

INSURGENT HEART

a
**VIPASSANA
MANUAL**

**FOR
THE**

**GUERRILLA
YOGI**

JESSE MACEO VEGA-FREY

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Guerrilla Yogi**

JESSE MACEO VEGA-FREY

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Do Less For Peace. 2020.

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**NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO
SAMMĀ~SAMBUDDHASSA**

*Homage to the blessed one, the worthy one, the fully
self-awakened one*

*

For my parents
who taught me how to love —
and how to fight.

CONTENTS

Foreward	8
Preface	13
Introduction	22
1. Sabotage: Dāna - Silā	47
2. Indigenous Knowledge: Bhavana	74
3. Contact: Aim - Attack / Harass	94
4. Mobility: Bases - Fluidity / Agility	118
5. Distrust : Suspicion - Investigation	140
6. Medicine: Mettā - The Divine Abodes	161
7. Retreat: Encirclement - Escape	186
8. Diversion: Distraction - Misdirection	207
9. Strike: Stillness - Cessation	229
10. The Guerrilla Unit: Camrades - Community	252
11. Independence: Autonomy - Self-Retreat	276

12. The Revolutionary Spirit: Discipline - Determination - Faith.....297

13. Intelligence: Reporting - Education - International Support.....319

14. Protracted War: Land Reform - Crisis - Building a Regular Army340

Epilogue: Mindfulness - A Balm or Bomb for Babylon....372

Acknowledgements.....395

FOREWARD

ON A COLD MORNING in early March of 1970, just as the crocuses were starting to come up, I found myself dumping two molotov cocktails into a dumpster outside my college—praying that this was the place they would do the least harm. Within a few hours, I packed my bags and dropped out of school.

It was my freshman year and a time of great angst and protest—at my school and across the country. During the fall and winter I had been working with a group of other students at a nearby day-care center and a soup kitchen run by the Black Panthers. Most of these friends were African American and had been involved in a long frustrating process of petitioning the school administration for basic academic and social accommodation and were being stonewalled. That spring, tensions across campus were peaking and emotions were quickly escalating.

Late one night—suddenly and with little explanation—some of us were brought together and put to work making molotov cocktails. Quite a dramatic turn of events! Students were planning to occupy one of the dorms on campus the next morning and these weapons were to play some unclear part. My friends were justifiably fed up with the administration and felt the need to increase pressure in order for their requests to be taken seriously. They were asking for so little and I was furious about how irresponsibly the administration was acting. I shared the sense of urgency for the need for action. But at the

same time, as I was walking toward the dorm with the molotov cocktails in the pockets of my coat, I knew deeply in my bones that I did not want to hurt anyone.

It was still early as I walked across campus. I remember the smell of the gasoline, the weight of the bottles in my coat pockets, and the weight on my heart. I cared so much about the cause we were fighting for and felt terrified and ashamed at the thought of betraying my friends at a crucial time—especially as a white person. But I could not ignore the explosion of epiphany that had detonated in my heart. I did not want to harm. Mine was a path of peace. I knew it.

There were very few people around at that hour but, by chance, I bumped into my ecology professor—someone who had made a profound impression on my life already. He was a committed Quaker and always seemed to exude a deep sense of reassurance and peace. The previous day he was so upset with the administration and overwhelmed by the turmoil that he left school and put a sign on his door: “Spending the day in the woods. Back tomorrow.”

When I saw him, I realized he was just coming back to work after taking that time to immerse himself in the forest. He had returned to resume his work, palpably reconnected to his inner compass. I started crying. He told me, “You need to find out who you want to be this lifetime to work your whole life to bring about positive change 100 years from now.” I thanked him and took a sharp right to put those bottles in the trash.

I wanted the harm to stop. But I didn’t want to create harm in the process. When we deeply care about and connect with the pain and suffering in this world, we want to do what

we can to bring relief to and end that suffering. But how do we fight pain without creating more of it? How do we deeply care and commit to end suffering through a path of peace? My professor's infusion of clarity helped me get immediately clearer in myself about my own motivation. It also led me to a more dedicated search to find my own lifetime path.

In 1975 I did my first two-week vipassana retreat and found the way of life I had been searching for. In 1984 I came to study under the guidance of Sayadaw U Pandita of Burma. He was a warrior in the most profound sense. Sayadaw helped me understand that this path of peace is not a rejection of war but of bringing the war under the firm authority of morality, kindness, and clarity.

The Buddha used a lot of war imagery to teach us how to find peace. These metaphors are essential but they also require some spiritual translation to be used effectively. The contemporary mindfulness movement usually tries hard to dismiss or sugar-coat the war aspect of the Buddha's teaching to make it easier to swallow. The movement has done well to try to heal the predominant patriarchal culture that has been so intensely macho: the toxic unhealthy masculine dominating the toxic dominated unhealthy feminine – both of which operate insidiously within and without us all. Indeed, most of us need to learn how to cultivate a relationship of kindness with things as they are. Our hearts and our world need so much healing. But we also need incisive and discerning clarity—which does not come from love alone. The great Indian saint Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj said, “Believe me, there cannot be too much destruction” and we need to take that to heart as we also try to build a loving, wholesome world. Complete libera-

tion necessitates a journey of learning to access a healthy masculine and feminine energy by facing their toxic sides.

In *Insurgent Heart*, Jesse does not shy away from facing the Buddha's war imagery. He not only faces it, he stares it down, and translates it with the deepest kindness and wisdom. He shows us how to find peace through understanding the way the Buddha taught to win the war. Jesse explains how to use these modern astute guerrilla war tactics as helpful tools to fight the most Noble war: liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion.

Jesse clarifies the path to liberation in our times. He helps us understand how to cultivate and harness healthy masculine energy as well as healthy feminine energy. Jesse instructs how to resolve this kind of paradox: how to cultivate both the soft, gentle, and kind with the firm, courageous, and strong. This is no small matter! How to balance heroic energy with gentleness becomes a spontaneous and auspicious way of life—and is the path to peace of the guerrilla yogi.

When you read this book, you will receive a delightful and practical abundance of deep liberation teachings, passed down to me from Sayadaw U Pandita: the Buddha's instruction on how to liberate yourself. All that we need to know. You will also learn how successful guerrilla warfare tactics can help our practice so we can apply that inwardly in order to truly win this war. Awesome!!!!

It is very hard to make this a way of life, to be in it for the long haul. To resolve paradox—to be connected but free within the vastness of the joy and sorrow in this world requires a nearly impossible commitment. But all noble work feels

impossible, requires tremendous courage, and is the most worthy of our effort.

Jesse is a keen, quiet disciple of the Buddha. I have a long-standing respect for his meditation practice. He is intensely dedicated to uprooting greed hatred and delusion within himself and all beings. I appreciate that he has traveled wide and deep in outer and inner liberation circles and that he takes the time to reconnect with his Dhamma roots in Burma nearly every year. He sits at least one month-long retreat each year, and longer whenever he can. Jesse strives toward this freedom with as much dedication and care as I have seen.

I encourage you to read this book to the end. His understanding of how to teach... impeccable.

Michele McDonald

May 1, 2020

PREFACE

AS A KID, my parents brought me to a lot of demonstrations: housing rights protests, anti-war protests, union rallies, picket lines, strikes, boycotts, ballot initiative demonstrations, and the like. My children's books were steeped in critiques of capitalism, racism, and sexism and celebrated cultural and political heroes and heroines from around the world. Even my nursery school organized us on a peace march. Plenty of nights during my childhood were spent at meetings where I was lucky if there were any playmates my age. My parents were part of a larger community of friends who grew up together in political organizing and community building. Joy and struggle were woven into our lives at every turn. My mother helped build community very literally — as a nurse midwife dedicated to public health and access to affordable care for women, poor, migrant, and other disadvantaged people. My father, a community organizer, helped build neighborhood strength in our community through the creation of affordable housing, festivals and block-parties, after-school programming, and grassroots economic initiatives.

The art in our home was as much about politics as it was about beauty. The music that played throughout the house celebrated life and struggle. Our practice of family was intended to align our actions with our beliefs about our world, our community, and our relationships. Solidarity, really, was our religion.

And it was not always harmonious. There were frequently ways in which the approaches of my father and my mother conjured an impressive dissonance. Aligned with their traditional gender norms, my father was often more dedicated to principle and my mother more to spirit. In our household the struggle for supremacy (or search for balance) between truth and beauty, honesty and compassion, reason and care, righteousness and love, rigidity and permissiveness was an everyday affair.

While the dynamic tension played out between my parents, and between us all, the internal dimensions for me were no less significant. We honored leftist revolutionary leaders of history and yet readily admitted the many flaws of their personalities and the programs they put in place. The ways in which so many of our movements for freedom had managed to replicate systems of oppression in their efforts for liberation instilled a conundrum in my own mind, muddled my own vision for the world and for my role in it in ways that persist today.

What always seemed clear was that *social change takes force*. But force almost always seemed to mean violence. There were leaders I learned about—like Harriet Tubman, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, and Nelson Mandela—whose power seemed to emanate from a kind of inspiration that didn't require violence and which would have actually been diminished by it. But they seemed much more rare than those who were able to galvanize the frustration of the masses and use that energy to violently topple oppressive regimes. Learning eventually that Tubman did carry a weapon, that Mandela had roots in more violent campaigns, and being challenged

with the truth of Malcom X and the honesty of his anger complicated my understanding even further.

It was not until I encountered my own training in vipassanā meditation and the Buddha's teachings that I found a scale at which the impulse toward freedom and the mechanics of violence were clearly at odds; where love and interest were the only tools of revolutionary change that actually worked. Liberation in the Buddhist sense also takes tremendous effort and I eventually was able to witness the very subtle differences between effort motivated by craving or aversion and effort made by care or interest—full-of or free-from expectation. From those subtle differences larger impacts became evident and the process between volition and action and action and impact—something we would call *kamma* (karma)—became more and more clear.

This sensitivity is not always how my tradition has been taught. Much of the training in Theravada Buddhist systems over the centuries has encouraged a much more combative approach to meditation: a patriarchal mode that emphasizes extreme effort and forcefulness of mind, of penetration of the object of awareness, of relentless determination and unwavering diligence. In our cannon, the metaphor of war between healthy and destructive forces of mind is elaborated upon in great detail. Lovingkindness, patience, relaxation, and rest have been treated as less important, implicitly or explicitly, and so the flavor of the teachings have been molded in a very particular form that one could easily interpret as out of balance.

My own teacher, Michele McDonald, studied and practiced for many years under one of the most rigorous Burmese

monastic teachers of our era, Sayadaw U Pandita. Amazingly she was able to learn for herself how to balance his militant approach with her intuitive knowledge of her own needs regarding the force and pace of change. Like any great female “first” in a patriarchal institution or culture she had to prove her capacity to operate on those terms while secretly building an approach that kept her in balance. Perhaps her greatest strength was in not rejecting the training of her overbearing guide but instead to see its benefits and put it into healthier relationship with the other side of her spiritual practice that required a deeper commitment to compassion, patience, joy, and the nourishment of forgiveness.

From the beginning of my own meditation practice (and certainly earlier than that) I had internalized the idea that this warrior archetype was the embodiment of the most important principles of spiritual and social pursuit. Over and over again, through convulsions of force and failure, I found that approach limited and undermining. But when I abandoned the warrior spirit altogether I found my practice vapid, rudderless, and ambling. The path to freedom requires a broad range of capacities of heart and while combat is not the only—or even most important—metaphor for our practice, it is a valid one and one that we must find a way to come to terms with. While not rejected, it must still be balanced and sometimes we struggle to find meaningful archetypal models for what that dialectical embodiment might look like.

I have been unbelievably blessed by the integration and digestion of these polarities already done by my parents and my teacher before me. And yet I know I must embody the tension myself and let it work on me as I walk through this life.

All of us must do the work on our own, must find our footing on the spectrum of effort and effortlessness and of love and wisdom and be open to the surprising ways we may find they—and all other spiritual matrices—interact. I have complete and utter confidence in the approach my teacher has taught me and trained me in: one that allows for a wide flexibility of approach held firmly within the rigor of the overarching strategy of our tradition.

When my father died, I inherited what I could manage of his vinyl records and his revolutionary literature. I was initially drawn toward the works of Karl Marx in my thirst to more clearly understand the nuances of his analysis of the current socio-economic system and the possibilities of another. For some years I kept my distance from the handful of books that laid out explicit theories of revolutionary war as the moral chasm in relationship to violence caused uncomfortable tremors to burden my heart.

When I finally began to read the military works of Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, T.E. Lawrence, unnamed Irish Republican Army tacticians, Kwame Nkrumah, Lenin and numerous others that related to the strategies of guerrilla warfare, I came to see that in martial terms they shared an uncanny resonance with the mode of meditation practice that I had learned and adopted from my meditation teacher: Move in when you feel strong but move away when you are beyond the limits of engaging fruitfully, recognizing that this flexibility builds strength over the long-term. From there I could sense a kind of overtone resonance with the approach explored by my parents' relationship to change. These layered harmonics provided me an unexpected mechanism by which a metaphor

of military strategy could guide me toward the resolution of my tension with the traditional interpretation of the Buddha's approach to meditation, which differed in important ways from the practical methods that I had come to find so much faith in. In this process I came to understand mine as the method of a *guerrilla yogi* and over time have felt compelled to expand it into a framework that can be shared.

Though these war themes are offered as metaphor it is important to acknowledge that the guerrilla leaders who are quoted throughout this book are not speaking metaphorically: *they are talking about killing people*. In their real life missions many of them perpetrated unspeakable harm in their efforts to liberate their people. Anyone sensitive to the insanity of the Cultural Revolution might well be triggered by the quotations from Mao Zedong. For people pained by exile or whose property was expropriated by the Cuban Revolution, Che's words may very well spark a negative reaction. For anyone attuned to the role of people like "Lawrence of Arabia" played in promoting an orientalist view of the middle east, his words may grind toxically in your heart. As the quotations are almost all related to military strategy it is probably unsurprising there are very few female voices quoted here—but that will itself likely be troubling for many readers. Elevating these voices, almost entirely male, knowing what we know about the outcomes of some of their actions, is a delicate and complicated endeavor.

To make it more complicated, while most of the examples used in this book are representatives from left-leaning movements, which may sometimes be more sympathetic to many Western Buddhists, we are living in a time where many reactionary and right-wing fascist elements are using the

strategies of guerrilla warfare to impose immoral and inhuman conditions on society. Neo-nazi movements in the United States and Islamic fundamentalists like Al Qaeda and ISIS are studying and learning these same tactics to overcome far more powerful state enemies and are wreaking havoc around the world.

Finally, we are living in a time of the rise of right-wing Buddhist nationalism around the globe. We read every day about monks in Burma and Sri Lanka threatening and encouraging violence against minority groups—particularly Muslims—that are perceived as cultural threats. The understandable dissonance many people feel between the teachings of the Buddha and these expressions of violence can feel irreconcilable.

We live in a social era that assumes and reinforces an unbridgeable polarity between Thich Nhat Hanh and Ho Chi Minh, between the Dalai Lama and Mao Zedong, between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X, between Jesus and the Maccabees. But if we listen to our hearts honestly we will hear voices from across this spectrum and we must wonder if there is there a conversation to be had between these “opposites.” I believe that these contrasting positions represent powerful dimensions of spiritual and material paradox that should be engaged with and digested. It is spiritual and philosophical work that all who care about the world and care about themselves are called to wrestle with.

We want peace and we are at war. This is true in our lives and in society. In our spiritual and social justice practices there is always going to be the powerful tendency for us to avoid paradox, to choose one side and reject the other. Rather

than simply succumb to this conditioning, we have another option: to wrestle with the dilemmas of the path to peace that we have inherited and use that process as a one of growth and understanding. Through this process we may come to appreciate that the Buddha's middle path is not merely the refutation of extremes but the resolution of paradox.

We are not beyond violence and will not get there by ignoring its potency in our hearts. We are compelled in our society to glorify our saints and cast out our demons. But there must be a possibility for a more mature reflection on motivation and action, on inspiration and corruption—one that allows for transgression and transformation and finds the spiritual and social value of that. After all, we cannot deny the resonance between the basic impulse and action that many of these revolutionaries have been motivated and ourselves—aggrieved by the suffering in the world and inspired to change it and find a way out,

It is not the rebels that create the problems of the world,
but the problems of the world that create the rebels.

~ Ricardo Flores Margón¹

In Margón's quotation, the word “yogis” could easily replace “rebels” and sound as if it came directly out of our own tradition. The guerrilla method of vipassanā is where the Middle Path meets the Shining Path, where Thich Nhat Hanh meets Ho Chi Minh, where the Dalai Lama meets Mao Zedong. Just as the Buddha insisted on non-violence but found value in the war metaphor, I believe we can, to some degree, separate the inspiration and tactics of these revolutionary fighters from

the harm done by their actions in the world and watch the conversation they have. Without the metaphor most of us lose important possibilities for imagining the path to liberation for ourselves. This is the function of story, of metaphor, of archetype—and it is this level at which I seek to engage.

I am increasingly careful about claiming anything about the perfect scalability of the spiritual and political paths of humanity. I have never been convinced that social change is primarily a spiritual project². Like the relationship between quantum mechanics and Newtonian physics, I sense that they are in vital conversation with one another but that there are places where the laws at play are quite different. Either way, I am always keen to look more closely to try and understand the places where these paths resonate and where they don't. Both have fundamentally important things to teach us about the nature of individual and collective change and we should always be open to possibilities beyond our imagining.

Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey

August 3, 2019

~ INTRODUCTION ~

VIPASSANĀ:

Come for the Peace, Stay for the War



Greater in battle than the man who would conquer a thousand-thousand men, is he who would conquer just one—himself.

~ Buddha, Dhammapada¹

AT THEIR DEEPEST LEVEL, everything we can see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or cognize — all “conditioned phenomena”—are impermanent, undependable, insubstantial. From a tree to a mountain to a sound or a thought, anything that arose because of a coming together of conditions will change and pass away as those conditions change. This includes every aspect of what we think of as our “self.”

The instability and undependability of reality creates the foundation of the totality of our suffering as living beings: regardless of our effort to control experience we are separated from the pleasant, joined with the unpleasant, and cannot always get what we want. Responsibility for what befalls us can be pinned on any number of agents in our lives or in history or society. But well beyond this is the fact of the inher-

ent nature of the undependability of all phenomena. We struggle against the instability of life by grasping at pleasure, recoiling from pain, and numbing ourselves to the hardship through fantasy and delusion. The mind asserts itself against the wind: It is a portion of our beauty but the totality of our grief. The more we grasp, reject, or ignore the more the forces of greed, hatred, and ignorance are engrained in our hearts: as a learned protection from the undependable nature of reality. Over time, these patterns become a problem themselves as they entwine and operate in the most pronounced and subtle levels of our existence, forming the structure of most of what we consider our self.

The Buddha taught what has come to be known as *satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā* practice as a way to cultivate the mind's ability to uproot these mental defilements through observation. He understood that greed, hatred, and ignorance arise simply because the mind is not trained to see the nature of reality as it truly is. Experience is moving so fast it is very hard to observe clearly. Sounds, smells, tastes, sights, physical sensations, and mental activity are all streaming by at incredible speeds and give us the impression of solidity, and of a coherent self at the center of experience.

The basic method of *vipassanā* practice generally begins with the attempt to bring the attention to one primary object of experience, the breath for example, and develop concentration and mindfulness of the object. It is a very particular and rare kind of attention that is necessary to achieve *vipassanā* insight: a delicate but forceful balance of concentration that is powerful but nimble enough to move with the changing object and mindfulness that is genuinely interested and not manipu-

lative, supported by courageous energy, calm, equanimity, love, patience, urgency, to name only a few. The Buddha identified four fields of experience in which we can apply mindfulness to achieve insight: body (and the physically-based sense experiences of seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting), feeling tone, mind states, and the causal relationships between phenomena: basically all and any conceivable human experience. Most Buddhist meditation traditions emphasize a particular object over another or particular aspects of concentration over another. Whatever method we use the mechanics of liberation are essentially the same. Transformative insight can happen in relationship to any object. While we may train with one, like the breath, ultimately we develop the capacity to be in profound investigation with any object that arises in our field of awareness.

Thus trained, the mind begins to see phenomena as simply a chain of causal or conditioning experience, moving back and forth between mentality and physicality in rapid succession. As the mind strengthens, a progressive series of deeper insights into the insubstantiality of phenomena begins to occur and a deepening peace with the nature of reality blossoms alongside the uprooting of greed, hatred, and ignorance. We are not threatened by the instability of life because we understand there is no stable Self at the center of it all. The mind is freed because, as the Buddha said, without fear of pain or compulsion toward pleasure and amid the shifting changes of mental and physical experience “it sees security everywhere.” The mind needs no stability, needs nothing to be one way or another, is at home in the wilderness of reality. In

this condition, love, sympathy, understanding, and peace are the mind's natural responses to all that arises.

Abiding in this utter peace, in the release that accompanies the deepest wisdom, the mind has the capacity to alight upon the unconditioned, the aspect of reality that has no beginning and no end, does not arise or pass, the dark relief called nibbana. After an initial experience of this, the mind finds its way to a deeper and deeper abiding in this aspect of reality until it becomes one's true home, and upon the death of the body the mind is "neither here, nor there, nor in between."

There is that dimension where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising: unestablished, unevolving, without support. This, just this, is the end of stress.

~ Buddha, Udāna²

While this path may sound rather simple and straight forward, in practice it is very difficult and often bewildering. It is so profoundly at odds with the millions of years of mental evolution that have kept us grasping at what makes us feel safe, running from that which scares us, and spacing out to that which is overwhelming, it is hard to express. The mind is deeply defended against freedom and will stop at almost nothing to try to stay feeling solid and in control.

The path to peace can feel like a war, and the Buddha didn't shy away from this fact. The wide range of martial language scattered throughout the ancient texts of the Pali cannon is hard to ignore. Recognizing that the tendencies toward greed, hatred, and delusion in the human mind were profoundly entrenched and of inconceivable magnitude, the Buddha expounded on the idea that an enormous effort, with profoundly heroic qualities, must be conjured in order to overcome them. It was, indeed, a revolutionary war and these metaphors are some of the most commonly used and repeated to describe the path from suffering to liberation and the qualities of character needed to see it to completion.

In his most famous example, the Buddha referred to the process of his own awakening as a battle between himself and the armies of Mara, the deified personification of delusion. In the Padhana Sutta, Mara, using a voice of feigned compassion for the Buddha's hardship, tries to tempt the Buddha into moral and energetic slackness. The Buddha recognizes the ploy and calls him out, declaring his epic battle,

Sensual desire is your first army, the second is called discontent, the third is hunger and thirst, the fourth craving, the fifth sluggishness and laziness, the sixth fear, the seventh indecision, and the eighth disparagement of others and stubbornness: gain, fame, honor, prestige wrongly acquired and whoever praises himself and despises others — these, Namuci, are your armies, the Dark One's striking forces.

A lazy, cowardly person cannot overcome them, but by conquering them one gains bliss.

I wear muñja-grass³! Shame on life here in this world! It is better for me to die in battle than to live defeated. Some recluses and brahmins

are not seen exerting themselves here, so immersed are they in worldliness. They are not aware of that path by which those of perfect conduct walk.

Seeing the surrounding army ready and Mara mounted on his elephant, I am going out to fight so that he may not shift me from my position. This army of yours which the world together with the devas is unable to subdue, that I will destroy with wisdom, like an unbaked clay-bowl with a stone.

~ Buddha, Padhana Sutta⁴

Evoking examples from the battlefield, the Buddha emphasized the importance of determination, courageous energy, and the forbearance necessary to face the formidable obstacles to liberation within the mind. Sometimes monks were likened to warriors,

This individual, I tell you, is like the warrior who can handle the cloud of dust, the top of the enemy's banner, the tumult, & hand-to-hand combat.

On winning the battle, victorious in battle, he comes out at the very head of the battle.

~Buddha, Yodhajiva Sutta⁵

Other times, the beasts of war were held of as examples of courage and valor,

There is the case where a king's elephant, having gone into battle, sees a troop of elephants, a troop of cavalry, a troop of chariots, a troop of foot soldiers, but he doesn't falter or faint, he steels himself and engages in the battle. This is how a king's elephant is resilient to sights.

~Buddha, Pabbatopama Sutta⁶

Throughout the suttas, the Buddha refers to the experience of these forces and others as “invading” the mind,

Touched by that painful feeling, he sorrows, grieves, and laments, he weeps beating his breast and becomes distraught. When that pleasant feeling has arisen in him, it invades his mind and remains because body is not developed. And when that painful feeling has arisen in him, it invades his mind and remains because mind is not developed. Anyone in whom, in this double manner, arisen pleasant feeling invades his mind and remains because body is not developed, and arisen painful feeling invades his mind and remains because mind is not developed, is thus undeveloped in body and undeveloped in mind.

~ Buddha, Mahā Saccaka Sutta⁷

Mental fortitude—in the form of morality, concentration, and wisdom—is proposed over and over again as something that can provide defense against this invasion.

The enlightened state itself is described in destructive terms as often as it is in affirmative ones. The success of the Tathāgata, meaning “one thus gone,” a title by which the Buddha would regularly refer to himself, is frequently described using the language of violence. Speaking to Aggivessana he says,

The Tathāgata, Aggivessana, has abandoned the taints that defile, bring renewal of being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to future birth, aging, and death; he has cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising. Just as a palm tree whose crown is cut off is incapable of further growth, so too, the Tathāgata has abandoned the taints that

defile ... done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising.

~ Buddha, Mahā Saccakka Sutta⁸

Even the word *arahant*, used to describe the rare and honored fully enlightened person who has achieved the goal of the holy life, if broken down etymologically is widely interpreted to mean “killer of the enemy” from *ari* (enemy) and *hanta* (to kill).

The Buddha’s warrior metaphors rely on examples in which the enlightened fighter fully embodies heroic qualities that give them far greater strength than their enemy. Thus the warrior engages Mara on higher ground and so their success is inevitable. But over a lifetime of practice, even the most dedicated and enthusiastic yogis will find that a wholehearted embrace of this warrior approach eventually backfires.

We hear stories of the great masters like Taungpulu Sayadaw who spent many years practicing rigorous asceticism—like not lying down for over 30 years—and we are inspired by and want to emulate this “hard-core” approach. When we fail to emulate those achievements in our own practice we can find ourselves at a loss about how to reconcile this impulse toward vigor, so honored in our tradition, with the mental combustion and frustration that so often follows it. Countless well-intentioned yogis inspired by the words of the Buddha or other great masters begin their practice with a fervor and aspiration not matched by their training. When they encounter obstacles and negative mental forces overwhelm them, confuse them, humiliate them, like crushing waves pounding on the

shore, they easily lose hope—lose a sense of their own capacity—become demoralized, and give up.

In the worst cases, yogis can do serious damage to their minds by engaging in reckless approaches to meditation that puts them in dangerous engagement with mental and emotional forces more powerful than they can withstand. We forget that people like Taungpulu Sayadaw had many years of monastic training, studying, practicing, before venturing forth with such intensity. He was also supported by the powerful armor of monastic ethics—institutional and a cultural frameworks deeply ingrained in his home society that valued, honored, and supported his commitment. We can also forget that individuals like him are rare even in their home cultures.

The ideal soldier that the Buddha describes and esteems in the war against delusion is a monastic: Someone who's commitment to ethical life has extracted them from the pressures and influences of society, and whom in that protective container are able to build a powerful momentum of wholesome mental force in a consistent and sustained manner. Unlike the Buddha most of us have spent our lives cultivating less heroic qualities of the mind. And unlike Taungpulu Sayadaw we don't have the various levels of support in our lives, communities, society that enabled a practice life like his. Since we cannot often successfully engage Mara in all out war on the open battlefield, the heroic metaphors can ring hollow and dispirit us and we are left without a believable strategy for success.

Given how hard the path to freedom can be, those of us committed to the liberation that the Buddha described—of the heart's complete unbinding from greed, hatred, and delusion—

must ask ourselves what is the appropriate place of the warrior ideal in this pursuit? And what conception of warriorship can fully meet the manifold challenges of the long journey to awakening?

One solution is to abandon the martial metaphors altogether. After all, isn't the explicit violence distasteful and counter-productive? And isn't the implicit patriarchal undercurrent played-out and thus eminently rejectable?

Of course there are innumerable examples from the Pali texts that counterbalance the violent flavor of these violent illustrations. The Buddha's profound insight into balanced energy is one of the most beautiful expressions of the peace and tranquility needed to attain the deepest awakening,

I recall that when my father the Sakyan was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first *jhāna*⁹, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Could that be the path to enlightenment?' Then, following on that memory, came the realization: 'That is the path to enlightenment.'

~ Buddha, *Mahā Saccaka Sutta*¹⁰

or this, from the *Saṃyutta*¹¹ *Nikāya*,

The five aggregates¹² are truly burdens,
The burden-carrier is the person.
Taking up the burden is suffering in the world,
Laying the burden down is blissful.

Having laid the heavy burden down
Without taking up another burden,
Having drawn out craving with its root,

One is free from hunger, fully quenched.

And while the martial metaphors carry a uniquely resonant intensity intended to inspire full effort, he never condoned violence, or any action motivated by aversion or ill-will. The Buddha rejected the value of all violent actions—of causing harm to other living beings—and universally condemned them as immoral,

When embraced, the rod of violence breeds misery:

Look at people quarreling.

I will tell of how I experienced dismay.

~ Buddha, Attadanda Sutta¹³

He insisted that violence was incapable of leading to a beneficial outcome. A visiting headman named Yodhajiva once told the Buddha that his warriors believed that if they died in battle they would be reborn in a heaven realm as a result of their courage and valor. The Buddha's response was unequivocal,

When a warrior strives & exerts himself in battle, his mind is already seized, debased, & misdirected by the thought: 'May these beings be struck down or slaughtered or annihilated or destroyed. May they not exist.' If others then strike him down & slay him while he is thus striving & exerting himself in battle, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the hell called the realm of those slain in battle.

~ Buddha, Yodhajiva Sutta¹⁴

We live in a time and culture where among most meditators the futility of violence and repulsiveness of war are widely understood and opposition to those methods in our attempts to create change—internally, relationally, socially—is broadly

shared. It is unsurprising then that in most contemporary Western lay Buddhist communities the martial expressions of liberation have fallen out of general favor. Considered excessive, patriarchal, backward, and antiquated, many believe that these archaic notions are better left in the pre-feudal worldview of the ancient India. Doesn't the use of violent metaphors incline us toward a kind of violence with ourselves? Shouldn't we aspire to move beyond them? Since we have metaphors and approaches that don't risk encouraging debased behavior, can we not—and should we not—do away with these teachings as an evolution of how the Dhamma is shared, as we might with any number of offensive or questionable teachings from the Buddha?

These doubts bring up worthwhile questions. But equally important to examine are the cultural assumptions underlying those doubts. The mainstream demographic of the convert western Dharma world has been formed by educated female white middle-class liberals and along with plenty of white male and Jewish cultural influences, of similar class backgrounds, sprinkled in to the mix. This historically inevitable reality has put its cultural stamp on much of the norms of the world of practice. This stamp has had many benefits and has made these approaches to meditation available to many people who would otherwise never have found a natural entry point. And while there are more men, more youth, more people of color getting involved in communities of practice, these formative cultural norms still provide the recent foundation of western convert Dharma. It is simply important to remember that they are specific and along with all their strengths they will of course have their shadows.

Just as the Dhamma culture of our era is specific, so was it during the time of the Buddha. Patriarchal social norms can be seen throughout the cannon and in many of the most essential aspects of practice instruction many of us have inherited. The class dimensions and cultural dynamics from the time of the Buddha through the various Asian cultures that the Dhamma has run through is an entire body of research that we don't have time to delve into here¹⁵. But the historic promotion of effort over tranquility, of wisdom over love, of concentration over awareness, the phallicization of mindfulness, the exclusion of female bhikkhunis from the first council of monastics after the Buddha died, and the autocratic design of monastic institutions are a but a few of the codified evidence of the exclusion of female voices, female experience, and what might archetypally be called the feminine, from the earliest days of the tradition.

Nowadays we see the understandable impulse toward a counter-force in the form of an utter rejection of the patriarchal mode: a disarming of the Dhamma that emphasizes tranquility, love, effortlessness, joy, community, inclusiveness, open awareness, and non-hierarchy. People are tired of feeling bad about themselves, feeling that they are not working hard enough in their practice and that more effort is the only answer.

So much of the patriarchal impulses of the teachings we inherited reminded yogis of the negative side of religious traditions they had rejected because of male domination, unquestionable faith, and all kinds of physical, sexual, and psychological trauma. The lack of appreciation from many monastic teachers for personal story, of respectful communica-

tion, of non-heterosexual relationships conflicted with new western values that had burst out of the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movements, movement for gay-rights, for self-expression, of sensitivity to issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Foundational cultural norms related to women's rights, western psychology, and social justice were bedrock to the growth of Dhamma in the west. The Buddha's Dhamma has been transformed with every new cultural interface and this process is often confusing and complex.

While all practitioners in the West have surely benefited from this shift in emphasis — now promoted by men and women of all ages and ethnic backgrounds — there are places that it has left the Buddha's teaching vulnerable to corruption. One place where the current Western Buddhist culture has left the Dharma exposed is how this disarming of the Buddha's teaching has coincided with a process of abandoning its revolutionary character. A genetically modified version of mindfulness has been concocted in the West that no longer seeks to overthrow the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion but rather aims to smooth out the bumps of samsara¹⁶, to craft a more satisfying lifestyle, to find balance — in essence, adding nicer decor to our prison cells, make more glittery shackles: a balm rather than a bomb for Babylon. Instead of complete liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion, the utter destruction of suffering, and final relief from madness of craving, people are perversely ambitious to be “10% happier.”

In the flood of undependable psycho-physical fabrication the Buddha offered people a raft, a shore, an island with his liberation teachings. What we see — and indeed what the Buddha saw then — is that most people don't want out: they

just want warmer water in which to drown. But the Dhamma is not ultimately about giving people what they want or about getting our needs met, about “just loving” ourselves, about “effortless joy.” It is not merely about “wholeness,” “integration,” or “balance.” It is about breaking the shackles of our bondage to hope, to expectation, to happiness based on conditioned phenomenon.

Deepening our exploration of and commitment to lovingkindness (*mettā*), for example, can profoundly soften our resistance to the *dukkha* (painfulness) of reality. With this tool in use, a more natural unfolding of insight is possible. But *mettā* can also be used as an avoidance of reality, of a denial of *dukkha*, and can lead us down a path to delusion, ultimately weakening the mind.

The Buddha’s teaching was revolutionary because it called for an overthrow of the dominant forces of self-production and for their replacement with an entirely different set of principles and tools, ones that produce an entirely different experience of identity-structure. For many people the new-age approach of McMindfulness may work well enough for long enough. But to be in alignment with the revolutionary thrust of the Dhamma, we must accept the sometimes conflictual nature of the path designed to liberate us from the rounds and rounds of compulsive being.

From one perspective—and one might consider it as “masculine”—the process of liberation is oppositional. There are phenomena to be encouraged and phenomena to be abandoned or destroyed. Vipassanā practice is designed to uproot and overthrow them, not appease or come to a negotiated truce. As Frederick Douglas once noted, “Power concedes

nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will,” the Buddha acknowledged that his Dhamma goes against the stream and so force—moral, social, or physical—is a necessary tool for transformation. This masculine side of the coin is an element of the dynamic that we reject to our own—and the Dhamma’s—detriment.

The trick is that this necessary force must be motivated by factors such as wisdom, compassion, and love. In the spiritual war the forces that are morally aligned—balanced effort infused with wholesome volitional power—are the only ones that actually work. This must be our deepest concern and place of greatest sensitivity. These dynamics can feel like countervailing winds that are hard to reconcile with one another. But we cannot abandon the paradox of love and force if we want to stay true to the path the Buddha laid out.

Just as new-age yogis resist the war metaphor entirely, patriarchal orthodox Buddhist elements reject the feminine-drive behind this new approach to mindfulness. The need for our approach to be one or the other, to avoid paradox and fall into a polarization, is unnecessary and ultimately threatens to throw our lineage out of balance just as we are trying to propagate it in this new historical and cultural context. While we aspire to peace in the world, in our relationships, and in ourselves—and seek peaceful means of achieving this peace—metaphors of war are still meaningful in acknowledging the epic and challenging nature of the spiritual struggle. The practice should not always feel like war but there are good reasons why it sometimes does and why the Buddha offered the metaphor.

One solution to the dilemma of using war metaphors for the Buddha's path can be found in the model of the guerrilla warrior:

The fact is that the disparity between the enemy's strength and our own is now so great that the enemy's shortcomings have not developed, and for the time being cannot develop, to a degree sufficient to offset his strength, while our advantages have not developed, and for the time being cannot develop, to a degree sufficient to compensate for our weakness.

~ Mao Zedong, On Protracted War¹⁷

Minority, oppressed, and occupied human communities have long understood that they cannot challenge the dominant forces of society on the same terms that they are being subjugated by them. The nature of liberation movements has always been of the powerless against the powerful, the poorly-trained against the well-trained, the impoverished against the privileged. The oppressed cannot match the firepower, the organization, or the resource capacity of their opponents. Therefore they must rely on irregular tactics that adroitly evade the force of their enemies, exploit the enemy's weaknesses, and augment the value of their own strengths.

From history we also see that overzealous, blind insurrection never works. It might be inevitable that at times people take up of pitchforks and guns, burn, loot, and riot to express frustration and fulfill a thirst for the spirit of rebellion. But these actions generally do little to fundamentally change society and often end up awakening the most forceful and primitive forces of state repression upon them, for which there is, by definition, no organized resistance.

Premature and unnecessary attempts at insurrection are possible; so also are over-zealousness and excesses, which are always and definitely harmful, and may injure even the best of tactics. But the fact is that in most of the purely Russian centers we have so far been suffering from the other extreme, namely, insufficient initiative among our fighting squads, lack of fighting experience, and insufficient determination in their activities... We must not restrain but encourage the guerrilla operations of the fighting squads if we want to prepare for insurrection not merely in words, and if we recognize that the proletariat is seriously ready for insurrection.

~ VI. Lenin, Partiiniye Izvestia (Party News), №1¹⁸

When we consider a revolution of the mind—an overthrow of the dominant forces of defilement to which we are oppressed—we encounter a similar situation. The Armies of Mara are powerful, entrenched, well-trained, well-armed, institutionalized and hegemonic forces of the empire of the Self. At the time of his enlightenment the Buddha's mind was like a legion of perfect soldiers skilled in the seven factors of awakening, the brahmavihārās, the five spiritual faculties, the jhānic factors, and other such powerful capacities of the mind.

If we are honest, and we ought always to be, the army of our minds are not like the Buddha's. They are more like an untrained, ragtag group of disorganized idealists trying to maintain some semblance of resistance while hiding in the unmapped mountains of the mind. The forces we are up against are so overwhelming that we cannot hope to match them directly on their own terms in open struggle. It is not a level playing field.

But if we do not want to play the role of passive farmers abiding for ages under the feudal dictatorship of our own

ignorance nor petulant rebels whose romantic idealism and unsustainable bursts of energy will be humiliatingly crushed by the overwhelming momentum of our delusion, we must consider some of the most successful tactics of military campaigns of modern history. The modern yogi must rely on irregular, partisan, guerrilla tactics in their pursuit of enlightenment.

He must exhaust the enemy by constant harassment.
 He must attack constantly from all directions.
 He must stage successful retreats, return to the attack,
 avoid encounters with the enemy that are not of his own making.
 ~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army¹⁹

If we adopt the mentality of guerrilla yogis — serious and dedicated revolutionaries of the mind sensitive to the realities of our overpowered and oppressed condition — we can put into practice a variety of useful and inspiring strategies that will serve to constantly strengthen our capacity to achieve final victory. With a degree of honest self-assessment, we can see our strengths and weaknesses clearly and plot an adaptable approach ahead rather than fixate on an abstract ideal of how this path should be trodden.

A small nation fighting for freedom can only hope to defeat an oppressor or occupying power by means of guerrilla warfare. The enemy's superiority in manpower, resources, materials, and everything else that goes into waging of successful war can only be overcome by the correct application of guerrilla methods.

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army²⁰

If you are a lay person who has a job, and/or a family, bills to pay, who squeezes meditation practice into a busy schedule of other worldly responsibilities, who tries to go on intensive retreats—or at least a local sitting group—and yet has the aspiration for the deepest human freedom—you already are a guerrilla yogi and it will be worth your time to consider this approach. A lay person in modern times should be humble about the near-absurdity of the ambition of their project of awakening and take an approach to the path that honors and utilizes the strengths and weakness of the conditions they encounter in the emancipation of their bodies, minds, and world.

Small actions, continual mobility, emphasis on rear or flanking attacks—these are all features of a war in which the guerrilla fighter finds himself at home.

~ Bert “Yank” Levy, *Guerrilla Warfare*²¹

The near-totality of the teachings of most Buddhist traditions elaborate on the rationale and the methods of achieving closer engagement with the phenomena of reality. After all, an intimate relationship with sensory phenomena is essential for liberating insight. There is very little—almost nothing in our tradition—that explains why it may be necessary to move away at times, that validate this tactic, or that trains us how to do it skillfully. Most examples of distancing or withdrawal from engagement are dismissed critically in our traditions as the result of mental defilements. We are conditioned to think of running and hiding as cowardly. But the guerrilla combatant knows that in a lifetime of confrontation

with more powerful forces there are plenty of times we must run.

“Hit and run” some call this scornfully, and this is accurate. Hit and run, wait, lie in ambush, again hit and run, and thus repeatedly, without giving any rest to the enemy. There is in all this, it would appear, a negative quality, an attitude of retreat, of avoiding frontal fights. However, this is consequent upon the general strategy of guerrilla warfare, which is the same in its ultimate end as is any warfare: to win, to annihilate the enemy.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*²²

When Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, and 80 or so other men landed on the shores of Cuba to launch the overthrow of the Batista government they were immediately engaged in a brutal skirmish. Days later, only 12 of the original unit were able to regroup in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra. With a few rifles and a handful grenades they had an army to beat and a dictatorship to topple. It must have been a sobering situation. If their vision for success was rooted in orthodox military strategy, they would have jumped right back on their boat, the Granma, and turned around. Perhaps they would have never even set off for revolution in the first place. Yet they continued on and ultimately prevailed because their orientation as guerrilla fighters anticipated these difficult conditions as their basic premise which allowed them to continue forward. Their strategy reflected the reality of their situation.

Today the locust fights the elephant. But tomorrow the elephant will be disemboweled.

~ Ho Chi Minh, 2nd National Congress of the Vietnam Workers' Party²³

Buddhist orthodoxy, while aligned with the military notion, may instinctively argue against many aspects of the approach offered here. But if read carefully, and applied with consideration, one will see that this method is of the same overarching strategy that our tradition upholds, is carried by the same principles, and diverges most of all simply in the matter of tactics.

The argument that guerrilla warfare disorganizes the movement must be regarded critically. Every new form of struggle, accompanied as it is by new dangers and new sacrifices, inevitably “disorganizes” organizations which are unprepared for this new form of struggle. Our old propagandist circles were disorganized by recourse to methods of agitation. Our committees were subsequently disorganized by recourse to demonstrations. Every military action in any war to a certain extent disorganizes the ranks of the fighters. But this does not mean that one must not fight. It means that one must learn to fight. That is all.

~ VI Lenin, Guerrilla Warfare²⁴

One of the fundamental principles of guerrilla warfare is the high value placed on flexibility and great adaptability to specific times and place. The essence of the guerrilla approach, then, is one of firm principle and flexible application, of overarching strategies and secondary tactics, of recognizing the importance of conditions as we aim for the unconditional, of respecting the relative in the pursuit of the absolute.

Another fundamental characteristic of the guerrilla soldier is his flexibility, his ability to adapt himself to all circumstances, and to convert to his service all of the accidents of the action. Against the rigidity of classical methods of fighting, the guerrilla fighter invents his own tactics at every minute of the fight and constantly surprises his own enemy.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*

25

If guerrilla war can be imagined as a form of war that balances a masculine and feminine approach— sensitive to conditions and not stubborn about ideas, humble and careful rather than reckless and arrogant — then guerrilla vipassanā can be thought of as the balanced approach to Buddhist liberation. This is where the integrated approach is realized: where we cultivate the masculine without betraying the feminine; Where we nourish ourselves with tenderness and care without losing sight of the liberatory aim of our efforts; where we are restrained yet permissive, urgent yet patient.

As an advancement of the overall dialectical alchemy between the processes of spiritual and social liberation, I suspect that as these guerrilla tactics are internalized for the spiritual quest, they can at some point be reapplied outwardly for a non-violent revolutionary movement in society. In our present day, left-leaning social movements often lament their lack of coherence and cohesion, and thus our capacity for decisive engagements with the forces of capitalist society. But if these guerrilla approaches are taken to heart, and infused with some of the spiritual work suggested in this text, I believe there might be the possibility of a transformed and reconceived notion of the appropriate peaceful tactics to our social justice

movements in the world— something addressed in the epilogue.

Over the course of this book, a variety of approaches culled from a range of guerrilla tacticians will be offered to reframe the Buddha's model for liberation. The importance of sabotage, mobility, diversion, and retreat, among many others, will be brought into focus as important metaphors for our meditation practice. Chapters regarding medical knowledge, the nature of the guerrilla band, reporting, general strikes, and so on will help navigate the elements of our path beyond our meditation practice and into relationships, community, and considerations for the formation of our lives. In the conclusion I explore in greater detail aspects of the conversation between individual enlightenment and revolutionary social change that seem important to me.

If Dhamma instruction these days in the west suffers from a lack of clarity, coherence, and rigor, which I believe it does, and therefore is often presented as a hodgepodge of approaches to form a kind of new-age stew, which I believe it is, it is largely as an understandable dialectical response to the patriarchal history and norms of many of our lineages. But I would argue very strongly that turning the Buddha's Dhamma into new-age porridge is not an appropriate or effective counterpoint to the oppressive patriarchal momentum we sometimes feel in our spiritual inheritance. Rather it is a betrayal and an irresponsibility that while defanging the beast also destroys the animal.

I hope to offer a frame that recalibrates our understanding of the path of practice in a way that is still in alignment with the Buddha's original offering but satisfies our need for a

more intuitive and sensitive approach to our historical conditions—one, of course, that still works. Though the master is gone, we still have many good resources and therefore live in auspicious time. There are conditions we can leverage to make the most of our vault toward nibbana. It is a classic guerrilla position and we ought to use the tools at our disposal.

Wars in every period have independent forms and independent conditions, and, therefore, every period must have its independent theory of war.

~ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ²⁶

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SABOTAGE

Dāna - Silā



The death of a Turkish bridge or rail, machine or gun or charge of high explosive, was more profitable to us than the death of a Turk...

The attack might be nominal, directed not against him, but against his stuff; so it would not seek either his strength or his weakness, but his most accessible material. In railway-cutting it would be usually an empty stretch of rail; and the more empty, the greater the tactical success.

~ T.E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom¹

DURING HIS TIME in leadership of the guerrilla campaign in Syria against the Turkish army during WWI, T.E. Lawrence quickly determined that sabotage must be the primary focus of his efforts. Small bands could easily attack remote bits of railway and disappear back into the vast desert: severely disrupting enemy functionality and affording little opportunity for casualties on his own side. By avoiding direct confrontations with large enemy units and debilitating the enemy's lines of supply and communication, Turkish control of the territory was functionally confined to urban areas which could then be

increasingly isolated. The tactic used the greatest gifts of the irregular fighters to their advantage and avoided the pitfalls of their weakness. It comprised the near-totality of their campaign.

For destruction of railway tracks, bridges, and stations in enemy-controlled territory, it is necessary to gather together demolition materials. Troops must be trained in the preparation and use of demolitions, and a demolition unit must be organized in each regiment.

~ Mao Zedong

In a guerrilla warfare, various kind of sabotage can be used to disrupt the enemy's lines of communication, movement of supplies, functionality of industry, and governmental operation without engaging in physical violence against people. Disruption is, at the very least, irritating, distracting, and depleting of the enemy's energy. But over time these disturbances to the status quo are crucial to building the social tension that forces people to take conscious sides in the conflict, amplifying the intensity of revolutionary crisis. At its maximum potency sabotage creates the foundation for the overthrow of a dictatorial regime and does so without the dangers of direct engagement.

In our spiritual conflict, sabotage can similarly be thought of as an intervention that disrupts the patterns of behavior which create and reinforce the empire of delusion we are living under. This empire is also dependent upon a vast and complex infrastructure of communication, supplies, and mobility. In some ways that is all the "Self" is: entrenched patterns of habitual behavior linking the body and mind. Any

disruption to these networks is weakening, destabilizing, and frustrating to the system and lays the groundwork for the rebellious forces of insight and love to assert themselves more directly.

Our most important tactics of spiritual sabotage used to weaken the enemy also form the basis of our entire spiritual endeavor: our commitment to generosity (*dāna*) and ethical conduct (*silā*). *Dāna* and *silā* along with *bhavana*, mind-cultivation or meditation, are considered the three pillars of the spiritual life—and it is essential for the guerrilla yogi to understand how the three work together to disrupt and dismantle the empire of self.

Dāna means generosity in its broadest sense: it can mean the giving of money or material objects, of time, or our energy and skills. Sometimes patience with another person is the most powerful form of generosity we arrive at in a moment. It is the giving of our goodness.

Dāna is, of course, of benefit to the receiver. But *dāna* also decimates the strength of greed in the donor by strengthening the power of and building up the capacity for generosity in our minds. When we give that which is precious to us, in particular, it helps us break the bonds of attachment and release us from its burden. It interrupts the smooth channels of stinginess, ill-will, contraction, and indifference whose grooves can be dug so deeply in the mind. Generosity cuts the cables of the infrastructure of attachment—disrupting the relentless flow of self-centered greed in our hearts. It digs the channels of virtue and benevolence within which the mind can more naturally flow.

It feels good to give and it is good for us to feel our own goodness. When we give we should try to allow that good feeling to penetrate our hearts. I may seem indulgent to spend time reflecting on our own virtues but these remembrances give us something to hold onto when we are engulfed by the forces of self-hatred or self-doubt. They are a base we can find safety in when ambushed by doubt. During periods of intensive practice we may find so much fault in ourselves that we cannot recognize our own worthiness of liberation. This is a most dangerous trap, one that can derail our entire project. Remembering instances of our own generosity during these times, the ways in which we have helped others, is of vital importance. We need to develop a taste for and a sensitivity to the wholesome pleasure of feeling our own goodness so that the heart can build a wholesome preference for it over the deadened security of mental contraction.

I have a practice of carving small wooden spoons for the newborn babies of my friends. As I work on a spoon I get to spend time wishing these children well: imagining them being fed with the spoon, thinking about the love I know is being showered on them, attuned to the struggles they will face, and reflecting on my hopes for their future happiness. When I give the spoons away it feels wonderful to feel the appreciation from my friends. Long after, when I am on retreat struggling with some internal demon or another, it is invaluable for me to be able to recollect and consider these good deeds of mine. When the battalions of my less esteemable qualities are lining up against me it is basic survival for me to be able reflect on the beauty of these offerings and remind myself of my own

goodness. Dāna is one of the most fortified blockades we have against the forces of self-hatred.

Dāna also undermines other people's ill-will toward us. Showing up for others, helping out, bringing gifts, being kind-hearted—even in informal encounters—these are things that can help us soften many relationships, especially ones that have become difficult. Generosity is hard to fight against and therefore makes it harder for others to generate animosity toward you. It sabotages by disarming and is disarming in two ways: internally and externally.

Silā, ethical conduct committed to non-harming, provides a fundamental safety for our selves and others by destroying the bridges from mind to body, from thought to speech, from impulse to action, that would otherwise carry the supplies of greed, hatred, and delusion out into the world beyond. It is protective of ourselves and others and thus also provides attunement to our own goodness—in the form of remorselessness—a quality that the guerrilla yogi cannot survive without.

Silā secures our blamelessness and provides the matrix in which the spiritual life has the foundation to play out with success. The commitment to not kill (*pāṇātipātā*), to not steal (*adinnadāna*), to not harm with our sexual activity (*kamesu micchācāra*), to right speech (*musāvāda*), and to refrain from intoxicants that lead to heedlessness (*Surameraya majjapama-datthana*)—these five basic precepts of the lay Buddhist directly and profoundly undermine the ability of greed, hatred, and delusion to manifest in gross physical and verbal behaviors, even if they take root in our hearts. They are road blocks to the free-flow of violence and greed, an obstruction

and a barricade against the fires of hatred, a dyke against the floodwaters of ignorance. They are the first protection against our own future karma (*kamma*). With supply-lines cut, they bring the forward march of our bad kamma to a grinding halt. They weaken and inflict true harm on the power-plants of our suffering.

Silā also provides protection for all beings that come into relationship with us. We become a haven for others seeking sanctuary, a refuge for those who cannot find safety elsewhere. It defends us against the suspicion or ill-will of others.

The guerrilla fighter, as a person conscious of a role in the vanguard of the people, must have moral conduct that shows him to be a true priest of the reform to which he aspires. To the stoicism imposed by the difficult conditions of warfare should be added an austerity born of rigid self-control that will prevent a single excess, a single slip, whatever the circumstances. The guerrilla soldier should be an ascetic.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara²

PĀNĀTIPĀTĀ

The precept to refrain from killing, pāṇātipātā, is intended to protect ourselves and the world around us from the momentum of our anger and aversion. We not only restrain from killing other human beings but from all living things: including animals and insects—even the ones that irritate, hurt, or scare us. This concern for small beings is more important because, generally speaking, it is the situation most often encountered and one that we tend to take more lightly. Finding a mosquito in the summer while outdoors is a common phenomena, one that we tend to give very little thought or ethical weight to.

Caring for the trivial-but-easy builds the capacity to care for the significant-and-hard.

We are trained to think that it is the most dramatic and enormous challenges and ethical dilemmas which define us. But in truth it is in the small interactions, with beings that we don't often honor or respect, that we train the mind to be sensitive to its motivation, to attune to the worthiness of another being's life, to have the courage to feel the moral shame of violence. A guerrilla yogi knows that it is actually in these small skirmishes where the battle for ethics is practiced, developed, and won. This is the guerrilla approach to ethics.

When we commit to non-harming, we are committing to a deepening sensitivity to the motivation behind our potentially violent actions. We see how carelessly we can kill or harm another being for the simple fact of mild irritation or for the pettiness of slight discomfort. Restraint against the most egregious expression of anger is a training that sensitizes us to even the subtle burst of speech or attitude than can carry violence within them. We train in these small places of moral inquiry so that the heart becomes more and more rooted in its desire to be kind, to be caring, to be a sanctuary for all beings. The precept is a protection not only for others but for ourselves because riding on the wave of "right action" we have generated we are not burdened by the weight of remorse.

Then, when it comes to larger and more powerful spiritual dilemmas—where we may feel the need to kill in order to eat, to protect someone we care about or defend ourselves from violence—we have a baseline from which to make a clear-eyed decision, one we are willing to be responsible for because we know exactly what it means and how serious the

consequences can be. We need to be able to see anger clearly in order to understand it and therefore unbind from it, but this capacity only grows from the training in seeing minor irritation, annoyance, subtly aversion, clearly.

We don't rise to the level of our expectations, we fall to the level of our training.

~ Archilochus³

ADINNADĀNA

Similarly, the precept to refrain from taking that which is not offered, adinnadāna, is a protection for the world and for our own hearts from the power of greed, of wanting. It creates safety for others and safety for ourselves as we avoid the weight of guilt that comes from unrestrained greed.

Again, the practice of adinnadāna is not often fought at its most extreme ends. If we are in desperate poverty or consumed by greed because of psychological conditioning or other factors there can be a greater temptation to take that which is not ours. But generally speaking, most people are not commonly compelled to rob a bank or stealing someone's car—no matter what our socioeconomic or psychological conditions are. So we are instead engaged in the more subtle dynamics of non-consensual taking—sneaking this or that, borrowing without consent, listening in to other people's conversations, etc. Our care for other people can take the shape of respecting that which they feel is theirs. It is the guerrilla tendency to focus our energy on small battles that can be won and staying away from deeply entrenched enemy positions until we truly have the conditions to succeed.

Our initial concern with the precept is to not harm others or ourselves with our craving. Our next interest is to investigate this power of greed, of wanting, in our hearts. By putting up a barricade in front of greed-fueled action we are confronted with wanting. If we take responsibility for it and pull back from the fascination with the object of wanting we feel the burning intensity in our hearts and engage in the investigative process that leads to understanding and to peace.

We are not trying to create a police state of self-discipline. We are not trying to create a prison by which any greedy impulse results in the chopping off of a hand or the heart. We want to understand craving because that is the only way to truly uproot it. But this investigation must happen in the context of safety, where we are not acting upon these impulses and feeding the fires of self-oppression we are trying to subdue. This is how *dāna* and *silā* set the stage for *bhavana*, mind-cultivation. Seeing the mind colored by greed and understanding the ways in which it causes suffering, we commit to refraining from gross acts of infringement upon other people's stuff, belongings, securities, whether ill-gained or not.

Adinnadāna requires more intimacy, honesty, and vulnerability with others, things that are generally good for us. To ask for something rather than simply taking it is an action that induces trust and kinship—solidarity—in a way that is often very powerful, even if at times it feels unnecessary or threatening. Asking for help requires an honest vulnerability—an admission of dependence—that many people will avoid at all cost. But when we are honest about our needs, our worries,

our weaknesses, other people feel safe around us and in asking their help we give them the opportunity to be generous.

Rules:

- 1) All actions are subject to command.
- 2) Do not steal from the people.
- 3) Be neither selfish nor unjust.

Remarks:

- 1) Replace the door when you leave the house.
- 2) Roll up the bedding on which you have slept.
- 3) Be courteous.
- 4) Be honest in your transactions.
- 5) Return what you borrow.
- 6) Replace what you break.
- 7) Do not bathe in the presence of women.
- 8) Do not without authority search the pocketbooks of those you arrest.

~ Mao Zedong⁴

KAMESU MICCĀCĀRA

The precept to refrain from harming others with our sexual activity, kamesu miccācāra, continues the principle bulwark of adinnadāna against the most harmful tendencies of wanting. Sexual desire is probably the most powerful form of wanting that human beings experience. It is a fire. And while it can generate great pleasure it also torments people through vast expanses of their lives. We also know how harmful this force can be. Rape, sexual assault, harassment, and intimidation are the most gross forms of violence associated with sexual desire and these actions should be strictly abandoned. But even in consensual sexual activity, great harm can come and we want

to be as careful as we can for ourselves and for the sake of others—never mind the pain of longing or despair that can arise from its unfulfilment. Once again, it is in the more subtle dynamics in which we have the potential to learn, to unbind from the powerful prisons we find ourselves in as human beings.

The basics of sexual attraction are common and easily accessible. We can be overwhelmed with desire based on the subtle impression of an inexplicably evocative physical shape or gesture. It is within these much more available experiences of regular everyday fantasy and projection that we can begin to explore the pain associated with this kind of wanting.

Because the object of attraction is fantasized of as pleasurable, it can be hard to sensitize to the pain of wanting and the alienation inflicted on the object. A person once conveyed their attraction to me in an inappropriate context and expressed their interest in engaging in sexual activity with me. Initially, I was only aware of my anger for the person's lack of respect for the container we were in. When I attuned to their mind I could see how much confusion and pain was entwined with their wanting and I was awash in pity for them. Later I began to feel genuine compassion for them, a person who at that point couldn't have a healthy sense of human connection unrelated to sex and for whom seduction was their primary relational tool. Only much later did I become more sensitive to my own experience: the waves of ickiness, of the dehumanizing sensations of this person's projection being laid upon me, and the strange invisibility of being fixated on as a source of sexual gratification that actually had nothing to do with me.

The dissonance of this experience helped make clear to me that sexual attraction is, at some level, always alienating. It creates distance as it aims for intimacy. Whether the attraction is shared or not, it is always an imposition. It is a self-centeredness that paradoxically abandons ourselves and the objectified person. It is a pain in the heart we think can only be soothed by contact with another person; but this longing can never be satisfied through fulfillment, by clinging masquerading as connection. It must be felt directly, cared for directly, understood directly, and in doing so release the object and ourselves from the grip of wanting. Consider what a relief it would be to be entirely free from this dehumanizing impulse in our hearts and what a gift it would be to everyone we encounter.

We cannot simply crush these patterns of desire through aversion or rationalization. That will not uproot anything. We need to be willing to go through these feelings over and over, explore—and, yes, even carefully indulge them at times—as long as they don't cause harm to anyone. If we learn to observe the heart's contractions ever more closely, we will eventually come understand them fully and thus develop our full capacity for wisdom and care with them—for release from the bondage of craving. Over time we begin to experience the pain of wanting overwhelm the pleasure fantasy and become happily and naturally disenchanted with the entire process. Desire is almost never really about the object of desire but about our lack of loving and clear-seeing connection to our own restless hearts.

Seeing nothing in the end
but competition,
I felt discontent.
And then I saw

an arrow here,
so very hard to see,
embedded in the heart.
Overcome by this arrow
you run in all directions.
But simply on pulling it out
you don't run,
you don't sink.
~ Buddha, Attadanda Sutta⁵

One of the great oppressions we experience as a society—and have internalized individually—is a taboo on sexuality and sensual pleasure. We have been trained to see pleasure as wrong, as immoral, as misguided, and evil. This is ubiquitous and also more intensely imposed upon disenfranchised groups: Women's pleasure is deemed more scandalous than men's, homosexual sex is more perverse than straight, interracial relationships more suspect than monoracial ones, poor people's drug use more vilified than rich people, black pleasure is denigrated and white pleasure is uplifted, etc. This culture of anti-pleasure comes from Western religious and white-supremacist heritage but can easily be seen in, adapted to, or adopted by other traditions including Buddhism. This is an essential underpinning of the patriarchy, the result of millennia of the ossification of genuine spiritual transcendence into institutions of social control and points to the challenges of pursuing a genuine spiritual path that seeks to uproot greed without relying upon aversion to pleasure.

On the one hand, we must recognize that craving is a prison and that our thirst for satisfaction will never be quenched through gratification. Without this understanding we

are reinforcing the foundation of the empire that we propose to dismantle. It is an oppression that we face internally and that as students of the Buddha we are seeking to overcome. But we are not seeking to overcome it by force, by violence, but rather to disentangle the heart through the slow understanding of its own longing for satisfaction. Silā, as a commitment to ethical conduct, is a disruption to the normal mental and physical behaviors of craving and it is in this space of disruption that wisdom can enter through insight.

We have a challenging but meaningful path to follow that must accept that pleasure happens, that it is not unethical, and that longing for it is not immoral; but that we need to take extreme care in actions that seek it out. We need pleasure—especially when it helps create enough buoyancy for the mind to deal with the hardships of life. If we learn to regularly and skillfully bring in healthy measures of wholesome pleasure and joy into our lives we won't need to rely on harmful doses to numb out to the pain when conditions get hard. Sense pleasure will never be ultimately satisfying because all phenomena are impermanent and undependable. But pleasure itself is not the problem, is not even avoidable, and can be used to support the path of liberation. The problem lies in a misunderstanding of the heart. As the heart comes to see the truth of the undependable nature of all phenomena, it no longer grasps painfully at them, and is released through wisdom—not through control or self-abuse.

MUSĀVĀDA

The fourth precept is *musāvāda*, the precept to refrain from incorrect speech. Generally, this is an encouragement to refrain from lying, from speech that is harmful or deceitful, to not encourage delusion or fabrication through our verbal actions.

If we consider our *kamma* unfolding in the realms of mental actions, speech actions, and physical actions we can come to see how extreme care with our speech is one of the most vital ways that we protect ourselves from ongoing drama and defilement production in our lives. Conditions in our lives impact our ability to practice fruitfully, and so the more volatility, the more exasperation, the more conflict we engage in and are having to manage and defend ourselves against in the outer world, the less supportive conditions we will have to engage our inner practice. If we are always arguing, in our practice we will encounter obstacles to our basic sense of safety. We may encounter increased “monkey-mind” and mental proliferation (*papañca*), ill-will, remorse, and embarrassment. These affect our concentration most profoundly and can cause significant harm to our meditation practice.

Knowing how powerful our words are to create harm or to generate deeper connection, through *musāvāda* we sabotage the free-flowing lines of communication: the wires and signals of word speech through constant vigilance on these pathways. Speech is seeded in thought, this engine of views and opinions which is one of the most powerful ways by which the empire of self resupplies and reproduces itself each moment. When we interrupt the smooth flow of impulses between thought and speech, we undermine these systems and mechanisms of defilement.

This does not mean that the guerrilla yogi does not argue or get involved in difficult conversations in the world. Rather, they understand that there are inevitable impacts of this kind of speech action and so they are cautious in the extreme to only take on engagements that they are willing to follow through on, accept the kamma of. The guerrilla yogi must be willing to go through the results of their actions, to own them, take responsibility for them, and do their best to orient their destination not merely toward winning, but toward deeper understanding and care.

The most powerful form of *musāvāda* is silence: the utter restraint and disruption of this flow of experience between thought and speech in which we are willing to take on the full impact of the sometimes violent force of the mind as our impulses and volatility and pettiness are reflected back to us entirely and we bear the burden of the relentless engine of the mind. This refusal to generate kamma based on these mental impulses, to receive the repeated hammering of thoughts on our attention and to protect the world around us from the violence and craving and delusion, is a great gift to all we encounter.

Of course not all of our flow of mental experience is so toxic. We may have plenty of beautiful, kind, and generous thoughts as well. But in the case of the guerrilla yogi committed to silence we hold the baseline standard as the deepest form of protection, as the deepest security from causing harm, and the deepest commitment to try to learn from the activity of the mind rather than subject the world to all of its whims and worries.

Silence is not only a weapon but also a reward. Silence is the deep refuge of the guerrilla yogi—wherever we can find it we soak in it, nourish ourselves with it. Silence is the echo of nibbana in the conditioned world. It is a sacred relief: relief from the pressures of social world, from performance and posturing, from projection and the millions of moments of unnecessary propagation of the empire.

The seclusion afforded by silence is of utmost importance in our practice. Few of us can find ways to live long swaths of our lives in silence, but most of us can find ways to punctuate the normal social flow of our verbal engagement with periods of silence—of long or short duration—in order to reap the rewards and taste the value of this commitment. We have limited energy and capacity to attend to the relentless stimulus of life. When we commit to attending to the internal, we see that we barely have enough energy for that and each engagement outside of ourselves takes away from our inner reserves.

The guerrilla is also adept at the practice of “invisible destruction.” This means that you destroy the enemy’s transport, stores, and so on, without letting him know about it until the time comes when he needs to use it. If you make a noise, or if you burn or blow up something, he may be able to catch you; also he has earlier warning of his loss, and therefore more time in which to replace it.

~ Bert “Yank” Levy⁶

SURAMEREYA MAJJAPAMADATTHANA

Finally, *suramereya majjapamadatthana*, is the precept to refrain from intoxicants that can lead to carelessness. Carefulness (*appamāda*) is an esteemed quality of mind in the Bud-

dha's teaching and intoxicating substances have the power to detach us from the sense of responsibility of our actions, to not recognize the harm we can create, and to not care about it. Even though we have not overcome the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion in the mind we become increasingly aware of their potential to cause suffering for ourselves and others. This sensitivity to what is at stake in the struggle deepens our commitment to wholesome, non-harming actions. We are at war with mental defilements and the more we recognize the gravity of that, the greater responsibility we feel to show up for the battles with as much force of mindfulness, compassion, and skillfulness as possible.

Games that have no social function and that hurt the morale of the troops and the consumption of alcoholic drinks should both be prohibited.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara⁷

The levity and detachment that comes from intoxication is of course one of the primary reasons we do it: to get relief from the burden of responsibility, to let loose and take the pressure off. On one hand this impulse helps show the intensity of the pressure we feel—the prison that we experience life as—and so it is understandable that we long for relief. But when do we seek medicine that provides true relief and when do we seek “medicines” that end up creating more problems for us, more suffering, because of our heedless actions while we are under their influence? Our lives can change course dramatically from a brief moment of distraction, of unchecked aggression, of unrestrained craving. Why would we want to induce delusion?

Why would we not want to take full responsibility for our actions so that we can secure the goodness of the future results?

Of course we can also become addicted to things like our electronic devices that we use to distract us, to numb us out. This precept is just as meaningful for social media as for alcohol. What are we ingesting and why? What is the impact on our minds, hearts, bodies? This is a crucial investigation not just for the sake of moral purification, but for wisdom—of seeing what leads to what.

It does not mean that we do not take our medications that we may need for mental or physical health. It does not necessarily mean that we don't have a place of moderate and careful use of foods or substances that may stimulate or relax us to some extent, or which are used for cultural or spiritual purposes. It means that we are committed to being extremely careful and motivated by genuine concern for our wellbeing, our growth, and the growth and wellbeing of others so that we make these decisions in the safest way, in the safest conditions, for all. These precepts are meant to make us more relaxed, not more rigid, because we are confident in the wholesomeness of our actions.

There are places where we can take the precepts too far, where we are compelled to create uptight or dogmatic lifestyle choices that end up increasing the brittleness and bitterness of our hearts. *Dāna* and *silā* are designed to make the mind more malleable, more workable, by infusing our actions with beautiful carefulness and well-wishing. If we notice that our commitments are making us more rigid—more judgmental about

ourselves or others—we should take precautions to re-evaluate.

For the guerrilla yogi ethical rigor is more important than ethical purity. We live in society and need to be able to adopt to and adapt to social norms to some degree if we are going to be able to create the stable and supportive conditions for our own development. This can be a difficult path. There are norms in our society that may strike us as deeply immoral and through our participation in them we feel responsible for their propagation.

We can be agents for social good and should do our best to be on the side of historical righteousness, but we should also be humble and recognize where it is important to make hard demands of ourselves morally and where it is essential to have some flexibility in order to survive and practice. There are no hard and fast rules but certainly the more deeply we are entwined in society the more we must acquiesce. The guerrilla yogi is in an in-between land that can be hard to balance, but the fruit of this struggle is some of the richest part of our spiritual lives if we bring to it a flexible rigor.

On the other hand, we may decide that we need to take a hard stance against a social norm that becomes irreconcilable. This is a powerful practice and we should simply be aware of the ways that it is also a purifying practice, one that may call up all kinds of tensions and hardships in our lives. Moral actions can be the direct cause of negative repercussions for us, turning some of the traditional notions of karma on their heads.

As acts of sabotage the tactics of morality can cut both ways. The tensions brought about by such disruptions can

bring a person, a family, or a society toward crises. If conditions are right, that crisis will lean toward revolution.

It is possible to paralyze entire armies, to suspend the industrial life of a zone, leaving the inhabitants of a city without factories, without light, without water, without communications of any kind, without being able to risk travel by highway except at certain hours. If all this is achieved, the morale of the enemy falls, the morale of his combatant units weaken, and the fruit ripens for plucking at a precise moment.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara⁸

If the people are on your side, it can go this way. On the other hand, if conditions are not yet ripe and the population not fully supportive, the crisis can backfire and without lights, food, gas, etc a society can easily turn against you. This can cause catastrophic and existential harm to a guerrilla movement.

The internal costs to over-rigid ethical commitments can be equally destructive. For ten years I refused to pay federal income taxes out of moral disgust with the war in Iraq. Instead, I gave that money to underfunded people and organizations I felt were doing important work in the world that I believed in. While this moral stance was strengthening and clarifying, it was also destabilizing for my social, material, and mental well-being. Eventually I came to the conclusion that in order to protect the conditions to sustain my physical and spiritual development I needed to live in a less ethical relationship to society⁹. There are others who determine that the risks are worth the commitment and continue in their commitment clear-eyed but taking responsibility for the inevitable results of their actions. The most important part is not the outcome but the willingness to struggle.

Society — as well as culture, family, friends — are real forces determining the conditions of our practice. We often need to find appropriate distances from the negative or stuck aspects of these, but we should be very careful about total rejection, of bringing them to crisis, because often we need the support of these relationships more than we imagine. We must be careful not to turn our moral determination into judgmental moralism toward people in our lives. People will turn against you if they feel you judging them, if your parameters are too dogmatic and uptight they will exclude everyone in your life. That degree of isolation should only be taken if absolutely necessary. You may not want to use a cell phone, social media, gasoline because of its perceived negative influence on the world, but in doing so the yogi also alienates themselves from the world, whose support, on some level, they may need. We cannot starve ourselves as an effective means to cutting off the enemies supplies.

Additionally, we must remember that most restrictive decisions about sugar, gluten, caffeine and the like, are not moral questions. Limiting our consumption of those things may be healthy for us, but we should be careful to think of those decisions as ethically significant. The decision of whether or not to eat meat does have profound moral dimensions but it is important to remember that most Buddhist monastics around the world are not vegetarians. Even though eating meat involves killing, they abide by what they believe to be a higher ethic to accept whatever food is offered to them¹⁰. Most of their offerings come from impoverished laity and the monastics don't want to place any extra burden on their generosity. This basic lesson of gratitude and adaptability over preference and

rigidity is something most westerners could use some education around especially when it takes into consideration what mental qualities we are supporting by our restrictions.

When Queen Lili'uokalani's kingdom of Hawai'i was overthrown by American sugar and pineapple plantation owners, she had to accept that the conditions were not right for the Hawaiian people to successfully defend their nation. It was not worth the bloodshed that would not have worked. One can only imagine what soul-ache this position must have caused,

The way to lose any earthly kingdom is to be inflexible, intolerant and prejudicial. Another way is to be too flexible, tolerant of too many wrongs and without judgment at all. It is a razor's edge. It is the width of a blade of pili grass.

~ Queen Lili'uokalani¹¹

Dāna and silā are always available. We may not be able to practice vipassanā formally all day long, but we are acting all day long, making nearly invisible decisions about our behavior that have a moral quality to be careful about but also to explore. We may not be penetrating into the deepest nature of all conditioned phenomena when we are at work, but we are interacting, getting triggered, getting excited, and we have the power to use these places and times to chip away at the infrastructure of greed, hatred, and delusion in our lives. It can be the most meaningful activity of our daily insurgence as guerrilla yogi. The Buddha spoke of silā as a garland, our greatest adornment. If we cultivate this garland and the beauty and purity of our hearts, it is the greatest gift to ourselves and to the world around us.

Those who engage in bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct leave themselves unprotected. Even though a squadron of elephant troops might protect them, a squadron of cavalry troops, a squadron of chariot troops, a squadron of infantry troops might protect them, still they leave themselves unprotected. Why is that? Because that's an external protection, not an internal one. Therefore they leave themselves unprotected. But those who engage in good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct have themselves protected. Even though neither a squadron of elephant troops, a squadron of cavalry troops, a squadron of chariot troops, nor a squadron of infantry troops might protect them, still they have themselves protected. Why is that? Because that's an internal protection, not an external one. Therefore they have themselves protected.

That is what the Blessed One said.

Having said that, the One Well-Gone, the Teacher, said further:

Restraint with the body is good
Good is restraint with speech.
Restraint with the heart is good.
Good is restraint everywhere.
Restrained everywhere—conscientious—
one is said to be protected.
~ Buddha, Atta-Rakkhita Sutta¹²

As the guerrilla yogi slowly dismantles the infrastructure of the enemy's pathways, they also build their own network of resistance paths: trails, roads, and information networks within the mind and between the mind and body that facilitate the rebellious forces of kindness, generosity, wisdom, compassion, and love.

The Ho Chi Minh trail was a vast network of interlinking roads and paths through Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos that allowed the North Vietnamese guerrilla forces to penetrate

the South and supply their allies there during the war in Vietnam. It's functionality or destruction was essential to the success of the war—and both sides knew it. Relentlessly bombed by American forces for their strategic value, these roads required tireless work rebuilding and rerouting on the part of the Viet Cong.

The guerrilla yogi must likewise acknowledge the way in which the flow of good actions, of generosity and care, lays the basic groundwork for the success of their broader campaign—like a Ho Chi Minh trail of the mind. Even without attack, any trail in the jungle will quickly become absorbed back into the forest if not regularly trodden and maintained. The paths of morality will be the most obvious and vulnerable target for the enemy's attacks and must be protected and reinforced relentlessly.

When the great vipassanā master Sayadaw U Lakkhana was dying in a Mandalay hospital, a friend Steven was at his bedside, distraught. Sensing this, Sayadaw opened his eyes, turned to him and said, “Don't worry Steven: I have total faith in my kamma.”

If you let yourself feel the power and beauty of what a mind like that would be like: to have no fear of death, no fear of the future, no fear of anything in the next moment, utterly confident in the momentum of your past actions, you will imagine the deepest freedom of the heart. Sayadaw used to say, “Our actions are our only true inheritance.” In other words, all other phenomena in this world are fleeting and undependable, changing out of our control, but if we take responsibility for our actions—and for the forces motivating our behavior—we will benefit most abundantly from the

peace and beauty that this purified heart provides us. This is the essence of the teaching of kamma. It is the force of our inevitable victory.

Keeping a connection to our goodness and our worthiness is not trite feel-goodism, it is essential to the path, to our sense of confidence and our capacity for concentration and development of the mind. We have all done harm, engaged in unskillful behavior which we cannot undo. But we can have confidence in our actions from this point forward and that possibility is a great promise.

Generosity and morality as acts of sabotage are not merely preliminary practices: they represent the entire trajectory and fulfillment of the path. Dāna, silā, and bhavana are constantly reinforcing one another, supporting one another, purifying one another. Creating a foundation of ethical care provides the internal stability, the revolutionary infrastructure, to begin the work of investigation of the mind and body. To fully develop our generosity and purify our ethics the tools of insight are required, particularly as we start to be curious about and able to see the motivations of our actions. In this way we see it is not a one-way path to bhavana but that the three are like a tripod, mutually supporting our practice, a perfect and powerful tool for destroying the machinery of confusion.

They represent the fulfillment of the path because all acts of stinginess, greed, or harm have their roots in the misunderstanding of the mind that we are a solid self, that we can find security and happiness in transient things. dāna and silā are destructive to the infrastructure and mechanics of the self but are only fulfilled in entirety when the empire of the Self is

completely overthrown. They are building the new world as they destroy the old.

O house-builder, you are seen! You will not build this house again. For your rafters are broken and your ridgepole shattered. My mind has reached the Unconditioned; I have attained the destruction of craving.

~ Buddha, Jaravagga Sutta¹³

~ 2 ~

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Bhavana



Your sense of touch must also be used in finding your way at night, as well as your sense of hearing and of smell. Pig-styes, cowsheds, breweries, tanneries, all have their distinguished fragrance — if I may use the term — and their scent will help you locate yourself. The ripple of a brook or the croaking of frogs in a certain pool— all these things, carefully memorized on your nightly excursions, may in the future help you to find your way at night when finding your way is a matter of life or death, life for you and death for the enemy.

~ Bert “Yank” Levy, *Guerrilla Warfare*¹

AS OFTEN AS NOT, the territories guerrillas are trying to defend or reconquer are the neighborhoods, villages, and communities they grew up in; places that are a part of them and of which they are a part. It is this intimate knowledge of the place—the roads and buildings, hills and hollows, as well as the people and culture—that must be leveraged to its fullest extent to give the irregular armies their advantage.

Intimate relationships with the people and the land on which a guerrilla movement is surviving and fighting are essential to maximize their advantage.

In the Democratic Autonomous region of Rojava in Northern Syria, the feminist liberation movement has organized itself into councils of various sizes as a way of ensuring direct-democratic authority in the revolution. The councils exist at four levels: the commune of 30-200 households; the neighborhood of 30 communes organized by a coordinating board; the district which is city-size made of delegates from the communes and neighborhoods coordinated by a smaller group from within that body called the TEV-DEM; and finally, the People's Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK) made up of the TEV-DEM from district councils. This design is built upon the faith that it is the people closest to the issues—at the block level—who have the direct experience and social bonds necessary to best address most issues affecting their communities. They can do so more effectively than elected bureaucrats who live at a distance from the barrio and who manage based on ideas and priorities that become increasingly at odds with those of the people. As individuals move to higher levels of council, they do so as delegates not as representatives with decision-making power. This design has been as much a process of the re-organization of political power as a strategy of social re-education.

One of the greatest intellectual influences on this movement for “democratic confederalism,” Abdullah Öcalan, put it this way,

In contrast to centralized administrations and bureaucratic exercise of power, confederalism proposed political self-administration, in which

all groups of the society and all cultural identities express themselves in local meetings, general conventions, and councils. Such a democracy opens political space for all social strata and allows diverse political groups to express themselves. In this way it advances the political integration of society as a whole. Politics becomes a part of everyday life.

~ Abdullah Öcalan²

This premise is no less true for the guerrilla yogi. Liberating insight is a direct result of this same kind of intimacy with the landscapes of the body, the mind, of the textures and tones of all our sense experiences—the culture of our being—which is diminished by greater conceptual distance: what we believe about the body, what we perceive about a sound, what we imagine about an image, what we think about a thought. The revolutionary partisan may think they know the place they live and grew up in, but upon closer examination it becomes evident that their mind has tended to ignore the familiar—to take it for granted—and has not actually paid very close attention to the details of one's own home and community. The guerrilla yogi likewise thinks they know who they are, but when they sit down to examine ourselves the details of that knowledge are very fuzzy and the closer we look the more unfamiliar the inner terrain appears.

Unacknowledged and unexamined unfamiliarity with ourselves is the great danger that keeps us confined in the occupied territory of delusion, encouraging us to engage tactics for happiness that re-immense us in our confinement, that strengthen the grip of our bondage. The primary thrust of our effort in vipassanā, then, is to see and understand with more and more clarity and in more and more detail the depths of

what is happening in our inner world. The enemy tends to operate just below the surface and so the more light we shed on our inner landscape the fewer the shadows delusion has in which to operate. This is Buddhist process of mind-cultivation or meditation: bhavana. It is our primary weapon against the forces of delusion.

When we close our eyes and come to sit and try to gather our attention around the sensations of the body, for example, we generally find it very difficult to connect with the direct physical experience for any significant amount of time. Instead we fall back on the conceptual overlay we have of the body. Notions, opinions, interpretations, ideas or visual impressions of “belly” or “hand” or “body” tend to dominate the experience—or else the mind just wanders off. At first we don’t even know we are doing this because we cannot tell the difference between the word “hand” and the direct experience of pressure, tingling, or warmth in that part of the body. To experience the direct physical sensations of pressure, or tingling, or warmth in the area of the hand is so simple but it is considered to be a profound accomplishment in the development of our meditation practice precisely because we are conditioned to live mostly in our minds, in our thoughts about life, and not in the direct physical, sensory, or mental/emotional experiences. Reality is all around us but we don’t live there. We’ve barely even been there for a visit.

We live like this because mental fabrications feel safer than reality. Our minds are not trained to abide in the wildness of reality in a way that feels safe and stable. Mental fabrications feel safe because they seem like they can be controlled. In truth they are conjured and re-conjured so rapidly as to appear

stable. Like sand castles that crumble with each wave of time, we can spend our whole lives anxiously rebuilding these constructions, rehashing our worries and reshaping our opinions: rarely taking a moment to investigate and explore the nature of the sand, sun, wind, and water directly. Living like this—at a measured distance from reality—is exhausting. It takes relentless shoring up of constantly dissipating notions. Yet it also feels safer than reality because it is more familiar. Even if it is painful or scary, at least it is a familiar agony that we so often prefer to letting go into the unknown of the world.

With the body, similarly, we are only interested in it to the degree it feels good and can be controlled, which on a very subtle level we all try to do neurotically. Reality is always changing, undependable, core-less and so it takes powerful mental forces to be able to observe these actualities in a way that is wisening and not frightening.

As a way to manage the overwhelm of the project, the Buddha described four fields of engagement with all conceivable phenomena, four theaters of war, well known as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*): body (*kaya*), feeling-tone (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and their manifold interactions (*dhamma*).

Our defacto strategy of the Empire of Self is through the constant enforcement of ideas and views about ourselves (and the world) onto our experience. The four-foundations model does not deny the value of the thinking mind but it puts it into egalitarian relationship with the totality of our human experience. Thought is treated in exactly the same as the body. The Four Foundations are not intended to be hierarchical nor necessarily sequential. The practice of one is not better than

the practice of another. They are all always arising and passing, dependent upon conditions, out of our control. If seen clearly, they all lead in the same direction. They are all viable doorways into insight. There is no sensory experience outside of them. All of them lead the way to all of the others. Ultimately, none can be avoided. Our approach to them is simply a matter of wise strategy and skillful means.

We can think of the four-foundations frame as an assurance against the bureaucratic domination of the revolution by the thinking mind. As with the Rojava project, the four foundations can be understood as a means of diminishing representative power as concepts about ourselves are sublimated to training in awareness in the direct experience at the level. In this way there is a profound democratization process that we train in and build as we allow all experiences to express themselves outside of the mind's interpretation and preference.

When the invader pierces deep into the heart of the weaker country and occupies her territory in a cruel and oppressive manner, there is no doubt that conditions of terrain, climate, and society in general offer obstacles to his progress and may be used to advantage by those who oppose him. In guerrilla warfare we turn these advantages to the purpose of resisting and defeating the enemy.

~ Mao Zedong³

KAYA

Physical sensations of kaya are the most tangible of all of these and so is our most accessible point of entry into revolutionary engagement with our experience. Practicing primarily in this terrain is called kayanupassana. Because it is such a vast and varied field, physical sensations can be further broken down

into four general categories corresponding to the “four great elements” of earth, air, fire, and water. It is not to say that the body is literally made up of these elements but that we can describe our experience of physicality in a way that corresponds to them. The spectrum of experience from hardness or softness in the body can be labeled as “earth.” Air element is understood as the range of pressure and movement we can feel in the body; experiences including tingling, electrical pulses, abdominal gas and so on that we can mentally note as “air, air.” Fire element is experienced in the range of warmth and coolness, noted as “fire, fire.” Moisture or dryness, cohesion or distention, we can note as “water.” Often these forms of labelling can be more helpful than more precise descriptions because they allow for a basic conceptual acknowledgement but still allow and invite the attention into a more direct relationship with the experiences.

VEDANĀ

Once the mind has the ability to directly experience these elemental dynamics of the body, the yogi moves on to investigate the pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling tone, or vedanā, that arises in response to all sensation. vedanā is a mental feeling tone that arises simultaneously with all sensory experience and is experienced itself as either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. It is this aspect of experience that tends to entangle us so profoundly. The mind is deeply conditioned to respond to pleasant experience by grasping, unpleasant by rejecting, and neutral by ignoring, and thus the unnoticed experience of vedanā sets off a chain of events that reinte-

grates us into the cycles of suffering. Sensitizing to this aspect of our moment to moment existence is called *vedenanupassana*.

Our practice is not designed to change *vedanā*—to make the unpleasant pleasant—but rather to see that the mind is subject to a constant bombardment of changing feeling tone in regards to the body, the other senses, and the mind itself—and that this bombardment is largely out of our control. It is the hardship of this uncontrollability, despite our most sincere and determined efforts, that is the key to inspiring our movement toward freedom. As we accept the flux and see the Self as no more fixed than anything else we stop identifying with the need for pleasure to stay, for the unpleasant to depart, for things to be how we want them to be and engage each moment with genuine interest and care.

CITTA

Seeing all this wanting and not-wanting we naturally become more openly aware of the mind/heart (*citta*): of knowing, of emotion, of the mind flavored by various states—including anger and doubt, rapture, joy. Thoughts themselves are *cittas*. Notions and perceptions are *cittas*. If we consider the fields of “mind” and “heart” we begin to recognize the spheres of what is included in this theater of experience and the difficulty of trying to establish mindfulness there. The qualities of *citta* are even more varied than those of body and so are also broken down in numerous more discrete phenomena, but most basically: wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*). Getting to know the vast subtlety of variation of mental experience is

important but we should never neglect the power of simply recognizing mind as mind. Observation of the mind and of knowing itself is called cittanupassana.

DHAMMA

Dhamma is a term that is even more oblique and has a wide range of uses and meanings. In the case of the establishment of mindfulness, it is sometimes used as a catch all to describe that which does not fall into the other three categories (such as seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling—though these are considered aspects of kaya in some frameworks) but is also used as a place where more complex notions of interrelationship are explored and understood. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*), the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariya saccāni*), the hindrances (*nivāraṇa*), the five aggregates (*khandha*), and the framework of dependent origination (*paṭīcasamupāddha*) are all considered aspects of dhamma because they point to the way that the phenomena of being and becoming are dependent upon one another: *When this occurs, that occurs. When this stops, that stops. With the arising of this comes the arising of that. With the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.* Examining the causal relationship between mind and body, between various forces of mind, is considered dhammanupassana.

Progression along of four foundations of mindfulness follows a path toward the more and more subtle aspects of reality. These are the fields of war against the armies of Mara and they encompass all that can be directly known. And while we may experience our lives as a much less distinct jungle quagmire of

these realms, it is important to become aware of their distinctions as a way to make the battlefield more approachable, more discernible, more winnable.

Not only should you lean the outlines of buildings, and other marks, from all sides. You should know what they look like from a lower sight-level — when you are lying down. For the day may come when you cannot stand up to look for these landmarks: you will be crawling low through cover. You will be surprised to find the difference there sometimes is in the view of a thing from the standing and in a prone position.

You can practice this by day and night, on your way to work or on your evening or Sunday walks. Keep your eyes skinned and your memory keen. You cannot know every foot of your territory, but you can make that your ideal and aim for it. Mark every road, path, copse, shrubbery, bit of bracken, hill, hedge, valley, railway line, tunnel, culvert, power station, church steeple, isolated cottage or house, river or stream, pond, lake; and note, by compass, how they lie. And every indentation, dip and hollow, and the winding course of streams...

~ Bert “Yank” Levy⁴

Understanding the various ways we can structure our rebellion helps us become more deeply familiar with our vast mental and physical terrain. During the Algerian Revolution, the vast territory of the country was similarly divided into six *Waliyas*, or autonomous zones, within which the efforts for liberation were distinct but cohesive. Our experience of being can also be thought of as the aggregation of six zones of relentless turbulent experience: the six sense-doors of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touch, and the mind. Just as we use the four foundations of mindfulness as our primary map of the battle-

fields, we can use the schema of the six sense doors—our own six sense *waliyas*—when they make more intuitive sense.

The Buddha also spoke of the five aggregates or heaps (*khandha*) “of clinging” which human beings tend to confuse for a solid Self: form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*sankhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). This is another way of breaking down and understanding the terrain of human experience into the realms by which through insight we can manageably engage in order to come into greater freedom.

Traditional military philosophy states that the fundamental approach of war is to seek out the enemy’s core centres of power, its army, and destroy it in battle. But since the irregular army cannot attempt such a maneuver the strategy of the guerrilla is to be free to move about the vast terrain that is outside of the enemy’s fortified positions. In those places it can be a destructive nuisance: isolating bases, disrupting communications, and building strength. The whole country is the front and there is no rear—no defensive position,

Our largest resources, the Beduin on whom our war must be built, were unused to formal operations, but had assets of mobility, toughness, self-assurance, knowledge of the country, intelligent courage. With them dispersal was strength. Consequently we must extend our front to its maximum, to impose on the Turks the longest possible passive defense, since that was, materially, their most costly form of war.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁵

For the guerrilla yogi, we don’t try to contend immediately with the most entrenched entanglements of the heart and we don’t try to wake the sleeping dragon because we are feeling

brave. We focus our attention on the vast territory of the mind and body that is easily accessible to us—in which we are not likely going to encounter serious resistance—and build up our training and fortitude there.

We must not take Medina. The Turk was harmless there. We wanted him to stay at Medina, and every other distant place, in the largest numbers... His stupidity would be our ally, for he would like to hold, or to think the held, as much of his old provinces as possible. This pride in his imperial heritage would keep him in his present absurd position—all flanks and no front.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁶

Guerrilla yogi training is designed to unfold initially in the most neutral aspects of our experience, as the breath is for many people, because if we tried to train with the most intense emanations of the Armies of Mara we would find ourselves quickly overwhelmed. The method intentionally creates a platform for us to attend to the aspects of our experience where we are most able to maintain connection of concentration and interest, of lovingkindness and equanimity, in order to strengthen these powerful capacities of the heart. This is not to say that it is easy maintaining a healthy relationship with more neutral experiences. It is not. But at least we have a chance to develop the skills in places that are less volatile and where our loss will be of less consequence.

And while we may intend to choose the most neutral terrain for our training, we cannot always control the arising of more intense experience. Over time we will surely be confronted with the more volatile aspects of our being—the most challenging corners of our minds and bodies. We must never

feel that these experiences represent failure. Rather they are proof of our heart's increasing capacity to bear witness to the reality of our conditioning, to understand it more and more fully.

The ancients said, "Tai Shan is a great mountain because it does not scorn the merest handful of dirt; the rivers and seas are deep because they absorb the waters of small streams..." This is something that patriots will not neglect.

~ Mao Zedong⁷

Our obstacles are very often our most important vehicles for insight. Traditionally, our primary obstacles in the practice are known as the five hindrances (*nivāraṇa*) of: 1. sense-desire (*kāmacchanda*); 2. ill-will (*byāpāda*); 3. sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*); 4. restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*); and 5. doubt (*vicikicchā*). This list encompasses the spectrum of some of the most difficult mental experience we can encounter during our meditation practice. When we try to apply our attention to a mental or physical object these five forces assert themselves very powerfully because they are some of our most deeply-trained defenses against the uncontrollability of reality.

We may notice them most clearly while on intensive meditation retreats. Sometimes we can be so powerfully overwhelmed by one of them that it feels as if it will derail our practice entirely. But we must remember that these experiences are also part of our native habitat, the terrain of our inner world that we seek to know and seek to build a relationship of interest and kindness with. We may think, "I didn't

come to meditation to get more aversive, I came to become more kind. This isn't working. I'm no good at this." But this is not so. It is just sleepiness. Just wanting. Just aversion. And they are all worthy of our attention. It is necessary to bring our attention to them and try to understand them and know them fully, inside and out, if we are ever to overcome their grip on us.

As we come to map out our inner terrain we must try our best to treat each experience with the same respect and sense of worthiness of being known, careful to not believe our prejudices about the value of some experiences over others. Sometimes we think we have come to meditation to wrestle powerful demons but we find ourselves just falling sleep on our cushion. We get frustrated and bored because this hardly feels like an engagement worthy of a noble warrior. But the fact is we don't really know sleepiness. We don't have a relationship with it. We don't understand it because we don't value it as worthy of our attention. We think of it as an annoyance: something in the way of what we really came for. But if all of our terrain must be known—from the abandoned buildings to the bogs to the hidden caves—and from multiple positions, we must take the time to explore it become familiar with its many layers and nuances. Sleepiness, or restlessness for that matter, are fundamentally important places to understand the nature of consciousness. What is the texture of the sleepy mind? What kind of physical sensations do we notice? Where is the Self when we are asleep? If we think sleep is a problem and we cannot be genuinely interested in it, how do we expect to relate to our own death?

What are thoughts? What is fear? What is boredom? What are they made of? What are the conditions that lead to their arising? Their abandonment? Why do we not value them as worthy of our attention? There should be nothing outside of the field of our potential interest or engagement. Everything must be known. We are not getting rid of anything but through insight knowledge we find security in reality and make ourselves impervious to the counter-effectual weapons of fabrication.

We cannot afford to ignore, belittle, or dismiss these small streams of experience as irrelevant or as obstacles. In reality they are our entry point into the deeper river of existence. Full and profound knowledge of the vast landscapes of the mind and body; the hills and valleys, the rivers and gullies, the caves and crevices, the seasons, the weather patterns, the qualities of these places at different times of day—is essential for our purpose, for overcoming the occupying armies of Mara. As the Buddha says in the Itivuttaka,

Bhikkhus, one who has not directly known and fully understood conceit, who has not detached his mind from it and abandoned it, is incapable of destroying suffering. But one who has directly known and fully understood conceit, and who has detached his mind from it and abandoned it, is capable of destroying suffering.

Humankind is possessed by conceit,
Bound by conceit and delighted with being;
Not fully understanding conceit,
They come again to renewal of being.

But those who have abandoned conceit,
And who by destroying conceit are freed,
Have conquered the bondage of conceit

and overcome suffering.

~ Buddha, Itivuttaka⁸

The series of suttas in this section repeat this phrasing word for word with the exception that the word “conceit” is replaced in each by greed, hate, delusion, anger, contempt, and finally the All, so the message is clear: it is through fully understanding these phenomena that they are abandoned, and when they are abandoned they are destroyed.

There are vast stretches of our experience that are not even known in a cursory way. These are places that we may be afraid of, gullies of the heart that we deny, places that are almost completely under the influence of greed, hatred, and ignorance. But they can just as easily be places that we don’t value—that we think are boring or mundane—or places that we take our familiarity with for granted. In this case, we are wise to be careful and must provide ourselves the proper training to be able to familiarize ourselves with those places in order to begin the process of reclaiming them for the liberated state.

We can become bored when long periods of calm persist and that boredom can detract us from investigation. Some day when weeks of unrelenting fear express themselves or an existential restlessness beyond belief takes us by the throat, we will long for that quiet sea of calm and wonder why we didn’t appreciate it at the time.

We aim for joy but do we really know it? What does it feel like internally, detached from the object of our joy? Have we really explored the textures and tones of the mind and heart when we are fervently happy? We want love, we are

enamored with love, but do we really know what love is? Can we distinguish mettā, true lovingkindness, from love that is melded with craving, that is conditional, dependent upon people's behavior?

If you take the Seven Factors of Awakening (*bojjhaṅga*) of mindfulness (*sati*), investigation (*dhamma vicaya*), energy (*virīya*), rapture (*pīti*), calm (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, you will see that an increase or decrease of any of these will contribute to a wildly different experience of what is being observed. All of them are real, valid, and worth knowing. Different degrees of concentration alone can have tremendous impact on the character of our awareness. Depending on where we are in along the progress of insight, reality can be experienced with intense diversity—with more or less clarity, faster or slower, with peace or fearfully—and not in ways whose comparative significance can be easily assumed.

My own teacher likes to point out that we live in a multidimensional universe. We are explorers of the mind and must practice whole-heartedly to come to know the varied dimensions of reality through and through, up and down, inside and out, so that we are intimately, natively, familiar with the terrain of existence—and not attached to any of it. The most powerful insight of the Buddha, and the crux of vipassanā bhavana, is not to get stuck in any of these ways of seeing as more “true” or “deep” or “real” than any other. They are all real and they are all impermanent, anicca, they are all undependable, dukkha, they are all non-self, anatta.

The more familiar we are with it all—the plethora of physical and psychological conditions and phenomena that can arise—the more we recognize the inconstant, unsatisfactory, and disintegrating nature of it all. Through intimacy we develop insight. Through insight we become disenchanted. Through disenchantment we become liberated because no experience holds any chains around or within our hearts.

It is important to remember that everything we consider Self is just as inconstant as all other phenomena, and so to fixate the mind on any particular experience of Self—even non-self—leads to destruction. With our attention we are not trying to fix, affix, fixate in relationship to the object. There are millions of experiences in between the poles of extremely identified and the utter disappearance of self and it is important not to get too hung up on which of these is a “higher” form of observation—just notice the difference.

The mind will want to land on one experience as THE experience, or the place to get back to, or the place to attain. But the tendency to develop new beliefs, new fixations, new identities, new attachments that override our old ones is not progress: it is part of the same patterning that got us oppressed in the first place. The guerrilla army learns as much as it can from a victory but does not try to then relive it over and over in each battle. It takes its growing wisdom and faith to show up dynamically for each new engagement. And just as the guerrilla army cannot afford to get bogged down in defensive positions in concentrated areas, the guerrilla yogi must learn that their greatest strength is in intimate relationship with the broadest possible terrain of the heart and mind.

It is through understanding that we break through the fortress of delusion. The job of the guerrilla yogi is to see and understand phenomena as they actually appear, not search for what we expect or try to make them how we think they should be. This familiarity requires a starting place of not-knowing, of letting go of preconceptions, views, and assumptions in order to see each moment freshly.

It is very difficult to maintain and unmanipulated investigative relationship with the body and the mind. The ability to sit still and bear the changing reality of our unfolding kamma is a training unique to vipassanā. We may be compelled to augment or diminish the intensity of physical experience or to move energy around to try to perfect the experience, as in asana-based yoga or thai chi. But in our sitting practice we don't try to transform the experience, we try to understand it. Through that understanding the mind's relationship to all phenomena is transformed.

In this war we are confronted with the seemingly inexhaustible impulse of the mind to control, something that is ultimately even harder to bear than discomfort in the body. The mind is afraid of the undependability of life and it is caught in belief that controlling is winning. But we will never win that war. The body will never fully be under our command. Nor the mind. They will always arise and pass due to natural law: conditioned based on past experience. Understanding is winning. And while other approaches such as yoga or thai chi or breath-work—or any range of other spiritual practices—may be supportive and healthy in different ways for us, unconsidered faith in them will risk threatening the integrity of our receptive vipassanā relationship with the body

and mind to the point that they are only familiar and acceptable to the degree they are under our control.

But it is of this unfamiliarity and fixation on control that we should truly be afraid because it keeps the entire battlefield under the control of the enemy and we lose our native advantage. The process of regaining a relationship with the body and the mind—one beyond manipulation and based on genuine interest—of native birthright—is the beginning of the training of vipassanā: the source of our indigenous wisdom and the cornerstone of our advantage.

Starting in easy terrain gives us confidence as we maneuver through more difficult areas. It is the key to our success and guerrilla yogi's flexibility. But when they arise, how do we come to know such powerful and dangerous forces without succumbing to them? The essence of the answer will always be the same: come into relationship with the All carefully, humbly, and sensitive to when we have the capacity to meet the phenomena fruitfully and when we will be met in ruin. The guerrilla yogi must learn how to engage and how to run.

~ 3 ~

CONTACT

Aim - Attack - Harass



Our theory is the theory of the rose, a flower that defends itself. Every being has to create methods of self-defense according to its own way of living, growing, and connecting with others. The aim is not to destroy the enemy but to force it to give up its intention to attack. Guerrilla fighters discuss this as a defensive strategy in a military sense, but it works in other areas as well. It's a method of self-empowerment.

~ Çınar Sali, TEV-DEM, Revolution in Rojava¹

GUERRILLA ACTION is defined in a large part by a commitment to persistent punctuated harassment of the enemy, rather than definitive history-changing battles. Guerrilla units do their best to avoid getting stuck in prolonged defensive positions which expose their greatest weaknesses. Instead they try to rely on engagements of their own choosing, quick ones that have the greatest possible impact with the smallest probability of loss. This can mean short raids of high intensity that punctuate long periods of quiet, or a general campaign of tenacious harassment that may not be dramatically destructive but that wears down the enemy over time. Their dexterity of movement is dependent upon a profound sensitivity to a wide

variety of environmental and internal conditions that guide them to oscillate between tactics of concentration and dispersal with the greatest skill.

He must exhaust the enemy by constant harassment.

He must attack constantly from all directions.

He must stage successful retreats, return to the attack, avoid encounters with the enemy that are not of his own making.

~ Handbook of the Irish Republican Army²

In vipassanā practice, this strategy corresponds to our application of concurrent attention. We are not trying to obliterate a single target through prolonged engagement when we know our forces are likely to be overwhelmed. We apply quick striking pressure to destabilize, weaken, exhaust, and undermine the cohesive momentum of ignorance. This is why we should not despair that our concentration seems so weak at times or that we are not having powerful insights at every sitting. We cannot expect to win the war against Mara at every moment of the rising of the breath. Instead we understand that our efforts to try to keep our attention concurrent with experience is a powerful training that over time debilitates the coherence of the empire of delusion.

Every single time we 1) connect with a target object; or 2) connect and maintain the attention there—even for a few moments; or 3) lose our connection but notice it and bring our attention back, are moments of significant victory and successful engagement. No matter how imperfect our attention is, no matter how scattered our minds seem, it is this persistent mindfulness with any target that ultimately wears the enemy

down, pushes them to act desperately, breaks up their lines of defense, and keeps us attuned to their movements at all times.

We will never lose visual contact with our enemies; that is, we will accompany them from afar keeping within field glass range so that we are constantly aware of their position. If we do not fire into their quarters every night we are not performing our duty as guerrillas. A good guerrilla is one who looks after his men not exposing them to enemy fire; he makes sure they cannot see his troops with camouflage and skillful tactics. He hounds the enemy day and night, carrying on "minuet" tactics. That is, he advances when the enemy falls back; retreating to our right when the enemy plans to encircle us on that flank. We always keep the same distance from the enemy forces: some 800 to a thousand yards by day, sending two or three of our sharpshooters up as close as possible during the night to pester them, and thus bringing about the highest number of casualties.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud³

Our essential means of engaging the target objects of experience are through concentration (*samādhi*) and mindfulness (*sati*). Concentration is the range of mental skills that can make contact with a target object and maintain it there over time. Mindfulness is the observational quality of mind that has the ability to observe and understand what it is seeing. While they are distinct, concentration and mindfulness support each other in powerful ways and their symbiotic action is required as part of our training and fulfillment of the Dhamma.

Our lives are a constant bombardment of mental and physical phenomena. Classically, each moment of conscious experience is considered to be made up of the momentary coming together of three things: striker, receptor, and ignition. The striker is the sense object: any experience within the body,

mind, or body-based senses. The receptor is the sense-base in the body itself: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind-base. The ignition is consciousness that arises spontaneously when they come together. This coming together of conditions is called a moment of contact (*phassa*). When a visual object impinges upon sensitivity of the eye there is seeing consciousness. When a sound impinges upon the ear sensitivity, hearing consciousness arises. The mind is being impinged upon by a relentless torrent of contact at each sense door throughout our lives. This is what our life is, broken down: an endless assailing of moments of contact.

War is hell, but contact is a motherfucker.

~ Written on an American G.I.'s helmet in Vietnam

Each moment of contact—of hearing, smelling, seeing, tasting, touching, and cognizing—is said to condition a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling-tone (*vedanā*). Because our minds can't keep up with the barrage mindfully, we are overwhelmed and defer to our deepest survival training—craving toward the pleasant, aversion toward the unpleasant, and delusion toward the neutral. We drown in the river of experience and the mind's contraction around experience—a “great flood,” as the Buddha called it—being pulled toward and pushed away from phenomena at a horrifying speed. It is depleting, it is diminishing, it is wearying. We are besieged by contact from our moment of birth until we die, and if you believe the ancients, on and on again from there until we take up the task of liberating ourselves from the cycle of becoming.

There are those of us who survive this bombardment by inclining toward the pleasant, by grasping at and seeking out new, exciting, pleasurable experiences: “craving types.” Others are oriented more toward aversion and have a deeper sensitivity to the unpleasant. They tend to reject, push away, or withdraw in fear from painful or threatening experiences: “aversive types.” Some are “deluded types” and defend themselves through confusion, dissociation, and find themselves instinctively drawn to the comfort of neutral territory. The strengths of craving types can be a capacity for enthusiasm, faith, and lovingkindness. Aversive types naturally tend toward wisdom and clarity. Deluded types incline toward balance. The shadows of these, though, are addiction, hatred, and doubt. To counteract these shadows, craving types are encouraged to practice in austere environments, aversive types in comfortable and beautiful ones, while deluded types are supported by a strong structure. All of us have all three built into us. This consideration of tendency is intended to demonstrate how each of us often has a certain hierarchy of defilement which can be helpful to acknowledge and understand. These tendencies are powerful and deeply engrained in how we related to every minuscule moment of experience. Our greatest weaknesses are often the shadow of our greatest strengths and this understanding is essential for the training of the guerrilla yogi.

No matter our basic “type,” our social and evolutionary training is to concentrate our attention on objects or move our attention away from them based on their pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral character. We become transfixed with that which we hate, engrossed with that which we are enamored, ignore that which is boring, and dissociate from that which is overwhelm-

ing. These tendencies are not merely training from this lifetime. We have evolved for millions of years from animals who used fear and craving as their primary survival mechanisms. This behavior is deeply encoded in our consciousness and should not be pathologized. It got us here. We owe it a lot. But it is also a prison, and keeps us trapped in this prison—indebted, confined, and invested in it—and we are seeking release. When we begin to practice meditation we are making the decision to stop running from this assault, to bear the burden of its force, to directly engage it as best we can. We train for war and peace with as much clarity and kindness as we can muster.

CONCENTRATION AND MINDFULNESS

Concentration (*samādhi*) is most fundamentally the ability to 1) direct the application of mind to a target (*vitakka*) and 2) to maintain that application over time as the target changes (*vicāra*). Aiming (*vitakka*) and sustaining (*vicāra*) the attention are the first two subatomic elements of concentration, what are called *jhānic* factors; the others being rapture (*pīti*), pleasure (*sukha*), and tranquility (*ekaggatā*).

The urban guerrilla's reason for existence, the basic condition in which he acts and survives, is to shoot...Shooting and marksmanship are the urban guerrilla's water and air.

~ Marighella

If we think of mindfulness as a bullet—that makes a powerful connection with the target object—concentration is the barrel of the gun: the vehicle that channels the attention by which its

potential is reached. You can throw bullets at your enemy but it won't do much damage. Without the barrel of concentration the spark of mindfulness cannot connect with the target in a meaningful way. This connection of mindfulness to the target is the absolute source of insight and so its importance cannot be overstated. As objects are appearing with unrelenting speed, the attention must learn to be like a machine-gun of equal capacity. It is a training whose difficulty cannot be overstated.

This is the weapon. With this weapon you can fight your battle. With this weapon you can be victorious. If you fight with a pillow as a weapon, you cannot win.

~ Webu Sayadaw⁴

When the jhānic factors of vitakka and vicāra are applied to a target of our choosing—the stream of sound, the body as a whole, a physical touchpoint, or the breath (for example)—we have our first weapons to counter the conditioned tendencies of the mind's attention and the overwhelming oppression of greed, hatred, and delusion.

When we try to aim and sustain the attention on our target we immediately encounter the millions of other objects that call upon us: ones that are more interesting, more exciting, more scary, more urgent—and we see the power of the heart's pull in those directions. One cannot overstate how difficult and radical it is to target the attention in the field of chaotic action outside of the siren call of the pleasant or the painful. It is revolutionary because it begins to break us out of our profound conditioning to only expend our force of attention on that which feeds on our greed, hatred, and ignorance.

PĪTI

If we are successful over a period of time in keeping the attention on this target, we begin to develop a genuine interest that is beyond this polarity of pleasure and pain. This is the beginning of what we call rapture (*pīti*). It is a natural engrossment with experience, sometimes referred to as “joyful interest,” that has the ability to be fully engaged and interested regardless of *vedanā*. With enough persistent application of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, through jungle and desert, mountain and valley, we find *pīti*, with its accompanying energy and enthusiasm and finally calm that is the doorway to deeper exploration.

The sensations that arise alongside *pīti* can be quite powerful—from tingling to swaying to incredible lightness to disturbing sea-sickness. If they arise, we should notice these sensations, notice the enjoyment or even intoxication, but ultimately bring the attention back to the primary object. We can get transfixed by this *pīti* and so we must be cautious. We are not wanting to reject this energy or shut it down, because we need to be able to use it to deepen our engagement. But our attention is often not purified enough to be able to engage with these powerful sensations without becoming subject to craving, aversion, and delusion so it is best to recognize this and make sure to not lose the connection with the primary target. Otherwise it is just another trap, a more powerful pleasant sensation—a “spiritual” one—which seduces us away from our objective and back into the dynamics of pleasure and pain. It was persistent attention that brought about these experience, and

maintained, balanced attention that will move us through to the next phase of concentration: happiness (*sukha*).

SUKHA

In *sukha*, we gain a powerful foothold in what is considered wholesome pleasure. The pleasure of seclusion, of non-distractedness, of collectedness and creates a buoyancy of mind necessary to pursue the challenges of the path. It is not a pleasure that comes from sensory objects themselves but from the forces of concentration that have developed through the practice. It is beautiful to feel the goodness of practice in our minds and bodies. It is a great support to our efforts. These pleasures should be treated as meaningful fuel for your practice—something that can help invigorate us, inspire us, motivate us, but should also not distract us. We must still keep the mind suspicious of the quagmire of enchantment and focused on the target.

EKAGGATĀ

If concentration is pursued, this pleasure can smooth out into a place of deeper stillness, of tranquility based on one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), the ease of mind that is the doorway to the deepest peace of equanimity and the unconditioned. When this place of tranquility is explored, we come to see how unrefined and restless the pleasure of *sukha* can be, and are compelled by the simple purity of this kind of stillness, the profound restfulness of this experience.

The implementation of this series of *jhānic* factors is one important aspect of what is meant by attack: the application of

mindful attention to a target over time. This is how we overcome the pleasure/pain syndrome, break out of the prison of delusion, that we are trapped in. Over time, more and more of our human experience is successfully engaged in this way. But we start small and build from there.

While these units function as guerrillas, they may be compared to innumerable gnats, which, by biting a giant both in front and in rear, ultimately exhaust him. They make themselves as unendurable as a group of cruel and hateful devils, and as they grow and attain gigantic proportions, they will find that their victim is not only exhausted but practically perishing.

~ Mao Zedong⁵

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the concentration of the guerrilla yogi is the emphasis on momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*) rather than on fixed absorptive concentration (*appaṇā samādhi*). In vipassanā practice, we bring the attention to targets—physical, mental, or body-based experiences—that are changing and it is their changing nature that we are seeking to observe. The hardest thing for us to see is the source of all liberating insights because it is the ignorance and resistance to this undependability which is the source of our suffering.

Yogis could choose instead to practice fixed concentration on targets that appear to be non-changing. Most often these are conceptual objects like a visualized image, a phrase, a field of color, or a particular spiritual emotion, like lovingkindness (*mettā*). Even in some real objects change can be so subtle as to be ignored: a candle in a dark room or the subtle sensations at the tip of the nostrils when breathing.

Using extreme control of attention rather than mindfulness, the yogi ignores all other experiences. When another object of contact arises in consciousness, the yogi ignores it and comes directly back to the object of fixed concentration. After some time, the mind becomes absorbed into a state of apparent stability which can create a profound sense of tranquility and even bliss. It is blissful because you are ignoring reality and the mind is powerfully repressed. It is very powerful. It is very seductive. And because there is no wisdom in it, it also has the potential to be dangerous. The danger comes from the deepening belief in Self that can result from this kind of effort and this kind of outcome.

In the metaphors of traditional Buddhist warriorship, absorptive concentration in jhāna is like having a standing army. And like most standing armies there is less sensitivity to ethics, to motivation, and less capability of the dexterity and versatility that the guerrilla yogi depends upon. Jhāna is powerful but potentially dangerous and requires long periods of intense seclusion that are not accessible to most of us. And for those of us for whom it might be, jhāna is usually like a powerful drug whose highs are sensational but from which we must crash, over and over again, and the effects of this can be debilitating and destructive.

On one hand, concentration is the vehicle that allows for mindfulness to explore effectively. On the other, it can suffocate and stifle the dynamism of reality, cutting off our ability to grow. While keeping the mind fixed on an object is an important skill, it is a more important skill to understand why the mind moves away. If the concentration is too strong, or the emphasis on concentration too strong, we won't value

the learning that comes from the mind's wandering, from the forces that impel it to grasp or reject or trickle into the stream of fantasy. We need to see these things in order to liberate ourselves, we need to be able to learn about the mind—its beauty and its neuroses—not simply control it.

Using *khaṇika samādhi* we can train the mind on reality—in all its dynamism—and through this develop a degree of concentration that is powerful enough to penetrate but also nimble enough to keep connected through the wildness of moving life. We may choose a primary target and try to watch its changing nature, but we are not distraught when another object enters the field of attention. We have the flexibility to show up for that object as well. The guerrilla yogi uses these tools of momentary concentration because they see that it provides them with the flexibility they need to engage and disengage with the enemy at a moment's notice: and because it works. Through momentary concentration we can still attain “access concentration” which is a *vipassanā jhāna* necessary for penetrating insight to arise. Over time we may build a powerful army—one including *jhāna*—but we must do so based on solid radical foundations otherwise our army will recreate the exact dynamics of control and oppression and entanglement that it was supposed to be fighting.

It is not radical to build quickly. It is radical to build fundamentally.

~ Scott Nearing⁶

THE TARGET

The rule is:

Never give battle on the enemy's terms.

Divert him by quick attacks in other areas.

Hit him at his weakest point and drive a wedge through him.

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army⁷

Just like the guerrilla army, we do not choose the most well defended headquarters of anger and craving as our primary targets. We don't go looking for our deepest fears, our most compelling addictions, our places of most aggravating confusion as our principle targets for engagement. The guerrilla yogi always raids the enemy at its easiest and most accessible point. We know that our forces would be overwhelmed if we tried to go up against Mara's most fortified positions, so instead we choose a place of relatively neutral experience as our primary target.

For our primary target we try to pick something that is relatively neutral and still clearly evident. For some that may be the breath at the abdomen. For others, the stream of sound experience. Sometimes the sensations of the whole body seated or just a touchpoint—like the hands—are the best places to begin our training. There are endless possibilities of targets, dependent upon the particular conditions of each yogi. Generally speaking it must be something that we do not experience as very intense—not something we have a strong instinctual agenda with changing—to be our training ground for concentration and mindfulness.

When men and reserves are insufficient and the enemy is strong, the guerrilla should always aim for the destruction of this vanguard point. The system is simple and only a certain coordination is necessary. At the moment when the vanguard appears at the selected place—the

steepest possible—a deadly fire is let loose on them, after a convenient number of men have been allowed to penetrate.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara⁸

No matter what aspect of reality we are bringing our engaged attention to, we should always remember to only target phenomena that are actually and presently arisen—the vanguard point—and not try to engage an enemy or object that we imagine is behind, underneath, beyond what we are currently experiencing.

This may seem obvious but it is in direct contradiction to typical western psychological training. In western psychology we are taught to consider the Self as a layered thing: like an onion, with normal consciousness on the top, surface, level and with powerful unconscious or subconscious forces acting in the shadows, the invisible and unseen recesses of the mind. We are taught that many of these phenomena cannot be seen directly but can be inferred based on patterns and analysis that we observe in our minds and actions. In this context, the Self is a three dimensional thing: we are taught that our problems are “deep” or that other things are “on the surface,” that there are “underlying” and “hidden” tendencies in the psyche.

Classical Buddhist psychology offers a different perspective which is invaluable for the guerrilla yogi to understand. In it we see that mind-and-body experience can be directly observed only in a momentary way—in a single dimension—that is not physically or psychologically spatial. Reality only exists in a momentary way. That is to say, there is only what is experienced in the present moment, and the present moment, so fast and fleeting, can only hold one experience: a single

moment of sound, of sight, of smell, of taste, of touch, of cognition. This is the vanguard point of the armies of Mara. There is no unconscious or subconscious, only the subtly-conscious, flashing in and out of existence with immense speed. The perspective and perception of space—of inner and outer, of deep and shallow—is merely a psychological framework for managing what would otherwise be an overwhelming onslaught of sense experience.

We only have the vanguard point to engage. In our case there actually is no army behind it, no deeper well of delusion or shame or jealousy or doubt, these things we think of as our deepest problems. There is only what is arisen in the present moment. This gives us an incredible tactical advantage because we don't need to fight an entire army, we don't need to excavate and destroy our deepest fears—only attend to this one moment of fear, of sound vibration, of physical pressure. We don't concern ourselves with that which is unarisen, behind, underneath, beyond: we come to see these as monsters of our own creation, patterns of approach that only make our path harder. In this, we have a chance of success.

You have the teachings, the technique. All you need now is effort. And why do you need effort? Because during meditation the enemies will come to disturb you.

~ Webu Sayadaw⁹

ATTACK

Aiming and sustaining the attention are the building blocks of concentration but ultimately we are concerned with wisdom, which is dependent upon mindfulness: seeing clearly and

profoundly that which we are observing. While all our other weapons can help suppress the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion, it is only liberating insight that can uproot and extinguish them.

Here bhikkhus, the warrior shoots from a distance, knows the right time to shoot and breaks down a huge mass.

Bhikkhus, how does the bhikkhu shoot from a distance?

Here, bhikkhus, whatever forms...feelings...perceptions...formations...consciousnesses, in the past, future or present, internal or external, rough or fine, unexalted or exalted, at a distance or in close proximity, all that matter `is not mine, am not in it, it is not my self.' He sees this, as it really is with right wisdom.

Bhikkhus, thus the bhikkhu shoots from a distance.

~ Buddha, Yodhājīva Sutta¹⁰

Our efforts to “aim and sustain” the attention are no different than the guerrilla tactic of “attack and harass” except that by observing the mind and body we are not attacking them—we are attacking the forces of greed hatred and ignorance that mindlessly drive the direction of our attention and learning to have a relationship of wisdom and kindness to the mind and body.

The perfect attack can be considered when the Seven Factors of Awakening (*bojjhaṅga*) are entirely in balance. Mindfulness (*sati*), investigation (*dhamma vicaya*), energy (*virīya*), rapture (*pīti*), calm (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) comprise the seven

qualities of mind that when present in strength and in balance produce a consciousness that is capable of insight.

SATI

Mindfulness (*sati*) is considered the general of the bojjaṅga, the factor that gives all of them agency. It is rooted in an older Sanskrit word, *smṛti*, which can be translated as “memory.” Sati has a range of connotations such as remembrance, unforgetfulness, non-obliviousness, unconfused, presence of mind. It sees things as they truly are. It is by its nature non-elaborating, non-conjuring, non-conceptual, not shrouded in views—bare—it is considered the primary weapon against and protection from delusion. Sati is not heavy, not harsh, not rigid. It is supple, light, invisible. It has not flavor of its own. It is uncontracted, unmanipulative attention that allows phenomena to arise and pass according to their own nature without the tethers of reactivity and control.

In the suttas sati is almost always paired with clear-comprehension (*sampajañña*), so we can see that mindfulness is not merely “bare-attention” but a kind of observational force that has the power to understand very profoundly the nature of what it is observing. In many ways it is weaponized in the process of investigation.

Thinking, ‘I shall protect myself,’ establishing of mindfulness is to be practiced; thinking, ‘I shall protect others,’ establishing of mindfulness is to be practiced. Protecting oneself, bhikkhus, protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself. How, bhikkhus, does one protect others by protecting oneself? By continued practice, by development, by making great... How, bhikkhus, does one protect oneself by protecting others? By patience, by absence of cruelty, by friendliness, by kindness.

~ Buddha, Atta-rakkhita Sutta¹¹

Breaking down the complex relationship between concept and direct experience is very difficult and is why the late Mahasi Sayadaw developed his particular style of mental noting. The Mahasi method of satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā emphasizes 1) the recognition of the target in the field of awareness; 2) the deliberate mental noting of the target; and 3) the observation of the target through its duration. In this approach we silently apply a soft mental label in the mind that describes the experience as it is directly experienced. The label can be as simple as “rising, rising” or “falling, falling” if we are noting the movement of the breath in the rising and falling abdomen. It can become more nuanced and sensitive to change over time, noting “pressure... tension... tightening... unpleasant... disliking...” or “softening... warmth... pleasant... enjoyment...” Emotions such as “fear... anger... calm... compassion... sadness” should also be noted as they arise and, just as other phenomena such as “reaching...lifting...chewing... swallowing,” should be watched until they pass away or another experience becomes predominant. Noting can also be more general, “body... mind...” are sufficient if this is the scope of the field of attention in that moment.

Over time mental noting helps give us a sense of what leads to what—especially in the relationship between the mind and body where the most profound insights begin to emerge. Our entire life can be tracked through the sequence of noted experience, “pressure, hardness, throbbing, unpleasant, disliking, a visual memory, anger, blame, aversion, etc” all happen in sequence and help us investigate how life is actually unfold-

ing moment by moment rather than as the normal series of constructions conjured by the mind.

The mental label is still a description: a mental construct at a distance from the direct experience itself. It is by using the notional capacity of the mind—something that might otherwise wander in distraction—that we stay in close relationship with the experience itself. This is an essential skill for the guerrilla yogi just as noting the position of the shadows at different times of day is for the guerrilla warrior.

Over time can feel like a distraction from or an impediment to the directly observed experience. When it feels cumbersome or frustrating we let the noting go, understanding that every tactic and technique has its time and place. Noting can never keep up with the actual speed of sense-experience arising and passing. Trying to do so when the attention begins to be able to move as fast as reality will slow us down. While noting is an essential tool of the guerrilla yogi, when the conditions are unfavorable it is a technique that should always be put down in favor of sinking into the direct experience when that is an option. It is always good to know that the noting can be brought back at any time when we feel lost or disconnected from the present moment experience.

DHAMMA VICAYA

Investigation (*dhamma vicaya*) is the inquiring factor of the mind that looks more deeply into phenomena as they arise and pass. It is this tool that gives mindfulness its blade-edge to cut into experience in order to understand its true nature. Dhamma vicaya is not conceptual investigation. It is not thinking

about or ruminating on an object or an experience. It is not intellectual. It is investigation on the same terms of the target object itself—from inside the experience—and to be at its fullest capacity for insight must be motivated by genuine interest, and not seek to manipulate based on preference. It explores the wetness of water, the warmth of heat. It helps break out of believing in the solidity of the concept of “pain” and explores the molecular elements such as pressure, heat, throbbing that make up the experience we call “pain.”

What is a thought made of? What is the relationship between this unpleasant physical sensation and the mental experience that arises in dependence upon it? These questions can be asked intellectually but can only be observed truly through a committed experiential investigation—like internal espionage—into the nature of phenomena. It is through our commitment to dhamma vicaya that we purify the motivation of our attention, coming to see the humbling degree to which we are usually trying to control reality through our awareness and so find our way back to an unmanipulative exploration of non-attached interest.

A spy is a peasant working for us who accompanies the enemy troops pretending to be their friends and selling them anything they need. The type of article sold or his profits or losses are of no consequence. The important thing is that he become friendly with as many of the enemy, of all ranks as possible. He should never ask them for any information whatsoever, but rather report everything, every movement, he sees; about the equipment the enemy has; information on their delays, etc.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud¹²

VIRIYA

Investigation applied over time develops energy or strength (*virīya*). It is said to manifest in “a state of non-collapse.” Classically, *virīya* is generated for the reason of the Four Right Endeavors (*sammā-ppadhaṇā*): restraint (*samvara-ppadhāna*), abandoning (*pahana-ppadhāna*), development (*bhavana-ppadhāna*), protecting (*anurakkana-ppadhāna*) as explained here,

In this connection a bhikkhu generates purpose, strives, initiates strength, takes hold of his mind, endeavors for the sake of the non-arising of bad, unskillful dhammas that have not arisen; he generates the purpose, strives, initiates strength, takes hold of his mind, endeavors for the sake of abandoning bad unskillful dhammas that have arisen; he generates purpose, strives, initiates strength, takes hold of his mind, endeavors for the sake of the arising of skillful dhammas that have not (yet) arisen; he generates purpose, strives, initiates strength, takes hold of his mind, endeavors for the sake of establishing, of not losing, of increase, of abundance, of development, of fulfillment of skillful dhammas that have arisen¹³.

One of the greatest challenges for the guerrilla yogi is development of the extremely nuanced sensitivity to the quality of energy that is present and the effort made to manage it. So often when we make the effort to increase our energy we unknowingly also cultivate striving, forcing, and wanting. We generate a pressure on the present moment experience that is actually more interested in some future moment of being, some thing we are trying to achieve, some state we are trying to attain. Thus in our attempts at cultivating energy we undermine our efforts. For a beginning yogi, true balanced energy may not be recognizable as energy at all because it does not have that sense of contraction of the mind that we associate with effort. True *virīya* should not make us strain, should not

create a sense of spiritual constipation. More often than not, the guerrilla yogi does not try to attain any unattained state of energy but simply works with the level of energy that is present and makes the most of the current conditions.

PĪTI

Rapture (*pīti*), as has been stated, is a natural and joyful engrossment with experience that breaks through the stranglehold of preference on the mind. This enthusiasm and enthrallment with the target object can have a range of intensity, with a spectrum of physical sensations associated with it.

For one enraptured at heart, the body grows calm and the mind grows calm. When the body & mind of a monk enraptured at heart grow calm, then serenity as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

~ Buddha, Ānāpānasati Sutta¹⁴

PASSADHI

Thus we also see an important link between rapture in the mind leading to physical tranquility (*passaddhi*) or calm, resulting in mental tranquility, calm, serenity, repose. This mental settledness then provides the foundation for concentration.

SAMĀDHI

We have already discussed concentration in some detail and will continue through the chapters of this book.

UPEKKHĀ

With concentration developed and all of the other factors coming into balance, the mind develops equanimity (*upekkhā*) a profound balance of mind, stability of acceptance and understanding that comes most powerfully as a result of insight. The mind can build equanimity in many ways but the most profound *upekkhā* as insight knowledge comes from the most profound acceptance of things as they are, of not needing to make anything one way or another to feel satisfaction. It is the happiness of peace and something an arahant is said to experience at every moment at every sense door.

The seven factors of awakening can be held in this linear way but they also develop and arise and pass in less structured ways, dependent upon conditions. Our greatest effort cannot force these factors to arise or to come into balance. They are deepened simply by maturity in the practice. In fact, much of the guerrilla yogi's strength of approach is in learning how to continue to engage our targets even when certain factors or others are weak. Over time we develop more and more capacity with all of these factors and they come into balance with more frequency.

It is helpful to consider the *bojjhaṅga* as being broken down, after mindfulness, between energizing (investigation, energy, and rapture) and tranquilizing (tranquility, concentration, equanimity) factors. In this way we can also see the ways in which they keep each other in balance. Investigative interest is balanced by concentration, energy is balanced by tranquility, and rapture is balanced by equanimity, so that none of them override or dominate the other.

The *bojjhaṅga* are our primary weapons against the forces of delusion. It is through these mental factors that we

gather the capacity for insight. It is because of these insights we are able to find peace within the instability of reality because there is no coherent self that is threatened by it. We “destroy this whole mass of suffering,” as the Buddha exclaimed, by breaking it into smaller and smaller bits of experience—to the degree that we no longer believe in the solidity of anything and are freed from the need to secure ourselves a home in that which can never provide stability.

His main concern must be the care of his gun, since the weapon is his friend and protector, his means of survival. The rifle must be kept clean and oiled, especially when you are out in the country, marching by dusty paths where guns easily get dirty.

~ Alberto Abayo Giroud¹⁵

~ 4 ~

MOBILITY

Bases - Fluidity - Agility



When the situation is serious, the guerrilla must move with the fluidity of water and the ease of the blowing wind.

~ Mao Zedong, On Guerrilla Warfare¹

IN THEIR STRUGGLES with more powerful adversaries, non-traditional fighters throughout history have come to understand that they must be able to move quickly and with agility at all times: ready to fight, flee, pursue, hide, or take advantage of an unexpected opening. A small band of partisans can move quickly around a fortified base, blend into the population, or disappear into the mountains much more easily than a battalion of regular soldiers. In this way, the guerrillas leverage their weakness—lack of numbers or heavy artillery—to their benefit.

...avoid the solid, attack the hollow; attack; withdraw; deliver a lightning blow, seek a lightning decision. When guerrillas engage a stronger enemy, they withdraw when he advances; harass him when he stops; strike him when he is weary; pursue him when he withdraws. In guerrilla strategy, the enemy's rear, flanks, and other vulnerable spots

are his vital points, and there he must be harassed, attacked, dispersed, exhausted and annihilated.

~ Mao Zedong²

Most Buddhist meditation traditions emphasize the enormous power of mind needed to penetrate the target in order to attain insight. But when we think of something powerful or forceful we tend to imagine something large, something heavy, something hard—and this limitation of our imagination can prohibit us from utilizing the capacity we have more readily at hand in our vipassanā practice: a mind that is nimble and agile—able to move with reality, with life, as it is moving.

In the Dhammasaṅghani of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, the ancient compendium of dhammas in Buddhist psychology, twenty five mental factors are considered to be beautiful (*sobhana cetasika*). Twelve are in pairs of mental qualities associated with all beautiful mental states: tranquility (*citta-passaddhi* and *kayapassaddhi*), lightness (*cittalahutā* and *kayalahutā*), malleability (*cittamudutā* and *kayamudutā*), wieldiness (*cittakammaññatā* and *kaya kammaññatā*), proficiency (*cittapāguññatā* and *kayapāguññatā*) and uprightness (*cittujukata* and *kayujukata*). Often our assumptions about the powerful mind imply a rigid and unyielding quality. Yet how can we ignore that nearly half³ of the beautiful mental qualities that are encouraged in the practice of vipassanā can be described by words like *buoyant, agile, flexible, soft, workable, pliable, dexterous, proficient, learned, familiar, clever, masterful, upright, straightforward, honest*.

When we aim toward any target of observation, we see that it is moving at incredible speed. The life-cycle of a mo-

ment of consciousness happens much faster than the unskilled mind can keep up with. When we begin to train the mind to keep up with the flow of experience we come to see that most mental and physical phenomena that we already experience as fast are actually made up of even smaller moments, happening in such unbelievably quick secession that give life a sense of solidity. So even a powerfully concentrated mind, if fixed on an object in a heavy-handed way, will be too sluggish to keep up with reality as it is actually moving. To meet the movement of life with all its force the mind must be equally light, agile, able to flow with experience as it unfolds, without expectation or pre-conception. Ultimately, our mind must learn to be both powerful and agile. The dual action can feel like modes that counteract one another but it is a paradox which we must learn to trust and explore because they are both absolutely necessary.

THE GUERRILLA BASE

Guerrilla bases must have a good line of withdrawal in case of attack. Indeed they should have several routes of escape. If possible there should be only one entrance and the base should be located in an inaccessible area—mountains, marshes, uninhabited places. It should be changed frequently.

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army⁴

Before going out to attack some far-off enemy, a guerrilla campaign must first establish bases in safe territory that provide a modicum of security and stability. For the guerrilla yogi, some targets of the attention also have the ability to provide the refuge of more long-term bases for the attention to reside

in. Relatively neutral territories tend to be where we look to find a target area where we can practice the basic mechanics of engagement over the long-haul: a place we can come back to in times of overwhelming attack. While no base will be safe forever from attack, and we want to train the mind to be able to maintain fruitful contact with the wide range of human experience, cultivating a base is an important aspect of the practice.

The guerrilla yogi can try starting with a four-tiered system for their home base:

- 1) the stream of sound;
- 2) the physical sensations arising throughout the body;
- 3) the physical sensations in the hands;
- 4) the physical sensations of the rising and falling of the breath at the abdomen.

Generally, we will try to find one of these targets to use as our primary base but we must recognize that there are times where the conditions are unfavorable for success in one and so it is important to have several back-ups to help engage the attention.

Of course, experiences will inevitably arise outside of these bases and we can always bring awareness to them, relating to them with all the same qualities of mindfulness and concentration, before coming back to our primary base at our own discretion. We must be committed in our connection to our base but also be agile, ready to move as it moves and/or as conditions change. We must stay nimble and light so that we

do not get stuck or frozen on one aspect of the experience. The harder we push the mind, the duller it gets. The duller it gets, the more danger we are in... unless we are nimble enough to note the dullness and explore it. Then we are back in position and have extracted ourselves from a defensive rut.

...in selecting any kind of base, there is one essential thing to look for: it must have a good get-away — a good way out to safety if discovered or attacked; preferably more than one get-away.

~ Bert “Yank” Levy⁵

A yogi can become fully enlightened simply by watching the breath. It has all the elements needed to attain the deepest insight. Through it are revealed the nature of all four foundations of mindfulness and it can train the mind in all the skills it needs to attain its liberatory goal. We should never forget this, especially in our delusions of grandeur when we believe that to claim our victory we need to fight the most ferocious dragons.

But, for me—as an asthmatic with all kinds of allergies—for many years the breath was not neutral, was not safe. It was too evocative and entangled in patterns of anxiety and discomfort and was not a good base. So I learned to use the more open field of sensations throughout my entire body as my primary base for the attention. Over time, more and more of my physical experience became easier for me to connect with, eventually including my breath.

But even when the sensations of breathing felt more neutral, I came to see that focus on the small area of the abdomen felt too confining and the larger field of sensations of the entire body allowed the space with which to engage that

didn't agitate or frustrate my mind. Sometimes the body was too wild-open a field so I learned to narrow my attention to the area of the hands. Sometimes the hands were too narrow a field, so I opened up to the sensations of sounds around me, vibrating at the ear door. Many people who have trauma related to their bodies often benefit from opening up the attention to this wider field: learning to practice with the stream of sounds arising and passing outside the body.

When the energy is low we can consciously move between objects: a series of touch points throughout the body to help gain traction for the attention. This can look something like: right ankle, left knee, right hip, left elbow, right shoulder, lips touching, top of head, and then back on the opposite sides: left shoulder, right elbow, left hip, etc: perhaps moving at the pace of the breath. When the energy is high, we might gather the attention more firmly on a single object if it works to help us get traction with the target objects over time.

The guerrilla yogi must explore and act on what works to engage the attention with the vanguard point and cannot afford to get stuck in "shoulds" with our practice—based on preconceived ideas. They try their best to be open to what is effective. Any non-conjured direct experience that is relatively neutral can be our home base or temporary target. It does not matter what we use, if we learn to use it well. There are innumerable other objects that can be appropriate bases for the attention but the point is simple: always be ready to move and always have another place to go.

During the battle of Dong Ap Bia—or "Hamburger Hill"—in the South Vietnam, American forces attacked the Peoples Army of Vietnam jungle position for 10 days in the

remote A Sâu Valley, near the border of Laos. Normally Vietcong forces only engaged in intense battle very briefly before disappearing into the jungle, but in the case of Dong Ap Bia concentric bunker positions prepared them for a longer entrenched positional confrontation. Difficult terrain that channeled American soldiers into single-file lines, lack of suitable helicopter landing sites, unpredictable weather, and dense jungle canopy helped disorganize the American forces and made the confrontation a very bloody one.

In total, 5 US infantry battalions and 10 batteries of artillery were committed to the fight, with the US Air-force flying 272 sorties and dropping more than 500 tons of ordinance. Officially 72 Americans were killed and 372 were wounded. And while many more Vietcong lost their lives (as was often the case), at the precise moment of overwhelm most of them silently vanished into the jungle and disappeared into the darkness across the border into Laos.

The Americans claimed victory—and the hill—but found themselves owners of an insignificant scorched hilltop in the middle of nowhere, with no strategic value. Perplexed and demoralized about the meaning of such absurd efforts and profound losses, two weeks later US forces abandoned the hill which local tribesmen called "the mountain of the crouching beast." Within a month, the North Vietnamese reoccupied it. The incident was a terrible media fiasco in the US and led to an important sober reconsideration of American involvement in Vietnam from within the power structure.

It was one of many incidents that could be numerically characterized as a defeat for the North Vietnamese. But because of their dexterity and strategic coherence, and the dam-

age done to the enemy's morale, in practical terms it was an important success.

The conventional approach to meditation can certainly lead to this profound misunderstanding—that good practice means following your breath and we need to stick with it no matter what. But the goal of vipassanā is not to follow the breath. The goal is *insight* and it can happen anywhere and we should train for that precise possibility. If we are anchored at the abdomen but find ourselves thinking, we can be mindful of those thoughts, investigate the nature of thought, or sound, or the itch on our face or whatever else—and when it has passed, we can return to the breath or follow the next arising experience. No problem. If a powerful attack of terror befalls us while we are practicing, we can try to be with it in the mind, in the heart, in the body: using all the points of connection we can that maintain our mindful connection. But when we are overwhelmed, there is no point in getting destroyed. We can switch to targets outside the attack: practice mettā, move to sound, open the eyes, run back to a safe-house wherever we can find it. When the time is right we can retreat entirely without shame.

In conventional warfare an army is obsessed with “real estate.” It seeks to conquer land, consolidate its position, then move on to conquer more land. The guerrilla army knows it cannot usually defend territory for very long. After a skirmish, whether it has won or lost, it is willing to retreat to a safe location. When ready, it comes back to reconquer the land the enemy has abandoned, or even attack the enemy at its rear as it withdraws. In this way, *the guerrillas don't formally control land, but no land is dependably under the control of the enemy.*

This wears the enemy down. Their rear immediately becomes the front or they are flanked from the side and suddenly they must engage in all directions—something they are entirely unsuited for. They become disheartened by having to come back to retake the same area over and over again, while the guerrilla finds it invigorating because it is an affirmation of their strategy.

The guerrilla yogi likewise lacks the capacity necessary to claim the “real estate” of the primary base for very long, especially when it is under attack. We engage as thoroughly as we can for as long as we can but don’t resist, for example, even the mind’s dispersal into fantasy—a realm that feels safer for the mind than the instability of reality. We bivouac in this new base of conceptual activity, observe the thoughts and emotions as best we can, and can return to the breath or other target of the mindfulness if and when we choose.

We must unite the strength of the army with that of the people; we must strike the weak spots in the enemy's flanks, in his front, in his rear. We must make war everywhere and cause dispersal of his forces and dissipation of his strength. Thus the time will come when a gradual change will become evident in the relative position of ourselves and our enemy, and when that day comes, it will be the beginning of our ultimate victory

~ Mao Zedong⁶

The guerrilla yogi must have high standards and low expectations. With each sitting we should not imagine that we will have more than one minute of grounded concentration, or even one clear observation of breath. This is not defeat. This is understanding the nature of reality and of dukkha. It took me

ten years of intensive practice—daily and yearly retreats including several three-month retreats—before I felt I could honestly say that I saw the full rising and falling of a single breath. And while it was amazing I also saw that it was merely concentration and that just because my concentration had not been quite so unified before did not mean that mindfulness had not resulted in profound insight without it. Mindfulness can arise powerfully without strong concentration but one needs to understand how to operate it differently. When the mindfulness is strong but not supported by powerful concentration the guerrilla yogi has the need to “alert shift” as Mao describes,

In addition to the dispersion and concentration of forces, the leader must understand what is termed "alert shifting." When the enemy feels the danger of guerrillas, he will generally send troops out to attack them. The guerrillas must consider the situation and decide at what time and at what place they wish to fight. If they find that they cannot fight, they must immediately shift. Then the enemy may be destroyed piecemeal. For example, after a guerrilla group has destroyed an enemy detachment at one place, it may be shifted to another area to attack and destroy a second detachment. Sometimes, it will not be profitable for a unit to become engaged in a certain area, and in that case, it must move immediately.

~ Mao Zedong⁷

In most traditions, there is so much emphasis placed on concentrating our attention on a particular object, like the breath, that we can forget that it is simply a training ground. We train for insight in any of the four foundations of mindfulness and cannot afford to have a preference about where it happens. We engage wherever the attention is drawn. If a bee only gathered

pollen from one flower it would never pollinate the field. Similarly, wisdom arises from the pollination that happens as the mind moves from one object to another. Understanding how phenomena relate to one another is the essence of *dhammanupassana*, the fourth foundation of mindfulness.

The mind that wanders everywhere, motivated by craving, aversion, and ignorance, will tend to reproduce and strengthen craving, aversion, and ignorance. But the mind that is not allowed to wander anywhere can *also* amplify those same mental forces because the effort it takes to maintain that rigidity of mind are so-often rooted in the same desire to control and aversion to reality. The mind that is allowed to wander a little, that isn't bothered by it, will relax. And only a relaxed mind is one that is receptive to insight.

Again, the Ho Chi Minh trail—what the North Vietnamese called “Route 559”—was a vast network of interlinking trails through Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos built by the North Vietnamese Army to enable Việt Cộng guerrilla units to penetrate the south. US forces could only operate with extreme discretion in those other countries and this afforded an important degree of refuge for the guerrillas. Moving through these other countries, friendly to their cause, provided them with some degree of safety. Similarly, our primary base can, over time, come to be a safe country for us, friendly terrain, and because of this we should never dismiss its essential value to our broader campaign.

At the same time, as single road the Ho Chi Minh trail would not have provided versatile access to all points in the south nor escape routes back into safety. All the different routes of were necessary and worked together to provide

access to their strategic destination no matter which routes got bombed or blockaded. In our efforts to create a Ho Chi Minh trail of the mind, the guerrilla yogi follows this same method of creating numerous and overlapping trails and points of access through the system. If we only train with the breath, we will never know how to engage something more fearsome when it arises.

With this baseline ethic, a guerrilla yogi will not become disheartened because of their inability to concentrate their attention on the primary or secondary target. Most of the time when we try to aim and sustain our attention the mind wanders or other objects call our attention. In the chaos we can feel scattered and defeated. But if we relate to the base as a guerrilla yogi and trust the value of *khaṇika samādhi* more than of fixed concentration, we will not be upset by the wandering or by so-called “distraction” because we recognize that nothing is truly a distraction; we can fight our war anywhere. We are concentrated on the experience of the present moment—whatever experience that may be. We have trained to be this fluid, this agile, and have no belief that “good practice” means staying within the base for long periods of time. We have built trails back home from everywhere and so anywhere can lead us back home.

THE SELF

The sense of Self is our biggest and most well-established intuitive base. It is home like no other thing, though what it is actually comprised of changes from moment to moment. Sometimes it feels like we are in our bodies. Sometimes it feels

like our bodies are *us*. Sometimes it is our emotions or our thoughts and our stories about who we are, our aspirations for who we want to be.

As the persistent-yet-momentary product of greed, hatred, and delusion, we must be extremely cautious about the sense of Self because it is really like having a base in enemy territory. Just like with the home base in bhavana practice—our primary target—we are training to become more and more comfortable outside that temporary refuge. But we also need to feel that it is ok to go back again and again, as flawed a refuge as it might be. We need to understand the draw of the Self in order to ultimately be released from dependence on it.

We are constantly and compulsively generating the framework for an internal structure of Self. All conditioned phenomena we encounter at the sense doors are unstable. The mind tries to create a sense of stability through grasping, rejecting, and tripping into delusion—all three of which help create a persistent sense of Self.

Our sense of Self creates a sense of stability—of coherence—amid the stream of rapidly changing phenomena, and we use every single moment of sense-experience to reinforce it. Of course, if it was actually stable, we wouldn't need to keep shoring it up. This scaffolding of the Self last only a moment so we live in a frenzy of building and rebuilding, frantically trying to grab control of the flow of life: asserting and reasserting who we are, rehearsing our Selves over and over again.

All of the hindrances (*nivāraṇa*) can similarly be understood as protective tools that are trying to defend us from the relentless inundation of experience and its instability. Craving is a kind of contraction around experience that generates the

sense of Self. Aversion and ill-will are similar. Sloth and torpor help deaden the mind to experience by creating a kind of somatic experience of delusion. Restlessness keeps us on the run from reality. Doubt casts our whole endeavor under the cloud of delusion, keeping the mind un-investigative and the empire intact.

Who would we be if not for all the things we worry about or want—our jobs, our relationships, our health, our world? The Self is a dynamic triangulation of our strongest longings and fears and fantasies. It is important to recognize both the need for compassion toward our stabilizing tendencies as well as the wisdom of their ultimate unsatisfactoriness. No fixed base or structure can ultimately give us the security. Again, realizing that it is only through insight, brought upon by mindfulness and care that we are able to uproot the need to engage in these tendencies.

Even when we “come back” from being “lost in thought” we are usually returning to the comfort of our deepest delusion—of our Self, here at the center, watching—which we then reinforce by the belief that we are suddenly “being mindful” again. It is fine to appreciate the apparent stability of the Self and come back to it as a base. But we must also recognize that have actually found ourselves back in the mist of the great delusion and stay vigilant and dextrous with our attention. We should not claim this territory as “more real” but instead help sharpen our sense that all conditional realities are subject to the same forces of changeability, undependability, and essencelessness. In this way we come to see the possibility of being free in a greater and greater range of terrain, to the degree that someday we will have no need for bases at all,

including the base of the Self. Everything will be a base and nothing will be the Self.

It doesn't matter anymore. We've been wounded so often, it's as if we're running through water but we don't get wet. We free an area, then go someplace else.

~ Melsa, YPJ fighter, Syria⁸

AGILITY

We can have no agenda as to what target arises in each moment or the next. This is the purest form of practice. It is so pure that even if a preference does arise, we don't resist it either. It is OK. Remember: *we are not trying to hold ground*. We engage with the targets that present themselves and let them arise and pass on their own. Defilements come, we allow them. Hindrances come, we allow them. We can aim and sustain our attention on them for as long as engagement is fruitful. Hatred, bitterness, irritation, craving, sadness, knee pain, itch, memory, fantasy. We cannot evaluate our practice based on what targets arise. It doesn't matter at all. But resistance, if it is rooted in wanting, aversion, or delusion, gives them strength. The more we resist them, the more ground they hold. The less resistance we give to these tides of the mind, the more they ebb and flow without affecting us.

In fact, the less we resist the resistance, the more dexterous our guerrilla band will be. When we think "this shouldn't be happening," or "I shouldn't be attached," we must recognize this resistance and allow even the resistance. Explore it genuinely and we will see that eventually even it will blow through. If we conceive, "I am a terrible yogi" or "I am the best

yogi” we recognize conceit but see no territory in it, claim no part of it. It is known in its arising and its passing. The mind is a vapor that we treat like a mountain. Let Mara have his hill. Let Mara have his anger, no need to try and wrestle it from him.

The guerrilla tries their best to not get stuck in an indefensible position—to not be so attached to a base or a target they are pinned down and not ready to find a new one at a moment’s notice. This is just as true for pleasant experiences as unpleasant ones. Any yogi can get enamored with certain unfamiliar experiences in their practice. When we experience something very new,—or maybe something familiar in a new way—we feel like we have finally achieved something and there is a tendency in the heart to contract around it, to cling to it, to try to hold, perpetuate or recreate it time after time. Even when we intellectually know that this is folly, the heart cannot help itself. But the guerrilla yogi understands that these experiences arise because of the existence of certain conditions also understands that it is untenable to hold this ground once those conditions change, and will not be attached to it. They will not risk defeat based on this attachment. This is the true freedom of vipassanā: not the maintenance of any particular state, but the mind that finds freedom everywhere because it is not attached to anything anywhere being a certain way.

One of the best examples of this kind of agility in the cannon is from the Uppalavaṇṇā Sutta⁹, where the nun bhikkhuni Uppalavaṇṇā demonstrates her incredible versatility to Mara in an expression of classic guerrilla training,

Then bhikkhuni Uppalavaṇṇā, having understood,

“This is Mara the Evil One,” replied to him in verses:
Though a hundred thousand rogues
Just like you might come here,
I stir not a hair, I feel no terror;
Even alone, Mara, I don’t fear you.
I can make myself disappear
Or I can enter inside your belly.
I can stand between your eyebrows
Yet you won’t catch a glimpse of me.
I am the master of my own mind,
The bases of power are well developed;
I am freed from every kind of bondage,
Therefore I don’t fear you, friend.
Then Mara the Evil One, realizing,
“The bhikkhuni Uppalavaṇṇā knows me,”
sad and disappointed, disappeared right there.

It is this mobility and non-attachment to tactic which expresses the fulfillment of the training—of complete mastery and the destruction of defilement without the need of anger or hatred. When Uppalavaṇṇā finally addresses Mara as “friend” we are struck by the profound totality of her accomplishment: a mind infused with love and wisdom even for the greatest enemy.

There are many dimensions to what we might consider the mental versatility of attention: its direction, its scope, its flavor, its intensity, its motivating intention. For most people, intense energy (*virīya*) simply cannot be aroused all of the time, at least not in a balanced way that doesn’t ultimately support the propagation of defilements. Not only is constant intensity not possible, it is not helpful. Intense pressure tends to actually dull the mind, make it less precise because we can never push the mind to the speed of reality. A relaxed mind naturally arises and passes at the speed of reality. The forced effort of striving, often rooted in wanting or aversion—and

therefore leaning into some future moment—will actually undermine its deepest potential. Our effort is better spend attuning to and being mindful of whatever energy level is actually present—that has currently arisen—and exploring it and learning about it rather than forcing it to match an ideal or ambition.

In a real sense maximum disorder was our equilibrium.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹⁰

Sometimes this means a kind of inner “down-shifting” to meet the actuality of experience rather than stepping on the gas to reach a higher gear that you are ambitious to achieve. Straining for a higher energy level will often lead to frustration, cultivating hate or desire, or over-exuberance that gets in the way of clear-seeing. Sometimes intentionally letting the mind wander can help us find our way down to a lower gear that actually matches what can click the mind into fruitful engagement.

Newcombe had constant difficulties owing to excess of zeal, and his habit of doing four times more than any other Englishman would do: ten times what the Arabs thought needful or wise...

‘Newcombe is like fire,’ they used to complain; ‘he burns friend and enemy.’

~ T.E. Lawrence¹¹

In this way the guerrilla method is fundamentally a training in equanimity (*upekkhā*) because we are learning each moment not to be attached to any object, to any experience, to see the equal worthiness of all experience of being known and investi-

gated as well as the equal unworthiness of all experience of being attached to, and can relate to them all with these beautiful qualities of mindfulness and concentration. Because equanimity is the doorway to enlightenment, we see how this approach is utterly practical and has the final goal always at its heart.

At times and over time our versatility in a wider range of experience becomes evident. We can find ourselves capable of engaging in intense experiences of pain, grief, or anger in very stable and fruitful ways. When we do engage with more difficult targets, we must recall one of the most basic mottos for a guerrilla insurgency: *only engage in the battles you are confident you can win.*

This means we may well run from more battles than we engage. The overzealous and naive fighter will rush headlong into any battle—blinded by their lust for glory and greatness—and be easily vanquished by the enemy, putting their own lives at unnecessary risk but also the lives of their compatriots. The guerrilla yogi is unique in understanding that humility is a development factor to our progress, that once we learn how to engage the enemy we might spend the majority of our time learning to avoid or escape their strength. This is a particular and essential aspect to this campaign of liberation and one that is not taught in almost any of our traditional teachings.

The enemy is numerically superior and better armed than the Guerrilla Army. Guerrilla units must overcome this disadvantage by knowing when to concentrate their forces and when to disperse them. They must concentrate their forces, by linking up with other units and by reinforcements, when the enemy is in a weak position and can be attacked. They must disperse forces when confronted by large confrontations of

enemy units, when there is danger of encirclement, and where the terrain is unfavourable.

~ Kwame Nkrumah¹²

When we hear that the Buddha sat down one day at the foot of the Bodhi tree and made the determination to finally get free, we can be inspired to do the same and make a similar determination. But this inspiration is naive. Why set ourselves up for failure? The Buddha had been training and preparing the ground for this liberation for innumerable lifetimes. We don't know where we are in that process over the vast fields of space and time. Best to be ambitious yet humble so that when we do decide to sit down and make that final determination, we will be ready to fulfill the promise of our training.

Don't be a warrior dead from lack of fear.

~ Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche¹³

There is no ultimate refuge outside of our own wisdom, but that doesn't mean that we don't have or use bases. Until the war is over we will need places of rest and comfort, relaxation and rejuvenation, where we do not always feel at war. One can only feel at war on so many fronts for so long before the heart gets weary and embittered—leading to hardness, desertion, or betrayal. In a universe defined by instability, it is of fundamental importance to have places of temporary refuge. These bases can be our primary target objects in practice. They can be our sense of Self. The Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha are the most classic examples of refuge that we can take as Buddhists. They can also be temporary respites from the training. There are a multitude of other bases, places of spiritual and

material refuge, that provide us rest and a sense of renewal, that give us shelter, sanctuary, and a sense of safety during this long journey.

We cannot underestimate the value of rest—in our primary base, in taking a shower, in basic comforts—for the process of regeneration. But these bases are abandoned as needed, let go of when attacked, because we have deeper and deeper faith in our ability to find them again when they are available and other phenomena have passed. We don't try to hold it but we can keep coming back to it, deepening our relationship to it over time, eventually making ourselves more impervious to attack.

We can, however, establish small bases of a seasonal or temporary nature. This we can do because our barbaric enemy simply does not have the manpower to occupy all the areas he has overrun and because the population of China is so numerous that a base can be established anywhere.

~ Mao Zedong¹⁴

Over time we do develop the ability to fix our concentration on one object for longer periods, holding greater “real estate.” The process of created liberated zones is a slow one, developed over time. But we also know that this doesn't matter—that we can and will great achieve success with or without it, depending upon conditions. In fact, we can create a temporary base in anger, terror, or sadness and this is the ultimate truth of liberation: not a fixed state of unchanging bliss but a dynamism of equilibrium that is not threatened by any changing condition. Any verified experience of this provides the greatest faith in the guerrilla yogi.

They were as unstable as water, and like water would perhaps finally prevail.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹⁵

~ 5 ~

DISTRUST

Suspicion - Investigation



At the beginning, do not trust your own shadow, never trust friendly peasants, informers, guides, or contact men. Do not trust anything or anybody until a zone is completely liberated. Vigilance: constant guard and scouting, setting up camp in a safe spot, and above all, never sleep with a roof over your head, never sleep in a house that can be surrounded. This was a synthesis of our guerrilla experience...

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Episodes of the Revolutionary War¹

FRUSTRATED BY THE BRAZEN and unrestrained activity of the insurgent leader Krim Belkacem during the Algerian war of Independence, occupying French forces schemed to create "Force K"—a counter-insurgency unit designed to bring him down. Force K was made up of Kabyle people whose long-standing tensions with Arab neighbors the French hoped to exploit. But immediately after Force K's creation, Krim infiltrated its leadership and secretly overtook its command. Instead of debilitating the revolutionary National Liberation Front (FLN), Force K passed information and weapons to FLN units while disseminating disinformation to

the French. Eventually, the members of Force K revealed their true allegiance and disappeared into the desert.

French forces in Waliya 4 came up with another scheme to use a man named Kobus as an undercover anti-guerrilla operative in FLN controlled territory. Even though Kobus remained loyal to his French handlers, FLN leaders made it look as if he orchestrated a number of actions against the French, thus dismantling their confidence in Kobus and exposing him for eventual assassination by the FLN.

Over the course of eight years of war, the FLN were themselves victims of numerous disinformation campaigns—and not always from the French. Arab traitors were easy targets for the FLN and were often treated much worse than the French enemy themselves. Internal power struggles within the liberation movement led to a number of underhanded and cold-blooded power-plays that resulted in the death of many comrades.

An unfortunate reality of any revolutionary campaign is the general orientation of distrust that must be at the center of all planning and action. At the beginning of a mobilization, the revolutionary organization is too frail to chance being betrayed parties naively perceived to be friends. Later, as the enemy's response gets more sophisticated, tactics of espionage and psychological warfare will be used against the rebels to sow discord and distrust within its leadership. Any revolutionary organization must therefore be grounded in an ethic of suspicion, practices of secrecy, and structured in such a way as to prevent any betrayals from infecting the larger organization. Utmost care must be taken to protect the development of the movement according to its own internal integrity.

The human mind is an incredible tool for identifying things, learning relationships between things, and creating conceptual frameworks that make sense of the world in order to navigate it effectively. When a child learns, *this is a shoe*, *this is a bus*, *this is mom*, *this is me* they slowly gain the shared reference points between us that allow us to negotiate our lives in society. We also learn and integrate aspects of things that are important: *This is safe*, *this is poisonous*, *this is delicious*, *this is dangerous*, *this is useful for this*. While this is an essential and powerful aspect of education and socialization it also forms a relationship to things in which knowing becomes fixed and our view of things solidified.

Once we think we know something we generally cease to be interested in it beyond our desire for its increase, decrease, or stasis. We stop exploring it. We hold a static view of the way things are. By the time we are adults, many of these views are not based on direct experience but on compounded notions, on conditioned reasoning, on fragments of information the mind has trained to reconstruct in specific ways. We begin to live more in the conceptual than the actual—more in our heads than in our bodies—so that our views stop being formed or informed from direct experience and instead on the layers and momentum of conceptual coherence that builds in the mind. *I am this*. *You are this*. *These people are like this*. *This is good*. *This is bad*. *This is wrong*. *This is right*. We hold the world—and ourselves—prisoner to our views. Even if these views happen to be true, they are conventionally true but not ultimately so. The same process that brings us into functional relationship with reality becomes our deepest defense against it. It entirely upends the function of concept in the mind. Our

friend becomes our enemy. As a child we believe what we see. As adults we only see what we believe.

We can recognize the power of this inversion immediately when we begin our meditation practice. Rather than observe the sensations of rising and falling of the abdomen, the mind wanders in thought. When the mind does direct its attention to the breath, it is often a visual image of the belly that we observe, or our ideas about it, but not the direct sensations themselves. When we try to observe the hand, it is our memory of the hand we often see, our notions about it, not the sensations of tingling or warmth that are actually happening in the present moment.

Over time we come to appreciate the degree to which we live imprisoned by ideas about who we are—afraid of death, rejection, pain—and that we likewise keep the world around us imprisoned by those same anxieties and compulsions. We have become much more comfortable in the terrain of concept than in the terrain of reality, and this disorientation and reorientation is often a very slow and careful aspect of training of the revolutionary mind, requiring determination, patience, and investigative distrust.

Intelligence information must be broad—it must embrace everything, including the most insignificant material. There is a technique of obtaining information, and the urban guerrilla must master it. Following this technique, intelligence information is obtained naturally, as a part of the life of the people.

~ Carlos Marighella²

An essential part of the process of investigative distrust is that we must be skeptical about our *views*—what we think about

things—our opinions about phenomena but also our perceptions of what these phenomena actually are. Our habit toward delusion is so strong that our interpretation of every moment must be suspect. As we combat the tendency to believe in notions as ultimate truth—in perceptions as reality—we must develop a practice of general distrust toward all that we observe.

Do not try and bend the spoon, that's impossible. Instead, only try to realize the truth...there is no spoon. Then you will see it is not the spoon that bends, it is only yourself.

~ Spoon Boy, The Matrix³

Most of the time we are not observing very clearly. Perhaps we are observing something but not all the aspects of it, or not in intense detail. Because of this we are tricked into believing a thing is one thing when in fact it is often, largely, another thing altogether, or multiple things, or even nothing at all. In order to strengthen our meditation practice, the guerrilla yogi must become increasingly sensitive and diligent about distinguishing between 1) what we believe to be true; 2) what we want to be true; and 3) what we know is true because we have experienced it directly. Most people blend these categories together seamlessly. But because we cannot always trust our degree of clear-seeing or of interpretation, the guerrilla yogi comes to be less and less sure about more and more of what they observe. Our need to lock things up into conceptual knowings, boxes, limitations, is also diminished. We become interested in reality on its own terms, not dedicated to our

opinions or practicing meditation in order to shore up and strengthen our old stale views,

Having abandoned what is taken up, not clinging,
One does not create dependency even on knowledge.
Not taking sides among those who are divided,
One does not fall back on any view at all.

For one who has no wish here for either end,
For various states of existence here or beyond,
There are no places of residence at all
Grasped after deciding among teachings.

Not even a subtle notion is formulated by him
About what is seen, heard, or sensed here.
How could anyone here in the world categorize him,
That brahmin who does not cling to any view?

They do not construct, they have no preferences;
Even the teachings are not embraced by them.

~ Buddha, Paramatthaka Sutta⁴

Some people will believe that this notion of distrust sounds too negative. In practice it is not. The mind is fooled over and over again by objects—by its own delusion as to the true nature of things. It doesn't recognize that a stump is really a land mine, that this sweet thing is really a booby trap, and so our lack of suspicion has painful consequences.

In its purest form, this distrust is merely carefulness (*appamāda*) that seeks our own well-being and the well being of others. It is not uptight or controlling, it is merely careful: Careful about trusting any sense-object, careful about trusting the mind's response, about the tendency to fall back on views

and expectation. As we engage in a deepening degree of unknowing curiosity, the purity of our investigation is heightened, our sense of awe and wonder increased, the ease of our mind amplified. We generally confine the world in the bondage of our minds—this is this, that is that—and in that clenching our minds are equally shackled. When we are able to accept the power of our fabrications and recognize the fact that we don't really know what we are seeing, who we are, what is really going on, only then are we able to actually explore and learn.

By whatever means, the sources of information at the disposal of the urban guerrilla are potentially better than those of the police. The enemy is observed by the people, but he does not know who among the people transmits information to the urban guerrillas. The military and the police are hated by the people for the injustices and violence they have committed, and this facilitates obtaining information which is damaging to the activities of government agents.

~ Carlos Marighella⁵

When we are engaged in a more pleasurable period of meditation, something simple may change—our concentration or energy will dissipate, for example—and we won't have immediately realized it. Our practice feels as if it is going down and we become frustrated, grasping more firmly onto the experience which is actually gone and not recognizing the new conditions, new phenomena, which have presented themselves. We are often left invisibly grasping at past pleasant experience without knowing it until we are in a full scale war with reality. When we are suspicious from the beginning

of our own doubt, aversion, confidence, or view, we loosen the grip of conditions on our sense of peace.

A guerrilla yogi cannot underestimate the value that even a few moments of clear-seeing has on the power to transform our understanding of the world. Our expectations can be much higher than that, hoping that a period of clarity will last for hours or days or forever. But the conditions that lead to a powerful experience of clear seeing are often only in perfect balance for a short time—perhaps just a few moments. Sometimes these balanced conditions can last for longer periods, but until we have completely uprooted greed, hatred, and ignorance they will always fall apart.

VEDANĀ - THE HIDDEN OBJECT

Very often our entrapment comes from not seeing the quality of feeling tone (*vedanā*) of a target. This is understandable because *vedanā* is very hard to distinguish from the object itself. Seeing *vedanā* clearly requires the arousal of very refined mental forces so it is not always going to be directly evident. Sometimes it needs to be inferred from a more gross mind state that has arisen or a more entangled pattern we find ourselves in. Either way, it is essential to remember that it is there and important to begin to get a sense of it: the faint whiff of *vedanā* in the air clues us into the fact that a process of seduction or repulsion is beginning. Soon we may start to see the way in which *vedanā* is like a hidden object, a booby trap, profoundly affecting our experience without us knowing.

We may notice a painful sensation in the knee, for example, but not initially be aware of our sense of aversion toward it.

We may try to stay focused on observing the sensations, but find ourselves more and more upset. Mental anguish, perhaps even hopelessness, has become the predominant sensation but we do not see it. We think the painful physical sensations are what are most challenging and so we keep trying to watch those. But it is a mental experience—*dukkha vedanā*—in response to the physical sensation which has become predominant and we don't know how to observe it. From that, dependent upon that not-seeing, deeper mental pain arises. As long as we keep pressing to stay focused on the physical sensation, the mental hardship grows in strength outside the frame of our attention.

But if we are able to note the unpleasant quality of the physical sensations we have a doorway to recognizing aversion. If we can do this, we open to the spectrum of emotional activity that may be involved, and while it will not make any of them pleasant, it will give us the possibility of trying to be with the range of physical and mental sensations more calmly and clearly. This is a classic capacity of dexterity of the guerrilla yogi that is lost when we approach the object with dull force.

The same can happen with a pleasurable experience (*sukha vedanā*). Sitting at our window we might hear a beautiful bird song outside. We might cherish that sound—become enamored with it—and feel disappointment when the bird flies away. We imagine that if we put a bird-feeder outside our window we could listen this song more consistently. When we place the feeder outside it attracts the bird we love but it also attracts birds we don't like and squirrels that scare away our cherished bird. So we decide to capture the bird and put it in a

cage in our home. Now we have the pleasant song at all hours. But the bird does not thrive in a cage. Because of its loneliness and confinement, it stops eating and dies. Perhaps, if unheeding, we will go out to capture another one, and when it dies, another.

Or perhaps we will be mindful enough to acknowledge that in our craving for sense-pleasure we were responsible for the death of another being. We might seriously reflect on the process that unfolded, see its pitfalls and be careful not to do it again. Without the distrusting edge to our mindfulness, we cannot see clearly what is motivating our actions and so cause harm. We were responsible for this bird's death and we created agitation in our own minds. There is a tension, a constriction that develops in the mind which is always seeking to control conditions, to maintain our hold on these pleasant experiences. At any step of that process, mindful distrust could have stopped us from creating more harm.

If we acknowledged our own mental entrapment when the bird died, we would feel a healthy sense of moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*): remorse for our actions and a strong desire not to cause harm again in the future. In English, these words—shame and dread—can have a heavy connotation. In the Buddha's teaching it is clear we are not encouraged to live our lives under a grinding cloud of shame. The self-centered quagmire of guilt is the last place a guerrilla yogi wants to find themselves bogged down. But a certain degree of remorse in relationships to our unwholesome actions and their consequences is considered healthy, essential in fact, to directing our volitional energy along the path of our moral compass.

You look at me with a smile and ask: What is gained by that? No revolution is made out of shame. I reply: Shame is already a revolution of a kind... Shame is a kind of anger which is turned inward. And if a whole nation really experienced a sense of shame, it would be like a lion, crouching ready to spring.

~ Karl Marx⁶

If, earlier at the bird-feeder, we noticed that our mind suffered when the unpleasant birds arrived or when the pleasant bird flew away, we would have seen the pettiness of it and not bought into the fragile happiness it offered: dependent upon keeping the pleasant and rejecting the unpleasant. If we were mindful of the mental fantasy of a cage—of control based on desire—we could have stopped the physical action of capture. If we carefully noted just as the bird's song first made contact with our ears, and hearing-consciousness arose, we could have noticed the pleasant quality, noticed the enjoyment of it, noticed the pain of our heart's contraction around the experience—the pain of wanting—and in feeling it fully let it dissipate right away on its own. We wouldn't want the pain of holding on to this ethereal thing.

If the mind was perfectly still and the awareness of hearing arose in our consciousness, we could simply add a mental note to our experience, "Oh, hearing... hearing...pleasant..." and let the sound pass away and the pleasure pass away, ready for the next experience to arise without a hint of grasping. This is the peace that comes from suspicion of objects. It is the peace that stops projecting our happiness or sadness onto experiences in the undependable world around us but understands that our liberation or suffering actually comes from the actions of our own mind.

If everything is noted, all your emotional difficulties will disappear. When you feel happy, don't get involved in happiness. When you feel sad, don't get involved with it. Whatever comes, don't worry, just be aware of it.

~ Dīpa Ma⁷

Mindful suspicion keeps us interested and engaged: we can't trust our initial view but we want to find out what is really going on so we look more closely. It is entirely different than the hindrance of cynical doubt (*vicikicchā*). Doubt disengages us, inclines us to dismiss. I can't do this. This is stupid. These teachers don't know what they are talking about. Doubt is often disguised in reasoning that is entirely logical and our view becomes quite settled on it. But this disregarding is reckless and is an impulse we must be most careful with. In fact, distrust of doubt is one of the most important suspicions we can engage and will save our practice from derailment on countless occasions.

If carefulness (*appamāda*) is a primary motivator of our suspicion, the mental factor of investigation (*dhamma vicaya*) is its primary tool, the mechanism by which it operates. We must be genuinely interested in whatever experience we are observing in order to see it clearly, and this is much harder than it may seem. It is why merely "paying attention" is not enough to qualify as true mindfulness. Over time we must humbly begin to see how very little of our investigation is actually very purely motivated. Unwittingly subject to the stream of *vedanā*, much of our attention toward objects is instinctually designed to augment the pleasurable ones and rid

ourselves of the unpleasant ones—that is, entirely motivated by the craving and aversion we are trying to uproot.

This is why physical stillness in neutral postures is so strongly encouraged in the practice: we have to bear the relentless impulses of the mind to constantly move the body, to adjust, to make more comfortable. Sometimes, often even, it is good to admit we are not totally free and allow ourselves to move. This is an act of kindness and compassion and we should receive it as such. But this internal honesty and kind-hearted permission is significantly different than the controlled process of something like asana yoga, where the posture is manipulated in order to stretch the mind into acceptance, or tai chi, where energy is moved about to create a perfect state of balance—or any number of spiritual practices where concentration—in the form of unification of mind and body—is confused with the wisdom generated by investigation.

These practices claim to be “embodied” but in most cases they actually keep people trapped in a ceaseless need to keep manipulating the body—or the energetics of the body—to feel good, and to keep our awareness out of the body’s true uncontrollable and undependable nature. True embodied freedom is the powerful and subtle awareness of the relentless stream of physical experience that is flowing entirely out of our control. It is only through this awareness that we can be free while in discomfort, in disability, or while dying. The body will ultimately fail us. There will be knots we cannot work out, dysfunctions that will only grow. We must care for the body profoundly but never trick ourselves into thinking we can save or perfect it. If all we ever learn to do is adjust and manipulate it, we will never learn to die honorably. The guerrilla yogi

practices birth, life, sickness, death, and decomposition in every moment.

Other practices try to avoid these truths with the mind as well: falling into the trap of the powerful tendency to identify with a “greater self.” We know we cannot trust the little sense of “I, me, mine” but that does not mean that we believe that we are the big sense either: the “All” or “Loving Awareness” or that there is a greater all-encompassing “Self” or “Consciousness” that we become absorbed into—the “Witness” or even an eternal “God.” These are all still fantasies of identity view that the Buddha was at war with: new oppressive regimes disguised as freedom.

Mind arises and passes away with each moment. It arises again because of the momentum of conditions of past action. Anywhere we try to identify, try to land as the foundation of being, even in a “greater self” is wrong view. There is no essential Self, within or beyond the body, in space or time. This is anatta and it is primary and essential and should be the basic standard by which we hold all views of me and mine with the deepest suspicion. The Self is a spasm that arises in relationship to phenomena based on ignorance of their changeable, undependable nature. Consciousness is just as unstable and undependable as any other phenomena—and arises and passes away in dependence with them: “The Self is dead! Long live the Self!”

Other spiritual practices may be exceptionally beautiful and powerful and carry a variety of benefits. But the guerrilla yogi must always ask themselves if they are truly designed for the same disenchantment and release that the find in the Buddha’s dhamma? Very few are. That does not mean that they are bad,

that we cannot benefit from them, or that we cannot respectfully engage in them. But we must do so clear-eyed, without unproven faith or belief in their efficacy for our ultimate liberation. Stretching can be of incredible benefit. So can taking a nap. Or riding your bicycle. While they can all be done mindfully, we shouldn't confuse their philosophical frameworks with vipassanā or the teachings of the Buddha. We should be skeptical about the underlying pressures on the mind in those activities that lead the experiences to be at odds with liberation, that reaffirm patterns of control and fantasy.

In fact, the guerrilla yogi should be just as suspicious of our motivation for our own vipassanā practice as any other. We must be entirely skeptical even of the impulse of the mind to observe. We think that bringing the attention to an object is vipassanā, but if the motivation of the mind is to get more of or get rid of we are undermining our own efforts. Most yogis will be humbled to see that the majority of their efforts to observe phenomena are tainted by grasping: trying to get concentrated, get insight, get wisdom or trying to get rid of discomfort, get rid of mind-states, get rid of the self. None of these are genuine interest—they are a false aim and a betrayal of our cause—but at least vipassanā has the underlying framework to see these patterns skeptically.

So often people approach this path as if it is going to turn them into the fantasy version of themselves: more effective, more productive—a better leader, parent, child, friend, lover—and that it is going to heal our relationships, in effect make us and our lives more perfect. But the path mostly does the opposite: helps us get more and more at ease with the imperfections of ourselves and the world and the folly and

ignorance at the root of trying to control everything, everyone—including ourselves. We will get nothing out of this path. And that nothing will be an unfathomable relief. In the process we will have all of the hope slowly ground out of us so that in the end, all that is left is a mind polished smooth like a shell.

There is a famous taoist story from Chuang Tzu⁸ that talks about a master carpenter and his apprentice who in their wanderings come upon a giant oak tree in the center of a village. The tree provided shade and protection for people at rest, in meditation, eating lunch, for family outings, profound conversations and intense arguments. The caring center of community life. When they walk past the tree without taking a second look, the apprentice is astonished. "Since I first took up my ax and followed you, Master, I have never seen timber as beautiful as this. But you don't even bother to look, and go right on without stopping. Why is that?"

"Forget it - say no more!" said the carpenter. "It's a worthless tree! Make boats out of it and they'd sink; make coffins and they'd rot in no time; make vessels and they'd break at once. Use it for doors and it would sweat sap like pine; use it for posts and the worms would eat them up. It's not a timber tree - there's nothing it can be used for. That's how it got to be that old!"

We ourselves think that we are working to make ourselves a tree with perfect grain—useful to all the plans and objectives of the status quo, to fit in and thrive in saṃsara. But we fail to see that it was through the great and manifold honest imperfections of the tree that it grew into this force that could provide such shade and protection for so many other beings. This is the practice of the guerrilla yogi—not the perfection of the

self but the understanding of the self and through this understanding and dismantling of our prejudices and beliefs around it come to free the heart from all its fixations and obsessions.

This is all the more true for the hardest of knots and entanglements in our hearts. When a tree is wounded the scar tissue that builds around the wound is warped and dense, entangled and entwined, as it slowly forms a burl on the side of the trunk. These burls are frustratingly hard to work with, to carve, with their ironlike grain so wildly confusing. But they are considered the jewels of woodworking because the result of our efforts makes the most beautiful bowls, with the most glorious swirled grain. Do we relate to our own wounded places with that same reverence? Can we even imagine that they are not obstacles but our primary doorways to understanding? Will we take the time to understand the grain of the scars that have built up around our most wounded places so as to reveal the deep beauty that lies within?

So many of our attempts at relieving our suffering actually engage us in the same processes that feed it in the first place. We must always ask ourselves, can we truly be interested in something we are trying to control? On one hand, the mind needs to be reined in to some degree, its energies channeled, its capacity emboldened. But if in our process of concentration we stifle its wildness, its aliveness, we lose the relationship of interest that is the heart of our practice. We lose our doorway to freedom and without interest in the mind, we lose the relationship to care for it genuinely and to develop the compassion for all other beings that relentlessly go through the same turmoil.

DISENCHANTMENT

The guerrilla yogi need not only be suspicious of each target, but of their relationship to each target. Because the mind has not been properly trained—and simply doesn't know any better—it will long for stability and satisfaction and seek to find stable footing in the quicksand of ephemeral phenomena. This powerful longing to find satisfaction, refuge, comfort in that which can never ultimately provide it cannot be overcome by willpower or decision. It can only be uprooted by insight, through experiential knowledge of the toxicity of hope. We must be honest about our heart's investment in the arising or cessation of future experiences. We must be willing to see and experience the pain of hope and witness what a prison this is for our selves and for the world.

It is through investigation that we learn the true nature of phenomena, and thus become disenchanted by them. Through disenchantment we lose the expectations of fulfillment. Unbound from these preconceptions of experience, we are freed. This process of disenchantment with phenomena, with people, with life is an essential aspect of the path of liberation and one that most of us are deeply conditioned to resist. We see hope as an angel, but in reality it is just wanting dressed as an angel. We are invested in other people's behavior. But as long as our happiness is dependent upon other peoples' behavior we will never be happy. We are invested in the world being one way or another. But if we can only be free when all others are free, we will never be free.

One might worry that this disenchantment is a kind of despondency, but it isn't. As we understand the word "disen-

chantment” in a common sense, it is accompanied by a kind of grief. But in the context of the Dhamma, letting go of hope and of expectation—of the delusion of satisfaction from sense objects—is a profound relief. We are liberated through disenchantment, released from the prison of expectation. We no longer lean into the future with hope for satisfaction, we have found relief in reality, “security in renunciation.”

Not harsh, not greedy, not perturbed, everywhere in tune: this is the reward — I say when asked — for those who are free from pre-conceptions. For one unperturbed — who understands — there is no accumulating. Abstaining, unaroused, they see security everywhere. The sage doesn't speak of himself as among those who are higher, equal, or lower. At peace, free of selfishness, they do not cling, do not reject.

~ Buddha, Attadanda Sutta⁹

We don't need to beat ourselves up for feeling hope—for having expectation. That would be counter-productive, creating an aversion to hope which is not freedom at all. It is a recipe for authoritarian dogmatic rule in the name of the revolution. Of course we hope. It is not a sickness but a symptom. Instead, we must relate to our mental contractions with clarity and compassion, understanding that the mind longs for happiness and simply does not have the development yet to naturally abandon these impulses safely, to see the futility in the notion of satisfaction through sense-experience which is inherently unstable and unsatisfying.

Slowly the mind tires of the fabrications, tires of the conjuring, and feels more and more secure in the unmanipulated flow of experience. It sees the danger of each formation like a grenade. When the heart finally tires of explosion after

explosion it will release each moment on its own. Trying to prevent the mind from clinging is just another form of clinging and so another win for Mara. In the process we must allow for the rhythm of release and contraction to proceed in its own conditioned way—and commit to watching it closely, seeking to understand. This process of allowing the opening and closing of the heart is actually much harder than the behavior modification that is so deeply engrained in us.

We must be skeptical about our assumptions, our erroneous views, and be hesitant about landing on one side of a paradox or another. Some people insist that the path is all effort. Others that it is all effortless. Why choose between the two? Why not approach each moment with the full range of skills at our disposal based on what we observe? This is a fundamental principle of a guerrilla yogi.

...the quick intelligence that constantly watches the ever-changing situation and is able to seize on the right moment for decisive action is found only in keen and thoughtful observers.

~ Mao Zedong¹⁰

One of the most significant adjustments we can come to make in our practice is in regards to what we think of as “deep” and “shallow.” Even if we have been told in countless stories though the ages of people coming to awaken through every-day experiences, we still tend to engage our practice in a way that is trying to “go deep,” trying to make something exciting and foreign happen—all based on a false idea that what is on the surface is not deep, and that profound experiences are things that are extraordinary and unfamiliar.

We must be suspicious of all of our instinctive methods of measurement and evaluation but our suspicion should not be tense. It should be relaxed. It should be infused with affection. It should pervade us so profoundly that we are completely un-agitated. When we have no expectation of what is next, about the threat of benefit a particular object has in store for us, we go about calmly.

In this process we come to realize that the greatest enemy is not outside of us, but inside, and that we have the power to overcome it. Not only that, but all the basic weapons we need to win are already within us. They simply need training.

Soon, the impulse to project our fear or anger or fantasy on others or on phenomena outside of ourselves begins to noticeably weaken. When we stop establishing our hopes for fulfillment onto the unstable conditions around us we gain the power to overcome this pain through wisdom. Then we act out of clarity and kindness, unattached to the outcome of our endeavors because of the faith we have in the righteousness of each action. The path to freedom becomes clear and trustworthy, if only just begun.

Observation, investigation, reconnaissance, and exploration of the terrain are also excellent sources of information. The urban guerrilla never goes anywhere absentmindedly and without revolutionary precaution, always on the alert lest something occurs. Eyes and ears open, senses alert, his memory is engraved with everything necessary, now or in the future, to the continued activity of the guerrilla fighter.

~ Carlos Marighella¹¹

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MEDICINE

Mettā - The Divine Abodes



One of the grave problems that confronts the guerrilla fighter is exposure to the accidents of his life, especially to wounds and sicknesses, which are very frequent in guerrilla warfare. The doctor performs a function of extraordinary importance in the guerrilla band, not only in saving lives, in which many times his scientific intervention does not count because of the limited resources available to him; but also in the task of reinforcing the patient morally and making him feel that there is a person near him who is dedicated with all his force to minimizing his pains. He gives the wounded or sick the security of knowing that a person will remain at his side until he is cured or has passed danger.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*¹

IN A GUERRILLA CAMPAIGN, the rebel movement must do its best to acquire advanced medical supplies and at the same time to develop bush-medicine skills to address injuries incurred while out in the field of combat. Fighters are in need of immediate emergency medicine and also the time and space to recuperate after battle. Understanding the need for a guerrilla movement to treat its wounded, the enemy will seek to destroy these facilities and undermine these capa-

bilities as best they can. Because of this, the insurgent forces must learn to camouflage these spaces and create innovative means for treating wounds in the field.

The wounds of war are more than just physical. The mental/emotional pain that arises from violent conflict are difficult to heal for combatants themselves and also the many communities effected by the violence. Unhealed trauma is the source of ongoing and debilitating suffering that has unforeseeable consequences for a society, often for generations. Healing in places of past and ongoing conflict is possible but is difficult and requires powerful commitments to love, patience, courage, and creativity.

The guerrilla yogi is likewise burdened by many layers of woundedness. Life itself is a conflict zone from which we have incurred countless injuries, and it is rare that we have received proper care or treatment for many of them. Our psychic injuries go back generations as we have inherited the burden of unhealed trauma from our lineages who didn't have the spiritual medicine or the material conditions under which to apply it sufficient to the task. The yogi takes this truth as baseline and then is willing to begin the process of healing-through-understanding, an approach that investigates the wounds, increases our sensitivity to old and new injuries, thus doing the work that will prevent our injuries from harming others down the stream of action from us: whether the people we meet the next day or in the generations that follow.

Love is medicine in its own right. It is a mechanism by which we are healed and it is also a salve by which the heart becomes more open and responsive to the medicine of insight. The relationship between love and wisdom is just as important

as the relationship between mindfulness and concentration, and likewise requires patience and determination. Just as the forces of the autocratic state will seek out to destroy the medical facilities of the guerrilla fighters, the empire of delusion knows the risk that love plays in the coherence of its dominance. Love is vital and in our struggle to develop it we encounter—indeed, invite—the powerful forces of ignorance that will seek to destroy and undermine it.

The approach to wounds, to trauma, and to healing in the Buddhist sense may not be the same as many other modalities but it is vitally important for the guerrilla yogi to understand the function of love, compassion, appreciation, and equanimity—what are known as the divine abodes (*cattāri brahmavihārā*)—in relationship to injury and to ultimate liberation.

When the body is wounded, red blood cells swarm to the area, causing heat, swelling, itching and discomfort—inflammation—as the body's own systems try to mend it. It is often the sensations of this inflammation that we experience as the primary symptoms of the injury. While inflammation is part of the natural healing mechanism of the body, it can be profoundly unpleasant. And chronic inflammation—an *itis* based on persistent injury, infection, or immune disorder—can lead to severe health problems that lead to more profound and debilitating illnesses over time. For this reason, medical interventions commonly try to reduce inflammation—to alleviate the painful symptoms as well as stimulate and calibrate the healing response of the body.

For the guerrilla yogi, the process is similar. When the mind (*citta*) is aggrieved, wounded by *dukkha*, it also experi-

ences a kind of inflammation: heat, swelling, irritation, or discomfort. While natural, it can also lead to a chronic state of mental inflammation—*citta-itis* if you will—neurosis that undermines our wellbeing by chronically distorting our view of experience. Alongside wisdom (*pañña*), the four divine abodes (*brahmavihārā*) of lovingkindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), appreciative joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) are the most powerful natural anti-inflammatory bush medicines that we have. Over the course of their long campaign, a guerrilla yogi should of course try to learn standard practices for *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *mudita*, and *upekkhā*. But because of the irregular nature of their endeavor, it is imperative that they also learn life-saving techniques for love while injured in the midst of combat—bush *mettā*, as it were.

In the guerrilla army in general, and at bases in particular, there must be a high standard of medical equipment. Besides the services of the doctors, medicines must be procured. Although guerrillas can depend on the enemy for some portion of their medical supplies, they must, in general, depend upon contributions. If Western medicines are not available, local medicines must be made to suffice.

~ Mao Zedong²

Dukkha is the word that the Buddha used to describe the unsatisfactory nature of existence. It is translated commonly as “suffering,” “pain,” “hardship,” or “stress” and the Buddha broke it down into three distinct categories: *dukkha dukkha*, *anicca dukkha*, and *saṅkhāra dukkha*. *Dukkha dukkha* is being joined with the unpleasant: something painful happens. *Anicca dukkha* is the hardship that comes from impermanence, from being separated from that which is pleasant. *Saṅkhāra dukkha*

is the dukkha of “formations” and is the most refined and yet basic of these. It can be described as the exhaustion and weariness that come from the constant bombardment of experiences in body and mind, the relentlessness of impingement on the sense-doors. When the mind is sensitized at this level, even the lightest, most pleasant sensation feels oppressive. Whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, each moment of formation is painful because the barrage is overwhelming to the untrained mind.

All of our wounds can be placed within these three frames of dukkha as well as the experience of “not getting what we want.” If met with a perfectly balanced love-and-wisdom-infused mind, a moment of physical pain will still be unpleasant but it will not harm the mind, just as a moment of loss will not harm the mind. But each moment of experience not met with perfect mindfulness wounds the mind, creating agitation that calls for repair. It may sound hyperbolic to say that we are wounded by each moment of fleeting fabrication, of sense experience, but it is true.

Knowing that each discrete moment of experience is like a bullet to the heart, the guerrilla yogi must commit to being a kind of companion to themselves without fail. The sooner and more fully we are able to heal our psychic wounds with our own mastery of love, the less we will be dependent upon external sources—wholesome and unwholesome—on which we cannot always depend or which can get us into deeper difficulties. No one else’s love will ever penetrate as deeply or be as dependable as our own can be if we practice. While we ultimately aspire to bring these brahmavihārā capacities of unconditional care and peace equally to all beings in all direc-

tions, we must start wisely—appropriate to the strategy of the guerrilla yogi—with the easiest, and only expand when we feel confident in our ability to achieve success in a more challenging environment.

THE BRAHMAVIHĀRĀ

Lovingkindness (*mettā*) is the baseline of heart-centered practice. It is a feeling of kindness, goodwill, well-wishing, and care toward other beings or ourselves. It is a connection with the worthiness of all beings to be cared for—simply because of their existence. Compassion (*karuṇā*) can be thought of as a very similar feeling, but oriented toward the pain in the world. It is the sensation of caring about someone's suffering, their hardship, or our own. It is a *pleasant* feeling entirely distinct from grief or remorse. Appreciative Joy (*mudita*) is this loving quality of heart directed instead toward the joy in the world: for our own happiness or the happiness of others. Equanimity (*upekkhā*) is of a very different quality: it is peace of mind, balance, evenness, stability of mind: a profound acceptance of things as they are. While it may seem like a contradictory emotion to the other three, *upekkhā* is purifying and balancing for them and is purified and balanced by them. Without equanimity love will be distorted, subtly motivated by preference, by a desire to control, by grasping. Without love, equanimity becomes cold and distant. They are a coherent set of medical treatments designed to encourage and balance the capacity for love and wisdom in the mind.

Traditionally, the brahmavihārā are taught as concentration practices. Using this approach, a yogi imagines a person and

repeats certain phrases intended to evoke that emotion in relationship to the person and then strengthen that connection to the degree of deep absorption (*jhāna*). Here is one version of common phrases:

Mettā/Lovingkindness

May you be safe and protected from inner and outer harm

May you abide in happiness

May you be healthy and strong of body and mind

May you know the deepest peace

Karuṇā/Compassion

May you be free from suffering

Mudita/Sympathetic Joy - Appreciation

May your happiness and success never end

Upekkhā/Equanimity

You are the owner of your actions.

Your happiness and sorrow are dependent upon your actions, not on my wishes for you.

Or, alternatively:

Things are as they are

Typically, a yogi starts these practices with themselves before moving onto to a “benefactor” and then sequentially on to an “easy” person, a “neutral” person, an “enemy” and then “all beings.” This method was derived over centuries of dedicated practitioners experimenting and coming up with formulas that developed the mind in a systematic way.

We are profoundly indebted for the ancient teachers who systematized the standard method. And while it provides

a powerful way to practice, the prescription of the tradition can feel stale and dry, forced and inhuman. For most people it takes a long time to find a connection to our mettā practice that works consistently but if approached carefully, even those of us that struggle with intense feelings of self-hatred or worthlessness can often find an object of lovingkindness outside of ourselves.

It is also important to know that this is not the way the Buddha himself designed the practice of mettā. The Buddha himself tended to express an inclusive radiating of mettā in all directions,

Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
~ Buddha, Karaniya Mettā Sutta³

This wordless radiating or abiding is an important approach to try. It can simply be tried as expressed, “outwards and unbounded,” though it also can be broken down into a shifting focus on various categories of beings in various directions—classically, north, south, east, west, northeast, southeast,

northwest, southwest above, and below. Inspired by the Buddha's own words, it is important for the guerrilla yogi to try a range of tools—traditional or not—to help them get a felt sense of the experience of mettā and slowly develop a deeper, more accessible, stable connection to it.

Much of what holds us back in our practice of mettā is our tendency to compare our experience of it to an idea of what we think love should feel like. Often we confuse genuine mettā with romantic love or attached or conditional love just as we may confuse karuṇā with grief or pity, mudita with over-exuberance, or upekkhā with indifference—what are called their “near enemies.” But if we accept the possibility that we might not really know what true unconditional love feels like our practice becomes not so much about cultivating mettā but about exploring the range of emotions in the spectrum of care, sensitizing to them, fine-tuning our taste for the purity of mettā, karuṇā, mudita, and upekkhā and learning to find our way back through increasingly difficult emotional terrain. In essence, we must practice like guerrillas. This means starting out by scouting, learning the terrain, exploring with skeptical mind that which we encounter as “love” and beginning small raids of lovingkindness at easy targets before we try to take on an army of hatred.

The brahmavihārā are like an oasis in the desert that guerrilla yogi must come to know through and through. Using the acronym **SABER**—a *sword* and also *to know*, in Spanish—we can train to:

- Scout-out, sniff-out, sensitize to love amid all the other scents in the air;

- Acquire a taste for them and appreciate their nourishing qualities;
- Build trusted paths to them through more and more distant and difficult terrain;
- Explore the range of defining sensations and obstacles we encounter to clearing these paths;
- Reside in the abode, relish the experience, rest in the base, restore our faith, and rejuvenate ourselves as we learn to soak in them for longer and longer periods of time.

One guerrilla approach is to practice brahmavihārā for the objects at the six-sense doors. We can begin by attuning the attention to receiving sounds coming and going at the ear-door. As we receive them fully, we move away from investigation (*dhmma vicaya*) and start to notice any tenderness toward these sounds, any sense of caring or gentleness that might be subtly arising on its own. Can we feel a sense of kindness toward sound objects? If we do—even slightly—we let ourselves get a sense of that flavor of mind and the goodness of it, the sweet flavor of this gentleness. If not, we might try to attune to any idea we have of what we think we are hearing and its worthiness of being cared for, and offer mettā to it. If that works, get a sense of that tender feeling—toward the people or animals or other objects at play—and let it sink in. Sometimes we might attune to the area of the heart-center and see if we notice any softening. If we do, feel the goodness of that and let it permeate⁴.

Sometimes it can be of benefit to see if we can receive the sounds themselves as a kind of mettā, as a gift that we feel

appreciation for. What are the sensations in the mind/heart that arise when we do that? If there is a sense of gratitude, of softening of the heart, go with it. If that means we incline more toward *mudita*, appreciation, so be it. If the sounds are unpleasant or overwhelming, maybe the quality of compassion. *karuṇā*, is more naturally available. Can we attune to a sense of caring for the strain of hearing on our ears? If we feel any warmth toward the hardship and exhaustive work of the ear itself, let that caring sink into the mind, sink into the ear. That is compassion for a physical sensation. Fine. The guerrilla yogi goes where there is an opening.

If none of this sending or receiving of *mettā* works, perhaps we can try to simply abide in a heart space of *mettā*, of tenderness, of kindness, of care as the sounds arise and pass through that space on their own.

As we feel ready, we can let the attention move into seeing. Even with the eyes closed there are colors, light, dark, motion. Can we send, receive, or abide in *mettā*, *karuṇā*, or *mudita* with visual impressions? How about smelling or tasting? Anywhere we even get the faintest scent of a softening of the heart, we should let ourselves be nourished by that good feeling: in the body and in the heart/mind.

At some point, we can begin to open up to bodily sensations in the same way. Explore sending, receiving, or abiding with *mettā*, *karuṇā*, or *mudita* depending on what naturally links the heart with these emotional sensations. You can move the attention slowly through the body from head to toe, or simply try to attune to the flavor of caring that meets whatever sensation is naturally arising in the body. We may notice more unpleasant sensations and so tilting toward compassion may

be more natural. We may notice pleasant sensations in which appreciative joy may be inspired. We can appreciate the burdens of the body, the beauty, all of the hard work that it has done to protect us, the mistreatment it has suffered from others and from our selves. Whatever we do, we must take the time to nourish ourselves with even the faintest scent of kindness, appreciation, or compassion in the heart.

Finally, try to include the mind/heart itself in our field of tender-heartedness: receiving thoughts or knowing with tenderness, appreciation, care. Any time that we actually feel a sense of what might be considered kindness, tenderness, compassion, etc toward the mind, its beauty, its struggles, we can let ourself feel it, get a taste for it, let it permeate our body and mind as much as possible. If we are able to stay connected to the heart feeling for a few moments, there is no need to go back to the original sense-target. Just hang out in kindness. When it dissipates, find the connection again through whatever approach to whichever sense door seemed to be working.

Some people find it more natural to send, others receive, and others, abide. See what might work most naturally for you during any given sitting period. This may very well change over years. We can learn to practice all of the brahmavihārā without having to conjure an external being in our minds. The activity of the six-senses is enough. This approach has the additional benefit of helping us integrate with the aliveness of our vipassanā practice. It is also a way to trick ourselves into doing mettā for “ourselves”—a common obstacle. Take time to explore a relationship to sound that is inclining toward care rather than investigation (which would be our normal vipassanā practice). Play around and learn to

feel the difference. As we build through all our sense experience, we start to see that nothing need be a distraction and nothing need be outside of our ability to care.

Sometimes all method seems impossible and yet a light general feeling of caring for the beings in front of you, to your right, behind, to your left, above, and below helps keep the mettā buoyant. Sometimes just tuning into kindness without any object at all works best. When nothing works, let it go. Our mind can simply be like a sail that is open and receptive when the winds of mettā begin to blow on their own. You don't even need to make it happen but can learn to catch the breeze when it begins to rise.

When all this caring feels exhausting and forced, there is an opportunity to settle into equanimity, upekkhā. Reminding ourselves things are as they are and letting that dark coolness settle into the heart and mind, we can explore this relief, this letting go, this surrender with all of the six sense experiences as well. Whatever arises in the fields of sound, smell, taste, visual impressions, physical sensations, and mind, we attune to the OK-ness of it, the lack of resistance or of clinging to it, the lack of ripples it creates and feel the powerful peace at the heart of this relationship to reality. Anytime we feel the peace of upekkhā, allowing it to nourish and calm our agitated minds and body.

Just like with insight practice, the guerrilla yogi considers the appropriate spheres, timing, intensity of our engagement with the brahmavihārā. No matter what method we use, the brahmavihārā practices are purifying and will tend to bring up their opposites: hatred, cruelty, jealousy, overwhelm. If we feel up for this struggle, great, but we don't need to do it in a

way that deepens our sense of self-hatred, hopelessness, or despair.

While the classical methods of brahmavihārā practice involve conjuring a mental impression of another being in the mind and fixing this mental quality onto that impression, with the six sense-door brahmavihārā we train in a more integrated and versatile approach. Because this method is so similar to our vipassanā practice, over time we can learn to interweave the two practices as necessary. While we may still practice vipassanā or mettā in independent ways, and derive the clear benefits of that, we can also learn to skillfully integrate them into a seamless approach. This may feel like having a general sense of tender-heartedness as we observe the breath in detail. Sometimes it is simply being willing to ride a wave of appreciation that naturally arises in response to an experience and use the buoyancy of that to strengthen the power of our mindfulness. It can also be used as a more precise and malleable tool to use when deeper challenges arise as a way of helping the mind open to relationship with more painful experiences. This versatility will become invaluable as we begin to engage more dynamic experiences in our practice.

We won't immediately find ourselves abiding in mettā all (or even most) of the time. But with determined practice we learn to find our way back to it more and more easily. It slowly becomes a home base, a place of safety and rest for the mind, a natural place of refuge from which we build our campaigns with all objects.

Do what works to get you connected to the brahmavihārā. Stabilize it. Over and over. Let the goodness of that feeling of love nourish you and strengthen you. It doesn't

matter where you find it. If you really knew how thirsty you were, you would never turn down the quenching water of love.

Upon the water-cleansed and fragrant ledge I undressed my soiled body, and stepped into the little basin, to taste at last a freshness moving air and water against my tired skin. It was deliciously cool. I lay there quietly, letting the clear, dark red water run over me in a ribald stream, and rub the travel-dirt away. While I was so happy, a grey-bearded, ragged man, with a hewn face of great power and weariness, came slowly along the path till opposite the spring...He heard me and leaned forward, peering with rheumy eyes at this white thing splashing in the hollow beyond the veil of sun-mist. After a long stare he seemed content, and closed his eyes, groaning, 'The love is from God; and of God; and towards God.'

~ T.E. Lawrence⁵

PURIFICATION OF MOTIVATION

We must integrate brahmavihārā into our vipassanā practice wherever we can. As long as we keep bringing love in, little by little, our internal system will learn to trust it, learn to trust the tenderness of mind that it brings because it will recognize that only a mind that is softened and prepared by love can actually receive experience in a direct and full way. Over time it can become a primary factor of our motivation to fight but there is no use rushing the process. For many it can take time.

In the patriarchal unfolding of the Dhamma, many lineages have relegated love to the sidelines. But mettā is not merely an added benefit to practice, nor is it simply a balm for our wounds: It is an essential ingredient and one of the greatest outcomes. It is almost impossible to imagine a successful liberation strategy without it. In our attempt to cultivate wisdom, love is an essential amendment to the soil. A mind

overextended in its commitment to wisdom can become too acidic, subtly suffused with aversion, attacking objects as they arise. A mind cultivated with tenderness leads to the flourishing of tenderness as its fruit.

Love that is not balanced by wisdom can be equally toxic so we must always consider the pH of the mind, and inquire internally about the primary motivation of our practice: Is this a mind that is clear and pliable? Is it tender and strong? Is it receptive to insight? If not, can we, without forcing, invite the mind to soften and see what happens? Balancing the attention with mettā is often our first step at purification of motivation of our practice—where we see the powerful tendency to destroy rather than understand, to kill rather than to liberate, that can undermine our practice at its very foundation.

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara⁶

The traditional soldier may fight out of a sense of patriotism and dedication, but they are just as likely to be compelled to fight because of social conditions: poverty, alienation, lack of education, family pressure, forced conscription. Even their sense of patriotism may tend to be rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion. But the guerrilla fighter, who voluntarily commits their life to a cause and joins the ranks of a liberation struggle against all odds and intends to make the world more just, more equitable, more free—this person is much more likely to

be driven by qualities of love, of hope, of moral conviction. It is this way with the guerrilla yogi and we must never lose sight of this principle inspiration.

The path of freedom can feel so much like a war that we can come to believe that aversion must be its primary motivation. We intend to destroy the things we hate. But in this practice it is our hatred of the enemy that gives them strength and it is only when we find our way to love them—because we fully understand them—that we are freed.

If our whole spiritual quest is fueled by aversion, by animosity and bitterness, we will never win and we will never achieve success. If we are trying to get enlightened out of self-hatred, it will be a miserable process that, over time, will be so dispiriting as to pull us off the path. It is not a sustainable source of energy for the long haul and it cannot be the baseline motivator. T.E. Lawrence expressed it beautifully when he said,

Efforts to make our men hate the enemy usually made them hate the fighting.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁷

Lawrence's fighters recognized that their primary motivation was an aspiration for freedom, something they didn't ultimately want to kill—or *die*—for, because “only a living man could enjoy its fruits.” We must think ourselves worthy of these fruits and love ourselves enough to go through immense suffering, clear-eyed and caring, in order to get there.

Mettā is a powerful weapon against Mara and must still be used wisely if it is to keep us on the appropriate course—

balanced by the wisdom of *upekkhā*. We will be tempted to use love as a way to control—internally and externally. We may find ourselves “breathing into” an area of the body to help loosen the tension like some other practices suggest. We may bring an imagined warm light or love to an area of the body in the same way. These things can work on occasion, but they will not work forever and they will not help the mind be able to process and manage the inevitable pain of life. They will not make the mind stronger. In our practice we will be tempted to use love to try to avoid, remove, or suppress physical pain, but we should be extremely cautious to avoid this. It will lead to a contaminated practice. If you are honest, you will not be able to avoid this tendency at times. But it is through this honesty that we come to purify our motivation, which is at least 90% of the practice.

There is a time and appropriate place for the alleviation of intense physical sensation, when we cannot be mindful of it. In these moments we should simply adjust the posture—motivated by caring tenderness. If we use mental tricks to get rid of pain we will start to confuse *vipassanā* with other modalities that ultimately lack the integrity of our process of liberation. If we are going to soften the pain because we cannot be with it in a skillful way, we should know that we are doing that—turning down the intensity to make the sensations manageable for the mind. The worst thing we can do is convince ourselves that we are being kind to the pain when we are really just trying to get rid of it. In those intense situations, it may be skillful instead to send *karuṇā* to the body and the mind: to the mind that is afraid of the pain, that feels overwhelmed by it, the heart that feels hopeless in the face of it. That is entirely different be-

cause compassion can meet the emotion face to face and care for it, softening the mind enough, perhaps, to recognize that the physical pain is much less challenging than the emotional pain, and it is there that we can apply our healing balm.

There is a fine line to walk between wanting to heal the body because we care about it and getting derailed because we are terrified of sickness and death. As spiritual seekers we can get a sense of our aspirations for physical health that can be wholesome but can also verge on the unwholesome. We can be inspired to be more healthy, to take care of our bodies with more earnestness. We may try to eat healthier food, eat in more moderate portions, get more exercise. We may benefit from the precepts supporting their restraint from alcohol or other intoxicants. Yogis may have remorse about their physical behavior in the past and are inspired to change in the future. These can be beautiful and essential endeavors, stages of our healing that are profound. But all of these actions can start to build stress rather than love. Because of our deep conditioning, they can be motivated by control, self-hatred, shame much more easily than by kindness and compassion. And we must always stay vigilant to the deeper motivation of any action and try to find the path back to whatever place of caring that birthed it.

As we sensitize to the dynamics of the body and the mind, we begin to notice challenges: physical discomfort in one place or another that we try to fix. We begin to notice the subtle sensations of body and have a sense that we can improve our bodies, our posture, our physiques and soon we can easily make a project out of it that distracts us from our deeper purpose: liberating the mind. We must tend to the body, care

for the body, love the body—but not lose sight of the wisdom side of our practice: that all conditioned things are subject to change when those conditions change. All beings will die. We must accept that the body is ultimately hopeless, all the tinkering and adjusting in the world is not going to save it from its inevitable downfall. If it is shame or craving or aversion that is motivating our “care” for the body, it is not worth the mental price we pay.

In this society, people regularly confuse *care* with *worry* or with *anger*. How often do we get the message, explicitly or subliminally, *If we you not angry it means you don't care*. This is a dramatic and troubling confusion of notions. This perspective is a common defense against the practice of equanimity where people are afraid that with too much peace, they will stop caring. But care and worry are entirely different and don't necessarily have anything to do with one another. We may understandably be angry or worried because something we care about—like climate change—has been threatened or harmed. But anger and worry are not the same emotions as love or compassion and it is extremely important to recognize this while still exploring their profound and subtle relationships. It is often helpful to trace back worry or anger to its root cause—care that feels too vulnerable to feel directly. It is the vulnerability of *dukkha* that leads us to worry or get angry or greedy or deluded—as defenses. We feel the pain of loss, a sense of powerlessness that is too hard to bear, and so the heart keeps us feeling strong through anger. It is not crazy or immoral, but it is not the same thing. If we don't see this difference we cannot expect to understand and ultimately transform these dynamics.

We know how different it feels to care about someone versus worry about them. When we care about them it is an honest connection and we feel that connection—even if it is in regards to something painful. When we are worried about them, it is usually fear of our own emotional world: our fear our future loss, future shame, etc. It is a contraction away from the other person because it is not actually interested in them. Their own heart knows this, as does their body, and it is never worth trying to trick it.

Without the balancing force of equanimity, we cannot really love cleanly. Love without equanimity is still going to be controlling, still clinging to conditions on some level. Only when the heart can accept the basic truths of reality—impermanence, undependability, essencelessness—does it have the ability to love cleanly, without stickiness or sentimentality. Only when the mind can love fully and connect with the worthiness of all phenomena to be cared for can it bear these truths and encounter a peace that is not indifference. There is an inter-purifying dynamic between love and wisdom and we should not let the paradox be an obstacle. They can only do their difficult work on the heart if we jump in and acknowledge that we need to love and to let go—and that we can do neither honestly without the other.

Be honest about the emotion that arises and track your way back to the care as best you can in order to get to the heart of what is so painful. What course of action you land on will be what it is, but you will have the confidence that the mind will be protected by wisdom and love instead of toxic contraction.

Mental pain is generally much harder to be with and care for than physical pain, but we often confuse the two and cannot see the real cause of our anguish. Mettā or karuṇā for the wanting or not wanting of a physical experience is always appropriate—but it won't make the wanting go away. Only wisdom, understanding, insight can do that. We must have compassion for the mind that is in turmoil but this is a method to help soften the resistance to feeling the pain, not as a means to get rid of it. Care for dukkha is entirely different than trying to use mettā to change reality. When we pull back our mind's projection and see that our real dukkha is not about the object of wanting or aversion, it is about pain of wanting and aversion in our own hearts, we come face to face with a kind of primordial dukkha, a wanting at the center of our being, and see clearly why we choose to avoid it. Mettā, karuṇā, Mudita, and upekkhā can help us attend to the pain in the heart from a healthier place. As always, we must be careful about the ways we can use the tools of freedom to deepen our bondage. The guerrilla yogi must be more sensitive to this than others.

We have many examples of times throughout history where people have undermined their most sacred principles in their efforts to defend them. Guerrilla wars and wars of liberation are notorious for this. The individual spiritual quest is no different. We take this struggle for liberation seriously. We may consider it to be the deepest aspect of our life's calling. In that seriousness, and in the desperation for freedom, it can sometimes be compelling to engage in practices motivated by forces that actually betray our path.

I don't want victory if it is accompanied by dishonor

~ Antonio Maceo⁸

Freddie Oversteegen was a Dutch teenager in the resistance movement during WWII who hunted down, seduced, and killed Nazis. She was given permission to fight by her mother who gave her only one rule: “Always stay human” which guided her actions through a range of physically dangerous morally treacherous behavior, including killing. When she killed someone, “It was tragic and very difficult and we cried about it afterwards,” said her sister Truus, who also joined the resistance efforts. “We did not feel it suited us—it never suits anybody, unless they are real criminals ... One loses everything. It poisons the beautiful things in life.”

In one interview Ms. Oversteegen reflected,

“I’ve shot a gun myself and I’ve seen them fall. And what is inside us at such a moment? You want to help them get up.”⁹

We cannot afford to lose our humanity in the struggle for freedom. Indeed, this spiritual struggle is one that requires us to go through our humanity, in all its beauty and danger, with greater and greater love, compassion, joy, and peace. If we learn to accept that each one of us has the raw material and capacity to become either a saint or a dictator, we come to understand the challenge of humanity at large, and are more profoundly humbled and inspired by the possibility of our liberation.

Until the death of King Kamehameha of Hawai`i 1819, the ancient kapu system had governed behavior in the social and religious order of Hawai`i for centuries. It provided a

framework of sacred restrictions that defined most interactions between royalty and commoners, regulated fishing practices and, among other things, denied women permission to eat bananas, coconuts, pork, and many kinds of fish, and forbade women and men to eat together.

Before he died, Kamehameha bestowed his political authority to his son, Liholiho, and his spiritual power, in the form of his great feathered war god, Kukailimoku, to his nephew, Kekuaokalani. Shortly after his father's death, Liholiho, under pressure from his wife and step-mother, sat down with them for a meal, thus breaking the kapu and abruptly ending the ancient religious system across the islands. Within days, he ordered the temples across the islands burned. Out of the blue, and without warning, the old religious and social order was gone.

Many rightfully feared that the deepest influences of the new era were of foreign origin and would ultimately threaten Hawaiian society and its alignment with the spiritual powers much greater than the human¹⁰. As chief defender of the old religion, and someone with a fair claim to succession to the crown, Kekuaokalani (Kamehameha's spiritual heir) mounted a campaign to overthrow Liholiho. Because of their incompatible visions for the future of their nation, friends and relatives took arms against one another in Kuamo'o, south of Kona on Hawai'i Island. Over an entire day of ferocious fighting on fields of jagged lava, and under the heavy strain of the unrelenting sun, the rebels—outnumbered and outgunned—were defeated. When Kekuaokalani finally fell, his wife Manono, who had herself fought vigorously all day, called for a stop to the fighting and pled for mercy for the rebels. The leader of

Liholiho's troops and Manono's own half-brother, Kalanimoku, rejected her request and pushed forward with their annihilation. Collecting her mind with an awareness of the inconceivable weight of the moment, Manono cried out to her people, all of the fighters on both sides, "Malama ko aloha!" protect your love, before falling to the ground—killed by a bullet to her temple.

I consider it to be, in its context, one of the most profound things anyone has ever said. How powerful a call this was to her people to remind them in the wake of this bloody battle, in the midst of a nation in turmoil whose future was in shadows, of their shared responsibility and commitment to their deepest spiritual values? How do we protect our aloha in the fight for those things we believe so deeply in? How do we ensure that we don't betray our essential principles, our most fundamental spiritual virtues in our effort to defend them?

~ 7 ~

RETREAT

Encirclement - Escape



The guerrilla combatant ought to risk his life whenever necessary and be ready to die without the least sign of doubt; but, at the same time, he ought to be cautious and never expose himself unnecessarily. All possible precautions ought to be taken to avoid a defeat or an annihilation. For this reason it is extremely important in every fight to maintain vigilance over all the points from which enemy reinforcements may arrive and to take precautions against an encirclement, the consequences of which are usually not physically disastrous but which damages morale by causing a loss of faith in the prospects of the struggle.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara¹

ONE OF THE GREATEST military threats to a guerrilla band is the enemy’s tactic of encirclement. The superior occupying force discovers a guerrilla encampment and creates a perimeter around it at some distance. Slowly, the formation tightens around the base like a noose, and the guerrilla unit is attacked from all directions at once, with no easy route of escape. This traps the partisans in a defensive position—something they take great pains to avoid because it exposes their massive strategic disadvantage. The risk of high

casualties, demoralization, and lost initiative cannot be overstated.

For the guerrilla yogi, a similar scenario of encirclement by the forces of Mara is one of our greatest threats and challenges. When certain conditions come into alignment, we find ourselves besieged by powerful, overwhelming entanglements of rage, terror, grief, doubt, or self-hatred. When these confluences of dangerous conditions arise we find ourselves trapped in a kind of vortex of hindrances from which it can be very hard to escape and within which we can suffer great setbacks.

There are certain formulas of deep-seated doubt or anger, confusion or greed to which each of us are most vulnerable. They seem so much a part of us—the perspective they offer seems so fundamentally true—we are entirely susceptible to their spell. On the other hand, they are so deeply engrained that they are largely invisible to us. They often provide the basic platforms from which we build our selves and the world around us. We rarely get enough distance or stability to see them clearly.

Sometimes we refer to these formulas and dynamics of entanglement as “karmic knots.” The phrase is intended to show how our inner constructs of personality are the result of many factors in our lives, many formed very early on. The families we were born into, the communities, the threads of culture and habits within our direct lineages and those outside of them, and whatever ancient forces are at play in our make-up, met the challenges of our childhoods in specific ways that tended to engrain certain patterns of defensive internal and external behavior. We all have them and they are the most delicate and profound teachers for us.

All yogis will encounter craving and aversion throughout any normal range of meditation experiences, and the depths of even mild hindrances can be humbly profound. We try at first to be mindful of whatever experience we are having and implement our normal range of tactics to come into meaningful relationship with whatever is predominant. But encirclement by a karmic knot is not simply succumbing to a greedy impulse or getting angry (though under the right conditions those kinds of experience can get the ball rolling toward an overwhelming attack of doubt and self-hatred that would qualify as a karmic knot). Encirclement is a dire situation in which you are faced with the possibility of an overwhelming loss and an extreme setback in your struggle for liberation: getting lost in a black hole of self-hatred, doubt, despair, hopelessness, or worthlessness that can be all-consuming.

Sometimes these experiences are related to past trauma. Other times, childhood experiences that may have been less dramatic but nevertheless powerful, instill deeply held negative beliefs about ourselves or the world around us that ripen under the right conditions. Often we don't precisely know where our karmic knots come from but they are familiar demons, sometimes subtle ones, that are so hard to see because they seem so true.

Over time we can begin to get a sense of the various conditions that lead to us getting caught in the net of our karmic knots. For example, a particular kind of insight experience leaves us vulnerable to a challenging memory or a chronic pain. There arises a deeply held negative belief about ourselves in the context of a little bit of low energy. With our defenses down, these thoughts fuel profoundly challenging

emotions we don't have the capacity to be with mindfully, which then create more negative-thought propulsion, and *voila*: we have the kind of confluence of conditions that has us spiraling into a black hole of despondent hopelessness.

Many practitioners fail to recognize that there are very real dangers along this path that must be taken seriously. When we deepen our exploration into the nature of conditioned phenomena and begin to see their nature of *dukkha*, we are not always well-prepared for the shock of this reality and for the intensity of the psychological distress that it can provoke. Insight itself can be powerfully disturbing when we penetrate the empty, insubstantial, or dissolving aspect of things. Yogis with pre-existing mental health challenges—especially ones that have not been or are not being treated by medicine and therapy—are most vulnerable to these negative consequences. But even the most psychologically in-tact people will at some point be profoundly troubled by what they encounter in the mind and we must be responsible in our training how to manage these mind-states. All of these realities must be treated with the greatest respect and care.

A black hole is a mass in the universe that is so dense, so heavy—whose gravitational force is so great—that nothing escapes it, not even light. For us, that would be to say that all of our goodness gets swallowed up in the pull of these karmic knots. When we lose connection to our own goodness we are truly lost and must proceed with extreme measures of escape and withdrawal. If we are not careful and engage in dramatic retreat we can be led into a chasm of despair and darkness, in the worst cases even psychosis, because we have not learned how to escape them in time.

Under the strain of being constantly pursued, and of being forced to speak in whispers perhaps for weeks on end for fear of betraying themselves to the enemy, seasoned fighters not infrequently broke down and became demented.

~ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*²

RETREAT

A little piece of advice. You see an agent, you do what we do: Run. You run your ass off.

~ Cypher, *The Matrix*³

The guerrilla yogi should do everything in their power to avoid encirclement. As when the guerrilla band gets encircled by the enemy, it is usually the result of a gain in their knowledge of us, and a deficit of our knowledge about them that puts us in a particularly vulnerable position.

Part of the sorcery of a karmic knot can be convincing us that we need to engage them more deeply: We don't even know that we should run. Even if we do, we don't respect the inadequacy of our minds to meet these entanglements fruitfully and in arrogance or desperation we dive deeper into trouble. It can take us a long time to learn the signs of an impending encirclement and even longer to appreciate the need to run. The guerrilla yogi must recognize as soon as possible when they are outgunned and should do their best to retreat, to actively withdrawal from engagement, because they know they don't stand a chance.

If we stay and fight we will fail, and we will have been defeated twice: once by the enemy, and once by ourselves. We

will have doubtlessly called upon the forces of aversion and conceit in your attempts to vanquish the enemy and in doing so will have cultivated the very forces we are trying to overcome. This is the ultimate challenge for the guerrilla yogi who should try at all costs to use only the tools of wisdom and love to defeat the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion. Any time we rely on those “three poisons” of greed, hatred, or delusion we have already lost the fight.

...if after all there is no other alternative the best way to escape is to break through the enemy lines in the middle of the dark and flee to the hills.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud⁴

When we find ourselves being attacked by difficult forces in the mind and body and are wondering about the potential success of the battle, the first question we should ask ourselves is, “are we actually being mindful?”

When we watch our fear, pain, doubt, gather momentum, are we truly able to be mindful of these targets? Have we the genuine interest and relative objectivity that this entails or is our attention motivated by aversion or craving? This discernment can help us determine if we can truly engage the object in a way that is fruitful or if we are undermining our practice by reinforcing the tactics of greed and hatred. As long as we are trying to change what is happening, to override, to overcome it, it is not mindfulness—it is aggression, and with aggression we will always lose.

If we find that we can be mindful of the fear most of the time, we should stay engaged. Check it out, explore and try to

understand the nature of what you are watching: *What is it? How does it feel in the body?* But with a karmic knot encircling us, this is not easy. The emotional undercurrents are often unseen and overwhelming. When they are seen, they are things like shame and self-hatred, terror, profound self-doubt: not things that are easy to be mindful of because their gravitational pull is so powerful. We identify with them so strongly we cannot see them clearly. They have a hold on our hearts, they know our secret keys into these dark places, and we are sometimes powerless against them.

Because of the threat of encirclement, one of the most important trainings for a guerrilla yogi is to perfect their plan of escape. Always have an escape route (or two or three) set up for situations of encirclement or attack and develop the ability to use them in subtle and more dramatic ways. This kind of mobility and sensitivity will save your life and your morale over the years of struggle.

The guerrilla must live to fight another day and for that reason the withdrawal is as important as the attack itself.

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army⁵

It is generally better to overreact at first, to engage in a more dramatic retreat, if it saves you from devastating bombardment. In the case where we are overwhelmed by the attack and we succumb to these sophisticated forces, there are always secondary tactics to be implemented, but they almost always come at a heavy cost and it is much better to never get to that point. Over time, we learn to see which engagements

we can actually win and our escape routes become more sophisticated and secure.

The guerrilla must know and understand that:

- 1) No encirclement is complete enough that it can't be broken. There are always weak links and these must be found, probed and exploited. Note where the units link-up.
- 2) Proper intelligence can counter the special surprise blow. The guerrilla must always be on his guard.
- 3) When the enemy attacks with his trained bands of hunting packs the guerrillas must fall on them and ruthlessly destroy them. Provide diversions. Hit the enemy's base. Cut him off. When an area is under enemy attack, increase activity in other areas.⁶

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army⁷

This essential technique of retreat is actually rather simple: run. In the case of the guerrilla yogi, escape means moving away from the difficult object. The only question, with often the most humbling answer, is how far must one go to reach safety? Sometimes, it is simply a matter of moving the attention away from the fear that is gripping it and coming back to our home base, like the breath or a touch-point in the body. This is the basic training of versatility of mind. In the case of overwhelming encirclement, though, this will generally not be enough. If the experience is related to sexual or physical trauma, often nowhere in the body will feel safe enough to anchor the attention. Perhaps we move the attention to sound targets. Often, that is not far enough. The space around us? Opening our eyes?

If all that fails, and at some point it surely will, we should get up, go outside and take a walk. Get some fresh air,

try to take in the sounds and lights and space around you. Keep your mind from returning to the black hole. Sometimes this requires great vigilance and determination because the gravity of the knot is so seductive and there is simply no way to safely engage it under the current conditions, even outside of formal meditation. Use your physical energy to dissipate the overwhelming intensity that has built up in the mind.

Then we get more serious. Take a bath. Grab a stuffed animal. If it makes you feel safer, lock your doors. Get under the covers and “hide from the hindrances,” as my own teacher is fond of saying. Cultivate wholesome mental qualities with urgency and commitment in order to override and shut down the momentum of the unwholesome ones. Go to a distraction: read, watch a movie, get a treat for yourself. Bring in beauty. Taking in some healthy pleasant stimulation—nature, art, music, a movie, reading, etc can save your life. Talk to a friend. We are trying to incorporate a process of finding safety for the mind when it is under attack by overwhelmingly powerful forces. We will need the buoyancy, we need to feel good, we need to get away, recalibrate, run to the hills, heal our wounds, and regroup.

In a rare expression of the need for retreat from a monastic meditation master, Mahasi Sayadaw, in his grand treatise on vipassanā practice, demonstrates the need to take breaks. Speaking of *kamavitakka*: thought based on desire directed to sense-pleasures, he writes,

If *kamavitakka*, etc. frequently occur connected with any sense object, this object should be ignored without any regard. If such thoughts arise at every moment of contemplating and noting, the practice of contem-

plating and noting may be better stopped for a while. Much benefit may be accrued to some persons by putting off the contemplation and noting when yearning desire goes to the extreme or when becoming over-anxious and over jealous. When it so happens, it would be proper to completely halt the contemplating and noting for a period of two hours, or three hours, or half-a-day, or a whole day, or a whole night and then to have a light talk with other persons staying together with you on extraneous matters as a diversion. It would appear even necessary also to go on pilgrimage, to do the worshipping and pay homage to pagodas. Moreover, bathing washing of clothes, etc. be done. If desirous of going to bed, sleep for some time to keep the mind at rest without contemplating and noting.

~ Mahasi Sayadaw⁸

Sayadaw describes these tactics for *kamavitakka* but they are equally relevant for *byapadavitakka*: thought based on ill will, malevolence, directed to killing, destroying, harming; and *vihimsavitakka*: thought based on cruelty, injuring, hurting, directed to causing harm and injury to others. One can see that depending on conditions we may take a short break or a long break—long enough to go on pilgrimage! How many of us are humble enough to retreat that far? Too few. And it is to our detriment.

Without these tools, or if we go beyond our own capacity to reel ourselves back from the edge, the mind will use its own powerful defenses of dissociation, addiction, unwholesome gratification, and, in extreme conditions, even psychosis or dissociation in order to find a sense of safety. If this happens, it may not be the end of the world—we can often recover—but depending on the severity of the trauma, there is a heavy price to pay for experiences of deep dissociation and it is always imperative to try to avoid them at all cost.

Dissociation or, more dramatically, various types of “conversion disorders” can be our system’s own protective circuit breakers that function to protect us from places that are too painful, when the voltage is too high. But it is very blunt and powerful mechanism that can reinforce a trauma response, which is simply something that we will have to take more and more careful time to untangle later, until we learn how to retreat. Over time we learn to see the signs, get a scent of the impending attack in the air, and can withdraw to safe distance before real danger emerges.

The organization, combat capacity, heroism, and spirit of the guerrilla band will undergo a test of fire during an encirclement by the enemy, which is the most dangerous situation of the war. In the jargon of our guerrilla fighters in the recent war, the phrase “encirclement face” was given to the face of fear worn by someone who was frightened. The hierarchy of the deposed regime pompously spoke of its campaigns of “encirclement and annihilation.” However, for a guerrilla band that knows the country and that is united ideologically and emotionally with its chief, this is not a particularly serious problem. It need only take cover, try to slow up the advance of the enemy, impede his action with heavy equipment, and await nightfall, the natural ally of the guerrilla fighter. Then with the greatest possible stealth, after exploring and choosing the best road, the band will depart, utilizing the most adequate means of escape and maintaining absolute silence. It is extremely difficult in these conditions at night to prevent a group of men from escaping the encirclement.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara⁹

My old boss used to joke, “When I retreat, I attack!” and this is exactly the motto of the guerrilla yogi. We will come to trust that it is true, that it is actually stronger and wiser to run when we need to run, than to abstinently fight a battle we have no

hope of winning, one that will strengthen the enemy and weaken ourselves. There are many times where we do greater harm to our enemy and service to ourselves by running away rather than digging our heels in and fighting. It may appear cowardly, it may not have the ego-satisfaction of engagement, but it fulfills the only formula that matters,

Before we treat the practical aspects of guerrilla war, it might be well to recall the fundamental axiom of combat on which all military action is based. This can be stated: "Conservation of one's own strength; destruction of enemy strength."

~ Mao Zedong¹⁰

In June of 1812, Napoleon's Grande Armée of 680,000 soldiers crossed the Neman River to confront the much weaker Russian army. As French forces pursued them, the Russians retreated eastward: evading serious engagement and luring the French deeper into Russian territory. As the Russians retreated, behind them their own Cossack guerrilla forces burned grain fields and storehouses throughout the countryside and torched their own towns and villages to the ground. Russians surrendered vast quantities of territory to the French—but it was charred, lifeless land that prohibited them from sustaining themselves on the spoils of their victories. This combination of retreat and scorched-earth tactics denied the French any decisive victories and caused them to advance faster than their supply lines could keep up with. French soldiers were unable to sustain themselves from the ashed lands they had conquered. When they desperately abandoned their camps in search of food, they were quickly ambushed and captured or killed by local forces. With no grasses to sustain the horses, the animals were slaugh-

tered to feed the thousands of famished soldiers: the army ate its own calvary. Without horses, soldiers march on foot, leaving cannons and supply wagons abandoned along the roads, with no way to pull them.

When Napoleon finally reached Moscow, in what should have been his great victory, he found the city abandoned. Local police had set fires across the city with the intention of burning Moscow to the ground, forcing the French to frantically scramble to save the city they had just conquered. Technically they were victorious but the city was destroyed and their army was decimated—degraded in supplies, numbers, and morale. Immediately, the brutal Russian winter set in for which Napoleon's forces were entirely unprepared. In December, a coup d'état was sprung against Napoleon back at home so he fled back. A few weeks later his entire Grande Armée retreated from Russia, with only 27,000 soldiers remaining. Not only was this expedition a disaster, it profoundly weekend Napoleon's reputation and set the stage for his eventual downfall. The Russians had, as Bob Dylan once wrote, “won the war after losing every battle.”

The Russian retreat needed to be committed, swift, and profoundly unattached in order to keep the French in pursuit and irrecoverably weakened. For yogis, these same three qualities must be learned, and for many of us they take years of humble practice, of getting obliterated by fear, rage, or grief, before we are even willing to learn this important tactic.

In general, guerrilla units disperse to operate:

- 1) When the enemy is in overextended defense, and sufficient force cannot be concentrated against him, guerrillas must disperse, harass him, and demoralize him.
- 2) When encircled by the enemy, guerrillas disperse to withdraw.
- 3) When the nature of the ground limits action, guerrillas disperse.
- 4) When the availability of supplies limits action, they disperse.
- 5) Guerrillas disperse in order to promote mass movements over a wide area.

~ Mao Zedong¹¹

RESISTANCE AND RE-ENGAGEMENT

Much of our social and cultural training is to imagine a warrior as having a certain set of qualities: ironlike, macho, direct, disinterested. We easily internalize these same ideas about strength and take them into our spiritual training—largely to our disadvantage. Of course the spiritual path does take enormous courage: the depths of vulnerability that we subject ourselves to are beyond comprehension. But there is no need to be ideological or stubborn about the strategy. Most of the time the macho approach simply doesn't work and people spend their lives hardening their hearts by trying to destroy the parts of themselves they don't like rather than develop a relationship with them of interest and kindness; a relationship that eventually untangles them from within.

The first stage of building a healthy relationship is learning to move away. (This is often as true for our families as it is our karmic knots, which is no coincidence). Developing this spiritual instinct helps us see the unwholesome motivations that are often at the heart of our enthusiasm for engagement. Mara is prepared for an all out war and can use our own twisted motivation against us. But delusion is not designed to hold up

against the slow undermining of a guerrilla front and will ultimately break from the pressure. Like the Russian army in 1812, sometimes that relationship means giving way, allowing these phenomena to burn through, but keeping our distance ahead of the fire and burning up our “Selves” in the process—with nothing left to conquer.

When we retreat from rage, we may allow it to burn through us like a wildfire. At first, we may feel like we are giving up ground and surrendering to the enemy, but if we do it right, we see that we have lost nothing; indeed there is no thing to lose and no one burned by the fire. This is the ultimate understanding of *anatta*, or non-self. If it is our ego pushing us into the fire, we will be burned—even if it feels like we win—because it is “we” who wins. But if we enter with humility the ego gets burnt up, even if we lose.

The enemy encircles China, the Soviet Union, France and Czechoslovakia with his front of aggression, while we counter-encircle Germany, Japan and Italy with our front of peace. But our encirclement, like the hand of Buddha, will turn into the Mountain of Five Elements lying athwart the Universe, and the modern Sun Wu-Kings — the fascist aggressors — will finally be buried underneath it, never to rise again.

~ Mao Zedong¹²

Our biggest obstacle to learning and valuing retreat is often our own stubbornness. When it comes to skillful engagement with overwhelming emotional entanglement, a yogi’s desire for courageous battle frequently makes them reckless. They don’t see the profound danger in engaging in a battle they have no chance of winning, oblivious to the harm that can come from

being bashed by the brutal pounding waves of a tsunami of hopelessness or confusion. We are seduced into the black hole by our egos but by the time we see that we are in slippery territory it is already very dangerous. We may have the sense that we “should” be able to go further, we “should” be able to fight deeper into the darkness. After all, aren’t we here to fight dragons? But in this we forget the most basic aspect of our training as guerrilla yogis: we are outgunned, outnumbered, outmaneuvered and that our essential strategy is to run directly for the hills to protect ourselves, to reserve our strength, to keep the mind buoyant enough to keep going rather than succumb to the quagmire of our karmic knot.

On occasion the yogi will not heed the warnings of their teacher encouraging them to withdraw and they end up in a psychiatric emergency which could have been easily avoided if they were humble enough, trusting enough, or wise enough to run. It is a confluence of delusion, ambition, anxiety, and arrogance masked as spiritual virtue that will get yogis diving headlong into an inescapable vortex of suffering. With appropriate care, these kinds of experiences can eventually be healed from, but sometimes the cost is losing sight of the path altogether. At first the notion that retreat is the approach most aligned with our spiritual principles and ambitions can feel deeply counterintuitive. Especially in the realm of karmic knots where the belief that we are in control of them is often central to the experience. But if we learn to evaluate the tactic we will undoubtedly see that it is motivated by and strengthening of care and wisdom and thus is indeed the appropriate response.

Yet we don’t want to use “training wheels” and we resist. We are arrogant and deny the validity of the fear in our

hearts. We do so at our own peril. It is only attachment to identity that keeps us from surrendering to a better way. It is not infrequent that we transition a yogi out of retreat against their desire because they are not willing to stop the momentum of their descent into the darkness. They don't see the danger and they don't see the attachment that is at the heart of their stubbornness.

Battles in Arabia were a mistake, since we profited in them only by the ammunition the enemy fired off... We had nothing material to lose, so our best line was to defend nothing and to shoot nothing.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹³

Once the mind begins to appreciate that it cannot successfully go into direct conflict with its most deeply entrenched hindrances, often only after a series of humiliating defeats, there can finally be an acceptance of a new way. Once we turn the corner and begin to experiment, we slowly start to learn how to keep ahead of the gravitational fields of the black holes that would pull us in.

Over a life of practice, we become more sensitive to the early-warning signs of an encirclement or a “multiple-hindrance attack.” Having scouts ready throughout the land, ready to notice even a subtle shift in the winds, can lead to better intelligence and more rapid and efficient response. The earlier these storms are seen building, the less dramatic an escape is necessary, the less dire the engagement. Over time, recognizing that these kinds of black holes are a part of our basic psychology and inner structure, we should be able to detect them approaching when they are still quite far off, far

off enough at least to be able to get out of there with plenty of time—perhaps even without getting wet.

But we must begin by appreciating the strategic advantage we have in discovering and maintaining a true safe-house. A New York Times journalist covering the Algerian Revolution wrote, “As the United States learned in Korea, it is singularly difficult to destroy an enemy enjoying the sanctuary of an inviolable frontier.”

Indeed, as we strengthen our capacity to run, to evade, to hide in the mountains until we find safe passage, this confidence allows us to begin to engage the forces in small, homeopathic, doses. It is the confidence not to betray ourselves. Because we know we can run to safety, and have learned to do so, we can begin to allow ourselves to dip our toes in the water of terror. When we know we can find safe harbor, we allow ourselves to be caught by the wild gales of the heart without fear. Over time, our confidence in these storms grows and need to retreat lessens as we learn to navigate these strange and uncomfortable terrains.

Always remember that Sandino fought against the Americans for seven years without once being cornered in spite of his pursuers' many thousands of perfectly trained men with motorized units and dozens of radios beaming concentric rings around the Sierra de Segovia where our hero was fighting.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud¹⁴

Eventually we may come to directly engage these forces of the mind fruitfully, but we must always do so with extreme caution and humility. What our karmic knots ultimately need is profound patience, genuine interest, and love. This is what it

means to be able to finally engage these parts of the mind fruitfully, and so the approach is also the result. But we must also come to understand that we don't have to make them go away in order to be free. We don't see them as our biggest obstacles. Rather, they are the results of our deepest wounds, and so clearly the source of our deepest understanding—the ultimate crucible of our awakening. We too often conflate freedom with getting rid of these parts of ourselves but it is only our identities that are caught up in their resolution, not the mind itself. That is not the point of our practice. Our desire to get rid of them is actually part of the karmic knot itself: the very hardest part to disentangle from. We must remember that the universe will never rid itself of all black holes. It doesn't need to. It doesn't try to. It isn't threatened by them. They arise and pass dependent upon conditions. For a long time—in all likelihood many years—our primary tactic in relationship to our karmic knots is learning how to escape, move away, protect and heal ourselves, and regroup for when conditions are more favorable. If we become friends with these forces over time, all the more beautiful.

The mind that longs for freedom is also afraid of freedom and will set up landmines, will try to sabotage our progress and undermine our insights throughout our campaign. We must have compassion for these parts of ourselves that are afraid of freedom, understanding that they are not wrong and that sometime our motivation for release is an arrogant avoidance of the pain.

Even before we try to connect to these wounded places with love, we must learn to see that getting out of this kind of vortex is itself an act of love. It should not be conceived of as a

failure of some mental factors, but as the strengthening of others. It is the activation of love and good will toward ourselves, toward our minds and bodies. We are motivated to protect ourselves from overwhelming defeat because we care. It is replacing the subconscious self-hatred motivation training with compassion and kindness at the times when we most desperately need it. Developing this reflex is fundamental training for any guerrilla yogi.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Hawaii's local Japanese community was on the defensive. On the mainland US, American citizens of Japanese descent who lived within 100 miles of the coast were sent to internment camps, subjected to severe restrictions in their movement and rights, and had enormous amounts of property confiscated. This extreme degree of relocation and confinement was not practical in Hawai'i because Japanese-Americans made up almost 40% of the territory's population. But Japanese-American religious leaders were sent to internment camps on the mainland and local communities were not allowed to congregate. On the small island of Lana'i, members of the Hongwanji Buddhist Temple knew the stability of their community and the sanctity of their church were under threat. Within a matter of months, they were notified that their church was going to be confiscated by the plantation and given to a Christian denomination.

The altar of this particular temple, crafted in Japan, was made of beautiful wood carvings and adorned in gold leaf and paint, and held the ashes and relics of generations of family members. It is hard to convey the deep connection a Hongwanji community has to their altar. Along with the reliquary, many

consider it the most sacred part of their community. Late one night, members of the congregation snuck into their own temple and quietly dismantled their altar. Carefully wrapping each piece in cloth, they tiptoed to their cemetery and buried their altar and their bell—until an unforeseeable time in the future when the war was over and they hoped they could recover, rebuild, and restore the physical heart of their community.

Eventually, social conditions did change—the war ended and the racist restrictions on Japanese Americans were lifted. And while the old church was never returned to them, the Buddhists found a new building and began the next chapter in the history of their community by unearthing and installing the altar in its new home.

Realizing they were in hopeless situation, they did their best to protect their most sacred possession until conditions returned to their favor. These are the essential tactics of the guerrilla yogi.

When a guerrilla unit, through either a poor estimate on the part of its leader or pressure from the enemy, is forced into a passive position, its first duty is to extricate itself. No method can be prescribed for this, as the method to be employed will, in every case, depend on the situation. One can, if necessary, run away. But there are times when the situation seems hopeless and, in reality, is not so at all. It is at such times that the good leader recognizes and seizes the moment when he can regain the lost initiative.

~ Mao Zedong¹⁵

DIVERSION

Distraction - Misdirection



Their tactics must deceive, tempt, and confuse the enemy. They must lead the enemy to believe that they will attack him from the east and north, and they must then strike him from the west and the south. They must strike, then rapidly disperse. They must move at night.

~ Mao Zedong, On Guerrilla Warfare¹

A GUERRILLA ARMY will learn to disorient, confuse, and distract the enemy as much as possible. It must learn techniques to make the enemy believe the band is located in one place when they are really in another. They learn how to give the impression of being a larger unit or a smaller one depending on if they are trying to intimidate the enemy or draw them in. They try to make the enemy believe the rebels are resting or defeated in order to lull them into complacency and to make them feel that an attack is imminent when they are actually resting, wearing the enemy down through agitation.

Being overly obvious in their efforts can expose insurgents to unnecessary exposure in their campaigns. Being discrete and keeping to the shadows, especially when on the move, can help

save a movement from profound risks. Si Azedine, one of the most tenacious of Algerian guerrilla fighters, barely escaped annihilation at Agounennda when he led his forces boldly through the valley rather than more discretely along the crest of the hills. Spotted easily by local scouts, his overt maneuver allowed French *para* forces to position themselves in an effective encirclement, trapping the combatants for three days of dogged fighting for which they were ill prepared. Slowly escaping in small groups at night, the guerrillas lost 96 men—truly devastating for them—though they managed to hold on to half of the weapons of the fallen.

Anything the guerrilla yogi can do to confuse the focus or disperse the energy of the enemy gives us room to breath and provides an important psychological sense of protection—and so in our case *actual* protection—from attack. If we constantly draw attention to our spiritual rebellion we are obvious targets for the armies of Mara. When we are discrete or pull the enemy's attention toward something non-essential or hide our activity, we give ourselves some padding to operate outside of the zone of conflict, the pressure of which we might at times lose the capacity to maneuver within effectively. This is why diversion and distraction are essential tactics in the insurgents' toolbox: They can disorient the opposition, diffusing their energy while gathering our own.

Our circumstances were not twice similar, so no system could fit them twice: and our diversity threw the enemy intelligence off the track... our strengths depended upon whim.

~ T.E. Lawrence²

During the war of independence, Algerian forces found a safe haven for training and coordination across the border in neighboring Tunisia. French forces eventually constructed a giant defensive position along the border designed to stop the flow of partisans back and forth. After Haoari Boumédiène came to lead the National Liberation Army (ALN) he quickly changed the long-standing but self-destructive practice of massive attacks attempting to breach the French barrier which had caused the resistance massive casualties. Instead he successfully implemented a strategy of constant “pin-prick” mortar attacks of the border from a safe distance: minimizing Algerian casualties while still freezing French troops on the line. This gave his forces in the interior of the country a much-needed reprieve from persecution and greater freedom to move about. This is the acupuncture of war.

Similarly, during the fall of 1968, in what became known as the “border battles,” North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces provoked a number of engagements with Americans in remote jungle areas, drawing energy and attention away from the urban centers of the country. With occupying focus distracted away from areas of heavy population, the Vietcong began the *General Offensive and Uprising of Tet Mau*—the “Tet Offensive”—where over 80,000 Vietnamese guerrillas attacked positions over 100 cities and towns across the country. The massive action shocked American forces and society who had no idea of the growing capacity of the North Vietnamese forces. It was an important turning point in the war.

Campaigns of distraction and diversion are of powerful utility to the guerrilla yogi if they are done consciously, with the grander vision always in mind. As guerrilla yogis, we need

reprieve. We need breaks. We need to take the foot off the gas. We need to engage in activities, diversions, that help bolster the mind, provide it with buoyancy, even in ways that might not look like—or might even appear to contradict—formal practice. This can mean anything from watching movies, reading, making art, listening to or making music, taking a nap, having a cup of tea, or just spacing out—even during periods of intensive practice. It is not just run and hide—it is rest and recover.

In addition to a piece of soap, useful for washing utensils as well as for personal cleanliness, a toothbrush and paste should be carried. It is worthwhile also to carry a book, which will be exchanged with other members of the band. These books can be good biographies of past heroes, histories, or economic geographies, preferably of the country, and works of general character that will serve to raise the cultural level of the soldiers and discourage the tendency toward gambling or other undesirable forms of passing the time. There are periods of boredom in the life of the guerrilla fighter.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara³

When we are grinding it out in the struggle of liberation of the mind, we sometimes need to be reminded of the broader palette of emotion we are capable of but may have lost contact with. On occasion our perception is too narrow and we lose sight of the way doubt, aversion, or wanting might have snuck in and be tainting our perspective on what we are observing. Diversion opens us up to possibility, to a broader perspective. While “story” generally gets a bad rap in vipassanā practice—discounted as fabrication and fantasy—we have to acknowledge that whether it is books or movies, or over a campfire, story has since time immemorial helped us laugh at, consider,

care about, reflect upon the human experience in ways that are de-isolating, uplifting, connecting, and wonder-inducing. For eons humans have sat around the fire and shared stories of joy and woe, and that there are times where we need this sense of connection and perspective. Our tradition is full of stories to help inspire, educate, warn, and amaze. The guerrilla fighter and yogi are no exceptions to this basic human need,

In the evening, when we had shut the gate, all guests would assemble, either in my room or in Ali's, and coffee and stories would go round until the last meal, and after it, till sleep came. On stormy nights we brought in brushwood and dung and lit a great fire in the middle of the floor. About it would be drawn the carpets and the saddle-sheepskins, and in its light we would tell over our own battles, or hear the visitor's traditions. The leaping flames chased our smoke-ruffled shadows strangely about the rough stone wall behind us, distorting them over the hollows and projections of its broken face. When these stories came to a period, our tight circle would shift over, uneasily, to the other knee or elbow; while coffee-cups went clinking round, and a servant fanned the blue reek of the fire towards the loophole with his cloak, making the glowing ash swirl and sparkle with his draught. Till the voice of the story-teller took up again, we would hear the rain-spots hissing briefly as they dripped from the sonde-beamed roof into the fire's heart.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁴

It is comforting to take a break, to rest and gather our forces, let our guard down, find solace and solidarity. We cannot force the pace of our recuperation from practice wounds or life wounds. Often this means diverting the attention further and further away from formal practice: something that can we can be deeply resistant to because it can feel so untethered. But in fact we need to be able to tether ourselves back into the con-

ceptual world where, for better or worse, the mind feels more comfortable and more relaxed.

Human beings are mostly caught in the conceptual level of reality. We so often live in our thoughts about things more than in direct relationship to them. We are prisoners of our mental constructs which is why so much emphasis is put on the practice in viewing phenomena non-conceptually, releasing ourselves from “story.” We try to experience physical sensations directly rather than as “pain” or “back” or tying them into a story we have about ourselves that keeps us involved and invested in a structure of ideas about who we are and about the world around us. In vipassanā we get underneath these notions and feel the pulsing and vibrating of the sensations of the body, hardness, softness, moisture, dryness, warmth, and coolness all in flux, arising and passing, one moment leading to the next.

These insights are profound to our understanding of the nature of reality—of who we are and what is really going on—but they can be so disruptive and so jarring to our normal perspective as to cause us to be disoriented, disturbed, and confused. That is why at times we need to be able to call upon and fall back on the conceptual, on stories, on ideas, on the terrain that our systems are more comfortable in, where we feel safe and secure. Even if these planes of existence are not *ultimately* safe and secure, they are familiar, comfortable, and real in their own way. They let the mind settle down, come back into a familiar sense of solidity from which to rest and recuperate before delving back into the more levels of reality that are experienced in a more dispersed way.

Vipassanā tries to puncture the solidity of the conceptual but it is not trying to get rid of it. Notions, ideas, concepts are amazing and powerful capacities of the human mind—our personal and social survival are dependent upon them. We are not trying to get rid of them, only to put them in perspective—to see that reality has many other layers, many other dimensions that we are less familiar with but are not less true or real. To be attached to any of them is *dukkha*, and so we don't prioritize one over the other, but we need to have a relationship with them all and to see them all as conditioned, as *dukkha*, as *anicca*, as *anatta*.

Consider Arjuna from the Bhagavad Gita who wanted to see Lord Krishna in all his glory. When Krishna finally revealed himself Arjuna came to see that he could not actually bear the immensity of Krishna's unrestrained presence just as our psyches cannot handle breaking through all at once. So we work with our conditioned defense system in order to open the mind and let it close, expand the perspective and narrow the perspective, so that it trusts us enough to let go deeper and deeper. If we allow or even encourage the mind to come back to the safety of the conceptual, it will feel the strength of being able to let go of it more and more.

Our distractions should be true distractions: stories, stories that get us out of the cycle of mental inflammation. These tactics are supposed to be distracting, defusing, grounding, neutralizing. The stories can be inspiring or moving, but they can also be dumb and funny. Be very careful about judging what works for you at various times and under a variety of conditions. What actually allows your system to rest? What provides you with enough space and groundedness to get back

up on the horse and back into the battle when you need? What helps you eventually re-engage in a way that is balanced rather than agitated or based in striving and self-punishment?

When yogis are in deep need of diversion they should be hesitant to watch dharma movies or reading dharma books. While Buddhist literature is an important place of education and inspiration in general, there are phases of the war where can be incredibly deflating. Most dharma books point to the highest and clearest experiences of the human mind, and therefore elevate our standards that we cannot help but compare ourselves to our *imaginings* of “great” yogis or the author of the books. We self-evaluate in a way that is profoundly dispiriting. The version of the Buddha recorded in the suttas, while amazing, rarely seems to address the many obstacles we face in our practice in a technical way and can actually make it look so easy. “And in no time at all, so-and-so became one of the arahants...” goes the common refrain. So when we don’t find ourselves charted on those maps, we create the fertile ground for doubt to grow and overwhelm us. Other times these stories can be motivating but we also need to be cautious about the threat of unbalanced zeal, of faith ungrounded by wisdom, and the negative effect it can have on our practice.

Mahasi Sayadaw writes that in the commentary on the Majjhima Nikaya, it is stated that engaging in conceptualizing activity can be helpful when plagued by unwholesome thoughts,

what is carried in one’s own hand-bag or pouch may be taken out and then, repeatedly observed to find out what these are, reflecting thus:

“Oh, this is a lighter, or that is a match box, or that is a pin, or that is a razor, or that is a nail-clipper, or that is a needle, etc.,etc.” The method adopted by sages of old times as to how Vitakka can be rejected by performing the work of constructing a building meant for meditation, has also been cited...⁵

We might think that going through our bag and naming the assorted objects as somewhat archaic forms of distraction but consider the degree of diversion from practice necessitated by constructing a meditation center! That project would certainly require a lot of conceptual activity.

It is not only painful or scary experiences that can be so overwhelming that we need to create a diversion for ourselves. Sometimes when the practice gets very quiet and we drop into non-conceptual terrain, a furious amount of voltage can be released in the body. It is not painful, but can be incredibly intense as we see the way that our greed, hatred, and ignorance binds so much energy up in the body and mind. When it is released a very powerful non-personal energy can coarse through our system. While not physically painful, it can be confusing or deeply unfamiliar. This is also a good time where we need to take our foot off the gas and negotiate the process of coming to terms with our experience.

The revolution in Rojava came about not through a violent overthrow of the Syrian state but instead took advantage of a period in which the state had become both distracted and dysfunctional. Strengthened by years of movement building and guerrilla training in and out of the shadows, revolutionary forces took advantage of a gap in attention to gently take over the entire state infrastructure and entirely rebuild the democratic practices that run the communities under its

autonomous protection. It was a rare historic moment that they encountered—one they may have never foreseen—but it was one that they were prepared to take advantage of because of their many years—many generations—of sacrifice and training.

Whenever someone was killed, we took their weapon. When there was no fighting, we sang. Between skirmishes we did training, we read and discussed the roles women play in the war. To show the enemy our resolve, we called out to them, and they got afraid. Our morale was very high. The units at the front rotate frequently so they won't be tired. We were very disciplined, to avoid needless casualties. Whenever anyone fell, we immediately talked about it, and about why they fought, so that morale wouldn't waver.

~ Çiçek, YPG fighter, Syria⁶

A Guerrilla tactician is not only concerned with carefully choosing the *place* of combat, but with choosing the *pace* of it. If we are always in a state of all-out war, we constantly provoke extreme responses of retaliation and we keep the enemy on guard and vigilant and give them a chance to build momentum. But by strategically stopping and starting—pacing ourselves based on sensitivity to our inner capacity—our rebellion moves in a way that is hard for the enemy to keep pace with and gives our movement an opportunity to work on the infrared spectrum of the mind.

...the idea of assaulting Medina, or even of starving it quickly into surrender, was not in accord with the best strategy. Rather, let the enemy stay in Medina, and in every other harmless place, in the largest numbers. If he showed a disposition to evacuate too soon, as a step to concentrating in the small area which his numbers could dominate effectively, then the Arab army would have to try and restore his

confidence, not harshly, but by reducing its enterprises against him. The ideal was to keep his railway just working, but only just, with the maximum of loss and discomfort to him.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁷

Humor is one of the best ways to get solid, to get grounded in a lighter perspective on our condition that reinvigorates and energizes us for the long battle ahead. If you really look at what we are doing as a yogi, from a normal social perspective it is very strange. If you are ever able go on intensive retreats you will find people walking around like zombies for weeks at a time, moving very slowly, not looking at one another in the eye, and getting upset about and involved in very subtle phenomena that people on the outside would—at best—give you a curious look about. It is all truly weird. Yogis can get very sensitive and raw, exposed to their very basic forms of greed and aversion, fantasizing over dessert or getting unreasonable angry about such triflings as where another person puts their shoes in the coat room. There is often a lot of reactivity over very little. We are all reactive and our practice highlights this dramatically before it does anything to resolve it. We must be honest about our craziness and especially be able to laugh at it in order to not take ourselves too seriously and not get pulled into the downward spirals of despair that are so possible for a yogi.

Sometimes I feel like we should add a precept, vowing to keep a sense of humor during our intensive periods of practice. While the Buddha very occasionally demonstrates a rather dry or sarcastic kind of humor, he never spoke of humor as a wholesome mental quality, probably because it leads to a

kind of over-exuberance. Though in the commentaries it is said that there is a kind of smile-producing consciousness (*hasitupādda citta*) that only an arahant is capable of, a kind of happiness and satisfaction that has no kammic force, good-humor perhaps, that only a fully enlightened being can know.

But as guerrilla yogis, not yet fully enlightened, sometimes we need to fall back on the *ignoble* eightfold path in order to keep sane,

THE IGNOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

- Right Distraction
- Right Napping
- Right Caffeination
- Right Treats
- Right Humor
- Right Indignation
- Right Identification
- Right Irresponsibility

RIGHT DISTRACTION

The overarching guardian of the Ignoble Eightfold Path, distraction, mentioned in detail above includes all kinds of activity for the body and mind that gives it reprieve, rest, and allows for the recuperation from wounds received while in battle with Mara. It allows the system to carefully regulate the voltage of insight.

RIGHT NAPPING

The quintessence of right distraction: turning off the mind as much as possible to get relief from the war. Checking out, clocking out, shutting down deeply and fully can provide a powerful sense of rest. The Buddha called sleep, “the world’s greatest pleasure” (which was not an advertisement for it).

RIGHT CAFFEINATION

Sometimes yogis come on retreat and think they need to quit all their habits. They have an idea about their health that they want to live into and so lay on an extra burden on themselves during retreat to quit drinking coffee or quit smoking cigarettes. We always try to dissuade them. Buddhists around the world use caffeine as an aid to their minds and meditation practice and it is not considered unwholesome, not something that “clouds the mind.” Similarly with cigarettes, even if it is rooted in an addiction, there is no value in cranking up the intensity of your hardship on retreat if it is not for genuine ethical restraint.

A customary and extremely important comfort in the life of the guerrilla fighter is a smoke, whether cigars, cigarettes, or pipe tobacco; a smoke in moments of rest is a great friend to the solitary soldier.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara⁸

RIGHT TREATS

Acknowledges that great degrees of restraint and renunciation are involved in intensive periods of practice and so some pleasurable experiences, held within the ethical framework, can provide a bolster to the mind that is necessary, even if it is in the samsaric realms of sense-pleasure.

RIGHT HUMOR

Allows for the buoyancy of the mind amidst the great hardship of the struggle for freedom, providing relief and perspective on the absurdity, hardship, and joy of life.

RIGHT INDIGNATION

Allows for the unwholesome factor of mind to proliferate for righteous causes, as long as mental, verbal, and bodily actions are carefully restrained. There is an important value in indignation—which Buddhism has less of than the Abrahamic faiths—to be able to honestly engage with it, relate to the suffering and oppression in human society in a way that is socially valued, recognized, and meaningful. It is only with this internal permission that we also can investigate the deepest roots of caring often at the heart of our anger.

RIGHT IDENTIFICATION

Allowing the sense of Self to re-solidify, to reassert itself, and to permit the propagation of samsara (again, within the confines of ethical conduct) is an important safety valve for the mind trying to find its way to freedom. An animal who was born in captivity needs to be allowed to go back to the security of its cage until it becomes more and more comfortable with the experience and responsibility of freedom. If we are to understand the empty nature of Self we have to allow for it to arise and be genuinely interested in exploring it. We have to allow the sensation of I, of me, of mine in order to understand them.

RIGHT IRRESPONSIBILITY

The ability to let down friends, family, colleagues, the world—all beings, for the sake of your dedication to your own liberation. At some points we have to prioritize our own practice above the pressures of the world on us and this takes a profound confidence and willingness to disappoint multitudes for the sake of your own freedom.

Following the Ignoble Eightfold Path has its obvious risks. But just because there is danger does not mean it should be discredited. Mao spoke of this approach as “one step backwards, two steps forward” as a way of integrating this understanding into the overall strategy of the revolutionary movement. We cannot move forward without the occasional step back. In fact it is the step back that allows us to move two steps forward. In times of distress, distraction works. This should be the test of any strategy in a battle. Does the tool have its place? Can it be effectively implemented, considering the risks it also carries? It is important to always understand the fact that we are doing it and why.

Of primary importance is to understand that we cannot follow the Ignoble Eightfold Path successfully if we are not also following the Noble Eightfold Path: right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), right intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*), right speech (*sammā-vācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). The Ignoble Eightfold Path is a balancing force, not a contradictory one or a replacement. We should never confuse *distraction*

with *mindfulness*. As a matter of fact they are essentially opposites. But “mindful distraction” as an aspect of appamāda and general skillfulness is a paradox we can benefit from is used wisely. And if we can have wise-distraction, what else that we might consider obstacles could be skillfully used to gather our strength and diminish the strength of Mara?

You may enjoy playing an instrument, doing some knitting, spoon-carving, scuba diving, art, etc. Fantastic. But we should recognize that this is entirely different than saying “Spoon-carving is my meditation” or “scuba-diving is my meditation.” Meditation is not just anything we enjoy doing which concentrates our attention. Few would honestly try to claim that “watching movies is my meditation” or “sex is my meditation”—and by that mean the activity that is going to uproot greed, hatred, and delusion. This doesn’t mean watching movies or sex are bad. And it doesn’t mean there aren’t approaches to our path that incorporate distractions. But they are not vipassanā meditation. And that is OK. They may not be vipassanā but they may help us get grounded and relaxed which can make us more susceptible to insight. We should value them for the way they may calm us or sooth us. The guerrilla path is not simply about following every whim to deaden the intensity of reality, or believing that all practices are essentially the same, or that everything is “One.” A wholesome distraction is just that. It has its place but we cannot conflate it with vipassanā itself.

Right now there is a movement within the Buddhist meditation world to incorporate psychedelic substances such as LSD, psilocybin, or ayahuasca into formal practice. People complain of being stuck, of not making progress, and believe

that these substances hyper-charge their meditation by elevating them to states of mind in which insight is more pronounced. As someone who has taken psychedelics myself, had meaningful experiences with them, who honors the variety of indigenous teachings related to these plant medicines, and who has worked with numerous yogis who have experimented with this orientation to practice, I can say with comfort that this trend is problematic and rooted in a basic misunderstanding of vipassanā and of traditional indigenous “ethnogen” practice.

As a teacher in these times, all I have witnessed is yogis becoming more and more enamored with special states and a declining capacity or interest in going through the challenges of formal practice which can sometimes be very dry. I have seen people blow the fusebox of their mind with drugs so they lose the investigative energy needed to practice. I have seen a great amount of delusion and attachment upheld as spiritual tools. Even within formal practice, overemphasis on states of deep concentration can lead to the same unwholesome approach. vipassanā has no preference between any state of mind. The goal is not to reach any particular state and stay there, but to recognize the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and emptiness of *all phenomena, all experiences*, so that we are not enchanted by any of it and free to abide in total peace no matter what conditions arise. You can paint the prison walls new and exciting colors—but it is still a prison and we should never confuse liberation with new decoration.

As someone whose American indigenous ancestry is deep in the past generations, I have learned a great deal that I value from indigenous friends and mentors who are in more

immediate contact with their traditions. And while I value these traditions and lineages immensely, and am profoundly grateful for my connection to them, I do not confuse them with the Buddha's Dhamma. Most indigenous traditions focus rightfully on coming into healthy alignment—often through prayer and sacrifice—with the cycles of life, the planet, the universe, and the spirit world, and through that alignment finding spiritual guidance and strength.

The Buddha's Dhamma is ultimately about escaping from the cycles of life, of rebirth, and we should be very careful about confusing this ultimate goal of release with the goals of other traditions, as beautiful and important as they all may be. When we are invited to practice and share in those traditions, we come as students of those ways, not as colonizers or borrowers or blenders. When I sit in the sweat lodge, I don't practice vipassanā: I pray. That is how I honor that lineage. That is what that ceremony is designed for. Those spirits are real and people from all places have learned how to be in good relationship with them, in their own way, just as the Buddha taught about our engagement with the devas. But the Buddha taught the way to release, to end the cycle of existence, and recognizing that draws a fundamentally important, meaningful, and respectful boundary.

The Noble Eightfold Path can be so difficult—overwhelming, humiliating, demoralizing—that in dark times, finding access to ease, laughter, is the only thing that will enable us to stay on it. We are building a powerful sense of internal heroism. But it is not a patriarchal heroism. It is a heroism that is sensitive to what is actually being called for as medicine in the moment. We need permission to rest, to recov-

er, to lift ourselves up—recognizing these things as important elements of the path. But we must always be careful that this does not mean that we willy-nilly include everything we want to do as being essentially supportive if it is merely an excuse to engage in behavior that would be harmful or dangerous to ourselves or others. We are not introducing recklessness into our mental activity that threatens the integrity of our *silā* and zaps the mind of its ability to go beyond enchantment with states. We are trying to help make the mind strong and relaxed enough for insight to emerge.

I first learned this lesson most clearly about about a month deep into one of my early long self-retreats. During my sittings I began to experience a range of pleasant sensations that were very unfamiliar. I had steadily folded a lot of energy into my practice over the weeks but now the mindfulness started to feel self-propelled. The body tingled with light vibrations. The mind felt very settled, light and nimble, but also very stable. There was a kind of enthrallment in it that was very new to me, something steady but also very alive, a sense of growing momentum, of heightening intensity. Rather than simply recognize these as rapture, *pīti*, and moving on, I interpreted it to mean that something very big was about to happen, some kind of break-through experience was right around the corner, right over the horizon: *next*. Excited and expectant, I dug in a little more, stepped on the gas, stretched toward, reached out to this thing that seemed just out of my grasp. It didn't come. In fact, the whole package of new sensations soon began to feel like they were slipping away.

Everything started to feel a little more *normal* —which was not what I was aiming for at all. So I began to strain

harder, push the mind forward into this experience I was sure was right there in front of me. As my attitude became more and more tight, more and more frustrated, more and more violent, the breakthrough continued to elude me. The harder I pushed toward this fantasy object, the more tense I became. Eventually, I was at war: sweating, striving, struggling. After some time passed, I came off my cushion and collapsed—exhausted, humiliated, defeated.

It may not seem very dramatic but the secret recipe of conditions that can unlock our deepest places of identification and doubt or self-hatred—my karmic knot—had arisen and I had become completely engulfed in it without knowing. I felt I had done the best I knew, put the most energy I could, tried as hard as possible, and not only had I not attained enlightenment, I had hurt myself, trying to *crush*, as the Buddha himself once acknowledged, *mind with mind*. A horrible feeling of despair, of hopelessness and incapacity rolled in like a storm.

Defeated and confused, I listened to my teacher and took a dramatic break from my practice—finding my way to a nearby beach where I did my best to decompress. I sat down to watch the ocean, trying to reflect a little and hopefully revitalize my spirit. At some point a young family sat down near me. It was, apparently, the first time they had brought their newborn child to the ocean. The father carried the baby into the water, holding it close to his chest as they waded into the cool currents. Then he grasped the child with one arm and began to brush it through the water, swaying through the rippling sea until his arm was fully stretched out. The baby whimpered and trembled but before it started crying, the father pulled it back in close, bringing it to his chest, whispering and comforting it.

Once it had settled into the sense of safety, he reintroduced it to the water, slowly, gently, carefully, until the fear arose again, and he gathered the child back in. It was so pure and beautiful it seemed to last for hours, this process of introducing, of stretching, of overwhelm, of fear, then finding sanctuary, safety, comfort, and exploring again.

Could I not learn to relate to my own mind with this kind of care? As yogis, we all want to be one with the great ocean of the universe and explore its vast realms and in our ambition we cast ourselves out to sea recklessly. But the ocean is dangerous. It is vast and terrifying. We don't know how to swim. We haven't trained for it. There is a place in our practice for courage and energy, for exploration and pushing our edges. But there is also a time for retreat, for safety, comfort, ease. It was clear that the only way to learn how to swim was finding this rhythm between these two: that this is how we must treat our own hearts, our own minds. We are babies in the ocean of the universe and we treat ourselves like we should simply know how to swim and not be afraid. We fling the mind into the ocean, imagining that we want this great freedom, but forgetting how much safety and protection we need to be able to feel confident with the wild unfathomability of the universe.

Spend any amount of time with a newborn child and we can witness the basis of this entire process. The baby wakes up from their nap and has some period of wherewithal and stability. But at some point, some discomfort arises. Can we know what it is? Hunger, surely. Thirst, yes. But we also sense that some basic irritation, overwhelm, discomfort are also at play sometimes and there is very little resilience in the baby to be able to be with it in a stable way. So they cry and are comfort-

ed by their mother's embrace, her breast, the milk, the bottle, or the pacifier. There is a way we can come to see that as children, adults, and elders we are still in some version of this process: longing for independence yet desperate for comfort, to be fed, to be held, to be sated, and so we unconsciously repeat the pattern. Food, cell phones, various substances or compulsions can take the edge off the discomfort with the instability and invites us back into the suckle-mind of the infant.

The guerrilla yogi, trying to get free from dependence upon conditioned phenomena, trying to find peace in instability, has a challenging road before them. They must acknowledge that the path is not simply a matter of cutting off the need for satiation. We must abide by the child in us, the infant, and be able to offer kindness, care, protection. We can come to feel held by our own love, our own mother's milk to ourselves in one form or another: mettā, movies, treats, etc. But it only works if we are conscious of that process. We must allow our crying desperate selves the compassionate warmth of satisfaction and to gather our strength there. If done carefully we slowly learn that it is not about the objects of satisfaction but the quality of heart that we nurture ourselves with. In this way we come provide and abide in the deeper satisfaction of love and wisdom that is beyond all conditions. It is this love and the wisdom that provide the greatest safety and the greatest strength: to be without our bottles for longer and longer stretches, to find and be held by peace within the discomfort, love within the barrenness. This freedom, beyond conditions, is the ultimate goal of our path.

~ 9 ~

STRIKE

Stillness - Cessation



Strikes... although they are of brief duration, cause severe damage to the enemy. It is enough for them to crop up at different locations and in differing sections of the same area, disrupting daily life, occurring endlessly, one after the other, in true guerrilla fashion.

~ Carlos Marighella, Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla¹

THE STABILITY OF A STATE is ultimately dependent upon the productive foundation of its society—the factories and corporations that provide the financial sustenance of the social system. Disruptions to the forces of production can cripple an economy and create an existential crisis for a government. Radical passivity in the form of strikes, work-stoppages, and mass demonstrations represent powerful revolutionary tools that can challenge and, on occasion, even take-down a powerful regime. In a revolutionary context, they have a unique value of being critical strategies of a broader campaign to coordinate the actions of guerrillas, rural farmers, and urban workers. It is the heart of the word “pacifism” whereby actively doing nothing is understood to create an extreme and existential threat to a dominating oppressive force.

Similarly, in the cycles of *samsāra*, the Empire of Delusion survives and sustains itself through our active and passive complicity in the process of Self-production. Any threat to the smoothness of this Self-production—including strikes, slow-downs, and silent protests—is an existential threat to the stability of Mara’s regime.

There is an interesting resonance between the notions of “labor” in Marxist terms and those of *karma* (*kamma*). While labor connotes the fundamental aspect of the productive forces of society, in Pali, *kamma* is defined by notions such as “action” but is also used to denote “vocation,” “occupation,” “work,” or even “weaving.” Thus, as the dynamics of labor are at the heart of a society’s liberated or oppressive character, our *kamma* is at the heart of our liberated or oppressed mind.

Volition (*cetanā*) is action (*kamma*).

Thus I say, o monks;

for as soon as volition arises, one does the action,
be it by body, speech, or mind.

~ Buddha, Nibbedhika Sutta ²

The coming together of intention and action, of *kamma*, creates a force of momentum in experienced reality—through volitional formations called *saṅkhāra*—that is traditionally understood to be of either positive, negative, or neutral result; bearing fruit immediately or ripening at some point in the future. In popular culture, *kamma* is often considered by its outcome. But in the Buddha’s teaching, much more emphasis is laid on the initial action by which this momentum is generated,

One becomes a thief by action.
by action one becomes a soldier.
One becomes a priest by action,
by action one becomes a king.
So that is how the wise
see action as it really is—
seers of dependent origination,
skilled in action and its result
By kamma the world goes around,
by kamma the population goes around
Sentient beings are fastened by kamma,
which is like the linch pin of a moving chariot.
~ Buddha, Sutta Nipata³

By even the smallest action—mental, verbal, or physical—those of us who have any lingering ignorance, craving, or aversion in our minds, propel some results into the future: beneficial, neutral, or negative. This is the force of *bhava* or *becoming* that fuels the cycle of continued existence in the traditional framework of causation called *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination).

This level of mind-training is far more subtle beyond the realm of gross actions of hatred or greed we tend to judge our minds by. Most of the time, the very act of *doing* is an act of *becoming*. Because it is an imposition on the future, held in expectation, it is also inherently painful. While we cannot simply decide to stop the flow of kamma, the guerrilla yogi can take forceful and dedicated time to stop—or bring to a minimum—the unrestrained flow of action and Self-production in order to be able to see and investigate the the powerful forces at play behind our volitional efforting, *cetanā*.

It is believed that only a fully-enlightened arahant does not generate any kamma whatsoever. The arahant does not

stop existing, they continue to act, but with only wisdom, kindness, and basic functionality as their motivation. Without the plaque of attachment to outcome, their actions do not lead to *bhava*, becoming. For as long as they live, they ride the wave of their past actions but without generating new waves that would propel the Self into the future. There is only the complete peace and kind-heartedness of the unagitated mind.

If a guerrilla yogi is serious about this attainment—and they should be—they must not ignore the enormity of the implication of this. If we are aiming for enlightenment in this lifetime we are inviting all of our past kamma to unfold before it ends. We may fantasize about our life as an enlightened being but beware: many of the arahants in the Buddha's time suffered great hardships and died in intensely painful circumstances. We should only expect that this willingness to meet the fullness of the results of our actions—in all their joy and sorrow—with peace and love would necessitate this. There is no deal to be made with our kamma. The Dalai Lama says beautifully, "My religion is simple. My religion is kindness." The guerrilla yogi responds, with clarity, *Our religion is simple. Our religion is ownership of action.*

STRIKE

...it is possible to arrive at organized mass action in the centers of work, of which the final result will be the general strike. The strike is a most important factor in civil war, but in order to reach it a series of complementary conditions are necessary which do not always exist and which very rarely come to exist spontaneously. It is necessary to create these essential conditions, basically by explaining the purposes of the revolution and by demonstrating the forces of the people and their possibilities.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara⁴

The mind requires profound sensitivity in order to see these very subtle aspects of reality. The guerrilla yogi benefits from restraining themselves from action and watching the flurry of Self-production impulses arise and pass over and over again in the mind. The most basic and fundamental resistance strategy in order to support these necessary conditions in the life of a guerrilla yogi, then, is one of general daily non-productivity punctuated by more robust commitments to the non-generative. Of course we all need to work and to get things done. This is life. But we should acknowledge also how our emotional and energetic investment in the outcome of productive work drains us of the energy we need to also powerfully investigate the dynamics of the mind and body. We have finite energy and we must not be bewildered about the ways in which our responsibilities in life outside of ourselves take power away from our capacity to investigate inside ourselves.

The best we can often do is simply to not invest too much into our own productivity. We are responsible for supporting ourselves and every degree beyond that we take may be beautiful and inspiring but it will also have its natural consequences which we must take responsibility for as well. The refusal to work motivated by identity craving, solidity-desire, and general neurosis is a radical act of resistance. It is the essence of renunciation (*nekkhamma*) which is not just restraint from the most obvious manifestation of greed, but a commitment to the the radical work-stoppage of the society of the Self. Strike is a practice and these lessons can also be integrated in degrees until the mind learns the most funda-

mental and powerful form of rest and relief: cessation (*nirodha*), the attainment of *nibbana*.

...all efforts must be directed to paralyze regular work, whether in government offices or in private factories, especially wherever it may affect influential figures.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud⁵

The strongest kind of resistance to the wheels of production is the strike, which for the guerrilla yogi is akin to going on an intensive silent retreat. There is nothing like a long period of secluded practice to give us a broader palette of training and engagement from which to deepen our skills and grow as a yogi. We recognize that the conditions of our daily lives are not conducive to the level and sensitivity of engagement with ourselves that will be required for our campaign to strengthen. We need more protection, more quiet, where our enemies are lured into a place where we have more skills, capacity, and energy to engage them fruitfully. It is a powerful stand to take: of non-violent resistance and a declaration of commitment to integrity and confidence, not unlike a strike,

If in a street fight either the police, the armed forces, or the "steel helmets" open fire against the crowd, the next day all our friends and comrades in the work must be induced not to go to work so that a protest may be transformed into a revolutionary general strike. If this end is achieved all efforts will be directed toward generalization of the strike so that business will stop and nobody will dare to work in the factories.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud⁶

Sometimes yogis are criticized for going on retreat. Friends and family may believe that going on retreat is escapism—that we are not dealing with reality and hiding from our problems. But anyone who has been on an intensive vipassanā retreat knows we are merely evening the odds. In the everyday world of society, we are inundated with the same stream of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations. But in our lives we have mountains of responsibilities, distractions, temptations that weaken our ability to attend to this inundation skillfully. People in some traditions may insist that we can be enlightened in an everyday kind of way—that we shouldn't need special conditions. This is wishful thinking. This is a big part of why we sit in the first place: to create the conditions that give us a chance at keeping up with the unfolding avalanche of experience in a healthy way. Retreat is simply a way of deepening those conditions to turn the tables more forcefully in our favor in our battle against Mara.

We should be forewarned: going on retreat is also an invitation to more intense engagement. We are provoking the armies of Mara. A strike is an escalation—a peaceful confrontation—with the forces of production on which Mara is dependent. But it should be done without any naiveté about the battles that we are engaging, of the ruthlessness that can be unleashed in the resistance to our freedom. The State of Self will do all it can to undermine, destroy, disempower, and diffuse the basis of support for such an action,

The strike is a model of action employed by the urban guerrilla in work centers and schools to damage the enemy by stopping work and study activities. Because it is one of the weapons most feared by the exploiters and oppressors, the enemy uses tremendous firepower and

incredible violence against it. The strikers are taken to prison, suffer beatings, and many of them wind up killed.

~ Carlos Marighella⁷

One of the greatest miscalculations in the Algerian guerrillas was the decision in 1957 to call for an 8-day general strike of Arabs throughout the country. While the impact of success would have been monumental, the rebels overestimated the strength of their organization in urban areas. The conditions of the movement on the ground were not supportive of such a long-duration commitment, and the French found it easy to break the strike in a matter of hours. This humiliating defeat set the revolutionary cause back significantly and it took several months to recover its momentum.

Taking such powerful and committed actions against the enemy has great potential if successful but are also dangerous if the conditions of the rebellion are not ready to withstand the pressure that will certainly rain down upon them. It is better not to be reckless. A general strike of a single day may have been more possible—and still quite potent—attuned to the reality of the conditions of the movement.

I have met a number of yogis so enthusiastic to practice that they sell all their things, leave their jobs and apartments to go be monastics in Asia, only to find that degree of engagement far too disorienting. After months of aimless or over-exerted effort they find themselves without the stability in life that would otherwise support their continued fruitful engagement with the practice. Groundless and humiliated, they have to start their lives back at square one. When you give up everything, you have nothing to go back to. The guerrilla yogi ought

always ensure some escape route back to a modicum of security in the case that the challenges they encounter are overwhelming.

THE SLOWDOWN

Another radical industrial action, less dramatic than a strike, is called a “slowdown” in which workers still perform their basic duties but dramatically reduce efficiency or productivity. The first time I visited Thich Nhat Hanh’s old monastery near Woodstock Vermont, I was flabbergasted that the monks insisted on washing just one plate at a time, drying one plate at a time, and putting away plates one at a time. It seemed incredibly inefficient—as washing, drying, and putting away *stacks* of plates would have taken far less time. But through my surrender to their beautiful form, my view was dramatically altered. Even as someone who has always hated doing the dishes, I found myself calmed and uplifted by the lack of agitation in the process. It might have taken a little longer but was much more relaxing, and strengthening, for the mind.

The contemporary idea of “efficiency” has true contempt for considerations of the process and the negative byproducts of rapidity, making the modern production neither truly efficient nor truly effective. In the cult of becoming we are seduced by the notion of “killing many birds with one stone,” but the guerrilla yogi learns to value the basic truth of mindfulness: *that each bird deserves to be killed by its own special stone.*

Whether you are walking, crouching, crawling or “snaking,” your movements should be deliberate and slow. Never move jerkily. The world of nature is usually in continuous motion, even on the calmest

day, and particularly in this country where breezes hardly ever fail. Slow, flowing movements on your parts will harmonize with the movements of the growth around or behind you. If you are lying down or crawling on all-fours, keep your feet on the ground and do not stick your behind up in the air.

~ Bert "Yank" Levy⁸

This is part of the value of slowing down and coming into stillness and why as yogis we are encouraged to move very slowly. Mahasi Sayadaw encouraged yogis to move as if they were very old or very sick. This was not to be morose, but to encourage a profound carefulness and patience. It is not trying to control the speed of life. But by inclining toward stillness we are able to see the incredible speed at which life is happening, at which Self is being produced.

Learn to move with the wind, stopping when there is a lull and continuing when it blows again. When possible, have the wind blowing from the enemy towards you, for wind carries sounds, also the scent of cooking, of petrol, and so on.

~ Bert "Yank" Levy⁹

If we move slowly enough we can experience a tingling intimacy with the environment, like when playing hide-and-seek. Walking meditation can feel like we are sneaking up on ourselves: and in a way we are stalking the Self: learning to read the signs, impressions, and path of this unfolding process of being.

An intense sensitivity can develop where the line between the observer and the observed is heightened, blurred, or erased. When we are observing ourselves in stillness or in motion, sometimes the body or mind can feel extraordinarily

alien: its animalness or its impersonal nature are brought into extreme, sometimes disturbing, intensity. Other times, a kind of settled and easeful embodiment can arise, where a powerful coherence between knower and known becomes predominant, or vanishes altogether. This kind of sense of disappearance or of non-separation can be extremely pleasant. As Li Po writes in *Zazen on Ching-t'ing Mountain*,

The birds have vanished down the sky.
Now the last cloud drains away.
We sit together, the mountain and me,
until only the mountain remains.
~ Li Bai¹⁰

This kind of vanishing is an important experience in the life of a meditator because it gives confidence in the Buddha's teaching on *anattā*, non-self, and gives a sense of versatility and capacity of mind that is confidence building. It is a degree of non-doing that provides complete invisibility, in the insubstantiality of the sense of Self.

Invisibility is the guerrilla's fortress. The only one he can hope for. Steel and concrete can be shattered by high explosives, but how can you blast invisibility? Of what use heavy artillery or dive-bombers against ghosts or will-o'-the-wisps?
~ Bert "Yank" Levy¹¹

It is very hard to do nothing. To simply sit on your steps and receive the life of the street, on a park bench and be *a part of* and *apart from* all that is happening, or a kitchen chair and stare out the window and just observe the movements within the frame, requires a profound faith in the merit of not being

caught in the merciless current of busyness and occupation that tend to overwhelm our lives.

Doing nothing is hard, in part, because the powerful mental impulses of volition (*cetanā*) constantly at play in our minds and hearts are so subtle. When we commit to slowdown and stillness we are confronted with the otherwise invisible force of *cetanā* which is so very important to see. The source of our restlessness, our dis-ease, our discontent is brought into focus when we just try to sit and do nothing. We see the impulse to control, to judge, to make more of, rather than let reality play itself out, without our constant intervention.

I learned the most about how to truly relax and settle my system not in intensive meditation retreats, but rather by sitting on my stoop. Anywhere I have lived as an adult, I have spent time on the steps outside and just watched people, cars, birds, winds, clouds, sounds and smells go by. It taught me a lot about vipassanā long before I ever heard the word or sat down on a cushion to meditate. Through it I came to trust the value of doing nothing. I learned how to push myself and hold myself through the initial discomfort of restlessness and just settle back and observe by appreciating the peace of mind it brought me—relaxation from the simple concentration—but also the deeper perspective of life moving by.

You may not have a stoop to sit on but perhaps you can find a park bench to commit to and watch the world move by: Watch families and couples, individuals at rest, at play, exercising, reading, smoking, arguing, sleeping, dreaming. The homeless people, the rich people, the young and old, the happy, the sad, the lonely, the busy. The animals, the elements, the plant beings, the feeling in the air, the sense experiences we are

immersed in. This practice can be a powerful doorway into the brahmavihārā practices of lovingkindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. If we can learn to watch the outer world around us without an agenda—and take refuge in that process—we can transform our relationship to our internal practice as well. We let go our need to try to perfect everything we see and settle into the appreciation of what is, of actuality—not because we approve of everything we witness but because it is real. If we can meet reality with genuine interest and care, and see the ways that it connects us to the greater humanity, to the greater beingness of the world around us, it bears profound fruit: loosening the grip of perceptions (*sañña*) on our mind. Of course when we see our agenda, our preference, our reactions, it is not problem. In fact it is just another element of what we observe and learn to integrate into our knowing.

If you need to bring a prop to being, that's fine. You can carry along book, a drink, a trumpet, a deck of cards, some dominoes, or a spoon to carve—that's OK. Just remember that it is a cover for your more serious work of just sitting there and doing nothing but watching the world and your heart's response to it.

The form of attack of a guerrilla army is also different; starting with surprise and fury, irresistible, it suddenly converts itself into total passivity.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara¹²

INVISIBILITY

Just as there is no perfect silence in the battlefields of conditioned reality, there is no perfect stillness. As we commit to

longer periods of intensive retreat and silence, the sense of noise is often augmented. The bombardment of sounds can become more intense. The busyness and restlessness of the mind can be quite overwhelming. When we come to sit still it becomes clear that everything is moving, everything is changing, nothing is ever still for a moment. But it takes the orientation toward stillness to be able to notice it.

As we first come to sit we may notice that it is very hard to simply watch the breath without controlling it. Even as this becomes easier, we get to a more subtle level of investigation of the mystery of the power of volitional capacity of mind as it stimulates physical activity, or as it stimulates further mental activity. What impels the attention to move to another object? Is there an aspect of volition to even what we would otherwise consider unconscious or involuntary actions? Some lineages say even the heartbeat has subtle mental moments of volition compelling that rhythm. Do what degree can we observe the doing without doing the doing?

When we see the mind controlling the experience we don't need to fight it. Just see it, observe it, try to get a sense of what is the emotional flavor of each impulse-moment. As the more gross motivations settle down or become more acceptable, we can see that there are ways of observing that are less and less intrusive, less and less impactful. In fact, there might be an aspect of awareness that arises effortlessly alongside the experience itself without the disturbance that comes through agitation. In the purely observed moment, mindfulness still has impact—but it is the impact of wisdom and insight rather than anxiety and control.

We should consider that we might experience mindfulness as entirely odorless, colorless, flavorless, invisible, weightless. Perhaps mindfulness has no sensory character of its own, no particular experience of its own, doesn't add any qualities to the observed experience. If being mindful results in pleasant sensation it is because it is not grasping or rejecting what is happening—even if what is happening is grasping or rejecting—and that is an unfathomable relief. How is something so invisible so impactful? Perfect stillness resists no motion. Perfect silence resists no sound. Mindfulness resists nothing, and so is invisible, unobtrusive, takes no space, and creates no ripple.

Suppose we were... an influence, an idea, a thing intangible, invulnerable, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man's mind; and as we wanted nothing material to live on, so we might offer nothing material to the killing. It seemed a regular soldier might be helpless without a target...

~ T.E. Lawrence¹³

The earth feels still most of the time. It is our basic metaphor for solidity and security. "Anchor," "grounded," "firm," "settled" all have a relationship with this idea that the earth is stable and our place on it can be stabilized. But one look at the United States Geological Survey website and you come to find that the earth is entirely unstable. It is constantly shifting, trembling, shaking, cracking. If you have ever experienced an earthquake then you know this directly, and the effect can be not only devastating physically but profoundly unsettling on an

emotional level as well. Mindfulness also produces earthquakes of the Self, in which we realize that our primary framework of stability is itself entirely unstable. As is often the case, it is awakening to the degree it is disturbing. The guerrilla yogi can recoil in fear or accept the challenge of the implications of the truth.

At some point in our meditation practice we learn to let go of our anchor, realizing that the mindfulness and concentration are strong and supple enough, the mind is skilled enough, that it doesn't need to rely on a conjured sense of stability to be free. Actually the mind doesn't need to be doing anything at all. When strong and balanced between the seven *bojjhaṅga*, mindfulness spontaneously observes whatever is arising—in the body, in the mind—without sticking and without rejecting.

This is an acute form of guerrilla vipassanā—open awareness—where there is no intentional directing the attention of the mind at all. The mind shows up where it is called and passes away with that experience, arising again alongside the next moment of sensation. In this way there is no sense that the mind is being driven by unwholesome motivations—or *driven* at all. If it is directed, it is OK because that directivity, in the form of *cetanā*, is seen and known and not identified with. If it is identified with, that is also known and so need not be a problem. This is effortlessness in its purest form, equanimity in its purest form, a practice worth developing and having a deepening sense of faith in. The times where this method is truly choice-less are actually quite rare but we can practice in a more general open way with a great degree of fruitful success.

When we start to feel that every assertion of the mind is an assertion of Self—a form of control, an enforcement on

reality, a renewal of existence—the guerrilla yogi must learn to let go of all method, sit back and allow reality to take its own shape at its own pace. Letting go of method entirely, allowing for wandering thoughts, for craving and aversion, for sleepiness or wanting—the Self becomes truly invisible.

Capt. Willard: They told me that you had gone totally insane, and that your methods were unsound.

Col. Kurtz: Are my methods unsound?

Capt. Willard: I don't see any method at all, sir.

~ Apocalypse Now¹⁴

Because the experience of open awareness can be so wild, it can feel less contained and concentrated because it is alive and moving with life as it is. It may not fulfill the same need for immediate feedback in regards to concentration or the suppression of defilements. But the more we let go and allow ourselves to explore practice in this way, the more we will benefit from the natural equanimity and calm that arises alongside it. It is this equanimity that is of such fundamental value because we come to the inescapable truth: *it doesn't matter at all what is happening*.

We can see in this development that our path is really one of the purification of motivation. So the guerrilla yogi seeks to undermine this by settling back and unhooking from the wanting that is motivating our mental actions. We might notice that we have more energy but we almost don't recognize it as energy because we only know what energy feels like as a constrictive force, a pushing, a tension. What is *virīya* that does not burn itself up? What kind of *virīya* generates more of itself rather than depleting itself? Mostly beings use their

minds like propellers, getting them to where they want to go, asserting themselves onto the world. In vipassanā we use the mind as a windmill, receiving experience. But through that passive connection moment by moment we are generating energy, generating force of mind—through restful and relaxed. This kind of *virīya* is a form of renewable energy.

If you are always practicing at 100%, much more often than not it means that your motivation is skewed. When we are applying that much effort, most of the time we are pushing, striving, controlling, grasping, forcing, wanting. Because the energy is so firm, we tend to fixate on the object we are trying to observe and are unable to see the mind that is doing the observing, and the underlying motivation. We are so invested in getting concentrated that we aren't interested in the object itself. It is the place where *trying* is actually *avoiding*.

You must always work not just within but below your means. If you can handle three elements, handle only two. If you can handle ten, then handle only five. In that way the ones you do handle, you handle with more ease, more mastery, and you create a feeling of strength in reserve.

~ Pablo Picasso¹⁵

As a general baseline, the guerrilla yogi should aim for using only 70-80% of our energy. Usually, being able to observe the object and the mind requires some slack in the attention. The sun is so bright it obscures the heavens. The intensity of the mind can actually shroud reality. We exhaust ourselves because the mind can only push so hard for so long. If we pace our energy for the long haul, when challenging experiences

come up we feel naturally able to call upon the reserve energy that we have because we haven't spent it, we haven't depleted ourselves.

Of course there are times when full energy is necessary and appropriate. Sometimes the situation calls for it, sometimes it simply arises on its own. There are times, important and powerful times, when the mind can be entirely balanced and purely motivated at 100%. There would never be any reason to stop or hinder this. But the guerrilla yogi should be willing to see the reality of what is motivating the mind, and what impact it is having, what it is keeping in the shadows, and make adjustments as appropriate. There may also be times when almost no effort is needed, when even the slightest impulse toward or away from one object or another is experienced as a distasteful manipulation, unnecessary and unfruitful. These are important as well.

Walking meditation is a good place to practice our range of effort and the spectrum of intensity we are applying to the practice with what motivation. Walking at different speeds can help give us a sense of what *speed* can engage the concentration most effectively at what *scope*, given the current conditions. That is to say, if we narrow the field of attention to a small area (bottoms of our feet), medium area (the whole body moving), or wide-open (to all the senses), is it more effective to walk at a super-slow, medium-slow, or a regular walking pace? Seeing how quickly we can get into an unconsidered rhythm of walking is helpful to keep the energy of the walking practice balanced and renewed. Take the time to ask yourself, how quickly can I move and honestly say that I am

observing sensations? Most of the time we will find ourselves humbled and walking more slowly.

If you are starting a longer period of intensive retreat, be very careful to pace yourself as you begin. Try to have your immersion be as gentle as possible. When we appreciate how rare retreat time is, sometimes we can overdo it with gusto and enthusiasm and so trip ourselves up early on. If you are serious about your retreat, take your time. Start in first gear. We cannot bring the same attitude and approach that we have in our daily lives onto retreat. Out there we need to push and achieve. In retreat, we need to be stealthy, careful. We are in a war zone, respect the intensity of what you are up against. Respect the sanctity of the subtly conscious, of the workings of the heart and mind—and don't just try to bust down the door, jam on the gas, come in with guns blazing. You will get blazed back, slammed down, busted up. You begin a retreat with very little resource—and you don't even know it. Give yourself time and space to take stock, inventory of inner resources, and begin to apply them with care and tactical sensitivity.

As the days go by, you may decide that it would be appropriate to build your momentum, apply a bit more intensity: aligning more with the formal schedule, for example, or even sitting for longer periods once in a while. On the other hand, you may notice that the intensity builds at the right pace right at the level of energy you are applying. This is more often the case than not. The heart only opens when it is relaxed. and we can begin to see how restless even a little bit more application of energy can make us. Be willing to be surprised by how deep you can get by being easeful.

One important way that we can train the mind in this kind of limber agility is by practicing in the lying posture. When we lie down it is very difficult for the mind to strive, to push, to conjure unhealthy ambition. Our mindfulness is often less precise, more fluid: “more like a water-color than an oil painting” my teacher would say. Again, at first it can be hard to trust this. We become accustomed to believing that “good practice” is sharp and concrete and clear. But over time we can see that other qualities are raised as we lie down: non-resistance, equanimity, calm—and these are fundamentally important to the guerrilla yogi. Of course there is much more of a threat of falling asleep, but we simply recognize this as the cost of the training and exploration. Until our energy becomes balanced and the mind stops assuming that lying down means sleeping, we run the risk of dozing off. But is this so terrible? Perhaps we need a nap.

NIBBANA / CESSATION

The most profound experience of non-doing is in the realization of *nibbana*. When perfect conditions align in the mind and the progressive stages of insight are fully explored and digested, the mind has the capacity to take the unconditioned, *nibbana*, as its target. In Spanish, the word used for strike is “paro” or “stoppage.” Nibbana is the most pure, most successful kind of strike: the deepest peace, true freedom. Whereas all other experiences of reality are “conditioned” in that they are subject to change, arise and pass based on conditions, *nibbana* is called “the unconditioned.” It is an aspect of reality in which there is no coming or going, no arising or passing, no produc-

tion or consumption, no birth or death of any phenomena. It is perfect stillness where even consciousness does not arise. It is considered the most profound rest and relief.

Where water, earth, fire, & air have no footing the stars don't shine and the sun sheds no light.

There the moon does not appear, yet darkness is not found.

And when a sage—a brahman through sagacity—has realized this for themselves, from form & formless, from bliss & pain, they are freed.

~ Buddha, Bahiya Sutta¹⁶

The Buddha commonly referred to beings as “stuck on taking up” and encouraged students into the process of “seclusion, dispassion, cessation, maturing in release.” This release is the strongest and most natural refusal to “take up” anything as me or mine, to bear any ill-will, or to covet anything. Nibbana represents the fruition of this release which, in our tradition, is recognized to occur in 4 progressive stages: Stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakadāgāmī*), non-returner (*anāgāmī*), and arahant (*arahant*). The stream-enterer has their first experience of nibbana, usually no more than a blip, but it is powerful enough to uproot all doubt in the path and profoundly clarify the nature of the path for that yogi. Each stage beyond that represents a deepening process of uprooting of defilements until upon final liberation in arahantship there is no more greed, hatred, or delusion at all.

As a person develops along this path they are able to abide in nibbana with greater and greater facility and for more extended periods of time. The arahant has total control over this ability and upon the breaking apart of the body, the mind,

with nibbana as its home, does not come back into any state of being. Without the momentum created from wanting, everything comes to rest. No more death, no more birth: It is the end of the war.

~ 10 ~

THE GUERRILLA UNIT

Comrades - Community



~How many guerrillas work in a guerrilla unit?

The ideal number is between ten and twenty.

The fewer the men, the greater the mobility.

~What is done with guerrillas who cannot withstand long marches?

They are brought together to form slower units within which, however, everyone has to keep up.

~How should guerrillas treat one another?

Everyone should be friendly or at least cooperative.

Practical jokes and tricks are considered bad taste.

They cause enmity among the men, weaken the unit's strength, and therefore are forbidden in our organization.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud, One Hundred Fifty Questions to a Guerrilla¹

WHEN IT COMES to the nature of the relationships with those they fight alongside, the guerrilla fighter generally finds themselves in a distinct position from the soldier in a regular army. The bonds within the guerrilla unit are more dependent upon a sense of shared world-vision and solidarity than their siblings in the professional army whose dynamics of camaraderie are a mandate imposed from above. The regular conscript is forced into military service and so often lacks philosophical alignment with the cause, and therefore with their unit, which translates into ambivalence on the battlefield. Even as volunteers, these soldiers are likely to be more motivated by mainstream social pressures in their community or family, or even directionless with the army representing something stable that provides needed discipline or professional opportunity. The guerrilla tends to volunteer because of a deep wellspring of concern for their society, of frustration with the social conditions in which their people live. They volunteer based on an ambition to manifest a transformed society. While both systems have a degree of hierarchy, the guerrilla fighter tends to find themselves with a greater degree of autonomy and responsibility, and their band finds itself with greater autonomy from the larger movement.

It is traditionally believed that a Buddha is the extremely rare being who can achieve true freedom on their own. The rest of us need guidance, friendship, camaraderie, relationship, community—to one degree or another—at various points along the path. The Way can be so difficult, so long, and so perplexing that at various times we need to rely on the confidence and care of others to offer us shelter in the surging storm of the

mind. The bonds generated by this dynamic inspire faith and energy. They are nourishing and encouraging if also challenging and demanding. True spiritual friends hold us accountable and capable of our deepest spiritual ambitions. The nature of these connections for the guerrilla yogi is often not well understood—particularly the qualities of spiritual camaraderie that are distinct from everyday samsaric friendship.

There is no prescription, no formula, for spiritual friendship. The Pali term *kalyāna mitta* has become popular in the west as the broad and general container of this ideal: as an expression of teacher/student relationships and as wide as basic egalitarian principles between yogis and their community as well. Because the ubiquity of its use and generality of its meaning, some of the value of what it points to may have been lost.

Much of people's affection for the notion of spiritual friendship is rooted in the appreciation of part of an exchange between Ananda and the Buddha in the Upadda Sutta². Sitting beside the Buddha, Ananda comments, "This is half of the holy life, lord: having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues." To which the Buddha responds,

Don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, he can be expected to develop & pursue the noble eightfold path.

While a clear vote for the value of spiritual friendship, most people fail to read beyond that point, to where the Buddha continues,

And how does a monk who has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, develop & pursue the noble eightfold path? There is the case where a monk develops right view dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in release. He develops right resolve... right speech... right action... right livelihood... right effort... right mindfulness... right concentration dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in release. This is how a monk who has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, develops & pursues the noble eightfold path.

~ Buddha, Upadda Sutta³

How is it that seclusion, dispassion, cessation, and release are strengthened by spiritual friendship? This points to another paradox in the practice that we encounter over and over again in our lives as guerrilla yogis: we operate independently and take full personal responsibility for our liberation and yet our practice is undeniably dependent upon the quality of relationships in our lives. Clearly, a friendship that supports seclusion it is not just any old friendship. The Buddha points to himself as the prime example,

It is in dependence on me as an admirable friend that beings subject to birth have gained release from birth, that beings subject to aging have gained release from aging, that beings subject to death have gained release from death, that beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair have gained release from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair.

Socially-minded and extroverted Buddhists love to highlight the Buddha's honoring of spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa mitta*) and community (*saṅgha*). But the Buddha did not support

friendship or community unequivocally. He supported them to the degree that they helped *individuals* incline toward seclusion, dispassion, cessation, and release. Which is to say, very rare and particular—even peculiar—friendships and forms of community. To the degree that we seek mechanisms of relationship and community toward other ends, like social change or social revolution, Buddhists must accept that we may need to look outside the Buddha’s teachings for guidance.

This quality of friendship in Dhamma has characteristics that are not found in common human relationships. Anyone who has practiced under the authority of a Buddhist monastic understands well that what is meant by “friendship” in this context is hardly recognizable as the friendship in mainstream society. The degree of emotional distance—of boundary—is met by profound care and trustworthiness that can be confusing to some people. Ultimately it is the boundaries that makes the relationship safe and this goes against so many of our contemporary ideas about what friendship should be: open, equal, intimate. While our heads may resist more boundaried relationships, our hearts can learn to deeply trust the experience.

In his translation of the Nikayas, Bhikkhu Bodhi translates the Pali word *sampavaṇṇika* as “comrade,” and while surely the socialist connotation is not inherent in the ancient meaning of the word, as guerrilla yogis it is perhaps more valuable. Comradeship denotes a particular kind of bond between people, a special and rare one that denotes a kind of faith and trust we can share with someone well beyond personality or character differences: a solidarity, an egalitarian acknowledgment that no matter how far along the path we are, we are all

yogis trying our best and there to support one another in joys and hardships of the path.

For the guerrilla yogi, the *sampavaṅka* can take the shape of a typical friendship, of intimate partners, of a teacher-student relationship, but also what we might call an “intimate unknown.” Often these powerful forms of friendship don't fit into the mold of mainstream society. This remembrance should help us keep a broad perspective on the nature of the *sampavaṅka* as we stay open to the spectrum of nourishing dhamma relationships. Dhamma comrades may be closer or more distant than what a society tends to recognize as friends. These friendships are trying to get us past society, out of its gravitational pull, and so it is only natural that they may not fit into the traditional forms generated by and generating of mainstream society.

The guerrilla fighter must never for any reason leave a wounded companion at the mercy of the enemy troops, because this would be leaving him to an almost certain death. At whatever cost he must be removed from the zone of combat to a secure place. The greatest exertions and the greatest risks must be taken in this task. The guerrilla soldier must be an extraordinary companion.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara⁴

The great Chinese poets Tu Fu and Li Po considered one another to be their best friend, though they only met in person a handful of times. As they were both wanderers in times of war, they wrote poems and letters to one another they never were sure would ever reach their friend. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were dynamic comrades in their shared struggle for women's suffrage. The great Sufi poet Rumi had a

beloved named Shams, to whom he was so devoted, it is said, that Rumi's own students killed his muse out of jealousy. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels collaborated in every aspect of their lives and were deeply dedicated to one another via financial, philosophical, and emotional support. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas enjoyed a companionship that interwove all facets of their artistic, literary, culinary passions. Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan shared a sense of mutual interdependency that strengthened them both. These were all relationships of vital importance for these people as they negotiated the work of their lives to the world around them—the totality of which doesn't seem to be comprehensively described by the word “friend.”

In the Burmese language there is a phrase, *ye ze soun de*, or “water-drop connection” that is used to describe the intuitive sense of connection between people who may hardly know one another. It is an experience that can feel mysterious but is explained by the idea that a pair have spent countless lifetimes as meaningful companions and have now joyously come together again. The image is meant to suggest that we have been part of a current of being and rebirth for countless generations and only now find ourselves again as momentarily separate drops of water. The more open we are, the more people for which we can feel this is true.

Frederick Engels wrote that “freedom is dependency acknowledged.” Our *sampavaṅka* can provide for us spiritually and materially, and we them. The solidarity economics of free-flowing *dāna* is one way to strengthen the bond of a true *sampavaṅka*. As we deepen in our commitment to meditation practice, sometime the guerrilla yogi needs to find living

arrangements, retreat, and livelihood that are non-traditional. From some angles these collaborations may look odd but a guerrilla yogi must always ask themselves what they value more: the connection or the social impression? Are they willing to risk foregoing the utterly rare experience of true camaraderie because a friendship does not fit into the bounds of samsaric society?

Our sampavaṅkas may have these same qualities, if not always to such a degree of perfection. These comrades may be people we see rarely, people very different from us. Certainly they need not be Buddhists. They may be of a different age, class, race, gender, even someone we barely know in practical terms. Perhaps we don't even share the same language. It is common on intensive silent retreat for yogis to find the beloved nature of the people around them, without knowing nearly anything about their lives or their stories. The purity of this connection is real and valuable, even if it dissipates once we begin to speak, and all of our personality and conditioning reemerges and gets in the way. These are friendships that transcend friendship. Because of this we see the potential to have important and deep spiritual comrades everywhere—at the gas station, the bus stop, on journeys, or in our daily routine.

Human relationships are often so stewed in history that we may rarely feel them as being supportive of real rest. We must always remember the non-human beings in our lives that provide us so much potential for sampavaṅka and for community (*saṅgha*). In every moment we are part of a saṅgha but we may not recognize it or benefit from it if we do not recognize the beings around us available for relationship. In fact, the

non-human community may be a more important saṅgha foundation for the guerrilla yogi as they wrestle with the tension between culture and practice.

Animals are beings of often more easy connection of lovingkindness and trust. Birds, insects, squirrels, etc—pets or wild—are all around us. Tree beings, plant beings, and fungi are everywhere, are alive, and are available for relationship. Rivers, oceans, ponds, fields, forests, deserts, are all relatives that we can find a sense of sanctuary with in our hearts and minds.

The spirit world is also available and open to be in relationship with the human world, yet these days it is disregarded by many. In the Buddha's time the spirit world was much more discernible—with its devas, brahmas, petas, and other non-physical beings—though people throughout those lands still build relationships with the spirit beings of their areas. This is, in fact, one of the fundamental qualities of Buddhist expression over the millennia—its integration with and incorporation of animist indigenous practices.

Wherever you live in the world, there were indigenous people who maintained that land and cared for those spirits long before the current society. Many still do. Maybe you are one of them, or their ancestor. Everyone has indigenous ancestry somewhere on the planet. Over millennia traditional people developed methods and tools and languages for the sake of these spirit relationships. In any geographic region these spirits are accustomed to certain ways, certain traditions, certain languages, certain people, and so it is important for the guerrilla yogi to learn as much as they can about them and relate appropriately.

If you do build the human relationships necessary to learn these methods—whether from your family or from people you do not yet know—remember your precepts: Don't steal. Don't co-opt or bend a practice or tradition you have been taught without authorization. Don't go hunting for knowledge out of a sense of accumulation. Offer help. Don't expect to learn in the western way. Be respectful. Practice on their terms, not on yours—or even the Buddha's.

Relationship with the spirits is everyone's responsibility, not just that of native people, though these communities often still have the most intact practices and traditions. Whether you are indigenous or not, it is important to build a relationship with the spirit world because these beings are worthy of our relationship, because they can be of great beneficial support for us, and we can be of benefit to them. In the end, method is least important. All spirits, all devas respond to mettā, to offerings, to acknowledgement in any language. The most important thing is a pure heart.

COMMUNITY / SANGHA

The column should be able to live and fight on its own for a long period of time...without help from any quarter. And it does the following:

- 1) Picks its own targets except when acting under direct orders of higher command.
- 2) Co-ordinates its activities with other columns through higher command.
- 3) Gets its reserves and replacements from the local population.
- 4) Is responsible for its own security, intelligence, arms, equipment, supplies, and propaganda among the people.
- 5) To operate outside its allotted territory it must get the sanction of higher command, Also it passes along all intelligence data collected to higher command.

~Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army⁵

People in the west often profess to be desperate for community but do not even value the potential and rarity of a single good friend. Just as the qualities of spiritual comradeship are not well distinguished from samsaric friendship, the differences between Dhammic and samsaric community are also not well understood. Community is both necessary to secure the Buddha's liberation path and is also fraught with obstacles and threats to our practice. Fortunately the Buddha—our comandante—gives us a wide field of options with which to explore and navigate these tensions.

The Buddha created a very powerful structure for his community of followers, the monastic *saṅgha*. Traditionally, it is revered as a refuge equal to the *Buddha* and the *Dhamma*. But it is important to remember that he was not interested in building community for its own sake, or to change or takeover the larger society, but to create, on a small scale, the supportive social conditions for the pursuit of individual liberation.

We must start by acknowledging that amid all this efforts to build the *saṅgha*, the Buddha appeared ever-vigilant against the down-sides of community, its tendency to lead toward conditions that are not suitable for practice. There are numerous examples from the suttas where the Buddha admonishes large groups of monks for their rowdiness, for their conflicts, for their wayward behavior, and he personally finds solace and comfort wandering alone or else encourages monks and nuns to live alone or in very small groups living in seclusion and simplicity.

In the Upakkilesa Sutta, the Buddha discovers a group of monks is embroiled in conflict, “have taken to quarreling and brawling and are deep in disputes, stabbing each other with verbal daggers.” He tries to intervene, encouraging them to put down their disputes but is ignored, and “a certain bhikkhu” even tells him not to get involved. After going on his alms round and resting, the Buddha then offered these words,

When many voices shout at once
None considers himself a fool;
Though the saṅgha is being split
None thinks himself to be at fault.
They have forgotten thoughtful speech,
They talk obsessed by words alone.
Uncurbed their mouths, they bawl at will;
None knows what leads him so to act.
‘He abused me, he struck me,
He defeated me, he robbed me’—
In those who harbor thoughts like these
Hatred will never be allayed.
For in this world hatred is never
Allayed by further acts of hate.
It is allayed by non-hatred:
That is the fixed and ageless law.
Those others do not recognize
That here we should restrain ourselves.
But those wise ones who realize this
At once end all their enmity.

Breakers of bones and murderers,
Those who steal cattle, horses, wealth,
Those who pillage the entire realm—
When even these can act together
Why can you not do so too?
If one can find a worthy friend,

A virtuous, steadfast companion,
Then overcome all threats of danger
And walk with him content and mindful.
But if one finds no worthy friend,
No virtuous, steadfast companion,
Then as a king leaves his conquered realm,
Walk like a tusker in the woods alone.
Better it is to walk alone,
There is no companionship with fools.
Walk alone and do no evil,
At ease like a tusker in the woods.
~ Buddha, Upakkilesa Sutta⁶

The Buddha then leaves this group of monks and wanders to a nearby area where he encounters a small group of only 3 monks, “living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.” He inquires as to the method by which they have achieved such stability, and to what end that stability has led them in their practice and finds very simple and powerful answers.

Venerable sir, as to that, the seats, sets out the water for drinking and for washing, and puts the refuse bucket in its place. Whichever of us returns last eats any food left over, if he wishes; otherwise he throws it away where there is no greenery or drops it into the water where there is no life. He puts away the seats and the water for drinking and for washing. He puts away the refuse bucket after washing it, and he sweeps out the refectory. Whoever notices that the pots of water for drinking, washing, or the latrine are low or empty takes care of them. If they are too heavy for him, he calls someone else by a signal of the hand and they move it by joining hands, but because of this we do not break out into speech. But every five days we sit together all night

discussing the Dhamma. That is how we abide diligent, ardent, and resolute.

~ Anuruddha, Upakkilesa Sutta⁷

There is a simplicity to this explanation that is something I have valued over and over again in my relationship with the Dhamma. The world is so full of strife and mayhem and a preponderance of methods proposed to address these troubles. That a group of strangers can come together for ten days or three months and get along, and cultivate beautiful qualities of mind and heart side by side in harmony, only by observing the five precepts seems little short of miraculous.

Other times, the behavior of the saṅgha was too much and Buddha sent the monks away, abandoning them. When five hundred monks arrived at Catuma and cause a ruckus, The Buddha asked Ananda "...what is that loud racket, that great racket, like fishermen with a catch of fish?" before sending them off to be alone. In that instance, a great Brahma deity eventually had to come to intervene and beg the Buddha to allow these monks back into his favor,

If they do not get a chance to see the Blessed One, they would change their minds, like small plants that die in want of water. Venerable sir, if these bhikkhus recently come to the dispensation do not get a chance to see the Blessed One they would change their minds. Like the calf that would be disturbed not seeing the mother.

The Buddha finally acquiesced.

While the saṅgha was one of the Buddha's greatest accomplishments, it was also fraught with the frailty and imperfections of all human institutions and conditioned phe-

nomena. Even during his lifetime he was questioned about the nature of these imperfections when he was asked by bhikkhu Mogallana about why was it that when the Buddha first began to teach there were few monks, few rules but everyone was getting enlightened and now there are many monks and many rules and very few are getting enlightened? His answer was essentially “That’s the way it is” with human endeavor, that the decline of the dispensation was inevitable and that it was harder and harder for larger groups of people to get together and blend “like milk and water.”⁸

THE GAHAPATIYANA

Western lay Buddhist communities that are rooted in Theravada practices are in a critical time. As householders (*gahapati*) without a traditional religious model of community to follow, we are left largely to our own devices about how to create and structure spaces for practice and community support. For communities of practice, trying to determine the appropriate boundaries of method, of program, of responsibility and approach can be very challenging, and in some cases can cause overwhelming tension within a unit.

Because Buddhist saṅghas in the west tend to be comprised of liberal and progressive people, there is a strong momentum to move away from models that are considered hierarchical, homogeneous, and disengaged from the world. Instead, they incline toward ones that support shared leadership, diversity, and social engagement. People see the flaws of patriarchal leadership that has been the model of Buddhist religious life for millennia and are trying to undo those histories and me-

chanics of oppression. They see the violence of white-supremacy, of settler colonialism, of capitalism, and don't want to create communities that re-enforce those traits. They recognize patterns in spiritual communities of corruption and abuse of power, of narrow-minded dogmatism, of reactionary views and oppressive policies—often associated with a guru mentality—and want to learn how to create human systems that are free from these tendencies.

On the other hand, in the effort to rid ourselves from these oppressive forms, people can begin to hold all forms of structure, of boundary, of authority as inherently oppressive and in that view undermine any possibility of creating safe space for the profoundly sensitive nature of the exploration of the mind and body.

When it comes to leadership models we find that both ends of the spectrum have strengths and weaknesses. Strong individual leadership can provide clarity and direction, the possibility of the sense of quietude and protection, but also can provide a haven for corruption or abuse that is not addressable because of the centralized and worshipful nature of the guru's power. Collective leadership models can provide a more full sense of community participation, of values alignment and cultural vibrancy, but can also become easily embroiled in process and conflict and can lose the protective conditions necessary for the mind to progress in the practice.

Guerrilla movements tend to be organized as a blend of these models, with varying spectrums of autonomy and authority. Different kinds of leadership can be appropriate in different contexts. If we are going to have a rich and sustainable Buddhist culture, we need to be able to support a variety of

approaches, and have mechanisms by which we can learn from one another.

A skillful guerrilla organization makes it possible for people of all walks of life—men and women, old and young, intellectual, peasants, workers, traders, etc.—to take part in all activities: fighting the enemy, supplies, reconnaissance, liaison, propaganda, etc. In short, everyone has a chance of serving his Fatherland.

~ Ho Chi Minh⁹

Buddhist leadership in the west has largely been rooted in teachers: people who have been authorized to teach meditation, having the greatest authority in all forms of Buddhist community. While not as fixed as it is in most monastic contexts, this locus and spectrum of authority needs to shift. I believe we are at a point in the historical and spiritual development of society where spiritual teachers should no longer be given total authority over the life of the saṅgha, where they can so easily replicate the unhealthy patterns therein. There is too much potential for abuse while trying to impose these ancient frameworks on modern social relations. The mechanics of power in lay Buddhist saṅgha need to be more democratic in a large swath of its parameters.

Most teachers are good at their teaching because they are not very social. They have developed the spiritual skills of an introvert to a high degree and understand the need for seclusion and have spent great amounts of time in those settings. They are not as trained in inter-personal dynamics, in social skills, in community building. Their sphere of authority should reflect their sphere of understanding. Surgeons should be trained in bedside manners, in human-relation skills—it will

make them better at their jobs. But we primarily want them to be good surgeons. When it comes down to it we would always want a good surgeon over a nice one.

The same is true of Dhamma Teachers. They ought to be developed beyond their social conditioning but they should foremost be trained and skilled in the important work of Dhamma insight. And they need a high degree of authority in the context of intensive teaching containers where the most subtle work of spiritual endeavor is being carried out. Without any willingness to submit to the authority of a teacher, yogis will make no progress. This authority should be valued but also boundaried around a specific field of engagement for a specific period of time.

Retreat is not a democracy nor should it be. It is a “Temporary Autonomous Zone,” where specific forms of authority are agreed upon for discrete periods of time. Teachers need to be open to critique and comment and there must be strong protocols in place that protect students from harmful teacher behavior. Yogis should try to take responsibility for their emotional mind state and protect the sanctity of the container and the minds of their fellow yogis, but teachers should not be so fragile that they cannot handle a challenge.

Robust teacher authority is appropriate in the contexts of intensive retreats. But in places where the container can safely be more flexible, it is necessary for leadership to come from people who have training in community spaces—forms of dialog, conflict resolution, facilitation, training in understanding the dynamics of privilege and oppression—and can accommodate the many needs of the saṅgha. Lay Buddhist saṅgha should be a place where all kinds of leadership, authority, and

respect are encouraged because a community needs guidance in many realms beyond meditation and tools beyond the ones the Buddha offered.

A weariness of the desert was the living always in company, each of the party hearing all that was said and seeing all that was done by the others day and night. Yet the craving for solitude seemed part of the delusion of self-sufficiency, a factitious making-rare of the person to enhance its strangeness in its own estimation. To have privacy, as Newcombe and I had, was ten thousand times more restful than the open life, but the work suffered by the creation of such a bar between the leaders and men. Among the Arabs there were no distinctions, traditional or natural, except the unconscious power given a famous sheik by virtue of his accomplishment; and they taught me that no man could be their leader except he ate the ranks' food, wore their clothes, lives level with them, and yet appeared better in himself.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹⁰

Because the role of the teacher is so unique, and the responsibilities so intense, it can understandably necessitate a great degree of psychic, physical, and community distance from students. If so, then it is also understandable that the community might need forms of leadership that are more intimate and involved.

Some will say that “there is no place for politics in the saṅgha” but in many ways, that is all that saṅgha is. *Where three or more are gathered, there are politics*. But it is also true that that the momentum of group process, of argument, of views can undermine the conditions for meditation practice. It can even do much more than that. Schisms in the saṅgha can lead to all kinds of harm and most importantly is the loss of faith the path for yogis. As mentioned above, yogis can become

like plants without water, calves without their mothers. saṅgha must be a safe-enough place to provide conditions which are compelling, inviting, encouraging, and inspiring.

Our women are normally home 24 hours. At first we were afraid to pick up a weapon with our hands. But we like the friendship, the interactions. We hope the project of Democratic Autonomy will have an effect throughout Syria.

~ Berivan, YPJ fighter, Syria¹¹

Many centers, temples, and sitting groups feel the pressure to fill all needs of the community. There may be times where this is appropriate but we can also see that the liberation path of insight requires very rare conditions in order to thrive, conditions that the Buddha recognized could be very easily sabotaged by other priorities. Interpersonal power-politics can easily take over a community, and consume all of the energy that would otherwise be fed into practice. The Buddha had such an extremely strict and comprehensive set of rules for his monks and nuns, to help them avoid the pitfalls of unethical behavior that could threaten the bhikkhus' progress but also the legitimacy of the saṅgha in the eyes of the broader public. To be seen as acting in an inappropriate way is just as problematic as actually acting inappropriately. But he also lived in a time where his authority was largely unquestioned and so he could create rules as time went on as a response to destructive behaviors.

There are elements of the formal monastic tradition that may not be appropriate for our time and place, and as lay people living largely outside of the influence of these institu-

tions, we have an incredible degree of discretion regarding our choices and observances.

Recognizing the need for support from the institutions, from the tradition, from the saṅgha—wanting to hold it as a refuge—is an important source of tethering for our experiments while we also honor the contemporary discomfort with institutional religion that may keep us at arms length.

If you are not already in relationship with a traditional monastic Buddhist institution, it is worth beginning one. If you were born into this tradition or have family ties to a temple or monastery, the details will be different but the encouragement is the same: take care. Go to services, offer dāna, build relationships but also take care not to betray the deepest truths you are uncovering about yourself through the practice. In all likelihood there will be parts of your thirst for community that will not be fulfilled in these places. If so, it is fine to seek those elsewhere without rejecting the value of what is to be learned by staying in relationship with the monastic saṅgha. Stay connected in a way that feels appropriate. You can honor the heritage without being beholden to the weight of all its shadows.

I have seen a number of Asian temples in the US offer space and time for small, mostly white, saṅghas to hold their sitting groups. I have almost always seen the small saṅghas long for a space of their own, rooted in their own culture, etc, and I have almost always felt it was a mistake to end the relationship with the temple, as awkward and challenging as it may be at times. The western lay vipassanā scene is already a little bit like a rebel movement: leaderless, made of independently acting cells with some basic coherence of vision. Gener-

al coherence around the tool of mindfulness is about all that can be claimed. Some are interested in revolution of the mind, some in bourgeois acquiescence, some commit to dāna, some are charging and making a lot of money, some still preserve the quality of ethics, some do not, some are rooted in lineage, some are a hodgepodge of method. Keeping a link to the mothership of our tradition, the monastic saṅgha, is a fundamentally important way to ensure that all of these adaptations are happening in relationship to the tradition, even if they stretch it one way or another.

If we can embrace the call to diversity to the degree that we accept a diversity of approaches it will ultimately lead to stronger models that can create a rich, vibrant, and functional field of culture. The space of practice and of Dhamma must be as safe as possible for all, and as guerrilla yogis we must see that they need to be rooted in a culture outside of the dominant one. But if we try to make every saṅgha fit all needs of every community member, or force all members to fit the standard model (a pressure that partly exists because many areas cannot sustain more than one saṅgha) we will encounter overwhelming pressures.

We all have to make individual choices about what kinds of groups we become involved in and be willing to live with the repercussions of that. Sometimes it means not getting involved in groups and in these cases, individual spiritual friendship is of primary importance.

Right now in the west we also experience a broad dismissal of a so-called “individualistic” approach to practice, where people insist that an emphasis on community is the fundamental way to pursue the Buddha’s teachings. Given that

the Buddha taught in a village culture that was much more coherent than our own society, already so steeped in individuality, this view has a logic to it. On the other hand, as guerrilla yogis we should be suspicious of all attachment to views: whether it is resistance to change or the impulse to change. We need to realize that the insistence on “community” or “the world” can also be the result of resistance to practice, to silence, to responsibility, and to acknowledging that there are conditions that support development of mindfulness practice and ones that distract from it, and that community dynamics can fall on either side of that. All people will find the most righteous excuses to prevent themselves or those around them from getting quiet. The effort and courage it takes to go on retreat—to leave the world behind— and then to go beyond our conditioning is greater than what it takes a rocket-ship to escape the gravitational pull of the earth. There are a lot of forces in your life—internally and externally—that don’t really want you to leave for the fear of losing you entirely.

Successful guerrilla operations involve the people. It is the quality of their resistance to the enemy and support for the guerrillas which in the end will be the decisive factor. The guerrillas are the spearhead of the people’s resistance. In fact, a guerrilla force will be unable to operate in an area where the people are hostile to its aims. And it must be remembered always that it is the people who will bear the brunt of the enemy’s retaliatory measures.

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army¹²

While past eras of Buddhist lineage have been described in some places by terms like Hinayana (lesser vehicle), Mahayana (greater vehicle), Vajrayana (thunderbolt way), defined by

their various approaches and scope of their impact, we might consider that we are living in the era defined most significantly not by lineage or method but by the fact of being taught and practiced primarily by householders: a “Gahapatiyana” (the householder vehicle), if you will. This is quite significant in the history of our Buddhist traditions and should be taken up with the utmost care and dignity by all those involved. We are in a delicate time where the boundaries and methods of our inheritance are being tested, changed, and tested again and we have an inconceivably profound responsibility in aiming for the highest standards so what we create and set in motion for the generations that follow will have the integrity and durability of a bonafide liberation lineage.

~ 11 ~

INDEPENDENCE

Autonomy - Self-Retreat



Outside of the support he gets from the people among whom he operates—and this support must never be underestimated for it is vital to his eventual success—he fights alone. He is part of an independent formation that is in effect an army by itself. He must be self-contained.

If necessary he must act alone and fight alone with the weapons at his disposal—and these very often will not be of the best. He must find his own supplies. His endurance has to be great; and for this he needs a fit body and an alert mind. Above all he must know what he is fighting for—and why.

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army¹

SOMETIMES THE DRAMA of community, of relationship, is too much of distraction and the guerrilla yogi, realizing that they have limited energy, determines to use that energy to direct the mind inwardly. There is work and benefit of saṅgha culture that is important and valuable. But we should never lose sight of the primary field of our own practice as the foundational locus for this battle, even in the midst of social crisis.

Why should other people's minds be so hard to bear? It is because in them our own minds are unbearably brought to light. Our reactivity to other peoples' views and actions, as well as our attachment to our own, can trigger deepening cycles of aversion, delusion, or craving in our hearts that can be increasingly hard to untangle. Spending time alone, having each moment be a reflection of internal impulse whose impact we take responsibility for is a profound gift that requires its own conditions and accommodations.

There is a story from the suttas. The death of the Buddha was imminent and a certain monk was asked to join an assembly to help make preparations for the transition of the saṅgha. We can only imagine the pressure elder monks faced in helping ensure the future of the dispensation after the Buddha was gone. But while there were certainly endless important matters to discuss, this particular bhikkhu refused, deciding his energy was better used trying to attain final liberation while the Buddha was still alive. Other monks even went to the Buddha to complain about this bhikkhu. But the Buddha upheld him as the ideal.

The value of saṅgha cannot be overstated, but neither can its potential threat. Even in the greatest expression of saṅgha we can imagine, each of us must do our own work and win on our own terms in our own way. In the end no comrade can fight for you. While the emotional and material support is essential, each of us must fight our own war and sometimes this means periods of greater intimacy or distance with others, with community, with the greater society, as always: *dependent upon conditions*.

The guerrilla yogi may find the path frustrating and lonely at times if the Buddhist communities that are available do not feel like they offer supportive conditions for their development. For any number of valid reasons, the culture of any given saṅgha may feel too dissonant with or distant from our current needs.

When our options for saṅgha are repeatedly frustrating and dispiriting, we have the choice to 1) get involved and accept it; 2) get involved and try to change it; or 3) as the Buddha himself encouraged,

As a deer in the wilds,
unfettered,
goes for forage wherever it wants:
the wise person, valuing freedom,
wanders alone
like a rhinoceros.

In the midst of companions
— when staying at home,
when going out wandering —
you are prey to requests.
Valuing the freedom
wander alone
like a rhinoceros.

...

Unstartled, like a lion at sounds.
Unsnared, like the wind in a net.
Unsmear'd, like a lotus in water:
wander alone
like a rhinoceros.

Like a lion — forceful, strong in fang,

living as a conqueror, the king of beasts —
resort to a solitary dwelling.
Wander alone
like a rhinoceros.

At the right time consorting
with the release through good will,
 compassion,
 appreciation,
 equanimity,
unobstructed by all the world,
any world,
wander alone
like a rhinoceros.

Having let go of passion,
 aversion,
 delusion;
having shattered the fetters;
undisturbed at the ending of life,
wander alone
like a rhinoceros.

~ Buddha, Khaggavisana Sutta²

Stars at the center of a solar system burn at a relative close distance to each other: light-days or light-weeks apart. But throughout the rest of the universe, this is actually very rare. Most stars find themselves an average of five light-years—about 30 trillion miles—away from their nearest neighbor. A guerrilla yogi must be able to look up into the night sky and find solace in that isolation, relief in that potential for seclusion, as if that might be us in a future life, burning up our last remaining kamma in the cold depths of the dark expanse of the universe.

NON-COMBATANTS

A guerrilla force can operate successfully only in an area in which the civilian population is not merely passively in sympathy with them, but in which there is a far proportion who will give them active and willing support.

~ Bert "Yank" Levy³

The ideal in the Rhinoceros Sutta of a lone monastic wandering in the woods is a fantasy that may never have been broadly realized in reality—even in the time of the Buddha. To the degree that it did exist, the solitary wanderer in his day was held by a broader culture that supported and valued that kind of renunciation and commitment to awakening—a social reality that was essential to its functioning. To this day monks and nuns continue to be entirely dependent on donations from lay people and so could never wander or live too far from a village. The fact that multitudes of others were operating in monasteries created the cultural context for the lone wanderer to succeed in those more “independent” conditions. In this same way, a guerrilla fighter without a revolution is just a vigilante, and a guerrilla yogi can never truly be considered alone because of the context of other yogis in the world.

Though I have no family of my own, yet I have a very big family—the working class throughout the world and the Vietnamese people. From that broad family I can judge and imagine the small one.

~ Ho Chi Minh⁴

So it is important for a guerrilla yogi to consider the relational conditions of their lives that support or threaten their solitude,

and the strength or strain that this solitude puts on their social relations. The guerrilla yogi lives at the tension between householder (*gahapati*), and renunciate—and this tension must be addressed. Neither fully outside of society nor fully inside it, they ride the razor's edge between the worlds. In the case of our families and non-dhamma acquaintances, there are tensions that can arise between our need to struggle and our need to be in healthy relationships.

The **Ignoble Path** factor of *Right Irresponsibility* shows us that we need, at times, to be willing to let down the people that want so much from us. We decide not to go out to a party, rest instead of answer the phone, sit instead of respond to email, disappear onto retreat—for longer and longer periods of time—and we are sometimes resented for it. The people in our lives who do not understand our dedication, who do not share in our interest, feel that they are losing us to something that threatens them and their needs. If we disappear into the battle for a weeklong retreat, that sometimes can be OK, but when we are gone for a month, three months at a time, six months, a year at a time—we are inevitably gone during someones illness, during a birth, a death, some up or down in friends lives, where the specter of death looms, people get married, have children, graduate, get a promotion, get divorced, and you are not there to share it with them.

Family and friends need to be trained to accept this reality. But as a guerrilla yogi you cannot expect them to keep pace with your own enthusiasm. Because they do not understand or share your goal of the happiness of peace, they are less concerned with your journey toward it than with their own beliefs in what would make you happy or in getting their own

needs from you fulfilled. Part of their training is slow progressive comfort with longer and longer times away, but it is also demonstrating the value of your time away *for them*. They must come to recognize that you are a better version of yourself when you have had time away, that you are happier, kinder, more patient, more understanding. They can learn to recognize that if you do not get this time away you are more contracted in the heart—and this effects them negatively. A guerrilla yogi must train their friends and family to feel as if they have already died—and that any time you show up is a miracle for which they eventually become grateful, if not sated.

A new spirit permeated the Sierra. Peasants would come and greet us, no longer fearful. We, in turn, had more confidence in them. Our relative strength had increased and we felt safe against any surprise attack; we also felt that a closer bond existed between us and the peasants.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara⁵

Sometimes we become aware that we need more significant distance from certain people in our lives in general—not just when we are on retreat. We come to see that engaging too regularly or casually with them leads to more and more conflict and strife and drama that effects our mind and overall wellbeing. Letting go can be hard but at some point we learn to stop betraying our own needs for the sake of others. It does not mean that we never stretch or sacrifice for the wellbeing of another, of course not—but rather that we are not ultimately going to undermine our own potential for liberation to satisfy someone else's defilement-based needs of us. To dedicate your life to feeding insatiable hungry ghosts might be kind but it is

not heroic, nor wise. It is folly. A guerrilla yogi can be relieved to consider: *Beings are numberless. I vow to disappoint them all.*

All food taken from them must be paid for at a good price, thanks must be repeatedly expressed and peasants made aware that they are helping their own cause. Our men will try to repair things in the house such as beds, closets, tables that might be ruined. They will help the peasant in fencing his lot or in sowing or clearing the fields, and in so doing they will clearly show our sympathy and attract the peasants to our cause so that we may eventually request their help any time.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud⁶

The guerrilla yogi desires to help but is not here to “save” all sentient beings and is not trying to convince anyone about the Dhamma. If someone is inspired to join the cause, wonderful—as rare as they are, we never leave the opportunity for a new sampavaṅka on the table. But we leave salvation to others. Besides the obvious unrealistic aspect of that aspiration (after all, even the Buddha did not save all sentient beings) it is unavoidably evangelical—because salvation can only mean that they convert to the Buddha’s path. In our tradition, we help people and society as much as we can, in as many ways that we can or are moved to, but we also recognize that people are the owners of their actions. Just as no one can save us, there is no saving anyone else. We can support them and struggle with them in all imaginable ways but we also must be thoughtful and considerate in regards to the proportion of our energy that goes into our practice versus the world around us. We need to be in healthy relationship to society, whatever that may mean at any given stage of our struggle. But at some point we must recognize that we cannot have it both ways: we are

either committing to samsara or committing to liberation and it is fantasy to hope that those paths can be the same.

True isolation is not something most people can handle for very long. The Buddha encouraged monastic life near villages and towns: apart from society but still in relationship with it. The monastic saṅgha is entirely dependent upon laity for their livelihood. This dynamic must never be forgotten. The guerrilla yogi is no different than others—and must defend against conceiving of themselves as better, worse than, or equal to—but must recognize where their aims and the aims of society are different, where they align, and how to manage that tension. We are a part of and apart from society, and that is a role that requires firmness and flexibility.

The urban guerrilla must know how to live among the people, and he must be careful not to appear strange and different from ordinary city life. He should not wear clothes that are different from those that other people wear. Elaborate and high fashion clothing for men or women may often be a handicap if the urban guerrilla's mission takes him into working class neighborhoods, or sections where such dress is uncommon. The same care has to be taken if the urban guerrilla must move from the South of the country to the North, and vice versa.

The urban guerrilla must make his living through his job or his professional activity. If he is known and sought by the police, he must go underground, and sometimes must live hidden. Under such circumstances, the urban guerrilla cannot reveal his activity to anyone, since this information is always and only the responsibility of the revolutionary organization in which he is participating.

~ Carlos Marighella⁷

SELF-RETREAT

For the guerrilla yogi, the ideal of the rhinoceros takes its most dramatic form in the process of self-retreat. Intensive periods of practice are generally supportive to all guerrilla yogis but there may be times in our lives where being in a large retreat container—with the distraction of numerous other yogis, an inflexible schedule, costly expenses, travel challenges, etc—that can be inappropriate or impractical. Sometimes our practice is simply at a point of maturity where we need to test our capacity for our independent action. For these reasons it is important to learn how to go on a self-retreat.

We encourage all yogis to attend a number of formal organized vipassanā retreats before embarking on a self-retreat. There is a lot to learn about our relationship to structure, to the formal process, and that holds and protects us for moments of crisis and confusion that we may not otherwise be trained for. There are so many opportunities to get caught in wrong-view, to strategize based on preference rather than wisdom, to be overwhelmed in isolation and hindrance patterns that we must really have a good handle on basic training in a community before we try to go off on our own.

When we do decide to try a self-retreat, it is best to start small: a daylong or a weekend. Try doing a number of short self-retreats to get a sense of the logistical and spiritual challenges to trying to create the protective conditions for practice.

Often we will need to sit self-retreats in our own home. This can really only be done successfully if you live alone or at least have the space to yourself for the time of the retreat. Turning your day-to-day living arrangement into a space of intensive practice can be a challenge but also very fruitful in terms of the long term possibility of getting quiet in your daily

life. Of course issues such as internet, household chores, cooking, shopping, etc will arise in relationship to this independent form of intensive practice. Your relationship to the space takes on a different character that goes a long way toward the “integration” that we all long for. Just remember: you are not in a remote cave deep in the Himalayas. Don't pretend you are. Don't hold yourself to that standard of seclusion. But, a high degree of seclusion is often possible and it is worth finding those boundaries and flexible places.

There are a number of things important to the process of preparation for a self retreat. Of primary concern is how best to create the conditions of seclusion and renunciation in a space in which there is no sense of authority watching over you, no social pressure to keep you within the bounds of approved yogi behavior. This lack of pressure is fundamental to training for our own attunement to our determination but also has the risks of over-slackness in our endeavor or an overly porous container for our mind.

Protection from technology and our addiction to it is an ever-increasing challenge and vitally powerful for a guerrilla yogi. Set an automated email “away” message, leave an appropriate message on your cell phone, turn off your wifi, delete compelling apps from your phone, turn off automatic password entry, put your phone and computer in harder to reach places. These are all things that can help you keep these tendencies at bay. Have a *mala*—a string of prayer beads— that you carry with you on your wrist (or in your pocket instead of your phone) so that when you have the impulse to “check” you find your beads and can practice mettā rather than get sucked back into social media, news, work, etc. Be careful about using your

phone for an alarm or even a meditation timer. Most timer apps are now integrated social apps as well and it can be hard to maintain the protection of seclusion. On the other hand, having a sense that you are sitting with others can be a psychological support for some yogis on self-retreat. Let yourself explore.

Try to organize some teacher support during your longer retreat. Can you ask for a phone or video chat interview at some point so that a teacher can check on you, hear about your practice, and give you guidance?

Just walking around your living space can be very distracting as you notice all the little projects that you suddenly have time to attend to. Be careful. There is nothing wrong with a little *yogi job* each day but don't let yourself get entirely distracted by the long list of projects you have been meaning to get to. There are a number of understandable and typical distractions that we should be wary of:

- If you need to exercise, OK but keep it boundaried.
- If you need creative time, OK but keep it boundaried.
- If you need to read, OK but keep it boundaried.
- If you need to do work, keep it very boundaried.
- If you need to use technology, keep it very very very very boundaried.

One can easily see how those five things could take up your whole day and entirely undermine our efforts for seclusion and concentration. With too much other stuff to do, you'll never meditate. The point of secluded retreat time is to build enough strength to be with yourself without the distractions—external or self-imposed. So much of what we do to fill time or enter-

tain ourselves is a kind of escapism from moment to moment reality. Self-retreat shouldn't be a prison, and there should be pressure release valves for us when we need them. But the baseline should be renunciation so that we don't need to lean on distractions for sense of peace. It's the only way to build up confidence in the mind's ability to be with unmitigated reality.

Make a schedule. Don't make it too tight, too constrictive. But don't make it so loose that you find yourself wandering around wondering what to do. Let it be based on sense of natural rhythm with your day. Give yourself room to breath and space for cooking, cleaning, rest, and space for other unexpected variables, inspirations. Make sure you get outdoors, even if it feels difficult. If that means going out of seclusion, take it seriously and follow the Moscow Rules laid out below.

One of the biggest logistical challenges for being on self-retreat is food: Its purchase and preparation. The best scenario is if you have a situation in which you can purchase all of your food ahead of time. If this is not possible, you will need to leave the protective conditions of your retreat container at times and enter areas outside of guerrilla control. This should be done as infrequently as possible and with the utmost care and protection. If you have a sampavaṅka who is not on retreat and willing to support you in your worldly errands, all the better.

If a yogi on retreat must leave their protected container they should try to blend in as much as possible in the outside world and not draw too much attention to themselves by strange yogi behavior: walking super slow, not speaking when spoken to, looking unkempt, or wearing unfresh clothes,

Do not forget that your uniform is designed to bend with the prevailing colors of the countryside. If you wear civilian clothes, choose things of a neutral colour, brown or dark grey—not white, light grey, black or navy blue...

~Bert Yank Levy⁸

The “Moscow Rules⁹” are a list of heightened precepts that intelligence agents in the CIA use when operating deep in enemy territory. Most of these rules are perfectly relevant for a guerrilla yogi who is on self-retreat and must enter enemy territory on occasion for supplies. When a yogi who is on intensive self-retreat needs to go into town for supplies (or for any other reason) they should follow these same rules to secure the protection of their own minds. Here is one list, culled from various sources:

- Assume nothing.
- Never go against your gut.
- Any operation can be aborted. (If it feels wrong, it is wrong)
- Everyone is potentially under opposition control.
- Do not look back; you are never completely alone.
- Go with the flow, blend in. Maintain a natural pace.
- Do not attract attention, even by being overly careful.
- Vary your pattern and stay within your cover.
- Do not harass the opposition.
- Lull them into a sense of complacency.
- Pick the time and place for action.
- Keep your options open.
- Technology will always let you down.
- Once is an accident. Twice is a coincidence. Three times is an enemy action.
- There is no limit to a human being's ability to rationalize the truth.

This may all seem a bit paranoid, but when you are a yogi who ventures out into the world after days, weeks, or months in silence you will not regret having this guidance. When negotiating the world of non-combatants it is unlikely you will be able to note as precisely about each breath or physical sensation. Instead, a general noting of “seeing,” “smelling,” “body,” “thinking” can be of enormous support. Of course you cannot be expected to maintain perfect silence while out in enemy territory, which would draw too much suspicion and potentially (and unnecessarily) alienate you from neighbors, and members of friendly samsaric society—who you are invested in over the long haul. It is best to act relatively normal but try as hard as you can to maintain your sense of seclusion.

With one foot in the spirit world and the other on the gas, simply driving a car while being a yogi can be a harrowing experience. Going outside of your sacred container can be a challenge before, during, and after returning back. It also can provide powerful perspective on your understanding of the value of the container as we often become aware that we are quieter than we think we are when we are forced to puncture the boundary. We learn to trust that our system knows how to get solid if it needs to—knows how to normalize—often to a degree that is painful once we return home. We can feel afterwards as if we have lost all of our momentum, our concentration in particular. We might feel agitated, exhausted, beset by the hindrances in a powerful way. We should take it as a learning opportunity. If our car breaks down out there in enemy territory, we have an opportunity to show up to a stressful experience with more momentum of mindfulness than we tend to in daily life. We also get a sense of enemy’s society

and hopefully find ourselves drawn back thankfully to the seclusion of our retreat container. When we come back to our base camp after a run to get groceries we are hit with the impact of the kamma of the past few hours and it can be shocking—not in the least because we recognize that we are going through this every day without the time, space, or tools to recover and so the trauma of daily life builds.

I remember a small girl who kept watching me as I listened to the women who came to me, with an almost religious attitude, in an effort to find out the reason for their various illnesses. As the girl's mother approached my office—a corner of an old palm-thatched hut—the little girl said to her: “Mamma, this doctor tells every one of them the same story.”

The little girl was right. My experience as a doctor was limited; moreover, everyone of them had told me, unwittingly, the same horrible story. What would have happened if the doctor had come to the conclusion that a young mother of several children complained of fatigue following her daily task of carrying a bucket of water from the stream to her house, simply because she did not have enough to eat? It is useless to try to explain the reason for that fatigue to a woman of the Sierra. She will argue that she has done that kind of work “all her life” and it is only now that she gets this sudden feeling of tiredness. There is the whole sad story: People in the Sierra grow like wild flowers, unattended. Then they fade away constantly busy at a thankless task. It is due to our daily contact with these people and their problems that we came firmly convinced of the need for a definite change in the life of our people. The idea of an agrarian reform became crystal-clear, and communion with the people ceased to be a mere theory, to become an integral part of ourselves.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara¹⁰

Food preparation is another challenge—for time and for the mind. For the guerrilla yogi, tasty foods that are simple and quick to prepare are the best. Two meals a day should be enough. If a recipe is too complicated the mind becomes stressed and too much time is spent on the complicated task. Casseroles or soups that contain proteins, vegetables, starch in one dish are of particular efficacy. It is sometimes helpful to cook basic ingredients most simply and make an over-sufficient quantity so that the left-overs can be used in a new way, with new amendments, for a new meal. A basic tomato sauce can be used in pasta one night, add a few spices and it can be added to a soup, used to fricassee chicken, or to poach eggs. Left-over vegetables and grains can be added to eggs for a frittata. Basic beans can be had one night and then one can add different ingredients each day—spices or squash—to give the yogi a bit of variety.

... it is very pleasing to a soldier subjected to the extremely hard conditions of this life to be able to look forward to a seasoned meal which tastes like something. (One of the great tortures of the war was eating a cold, sticky, tasteless mess.)

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara¹¹

A guerrilla yogi on self-retreat cannot forget the ignoble path factor of *Right Treats*. Some sweets or snacks that provide a boost to our spirit can be a helpful in case of emergencies—or the pervasive doldrums. On my first long self-retreat I was in a cabin in the woods for 2 months with little more than a stock of rice, beans, canned fish, oatmeal, powdered milk, and tea. Toward the end of my retreat I started to feel desperate for something fresh: a salad, some fruit! Oh how my mind started

to think about oranges. And then one chilly December morning, after my trek through the snow to gather sulfurous water from the well, I returned to my cabin to find a bowl of oranges at my door! The caretaker of the facility had gone into town and brought me this amazing gift. It was an act of generosity that helped me get through the last few weeks in ways I cannot express.

Our recent monastic teacher at the Kyaswa Monastery Fusion retreat in Burma, Sayadaw U Paññabhinanda, met our yogis outside of the hall as they exited after the morning sitting with a box of donuts and cupcakes—to their delight! These kinds of offerings are of such value and inspiration we cannot forget them. The sweetness of the mettā pervades long after the sweetness of the sugar has dissipated. We cannot always depend on our good karma for treats to miraculously show up so we should take steps to plan ahead as much as possible and benefit from the special circumstance of when we are both the donors and receivers.

Salt is one of the essential supplies... The inhabitants of the zone should have on hand a minimum of food supply that will permit them at least to survive, even though poorly, during the hardest phases of the struggle. An attempt should be made to collect rapidly a good provision of foods that do not decompose — such grains, for example, as corn, wheat, rice, etc., which will last quite a long time; also flour, salt, sugar, and canned goods of all types; further, the necessary seeds should be sown.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara¹²

HAPPY YOGI CONGEE

This recipe is for a congee that is a great breakfast, lunch, or snack and balances simplicity with mental buoyancy. All one really needs for congee is rice, water, and salt and so this recipe can be made with any of the ingredients listed here or just the three. The more ingredients, the tastier it will be. It is said in the Visuddhimagga that greedy types should eat very bland and flavorless food, while aversive types need really good food to keep them uplifted enough. You can make your own choice about what kind of nourishment you need.

It can be used breakfast—or any meal—for several days. It refrigerates well. Simply add water and reheat.

Ingredients:

3 tbs peanut oil (or any oil, preferably not olive)

1 cup white or brown rice

10 cups water (or 1/2 chicken broth)

1 onion, peeled whole

3 cloves of garlic, peeled smashed

1 2-inch piece of ginger, peeled smashed

2 bulbs of lemongrass, smashed

1 hot chili pepper, diced

4 tbs soy sauce

bunch of mushrooms (fresh or dry), chopped

1 chicken breast (optional)

Salt to taste

Pepper to taste

1 egg

water

2 tbs vinegar

salt to taste

Garnish with cilantro, soy sauce, hot sauce, etc

For the congee:

- 1) Sauté the rice in the oil until browned and popping.
- 2) add everything else
- 3) Bring to a boil, lower heat, and let simmer gently for at least an hour, stirring occasionally so it doesn't stick and burn.
- 4) Remove the ginger, lemongrass, onion

For the poached egg:

- 1) bring water to boil
- 2) add vinegar and salt
- 3) crack in eggs
- 4) lower heat for a soft roll, cook for about 3 minutes for a still-soft yolk

If there is no barber, it is unimportant. If there is an insufficient number of cooks, any member of the company may be designated to prepare food.

~ Mao Zedong¹³

VARIABLES

Self-retreat has its particular challenges in the beginning, the middle, and in the end. The end can be particularly hard for many. As the bubble of our container starts to break, the psychic barrier weakens and we find that people start to call, text, message. We are often faced with greater doubt, restlessness,

etc. Our concentration may seem to falter. The five hindrances (craving, aversion, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt) can be harder to see and therefore more powerful when we don't have a group or teacher to reflect the situation back to us. Just remember: they are normal tactics of the mind to defend itself from the changeable, undependable, core-less qualities of reality that the mind is just not well-trained to navigate. They are understandable but we don't want to be beholden to their power. Be kind to yourself and be careful about believing in these phenomena as true - especially doubt, which is the most insidious. Whatever cracks arise in the container, simply commit to the structure and begin again. Over time you will be amazed at how the present moment awareness continues to provide sanctuary no matter how the conditions of the mind or body have changed.

~ 12 ~

THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

Discipline - Determination - Faith



These forces should have a strict discipline, a high morale, and a clear comprehension of the task to be performed, without conceit, without illusions, without false hopes of an easy triumph. The struggle will be bitter and long, reverses will be suffered; they will be at the brink of annihilation; only high morale, discipline, faith in final victory, and exceptional leadership can save them.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare¹

WITHIN THE SCOPE of historical guerrilla movements there is an enormous range of structure in regards to hierarchical command and centralized coordination. Every movement must define these structures according to internal and external conditions specific to their situation. All orientations will have their strengths and weaknesses. But even in the least coercive guerrilla formations that seek to create a society

that is entirely free from hierarchy, some level of obedience to authority is necessary.

We live in an era where among the left-leaning there is a broadening assumption that an egalitarian and democratic ethic is assumed to be best in all circumstances. Activists increasingly hold authority—even temporary authority—as suspect. It is an understandable stance, and generally the result of a healthy affirmation of personal dignity and resistance to oppressive human systems. But this resistance has a shadow: the tendency to tear down all leaders is something that frequently holds movements back from gaining power and momentum. Vague leadership leads to lack of direction and tendency to get bogged down in process and indecision. Fear of action can be confused for inclusivity and patience. It is again a place where we must embrace paradox in order to make the most of the dilemma.

Over the centuries, lay and monastic Buddhist communities, like all others rooted in patriarchy, have at times supported abusive and manipulative behavior by their leaders. This reality helps fuel the contemporary concern that unrestrained spiritual authority has too deep a tendency toward corruption to be an effective model. While this is a vital concern whose charge will be of great value when brought into Buddhist community in healthy ways, it must also be balanced with the ability to use the benefits of authority when it is of value to ourselves and to the system as a whole. It is good to acknowledge that some people have more experience and training than we do, more profound understanding of vipassanā insight than we do. If we accept this then some degree of sublimation of one's own impulses and ego and submission to

the guidance of a teacher is going to be fundamental to progress along the path.

In the old days, monastic teachers were often stern and severe. They were not there to entertain: they were at war with the greed, hatred, and delusion in your heart and were going to give you as little room as possible to evade the confrontation they were dedicated to. Burmese monks would hold a fan in front of their faces when giving Dhamma talks to make it clear that the teaching was not about personality—as a protection from the projections of their students onto them. Nowadays, lay teachers in the west are expected to be funny, engaging, likable, worldly, friendly, emotionally and temporally available, without rough edges or fault. People want their teachers to be a projection of their own fantasy selves and will abandon them at the first sign of disagreement or firm boundary-holding.

In any revolutionary army, there is unity of purpose as far as both officers and men are concerned, and, therefore, within such an army, discipline is self-imposed... because only when it is, is the soldier able to understand completely why he fights and why he must obey. This type of discipline becomes a tower of strength within the army, and it is the only type that can truly harmonize the relationship that exists between officers and soldiers. In any system where discipline is externally imposed, the relationship that exists between officer and man is characterized by indifference of the one to the other. The idea that officers can physically beat or severely tongue-lash their men is a feudal one and is not in accord with the conception of a self-imposed discipline. Discipline of the feudal type will destroy internal unity and fighting strength. A discipline self-imposed is the primary characteristic of a democratic system in the army.

~ Mao Zedong²

In contemporary Western Buddhism, there is a lack of strong ethic or expectation of commitment between teacher and student. People bounce from teacher to teacher, abandoning a method at the first sign of difficult challenge, critique, or even boredom. Like a child, a yogi doesn't want to hear the word "no." But until they are mature enough to see the powerful forces of delusion at play in the mind, they must subject themselves to some degree of mirroring and restraint in order to learn.

Part of the problem today is certainly capitalism. Conventional yogis are tempted to relate to the process as consumers—shopping around until they find someone who tells them what they want to hear and in the way they want to hear it. People know that their teachers are not Gods. This is refreshing and necessary. But the pendulum can swing so far as to not respect the teacher at all. A common attitude is that the teacher is working for the student, hired as a consultant or therapist, and this is extremely dangerous for the yogis, for the teachers, and for the future of the Dhamma. The yogi is never pushed to hear the truth beyond their delusions and teachers are more and more compelled to speak what is profitable and popular rather than what is true.

Further, in such an army, the mode of living of the officers and the soldiers must not differ too much, and this is particularly true in the case of guerrilla troops. Officers should live under the same conditions as their men, for that is the only way in which they can gain from their men the admiration and confidence so vital in war. It is incorrect to hold to a theory of equality in all things, but there must be equality of existence in accepting the hardships and dangers of war.

~ Mao Zedong³

Students should be very careful about selecting a teacher. But when they do find someone they can trust, it is important to resolve to staying with them. This doesn't mean we submit to abuse but certainly through challenges, disappointments, and conflicts. A yogi will be profoundly hindered in their progress with only their own preference as their guide.

Yogis who do commit to a teacher discover for themselves how refreshing it is to be humble, to be grateful, to acknowledge that there are others who know more than they do. This is true even if, especially if, they also seem to share many of their imperfections. It can be truly inspiring to learn that what you want to be true may not always be the truth, and the the actual truth may not be what you want to hear. We will benefit from an attitude where we seek to have our eyes cleared and the truth revealed, not one where we seek to have our views reaffirmed. Something is wrong with our motivation if we are not open to learning and just want to shore up all the beliefs we want to maintain about ourselves and the world. To receive the help and guidance of a teacher and feel that sense of gratitude and dedication is fulfilling and powerful. To find a teacher that you respect and trust and are willing to follow is a wonderful and an essential component to the path.

When I first met my own teacher I quickly realized that I had found someone who I trusted: who understood my practice, my mind, who had herself been thoroughly trained and understood her own practice and mind better than anyone I had ever met. While I have learned things of great value from many people, I have had only one teacher. I needed nothing

else and I knew I didn't need to shop around. When one has found master why go search for flavors of mediocrity?

While a guerrilla yogi ought to acknowledge the authority of a teacher for guidance, instruction, and to occasionally lend them faith, they also know that can never depend on their teacher to provide the fundamental impulse toward revolutionary change. It is their own determination and longing for freedom which must be the ultimate force behind their endeavor.

The basis for guerrilla discipline must be the individual conscience. With guerrillas, a discipline of compulsion is ineffective.

~ Mao Zedong⁴

If we rely only on self-direction, we will inevitably be motivated by forces that we do not acknowledge or even see. If we only learn to rely on externally imposed discipline, we won't learn how to operate on the edges of our motivation and never learn to distinguish *discipline* from something like *determination*, which is a more profound and healthier relationship to our behavior. Ultimately, dedication and determination are much more vital than discipline because on some level discipline is always going to be a behavior that is enforced based on an idea of how things should be, rather than internally born from that reality itself. It is imposed rather than inspired, and while it may at times be necessary, we should never imagine that discipline requires even a fraction of the potency that determination does. Over our entire practice lives we can learn to be skillful about the places where we trust our own decisions, where we are experimenting with them, and where we

voluntarily place ourselves in conditions where a kind of discipline is protected and encouraged/enforced. All of us need to explore this range of terrain and learn to make wise decisions and evaluate the outcomes.

More than any other soldier the fighting morale of the guerrilla must be on a very high plane. Every volunteer is imbued with aggressive confidence in his fighting skill and the importance of that skill to his comrades and to his people. This pride will lead him to do the apparently impossible—and the “impossible” will seem easy as a consequence. His enthusiasm will be infectious and generate such power that no force on earth can stop it. For the fight he is engaged in is worthy of nothing less.

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army⁵

Early in our practice life we generally come to see that there is a wavering point between our determination to get free and our desire to sleep, check our email, read the news—or really do anything besides sit. Do we want to be liberated or do we just want a cookie? Do we really want to be free or do we just want things to be the way we want them to be? Often we will find that the wanting of the sense-object is stronger than the wanting of freedom from wanting. In these circumstances, three related outcomes are very likely:

- We succumb to our more base wanting;
- We feel bad about it; and
- We believe we should be more disciplined.

On one hand, it is important for us to have successful experiences with something we might call “discipline”—re-

straint or engagement that is not based on preferences. The experience of moving past a strong resistance to practice—of deciding to get up and sit at five a.m., for example, when we would normally be asleep—builds up a sense of freedom from the gravitational pull of unconsciousness. Restraining our compulsion toward addictive physical, verbal, or mental behavior can lead to a sense of possibility, self-confidence and strength—of our power for piercing through the mass of delusion.

On the other hand, there is a kind of discipline that we can generate that is not particularly healthy, not conducive to our practice. This kind of discipline overrides the investigative capacity of the mind. It deadens the ease and flexibility that we are trying to cultivate. It reinforces a hardness of mind, a stiffness of spirit, an overly tight control—rooted in aversion or ambition—that crushes our spirit and prevents learning. Discipline may or may not be motivated by wisdom and so we must treat it as a dull tool. We want rigor but not obsessive perfectionism.

They used to think me boastful when I said so: but my confidence was not so much ability to do a thing perfectly, as a preference for botching it somehow rather than letting it go altogether by default.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁶

If we rigidly hold ourselves to a fantasy ideal, we risk losing the chance to learn about the pushings and pulls of the human heart. Sometimes we see an array of dietary discipline that confuses the energizing effects of control with the peace of wisdom. It is not uncommon to hear people say things like “Be

mindful about how much food you take,” which is actually an indirect request to restrain one’s consumption—something quite different than the meaning of the word *sati* in Pali. There are likely many good reasons to be careful about how much food we take or consume—but it is not entirely a matter of mindfulness. In fact, the ability to be mindful of decisions made in craving or aversion is actually very important. We need to be able to have a relationship of understanding with these parts of ourselves in order to understand them—something that pure abstract discipline can cut us off from.

Any of our Arabs could go home without penalty whenever the conviction failed him:

the only contract was honour.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁷

If we resolve to go through suffering rather than inflict it on the world around us, it takes courage, confidence, and discipline. There are times when we must do what we don’t want to do, when we drag ourselves to the cushion or chair to sit with ourselves even when it is the least compelling thing we could imagine. But the strongest discipline is one rooted in our own personal experience, our own desire to be free, not in an idealization of another or hatred of our selves. We are not trying to create an authoritarian internal police state. We are not recreating the thing we are fighting against. Rigor, yes. Enthusiasm and zeal, yes. Determination that is flexible and dynamic, in which we can learn, observe, recognizing that the deepest change comes through understanding, yes, but not hate-based control or suppression.

In the regular Arab Army there was no power of punishment whatever: this vital difference showed itself in all our troops. They had no formality of discipline; there was no subordination. Service was active; attack was always imminent: and like the Army of Italy, men recognized the duty of defeating the enemy. For the rest they were not soldiers, but pilgrims, intent always to go the little farther.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁸

How does our enthusiasm become internalized? It happens as we build faith, as we encounter more and more challenging obstacles and are able to face them clearly, with compassion and clarity, and are less and less subject to every whim and fleeting compulsion. As we find more and more comfort in a greater and greater terrain and are able to move with more ease through a range of challenging territory, our rigor becomes more natural and invigorating, not compulsive or self-subjugating.

THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

The officers must be men naturally endowed with good qualities which can be developed during the course of campaigning. The most important natural quality is that of complete loyalty to the idea of people's emancipation. If this is present, the others will develop; if it is not present, nothing can be done.

~ Mao Zedong⁹

While the guerrilla approach to the Buddha's path resists enforced uniformity, there are elements of attitude that can be seen as broadly shared. First and foremost, *one must be a revolutionary*. One must aspire to the total liberation from

suffering for themselves—in this lifetime or in another. The complete uprooting and destruction of greed, hatred, and delusion. Love and sympathy unrestrained for the plight of all beings in all directions. People are drowning in the great flood. The Buddha's way offers a raft, a shore, an island, but most people demand only warmer water. This is what distinguishes the revolutionary from the appeaser, the person whose mind is bent on freedom from the person whose mind is bent on accommodation who is just looking to be "more productive," find more "work/life balance" or some such thing. This process is a "takeover not a makeover." Which is not to say that the guerrilla yogi is dogmatic or closed to tactics of temporary strategic compromise: they do at times let themselves find temporary sanctuary in pleasure. But whatever nourishment they take in rest from the battle is always understood to be in strategic service to the larger cause. We may make mistakes, we may lose our way, but we try as best we can to always keep our eyes on the prize: The utter destruction of craving and aversion, the uprooting of ignorance, the fulfillment of the holy life.

We were a self-centered army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom... a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹⁰

The qualities that count as revolutionary mature over time and a broader and broader palette of mental and emotional experience can be folded into what might be considered revolutionary characteristics.

If we think only certain qualities are ultimately able to uproot the enemy, then only a fraction of our experience will ever hold up. In a workplace, only a small percentage of people are going to be the types who are natural agitators, organizers, rabble-rousers, but an organizing campaign must allow for the people who are not those types to feel they have a stake in the struggle, and join it bringing their special gifts and talents. The agitated, rabble-rousing, angry, zealous—yes—but also the bored, the sleepy, the mischievous, the scared. The revolution must include everyone.

Social revolution is haunted by its dependency on a limited range of motivational forces for its success: anger, intensity, enthusiasm, tenacity, crisis, etc, and therefore suffers even when successful, from lack of coherence and longevity. Very few people can stay angry forever. Nor can they stay agitated, excited, rebellious for very long. At some point, people want to rest, live their lives, go to work, play, raise their families. They don't want to stay in unending revolutionary fervor. Even if they did, most cannot. It is not human, it is not natural. Those that can, the Lenins of the world, are a little demented. It is more natural to have periods of intensity and periods of rest, periods of clarity and periods of uncertainty. It is possible to have a sense of determination underlying all of this, a drum or heartbeat behind the action, that doesn't pretend that the motivating force of change is going to be constant. We can learn to have a consistency within that changeability that is more natural, more attainable, and ultimately more powerful. It holds the key to a resiliency that prevents us from abandoning the path every time we feel disillusioned.

One of the basic questions that we need to look at is how to convert merely rebellious attitudes into revolutionary ones in the process of radical transformation of society. Merely rebellious attitudes or actions are insufficient, though they are an indispensable response to legitimate anger. It is necessary to go beyond rebellious attitudes to a more radically critical and revolutionary position, which is in fact a position not simply of denouncing injustice but of announcing a new utopia.

~ Paolo Freire¹¹

PARADOX

Because of the consistency of changeability, the guerrilla yogi will benefit from trying to live in, lean into, and learn from paradox. There are many forces required in our engagement that may seem in conflict with one another. The resolution of them is not merely a process of bringing these forces into “balance.” At the very core of our practice life might be the dynamic rhythms, resonance, and tensions between the mental factors of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) and patience (*khanti*). I once asked a great teacher in Burma, the Mya Taung Sayadaw, about the tension between them. How do we reconcile this tension in our hearts? But he couldn't answer my question because he didn't acknowledge any tension. We must have *saṃvega*. Yes. We must have *khanti*. Yes. There is no contradiction. The Buddha describes this using an agricultural metaphor: though a farmer must hurry to prepare the field on the appropriate day of the season—plow the earth, plant the seeds, and water them—he cannot then command them to grow and bear fruit according to his own preference.

The path to full awakening must be considered as the most extreme example of this dynamic. A yogi commits to develop these important qualities of mind but cannot control the time-

frame in which they ripen. We cannot simply put a quarter into the machine and get our prize. But neither is it a slot machine of pure chance. As the 14th century Chinese hermit poet Stonehouse wrote, “getting free isn’t luck.” Conditions matter, intention matters, action matters—practice matters—but the road is long, mysterious, and unpredictable. So effort must be made urgently, but non-attachment to outcome rooted in a patience far beyond patience is also required.

What is patience beyond patience? The word patience, as we tend to use it, connotes a kind of posture of forbearance held for a time until inevitable and eventual satisfaction. “Just be patient” usually implies that your prize will come if you wait. It still is ruled by and dependent upon hope for a future outcome. But to be truly patient we must give up hope, give up longing, because while we all want peace, nothing is a greater threat to peace than wanting. This is not hopelessness as despondency. It is the hopelessness of peace that is not invested in the future at all.

Concentration and mindfulness can themselves feel contradictory at times and at other times are mutually dependent. Love and wisdom, body and mind, intensity and relaxation, narrow or open awareness, deep or surface, resistance or surrender, dukkha and nibbana. In the list of the seven bojjhaṅga, or “factors of awakening,” factors on either side of the list can seem contradictory: Investigation and concentration, energy and calm, rapture and equanimity. We have no coherent self and yet we are entirely responsible for our actions. We can free ourselves from hope without drowning in hopelessness.

To put forth energy toward a goal without any expectation of accomplishment, of *outcome*, is one of the hardest things for the human heart to accomplish. The entire life of practice can be seen as a giant tool of purification of motivation. As we come to see how so much of our motivation for practice is rooted in clinging and craving to certain experiences or certain fantasies of a future self, an investment in the experience of the next moment. To put forth our full effort and have no attachment at all to what comes next is a true miracle—more than any other fantastic magic that the saints have come up with in their times. The humility of perseverance, the purity of heart that is its fruit, is a precious doorway to freedom.

This doesn't mean that the guerrilla yogi walks around all day long with perfect motivation. It means they are committed to the greatest humility in seeing over and over and over again how most of the time their motivation is more rooted in craving and aversion. This degree of honesty is of paramount importance and not as a matter of self-denigration but in fact as one of wisdom because we start to see all of these impulses as impersonal, as rooted in nature and the trajectory of ancient kamma.

In the Vesali Sutta, the Buddha encouraged his monks to consider the body with *nibbidā*—defined variously as “revulsion,” “disgust,” “dispassion,” or “disenchantment” and reflect continuously on it as such. He then went into seclusion for several weeks. During that time, sixty of these monks were so demoralized by the disgusting nature of the body that they killed themselves or “sought an assassin” to do it for them. Upon emerging from his retreat, the Buddha asked Ananda,

"why does the community of monks seem so depleted?" Ananda informed the Buddha of the tragedy. The Buddha immediately asked Ananda to gather the remaining monks before him and proceeded to describe to them about how mindfulness of breathing should be enjoyed as a pleasant abiding,

Monks, this concentration through mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, is both peaceful & exquisite, a refreshing & pleasant abiding that immediately disperses & allays any evil, unskillful mental qualities that have arisen. Just as when, in the last month of the hot season, a great rain-cloud out of season immediately disperses & allays the dust & dirt that have been stirred up, in the same way this concentration through mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, is both peaceful & exquisite, a refreshing & pleasant abiding that immediately disperses & allays any evil, unskillful mental qualities that have arisen.

~ Buddha, Vesali Sutta¹²

The Buddha wasn't wrong to encourage disenchantment with the body, but the intensity of that realization must be counter-balanced with the buoyancy of wholesome pleasure. One of the great balancing acts in practice is to be sobered by these insights while not growing embittered or drowning in despondency or despair. We come to understand that nothing is stable enough to ever satisfy the hunger of the mind. The mind itself (arising and passing each moment based on conditions) isn't stable enough to be satisfied.

A heart bent on satisfaction will only find suffering. A heart inclined toward unbinding from expectation will undoubtedly attain freedom. The most important mechanism of liberation is *disenchantment*. Weariness—even to the degree of revulsion—with the conditioned world and the heart that

keeps searching for stability within it, is a key factor in the success of the revolutionary mind. We need to ultimately feel the dukkha of the oppressive and exhausting tendencies of the mind. It is the only way to tap into the “desire for deliverance” that propels the mind to the final stages of liberation insight. But when tired or otherwise vulnerable to the forces of doubt, we should stay away from this feeling of repugnance with the body or the mind. That frame of mind will tend toward despondency and depression instead of liberatory animation—and this should always be taken into strategic account. We can learn instead how to focus on and adhere to the pleasant side of practice in order to keep our efforts buoyant.

We can watch a nature show on television and be inspired by the beauty and wonder of it while at the same time feel horrified by the imprisonment of beings in the cycle of consumption and re-production, the stress of continued existence. Our practice should be rooted in humility and compassion for ourselves and all beings living under the powerful dictatorship of samsara, of craving craving for continued existence. If we do not allow this kind of openness to paradox—to allow both to be true—the mind tends to teeter between overzealous faith and hopelessness.

The spring itself was a thread of silvery water in a runnel of pebbles across delightful turf, green and soft, on which we lay, wrapped in our cloaks, wondering if something to eat were worth preparing: for we were subject at the moment to the physical shame of success, a reaction of victory, when it became clear that nothing was worth doing, and that nothing worthy had been done.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹³

As guerrilla yogis, we need to learn to acclimate and find familiarity and safety within the full terrain of the body and mind. We must learn to be as agile in the jungle of doubt as we are on the mountaintop of zeal, as stabile in the ocean of wonder as we are in the desert of hopelessness. As free in the green pastures of contentment as in the valley of the shadow of death. This is the essence of vipassanā: not controlling terrain but knowing the full terrain of existence so intimately as to not be seduced or disturbed by any of it, to have no preference for one or the other, no clinging to any states of existence. We cannot fake it and there is no way to rush it. We must go through it all over and over again and feel the glory and agony of it all, and the pain of our own clinging and rejection of it all—for this, in the end, is our true challenge, to recognize and not resist the pain in the heart that is always there.

To be of the desert was, as they knew, a doom to wage unending battle with an enemy who was not of the world, nor life, nor anything, but hope itself;

~ T.E. Lawrence¹⁴

While the Buddha's path of vipassanā is considered the most direct path to enlightenment, the road is not straight and we will have to weather great challenges when it seems like we are lost, or stuck, or going backwards.

This is why in the 5 faculties (*iddhipāda*) faith (*saddhā*) precedes energy (*virīya*), concentration (*samādhi*), mindfulness (*sati*), and wisdom (*pañña*). The mental support of conviction, confidence, faith are power bases for our mind's effort

and their undermining is our greatest concern. *Viccikicca*, doubt, loss of faith in ourselves or in the path is absolutely the greatest threat to our practice and our success, threatening our access to all that lies up river. This is not meant to imply that we don't question the path or the teachings or our method, but this form of doubt is a doubt that is disinterested, disconnects us, that believes in, is driven by guided by, hopelessness and meaninglessness and despair.

When trudging through the desert of dryness, we cannot expect ourselves always to be perfectly equanimous and simply relate to it without any agitation. We can remember to observe our dislike, or hope, our wanting of something else, something more exciting, anything, to be happening rather than what is happening, and recognize that we simply need to keep on the slog, that we cannot trust our minds at all in their analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of our experience. It will help us to find that small spark of willingness, of *chanda*, hidden as it might be beneath shadow's of doubt and resistance, and just keep moving and acknowledge that the pain is not about the object "out there" but of the wanting within our own hearts.

In a war of long duration, those whose conviction that the people must be emancipated is not deeply rooted are likely to become shaken in their faith

~ Mao Zedong¹⁵

Even when we lose track of the breath or practicing mettā but find ourselves getting repeatedly and overwhelmingly distracted, we have to see that there is almost always a thin thread of

connection that we can maintain to our anchor, our primary object. The problem is mostly the standard we hold ourselves to. If we allow that the mind is going to wander off, and that there is no way of keeping that intense clarity of mindfulness of breath all the time, we attune to what degree of attention is there and let that be enough. Soon we will find that we have much more consistency and concurrence than we ever thought we did, but that it may ebb and flow like the tides.

Owing to the loss of big cities and the hardships of war, vacillating elements within our ranks will clamour for compromise, and pessimism will grow to a serious extent. Our tasks will then be to mobilize the whole people to unite as one man and carry on the war with unflinching perseverance, to broaden and consolidate the united front, sweep away all pessimism and ideas of compromise, promote the will to hard struggle and apply new wartime policies, and so to weather the hardships.

~ Mao Zedong¹⁶

When there is hardship we have to lean on our faith. When there is no faith, we fall back on courage. When there is no courage, we fall back on our training. When our training is insufficient, we fall back on the teachings. When the teachings don't inspire, we take a break, remembering that countless other people have encountered these same obstacles you are facing and have persevered. We may need to rest but that does not mean we give up. And if we give up, that is only for a few moments. We can be ready to pick the sword back up in the next. Even if our break lasts a few years, that is nothing in comparison to the lifetimes we have been at it—moving in and moving away.

There will be setbacks. What matters most in these times is not merely doing the right thing but the undercurrent of our character that keeps us going. We can align toward a thread of evenness through ups and downs. We cannot stop them from happening but can we be willing to ride them all the way through to the end? Sometimes we have to go to the darkest recesses of the mind. When things fall apart and there is equanimity, it feels liberating. When there isn't, the same experience can be terrifying. Other times we find ourselves in the desert of the doldrums for days, weeks, or longer. We can lose our orientation. It takes an undercurrent of faith, and incredible perseverance, to not deny fear or bewilderment and to gently try to make sure we are still watching and noting each arising and passing as best we can.

Old Don Antonio taught me that you are big as the enemies you choose to fight, and as small as the fear is big. 'Choose a big enemy, and it will make you grow as you confront him. Lessen your fear because if it grows, it will make you small,' Old Don Antonio told me one rainy May afternoon, in the house when tobacco and words reign."

~ Subcommandante Marcos¹⁷

A few years ago as I walked to the open-air dhamma hall to open a weekend retreat, our entire space was swarmed by millions of flying termites. All of us were covered with them: in our hair, in our mouths and ears, and under our clothes. They were everywhere. We turned off the lights and covered ourselves in shawls. I tried my best to orient the yogis to our retreat and encourage them to persevere. The next day, the termites had all died and were covering the floor in a thick exoskeletal carpet. As we cleaned the hall, swept off our beds

and rededicated ourselves to the practice, I discovered that only one yogi had decided to leave the retreat. Her note read, “I’m sorry but I am just not enlightened enough to sit peacefully though a swarm of termites crawling all over my body.” I understood. But the truth is that none of us were so enlightened. That was not what kept us there. It was the longing to be free, the aspiration to be liberated from dependence upon conditions that kept us invested in the process.

During our closing circle, many yogis reported the same insight: when they focused their determination to explore the direct sensations of the termites on their skin they realized that it was not entirely unpleasant. In fact, many found the light tickling touch to be mildly pleasant. It was only when the idea of what was happening penetrated and took over their mind did they find themselves in agony. But when they noticed it as thinking and returned back to the direct sensations, they were calm and engaged. They had broken through an important aspect of our suffering related to the difference between concept and reality. *They did so not because they were free but because they so deeply wanted to be.*

The Arab army was so weak physically that it could not let the meta-physical weapon rust unused. It had won a province when the civilians in it had been taught to die for the ideal of freedom: the presence or absence of the enemy was a secondary matter.

~ TE Lawrence¹⁸

~ 13 ~

INTELLIGENCE

Reporting - Education -

International Support



Intelligence should compile all the information it can on all members of the guerrilla unit, all enemies, those indifferent to the movement; on the location of water, springs and rivers; on roads, highways, trails, bridges; on the conduct of the guerrilla members; on sympathizers who wish to join the unit; on soldiers, informers, spies, etc. At the same time it will obtain or make maps of the terrain and the principal targets in the sector assigned to the unit. It will conduct espionage and counterespionage activities, keep records on unit personnel regarding all combat performance whether outstanding or unimpressive; and carry on cryptographic work (coding and deciphering messages, documents of courts martial, etc.).

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud, *One Hundred Fifty Questions to a Guerrilla*¹

ONE OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL and difficult aspects of the Guerrilla campaign is the process of amassing, discerning, and putting to use information from a variety of sources—public, experiential, clandestine, rumor, and theoretical. Understanding that the enemy will implement their own

sophisticated disinformation campaign, it is vital for a rebel movement to be confident in its ability to get accurate reporting and to trust its sources—or at least have a sense of what degree and in regards to what spheres each can be trusted.

Being able to keep tabs on the enemy, get a sense of their movements, understand how they work often requires covert operations. For the guerrilla this means having a network and program of espionage and informants whose lives are embedded in the opposition camp or in the public domain where the enemy spends time—formally or casually. For the guerrilla yogi, this means that it is necessary to gather intelligence by building networks of information. First and foremost it means developing a program for both practical and theoretical knowledge.

In order to discern the truth about what we are learning from various sources the guerrilla yogi must rely on both experiential and theoretical tools. We try our best to observe all experience directly, internally and externally, from the most subtle to the most gross, but it is also important to have a theoretical framework—based on study and education—that helps us make sense of what we are seeing, to learn the lessons of what we observe, to interpret correctly, and make functional use of our observations. The flood of experience we are trying to observe can be so overwhelming that we need conceptual frameworks to translate our direct experience into knowledge of what would otherwise seem simply chaotic.

It is important to distinguish early-on the difference between direct and conceptual knowledge. Both kinds of knowledge have their place in our deepening ability to understand what we see. Primarily we are concerned with empirical

reality, ultimate truths (*paramattha sacca*) as directly experienced through vipassanā practice. Secondly we uplift value and role of conceptual knowledge of conventional truths (*samuti sacca*) that we may encounter in the literature and logic of the tradition, as aspects of conventional reality still supportive of our training and development.

At first a few of us lived together in a house and we had to teach the young people how to handle a weapon. Men took to the weapons quickly, but for women it was harder and more alien, so we placed special emphasis on it. Then came the theoretical discussions about what defense is and how people can protect themselves. This process gave the families trust, and so more women came to us.

~ Karaçox, YPJ fighter in Rojava, Syria²

REPORTING

It is necessary for guerrillas to know how to make speedy and accurate reports. You must write clearly, using block letter if your handwriting is at all indistinct, and always printing clearly the names of places, persons, regiments and so on, also the words NO and NOT. Always use the 24-hour clock. Number every message you send back so that your commander will know if the previous one is missing. When you have put every known fact into you message—answer the questions: What? How many? Where? When? Going where? Doing what? What weapons?”—you can draw a line and then put your own comments as to what you think the event reported probably means. Do not mix your guess with the known facts.

~ Bert “Yank” Levy³

One of the ways that we begin to subvert this tendency to live in the conceptual is through the process of mental noting, of labeling experience as it arises. This method is important as part of our momentary experience in practice, releasing us

from concept and developing the mind's ability to stay directly in relationship to actual arising and passing experience. It is also important to create a chart of our experience over time. By keeping track of our mental notings we are offered an important means of tracing our progress, creating a map of our inner terrain, developing appropriate strategies and tactics based on past experiences. This involves learning to formulate detailed and accurate reports of our experience—for our own review or for the review of a teacher who is supporting us. The Mahasi Sayadaw method of reporting is one such approach that is invaluable to this process.⁴

When reporting to your teacher or simply taking notes for yourself, your observation of body and mind can be reported according to the following three-step procedure:

- 1) What is your primary target?
(i.e. the rising and falling movement of the abdomen, hands touching, the body, sound, etc.)
- 2) What did you note / notice?
(i.e. what you became aware of in terms of qualities, sensations, textures, and characteristics.)
- 3) What happened to the object when observed?
(i.e. does it persist, dissipate, increase in intensity, decrease, change, etc.)

For example,

I watched the abdomen rise (or fall).

I labeled it as “rising, rising” (or “falling, falling”).

I became aware of stretching, pressure, stiffness, tension, etc. and noted accordingly.

I felt pressure increase gradually (or, perhaps, when falling, I felt pressure decrease).

It is very important to describe your primary object in clear, simple and precise terms with all the accurate details you have observed. Only after that should you continue to report on the secondary objects.

On the air, keep your messages clear and to the point to guarantee speed and security in communication.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud⁵

Secondary Targets

The secondary targets can include (but are not limited to) the following:

- *Bodily sensations*: pressure, throbbing, itching, etc.
- *Thoughts*: ideas, planning, remembering, thinking, etc.
- *Emotions*: anger, pride, joy, happiness, etc.
- *Other Sense objects*: Sounds (hearing), images (seeing), etc.

While mindfully pursuing the primary target, if any secondary targets become predominant, a yogi can turn the mind toward that target and mindfully observe it. After the reporting on the primary target, meditators also report the experience of the secondary targets according to the above three-step procedure. For example,

I noticed a painful sensation in the knee and I noted it as “pain, pain.”
I looked more closely and noticed warmth and a stabbing sensation.

I noted as “stabbing, stabbing.”

After some time, I experienced it as slow pulsating hardness. I noted “hard, hard, hard”

I began to notice a decreased in intensity at the end of each pulse.

After a few more minutes it disappeared altogether.

Then I went back to the primary target which is the rising and falling movement of the abdomen.

Our initial recognition may be something conceptual like “hearing a car” or “feeling pain” but the yogi is always encouraged to look more deeply than the conceptual and investigate the non-conceptual experience that we still may find a label for. “A rumbling sound” or “intense pressure” might be better descriptions of our actual direct experience. “Pain” is an experience that we hold very conceptually in that it leads to lack of investigation. When reporting different kinds of thoughts such as planning, imagining, judging, daydreaming, etc, or emotions such as anger, frustration, happiness, etc, meditators should report them objectively without mentioning whom or what they are thinking about or who or what makes them angry, etc.

I found myself lost in thoughts.

I noted as “thinking, thinking” or “planning, planning” or “remembering, remembering.”

I noticed frustration arise and I noted “frustration, frustration.”

After a while, it disappeared and I noticed warmth in the area of the heart.

These sensations were pleasant and so I noted “pleasant, pleasant”

Then I went back to the primary target.

Sample of a Comprehensive Report:

I noted the rising and falling movement of the abdomen as a primary target of meditation. When I noted the rising, I experienced tension and pressure and noted them. Then I noted the falling motion as “falling, falling.” My experience of falling was not very clear. I found my mind wandered and noted it as “wandering, wandering,” and after a while it stopped. I then went back to the primary target of rising and falling movement of the abdomen.

A painful sensation arose in my back. I noted it as “pain, pain.” When I looked more closely, it intensified and I saw it as throbbing. I noted “throbbing, throbbing” then “warmth, warmth” and eventually it lessened and finally disappeared. I noticed a sense of mental relief and noted “relief, relief” and then returned to the rising and falling movement of the abdomen.

Suddenly, a sound occurred. I noted “hearing, hearing” and then an itching sensation arose in the face. I noted it as “itching, itching.” I noticed irritation and noted “aversion” and a strong desire to move my hand to scratch which I labeled “wanting, wanting.” At some point I found myself lost in thought which I noted as “thinking, thinking.” The itch had disappeared and I returned to the primary target of the rising and falling movement of the abdomen.

Your experience in the walking meditation can be reported using the same method,

In my walking meditation I began by noticing the sensations of lifting at the bottom of the foot. I noted “light, light” as the pressure got less intense. Then I noted “stretching, stretching” as I felt the foot move forward through the air, “placing, placing” or “dropping, dropping” and “heaviness” as the foot moved back to the ground. Finally I noted “light touch, pressure, hardness”, and coolness as the foot made contact with the ground...

The encouragement is toward a non-conceptual precision and as much detail as possible. When the mind is not so clear as to provide such intense detail, it is important to note

that and to note the other factors of mind arising before and after any given experience. After all, we are not only learning to observe the body but eventually seek to observe the mind as well and then follow the process of unfolding experience as it relates to this dynamic. Walking meditation can be our most important entry point into the investigation into *nama* and *rūpa* because we can more easily observe how the mental intention to move leads to the physical activity of the body, and then how the physical experience of the body leads to body consciousness in the mind. Observing this process profoundly is considered to be the beginning of our formal insight journey and can lead all the way to the end. But for most yogis their first experience of nibbana can be so fleeting as to seem unnoticeable and without this precise training of mind—impossible to see and understand fully.

- Try to keep your report to your direct experience, not your interpretation of it.
- A good report is a condensed snap-shot of a few minutes, or even just a few moments, of our most clear sitting or walking period.
- Don't feel too much pressure to be too precise or too perfect - just note what you observe!

Over time our reports may have more or less detail and may describe a range of experiences. Don't expect this kind of reporting description to simply go in one direction of what we imagine "progress" to look like. We may notice more or less mental activity, more or less concentration, more or less any-

thing and it may not mean what you think it does. A single report is best understood in relationship to a series of reports over time. With experience, a yogi begins to see patterns in their internal experience. For example, when pain arises we may notice that doubt soon follows. Patterns become familiar and less personal. We can become interested in processes and relationships that used to frustrate us. Keep your scent on trail. Keep records. Commit as much as you can to memory.

EDUCATION

Information must be factual to build up confidence among the people in the national movement. What it must do it this:

- 1) Give the people tenacity to stand up to the enemy by showing them the struggle is worthwhile and necessary. They must be made aware that the national struggle will be victorious in the end—but that the end depends on them.
- 2) Get world public opinion behind the just fight of the people.
- 3) Undermine the enemy's morale and his propaganda by exposing his methods and by constant emphasis on the unjustness of his cause.
- 4) Be the spiritual mainspring of those actively engaged in the national movement so that they understand the need to destroy the enemy and his power forever.

~ Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army⁶

Though the Buddha had a variety of teachers with whom he trained in a range of meditative techniques (mostly related to concentration), none of them had attained the complete liberation he aspired to and so could not offer him guidance toward that final goal. He had to figure it out for himself. The amount of faith that must have been necessary for Siddhartha Gautama

to fulfill his mission is utterly staggering. Finding one's own way to freedom in the dark, with no sense that it had been done before, not even that it was possible, took human qualities of inconceivable beauty and magnitude. Indeed, one of the particular points of reverence for the Buddha is that he was *sammā-sambuddhassa* — “rightly self-awakened.” The deeper into the path we get, the more profound can be our appreciation for having the guidance of the Buddha himself as well as multitudes of others who have attained the path before us.

This guidance should be taken up, studied, questioned, explored, and ultimately integrated into our own practice: accepted if it works, rejected if it backfires, transformed where that is called for, but all with the most rigor and care that we can muster. No one else's word should be taken as fact until we have experienced it. No one's word should be rejected until we are absolutely confident in its fault. Nothing should be changed without the utmost reserve and testing. We will benefit from reading, listening, learning, questioning, and wrestling with the words and teachings, the traditions and cultures, that have come before us. They should not be accepted without inquiry but neither should they be rejected outright just because they don't immediately align with our philosophy of what we think should be true.

Theory is very necessary but unmethodical study yields no result.

Therefore in studying theory we have to stress that theory must be integrated with practice.

~ Ho Chi Minh⁷

We must rigorously differentiate between what we believe to be true, what we want to be true, and what we know to be true. This requires a careful, whole hearted, and honest process of *praxis* —of theory and experiential application. Even when it comes to Buddhist theory, though, we have so much to choose from that it can be overwhelming. Bookstores are filled with meditation and “mindfulness” instruction in many flavors and with many variations. All of it should be approached with utmost skepticism. It is rare in the world to find people truly interested in release, in disenchantment, in the ending of constructed being. Most authors will seek to use the practice in ways that reaffirm their identities and yours. But the Dhamma “goes against the stream” and we should always measure any book by the relationship to what has been said by the ancients.

An important encouragement for the guerrilla yogi is to trust the tradition as the foundation of your theoretical knowledge. Not without healthy skepticism, but the ancient texts—the Pali cannon and the collection of Nikaya suttas that are available in book form and online—will serve you well as the primary basis of the framework of your exploration. There is a rich, robust, and diverse array of teachings therein that form a coherent structure of profound relevance as well as historic interest.

Who can say that the texts of the tradition are entirely trustworthy? Who can say that they all truly offer the words of the Buddha? No one. There are many questions to wrestle with in regards to translation, to the potentially detrimental impact of oral transmission over hundreds of years, to the patriarchal agenda of the early compilers, to the nature of Buddha-hood and whether the Buddha himself, enlightened as he was, had

enduring aspects of personality that were more complex than the tradition would like to admit. Many of these are things that will never be resolved and so we can take our inheritance with profound gratitude, open-mindedness, and a healthy dose of rational but engaged skepticism. A guerrilla yogi knows that they cannot trust all information from all sources. But because of the broad general coherence of the suttas, one begins to get a sense of where to be suspicious, where to have confidence, and where to be careful.

There are some militarists who say: 'We are not interested in politics but only in the profession of arms.' It is vital that these simple-minded militarists be made to realize the relationship that exists between politics and military affairs. Military action is a method used to attain a political goal. While military affairs and political affairs are not identical, it is impossible to isolate one from the other.

~ Mao Zedong⁸

Ancient devout teachers and practitioners put vast amounts of time and consideration into the interpretations of the suttas as well as formulations of method and frameworks that are invaluable—if not always entirely trustworthy. The compilers of the tradition had agendas—some obvious, some hidden, some unconscious—that impacted their motivations and their decisions about their efforts. Where the Abhidhamma succeeds most brilliantly is in its description of momentary experience of consciousness. Where it comes up short is often in trying to create an objective explanation of material reality outside of consciousness. Just because we know to be suspicious of some of the data from this source doesn't mean we disregard the whole body. There are pieces we learn to absorb and trust and

others that will call us to look at our experience with more earnest investigation.

For example, abhidhamma literature suggests that one cannot be mindful of anger because you cannot have a moment of *sati* and *dosa* arise at the same moment—a moment of mindfulness is a wholesome moment not tainted by greed, hatred, or delusion and so cannot exist at the same moment as anger. It recognizes instead that the arising and passing distinct moments of anger and mindfulness in rapid succession can feel as if we are being mindful of anger, and so we can observe it fruitfully. Is this true? When we look as closely as possible what do we experience? Does our sense of this change one day to the next? It is also said that the physical water element cannot be experienced directly, that what we notice actually is the combination of air, earth, and fire elements in quick succession, providing the sensation of cool cohesion. Is this true? Check it out. The literature says that visual shape does not exist as a fundamental reality of which we can be conscious, but color does—and so shape is a product of mental perception in relationship to the boundaries of color. Is this true? Check it out.

Theravada abhidhamma presents experience in particle form: life, being, as a chain of momentary experiences, arising and passing, each conditioning the arising of the next. Life as we begin to see it is a flux between *nama* and *rūpa*, name and form, in dynamic interplay giving the perspective of dimensionality. Modern science recognizes that all light and matter have a dual nature: both a particle form and a wave form, depending on how we look at it. We should not assume that the particle form of the abhidhamma is the only way to see or

understand reality, but it is a helpful and true one that puts our normal perspective in a liberating light.

79. How will our men be busy when there is no immediate task?

They will relax during the day, wash their feet daily and take care of their toenails since feet and legs are the engines of the guerrilla. They will study the maps of the region, memorizing the names of all nearby villages, and their population and some of the names of the people, they will identify on a blank chart all rivers, tributary rivers, springs, reservoirs, and wells. They will learn the distances between different points within that sector and the location of bridges and sewers that might be used for train sabotage. In other words they must learn by heart whatever piece of information might be helpful to carry on the war or to facilitate the tasks of other sections of the militia.

~ Alberto Bayo Giroud⁹

The closer in time we get to literature formed in the present, the more questions arise about of caliber of the material and the minds that created it. There is good writing out there, but it takes a lot of sifting through to find it. Since we only have a certain amount of time to dedicate to our studies, it is always best to go with the Nikayas and commentarial literature.

At best, the Nikayas can be deeply informative and inspiring. On the other hand, they can sometimes hold such a high standard that we wither and feel ourselves humiliated in comparison. We don't measure up. The tone in many of the suttas can also be very male, very macho, striving oriented, and just plain boring. This is likely because it was men who dominated the tradition for a very long time, and a particular kind of man has thrived in that religious culture and been empowered to pass it down. In this way, what is offered as universal does not have the self-awareness of the historic and

cultural particularity that it embodies. That is how mainstream privilege works and why the voices at the margin are so important.

Classes were run in caves; each village sent a person to study for a few days, then he went back and taught his co-villagers. When his knowledge was exhausted he returned to the class and learned some more. While teaching others, the teachers also learned themselves. Such was the method we adopted for the mass education work and for its development into a movement...

The organization of teaching should be in accordance with the living conditions of the learners, then the movement will last and bear good results. Our compatriots are still poor and cannot afford paper and pens, therefore a small pocket exercise-book is enough for each person. Reading and writing exercises can be done anywhere, using charcoal, the ground, or banana leaves as pens and paper. Clandestine cadres were to teach and make one person literate every three months.

~ Ho Chi Minh¹⁰

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

Our Party grew and developed in the favourable international conditions created by the victory of the great October Revolution. The achievements of the Party and the people are inseparable from the fraternal support accorded us by the Soviet Union, People's China and the other socialist countries, the international Communist and workers' movement and the national-liberation movement and also the peace movement. We were able to surmount all difficulties and lead the people to glorious victories because the Party did not divorce the revolutionary movement in its own country from the revolutionary movement of the world proletariat and the national-liberation movement of the oppressed people.

~ Ho Chi Minh¹¹

The Algerian war of independence from France was one of the first coherent uses of international pressure to support a guerrilla liberation movement. The leaders of the FLN used relationships with western media outfits to highlight French war-atrocities in order to garner international public sympathy. They strategically used the policy mechanisms of the United Nations to apply pressure to France and leveraged cold-war tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union to gain support from both for their independence cause.

Cuban and Vietnamese revolutionary struggles would not have succeeded without funds, arms, and strategic guidance offered by more developed sympathetic states. Vietnam could never have resisted American interference for so long and with such success without the financial and military support of the Soviet Union and China. Many guerrillas in African struggles needed and utilized bases across borders in friendly countries to run back to for security. Vital support comes not only from states but from individuals living in foreign lands. Algerian forces in the revolution depended upon financial support from Algerians living in France. The IRA depended on funds from Irish Americans. The Republican side of the Spanish Civil War depended on volunteers from around the world to form the ranks of their battalions. In many ways the revolution cannot be bound by national borders.

Accepting the support of hegemonic institutions larger and more powerful than yourself is fundamental to success but it is also a dangerous game. To what degree are policies dictated from afar? When do the foreign mandates clash with our native interests? When are we beholden to these forces even when they are in the wrong or when their deeper motivations

run counter to our long-term goals? What are the costs of allegiance to foreign establishments and institutions of power?

A similar dynamic can be found in our relationships between our mode of practice and our tradition in Asia as well as our relationships with other Buddhist traditions, or other religious traditions entirely.

For a long time I believed it was unnecessary to go and practice or pilgrimage in Asia. Meditation can be practiced anywhere because the Dhamma can be found anywhere, in any object, in any moment, in any cultural context, in any time and place. We have good teachers in the West. We have supportive facilities. We have a growing body of resources that are available to more and more people, in books, online and elsewhere. But after going to Burma for over ten years now, where my tradition is rooted, I have come to see how important a connection this is for me: in personal relationships, certainly, but perhaps more uniquely in having the opportunity to spend time in a cultural context where the Dhamma is the norm, where the dominant culture is a Buddhist culture, and a baseline respect for the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and for intensive practice is unquestioned and honored. To be in a place where faith in the Dhamma is all around you is incredibly supportive, like filling a vitamin deficiency you didn't know you had. This may be especially true in our early years of practice when we may feel at odds with the dominant culture, where we may need to hide our Buddhist-ness. To be "out" and to be open and to share and be nourished by the ambience of faith is no small thing.

There is a profound experience to be in a place where people speak of the Buddha as if he just walked through the

village last week—as if we had just missed him—where they still wrap his statue in a shawl when the night is cold. To be in a village where people speak of arahants known to be alive today, ones they met as children, or whose bodies are still entombed in a nearby pagoda, provide an unfamiliar comfort. To hear the multitude of stories of meditators whose striving has inspired people for generations, to walk beside a field where it is said one monk *flew* across every day to get his breakfast, to walk into a cool limestone cave and feel the all-pervasive vibe, like the opposite of a nuclear bomb, of someone who attained enlightenment there a hundred years ago—has an impact and can give you the energy and momentum of faith that a tradition is supposed to provide.

If we pay close enough attention and keep our investigative minds sharp, spending time in a Buddhist culture is both inspiring and disenchanting. The deep social integration of ethics and Buddhist mythology is profound and important. At the same time we find that these societies are equally subject to the same forces of inequality, prejudice, violence and greed, as our own or others. The institutions of the Dhamma themselves are not free from scandal or degradation, and these things can be very challenging to negotiate. Many of our traditions come out of orthodox religious institutions that are troubled in one way or another or at the very least have dramatic blind spots that are antiquated or oppressive. Most stark are often the deeply sexist traditions embedded in the religion and culture that have resulted in the prohibition of full female monastic ordination. Even more basically we encounter the fundamental subservience of nuns to monks within the traditional *sāsana* ordination. Of course one can effortlessly find

representatives of the Dhamma who hold views that are racist, classist, prejudiced in one way or another.

In many countries where Buddhism is the religion of the majority—and/or practiced by the majority ethnic group—we find that it has all the trappings of any dominant culture, especially when it comes to the relationship with minority ethnic or religious communities. Persecutions, injustice, ethnic superiority, nationalism, and prejudice of all kinds are just as evident in Buddhist societies as Christian ones. Buddhist religious infrastructure can be just as sinister and imperious and dedicated to oppressive social economic power-structures as Christian churches are in the West or Muslim mosques are in the Central Asia or North Africa. The recent Bamar-Buddhist violence against the Rohingya Muslim people in Burma is only the most recent—if most atrocious—explosion of vitriol on the part of the Buddhist majority against minority ethnic groups in the country¹². These realities can help us pierce the fantasy of a Buddhist majority in the west, obliterating the notion that mindfulness will save any society.

Generally, we will still be able to find in some corner a person or place that we feel deeply embodies the shining path of liberation that we are deeply drawn to, and this may be in the midst of a multitude of things we find disheartening. It can cause us to question our assumptions about the social value of the dhamma, of the lineage that we are a part of. This is good. It is so much better to wrestle with our tradition than to blindly follow it, or blindly dismiss it. Indeed, in the west our habitual arrogance of view is a fundamental weakness that should be kept always in check. Our relationship to traditional Buddhist cultures—especially those still rooted in rural village

life—can help give us fresh eyes on notions of obedience, admonishment, cosmopolitan privilege.

When we come into deeper engagement with our spiritual heritage, we complicate and enrich our path. These relationships with people and cultures are necessary as we collectively learn to practice together, to struggle together, to develop solidarity amid real differences, real problems. We are living in a time where shared learning has untold potential for fostering vitality to the contemporary expression of the sāsana.

The guerrilla yogi by their nature holds deferential respect for the ancient institutions of our tradition (and of others) but also assumes the highest degree of personal responsibility and freedom of movement in terms of general operational functioning. We are certainly not beholden to them when it comes to issues of social oppression.

We on the Arab front were very intimate with the enemy. Our Arab officers had been Turkish officers, and knew every leader on the other side personally. They had suffered the same training, thought the same, took the same point of view. By practising modes of approach upon the Arabs we could explore the Turks: understand, almost get inside, their minds. Relation between us and them was universal, for the civil population of the enemy area was wholly ours without pay or persuasion. In consequence our intelligence service was the widest, fullest and most certain imaginable.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹³

There are countless sources of wisdom in the world and different experiences and expressions of it can be supportive of our practice—and relationships across these differences can be a dynamic blend of challenging and nourishing. We will benefit

from that flexibility to find our own sources of inspirational materials, while always begin careful to understand what is and what isn't in precise alignment with the teaching of the Buddha as our tradition holds it. Cold Mountain, Rumi, Hafiz, Mary Oliver, Rilke, Tupac, or Biggie may inspire us—and we can value that inspiration while still understanding the limits of their resonance, where the frequency doesn't quite match.

Of course we prefer our wisdom organic, free-range, and freshly-squeezed when possible. But knowing how vast wilderness is and how disorienting the desert can be the guerilla yogi eats where there is food and drinks from whatever source they find. In desperate times, they are not so proud as to refuse wisdom from a can.

We had to arrange their minds in order of battle just as carefully and as formally as other officers would arrange their bodies. And not only our own men's minds...We must also arrange the minds of the enemy, so far as we could teach them; then those other minds of the nation supporting us behind the firing line... then the minds of the enemy nation waiting the verdict; and of the neutrals looking on; circle beyond circle.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹⁴

~ 14 ~

PROTRACTED WAR

Land Reform - Crisis -

Building a Regular Army



Thus it is clear that guerrilla warfare is a phase that does not afford in itself opportunities to arrive at complete victory. It is one of the initial phases of warfare and will develop continuously until the guerrilla army in its steady growth acquires the characteristics of a regular army. At that moment it will be ready to deal final blows to the enemy and to achieve victory. Triumph will always be the product of a regular army, even though its origins are in the guerrilla army.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare¹

ONE OF MAO'S great accomplishments during the Chinese revolution was his ability to inspire and organize the movement by the dual insistence that winning was possible and that it would be an undoubtedly long and hard road to victory. He called the overall strategy one of "protracted war." The strategy recognized the humbling discrepancy between the

power of the invading Japanese forces and the native Chinese ones as well as between the forces of the nationalist and communist Chinese. Firmly rooted in reality, it still discerned that the potential for victory lay in a long-term commitment to tactics that leveraged and augmented their own strengths and the weaknesses of the enemy to the greatest degree possible.

In 1934 the nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek took a break from their conflict with the Japanese to prepare a major offensive against the Communist capital, Ruijin in Jiangxi province. To avoid a fatal confrontation with the stronger enemy, Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong orchestrated a massive retreat in what became known as the Long March. The Long March lasted an entire year in which they maneuvered the Red Army in a circular swing south, west, north and then east, while feigning attacks in other areas to disguise their movements.

The nearly inconceivable effort that took the army through nearly 8000 miles of treacherous terrain led to numerous casualties from fatigue, hunger and cold, sickness, desertion, and fighting. Of the original 100,000 soldiers who began the Long March, only 8,000 made it to the final destination in 1935.

On the other hand, while immensely costly, by avoiding decisive battles the Long March gave the Communist Party of China the protective conditions that ultimately allowed its army to recuperate and rebuild in the north. Peasants—the social group which the Army was most dependent upon for survival and legitimacy—were won over by the magnitude of the determination and moral code of these soldiers who had trekked so many miles in extreme conditions and terrain for the sake of national liberation.

The Long March is a manifesto. It has proclaimed to the world that the Red Army is an army of heroes, while the imperialists and their running dogs, Chiang Kai-shek and his like, are impotent. It has proclaimed their utter failure to encircle, pursue, obstruct and intercept us. The Long March is also a propaganda force. It has announced to some 200 million people in eleven provinces that the road of the Red Army is their only road to liberation.

~ Mao Zedong²

THE LONG MARCH

In meditation practice, progress is measured by our ever-increasing realization that the enemy is much greater than we ever imagined—much more entrenched and powerful—accompanied by an increasing faith and determination to pursue the cause to its end.

Often, enthusiasm provides the most vigorous momentum in the early days of our practice, when the inner revolution has just begun. There can be a fervor, an excitement, a fascination with every aspect of what we encounter. Sometimes this can actually get out of balance. A yogi becomes so enthusiastic they are even sometimes annoying to the people around them: constantly proselytizing, trying to convince family members or friends that they need to go on retreat, start meditation, need to accept the teachings of the Buddha. If this fervor is not convincing to others it can lead to a sense of isolation. While this quality needs to be tempered eventually, the excitement about the practice and the prospects of liberation are inspiring and deeply motivating. When we look, we see, and we see that seeing is liberating. The sense of transformation can be very fast and significant moments of change can keep us exception-

ally motivated. The faith that can arise is very potent and powerful.

But as time goes on our faith and intensity of motivation can wane. As we begin to connect with deeper but also more mundane levels of experience, the long slog of the war, the sense of insurmountable odds can take its toll. Doubt can arise and persist. This path will bring us through the desert—the vast barren landscapes of the mind and body—which is where so many lose their way, their hopelessness not yet purified.

The excitement of our early practice can be lost as we see “the same” material go around over and over and over and over in our minds for years. For long stretches the practice can feel aimless or fruitless. Our usual standards of measurement are confused. This barrenness is an essential ingredient to the process of disenchantment but caught in expectation and mirage, we forget to see the beauty of the barrenness.

As the stars rose we agreed that we must march upon Orion. So we started and marched on Orion for hour after hour, with effect that Orion seemed no nearer, and there were no signs of anything between us and him.

~ T.E. Lawrence³

We all must struggle to come to terms with the fact that this practice is not about reaching some perfect state and staying there. Rather it is a profound, unrelenting, and liberating disenchantment with all forms of experience—including the blissful states—that leads us to freedom. In the desert of the heart we are confronted with our longing for *more*—more intensity, more profundity, more knowledge, more excitement. We are brutally and repeatedly faced with the challenge of the

heart's ability to see this longing squarely, to fully accept it, and to fully abandon it. It is at this stage in practice that many vipassanā practitioners choose to abandoned the path for Tibetan practice or ayahuasca—anything that seems more exciting, more engrossing—because they cannot bear the penetrating boredom of the heart's dullest longing.

How devastating, because this purification is the doorway to our most important deepening. It is the suffering that ends suffering. We must not only bear the desert, the monotony, but even develop a taste for its tastelessness: Create a home there, receive it as a freedom, a great relief, recognizing that it is only the wanting of some other experience that is so painful. *It is the wanting that is the war.* When we reject this we refuse the quenching the cup of equanimity for the fantasy of a bitter wine.

We are trained to believe that pleasant and unpleasant sensations are the hardest challenges we will encounter. But neutral vedanā, especially for long periods, can be much more difficult to bear. People are amazed to see how often they would prefer the intense fires of racking pain to the dry desert of neutrality. Instead of clinging to some distraction of intensity perhaps we can take inspiration from Lawrence's desert comrades as they came upon an abandoned house in the desert,

The clay of its building was said to have been kneaded for greater richness, not with water, but with the precious essential oils of flowers. My guides, sniffing the air like dogs, led me from crumbling room to room, saying 'This is jessamine, this is violet, this is rose.'

But at last Dahoum drew me: ‘Come and smell the very sweetest scent of all’, and we went into the main lodging, to the gaping window sockets of its eastern face, and there drank with open mouths of the effortless, empty, eddies wind of the desert, throbbing past. That slow breath had been born somewhere beyond the distant Euphrates and had dragged its way across many days and nights of dead grass, to its first obstacle, the manmade walls of our broken palace. About them it seemed to fret and linger, murmuring in baby-speech. ‘This,’ they told me, ‘is the best: it has no taste.’ My Arabs were turning their backs on the perfumes and luxuries to choose the things in which mankind had no share or part.

~ T.E. Lawrence⁴

LAND REFORM

Only by implementing land reform, giving land to the tillers, liberating the productive forces in the countryside from the feudal yoke can we do away with poverty and backwardness, strongly mobilise the huge forces of the peasants to develop production and speed up the resistance war to complete victory.

~ Ho Chi Minh⁵

The responsibilities of the guerrilla movement are beyond waging war. They must also imagine, install, and defend the social and productive structures of a new society. Once a territory is determined to be stabilized in revolutionary hands, the process of land reform and structural social change must be addressed in order to legitimize the revolutionary program and build the spiritual and material support for the ongoing cause. The peasants have put up with a great deal of instability and risk during the campaign, so there must be something to show for it—spiritually and materially—long before final liberation.

Classically, in communistic revolutions, this has involved plans of land redistribution where old landlords, business owners, and aristocrats are removed from their positions of social power and replaced by people and systems that are intended to be more democratic and egalitarian. A more fair distribution of wealth and goods, improvements to education, infrastructure, and healthcare, as well as the collectivization of many aspects of social and economic life are commonly the key ingredients to making good on the promises of the revolution and solidifying support among the peasants.

The guiding principle for land distribution is to take villages as units, to allot land to those who previously tilled it, to take into consideration the quantity, quality, and situation of the land, to give a greater share of land to those who do not have enough, to give fertile land to those who have but poor land, to give land which is situated near the village to those who have only land situated far from their houses, to give priority to the peasants who previously tilled the land to be distributed.

The die-hard elements who are determined to sabotage land reform, and the traitors, reactionaries, and despots who are sentenced to upwards to five years' imprisonment will not receive land.

~ Ho Chih Minh⁶

The guerrilla yogi too must feel some benefit for the work and risks that they have taken. There must be some sense that this practice is “worth it” long before the trumpet of final liberation is sounded. This is not often a concern for the initial stages of the path of practice. For a long while, excitement can be its own motivation. But at some point the revolution must be able to provide what the enemy cannot. It must also wrestle with—and be realistic about—how hard it is to provide a lot of what

the enemy already does naturally. Greed can readily provide experiences of all kinds of gratification. There is no way an egalitarian society can produce the same degree of entertaining and trifling consumer goods without the underlying oppressiveness at its core. And a guerrilla yogi cannot expect the same degree of sense satisfaction that they can easily aspire to during the regime of ignorance. What is the satisfaction provided by a regime of mindfulness? How do we learn to value it?

The movement of secular mindfulness will defend itself by proposing that it can offer you all the mindless life has and with more vibrancy and satisfaction. Ironically, it is taught as a kind of gospel of prosperity. Mindfulness will supposedly make us more successful, more efficient, more likable. It will heal our relationships, fix our family, help us enjoy our terrible jobs. With mindful parenting we will have perfect children. With mindful investment we will get rich and help the world. With mindful sex we will give and receive perfect pleasure. With full mindfulness we will walk through life with in a lush and vibrant sensory ecstasy. It is the missing ingredient to everything in life. We are promised fulfillment here on earth.

People are told they can have it all: the job, the partner, the family, the vacation, the car, the house, the golf swing, and enlightenment like a cherry on top. There is no acknowledgment that renunciation (*nekkhamma*) might be a necessary aspect of the practice life, that we might need to make sacrifices for our practice, that these process—of spiritual liberation and social success—might actually move in different directions. It certainly isn't even in the same solar system as Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj who penetratingly said,

Truth gives no advantage. It gives no higher status, no power over others; all you get is truth and freedom from the false.

~ Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj⁷

Indeed, if we want anything out of the practice we undermine it: even peace, even freedom. We want equanimity but it is the wanting that keeps equanimity out of reach.

It is a curious thing to observe how at that time many people had the idea of profiting by the Revolution. They did little favors here and there, everyone of them expecting great rewards from the new State.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara⁸

Any long-term yogi knows this is true. Social life and relationships will not be the same after the revolution. Over time we may become more distant from people or cut down our social interactions and social investments. We may very well become less adjusted to society—more sensitive, less functional—less willing to betray our moral principles for comfort within the dictatorship. When we cause harm or when others harm us we may become more sensitive to the impact of it.

Why oh why didn't I take the blue pill?

~ Cypher, The Matrix⁹

This creates a paradox—before, when less sensitive, we had less of a feeling for our failings. Now, more sensitive, we see the deep roots and are more disturbed by them. We may become less willing to undermine our deepest aspirations for the satisfaction of our sensual longings. We become less tanta-

lized by the ephemeral and hollow. With these kinds of experiences as evidence, people unprepared for the impact of insight complain that mindfulness is flawed. But it is not a flaw of mindfulness that leads to this—it is its design. The heart's desire for fulfillment will never be quelled by attainment, because fulfillment is always fleeting. Satisfaction is always temporary and mindfulness training is designed to see this and to come to peace through it.

We wanted no rice-converts. Persistently we did refuse to let our abundant and famous gold bring over those not spiritually convinced. The money was a confirmation; mortar, not building stone. To have bought men would have put our movement on the base of interest; whereas our followers must be ready to go all the way without other mixture in their motives than human frailty.

~ T.E. Lawrence¹⁰

The value of this peace, then, is contentment. The dedicated yogi comes to see the value and beauty of small and meaningful connections and is motivated by their fleetingness rather than embittered. It is a desalinization of the heart. Meeting life with the basic sense of goodness is the early and enduring fruit of the practice. The relationships that we do cultivate are rooted in this goodness. Everyday friendship can feel like the breeze of blessings bolstering us through the day. Our more profound *sampavankas* become comrades in the most honest and durable sense. Our lives can become more simple, more nourishing, less toxic, less chaotic—based on decisions that honor our own spiritual and material needs as well as our commitments to the world. It may mean we live a more simple

life, but it is a more satisfying one more aligned with our values.

The vital necessities of the guerrillas are to maintain their arms in good condition, to capture ammunition, and, above everything else, to have adequate shoes.

~ Ernesto “Che” Guevara¹¹

To achieve the spiritual pinnacle of our aspirations ultimately requires us to restructure the material foundations of our lives. This may very well be a slow and careful process that happens over many years but is nonetheless essential. If the guerrilla approach is focused on the military campaign, we must also have a political wing to negotiate the practical dynamics of our lives. We are preparing our minds for the purity of an arahant. But are we living a life of an arahant? To what degree need we be in order to fulfill that possibility?

Throughout the Pali suttas, every story in which a layperson becomes an arahant, they either join the monastic saṅgha immediately or they die that same day. It is impossible to determine the veracity or general applicability of this dynamic, but there is something true we must grapple with about the challenges an arahant would face in the normal day-to-day life of a householder.

We must let go of all of the fantasies of what we would like full enlightenment to mean. Instead we might nestle into our own experiences and the experiences of the many yogis who have gone before us. While the ideal of the fully-enlightened person who is also fully-engaged in society—as an activist or a family person or whatever— is compelling to many

people, we must accept that it is at least possible that while these two paths, though they may deeply inform each other, at some point may need to diverge.

What we see from experience is that a deeply peaceful mind, when equanimous at all sense doors, doesn't have the tension that may be necessary to attend to functioning in society. Functioning in daily life—keeping up with the myriad tasks and responsibilities of food and family and work and taxes and bills and passwords—actually requires a certain degree of agitation in order to be successful, to survive. So even if it is not true that a person must go be a monastic, it certainly must be a life of great quietude and protection that would allow an enlightened being to thrive. With that in mind, we should always ask ourselves if we are living the life of an arahant? If not, something in the mind will always hold back from letting go. We will progress along the path only so much if we are not ready to destabilize the social foundations of our own livelihood.

The process of learning how to build a life in the Dhamma—in this culture, in this time, in this place, within these social relations, that allows us to support ourselves—is a challenge. This process may take a long time, it may never be realized to the complete extent of our wishes this time around, but we can craft this kind of life and in doing so begin to make the possibility of of a wholesome and profound dhamma life for the next generation that much more of a possibility, and that much easier.

For a monastic, the question of right livelihood is solved. For a guerrilla yogi, the question is ongoing, and one of ongoing importance for consideration and purification. The

guerrilla embraces instability as a tactic but not as a goal. During the Buddha's time it was common for a householder to move into the life of a wandering ascetic. The social relations supported it. Society valued that renunciation and so food, shelter, medicine, and robes were offered to monks and nuns in a way that deeply honored these spiritual value. These people let go, but society was there to catch them. It is not so in our times.

A guerrilla yogi needs a position of some stability from which to fruitfully observe and engage the instability of all phenomena. Stability is good. Stability is supportive. It does not help to enter the wilderness of the mind from a life that is chaotic. What measures as stable for any of us can be relative and in response to conditions. It is not simply a matter of wealth, though poverty, ambient violence, and lack of protection in many ways will certainly lead to less stability from which to launch our attack. Whatever stability we create we must also train ourselves to abandon it when the time is right.

The guerrilla yogi has the razor's edge challenge of trying to get free from the cycles of the world without fully withdrawing from it. They maintain a foothold in the society way of life but must slowly train in the recognition that at some point, both feet must firmly be on the path of renunciation. We develop the conditions of safety and security to use as artillery in the battle of insight that develops a more profound safety and security independent of conditions.

Western Dharma has not yet configured the social mechanisms that will allow all those who long for intensive retreat to be able to do fulfill that wish, and we should aspire and conspire to build those tools and create those resources

and make them as accessible as possible. Until then, we have to find ways of making do, of deepening our practice and our commitment to liberation in all the nooks and crannies of our lives where there is room to gather our attention and create protective conditions—so that when we do have the opportunity to sit for a longer period of time, we ride the momentum of a practice that is powered by the energy of our daily lives.

There are many variables in our lives that make this kind of retreat impossible but also create the general conditions that are supportive to insight. It may mean staying in a job we don't like for longer than we'd like for the sake of some financial stability. But it also may mean taking a risk and leaving a job so that we are not betraying our deepest longing for ourselves each day we work against our self-interest. Sometimes we have to change our lives dramatically, let go of some friends, gain others, move away from some relationships with family members, or finding ways to bring them more close.

people must contribute money in proportion to the money they have. Farmers will be required to furnish a certain share of their crops to guerrilla troops. Confiscation, except in the case of businesses run by traitors, is prohibited.

~ Mao Zedong¹²

Much of our practice can look like the process of recreating what was coined by the anarchist Hakim Bey as “Temporary Autonomous Zones,” periods of time and space where radical experiments in freedom are explored but never intended to be permanent. The consciousness of their inherent limitability is what gives them strength and potential but one for which a

revolutionary must have a long-scale view of history in order to expect satisfaction and development from. Occupy Wall Street is an important example in our era of a strategy in which people spontaneously and collectively took to the streets in the form of experimental, exploratory, radical presences that helped seed, incubate, flower, and disseminate ideas and methods across time and space. The tactics of the Temporary Autonomous Zone as they arise and disappear over time, slowly perforate society and provide us with the experience of freedom that is necessary to give us the taste we are longing for, something of a north star in our escape from the subjugation we are freeing ourselves from. Their significance is not lessened because of their temporary nature. In fact, their ephemerality is the essence of their strategic value. For the guerrilla yogi, a period of retreat, a trip to the bathroom, a moment of nibbana are all TAZs that help build our momentum without cultivating attachment or the wrong view that they should be permanent.

The path of liberation that the Buddha laid out was most coherently designed and propagated for monastics—social renunciates who abandoned the burdens and responsibilities of society to pursue this path without distraction. This basic fact of livelihood means that our approach as lay people will have a wide variety of intensity: periods where our efforts are more general and relaxed, and periods where we can practice with more intense concentration and protection.

CRISIS / POLARIZATION / CONFLICT

...a Marxist cannot regard civil war, or guerrilla warfare, which is one of its forms, as abnormal and demoralising in general. A Marxist bases himself on the class struggle, and not social peace. In certain periods of acute economic and political crises the class struggle ripens into a direct civil war, i.e., into an armed struggle between two sections of the people. In such periods a Marxist is obliged to take the stand of civil war. Any moral condemnation of civil war would be absolutely impermissible from the standpoint of Marxism.

~ VI. Lenin¹³

When guerrilla warfare is enough to topple a regime or to vanquish an invading force, it is through the practice of constant destabilization: by undermining all normal functioning of society, the resistance forces bring a nation to crisis and make it ungovernable. By forcing government leaders to take more oppressive measures, their inherent brutality is exposed and the population resists with greater and greater volatility. If foreign pressures are enough, if the rebels can actually manage civic responsibilities, and if the social sector is sufficiently organized and supportive, this period of crisis can cause a power structure to collapse on its own, without ever leading to full scale war. In this opening, the revolutionary regime moves in and takes the reins.

The polarization of society and a consequent collapse of state power is a direct result of sustained violence on the part of a revolutionary minority.

~ Carlos Marighella¹⁴

The dangers of this approach should be obvious. There are numerous examples around the world where intensifying crisis and deepening polarization led only to chaos, suffering, and

prolongation of hardship. The entrenched forces tend to dig in more deeply, subjugating the local population to more intense pressure, after which they are more likely to turn against the revolutionaries and side with the forces of familiar stability—as horrendous as it might be. The independence movement in Northern Ireland, for example, failed when it became clear that the people were weary and tired of years of violence and upheaval.

The guerrilla yogi must be extremely sensitive to how much crisis they want to introduce into their system, how far toward instability they can wisely push their efforts. The natural and liberatory collapse of the dictatorship of Self as a result of insight is entirely different than psychotic or life-structure break that leads to ungovernable chaos in our lives. As said in an earlier chapter, I have had students so enthusiastic about the practice that they abandon their jobs, homes, and network of support to go practice intensively for long periods in Asia. There are times when this has been wise and fruitful but more times when it has proven catastrophic: people have dismantled the foundations of their life's stability only to jump into a fire that is much too hot and find that they needed to take a slower approach to their unbinding—a process now hampered by the need to rebuild the foundations of their livelihood.

Still, there have been more of examples of the opposite, where people fit retreats into their life structure on occasion but never take enough risk, aren't putting enough on the line, to make real progress. There ought to be some degree of revolutionary polarization in our lives, of taking a stand in regards to *which side are we on*—but a guerrilla yogi should always stay sensitive to the dials of this intensity and learn

how to adjust and respond appropriately to changing conditions.

It is not just bhavana that can push our lives toward crisis, but dāna and silā as well. As mentioned earlier, I spent 10 years refusing to pay my federal income taxes because I felt that the amount going to pay for war and oppression was out of alignment with my basic moral precepts. It put my life in an intense period of purification that ultimately was too destabilizing for my life and mind to stay with, but I did not regret the intention or the process I put myself through. If we commit to some aspect of social justice in our lives as a moral stand, we should expect a process of purification to result from that. It is essential to learn to manage the volatility of that purification with skill. We reach, we strain, but not to the degree that it weakens our capacity for the fluidity tactics of the guerrilla yogi—for self-care, sustainability, wellness—or where our motivation becomes distorted.

We cannot and should not completely shy away from the tension we are trying to build in the system of our lives. Even if the current internal regime is not ready to collapse, not ready to be replaced by the revolution of the heart, some pressure must be exerted, some strain with samsara must be attuned to. The pain of dukkha must be felt. We cannot make progress without letting go of things, without the ethic of renunciation at the heart of our practice. We will have to let go of all of the world eventually, either through death or nibbana, and if we don't practice in the small ways, we will never be able to do it in the big way.

BUILDING A REGULAR ARMY

That is one of the clear things about guerrilla forces in modern war: they may be able to hold out, but they cannot win except in combination with striking forces that can meet the enemy in open battle.

~ Bert “Yank” Levy¹⁵

As we progress, certain aspects of the path become easier. Much easier. Other aspects become harder. Much harder. We can expect that as we get closer and closer to the core patterns of the heart’s ignorance, the intensity of engagement will increase. At the same time, the degree of training that we have under our belts at that point is immense, making us increasingly capable of confronting the enemy directly.

It is very rare that a war of liberation can be won solely along the lines of guerrilla warfare. In general, and over time, a traditional army will likely need to be created, trained, and perfected: based on the guerrilla training but also capable of increasingly intense, positional, and direct engagement with the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion in the heart/mind.

Our internal discipline must be strengthened. The soldiers must be educated politically. There must be a gradual change from guerrilla formations to orthodox regimental organization. The necessary bureaus and staffs, both political and military, must be provided. At the same time, attention must be paid to the creation of suitable supply, medical, and hygiene units. The standards of equipment must be raised and types of weapons increased. Communication equipment must not be forgotten. Orthodox standards of discipline must be established.

~ Mao Zedong¹⁶

What does this traditional, positional warfare look like? It is the ability to hold ground and successfully defend against

retaliation and reprisal. Over time, the capacity of the 7 factors of awakening (*bojjhaṅga* of mindfulness, energy, rapture, calm, concentration, and equanimity) as a unified force is greatly increased. With this, we create an altogether different caliber of weapon in the war against Mara. When the 5 faculties (faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom) gain in strength, they achieve a different degree, and even have a different name, “powers” (*bala*) as enormously forceful transformative and transcendent capacities.

Sariputta, all the words were true, yet listen to what I have to say. Here, Sariputta, the bhikkhu, having partaken of his meal and returning from his alms round sits in the cross legged posture. Setting his body erect, bringing his mindfulness to the fore, he determines "Until my mind is released from desires, I would not change this posture." Such a bhikkhu, Sariputta, adorns most the Gosinga Sala forest.

~ Buddha, Mahagosinga Sutta¹⁷

Over a lifetime of practice it is at some point important to explore and develop the mind’s capacity for *jhāna*—concentration to the degree of classic absorption. Jhāna can help us clarify our understanding of many aspects of the practice: the difference between concentration and mindfulness, the relationship between mind and body, etc. More commonly, in pursuit of absorptive states people become enamored, transfixed, seduced by experience and resist the discomforts of bare vipassanā. They cannot see their attachment to pleasant mind-states, and over and over again use them to avoid pain and acquire pleasure. Their deeper practice is perpetually derailed based on a hidden identification with these experiences.

People's practice should be well-established and mature before moving into these explorations, preferably after they have had an initial experience of nibbana. Only then can jhāna be more safely utilized for their sincere value and not provide more ammunition and power to the forces of delusion in the heart. Ultimately, the most important thing to remember is that *khaṇika samādhi*—momentary concentration that is developed through rigorous *vipassanā* practice—has the capacity to bring the mind to “access concentration” which is a *vipassanā jhāna*, entirely sufficient for the cause of deepening insight.

The fundamental problems are: first, spiritual unification of officers and men within the army; second spiritual unification of the army and the people; and, last, destruction of the unity of the enemy.

~ Mao Zedong¹⁸

DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT

Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle between the classes, as had bourgeois economists their economic anatomy. My own contribution was (1) to show that the existence of classes is merely bound up with certain historical phases in the development of production; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; [and] (3) that this dictatorship, itself, constitutes no more than a transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.

~ Karl Marx¹⁹

Marx predicted that the perfected communist society would be classless, and since the State is an important mechanism by which one class maintains power over another, it would eventually be rendered obsolete by the proletarian revolution. But

he also recognized that immediately following the revolution, counter-revolutionary elements of the owning class would try to undermine the revolution, re-establish themselves as the ruling party, and reimpose the old social relations. To defend against this inevitable reaction, Marx argued that in the period directly after the revolution, the State—now controlled by the proletariat—would actually need to be maintained in order to protect the revolution until that time which bourgeoisie elements were sufficiently integrated into the new relations of production of the new society.

This notion of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was intended to be a transitional period, after the initial revolutionary act and before the revolution is entirely matured. It is a tension that modern communists continue to wrestle with: Should the post-revolutionary society be in some sense “less free” in order to stabilize the revolution? If so, at what point do the efforts to stabilize the revolution entrench a bureaucratic class and undermine the progress of the revolution?

History has shed skeptical light on the notion that the State will simply “wither away,” as Marx and Engels imagined. What has mostly been seen in the post-revolutionary societies is an increased consolidation of power in the state and a the formation of a new hierarchical society simply played out along a different kind of class lines. Though none of the communist revolutions so far have followed the historical course Marx and Engels prescribed, a critique of the un-democratic and consolidating tendencies of the dictatorship of the proletariat are legitimate—concerns that anarchist critics feared all along.

However we feel about the notion of a proletarian dictatorship, history shows that Marx's concern was a fair one. After learning that the collapse of the democratic Guatemalan revolution resulted from CIA and capitalist interference with their internal democratic process, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara recognized that their revolution in Cuba could only succeed with a certain degree of autocratic organization. It is hard to argue with the reasoning, especially with the hindsight of decades of CIA plots to overthrow the Castro regime, the Allende regime in Chile, and their undermining of Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, Colombian, Venezuelan, Peruvian, and Bolivian (to name a few) revolutionary movements.

Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

~ Karl Marx²⁰

The metaphor for the guerrilla yogi is an important one. First is the notion that the success of the revolution comes at various stages. The Theravada framework recognizes four distinct stages of enlightenment: the stream enterer (*sotāpanna*), the once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), the non-returner (*anāgāmi*), and the fully enlightened (*arahant*). As the revolutionary forces of our minds reach their pinnacle of power and skill, they realize increasingly profound insight into the nature of phenomena. The deepening stability of mind in a wider and wider range of territory need only be for a moment to produce the right conditions under which the mind can puncture a hole in the "whole mass of suffering."

There are stories in the suttas of people for whom these four successive stages happened in quick succession, as with the Buddha himself. Most of the time, though, practitioners have a breakthrough experience and it takes quite a few years for the insight to be fully digested and for the mind to restabilize to a degree that the forces of liberation are able again to penetrate the fortress of delusion, each time with deepening impact. The first experience of this is considered to be a success from which the yogi can never backslide. The inevitability of final liberation has been secured, though it may still take many lifetimes.

For us, it was a victory that meant that our guerrillas had reached full maturity. From that moment on, our morale increased enormously, our determination and hope for victory also increased, and although the months that followed were a hard test, we now had the key to the secret of how to beat the enemy. This battle sealed the fate of every garrison located far from larger concentrations of troops and every small army post was soon dismantled.

~ Ernesto "Che" Guevara²¹

In our spiritual path, even after we achieve the seemingly impossible initial stage of enlightenment and are considered *sotāpanna*, stream enterer, our battle has really only just begun. The long path from stream winner to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th stage—final liberation—is likely to be an arduous one, where we use our training to tackle more and more established strongholds of delusion in more and more subtle corners of the mind. It is certainly one place where the necessity of a true *sampavanka* is clear. The texts say that only a Buddha can surely know the degree of attainment of any person. And so

any evaluation of our progress along the path of insight should be protected in the discrete and careful context of the teacher-student relationship.

There is no formula about when and where to get more restrictive or more slack in our approach. But remembering the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is crucial to remember that after any meaningful experience of insight we cannot simply ease up and think our work is done. Very often people achieve a breakthrough to the depth of practice only to find, in the words of Robert Aiken Roshi, “it doesn’t stick.” This is partly because people begin to put their guard down and become arrogant and over-certain about their attainments. They don’t recognize that at best they have pushed Mara, our internal bourgeoisie, into a corner from which he is desperate to escape. If anything we are called to be more vigilant in our practice because any success of ours in practice is an existential threat to Mara, making him more dangerous.

An initial enlightenment experience is usually a very small glimpse into the freedom of the unconditioned. But this glimpse alone is said to uproot identity view, attachment to rights and rituals, and doubt in the teachings. From there, the principles of our approach have not changed and our training is best served by continuing to perfect the guerrilla approach. Our technique is still in need of a lot of development, but our capacity to show up fully to more and more direct confrontation with greed, hatred, and delusion is also evident.

Realization of 2nd stage puts a bigger dent in the armor of delusion, but most of our defilements are still left intact.

It is absolutely natural and inevitable that the uprising should assume the higher and more complex form of a prolonged civil war embracing the whole country, i.e., an armed struggle between two sections of the people. Such a war cannot be conceived otherwise than as a series of a few big engagements at comparatively long intervals and a large number of small encounters during these intervals.

~ VI. Lenin²²

At the 3rd stage of enlightenment, the mind has entirely mastered concentration and so has developed the capacity of a full-strength army that can engage Mara head-on. It is said that the anāgāmī has totally uprooted craving and ill-will, though the subtle and powerful fibers of delusion are not yet totally eradicated. Surely the tools of the guerrilla are perfected and still in use but they are complemented by a magnificent momentum of strength and purity of mind that pushes undeterred toward the final goal.

The third stage will be the last in the protracted war, and when we talk of persevering in the war to the end, we mean going all the way through this stage... In the third stage guerrilla warfare will again provide strategic support by supplementing mobile and positional warfare, but it will not be the primary form as in the second stage.

~ Mao Zedong²³

FREEDOM

Someday this war's gonna end.

~ Colonel Bill Kilgore, Apocalypse Now²⁴

The mind of an Arahant is totally quenched, totally at peace. Like a hand moving freely through the air, the liberated mind is entirely unhindered by attachment or aversion and finds no

resistance anywhere. Its unwavering aim is love, compassion, sympathy, and peace. Freed entirely from conceit, from restlessness, and ignorance, the arahant is unoppressed by anything they encounter.

Not harsh, not greedy, not perturbed, everywhere in tune: this is the reward, I say when asked, for those who are free from pre-conceptions. For one unperturbed, who knows there is no accumulating, abstaining, unaroused, he sees security everywhere.

~ Buddha, Attadanda Sutta²⁵

We are trained to believe that security comes through control. The Self is a pattern rooted precisely in the insecurity we feel in the uncontrollability of nature, of life. The powerful impulses of the mind to consolidate and cohere reality through grasping, rejecting, and fantasy—are the most fundamental way in which we try to stop and solidify all that is unstable and changing. That pattern ends when we no longer feel threatened by reality. As the mind is more fully trained in reality—knows its objects inside and out, up and down, through and through—it develops greater and greater ease within the uncontrollable.

What use is there for a well
if there is water everywhere?
When cravings root is severed
What should one go about seeking?

~ Buddha, Udāna²⁶

When one sees clearly, there is understanding. When there is understanding, there is acceptance. When there is acceptance there is fearlessness. When there is no fear, the mind will let

go. Thus we cannot expect the mind to let go until it is seeing clearly.

Arahantship may seem like an unattainable fantasy for many of us. On one hand, it is good to be humble and to respect the challenge of the path. But while a mind entirely freed from all hindrance is indeed a lofty goal whose pace of progress can feel insurmountable, it is also nothing that isn't available to us directly in the experience of a single moment of mindfulness. If we develop a taste for the relief of that moment—of the refreshing and nourishing condition it creates in the heart—full enlightenment is the logical, natural, and inevitable conclusion of any effort we make to develop that capacity.

This is the value and function of *chanda*, the desire to act. None of this will happen on its own. We must put forth the effort now to attain that which our heart so powerfully longs for. And we must get in touch with the pain of this longing and use it as a motivator to achieve that freedom which is beyond comprehension.

We always have the option of heading to the monastery to take robes and ordain as monastics. Just knowing that is an incalculable refuge. However it is worth considering that for those of us seeking full liberation in these times we may have a responsibility to figure out how to do it as lay people in the social relations of our age. The west is in need of arahants and every experiment and effort we make toward that end will be of fruit to ourselves and to future generations looking for guidance and models of arahants who lived lives similar to theirs, born into conditions similar to theirs, folded their revolution back into society for the benefit of all.

We can do this. It is possible. But it will not happen on its own. It takes a profound development of skills that are considered dangerous to the regime of delusion we have lived under all our lives. Our skills are not only a threat to the empire of our own delusion, but also to the greater society around us that is formed under Mara's influence. Few will understand our longing nor the methods that we must take to cultivate the liberating power of the mind. Saṅgha and Sampa-vanka can support and inspire us. It is not possible to do it without them. But ultimately, our determination must come from within as our success or failure depends entirely upon our own efforts.

Talaputa Thera was a monk during the time of the Buddha. Trained as an actor, he came to the holy life after years of common disregard for his mind. After meeting the Buddha, he was eventually moved to abandon that life and live as a renunciate to follow the way of peace. "In no long time," as it was commonly said, he himself became an arahant and achieved that happiness of peace which people of the ages have aspired to. Here are his words of longing as a layman, that may help incite the same beautiful aspiration toward freedom in our own hearts,

O when will I come to live in mountain caves,
unmated with desire,
seeing clearly the impermanence of all that comes to be?

When will I, wearing patchwork robes,
be a true saint of yellow cloth,
without a thought of what is 'mine' - and from all cravings purified,
with lust and hate and illusions slain,
to the wild woods gone, and in bliss abide?

When will I see and know this body as unstable
a nest of dying and disease, oppressed by age and death,
and live free from fear, alone within the woods?

When will I, with insight's sharpened sword
cut this vine of desire,
with all its tendrils twining far and strong,
breeder of many fears, bearer of pain and woe?
Yes, when will it come to be!?

When will I draw the sage's sword
forged of wisdom with fiery splendor
And swiftly shatter Mara and his host,
While seated still in the lion's pose?

When will I be seen in the noble company
of those who hold the Path in reverence,
given to noble toil, masters of their faculties
they who see to the heart of things,
When will this come to be?

When will slackness, hunger, and thirst distress me no more,
nor wind, nor heat, nor insects nor creeping things wreak harm
while I practice bent on my own goal in the wilderness?

O when will I, composed, intent,
with clarity come to touch
that which the great Sage understood -
the Four Noble Truths -
so difficult to see.
When will it be?

When will I, fastened to meditation's calm
with wisdom see the innumerable sights and sounds,
odors, tastes, physical sensations, and objects of the mind
as things ablaze and burning?

When will I be unmoved by abusive speech,
and even when my praise is sung,
again be stilled in peace?
When will this come true for me?

When will I hold all the factors of my life:
wood, grass, vines, and all the countless objects known by sense,
internal or outside,
judging them all alike—hollow, impermanent?

When will the purple storm-cloud of the rains break above my head
and with fresh torrents drench my robes in the woods,
in which I walk my way
along the Path the Seers have trod before?
When will this thing come to be?

When in a mountain cave, having heard the peacock's cry,
that crested twice-born bird down in the wood,
shall I arise and summon thought and will
for attaining the ambrosial deathless?

O when will I, by spiritual powers
cross over the Gangā, Yamunā, Saraswtī rivers
unsinking, yes, float over the awful mouths
of hell-flung ocean waters?
Yes, when will this come to be?

When, like a charging elephant in battle,
shall I break through desire for sensual pleasure,
and, rapt in meditation, shun the marks
of outward beauty?

O when will I, like a pauper pressed
discover a hidden treasure,
and be filled with joy,
having attained the refuge of the Great Sage?

Insurgent Heart

Yes, when will these things come to be?

~ Talaputa Thera²⁷

EPILOGUE

MINDFULNESS

A Balm or a Bomb for Babylon



In our dreams we have seen another world, a world decidedly more fair than the one in which we now live. We saw that in this world there was no need for armies: peace, justice and liberty were so common that no one talked about them as far-off concepts, but as things such as bread, birds, air, water, like book and voice...This world was not a dream from the past, it was not something that came to us from our ancestors. It came from ahead, from the next step we were going to take. And so we started to move forward to attain this dream, make it come and sit down at our tables, light our homes, from in our cornfields, fill the hearts of our children, wipe our sweat, heal our history. And it was for all. This is what we want. Nothing more, nothing less.

~ Subcomandante Marcos¹

HUMANS HAVE LONG IMAGINED an ideal condition in which the “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of man” are in perfect alignment. From jihad to the kingdom come, from zion to the beloved community, from the stateless communist society to indigenous alignments of human activity with the greater forces of the universe, people have envisioned a society which is the manifestation of spiritual perfection.

While utopian visions may provide a useful north star for some of our social movements at times, they have also sown seeds of our world's greatest tragedies: from the crusades to the conquest of the Americas to Al Qaeda and ISIS, state communism, the killing fields, and cults of all flavors. The efforts to attain symbiotic perfection on the individual and collective levels of human existence is so compelling that the impulse arises again and again. And yet efforts are so fraught with suffering that many simply give up the aspiration.

The question *how do we all get along together?* has dimensions that are material and spiritual, social and individual. The most simplistic proposals put forward by utopian idealists tend to insist that either 1) the process of individual spiritual salvation brought to scale will result in the material liberation of society as a whole; or 2) that the emancipation of social-productive relations will inevitably result in broadly-shared spiritual blossoming. People who are invested in both aspects of change are drawn to propose that the two issues are fractal: essentially the same problem at different scales.

Part of where so many utopian efforts fail, I believe, is a false-equivalence of the spiritual and social projects. Though we may long for a grand-theory that aims to resolve the manifold dimensions of suffering in the world, I have come to believe that the inner revolution and the outer revolution are ultimately distinct. At different scales (internally, between individuals, and within large human systems) the nature of "liberation" and the mechanics of the process toward liberation seem to have meaningfully distinct qualities. They are founded in related but distinct human problems and rely on related but distinct mechanisms for change. Each project may support or

harm the other, but they cannot be entirely dependent upon one another nor should they be seen as essentially the same process. To treat them as the same, or to insist on their metamorphical and metaphorical harmony, might not allow us to fully explore the depths and potency of the dialectical alchemy between them that is mysterious and real².

DIFFERENT PROBLEMS / DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS

At the heart of existence—of the process of being and becoming—is a grief, an agony, a torment that no amount of social security, universal healthcare, racial or gender equality, worker ownership, free childcare, basic income, education, or any other transformed social relation is going to heal. The problem of human dissatisfaction will not be solved by creating stable material conditions because no conditions are ultimately stable enough to be satisfying. The mind itself is not stable enough to be satisfiable.

And just as the goal of social revolution cannot primarily be one of spiritual awakening—because it doesn't address the root causes of human suffering—the goal of spiritual awakening cannot reasonably be collective liberation. Social oppression is not merely a function of aggregated individual immorality. Oppressive dynamics are systematized in human relations in ways that are beyond the conscious moral acts of individuals.

For example, most of us need to buy food. The exchange of money—itsself congealed and alienated labor power—for that commodity necessarily involves the exploitation of someone's labor. We may make ethically-based choices about

the social impact of our consumption—boycotting one product or another—but we cannot be held individually responsible for the basic fact of a worker’s exploitation in commodity-creation because we are born into a web of social relations in which money is used to control the labor power of others³.

Capital has a beingness to it, a kind of artificial intelligence. It survives and thrives because of conditions that propel and permit it to seek growth beyond any single human’s effort. It will only die—or cease to reproduce itself—when the conditions are no longer favorable. It is not a question of mass enlightenment about the nature of reality but rather of transformed social agreements about the nature of society.

While the social revolution will not rid the world of loneliness, despair, or immorality, we are nevertheless still called to work toward this revolution because the profound hardship that arises from the oppressive toxicity of our social relations can still be greatly alleviated. A society can be structured in ways that are supportive of the human spiritual effort—of whatever flavor—or can make it much harder.

How we interpret the world may influence how we explore the nature of the Self. What we do with our vipassanā insights may influence how we see the world. But how a person learns to analyze and interpret the history of the world and the nature of society (essentially a *view*) has nothing to with the ability to clearly perceive the nature of reality as experienced directly by the senses. They are not the same thing.

Society can’t wait for all individuals to get enlightened before it is free. Each individual can’t wait for society to be liberated before they get free. And so we move forward.

ENGAGED BUDDHISM

Of course, many people believe that the pursuits of political and spiritual perfection are entirely at odds. But one need not probe too deeply to sense that Marx himself had a rather religious attitude toward the working class, the inevitability of revolution, and the faith in its ability to provide individuals with a sense of spiritual completeness.

Part of the leftist critique of the contemporary mindfulness movement is that it provides a balm for Babylon rather than a bomb. It is accused of trying to sooth the suffering caused by our social conditions on an individual level instead of applying pressure to the larger power-structure to enact change at a collective level. *Navel-gazing is an avoidance of the real work of organizing!* might be a good summation of the critique. Of course this has roots in historic leftist thinking: religion being an opiate of the masses and so forth⁴.

While I believe sati (mindfulness) can social value, I also believe it should be honestly acknowledged that it is not a tool that the Buddha designed or taught for social change. Its goal has essentially nothing to do with the transformation of material conditions of human society. While he certainly encouraged leaders of his day to commit to basic moral values and frowned upon corruption and wickedness in the world, the Buddha largely deferred to established oppressive social relationships during his lifetime in order that his teachings find a protective home in his social reality⁵. It is therefore understandable for critics to point out that his teaching has dimensions that can be seen as condoning—or even augmenting—social harm rather than decreasing it.

On the other hand, there are certainly ways that these tools can be integrated into liberatory social practice for the betterment of our social movements and of society in general. Activists can learn to have more caring and transformative relationships with their thoughts, emotions, bodies, and each other which can have a profound impact on the quality of organizing. These practices should be explored and exploited. But it is best not to pretend that in doing so we are bringing the practice home to its true work as the Buddha intended. And it is essential that we also acknowledge and wrestle with the places where these impulses of inner and outer transformation may be at odds with each other.

The relationship of any spiritual tradition to the work of social change will have its own particular dynamics to explore. In some, the projects are explicitly entwined. All seem to have elements that can be used to defend and inspire both right and left-wing movements. The contemporary growth of progressive “socially engaged” Buddhism and the rise of right-wing nationalist Buddhist movements around the world demonstrate that Buddhism is no exception. It is not inherently a tool for one or the other, no matter how much its proponents feel in their heart of hearts that it might be.

Many of us have bent over backwards trying to make the Dhamma fit our political viewpoint. It is one thing to contort our minds to make it all fit: those acrobatics are only natural and are part of the process. But is another thing altogether—a far more insidious thing—to try to contort the Dhamma to reaffirm our view (*diṭṭhi*).

Contemporary secularized mindfulness—as propagated in the west—promises satisfaction over disenchantment, fulfill-

ment over renunciation, acceptance over discernment. It has been pointed out by others how this contortion fits the capitalist consumer culture very well. But we can also see that in the field of contemporary spiritual activism it is often this dumbed-down, decontextualized, capitalist, colonialist, buddeoisie “McMindfulness” which is also easier for progressive social movements to digest because it doesn’t call upon the practitioners to test the boundaries and tensions between the inner and outer work, between the personal and the social. It glosses over them to avoid the complexity that would actually make the relationship more rich.

When we re-center the radical nature of the Buddha’s call to liberation from sense-desire, it actually becomes harder to integrate into our social justice work because most activists aren’t interested in the destruction of craving. They want a better night’s sleep and to prevent burn-out from their overwork. The goal of social revolution is to improve the cycles of social production and reproduction. The goal of Dhamma is not ultimately about “self-improvement” at all but rather to escape from the cycle of reproduction of Self entirely. No reasonable social change movement would aim for the cessation of becoming. On a basic level, the goals don’t match.

These mismatches are not trite and we gloss over them to the detriment of our deeper work—internally and externally. This tension in the relationship of honest Dhamma (rather than “mindfulness”) to social justice work is an investigation we should not shy away from because it is the only way mindfulness actually has a meaningful chance at being part of a transformation of society rather than a tool and victim of further exploitation and alienation. These uneasy places (and

many others) are not quickly resolved but they provide us with a foundation for important conversations.

For social change, we need metaphorical balms and bombs. We need healing from our wounds of historical trauma but we also need to dismantle and restructure society so it stops making those wounds.

NON-VIOLENT GUERRILLA TACTICS

When we incorporate the methods of guerrilla warfare into our vipassanā practice we generate particular orientation toward the pursuit of inner liberation. As we digest this integration, we can also fold this guerrilla yogi orientation back into the world of social change. In doing so we see that it may give us a kind of refracted clarity regarding some meaningful aspects of our approach to creating a more just world. Through this double-digestion of guerrilla metaphors and spiritual insights, we can build the foundation for a social re-expression that maintains the principles and militant notions of guerrilla warfare but that has integrated the full expression of non-violence, love, compassion, and peace.

Even with the spiritual dimensions excluded, each chapter of this book outlining the guerrilla strategic framework can provide guidance for our non-violent movements for social change. I hope these can be investigated. Here I will focus primarily on the places where the learning of the guerrilla yogi can have resonance with the strategic imperatives for social liberation. There are a few places which seem to get to the heart of the project trying to use some of the wisdom of the Dhamma to support our non-violent social justice movement.

As a starting place it is essential to acknowledge that the left already lives in the basic formula of a guerrilla movement. We are in the minority position. We are poorly funded. We are disorganized and largely leaderless. We are motivated. If the left could understand itself this way and strategize and organize appropriately we might refine or tap into a range of new approaches that could significantly increase the potency of our strengths and decrease the impairments of our weaknesses.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Contemporary activists want to feel the goodness of unity but not at the expense of ignoring our differences. Because of our allergy to the hegemonic flavor of many solidarity efforts, a lot of lamentation has been expressed about the silo-ing of movement work. The divergence of priority, analysis, cultural norms, and strategies within movements focused on racial justice, economic justice, gender equality, and environmentalism (for example) is seen as a threat to that most cherished leftist attainment: solidarity. But if we consider that solidarity is in many ways akin to the spiritual call for concentration, we may appreciate the ways that in their diversity our contemporary movements for change are intuitively defending a deeper value. Understanding how the forces of mindfulness and concentration work together in vipassanā practice is one framework that can help us develop healthy approaches to both in our organizing.

As we know from previous discussion, concentration—the ability to maintain a firm connection with an object over time—is powerful and necessary capacity in our meditation prac-

tice, but it will always be haunted by its patriarchal and non-investigative shadow. Concentration is a kind of control that can easily be overdone. In its effort to stabilize it can repress and obfuscate reality and undermine our path. Because of this, the guerrilla yogi must be extremely careful that their concentration be developed only when in service of mindfulness—the actual transformative tool of insight.

One fundamental way that concentration can be ensured to serve mindfulness is when it is oriented not to stabilize an object but rather to stay with it over time as it changes. The guerrilla yogi does not depend on or over-value the experience of absorptive concentration *jhāna* which creates a powerful sense of stability between mind and object. They trust, instead, that the practice of *khaṇika samādhi* (momentary concentration) can ultimately lead to the same power of mental concentration, indeed to *vipassanā jhāna*, but it does so by being in concurrent relationship with reality rather than over-riding it.

Coherence for a moment is actually all we need. If we let the object go and allow for a new coherence at the next moment and the next, we will be far better off than insisting on or aiming for a fixed solidity of attention over a long period of time. In this way our efforts toward concentration strengthen the mind's ability to see the true nature of all phenomena.

Our movement work can likely benefit from a similar understanding. As concentration serves a necessary repressive function to the flood of fabrications and mental impulses, solidarity organizes the energy of a group to generate enough power to make impact in the world. Mindfulness, on the other hand, has a natural investigative quality that has more reso-

nance with an appreciation of diversity. In social change work, we want to move forward collectively but not at the expense of an appreciation of our diversity — which proves to be as complicated a task as finding the right balance of concentration and mindfulness.

Notions and practices of intersectionality—that aim to create solidarity across a range of diverse experiences of oppression—have metaphorical resonance with a balanced approach to the vipassanā practice of the guerrilla yogi. The work of coming to intersectional solidarity, though, can feel conflictual and chaotic and therefore exhausting and depleting. Just as without any concentration our meditation practice struggles to connect meaningfully with any object, without any base of solidarity, the tendency to get caught in conflictual process without direction is the shadow of diversity.

We need some concentration—some boundaries to our attention — to create a basic sense of stability in our practice, just as in the movement we require some basic sense of cohesion to fruitfully hold whatever conflict or difference emerges. If we never get a sense of the beautiful taste of togetherness we can lose all inspiration to stay connected. But if stability and unified strength are all that is valued, we lose the underlying dynamism and trust that fuels our search for a deeper wisdom and freedom.

Just as in meditation, this *khaṇika solidarity* approach to social change may often look messier than one based on a repressive unity. It will also likely not have as many of the dramatic signs that we intuitively read as “progress” — like those that come from a forceful punch of movement power. But this orientation will invite us to be sensitive to the more

profound, if more subtle, cohesion that can and does arise between people in varied ways if we are aiming for it. And it will feel more real and more nourishing because it is not phony or built on erasure of difference, as traditional solidarity can be. That reality and the energy that comes from it quenches us over the long haul in ways that the more enthralling and ecstatic experiences cannot.

In fact, mindfulness is hardly the only other mental quality besides concentration we need to develop. Social change movements that are only obsessed with the need for greater unity and greater strength are also in some ways akin to a vipassanā yogi concerned only with concentration and energy while disinterested in the other *bojjhaṅga* (factors of awakening) of mindfulness, investigation, rapture, calm, and equanimity. As vipassanā yogis, sometimes the cultivation of these other factors complicates our efforts toward energy and concentration in ways that we don't immediately value. They can seem like distractions. But without their development, our inner movement is skewed toward a kind of inner fascism. Without the purification of motivation that comes from these, or the development of the *pañcabalāni* (five powers) of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, or the *pāramī* (ten perfections) of generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, patience, honesty, determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity — or any number of other associated heart-trainings — our efforts will be misguided and undermine themselves. In their dull ambition they actually become obstacles to our development. These other qualities of mind are not only good in and of themselves and they don't merely balance concentration and energy: they all purify and strengthen each

other in dynamic interplay. In the end, our energy is not tainted by striving, our concentration not flavored by craving.

Because of our fixation with power and energy in our social movements, they also can incline toward fascism. In what ways might we benefit from the broadening of the priorities of our revolutionary training? What would it mean if our campaigns were equally concerned with calm as they are with energy? Or generosity as much as determination? Not just as a value but as a revolutionary necessity? In what ways might we resist these practices as distractions because they are threats to internalized patriarchal models of collective movement building?

Recognizing this, some revolutionary theories value democratic process as an essential component to the program of power-building. What else might there be beyond that? If we treat movement-building as a practice in the way of a guerrilla yogi, we won't be disheartened by the immeasurability of our progress. We will recognize the non-linear as essential and understand and integrate the value of the lessons we are learning along the way.

This is one place where our individual capacity to be in healthy relationship to our emotional and physical world, to our triggers and our habits, can help us be more helpful participants in group dynamics. When we can learn to access genuine interest, compassion, forgiveness, and care for people who are sometimes dramatically different than or difficult for us, we build the capacity of a group to move forward through what would otherwise be insurmountable challenges. Our ability to take responsibility for our emotional world and hold

ourselves capable of transformative dynamics within them is essential to our individual and collective growth.

Some of these kinds of Buddhist principles will be easier to integrate into our justice work than others. Some may not be appropriate. The most difficult things to reconcile between the Buddhist framework and external revolutionary work are groupings such as those of seclusion (*viveka*), dispassion (*virāga*), cessation (*nirodha*), release (*vossagga*). While these are essential to the path of enlightenment, they can feel like a direct threat to the work of movement building. After all, their opposites: community, passion, creation, and attainment are often the quintessence of our frameworks for social change. In one path we try to build, in the other we learn to dissolve. We don't need to reconcile these if they don't fit, but we should keep the conversation open, especially if the individuals within our movements are called to fulfill these spiritual priorities for themselves.

Mostly our inner incoherence as a movement is experienced as squabbles, annoyances, and frustrations with comrades. But if we were in a revolutionary moment or actually held social power, we can imagine the consequences of these tensions could be much more intense. During the Algerian war of independence, French forces used countless deceptive tools to undermine the cohesion of the FLN. They augmented distrust, heightened paranoia, and spread factionalism. Like many revolutionary forces, the FLN barely maintained cohesion through the end of the conflict. The solidarity they did maintain was often secured through repressive violent purges and deceitful power-plays within their own organization. This

orientation continued as independence was won and infected the new state to its core.

If we do not have different spiritual and social practices to fall back on and that are ingrained in our structures, this movement toward repressive unity will always be the human default in times of organizational stress. There are few revolutionary movements that are able to trust the slow burn of the *khanika* solidarity approach. Out of an honest and legitimate fear of division most fall inwardly and outwardly into violent tactics of repression during their campaigns and again into the states they come to control.

Perhaps the spiritual notions such as “honesty” or “wisdom” or “generosity” are not themselves the perfect analogs to what an organization needs to practice radical change. But what might they be instead? What might be the 7 factors of collective liberation? How do we determine what they actually are vs. what we want them to be?

ATTACK THE WEAK POINTS AND CHIP AWAY

Without the narrow fixation with (and measurement by) solidarity, power, and energy, our movements’ approaches to the use of power externally can also be transformed.

The basic strategy of a guerrilla campaign is generally to avoid large confrontations of fixed positions. Instead, it is to quickly attack where the enemy is weak and immediately retreat in order to gain as many victories as they can and avoid the devastation that results from trying to attack the enemy’s strongholds. It is a lesson we ignore to our detriment. Of course we should be fighting against everything that is wrong,

and have a long-term vision to defeat our most entrenched elements of social adversity, but we may gain a sense of strength and momentum when we primarily gather our effort around easily winnable campaigns.

The non-violent guerrilla campaign understands itself as an irritant that is committed to a long-term process of chipping away. We fight where we can win, no matter how small or petty a victory it might seem, and from that we gather supplies, momentum, intelligence, confidence, and recruits over time—not worrying about the perfectly aligned and perfectly coordinated battle. The Black Panthers understood perfectly well that their movement could not just be about guns and molotov cocktails: they needed meal programs, after school programs and other less volatile social strategies that didn't necessarily feel "revolutionary" in the traditional sense. When we can converge with others and fight together in a more momentous way, great, we should. We must value the small victory like the air of each breath.

We should be ready for the internal struggles that are bound to play out when we try to organize across significant difference: attend to them when it is fruitful and leave them behind when it is draining our power. Not avoiding conflict but sensitive to the boundaries of our growth, we come together, we disperse. We come together, we disperse. We come together, we disperse. We don't become enchanted with the coming together and in the dispersal we see no loss. Over time, as a result of this orientation toward prolonged struggle, we build greater demonstrable power as a mass movement.

THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

We may also benefit from recognizing that revolutionary fervor—as it is commonly recognized—may be more of a personality disposition than a political one. If our revolutions only have space for people who are loud and angry, or are just dominated by them, we are going to exclude the participation of 90% of the population of any community.

Organizers are often trained to agitate the undeveloped frustrations of workers and citizens, inspire them to act out of frustration. This is understandable and can be incredibly effective. It often takes crisis for people to mobilize around their care. But it is also worth exploring the possibility of organizing around other emotions. What would that look like if what we commonly deem or recognize as a “revolutionary attitude” were not so narrowly defined? Could patience be a revolutionary emotion? Or equanimity? Can we imagine an unagitated revolutionary? What would that mean about the process of transformative change? Could it change the primary role of crisis as crucible? Can love truly be a primary force for cultivating revolutionary change? Joy?

THE DIMINISHING BREAK-THROUGH MOMENT

As meditators we are forced to go through the highs and lows of how the mind can experience reality over and over again. There are times of incredible struggle and times of incredible elation. When we are in the midst of their spell, we are often convinced that each will last forever. We rarely wonder why the painful times don't go on—we are just relieved when they

disappear. But we chronically interrogate ourselves—or the practice, our teachers, or the world around us—about why the insights don't seem to last, why the times of clarity and release seem to so easily become overwhelmed with the clouds of confusion and stress.

This is just the truth of uncontrollability, of conditions and conditionality. We also come to learn that if we follow the lows all the way to the bottom we open up to greater range at the top. Coming to terms with this by experiencing the full spectrum over and over again is one of the most important parts of our meditation practice and is the most direct doorway to our liberating disenchantment. This lesson may also be useful for the broader movement which similarly suffers from disintegration after victory, the falling apart after coming together, the loss of momentum after a big win. If we can accept, adopt, and integrate the conditional nature of this process and divest ourselves from fantasy of ever-increasing momentum and the disappointment of disintegration, it may help mature and strengthen our approach over the long-run. If we aren't so enchanted by the thrill of winning or so disheartened by the pain of loss, our relationship to the whole process is transformed.

Equanimity is this profound acceptance of the truth of reality, based in understanding, that is the source and the gift of this process over time which will help our movements burn at a cooler rate, move at a calmer pace, and weather the ups and downs with greater integrity and faith.

WE WILL BE FREE WHEN WE ARE READY TO BE FREE

We have many examples of people's movements overthrowing an existing power structure but then not having the collective maturity to be able to actually maintain power or protect society for very long. From the Communards in France to the Arab Spring across North Africa we have seen the lesson play out over and over again—that our desire for liberation may exceed our capacity to be liberated. It is of great benefit to be humble and conscious about this fact.

For the yogi, this gap between gusto and capacity is persistently clear. We want to be free from greed, hatred, and delusion but we do not have the capacity of mind to actually be with reality in all its volatility without them. We come to see greed, hatred, and delusion as the entirely understandable responses of the untrained mind to deal with the flux of formations, to get some kind of hold on the great unleashing of our kamma.

Can we recognize this in our communities as well? Can we see the ways which our violence, our poverty, our addictions, our fantasies might serve as protections? Protections from outer influence and further exploitation, from reckoning, gentrification, from bearing the weight of our past actions or truly feeling the pain of the harm that has been done to us and that we have perpetuated?

In our meditation tradition, the yogi must come to acknowledge that their mind is not yet trained, not quick or stable or tender enough to fully bear the intensity of reality as it unfolds moment to moment. That the stream of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experiences is actually too overwhelm-

ing. But the yogi also recognizes that it is simply a matter of training, of practice, and that through moments of increased capacity, of being with a difficult mental or physical sensation with great peace even for a few moments, the faith in our ultimate capacity and potential for total liberation is developed. In this way we come to see that we will be free when we are ready to be free, and there is nothing we can do to control that process more than simply apply our practice to our unfolding being as much as possible.

Our society may be similar. We want freedom. We want to end human exploitation, violence, oppression, addiction, and deception in all their forms. But we can also see them as crutches, as ways of managing a world as best people are capable of right now—as horrifying as that might be. This doesn't mean we don't continually strive for greater perfection, or lose a sense of that possibility and hold ourselves capable of more. But it does mean that we recognize that we don't have the skills or understanding yet about how to do it fully. We cannot even get along with our families or our colleagues—how should we expect the world to simply fall into alignment with our fantasy of freedom? Our world will be free when it is ready to be free.

QUIET EMANCIPATION

To hope for a world without conflict is to hope for a world without gravity or rain. Violence is a shortcut to power when understanding and interest aren't present in a greater quantity than pain or urgency or greed. Perhaps we don't need to aim for a vision of a perfect static utopia but rather one that at

least has processes, practices, systems by which it is managing, attending to, negotiating, and overcoming conflict: one that has the tools to work with what arises and, when it doesn't, knows to pull back rather than create more harm.

On the left, we must push both a program and a process. Why not let go of program and just focus on process? Because, as guerrilla yogis we know that practice can only be successful if allowed to bear fruit under certain conditions of baseline safety for some period of time. True honest communication and exploration between people is very hard under conditions of oppression and so the process itself must be determined, to some degree, by an enforced alignment with the greater program. It is another form of concentration. Those conditions can be framed as some kind of quietude, spaces and patterns where the tendency toward interpersonal volatility are dampened, where conflict can still arise but in a container that can hold it, or give space, protection, healing, when needed. We can create spaces where joy and celebration can emerge in a way that is not distant from pain and trauma and the shared work we do to heal. Whether this is a counseling session, a meeting, a classroom, a block party, a community forum, or some formation we don't yet know, many of the principles are shared. Conditions matter on the road to conditionless freedom.

It seems unlikely that profound social change at scale will come by the pursuit of consensus—certainly not in time to prevent a climate crisis—and so it is easy to get frustrated by process. As the guerrilla yogi needs some concentration to allow for mindfulness to do its work safely, we need power to defend the parameters of dialog that can lead to liberatory

agreement. Knowing that change which comes only through the enforcement of power can create such misery, we must always ask, do we want power enough to win? Do we want responsibility enough to win? When we are in power do we spend as much energy instilling healthy social process as we do trying to push forward our agenda and maintaining our authority?

It is probably realistic to expect a future world where personal violence still exists, where anger is not contained or held in healthy internal process all the time, where greed and delusion play out in painful ways. But we can easily imagine a world with less organized violence: violence coordinated by race, gender, capital, bureaucracy, or other forms of concentrated power. We can imagine a world in which there are fewer social positions in which people can steal from others, harm others, abuse others, or ignore the needs of others, and the ballast that this would give the heart in the wild seas of change. The people who dismantle those systems will be greatly informed if they also understand how to do so internally and are inspired by how good it feels.

We don't become enlightened by fixating on the person we wish we were and manifesting it. Rather, under conditions of profound commitment to doing good and refraining from harm we make a concerted effort to understand who we actually are in a profoundly intimate way and thus the fetters to our freedom dismantle themselves.

If we lived in a society with greater power to enforce ethical behavior—which is to say our social-relations of production and consumption—and also a greater commitment to collective processes of investigation and understanding, we

could come to live together with more vitality, equality and, ultimately, liberty. If so, it is important to remember that the world we are aiming for is not outside of the world we are living in—it is inside it and available at any moment.

We also might consider that in the end, our emancipation (*vimutti*) might be tranquil, quiet (*samatho*). That throughout the process of social convulsion, of conflict and agreement, of control and release, of resonances and dissonances, we might develop a way of being that learns from these movements of society, generating patience and determination and love as we get deeper and deeper to the heart of the matter. The path of the guerrilla yogi requires that these resonances and dissonances be engaged in their fullest way possible to fuel the deepening process of liberation.

Pau.

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DANA

In accordance with tradition, Jesse has offered this book freely to anyone—without cost.

His livelihood is dependent entirely upon the generosity of students and supporters.

If you would like to make a contribution to him and support his ongoing work in the Dhamma, please visit www.dolessforpeace.org or www.vipassanahawaii.org for more information.

Preface

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ricardo_Flores_Mag%C3%B3n

² For more on this matter, read the Afterword: Mindfulness~ A Balm for a Bomb for Babylon

Introduction

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² Ireland, John. *The Udāna: Inspired Utterances of the Buddha; the Itivuttaka: The Buddha's Sayings*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1997.

³ “Indian warriors used to wear a tuft of a certain grass, called muñja, on their head or headgear, for indicating that they were prepared to die in battle and determined not to retreat.” (Ireland)

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⁶ Pabbatopama Sutta: [The Simile of the Mountains] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 3.25. (Translated from pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu). dhammatalks.org Retrieved from https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN3_25.html

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⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *jhāna* are states of deeply absorptive concentration

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Bhāra Sutta [The Burden] *Samyutta Nikāya* 22. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Trans. The Connected Discourses of the Buddha. Wisdom Publications. Somerville, MA. 2000

¹² The 5 *khandhas*: form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are the 5 aspects of existence most easily misapprehended as a “self”

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designed to ensure land ownership by native Hawaiians but ultimately functioned to sever most of their titles to land as the vast majority of it was sold into foreign ownership. The ending of the kapu system was a fundamentally important link in a chain of events that led from Hawai`i's historical isolation and sovereignty to its eventual overthrow and annexation by the United States, that also tracked the arc from cultural coherence to, until recently, near-extinction. Casting away the old restraints led to a sudden sense of liberty for many. It also left the deeply spiritual society without a coherent internal spiritual structure, only months before the arrival of the first Christian missionaries.

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Strike: Stillness - Cessation

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Epilogue: Mindfulness - A Balm or Bomb for Babylon

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² This chapter is entirely insufficient for the problem it is trying to address. I do believe one meaningful exploration of the relationship between individual and social transformation could be made by a thorough rigorous reflection on and refraction of Theravada Buddhist abhidhamma and Marxist materialist frameworks. It would be a worthwhile endeavor and a wonderful contribution to both fields and to that of “spiritual activism.”

In particular I believe the question of the nature of mind and of matter and of their relationships as described in notions of dialectical materialism (Marx) and dependent origination (Buddha) deserves a serious theoretical and practical treatment.

And I am not going to do it: now or in the future.

Until someone does, my hunch is that the most fruitful and frustrating tensions between our efforts to transform the inner world and the social world are rooted somewhere in the dissonance between Buddha's notion in the Dhammapada that “The mind is the forerunner of all phenomena; they have mind as their chief; they are

mind-made,” and Karl Marx’s view that, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness,” as he states in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

³ To entirely extract ourselves from the social dimensions of production and consumption is one solution that avoids participation in exploitation but it then also withdraws us from social significance and leverage to change. Avoiding capitalist relations may give us some reprieve. And this reprieve can be essential to our regaining our sense of humanity, of de-alienating ourselves and our labor. But the avoidance itself doesn’t hurt capitalism.

⁴ The full quotation is more interesting than is usually considered, if still inadequate.

“The foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man — state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d’honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give

up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.”

Marx, K. 1976. Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Collected Works, v. 3. New York.

⁵ One of the great disappointments for the honest yogi who deeply values their own liberation and the liberation of the world will at some point be the Buddha himself.

By all legitimate accounts, the Buddha consistently expressed individual salvation as the priority in his teaching. A myriad of socially-beneficial values and actions are encouraged and developed along the way toward this goal, but one would be very hard-pressed to find an expression of radical leftists social vision in the Pali texts. The Buddha was not really a social disruptor. Over and over again he appears comfortable with the class divisions of the pre-feudal society in which he was born and raised: comfortable with hierarchy, with baseline social inequality. He sought to influence the core ethics of that society and how the social relations were subjectively experienced and enacted but (in a way that would not be dissimilar from contemporary bourgeois paternalism) did not seem interested in revolutionizing the structural nature of those social relations.

To this day, during the long ceremony that ordains a man as a Buddhist monastic, he must answer the question of whether or not he is a slave; an archaic question used to ensure that people were not using the monastic saṅgha as an escape from that particularly oppressive human social relation.

While currently women cannot fully ordain as monastics in most countries because of later-era sexism, the weaknesses in the nuns’ order were instilled from its inception. The Buddha’s reluctant admission of women into the monastic saṅgha came after great effort from Ananda (considered the most dedicated male monastic advocate for the bhikkhuni order) and with the conditions of extra precepts. Some of these additional rules may very well have protected them in practical ways. But mostly they protected the Buddha

from social criticism while they burdened the nuns with restrictions that would weaken their long-term struggle for survival.

The Buddha is regularly lauded for his openness to receiving saṅgha members from the lowest social caste, but this was a trait shared by most renunciate sects of the time and was in no way unique to his order. (To get a fuller picture, read: *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Uma Chakravarti. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers; 2008)

A few words must be said about the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, whose ancient texts commonly denigrate the traditions of early Buddhism (in which vipassanā practice is rooted) as the hinayana, “lesser vehicle.”

Because these practitioners take a “bodhisattva vow” to liberate all beings before themselves, there is a popular and broadly-shared notion that they are naturally in more perfect alignment with a vision for social liberation than the Theravada-descended lineages who appear to them to be overly self-interested.

Firstly, I follow historians in considering these “greater vehicle” teachings to be disconnected from the direct activity of the historical Buddha. The imperative to forgo one’s own enlightenment for the sake of saving all beings, and committing to a path of countless rebirths to ensure that eventuality, is a teaching that is at profound odds with the clear and direct expressions of the Buddha to attain arahantship in this very life — or as soon as possible.

There are other discrepancies regarding the essential nature of the mind that arise from these schools which I won’t go into here. I will just point out the basis of my opinion that the Bodhisattva commitment is inherently flawed as a revolutionary social-change strategy: Since those old texts are not talking about the material salvation of all beings but rather their spiritual salvation, the strategy is fundamentally evangelistic. The scheme for world liberation would require all beings to eventually become Buddhists — a dubious and profoundly distasteful social change strategy that is proba-

bly incongruent with the values of most contemporary leftists and Buddhists — if they ever stopped to think about it.

I consider the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions as no more and no less naturally aligned with a vision for world-liberation than the Theravada, though the complexities of the dynamics are different and won't be explored in any more detail here.