.

From now on John dedicates himself to simplifying his life and to making time for reflection. He works constantly at disentangling the complex connections that exist between the ego identity that he has now seen through and the world in which he lives and moves. He grows less and less concerned with mundane matters. It begins to dawn on him with conviction that he is no longer driven by the demands on the wheel, that the poisons no longer have hold on him. At that point he realised that he really is free from the chains of bondage.

ILLUSTRATION OF THE SPIRAL PATH

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So John goes to his first meditation class. He enjoys the meditation, finds it really making a difference to his life, and he gets more deeply involved in it all. As he learns more about Buddhism, he takes up the five precepts of Buddhist ethics.

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Write the link

(adapted from *The Wheel of Life*, Kulananda, ch. 12)

The twelve progressive links (in random order)	
Link	Description
Dispassion	A relaxation of the urgency of involvement with mundane worldly matters.
Rapture / Ecstasy	Bodily energy release especially in meditation
Bliss	A deep sense of happiness and ease, especially in meditation
Unsatisfactoriness (dukkha)	Need we say more?
Knowledge & vision of things as they really are	A transcendental insight into the true nature of reality
Calm	An oceanic feeling of stillness & fullness.
Joy / delight	A lightness and joy coming from an easy conscience
Knowledge of the destruction of the poisons	Realisation that one is no more being governed by greed, hatred & delusion
Faith / confidence	An intuition that there's more to life than "the wheel"; a confidence in spiritual possibilities
Disentanglement / withdrawal	A withdrawal from the emotional entanglements with mundane life.
Concentration / absorption	Fully-integrated, one-pointed meditation
Liberation / freedom	Complete freedom from being governed by the poisons of greed, hatred & delusion

Some quotations around "In dependence upon dissatisfaction arises faith"

The [progressive] version of dependent arising delineates a type of development that only becomes possible when this hope [for fulfillment in cyclic conditionality] has been dispensed with. It hinges on the prior recognition that any attempt to eliminate suffering through the gratification of craving is doomed to failure, and that the only way to stop it is to cut through the vicious nexus at its base.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, Transcendental Dependent Arising, Wheel 277

*I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
for hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.*

TS Elliot, East Coker, Four quartets

The [spiritual practitioner] lives in the present because he is free from desires, and therefore free also from hope and fear; whereas the worldling lives in the present because his desires are so importunate that he neglects in satisfying them even considerations of worldly prudence, plunging headlong into the torrent of enjoyment.

Living in the Present in Crossing the Stream, Sangharakshita

Phenomenal life by definition is a promise that is never kept. If we fulfil a desire, we're happy for a brief moment, but the nature of fulfilling one desire is immediately to find another one, and another one, and another one... When we rest at peace with our pain, this repose is the "Gateless Gate". And it's the last place we want to be; it's not pleasant, and our whole strategic drive is for pleasantness... It takes years of patient practice before we become comfortable resting there, until it's just a hard and friendly rock that's moulded to us, and where we can finally find rest and be at peace.

The Icy Couch in Nothing Special, Charlotte Joko Beck

[Faith is] the ethically wholesome counterpart of craving or thirst. In dependence upon feeling the unsatisfactoriness of the world, there arises not craving but faith – faith in something above and beyond the world, a sensitivity to a higher dimension of truth and reality. Perhaps the best definition of faith is that it is the response of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe.

The Spiral Path in What is the Dharma, Sangharakshita

"Samvega" was what the young Prince Siddhartha felt on his first exposure to aging, illness, and death. It's a hard word to translate because it covers such a complex range — at least three clusters of feelings at once: the oppressive sense of shock, dismay, and alienation that come with realizing the futility and meaninglessness of life as it's normally lived; a chastening sense of our own complacency and foolishness in having let ourselves live so blindly; and an anxious sense of urgency in trying to find a way out of the meaningless cycle....The first step in the solution is symbolized ... by the prince's reaction to the fourth person he saw on his travels outside of the palace: the wandering forest contemplative. The emotion he felt at this point is termed "pasada", another complex set of feelings usually translated as "clarity and serene confidence." It's what keeps samvega from turning into despair. In the prince's case, he gained a clear sense of his predicament and of the way out of it, leading to something beyond aging, illness, and death, at the same time feeling confident that the way would work.

Affirming the Truths of the Heart, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, on Access to Insight.