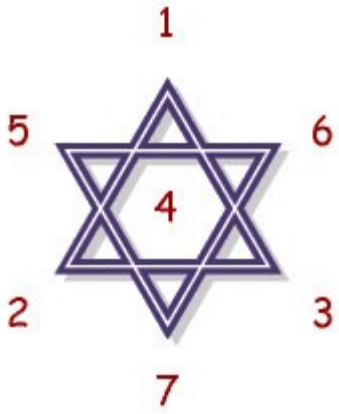
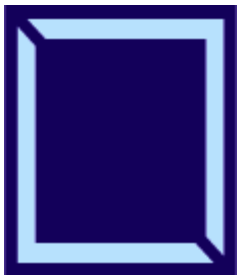


The Upper Triad Material

Topical Issue 6.22

Eastern Religions 2

Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and Zen



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Eastern Religions 2

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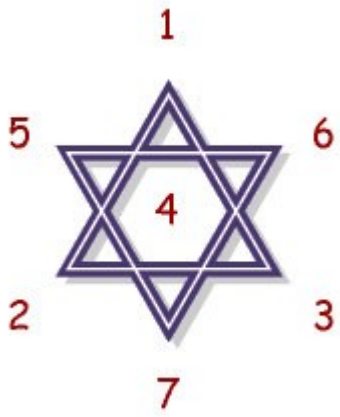
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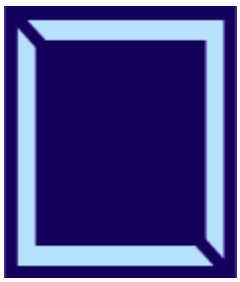
Eastern Religions 2



Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and Zen

- Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism are three of the traditional religions (philosophies) of China, while Shinto is a traditional religion of Japan. Zen is an outgrowth of both Buddhism and Taoism. All contribute to the spiritual depth and breadth and quality and value of the world religion.

- The exposure of far eastern religions to western peoples (and to some extent vice versa) has helped substantially in bridging the gaps between eastern and western cultures. In (at least partially) understanding and respecting the spiritual and cultural-ethical framework of eastern religions, the western student can more effectively relate to the eastern cultures.

† Commentary No. 1322

Eastern Religions 2

The three principal traditional religions of China are Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. The principal traditional religions of Japan are Buddhism and Shintoism. While Buddhism has its origins in India, it has flourished primarily in the far east of Asia. And while Zen is often associated with Buddhism, it is more properly considered an outgrowth of both Buddhism and Taoism.

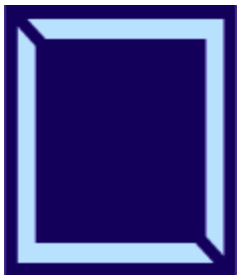
The exposure of far eastern religions to western peoples (and to some extent vice versa) has helped substantially in bridging the gaps between eastern and western cultures. In (at least partially) understanding and respecting the spiritual and cultural-ethical framework of eastern religions, the western student can more effectively relate to the eastern cultures. In embracing pertinent eastern principles, the western student is able to broaden and deepen his or her perspective. Conversely, in studying and apprehending the western religious framework, the eastern student is better able to understand and relate to western methods. There are of course both similarities and differences between the various eastern religions, and between eastern and western cultures, significantly and otherwise.

On of the biggest differences between eastern and western religions is that eastern religions tend not to be exclusive, while western religions tend to be exclusive and separative. In the west (oversimplifyingly) one is either a Jew or a Christian or a Muslim or something else. For example, one cannot properly be a Christian and a Muslim (or a Christian and a Buddhist) at the same time. But in the east, one can properly be one or another or some or all of these, at the same time (of course this is true in the west also, but not generally accepted as such). In the west the differences between religions tend to be barriers, while in the east the differences between (eastern) religions tend to be not so.

Some tension exists naturally between Judaism (Christianity) (Islam) and other religions because of the separative nature of these western religions. But this separativeness is not a natural characteristic of any of these religions, it comes about because of the (more substantially) egoistic nature of western adherents and the relative insecurity of western peoples. In the east there is in principal

more harmony within and beyond each of the religious frameworks. Of course there are always exceptions. There are eastern egos as well as western ones. And there are western mystics who are not constrained by the more conventional barriers. There are gentle and harmonious elements within each religion, and there are more hostile (separative) elements likewise. Those who are gentle and harmonious are simply closer to the core and truth of their religions, while those who are separative have moved far from the ideals of their own religions.

Perhaps it is a matter of cycles and a matter of perception. The west has collectively embraced materialism on a broader, more intense scale than in the east, but this is changing. There is an ebb and flow globally and regionally. And while inferred generalizations may be relatively true, they are never entirely true. It is really in the synthesis of eastern and western religions and cultures that a broader and deeper truth can be revealed and apprehended and embraced. One has no need to give up one's religion or faith in order to study and apprehend and appreciate the contributions of other religions, but one must move beyond exclusivity and separativeness if the whole and the deep are to be embraced.



Section 6.221

Buddhism

- While (outer) Buddhism originated in India, it has spread throughout southeast Asia and seems (now) to be more related to Confucianism and Taoism than to Hinduism, Jainism, or Sikhism. Buddhism is essentially more a moral philosophy (Buddha Dharma) than a religion. The four noble truths of Buddhism are (1) there is suffering, (2) suffering is caused by grasping (attachment) (identification with the material and sensual world), (3) suffering can be overcome, and (4) the way that leads to cessation of suffering is the noble eightfold path.

† Commentary No. 1331

Buddhism 1

Buddhism is a major religion and moral philosophy. While (outer) Buddhism originated in India, it has spread throughout southeast Asia, and to some extent even the western world, and seems (now) to be more related as much to Confucianism and Taoism as to Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Buddhism is essentially more a moral philosophy (Buddha Dharma) than a religion, though there are elements of religion in the sense that there are scriptures and priests and temples.

Buddhism was founded by Siddharta Gautama Buddha. The story of the Buddha is helpful but not crucially so. What really matters are the principles and teachings of Buddha (and Buddhism), much of which is derived from the life and experience of the Buddha and his subsequent enlightenment. Thus Gautama was a human being who became the Buddha, and remains human (much like Jesus became the Christ). While Buddhism does embrace evolution in consciousness, it does not seem to embrace the theosophical concept of our being Gods-in-the-making. In principle Buddhism is non-dogmatic and not in competition with any other religion. As a moral philosophy, like theosophy, Buddhism can be embraced without one needing to leave one's traditional religion or context.

The four noble truths or statements of principles of Buddhism are (1) there is suffering, (2) suffering is caused by grasping (attachment), i.e., identification and entanglement with the material and sensual world, (3) suffering can be fully overcome, and (4) a way that leads to cessation of suffering is the noble eightfold path elucidated in Buddhism. Buddhism has a strong inner component, with focus on meditation and contemplation, which leads potentially to a strong outer spiritual practice. Thus Buddhism exhibits a strong moral philosophy, with implications for individual and collective conscience (consciousness). There is progress, evolution in consciousness, but this is not properly (in principle) an egoistic endeavor, indeed it is to the contrary.

The underlying philosophical framework of Buddhism borrows much from Hinduism and theosophy (and vice versa), albeit not without a considerably different emphasis in its outer practices. In Buddhism there is acknowledged appreciation of karma and reincarnation, of the process of cause and effect, the wheel of life and death. The conditioning of karma refers to each effect being or evoking also a cause (and vice versa). The object is to transcend karmic conditioning so that one may live a life free from artificial conditioning (i.e., liberation). Dharma in Buddhism is perceived as something more transcendent, more absolute, than perhaps dharma in traditional Hinduism. The objective in this sense is to bring one's karma in harmony with dharma, which in turn means that karma is fulfilled or transcended and nirvana is achieved.

In Buddhism there is no emphasis on God, indeed in Buddhism there is no personal God in the sense of Christianity or most other religions. If perceived in terms of God, then God is the absolute, underlying void. This sense of void is often misunderstood; Buddhism is not nihilistic. Indeed, God is the void. Emptiness and fullness are equivalent. And words are necessarily limiting and misleading. Yet God is also found within, though usually referred to as the Self (in contrast with the not-self). But the not-self is entangled in the illusion or maya of life in the sensible world. All things in this lower world are relative and therefore illusionary. Through proper spiritual practice, over the course of many lives, one finds the truth or reality within (self-enlightenment), and bondage (suffering) is transcended.

† Commentary No. 1332

Buddhism 2

Besides Buddhism as a moral philosophy, there is a very central concept of self. In some sense Buddhism does not recognize the existence of a soul in the same sense as theosophy. In Buddhism the "soul" or self is much less personal. It is not the personal self that reincarnates, but the web of karma that relates to (and produces) a personal self. So there is a soul; it simply is not recognized and identified as a soul; instead it is recognized and identified in more abstract terms, but no less meaningfully. In this sense Buddhism complements more soul-oriented philosophies, and the truth is that the soul (atma-buddhi-manas) has both personal and impersonal dimensions. It is a matter of perspective.

And the Buddhist perspective is simply much less personal. Which is necessary for one to be able to grasp the need for non-grasping, which involves non-identification with the grasping element (the ego, the intellect, the personality).

Like Christianity, Buddhism has many "denominations" or sects or schools of Buddhism, each contributing to the whole. The three main vehicles of Buddhism are (1) Hinayana or Theravada with its Pali Canon, (2) Mahayana, and (3) Vajrayana, although Mahayana and Vajrayana are often considered together, as Tibetan Buddhism. Hinayana means "little vehicle" and is perhaps the earliest school of Buddhism, with Theravada or "doctrine of the elders" being the principal modern survivor of the original eighteen sects and which predominates as the "southern" school of Southeast Asia. Mahayana means "great vehicle" and predominates as the "northern" school or Tibetan Buddhism. In Mahayana there is a distinction between the arhat and the bodhisattva, the arhat being one who is assured of enlightenment and is mainly self-motivated, while the bodhisattva being one who is motivated more altruistically.

In fact, one cannot achieve enlightenment if one is personally motivated, for self-centeredness is a barrier that precludes the very object of the quest. Thus in a broader sense, both the arhat and the bodhisattva are necessarily transcending of selfishness and self-centeredness, but the bodhisattva is one who returns to the world to help others even while not required to do so by karma. The arhat is the ideal of Theravada Buddhism, one who has traveled the noble eightfold path and who has eliminated the ten fetters and has therefore entered nirvana. The bodhisattva is the ideal of Mahayana Buddhism, one who has renounced nirvana. Mahayana has advanced Buddhism both in the sense of its large array of scriptures and in its sense of active compassion for others. It is not enough merely to seek the end of one's own suffering, one must also work toward the alleviation and eventual transcendence of others' suffering, and ultimately to collective enlightenment.

Vijrayana means "thunderbolt vehicle" and is also known as Tantrayana. It is a school of Buddhism that emphasizes the Tantric path and practices (of magic and mystery and Buddhism occultism). But of course these distinctions (between Theravada, Mahayana, and Vijrayana) are not so clear-cut or exclusive, and there are noble elements and mystic elements within each school.

Theravada tends toward monks and monasteries and intellect and rules of discipline (detachment, seclusion, renunciation), while Mahayana tends toward the heart and the intuition and tends to appeal to a broader spectrum of students and lay people.

Much of Buddhism seems to involve lineage. But in the final analysis, the popular emphasis on gurus and lineage is really not important; what is important are the basic teachings and principles, the various concepts and practices that encourage the student in spiritual development.

† Commentary No. 1333

Buddhism 3

The lexicon of Buddhism is perhaps more complicated than that of Hinduism, as it involves more than just Sanskrit words utilized in some familiar, some not so familiar, ways, but also engages terms from other Asian languages.

The absolute plays a special role in Buddhism and effectively replaces the notion of a personal God. Ahimsa is a philosophy of harmlessness and compassion, embraced both by Buddhism and Jainism. Anabhoga refers to purposelessness, the living of a spiritual life as an end in itself, without regard to self-interest or conscious striving. Anapana-sati refers to the monitoring of the breath, and exercise of mindfulness. Anatman is the notion of non-ego (paradoxically equivalent to the atman or not-self) and refers to the non-separateness of all of lives, not to any sense of annihilation. Anicca refers to impermanence, of life being a matter of ever-changing (ever-becoming) flux. Anshin refers to the repose of mind. An arhat is one who has traveled the noble eightfold path, conquered the ten fetters, and attained nirvana. Asava refers to mental intoxication or that which impedes realization.

Buddhism is the Middle Way, between asceticism or self-mortification and entanglement in the senses. Bhava is a state of existence or becoming, the link between upadana or clinging to life and jati or rebirth. Bodhi refers to enlightenment, based on wisdom and compassion, i.e., the second ray aspect of love-wisdom. Bodhisattva refers to one who has gone beyond being merely an

arhat, but one who returns to this world to help others, one whose wisdom results from direct perception of truth. Buddha (like Christ) is a title bestowed upon those who achieve a certain stage of enlightenment and compassion. Buddha-Dhamma refers to the teaching of the Buddha. Buddhi is the vehicle or bodhi or enlightenment, the faculty of the (higher) spiritual intuition.

Compassion is a central virtue in Buddhism. Selfish desire is the cause of suffering. Dhamma or dharma is the notion of proper conduct, adherence to higher principles or law. Dhammapada is the principal scripture of the Pali Canon, i.e., the way of the Buddha's teaching. Dharmakaya refers to the Buddha as the personification of truth. Dhyana is meditation, leading to samadhi. Dojo is any place where the Buddhist teaching is provided or the way of Buddhism practiced. Dukka is the first of the four noble truths or suffering, a lack of well-being. The ego is an artificial barrier to truth and realization. Enlightenment is the lesser goal of Buddhist practice (the greater goal being love-wisdom). The eternal now or eternal moment refers to the place of mindfulness in the Buddhist practice. Fetters refer to personal (emotional and mental) attachments which must be eliminated and transcended before enlightenment can be achieved. The four noble truths are dukkha, samudaya, nirodha, and magga. Happiness in Buddhism is not an end in itself but merely a consequence of righteousness, ultimately to be transcended. Jiriki refers to salvation (liberation) through one's own efforts.

Maitreya refers to the Bodhisattva who will become the next Buddha. Nirvana refers to the goal of Buddhist endeavor. The Pali Canon are the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism. Paramita refers to the various stages of spiritual development leading to perfection. The ten precepts refer to moral and ethical practices of Buddhism. Renunciation refers to the sacrifice of self-interest. Samadhi refers to the meditative state of the quiescent mind, the mind that has transcended separateness. Santana refers to continuity of consciousness. The swastika refers to the ceaselessness of manifestation, to prosperity and long life. And vipassana refers to the meditation of intuitive insight.

Section 6.2211

Articulation

- Articulation implies the state in which things and lives are perceived to be differentiated and/or relatively distinct one from another and yet related in a relatively objective manner. In this sense articulation refers to the objective world of physical manifestation and more properly to one being so absorbed or immersed in that (mundane and egoistic) world-perception that one is not conscious of any higher reality. One who is articulated in this sense may have an intellectual appreciation of higher things but for as long as one is personally (phenomenally) (psychologically) absorbed in the great illusion of the material world one remains articulated in this lesser sense.

† Commentary No. 833

Articulation 1

Articulation implies the state in which things and lives are perceived to be differentiated and/or relatively distinct one from another and yet related in a relatively objective manner. In this sense articulation refers to the objective world of physical manifestation and more properly to one being so absorbed or immersed in that (mundane and egoistic) world-perception that one is not conscious of any higher reality. One who is articulated in this sense may have an intellectual appreciation of higher things but for as long as one is personally (phenomenally) (psychologically) absorbed in the great illusion of the material world one remains articulated in this lesser sense.

In this sense articulation is the first of three stages and is represented by the third ray of appearance and substance (manifestation) or consciousness in its lower sense (of being absorbed in matter). Non-articulation is the second path and is represented by the second ray of quality and consciousness proper, in its higher (non-articulated) sense. And the third stage is in one (lower) sense a dynamic integration of articulation and non-articulation in which articulated existence is seen as both articulated and non-articulated and in another (higher) path is a state in which that which was perceived as non-articulation is not-perceived (because one is beyond perception) as articulation and something else (nonetheless not differentiated) is not-perceived as non-articulation. This third stage is represented by the first ray of life and being (in the sense of being beyond consciousness).

Articulation is the place and process of consciousness of the personality, the mind, and its ego. Non-articulation is the place and process of consciousness of the soul (and in the higher sense of the monad). The passage from the articulated state to the non-articulated state is afforded by proper meditation, which involves letting go of all of the attachments of the lower worlds (including the existence of the ego) and thereby achieving the self-realization of non-differentiation (the mind as no-mind). Non-articulation then persists without behavior, without feeling, and without thinking. Yet non-articulation also persists with realization (satori) and allows or affords realization of the articulated existence (without being compromised by articulation).

Manifested realization is the dynamic integration of the non-articulated and the articulated. In manifested realization one can have awareness of the lower worlds and one can even interact to some extent within that realm of articulation, yet, if the higher state is maintained, one is not absorbed in the process. This means that (in this case) one non-behaves, that one non-feels, and that one non-thinks, in the sense that the ego is non-existent and one is merely and clearly reflecting the higher (non-articulated) consciousness. This is not in any way a passive state, yet if one thinks or feels or speaks or in any way acts for oneself (ego) (mind) (personality), then one is articulated (and has lost whatever non-articulation had been achieved).

The qualification and detachment of non-articulation is non-qualification and freedom. It does not imply or convey a lack of compassion or consideration but it does require a lack of entanglement and involvement. Non-articulation reveals the wisdom of one's inner being (real self) (soul) and the futility of one's outer being (personality) (mind) (ego) as an end in itself. Spiritual poise is non-articulation. Egolessness is non-articulation. The quiet mind is non-articulation. Being and self-realization are non-articulation. Yet even articulation is non-articulation.

† Commentary No. 834

Articulation 2

The real keys to passing beyond the stage of being absorbed in the articulated state are (1) meditation leading to awareness of the non-articulated state (non-passive openness) and (2) persistence in awareness of the role of the non-articulated state with respect to articulation (closed-ness).

While meditation per se is helpful but not essential to the growth and development of the personality consciousness (which is necessarily absorbed in articulation), proper meditation is very essential to achieving awareness of the distinction between being absorbed as a personality and being non-articulated. Meditation is the only means available for the spiritual student to (1) effectively refine his or her personality consciousness, (2) achieve progressive freedom from personality absorption, and (3) participate in the energy and qualification of the

(non-articulated) soul. Without proper meditation the student is very much limited by the personality consciousness. With proper meditation the student is able to go beyond the personality, and in bringing that (higher) energy and awareness back into the personality one is able to vivify and qualify the (refined and uplifted) personality in order to sustain the sense of non-articulation.

But even meditation can be articulated or non-articulated. Most people who think they are meditating are merely articulating, allowing the mind to participate in the (superficial) form of meditation. This is still helpful or at least it is better than no meditation. But as the non-articulated form of meditation is achieved, so does real freedom and the higher qualification of the personality begin. Any act of thinking (mental activity) or feeling (emotional activity) is a measure of articulation. If the student is involved in the act of thinking or feeling (or speaking) then the articulation is considerable, while if the student is not involved in the act of thinking or feeling (or speaking) then the articulation is less substantial and more incidental. But where there is no articulation there is non-articulation. In meditation proper there is naught but non-articulation (no-thing).

Awareness is not the same thing as articulation. But unqualified response to awareness in the form (of the personality) is a matter of articulation. So one needs to achieve and manifest awareness without the personality being absorbed or involved in the process. This leads to the properly qualified personality (refined quiescence (a non-active, non-passive state)) in which the ego no longer functions. Persistence in awareness of the role of the non-articulated state with respect to articulation is then possible. This means that one is (thereby) ever aware of the non-articulation (unity and integration) behind (within) every aspect of articulation (diversity and differentiation). This means that one is (thereby) also aware of the falseness (superficiality) of articulated existence and expression. One is no longer interested in phenomena or happenings. One no longer "needs" to demonstrate anything. One is then satisfied merely to be.

Of course in such a state (non-articulation (nothing (no-thing) (reality)) in articulation (thing-ness)) one can (must) still be of service, but that service activity is a matter of doing what needs to be done, what one is called to do by virtue of one's awareness (which is dharma or duty (appropriateness)), and is

not a matter of entanglement or involvement or attachment. The quality of consciousness exhibited in personality quiescence embraces real service (dharma) that is performed or fulfilled freely (and continuously, not merely continually) and is a viable measure of non-articulation.

† Commentary No. 835

Articulation 3

The articulation of reality (i.e., the non-articulated) is an arbitrary process depending greatly on one's powers of perception (primarily) and one's powers of reasoning (secondarily) and one's powers of realization (potentially). Because virtually everyone in incarnation is absorbed in articulation, then the habits of perceiving reality in its articulated forms and the association (mis-association) of reality with what is perceived is the general rule (and forms the basis and sustenance of the grand illusion).

One's perception is heavily biased by one's early training (and continued experience). Since those who provide that training and experience (parents, teachers, friends) are themselves (almost all and almost always) wholly absorbed in articulation, then one will normally develop with the same biases in perception, accepting the illusion of the physical world (material reality) and the appearance of reality as reality itself. As one develops the ability and associated habits of reasoning, one normally then unconsciously rationalizes away anything that would tend to violate one's predisposition toward the articulated existence. However, as one begins to be able to think for oneself, without the overbearing and unconscious presumptions of those who are wholly absorbed, and as one thereby gradually develops open-mindedness, then one can begin to realize aspects of the truth.

The problem of articulation is the reinforcement that articulated experience provides toward sustaining its illusion. In order for one to function in the articulated world, one must necessarily play some role within that articulated context. This makes it even more difficult for one to achieve freedom and for one who has (momentarily) achieved freedom to actually sustain that freedom. From the point of view of the non-articulated (which in truth has no point of

view), all of the people in the world are asleep except those few who are able to touch the non-articulated (and who are thereby irradiated) and those fewer still who live in the non-articulated while functioning in the articulated (i.e., whose waking-consciousness persists in non-articulation).

Thus the (unenlightened) vast majority of incarnated people see and hear and feel and sense and reason according to appearances. But eventually the call of the path begins to induce uncertainty in the minds and hearts of those who have developed to the point of that responsiveness. The mind begins to question the appearance of things and gradually attracts the opportunities for understanding. The great value of refinement and meditation is that these (essential and essentially spiritual) practices lead one to be less attached to (and less absorbed in) articulated existence and relatively more responsive to the non-articulated reality. The great value of Zen Buddhism (and comparable practices) is the challenge that it conveys to the otherwise insufferable and wholly self-absorbed mind and the assumptions and presumptions that have been entrained.

Articulation is limitation. As one achieves liberation from the limitations of thing-ness and ego, so is enlightenment (non-articulation) achieved. And yet achievement is an articulated concept and phenomena. So the achievement of non-articulation is non-achievement. In this sense achievement is really allowance, as the conditioned mind and its habits of perception preclude any sense of the non-articulated reality. But as one (and to the extent that one) allows the mind to function freely, without conditioning, the truth (non-articulation) is revealed. But of course as one then articulates what has been revealed or what has been realized, then one has again suffered some measure of absorption in articulated reality.

Articulation 4

The greatest challenge of the spiritual path lies in overcoming the natural and pervasive absorption in articulation. When one studies the philosophy of the path (metaphysics, theosophy, etc.), one may seek to become enlightened (or one may foolishly assume that one is already enlightened), yet how many are actually determined to achieve their freedom?

The very act of seeking is articulation (yet nonetheless a necessary precursor). Determination is likewise articulation. Real will, on its own level, is however non-articulation. Thus the real key to overcoming absorption lies in the proper exercise of the will (even though that exercise is necessarily a matter of articulation, as the exercise is induced from the non-articulated state, provided that one is responsive). Instead of articulating one's desire, wanting, seeking, or determination, one simply articulates one's existence as non-articulation (I am That). And eventually, with persistence in freedom of thinking and feeling, That will be manifested.

All of the other achievements within the context of the path are relatively easy compared to achievement of freedom. To become and to be pure of thought and feeling is relatively easy. To live a life of spiritual service is relatively easy. To learn to meditate effectively is relatively easy. To overcome the ego is more difficult, but still relatively easy compared with the achievement of freedom from absorption. Of course all of these other aspects (achievements) are precursory, as one cannot be free unless one is also (relatively) pure and living a life of dharma. A real love of truth and real self-honesty are quite essential. And one cannot be free unless one has overcome to some considerable extent the inhibiting aspect of the ego (the self-delusion of the mind). But one can and should nonetheless work toward freedom (non-articulation) as these other achievements are being addressed or sought.

The first step toward freedom from absorption is the realization and acceptance of the fact that one is absorbed and the understanding of what that absorption entails. The second step (proper) is the invocation of the aspect of will toward the objective of freedom. And the third step is the evocation of non-articulated

awareness. The first step is the more tedious and time-consuming. Without continual awareness of one's measure of absorption there is no hope of freedom. This first step does require considerable intention, persistence, and continual reinforcement of one's need to be aware of one's own condition in consciousness. One gradually learns to temper all of the personality inclinations (i.e., independence) and bias and one gradually learns to speak only from the poised state and not in the untempered manner of the wholly absorbed (if one wants to speak then one is definitely absorbed as a personality (which is the same thing as being absorbed in articulation or articulated existence)). If one speaks more naturally (in a manner of appropriateness) and from the spiritually poised (non-egoistic) (non-reactive) (non-contrived) state, then one is only partially absorbed (which is in itself a major accomplishment (but the perception of one's own accomplishment is counter-indicative)).

The second and third steps follow naturally from the increasing awareness and realization achieved in the first step. With a measure of intelligent (balanced) detachment (reticence) in thinking, feeling, and acting, comes a measure of freedom. In open-mindedness (honesty) (the value of truth) lies the seed of freedom. In persistence of awareness lies the development of freedom. And in service (dharma) comes the realization of freedom.

Section 6.2212

Aspects of Buddhism

- There are many aspects to Buddhism, including the ten fetters, the three obstructions, the sense of inscrutability, and the spectrum of Buddhism.

† Commentary No. 116

The Ten Fetters

Within the framework of the Buddhist moral philosophy (Buddha Dharma) ten great fetters or obstacles to advancement along the spiritual way are identified. Each fetter is a form of bondage through desire or illusion, and it is in the overcoming of all ten obstacles that spiritual attainment is found. The ten fetters are naturally interdependent and range widely in scope and concept. The common thread is consciousness, for in the evolution of consciousness comes increasing freedom from bondage.

The first fetter is the delusion of self or the illusion that the soul is a separate entity. It is a human tendency to identify the personality (the body, feelings, and the mind) with the self, whereas in truth the personality is only the instrument of the true self (the soul). Life in the lower worlds gives the appearance of many separated units of life, whereas higher consciousness reveals the unification and continuity of all life. Wherever the student identifies with the lower self or considers himself apart from other lives, there is bondage. Another form of bondage (the second fetter) is doubt or the illusion of mortality. Fear (doubt) normally arises from misunderstanding; fear is a serious stumbling block because it closes the mind and prevents realization. Wherever there is doubt or fear there is bondage.

The third fetter is superstition or dependence upon external ceremony. There is value in meaningful ceremony and in symbolism, but in superstition (attributing significance where none exists) there is distraction. Another problem (the fourth obstacle) is sensuality or the illusion of the senses. It is through desirelessness and the refusal to accept blindly the testimony of the senses that reality can be experienced and truth known. Surely there are lessons to be learned in the objective world, but eventually the lower worlds must be recognized for what they are; then desire, sensuality, and the appeal of phenomena will cease and the student will go forth unhindered by such. The fifth great obstacle is hatred or ill-feeling, whether conscious or subconscious, obvious or subtle. It is through love and compassion that the wounds of humanity shall be healed and progress obtained.

The sixth and seventh forms of bondage are the love of life on Earth and the desire for life in heaven. Wherever there is desire or attachment there is limitation and bondage. It is in the middle path of observation (experience) and learning without attachment that freedom is won. The eighth fetter is pride, the illusion of self-importance. It is with humility and moderation that the spiritual student should view all things. Elation and excitement are unnecessary and hindering. The quiet, inner joy that embraces a gentle and peaceful relationship with all life is freedom enough from distraction.

The ninth obstacle on the path to self-realization is self-righteousness. Moral, ethical, and spiritual values are necessarily a personal matter. A leading virtue is respect for the beliefs and values of other persons. Self-righteousness undermines spiritual development. Another fetter (the tenth) is ignorance or the illusion of knowledge. Beliefs and opinions strongly adhered to impede the expansion of knowledge and understanding to a higher, broader, and more inclusive level. An open (not passive) mind is indispensable in the quest for wisdom. Through increased awareness of life (increased consciousness), right-knowledge is attained and properly evaluated. It is through adherence to the path (bringing elevated consciousness) that each of the ten fetters is broken and the goal fulfilled. May consciousness become enlightened, that the self-inflicted fetters and limitations of glamour and illusion cease to hinder.

† Commentary No. 539

The Three Obstructions

The three obstructions are self-importance, jealousy, and desire, representing that which hinders progress along first ray, second ray, and third ray lines, respectively. In each case the obstruction is really a set of that which hinders and within which is found the key to progress.

The first obstruction is desire. Desire is a projection of personal energy along self-centered lines, a strength of feeling focused on some objective and representative of the coarseness of (unrefined) third ray energy (which includes all of the outer, lower manifestation and the entire personality domain (categorically)). Desire is an expenditure of energy and an indication of

mundane (material) absorption on some level. As an expression of energy, desire tends to bring about that which is desired, subject to karmic qualifications; the strength, coherence, and structure of the desire; and the practicality of its evocation. The utility of desire is the development of the personality's ability to project and focus energy. As the student progresses, desire is gradually transformed into goodwill (the underlying third ray quality), as the energy and efforts are brought to bear on more noble and less personal matters. As the student progresses, desire becomes more and more an obstruction to (spiritual) progress, until it is finally overcome and the student achieves the freedom inherent in refined third ray energy.

The second obstruction is jealousy, which is representative and indicative of a range of relatively coarse, separative tendencies associated with unrefined second ray energy. Jealousy (and each similar emotion) is a projection of personal energy along self-centered lines, one that hinders right human relations and prevents or inhibits the more natural brotherhood inherent in the more refined second ray energy. Like desire, jealousy is a personal activity which must eventually be overcome and replaced by compassion (which is the underlying second ray quality). Jealousy implies individualization (the illusion of independent existence), while compassion (impersonal love) implies a group orientation and the necessary realization of interdependence (as a stepping stone toward realization of unity in consciousness.

The third obstruction is self-importance, which is more general and more subtle than is the case for desire or jealousy. Self-importance is actually implied in all three obstructions, but culminates only (primarily) as the more obvious elements of coarseness are overcome. Self-importance is nonetheless an energy expression albeit relatively more internal than external unless imposed upon others. As an external (internal) expression (imposition), self-importance is a projection (an accumulation) of personal energy along (unrefined) first ray lines. Each (every) projection (accumulation) of relatively coarse (personal) energy impedes the flow of more natural energies, distracts the waking-consciousness and the personality subconsciousness from more noble (impersonal) pursuits, and must ultimately be resolved into some positive realization. In the case of self-importance proper, that realization is humility (the underlying first ray quality).

Each impediment or obstruction carries with it some significant lesson(s) to be learned. Every coarse or self-centered expression is a projection of self-returning energy which ultimately leads to the transformation of that coarseness, from self-importance, jealousy, and desire, to humility, compassion, and goodwill, from the personal (coarseness) to the impersonal (purity), from limitation (bondage) (attachment) to freedom, and from independence (delusion) to interdependence and unity (reality).

† Commentary No. 897

Inscrutability

Inscrutability is defined conventionally as the state of being not readily understood, the state of being enigmatic, hard to grasp, and/or mysterious. It refers, in this conventional sense, to the condition in which one lacks the experience and/or ability to readily understand or comprehend something. That something (that which is inscrutable) may be apparently abstruse, ambiguous, paradoxical, subtle, transcendental, and/or vague. In fact, that which is inscrutable may not in itself have any apparent meaning, but the encounter with that which is inscrutable may convey something nonetheless. Inscrutability may therefore refer to some (inscrutable) person and/or to some idea or concept (e.g., an inscrutable statement).

The key to inscrutability, even in this conventional sense, is that real understanding comes not from trying to understand in any intellectual or rational sense but from an unconditioned and intuitive sense of grasping some whole of which the (representative) inscrutability forces the mind out of its normal pattern. In short, inscrutability is an uncontrived tool for understanding that which is not otherwise readily understandable. The uncontrived methods or application of inscrutability are comparable to the utilization of symbols to convey ideas or concepts that are not easily explained or conveyed. Properly qualified symbols appeal to the higher senses and convey a deeper sense of understanding, even if not easily expressible. Inscrutability is more aggressive in the sense that symbols can easily be ignored, while an inscrutable presence is more compelling.

Thus, inscrutability is more properly defined as "the experience of fulfillment and uncontrived, spontaneous achievement." According to Chogyam Trungpa, inscrutability follows from the achievement of meekness (being uncomplicated, kind, humble (in the sense of depth of spiritual strength), modest, and confident (in the sense of self-composure)), perkiness (being energetic, cheerful (delightful) (in the sense of quiet joy and spiritual poise), and artful), and outrageousness (being fearless in the sense of hopelessness (in having no hopes one passes beyond fear)), all of which are (progressively revealed by) authentic presence.

Inscrutability conveys a sense of "predictability within the context of unpredictability." Inscrutability is a state of positive nonconformity, of being spiritually poised and self-composed, yet with considerable strength and confidence to do what needs to be done, without being constrained by convention or tradition (or external (internal) expectations). The expression of inscrutability conveys the implication of truth rather than (necessarily) the truth itself. Inscrutability is a state in which one lives the truth rather than a state in which one merely expresses the truth. There is, however, a false inscrutability (glamour) in which the ego seeks attention.

Inscrutability (proper) is egolessness and the refusal to be absorbed in personal or mundane matters, while at the same time refusing to take anything too seriously. It conveys a great freedom from conventional (personality-centered) and conditioned existence while maintaining a strong (inner) sense of dharma or duty (responsibility). With inscrutability, one lives without any of the (normal) personal insecurities (ego), living not to please others but to serve humanity in the broader sense (of participation in the way). With inscrutability, one lives without hope or expectation, confident in the way and confident in one's relationship to the way (more properly without even the distinction of separation).

† Commentary No. 1495

The Spectrum of Buddhism

In some sense each religion or moral philosophy has a spectrum or dynamic range through which it is embraced by various peoples and communities. Buddhism in practice exhibits a range from conservative, through moderate, to liberal Buddhism. Moreover, there are healthy and unhealthy (counter-evolutionary) aspects throughout that range.

Like most religions, the greatest contribution of Buddhism is its moral philosophy. These (proper) principles of Buddhism can be (properly) embraced regardless of where the adherent fits on the scale from conservative through moderate to liberal Buddhist. Indeed, the "labels" and schools of Buddhism are not really important. The only part that is truly important are the moral principles. And like most religions, there are lesser aspects. The "organized" dimension of any religion offers encouragement to those who need such organization in order to consider the teachings, but this dimension also generally evokes separativeness within the religion. Indeed, unlike Christianity, organized Buddhism is generally benign with regard to other religions, but like Christianity it can be actually quite hostile in its factional sense. Sadly, the factional "arguments" are almost entirely (needlessly) specious and not really important.

Most religions focus properly on the relationship of the human being to God, and this is also true in the various aspects of Buddhism, even if the "God" word is not used. Buddhism properly encourages meditation, which in principle engenders that relationship. Buddhism properly encourages the embracing the various moral precepts, which leads to refinement and potential for enlightenment. And overall Buddhism encourages a deepening spirituality that leads eventually to enlightenment. But along the way there are many pitfalls, not the least of which is the tendency of some elements within Buddhism to promote egoism or reliance on the personality instead of the underlying spiritual nature. That many Buddhist teachers do this without consciously realizing that it is egoistic is also problematic. It is always the personality-centered aspect of any religion that is its greatest weakness, and in Buddhism that is reflected in

the egoism of self-reliance in the lower sense and in the glorification of so-called "masters" and in the reliance upon lineage for authority.

Within the dynamic range that is Buddhism there is religious Buddhism which is the more conservative element, with its priesthood and reliance on presumed authority. This is where the factional problems arise, consequential "actions" over matters inherently inconsequential. At the more liberal end of the spectrum are isolated adherents who are free to explore their higher (deeper) (inner) nature without much constraint other than their own conditioning. The problem with liberal Buddhism is that there tends also to be a weakening of focus and loss of momentum. In moderate Buddhism there is appreciation for tradition without entanglement in tradition, and (potentially) freedom without diffusion. But this requires dedication and commitment.

But the highest aspect of Buddhism, like the highest aspect of any religion, is its mystical tradition. Embracing the moral philosophy conscientiously and sensibly, while relying on deepening meditation to evoke the conscious awareness that is needed to achieve mystical union. Indeed, much of the essence of Buddhism is relatively unique (in the sense of openness and prominence of the teaching, not of the actual teaching, which is common to the mystical dimension of all the various religions).

Section 6.2213

The Noble Eight-fold Path

- The eight-fold noble path consists of eight interdependent categories or aspects of proper mental and physical practice, namely right belief, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right exertion, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

† Article No. 7

The Noble Eight-fold Path

One of the most important of Buddhist disciplines is the living of the Noble Eight-fold Path. Though traditionally Buddhist, this discipline transcends particular religion, for it is quite applicable to the lives of serious students of all religions and spiritual philosophies.

1. Right Belief. The holding of right attitude, at all times free from prejudice, illusion, superstition, doubts, fears, and animosities.

2. Right Thought. The living of the highest standard of conduct which the mind can conceive; living the truth one knows.

3. Right Speech. The control of speech so that it is always true, simple, gentle, and entirely honest.

4. Right Action. Right Conduct. Honest, just, and enlightened relationship with other living things.

5. Right Livelihood. The practice of harmlessness. To live without hurting, either by killing or injuring physically, or the causing of sorrow, either mental or emotional.

6. Right Exertion. Perseverance in noble action. The overcoming of all of the illusional life.

7. Right Mindfulness. Right Thinking. The directing of the mind toward the understanding of the supreme wisdom.

8. Right Concentration. Right Meditation. The practice of the inner experience.

† Commentary No. 148

The Noble Eight-fold Path

One of the most important (spiritually meaningful) of Buddhist disciplines is the living of the Noble Eight-fold Path. The object of the eight-fold path (as a system) is to provide a framework or focus for right spiritual living (and all that that implies). The noble path consists of eight interdependent categories or aspects of proper mental and physical practice: right belief, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right exertion, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This contribution of the Buddha Dharma is quite applicable within the lives of serious students of all religions and spiritual philosophies.

Right belief (as to karma) is the holding of right attitude, being at all times free from prejudice, bias, glamour, illusion, superstition, doubt, fear, and animosity; the holding of right understanding, right view, broadmindedness; the holding of right knowledge about the path that leads to the cessation of ill. Right belief also implies freedom from opinion. Right thought implies the living of the highest standard of conduct which the mind can conceive; living the truth that is known or realized; right aspiration towards renunciation, benevolence, and kindness. The link between right thought and right conduct is not a casual one; the harmony (lack of conflict) between belief and practice is most important. The spiritual student is actually obligated (by karma) to put into practice the teachings that are understood and accepted.

Right speech means the control of speech so that it is always true, simple, gentle, and entirely honest; the abstention from idle talk. Right speech is a significant key to living in the lower worlds without being absorbed by mundane matters. The spiritual student needs to develop sufficient poise that speech occurs not for the sake of speech, but only where necessary, useful, and constructive. Idle talk contributes greatly to mundane absorption, while wisdom in speech is essentially creative. Right action means right conduct, abstaining from the taking of life and from taking that which is not given; the development of honest, just, and enlightened relationships with other living beings; to do that which is right to do.

Right means of livelihood is closely related to right conduct. It is the practice of harmlessness, living without hurting or causing sorrow (physically, emotionally, or mentally) (is it possible to cause sorrow?). Right means of livelihood has considerable karmic significance; the spiritual student should be aware of the consequences of livelihood, especially as karma is worked out and a life of service is begun. Right exertion is right effort, perseverance in noble action; the overcoming of all the illusional life (and glamour); determination and the building of right spiritual momentum, based upon self-control and the wise application of resources. The spiritual student must be willing to work hard (without attachment to the work), if the goal for humanity is to be attained (as the student loses and finds himself).

Right mindfulness is right thinking, the directing of the mind toward the understanding of the supreme wisdom (and the nature and needs of the lifewave); right remembrance and self-discipline; remaining ardent, self-possessed (without distraction) and mindful. Right concentration leads to right meditation (the practice of the inner experience) and right contemplation; the focus of the mind upon appropriate matters, the joy and ease of solitude (higher union), and the cultivation of the deepest equanimity. Right meditation is the spiritual exercise which ties all of the eight categories together, as a means of reinforcement of intent, and as a means of allowing the higher energies to flow.

Section 6.2214

The Ten Precepts

- The ten pillars or precepts or ethical principles of Buddhism are (1) love, the principle of abstention from killing living beings, (2) generosity, the principle of abstention from taking the not-given, (3) contentment, the principle of abstention from sexual misconduct, (4) truthfulness, the principle of abstention from false speech, (5) kindly speech, the principle of abstention from harsh speech, (6) meaningful speech, the principle of abstention from frivolous speech, (7) harmonious speech, the principle of abstention from slanderous speech, (8) tranquility, the principle of abstention from covetousness, (9) compassion, the principle of abstention from hatred, and (10) wisdom, the principle of abstention from false views.

† Commentary No. 1261

The Ten Pillars of Buddhism

The Ten Pillars of Buddhism is the title of a book by Sangharakshita (Dennis Lingwood) that describes the ten pillars or precepts or ethical principles of Buddhism, namely (1) love, the principle of abstention from killing living beings, (2) generosity, the principle of abstention from taking the not-given, (3) contentment, the principle of abstention from sexual misconduct, (4) truthfulness, the principle of abstention from false speech, (5) kindly speech, the principle of abstention from harsh speech, (6) meaningful speech, the principle of abstention from frivolous speech, (7) harmonious speech, the principle of abstention from slanderous speech, (8) tranquility, the principle of abstention from covetousness, (9) compassion, the principle of abstention from hatred, and (10) wisdom, the principle of abstention from false views.

Each principle can be considered as akusala-dharma in the sense of undertaking-to-refrain from some (negative, destructive, harmful, counter-evolutionary) action, attitude, or behavior, or as kusala-dharma in the sense of undertaking to observe the respective positive. Taken collectively, embracing the ten pillars or precepts is a matter of spiritual practice that equates, in part, to "going deeper and broader" into the wisdom, or to taking refuge in the Buddha, or going for refuge, which is "the fundamental Buddhist act." This fundamental act or commitment, is in one sense or dimension embracing the three refuges or jewels, namely (1) the Buddha or the ideal of enlightenment, (2) the dharma or the teaching of the way to enlightenment, and (3) sangha or spiritual community (fellowship); in another it is embracing (1) the ten precepts, (2) meditation, and (3) wisdom.

The spiritual student (Buddhist or otherwise) is encouraged to embrace or undertake each of these principles in the daily life (along with whatever other principles the student has encountered that are meaningful in the context of the student's path). One doesn't need to "be" a Buddhist in order to embrace these precepts, one simply needs to recognize and appreciate their value. There are number of collections of precepts, some comprehensive, some not as comprehensive, but a comprehensive set of principles such as this, properly embraced, serves as a formula or mantra for deepening, for progressive self-

transformation, of progressively embracing higher and deeper and simply, more meaningful truths.

It is, for the spiritual student, a refining of the personal mandala or how one lives one's life, what is important, what values are embraced. In this process (embracing principles, undertaking self-transformation) one revisits both interests and activities, encouraging those which support and engender the process of enlightenment (learning, growing, serving) and discouraging those which detract from that process. Or in other words, embracing that which is recognized to be constructive, healthy, and evolutionary, and not embracing that which is recognized to be destructive, unhealthy, or counter-evolutionary. This is what happens, properly, when one truly commits to a spiritual life.

In the Christian vernacular, it is "being saved" and making a commitment to living a Christian life (the principles of the Christian faith); in the Buddhist tradition, it is making this commitment to the three jewels. These two respective "commitments" are essentially equivalent, and also to those of other faiths. Each such (genuine) commitment properly evokes a quickening of the path and subsequently progressive spiritual deepening. So these pillars or principles are not simply a matter for intellectual consideration, but are, much more properly, a matter of commitment and embracing the path.

† Commentary No. 1272

The Ten Pillars 2

There are a number of reasons why embracing principles like the ten precepts of Buddhism are so effective. Embracing each (positive) precept strengthens (good) character, refining the mind, while embracing the converse weakens the (good) character, and coarsens the mind. Embracing the ten precepts collectively (comprehensively) (conscientiously) evokes considerable power for good, more so than ten times the value of the individual precepts, as there is a reinforcement (catalysis) through synergism. And by focusing on all three of the human "triad" (body, speech, and mind) there is balance.

Of course there is a difference of effectiveness in embracing the precepts for peoples of different initial conditions. Someone who is very coarse, who embraces the ten precepts, will if conscientious likely emerge substantially transformed. Someone relatively refined, who embraces the ten precepts to the same extent, will likely be only moderately transformed. But someone relatively refined, who goes deeper into the precepts, will likely be thereby substantially transformed. It is not simply a matter of embracing "some" precepts, but by embracing a sufficiently meaningful collection of precepts, that collectively enable multi-dimensional transformation, i.e., refining one's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual nature. Some precepts or principles may be helpful or constructive in some way, e.g., the golden rule, but without sufficient depth and breadth (guidance, encouragement, understanding), progress would be limited. For example, many people simply don't realize how harmful words can be, yet through the ten precepts (and similarly meaningful collections) one begins to understand, through firsthand experience, the consequences of all of our actions (and inactions).

The ten pillars or precepts may be considered as rules, principles, guidelines, laws, depending on one's perspective and circumstances. But the import of this dharma is all of these things. These ten precepts (silas) (siksapadas) (kusala-karma-pathas) are fundamental truths not limited to a merely Buddhist context or tradition. They are as much about moral duty as they are karmic guidelines. Ethics of course can be rationalized in any way that one chooses, but these fundamental truths with ethical implications persist nonetheless. In some sense it is about embracing the expertise of the way. In understanding the spiritual context embracing the ten precepts comes more and more naturally.

It may begin with more personal motivation (artificial (superficial) rewards in consciousness (happiness, knowledge, freedom) but eventually it becomes simply a matter of what needs to be. There is great value in living an ethical life, but even greater value when one actually understands the context of living an ethical life. It is not really about avoiding (negative) karma, nor in producing (positive) karma. It is really about achieving balance. And how one treats the body and how one speaks and how one thinks has great effect on that balance. Especially in the sense of how one relates to other people and other loves (through behavior, speech, feeling, thinking).

As principles of ethics the ten precepts are not detailed rules to be followed, but general principles to be embraced which in turn (with conscience) evoke behavioral (feeling, thinking) details (i.e., rules are derived from principles and apply to specific circumstances). As one progresses, one's behavior improves according to the quality of consciousness achieved, which is a function of relative refinement, knowledge and understanding, and evoked wisdom (conscience).

† Commentary No. 1273

The Ten Pillars 3

The ten precepts may be effectively embraced either formally in the context of training with some teacher or educational process, and/or informally in the context of individual study, meditation, and practice. The ten precepts may be embraced loosely, in the sense of being without vows or commitment until such time as they are genuinely understood or accepted into practice, or more properly, in the sense of one making an actual commitment to embrace them to the best one's ability and understanding. Conventional religion tends to emphasize what are considered absolutes, and tends to emphasize formal commitments and religious rituals as a way of strengthening the embrace of the spiritual path and spiritual ways, but merely formal commitments are simply not sufficient, for merely religious ways tend toward ritualized without real (conscious) understanding. And while a formal teacher may be helpful, indeed necessary for some, a formal teacher is not necessary (and may not even be helpful) for others. It all depends on where the student is upon the path and what the student actually needs (obedience to imposed discipline and practices have less value in the long run than obedience to discipline and practices based upon understood principles).

In the context of the ten pillars, both commitment and lifestyle are important, indeed one follows naturally from the other. With a true commitment, one's lifestyle necessarily changes to suit the deepening spiritual temperament and principles and values. Then "one's lifestyle is an expression of one's observation of the ten precepts" just as observation of the ten precepts is an expression of one's commitment (understanding).

Genuine commitment is important because it energizes and focuses the whole personality nature. Without commitment, one is not likely to be conscientious in embracing the ten precepts (or any other spiritual discipline). Without conscientiousness (and consistency) there is no effectiveness. Indeed one who embraces what one thinks of as a spiritual lifestyle without any real commitment to understood underlying principles is simply dabbling and the consequences are not particularly fruitful or significant (except in the sense of eventually having to face the consequences of one's self-deception). One cannot pick and choose what is suitable in spiritual matters, or to embrace spiritual principles sometimes and not at other times, and expect to make any real progress, because the very act of picking and choosing is self-serving in the lower sense (of merely entertaining the personality).

The proper lifestyle is also important because it reinforces one's commitment and embracing of values. If one's lifestyle is inconsistent with one's principles then it will naturally undermine one's effectiveness and spiritual progress. And of course there is great sustained pressure from the world (and people of the world (worldly ways)) to draw the student from the spiritual path and back into the lower worlds of self-serving experience and expression.

The real message here is that the spiritual path requires a holistic approach. It (the student's placement on the spiritual path) properly embraces one's ethics, one's principles, one's values, one's commitment, one's precepts, one's lifestyle. Not in bits and pieces, but in the all of it. It doesn't mean that one is no longer human or able to express oneself in human terms, it simply means that the spiritual path is the most important factor in life and that everything else follows accordingly. One doesn't neglect one's family or worldly duties, one simply embraces them in a higher (spiritual) context.

† Commentary No. 1281

The First Precept

The first precept is the principle of abstention from killing living beings, or love. While the precept focuses on abstention from killing, in the broader sense it includes abstention from causing injury (ahimsa). Most people understand that killing or hurting other people is generally "wrong" and a few even understand that the same is true for killing or hurting animals. But few people truly understand this.

The killing or injuring of any creature is inherently counter-evolutionary in the sense that it is a grave imposition, the deprivation or limiting of existence and experience in this world, and in the sense that since all lives are interconnected one is simply killing or injuring oneself in the process, and there are (grave) consequences. One might argue that it was the victim's karma to be killed or injured, and this would be true, but only in the victim's framework, and the act itself would still be wrong in the actor's framework or perspective. Any act of violence or imposition upon another life is generally and inherently wrong. There may be extenuating circumstances, which make it a matter of necessity, on some intellectualized-moral basis, and the temptation may exist to rationalize killing or harming in order to serve one's own (merely apparent, deluded sense of) self-interest. But it is still wrong.

Each person is responsible for his or her own circumstances. Thus any situation in which one is tempted to rationalize one's actions as unavoidable is nonetheless a consequence of one's actions. Thus if one is "forced" to kill, then one is not any less responsible. Many argue that "animal" life is inferior or that animals are here for human exploitation, neither of which is actually true. Animals are simply different. They have different consciousness, different characteristics and methods and means of evolution, but they are no less worthy than human beings for existence (experience and expression) in this world. Some may argue killing animals (or human beings) is a matter of self-defense, failing to realize that "threatening" animals (or human beings) are only attracted to us as a consequence of our consciousness and actions. No human beings and no animal lives are "here" to provide sport for or sustenance to others at the expense of their own lives or freedom of expression. Granted the karma

of humanity and the karma of animal lives are complicated, and have led to current circumstances, but the principles of ahimsa (non-violence) remain valid. Especially for the spiritual student.

One might be tempted to rationalize ahimsa on the basis of avoidance of consequences, i.e., that to kill or injure another life (human or animal) eventually brings about grave consequences and suffering to the doer, but pure action (ahimsa) needs no such self-serving motive. While the karma of human lives and animal lives does not include provision of sustenance, and while the karma of plant life does include provision of sustenance, one should nonetheless express love in one's relationship to the plant kingdom, affording whatever opportunities there need to be for "plant life" existence, experience, and expression, even while cultivating and harvesting the contributions in sustenance (e.g., food, oxygen, shelter).

But fundamentally, it is a matter of the "practice of equality of self and others" or paratmasamata). All lives are interrelated. All are connected. Love is the energy and quality and principle that reveals and actively expresses this connection. One who lives from the heart simply cannot kill or injure another life, through thought, feeling, or behavior. With love, one simply does what is right to do, non-separatively.

† Commentary No. 1282

The Second Precept

The second precept is the principle of abstention from taking the not-given, or generosity. There are of course fundamental issues of ownership, rightful ownership, apparent ownership, collective ownership, non-ownership, respect for others and others' rights, and theft, all of which become secondary to one's sense of generosity (and transcending the sense of materialism and egoism that pervade ordinary human relationships).

In the deeper sense one does not ever really own anything. Ownership is therefore merely apparent. This world and the "things" in this world do not belong to anyone, nor to everyone, but to God. Collective ownership is a step in the right direction (of understanding and respecting things in the world of

appearances), but even collective ownership is merely apparent. Bigger problems are simply attachment to things (possessiveness) and individuality in the sense of separativeness. The relatively unevolved tend to be attached to things, to be "possessive" of things and to (unconsciously if not consciously) exercise "individual" rights, which gives rise to competition, theft (stealing) (grasping), violence, etc. But as one evolves in consciousness, the student tends to be less attached to things, to think (and feel (and behave) less separatively, to be more gracious and to be more generous. To embrace goodwill as an end in itself.

But in the more pragmatic and worldly sense, there is apparent ownership of things, and the spiritual student should endeavour to respect other people and their apparent property and their apparent property rights. People are more correctly stewards of property (and money). Apparent "possession" conveys responsibility for proper utilization of that property or financial resource. And in not being attached to "one's own" property, and in looking more toward some greater perceived good, the evolving student becomes increasingly charitable and generous (and more gracious in human relationships). And since there is no real ownership (and no real limit to energy or substance), being generous tends to evoke more resources to be utilized for the good of all.

But this second precept has actually a much broader context than merely respecting the (apparent) property rights of others, being much more than simply a discouragement from stealing what appears to belong to others (i.e., wrong appropriation). It is really about not taking from others what is not freely given. So "ownership" (and apparent ownership) is not the real issue. Taking what is not freely given is a form of violence. And it matters not that in the world there maybe a majority of people who look out for themselves at others' apparent expense, the preclusions from violence and from hurting others in any way still hold. The spiritual student lives according to higher values. And loses nothing in doing so. There is no real advantage that one person has over another. That is all a matter of worldly perspective, seeing things superficially, according to appearances, rather than according to the underlying truth and reality.

In some sense the second precept follows as an extension of the first, as (true) love naturally begets generosity as is essentially incompatible with "ownership"

and other separatively individualistic notions. Indeed, in the higher sense there is no distinction between the giver, the gift, and the recipient. And in the broader sense, generosity includes not "taking" someone's time or energy (vitality), it includes faithfully honoring all of one's debts and obligations to others, and it includes being generous and gracious without regard to the existence of graciousness and gratitude in others.

† Commentary No. 1283

The Third Precept

The third precept is the principle of abstention from sexual misconduct, or contentment. There are actually two dimensions to this precept, one concerned with avoiding or transcending sexual misconduct in the normal sense and the other, relatively more noble, concerned with transcending (absolute) identification with one's sexual state. In either case, the intended and inferred result is contentment.

Sexual misconduct means different things to different peoples and varies according to diverse cultural and national and racial and religious contexts. But fundamentally, sexual misconduct refers to physically and emotionally and mentally unhealthy sexual practices, i.e., practices (perverted and otherwise) that undermine spiritual growth (primarily through over-identification with the body and over-indulgence in the pleasures of bodily experience). This does not preclude healthy sexual relationship, but it does discourage any sexual extremes that become ends-in-themselves (attachments) (obsessions) and it discourages any sexual practice which is harmful in any way to the participants and/or to others. For example, infidelity (in marriage or in committed relationship) is substantially harmful, to the participants, to the associated non-participants, and to the marriage or relationship itself. It is harmful primarily because it is separative, it undermines the energy and quality of the relationship, the connectedness of the partners. Similarly, sexual experience as an end in itself is substantially harmful. It tends to keep a person at the material level and undermines growth in consciousness. Thus the more obvious sense of abstention from sexual misconduct is the facilitation of harmlessness and opportunities for spiritual growth. It matters not that it may appear that no one

is (obviously) hurt; much of the harm from sexual misconduct occurs on more subtle levels.

But the less obvious sense has to do with identification (or non-identification) with one's sexual state. And the intent is to encourage spiritual students to not identify (absolutely) with being male or female, but to appreciate that on a higher level (the soul) people are androgynous, that sexual dimorphism only exists superficially and in the lower worlds of human endeavor, and not in the higher worlds. Thus to identify with being male or female, without appreciation for the "other" half of one's own being, is misguided to some extent. This is not to deny that one is male or female on some practical level, with associated instincts and needs, and naturally heterogeneously sexual, but to focus more on being a more complete person, without identifying so completely or absolutely with one or the other sex.

Again the keyword is non-separativeness. Identifying with being male or female is inherently separative. In realizing that one is both male and female, with one predominating on this level, and that one is non-sexual at the soul level and beyond, one can begin to transcend the separative nature and touch more clearly the higher common energies. In principle, there is a natural "progression from a state of biological and psychological sexual dimorphism to a state of spiritual androgyny." But this progression should not be (indeed, cannot be) forced. It simply happens as it needs to, based on overall progress in consciousness. And "spiritual androgyny" does not necessarily mean that one ceases to function as a male or as a female, but it does imply that one no longer identifies exclusively with being one or the other.

In sexual dimorphism there is an underlying tension between the sexes. In true communion (of male and female, in partnership and within oneself) there is only contentment.

† Commentary No. 1294

The Fourth Precept

The fourth precept is the principle of abstention from false speech, or truthfulness. It is the first of four precepts nominally concerning speech. Speech is one of four modes or means of action (thinking, feeling, speaking, and doing) and each of these four precepts embraces all four modes to some extent. These precepts, in the context of each of the four modes of action, are all a matter of harmlessness. Doing something physically is most obviously an action with potential consequences. Speaking is also physical and evokes consequences on two levels, the import of the words in waking-consciousness, i.e., what they actually mean to oneself or to someone else, and the import of the words in some higher sense. Feeling and thinking are less physically obvious, but nonetheless convey (more subtle) energy that has import.

Truthfulness is important in at least two regards, namely in the sense that thinking, feeling, speaking, or doing other than truthfully and honestly is harmful to others, directly (in ways relatively obvious) and indirectly (in less obvious, more subtle ways), and in the sense that thinking, feeling, speaking, or doing other than truthfully is harmful to oneself, i.e., in undermining the ability to discern the truth. Conversely, speaking (thinking) (feeling) truthfully, honestly (and kindly) is not harmful. Being honest (sincerely embracing what is believed to be true) is essential to being truthful (actually embracing actual truth). Thoughts, feelings, spoken words all have potentially tangible effects in the world. Truthful expressions are inherently harmless or constructive (evolutionary). Untruthful expressions are inherently harmful or destructive (counter-evolutionary).

Much of speech (as much of action) is based on conditioning, on habits various and cultural constraints in the context of some perceptive framework. And one's relative truthfulness likewise. Thus one should endeavor to break whatever conditioning there is, whatever mechanicalness, so that one can proceed more consciously and responsibly, as honestly and as truthfully (and as kindly) as one can. The single biggest hindrance to progress in consciousness is the relative inability to discern and embrace the truth. The mind is so filled with conditioned thoughts, and speaking so filled with conditioned speech, that

these inhibit the ability to see and hear and feel and sense any deeper, broader truth. So the student is first exhorted to be increasingly and more objectively self-observant, that one's tendencies in thinking and feeling and speaking can be recognized, and then in recognizing the habits there is encouragement (exhortation) to improve one's embrace of worldly experience and expression by more and more consciously engaging the truth as it is understood.

One of the hindrances to this process is the tendency for a person to unconsciously identify with what is thought, felt, or spoken, rather than to realize that much (if not all) of this emerges from the lower self, more or less independently of the (higher) consciousness. As long as the ego is primarily engaged in the process, then progress will be tempered. Embracing truthfulness allows the higher consciousness to (gradually) emerge into the waking-consciousness. Truthfulness encourages communication and understanding. Truthfulness means minimizing and eventually eliminating bias (exaggeration or discounting, exercising "favor" rather than being objective).

Being sincerely harmless is relatively easy (being actually harmless is much more difficult (because of the relative lack of awareness or realization of what is harmful). Speaking honestly (being honest) and speaking truthfully (being truthful) is relatively more difficult.

† Commentary No. 1295

The Fifth Precept

The fifth precept is the principle of abstention from harsh speech, or embracing kindly speech. Keeping in mind that what is true for speech is also largely true for thinking and feeling and doing, speaking harshly (crudely) (profanely) (loudly) (unkindly) (critically) (judgmentally) literally poisons the atmosphere and so the import is not merely in how another person reacts to the words or the context of the words, but also to the atmosphere engendered by the words. And while speech, per se, may be brief, the atmosphere charged by harsh words is substantially more persisting. Conversely, an atmosphere charged by kindly words also persists and much more constructively encourages communication and understanding (and good (healthy) (constructive) human relationships).

But harsh speech is not merely that which is crude or profane. It is also anything that is unkindly, obviously (apparent to most senses) and not-so-obviously (what is not so apparent to the senses). Thus critical (thinking) (feeling) speech is unkindly and harmful. And non-critical (thinking) (feeling) speech is potentially kindly and helpful (if also true or at least honest). honest, kindly speech purifies, raises the quality and vibration of the atmosphere. Untruthful, not-so-kindly speech poisons the atmosphere and lowers the quality and vibration. And of course what is conveyed to others through (the energy of) thinking, feeling, speaking, and doing is also simultaneously conveyed to oneself. If one speaks unkindly of or to others, then that (unkind) energy enfolds the speaker as well.

Kindly speech includes being truthful and being gentle and being considerate and being courteous and being polite. Kindly speech comes in two forms, a lower form of that which is spoken kindly from the head or intellect (i.e., what is contrived) and a higher form of that which is spoken kindly from the heart (i.r., what is uncontrived and non-mechanical, what flows naturally from the heart). Thus the student who embraces kindly speech (should) also be embracing the unfolding of the heart and the tempering of the head-centered nature. For it is (only) the head-centered nature that can be harsh or critical or judging. And (only) the heart-centered nature that is uncontrivedly (naturally) kindly and gentle.

Kindly speech is an aspect of harmlessness and a refinement of truthfulness in speech. In effect, truth is kindly. If one speaks unkindly then one is not embracing the truth (and likewise, if one speaks untruthfully then one is not speaking kindly). Those who "embrace" truth in the (merely) head-centered sense are missing a great deal. Those who think, feel, speak, or behave separatively likewise. For truth and kindness and gentleness and courtesy promote rapport, while the lack of truth and/or the lack of kindness and/or the lack of gentleness and/or the lack of courtesy are inherently separative. Those who think and feel and speak and behave independently or without regard for the collective context are separating themselves from themselves. On the other hand one must also be free to think and feel and speak and behave according to conscience rather than mechanically according to the unconscious and conscious expectations of the masses. And realizing that withholding harsh speech is not

sufficient, for harsh thinking and harsh feeling are also quite consequential, and care must be taken to examine that which is thought and felt but not spoken.

But speaking kindly (embracing kindness) is not merely a matter of relating to other human beings but also to other lives (e.g., animal, plant, mineral). All things and all lives (and all actions) are interrelated.

† Commentary No. 1326

The Sixth Precept

The sixth precept of Buddhism is the principle of abstention from frivolous or idle speech, or, in the more positive framing, the principle of meaningful speech. There are a number of occult or metaphysical aspects to speech, namely that speech requires and consumes energy, that speech tends to constrain the mind and attention to the content and quality of speech (and to the quality of the content of speech), and that speech (words and sound) both attracts and conveys energy, for good or ill. The first of these is not so important, but the second and third aspects are the focus of the sixth and seventh precepts, respectively.

Frivolous speech suggests speech that simply has little or no value except to the ego. Most people are asleep. They tend to speak, mechanically and superficially, according to their conditioning and according to the tendencies and needs of the ego. There is a momentum to habits of speaking, such that frivolous speech tends to maintain the status quo, effectively preventing or inhibiting progress. The danger is in the sense of constraining the mind and attention, preventing the mind from focusing on more meaningful issues, inhibiting awareness of what is actually significant. Thus idle chatter is counter-evolutionary. It sustains the bondage of mechanicalness. It sustains the sleep of those who are engaged and entangled in banal endeavors. And it prevents deepening leading to enlightenment.

Meaningful speech is another matter altogether. It has (some) value, it is the speech of encouragement to others, speech that helps the mind to focus on issues of significance, or speech that encourages or facilitates goodwill without

being banal. It does not mean that only speech that pertains to the spiritual path is meaningful, but that meaningless speech should not be engaged. One needs not to speak unless there is meaningfulness in speaking, contrived or otherwise. But many people speak as an unconscious end in itself, masking the need of the ego to control the personality. This wastes energy, keeps the mind needlessly occupied and distracted, and strengthens the mundaneness of life. While meaningful speech is constructive and leads away from that which inhibits progress, leads from being asleep to being not quite asleep.

If one is truly committed to the spiritual path then there is a natural reluctance to speech, a natural uncontrived reticence that is overcome only naturally as the inner senses evoke gentle, meaningful speech. Those who engage in idle chatter are simply not focused on anything meaningful and are simply not in tune with their inner nature. That is okay for most people, but not for the spiritual student, Buddhist or otherwise. Many people have minds which grasp, and are easily distracted by external circumstances (stimuli), which are continually entertained by stimuli and responding to stimuli in an almost never-ending sequence. But the spiritual student is more detached, more observant without grasping, without being engaged or entangled in events and circumstances, but simply able to respond as (truly) needed, according to (higher) quality of consciousness.

Furthermore, meaningful speech is in a sense a means to enlightenment, as it tends to help to focus the attention of the mind on the path and on consciousness. And eventually, the subsequent-consequent natural reticence leads to a more gentle and more quiet mind, one that is more capable of apprehending (deeper) truth simply by virtue of its non-grasping nature (and more refined, less personal, less worldly nature). No wonder then that in some serious schools there are prohibitions from speaking.

† Commentary No. 1327

The Seventh Precept

The seventh precept of Buddhism is the principle of abstention from malicious or slanderous or untruthful or otherwise harmful speech, or, in the more positive framing, the principle of harmonious and harmonizing and constructive and truthful speech.

The basic notion is that speech can be harmful and the spiritual student must endeavor to not be harmful in his or her speaking, thinking, or feeling, all of which broadcast energy that can impact other people, regardless of proximity (more properly, regarding people who are proximate and regarding people to whom the speech, thought, or feeling is related, regardless of how proximate those people may be). While speech is rather potent, one should not forget that thoughts and feelings also convey energy, for good or ill. Speech is usually accompanied by thoughts and feelings (and sometimes vice versa) which in turn intensify whatever energy is conveyed.

Harmful or slanderous speech (thinking) (feeling) is not simply saying something unpleasant or untoward to or about someone, or something that is overtly or indeliberately malicious, but any form of critical or judgmental or separative or dishonest (or untruthful) speech is inherently harmful, to others and to oneself (all energy conveyed ultimately returns to the sender). The human being (and the mind) is inherently creative, sending forth creative energies that impact the surrounding atmosphere and circumstances. Thus harmful speech is inherently self-reinforcing. The mind develops patterns that are very hard to relinquish or transcend. Slanderous speech is especially pernicious and reinforces one's tendencies in that direction. If one speaks (thinks) (feels) ill toward or about someone, then that tends to reinforce one's perception of that person, regardless of additional experience that may be contrary to one's perception and judgment.

Slanderous or harmful speech is that which comes from relative coarseness, from the coarse mind and from the coarse (closed) heart. As the student becomes more refined in consciousness, there is increasing clarity and refinement in thinking and feeling (and therefore in speaking). More constructive (more

refined) speaking then reinforces the refinement in consciousness, because it does not embrace or attract coarseness (coarse energy, coarse people), but tends to embrace and attract that which is comparably refined. Even well-intentioned (believed to be truthful) gossip is inherently harmful and separative. If one cannot naturally say something nice about someone then one should simply refrain from speaking (there is never any real obligation to speak, it is simply a matter of social conventions and (mundane) cultural conditioning). The challenge is really to observe one's own thinking and feeling and speaking so that one can reinforce the expression of positive (constructive) (gentle) energies and discourage the expression of negative (harmful) (separative) energies.

But the real object here is to bring about more harmonious conditions, both within oneself and within the immediate environment, within relationships with people, and within the broader collective consciousness. Thus abstention from slanderous speech in its more positive framing actually contributes directly to this object. Speech is creative, and refined (gentle, considerate, harmonious, truthful) speech is creatively harmonizing, i.e., tends to bring about harmonious conditions. This does not imply the avoidance of issues that need to be resolved, but it does imply that through harmony conflicts (illusions) can be more effectively resolved.

† Commentary No. 1328

The Eighth Precept

The eighth precept of Buddhism is the principle of abstention from covetousness and avariciousness, or, in the more positive framing, the principle of tranquility. Covetousness is considered in its broader, deeper context of seeking or striving for that which belongs to the lower self or not self, while tranquility is simply a consequence and expression of not striving in this sense.

Covetousness in this sense implies wanting something for the separated (superficial) self (ego) (personality), and/or brooding about something pertaining to that outer, lower self. It is another sense of self-absorption or self-centeredness, but not necessarily selfishness, instead of accepting one's immediate circumstances and remaining focused on the way or process of evolution in consciousness (spiritual path), one unfortunately allows the mind to

be distracted by some object in consciousness, something external or worldly, which can never actually be embraced. In one extreme it is a matter of desiring something that belongs elsewhere or through greed, in the other extreme it is simply (wastefully, unnecessarily) brooding over one's circumstances and not liking them.

Covetousness in this sense is a mental or emotional state that tends to pervade the waking-consciousness, undermining the fulfillment of whatever is actually needed. In some sense it is simply a matter of being passively (defaultedly) absorbed in mundane and personal things rather than being actively engaged in higher and more noble endeavors. It is also a matter of being entangled in the distinction between oneself and that which is beyond the immediate consciousness, i.e., between that which covets and that which is coveted, without realization of the lack of (actual) distinction. It is a product of immersion in matter (material existence) (the external world) and egoism, and something that must eventually be worked through and transcended. It is also a matter of the absence of proper meditation and meditative awareness.

In meditation, if properly engaged, the student is able to shift the focus of consciousness away from the coarse and personal and worldly, to more refined, less personal, less worldly, more noble endeavors. As one becomes more meditative, and as one carries that energy (qualification) into the day-to-day life (experience and expression), then one naturally becomes less covetous and more tranquil. Not passive, but actively tranquil. Through proper meditation the student tames and tempers the monkey mind and the grasping, seeking mind. Through proper meditation one overcomes melancholy and self-absorption. Through proper meditation one refines the waking-consciousness and the entire aura (physical, etheric, emotional, and concrete mental nature). The result is properly a state of active tranquility in which one can engage experience and expression more meaningfully and more effectively, and necessarily without appreciable entanglement.

Tranquility is a very positive state. Tranquility suggests and implies (and conveys) serenity and poise, equanimity and steadiness. It is a place where one is free from disturbing influences, and yet, in the higher sense, also a place where one can function effectively in the world without becoming absorbed or entangled. A properly relaxed mind (and accompanying disposition) is one that

can interpret sense impressions without exuding bias, one that is relatively responsive to higher impression and not (merely) an end in itself. Thus freedom from covetousness is quite preceptive.

† Commentary No. 1329

The Ninth Precept

The ninth precept of Buddhism is the principle of abstention from hatred, or, in the more positive framing, the principle of compassion. Again it is not simply a matter of not doing something, but of actively embracing a positive principle. Hatred is a very violent emotion and conveys energy forcefully even if not expressed in physical or physically violent terms. Hatred is entirely inconsistent with the higher Self and all spiritual principles. It is a great separator (in consciousness), between human beings and between a human being and the God within.

In the broader context of this ninth precept, hatred also includes contempt and despite and malevolence and ill will. Each of these conditions in consciousness constitutes a profound sickness (illness in consciousness), an emotional-mental disease that if not checked will eventually result in substantive physical illness. In such illness the aura is profoundly impaired, opened and vulnerable to the coarser elements. In some sense this precept is hardly worth addressing, as it should be obvious to anyone who contemplates a spiritual endeavor that any embrace of evil (selfish) intentions is simply inconsistent and incompatible with the path and its practices. One cannot possibly meditate, cannot possibly find the God within, if one engages in coarse practices. Hatred is simply an extreme form of coarseness, an identification with the basest human (animal) nature. In another sense hatred is simply an extension of covetousness, allowing the waking-consciousness and marshaled personal energies to be focused on whoever-whatever seems to be between the one who covets and whatever is coveted.

Hatred is in the final analysis simply a matter of extreme inner discontent. One does not actually hate another person without necessarily and simultaneously hating oneself (despite whatever other illusions or delusions there may be). And the inverse of hate is compassion. It is a gently growing

compassion for others (without discrimination) that eventually conquers one's atavistic and separative tendencies. One cannot resolve any of the more subtle challenges along the way without first overcoming the basest elements of human nature. And compassion is the principal means.

The first task would seem to become aware of the dangers and implications of hatred. Only then is it likely for someone to be able to become aware of his or her own nature in this regard (the second task, awareness or realization of one's hatred). Then it is a matter of checking the active form of hatred, i.e., in not expressing the energy, then a matter of transforming one's tendencies in these regards into something more noble. Eventually one passes through neutrality (detached indifference, not hating, not loving) and comes to compassion, and the positive phase begins. This is where the precept is really intended, for the spiritual student to more actively embrace compassion, both in everyday relationships with other human beings, with regard to all of humanity collectively and in its various components, and all of life's creatures.

Embracing compassion does not mean necessarily that one will never encounter hatred in others, but it does mean that one will respond to hatred not in kind but with compassion. If there is no coarseness within, then one is simply unresponsive (invulnerable) to external coarseness. Moreover and more properly one who embraces compassion has a very positive effect on his or her surroundings and all of the people who are encountered thereby. And since all people are connected on some level, the collective healing influence of compassion is quite profound.

† Commentary No. 1330

The Tenth Precept

The tenth and final precept of Buddhism is the principle of abstention from false views, or, in the more positive framing, the principle of wisdom. But what are false views? They are views (beliefs) derived from the world of appearances, of the material world and through ego. They are beliefs that sustain the illusion of ego and the place of that superficial individuality in the world. They are natural and common beliefs but derived from false premises (that the external world is real and that the ego (personality) (lower self) is substantive).

The problem is that (wrong) beliefs tend to become doctrines or principles that are embraced consciously or otherwise but which qualify and condition how one relates to the world and to other people (which condition how one experiences and expresses oneself in the world). If one believes in the separated individuality, then one is likely to act on the basis of apparent self-interest rather than more nobly. If one believes that this (apparent) world is all that there is, then one relates to that world accordingly. If one believes that "man" is superior to animals and that animal lives do not really matter, then one tends to live accordingly, i.e., in killing animals and eating flesh. Thus most of what is relatively common practice (behavior that is selfish or self-centered) is based on wrong belief. Or, in the terminology of the previous two precepts, wrong beliefs are derived from covetousness, hatred, and/or delusion, from a (conscious or unconscious) sense of separateness and separativeness.

Wrong belief is not so much a matter of beliefs that are unfounded or untrue, but a matter of seeing things wrongly in some broader or more fundamental sense. It is more pernicious than simply having a difference of opinion. Indeed, all differences of opinion are derived from wrong belief (not that one is right and another is wrong but that both are wrong because both are based on the illusion of separation (truth and reality are based on something much deeper and do not engender conflicting "differences" but engender harmonious diversity)). And right belief is not so much a matter of being "right" about something as it is a matter of seeing things in a deeper sense. Indeed, the basis of wisdom is not right belief but the assimilation of understanding (which is based on the assimilation of knowledge). Wisdom is not about beliefs at all. Beliefs are

inherently separative. Opinions even more so. Wisdom is about seeing things as they are rather than as they appear to be. Beliefs, opinions, knowledge, even understanding are based on superficial comprehension (at the personality level), while wisdom is based on something higher and deeper, the conscience, intuition, or love-wisdom of the soul.

In this context, right beliefs and right views are a matter of non-attachment to beliefs, to non-view. Awareness and enlightenment and realization do not relate to having right beliefs in contrast with wrong beliefs, but in being free to see things without the impediment of "having" beliefs or being attached to beliefs, having opinions, convictions, etc. One is not therefore aimless or unfounded, but is rather simply living from conscience rather than conviction, from a sense of what is right(eous) rather than from some rationalization or judgment or cultural conditioning.

So. How does one become wise? Through self-observation, through the gradual and deliberate refinement of one's nature, through dedication to truth, through embracing harmlessness and honesty and humility. Through allowing wisdom (the higher self) to emerge.

Section 6.222

Confucianism

- Confucianism is a "religion" of ethics emphasizing "filial piety, justice, propriety, benevolence, intelligence, and fidelity." One of the basic elements of Confucianism is belief in the inherent goodness of human nature. Consistent with the deeper tradition of all the world's great faiths, that inherent goodness needs to be cultivated or evoked into manifestation.

† Commentary No. 1336

Confucianism

Confucianism is a "religion" or moral philosophy of ethics, emphasizing "filial piety, justice, propriety, benevolence, intelligence, and fidelity." Confucianism is arguably the dominant philosophical system in China and enjoys a peaceful coexistence (complementarity) with both Buddhism and Taoism, indeed the distinctions between these three religions in Chinese culture is not so clear, nor between Confucianism and Chinese culture and philosophy in general. Yet much that is a matter of "Chinese" philosophy is loosely associated with Confucianism.

Confucianism was founded by Confucius. Confucius was a social scientist and humanistic psychologist. Much of the classical Confucian literature is ascribed to Confucius or to his subsequent Mencius. The principal scriptures are the four books, namely the Analects of Confucius, the Meng-tzu, the Ta-hsueh (the Great Teaching), and the Chung-yung (the Application of the Center). Confucius and his philosophy have had a profound effect on Chinese culture. In Confucianism, virtuous conduct begins in principle with the head of state and extends throughout the government and culture. The family is an important aspect of Confucianism, and it is a special place where virtues are expounded, developed, and experienced. Society is perceived in some sense as an extension of the family.

One of the basic elements of Confucianism is belief in the inherent goodness of human nature. Consistent with the deeper tradition of all the world's great faiths, that inherent goodness needs to be cultivated or evoked into manifestation. By seeing the good and acknowledging the good one is encouraging the good to grow. Mencius was a strong proponent of this idea (inherent goodness), while Hsun-tzu suggested that people are inherent evil and need to be reformed (i.e., learn goodness). There is truth in both perspectives, but the notion of inherent goodness more readily allows and affords cultivation of compassion and other heart-centered qualities, while the notion of reformation is more a head-centered approach and somewhat less effective. Another basis of Confucianism is living in harmony, among peoples and with

nature. Relationships are properly and ideally motivated entirely through love (humane love).

Another way of looking at Confucianism is through Confucius' notion of the ideal man (sage) (wise man) (perfected human being). The ideal man (person) has four characteristics, namely yi, jen, li, and chih. Yi is simply the best way of doing things, i.e., by living naturally (uncontrivedly) in accord with one's own inner nature (essential goodness). As yi is applied to social interactions, it embraces two major principles, namely reciprocity and sincerity. Jen is humane love or goodwill, accepting others as they are, allowing others to live in accord with their own inner nature. Jen is also considered as a willingness to live in accordance with yi, according to principles of harmony. Li is propriety, the link between one's inner nature and outer expression. One needs to embrace inner and outer harmony. Differences between inner and outer nature arise from insincerity. But in living properly (in accord with yi) and embracing jen, then one also embraces li. Li also refers to adherence to (proper) (social) ritual. Chih is wisdom, the fourth characteristic of the wise man. This is not about knowledge or even understanding, but simply living confidently-harmoniously.

The wise person embraces all of these characteristics, indeed, embodies them all. The wise person simply lives from a higher, deeper place in consciousness. And this place is found through embracing the way.

Section 6.2221

Aspects of Confucianism

- These are really aspects of Chinese culture and philosophy rather than Confucianism per se, but include the principle of yin and yang, and the art of feng shui.

† Commentary No. 528

Yin and Yang

Yin and yang are the two great opposite but complementary forces at work in the cosmos. The interaction of these two great forces produces all form and all phenomena within the entire realm of creative manifestation. Although the terms (yin and yang) are Chinese in origin, the principles which they represent are derived from first principles in the esoteric philosophy and recur in every major exposition of metaphysical philosophy and (at least symbolically) in every major religion.

Yin is the supreme feminine (negative) principle (power) (force), characterized by the earth, darkness, cold, and passivity. Yang is the supreme masculine (positive) principle (power) (force), characterized by the heavens, brightness, warmth, and activity. Cosmological (anthropological) evolution (progress) occurs as the two great forces wax and wane in a complementary manner (as one increases in activity the other decreases). Dynamic equilibrium is maintained at all times such that a balance exists between yin and yang throughout the duration of the manifested universe. Nothing can exist without both yin and yang and nothing can progress without yin and yang.

Yin and yang are more properly referred to as yin-yang, as they are really just two aspects of one single principle. The resolution (balance) (realization) of yin-yang (yin and yang) produces wisdom (harmony) as does the resolution of any of the various pairs of opposites which are analogous. The ray correspondence of yin, yin-yang, and yang are (respectively) the third ray, the second ray, and the first ray (all at the level of triune manifestation) (note that yin and yang have no ray correspondence at the septenary level). Within the human form (as within the cosmos) both yin and yang are equally present, meaning that the human being can draw effectively upon both principles (and in effect live in yin-yang (consciousness)).

The concept of yin-yang is related to the various basic elements of manifestation, to the cyclic processes of becoming and dissolution, and to the relationship (interdependence) between cosmos (the world of nature) and the

individual (the world of man). Yin can be considered energy in the form of matter, while yang can be considered energy in the form of spirit. Harmony is the perfect balance of yin and yang. The separation of human forms into male and female is an extremely minor distinction in the overall context of yin and yang. In a major sense, yang is the force of momentum (progress), while yin is the force of inertia (balance); yang is the masculine aspect of the personality, while yin is the feminine aspect of the personality. Yin-yang is the dance of the cosmos, the progression of the seasons, and the middle ground of the Tao.

In the western (predominantly occult) tradition the various pairs of opposites are referred to consistently in order of male and female (positive and negative) (light and dark) (heavens and the earth) (active and passive), etc., while in the eastern (more predominantly mystical) tradition (at least in the Chinese tradition) these same terms are referred to (conversely) consistently in order of female and male (yin and yang) (at least in this symbolic sense). As the two cultures are inevitably and eventually blended, so is the western (occult) tradition moderated by the eastern (mystical) tradition (and vice versa). More properly the western blend of occultism and mysticism achieves a more effective balance of yin-yang as the influence of the eastern blend of mysticism and occultism is properly felt (and vice versa). In every case, the law of correspondence (laws of correspondence) insure that the proper balance (harmony) (yin-yang) is fulfilled.

† Commentary No. 1081

Feng Shui 1

Feng shui is the ancient Chinese art and science of arrangement (placement) based on underlying principles of energy flow. Those principles are common to all legitimate occult traditions. The objective is to arrange one's physical surroundings in a way that facilitates the positive (constructive) (favorable) (harmonious) flow of energy and minimizes the negative (destructive) (obstructive) flow, i.e., living in accord with natural forces. Proper feng shui encourages health and healing. Bad feng shui "encourages" misfortune. Forces that are properly balanced are constructive, bringing or encouraging well-being, ease, success in worthy undertakings. Where natural forces are blocked or impeded, the flow is less harmonious, more chaotic, less settled.

Feng shui means, literally, wind water. It is a matter of recognizing natural forces, predominantly ch'i and its various aspects, and balancing these forces in one's immediate environment and circumstances. It involves the placement of roads, buildings, furniture, doors, pictures, mirrors, etc., including aspects of color and sound. Everything must be considered in the context of ch'i and other elements, e.g., other things already placed in the immediate environment. The natural flow of wind and water are the obvious elements. Other elements are sunshine, the earth's magnetic field, terrain, etc. As an object is placed in the immediate environment it affects and potentially changes whatever feng shui was already extant.

There are two problems with feng shui. One is a matter of superstition, which results from occult principles applied without understanding, i.e., the association of practice with (true) purpose is lost to some extent as the principles are applied in ways that were not intended. Another is a matter of self-centeredness, as principles are applied without regard to the whole, e.g., in selfish or competitive ways rather than in ways that regard the best interests of all concerned. These problems notwithstanding, feng shui (and similar practices) offers much toward attunement to cosmic (energy) flow and facilitation.

One of the aspects of feng shui is color. The selection and placement (utilization) of color can have considerable effect on the waking-consciousness and the subconsciousness. However, those effects vary substantially depending on a person's particular conditioning and receptivity (and as well on combinations and patterns of color). Thus, association of a particular color with a particular effect or influence should not be generalized. In some oriental cultures, certain colors have very particular connotations that are quite contrary to their perception (acceptance) in other cultures.

Another aspect is geographical or spatial placement of objects (buildings) (doors). The key to successful placement is recognition of where the "energy" flows from and how it is affected by various placements, natural and otherwise. If one places a building, for example, in a way that obstructs the natural flow of energy, then there will result a somewhat (substantial) tempering of the natural encouragement, while if properly placed and oriented, a building will be qualified

or conditioned in an uplifting manner. Of course people respond in different ways, but without the presence of uplifting energy there is no possibility of upliftment. Thus feng shui is a matter of encouragement and facilitation rather than compulsion. It is not a matter of luck. It is a matter of allowing forces to flow in the way they need to flow in order for them to be fulfilled. Thus feng shui and karma are interdependent. Feng shui is simply a consideration of the karmic balance.

† Commentary No. 1082

Feng Shui 2

If one's placement and circumstances are harmonious, then karma is facilitated. If one's placement and circumstances are not harmonious, then karma is still facilitated. Because one's effective utilization of the principles of feng shui must necessarily be a matter of karma. One's good intentions (action, behavior, feelings, thoughts) in the context of one's harmonious nature and circumstances promote positive balance. If feng shui is utilized selfishly, e.g., to promote one's personal or business interests at the expense of others, then consequences will emerge that are consistent with that selfishness that are also consistent with the principles of feng shui. Thus while one cannot avoid one's karmic consequences, one can take action to encourage a harmonious setting in which learning and deepening are encouraged. "Bad" things can still happen in a "good" environment, but the flow will be more harmonious and lessons more likely to be learned.

Ch'i is continuously flowing. Where constrained there results an accumulation of force that eventually explodes into fulfillment. Where wholly unconstrained, there results a dispersion of force in empty spaces. The proper flow is a balance of complementary forces (yin and yang). It is a matter of drawing from the natural energies available (ch'i or prana) without over-drawing (through accumulation). While feng shui involves the actual balance of forces and harmonious flow, there is also a matter of perception.

Perception is very powerful, as it can undermine otherwise realistic beliefs and consequences. If one believes that one has good (bad) feng shui, then (real) consequences will tend to emerge that are consistent with that belief. But those

consequences must also be consistent with actuality and karma. The problem is that perception (belief) is a strong force that actually alters or conditions one's circumstances. In some cultures certain colors are considered favorable and others unfavorable (which may be just the opposite or quite different in some other cultures)); in those cultures, the widespread perception of color favorableness will have an effect on emerging consequences. Thus feng shui has both a basis in actuality (yin and yang, ch'i) (karma) and a basis in cultural values and perception. But it is still primarily a matter of "living harmoniously in, rather than conquering, the natural world."

Feng shui is a matter of rules and superstition. What is not based in actuality is largely a matter of superstition, but superstitious belief still carries some weight (force). Some elements of feng shui have no basis in underlying (actual) principles, and are limited to the consequences of belief (suggestion). Some elements are real and remain in effect to some extent regardless of one's beliefs to the contrary. A feng shui master, one who is adept in these matters, is not one who understands the rules, but is one who accurately and intuitively senses the balance and flow or forces (and context) and who can see the effects of alternative placements, i.e., it is a matter of accurate perception (awareness) and common sense. Reliance on prescription (rules) in feng shui risks falling prey to superstition. Far better to understand the underlying principles and draw on insight or natural sensing.

On the other hand, in order to be affected by any balance or imbalance of forces one must be receptive. Most people are unconsciously and substantially (passively) receptive to environmental circumstances (external forces). But one can learn to be intelligently limited or selective in one's receptivity, e.g., being receptive only to positive feng shui (constructive influence) and indifferent to negative feng shui. This requires effort and training.

† Commentary No. 1083

Feng Shui 3

There are many prescriptive rules and there are many underlying principles. Many of the prescriptive rules are largely superstition and habits of cultural significance (only). Feng shui is related tangentially (not necessarily intelligently) to various means of divination, such as the I Ching, and astrology. While each of these has some value and validity, the underlying principles of feng shui do not involve divination, etc. (though divination may properly involve some of the same underlying principles).

The objective in feng shui is to encourage a positive balance of yin and yang, such that ch'i can circulate freely. One does not normally want a preponderance of either yin or yang. One should simply seek a positive balance and ensure that there are no obstructions to the flow. One should (properly) avoid competing with one's neighbors, and place one's own circumstances in the broader (community) context. Thus the flow "improves" for all.

Much of feng shui with regard to geographical and architectural factors is a matter of what "feels right" and is therefore comfortable. In rural areas placement and orientation with regard to terrain (mountains, hills, rivers, streams, lakes) affect the flow. Likewise placement and orientation with regard to the ecliptic (the apparent path of the sun) may be important. One should discern how the natural energies (forces) flow and place one's house accordingly. In rural areas it is primarily a matter of natural terrain and the "flow" of wind and water (and sunshine). In urban areas it is also a matter of how other buildings interact with the natural flow. In both rural and urban areas, one should not underestimate the subconscious influence of symbolic factors (e.g., an ominous-looking peak or building may or may not obstruct the flow substantially, but it may also convey its ominousness subconsciously (by suggestion)). Metaphorical and symbolic factors may therefore have some significance depending on receptivity (and provide some basis for superstition). Even place names can be suggestive.

In any construction endeavor, consideration should be made for the natural terrain and disturbance should be minimized. Where human activity upsets the

balance significantly, forces of nature are generally thereby evoked to restore the balance. Better to live in harmony with existing natural conditions than to engineer substantial changes. Modern ecological and environmental "concerns" are largely a recapitulation of ancient insight into the flow of ch'i and the balance of forces. Human arrogance has its price in consequences, but proper care for the environmental context encourages harmonious living and growth in consciousness.

In addition to the underlying natural principles, there is also a matter in feng shui of personal values. Personal values (perception) may weigh rather heavily. Some people are more comfortable at higher, more exposed elevations, others at lower, more protected elevations. Some people are more comfortable with trees in their natural setting. Others are more comfortable with open spaces. In principle, one should seek and find whatever circumstances are most comfortable, without imposing on others and without imposing on the natural environment. The earth, and the planet as a whole, is alive. Humanity lives within this planetary whole but human beings do not reign over it (regardless of their presumptions). There is a natural balance and natural restorative forces. But there are also natural progressive forces (i.e., things change over time). In wisdom, one considers the natural balance of forces in applying the principles of feng shui.

† Commentary No. 1367

Xunzi and Goodness

Xunzi or Hsun-tzu was a Chinese philosopher, a Confucianist, who believed and taught that the human being is essentially evil and needs to be reformed in order to be able to embrace goodness. Xunzi is also the title of his book. This notion of good and evil (evil inherent) is somewhat in contrast to that of Confucianism proper, in which the human being is perceived as being essentially good and simply needs to be encouraged and goodness cultivated (goodness inherent).

In fact, the human being has within himself (herself) both good and evil tendencies, the pull of matter (ignorance and evil) and the pull of spirit (enlightenment and goodness). Indeed it is in the human experience that a

being first more-or-less-consciously encounters these forces or tendencies, and it is within the human being that these contrasting forces are resolved. Thus Confucius and Xunzi were both essentially right in their thinking about good and evil. These are simply two perspectives which complement each other and feature a particular focus. Much like the yin and the yang, there are various complementaries and it is the human being in manifestation who must eventually confront them and resolve them (harmony through contrast).

Most people tend to see the world and other people in accordance with their own experiences and understanding. If Confucius could see and feel the goodness within himself, then it was only natural for him to see that goodness in others and formulate or realize a philosophy based on this inherent goodness. And if Xunzi could see and feel the evil tendencies within himself, and yet seek goodness, then it was only natural for him to see those tendencies in others and seek ways of helping himself and other people to overcome them. So while the methods and basis of Confucius and Xunzi may have been somewhat different, the objectives were very much the same. Confucius emphasized cultivation of good, of seeking and finding the good and encouraging it to grow. And Xunzi emphasized teaching people to embrace the good, through cultural and societal forms. For one approach, the evil is simply ignored and allowed to wane. In the other the evil is confronted and a person implored to change, through education, and through moral guidance.

Indeed education is important to this process (embracing the good, from either perspective). In order for someone to embrace the good, he or she needs to be aware of the tendencies and consequences, to understand the value of goodness. To understand what is (relatively) right and wrong, what encourages progress (goodness) (evolution in consciousness) and what encourages retrogression (evil) (devolution in consciousness). In these regards the moral laws and (proper) cultural-social traditions of (relatively enlightened) society serve to actively encourage goodness.

But fundamentally it is a matter of the individual and his or her place in evolution (relative maturity) (relative ability to listen to and adhere to conscience). Thus some people are relatively coarse (inexperienced) and the evil (ignorance) (entanglement in matter) is strong, while others are relatively more refined (more experienced) and the goodness (conscience) (insight) is relatively

strong (and the evil is weak). Some need external encouragement through societal pressures, while others need only to listen to their own conscience (which should not be inconsistent with the proper (enlightened) encouragements of society). Most people need both. Because most people are in the middle and feel the pull of both good and evil. Indeed, even with the (relatively) enlightened there remains a small pull of matter (ego).

Section 6.223

Taoism

- Taoism is a religion and philosophy emphasizing "conformity to cosmic order (the Way or Tao) and simplicity of social and political organization." While Confucius was a moralist, Lao-Tzu (the "founder" of Taoism) was a mystic. Tao per se is perceived as that immanent and transcendent essence (God ?) that is beyond (normal) human comprehension. Tao may be approached and considered, but the experience cannot properly be related in terms of language. However, the philosophy (methods) (principles) of Tao enlivens the spiritual path in its mystical element and evokes practical applications. The mysterious nature of Tao, once realized, provides a certain magnetism to the spiritual path and its practice, drawing the student upward and onward (releasing the bonds of attachment in the lower world (and to the lower nature), providing real freedom and the means of proper expression of that freedom). In other words, accord with Tao implies or conveys freedom from (transcendence of) personality (ego) (intellect).

† Commentary No. 935

Tao Teh Ching

The Tao Teh Ching is one the classical books of eastern (Chinese) philosophy, attributed to the mystic and sage Lao Tzu. The title means, literally, "Classic of the Way and its Virtue" with Tao (the way (path)) and Teh (virtue) being the principal and interdependent elements of a mystical and practical approach to the spiritual path and living in the world consistently with that path.

Tao per se is perceived (or more correctly considered (contemplated)) as that immanent and transcendent essence (God ?) that is beyond (normal) human comprehension. In the mystical tradition, Tao may be approached and considered, but the experience cannot properly be related in terms of language. However, the philosophy (methods) (principles) of Tao enlivens the spiritual path in its mystical element and evokes practical applications. The mysterious nature of Tao, once realized, provides a certain magnetism to the spiritual path and its practice, drawing the student upward and onward (releasing the bonds of attachment in the lower world (and to the lower nature), providing real freedom and the means of proper expression of that freedom). In other words, accord with Tao implies or conveys freedom from (transcendence of) personality (ego) (intellect).

The consequent Taoism is considered one of the three traditional Chinese religions (along with Buddhism and Confucianism), with much interpretation of the Tao Teh Ching in the form of commentaries, etc., being widely available. But the fundamental philosophy of Taoism has much in common with Buddhism and Confucianism, although the emphasis is somewhat different. Tao provides the mystical element, and through the (human) struggle of life in the lower worlds the Tao is glimpsed, approached, and ultimately embraced in the sense of the student achieving accord with its principles.

Tao may be conceived (perceived ?) in its transcendental sense, but it may also be conceived in its sense of natural flow (the underlying evolutionary harmonious trend of nature (in contrast with the willfulness of the (lower) human nature). In this sense Tao embraces spiritual cultivation (ceaseless preparation for mystic meditation) as well as wu wei (according to Henry Wei,

"non-action in the sense of non-interference with the flow of Tao" (spontaneous action)). Spiritual cultivation implies qualification in various ways, e.g., the development of a peaceful mind, equanimity, detachment from worldly things (ideas), etc., development of Teh (virtue) (various appropriate virtues). Wu wei implies the spiritual practice of attention to duty in a conscientious yet effortless manner, without being willful, i.e., allowing the flow of Tao (in fact, Tao flows whether or not we are consistent, yet a person impedes the effects of that flow by virtue of willfulness, etc.). Teh proper includes (1) mystic virtue, (2) the virtue of non-contention, and (3) eternal virtue.

Tao is not a particular or specialized spiritual path. The Tao perspective is simply one way of perceiving the spiritual path that is ultimately common (albeit not necessarily evidently so) to all cultures and all peoples. The mystic meditation associated with Tao is not substantially different than the mystic meditation of the (proper) traditional Christian approach to the path (or that of any other God-centered religion). Tao (the way) involves both the art of mystic meditation and the art of associated discipline(s). Tao (its practice) (conduct and demeanor) (wisdom) is as applicable to government and leadership of people as it is to self-government (spiritual cultivation) (and to the apparently solitary and reclusive student of the inner path).

† Commentary No. 1337

Taoism 1

Taoism is very complementary to Confucianism in the sense that while Confucius was a moralist and psychologist-activist, Lao-Tzu, the founder of Taoism, was a more so a mystic. Taoism is a religion and philosophy emphasizing "conformity to cosmic order (the Way or Tao) and simplicity of social and political organization." Embracing spontaneous action, in accordance with natural needs.

In one sense Tao is Nature, the totality of natural forces. In another sense (little) Tao is human nature. And the object is to bring the Tao in conformity or harmony with Tao, to live the way of Tao. Taoism is sometimes called the effortless path, in the sense that the object is to allow the higher nature to manifest, rather than changing anything (in any unnatural sense). But Taoism

is by no means an easy path. In Taoism there is a sense that "conscious efforts to control people and events are counterproductive" and that one only needs to embrace the natural patterns. Taoism emphasizes self-reliance not in the sense of ego or individuality but in the sense of the person in his or her natural (divine) state. Clearly there is a popular, outer dimension to Taoism, and a more mystical inner dimension, but both rely on the same basic principles. In Taoism there is properly no quest for immortality, there is however an effortless embracing of immortality.

While Confucianism emphasizes adherence to harmonizing social conventions, Taoism emphasizes adherence to natural conventions, which are not inherently different from the Confucian social conventions. It is more a matter of perspective than distinction. Taoism is not properly a matter of intellectual consideration, it is more about feeling and sensing the natural path and choosing to live in accord with that path. It is about wu wei, non-selfishness, doing nothing, or simply not doing anything in any contrived manner, or effortless action. It is about connecting with the underlying natural force (universal elemental flow) and working with nature rather than (futilely) attempting to struggle with or impose upon nature. Man's folly in this sense is his arrogance in thinking that this is his world, to be manipulated according to his whims, rather than a world to be respected and (almost) revered. This acceptance of nature does not mean giving in to the lower human nature, but aligning oneself with the true (higher, human) nature (which is equivalent to the Tao).

The principal scripture of Taoism is the Tao Teh Ching but Taoism also embraces the writings of Chung-Tzu and others, the I Ching (Book of Changes), etc. In addition to the interplay between Confucianism and Taoism, there is also an interplay (state of mutual influence) between Buddhism and Taoism. Indeed, Zen is properly considered an outgrowth of this interplay rather than an extension or dimension of Buddhism.

Taoism has many facets, both religious and philosophic, elucidated in the Shamballa Guide to Taoism, including its shamanic origins, the transformation of Taoism from philosophy into organized religion, mystical Taoism, the development of alchemical Taoism, the role and place of Taoism in the synthesis of the three Chinese religions, magical Taoism or the way of power,

divinational Taoism or the way of seeing, ceremonial Taoism or the way of devotion, internal-alchemical Taoism or the way of transformation, and action and karma Taoism or the way of right action. All of which lead to various practices including meditation, cultivation of the personality, and rites of purification, ceremony, and talismanic magic.

† Commentary No. 1338

Taoism 2

The terminology of Taoism is predominantly Chinese and overlaps with that of Buddhism and Confucianism, but many of the concepts are similar to what is found in Sanskrit and in the more metaphysical aspects of all the world's religions and in theosophy.

Chai refers to fasting, especially in the sense of ceremonial acknowledgement of sins. Ch'ang refers to that which is constant or enduring. There is that which is (relatively) permanent and immutable, and that which is changeable or transient. Ch'ang-sheng pu-ssu refers to immortality, popularly regarding physical immortality (which is simply not important) but more properly regarding spiritual immortality (enlightenment). Chen-jen refers to the ideal human being, one who has achieved Tao. Ch'i refers to energy, and in the Taoist sense it is the vital or etheric or life energy. Of course all lives exist within the etheric web and ch'i or prana is crucial. Ch'i may be embraced in its higher (profoundly spiritual) as well as lower (physical-etheric) sense. There is some emphasis in Taoism on the breath and its proper utilization (also movement).

Fang-chung shu refers to various Taoist sexual techniques, literally the arts of the inner chamber, again both in some higher, more spiritual sense, and in some lower, more personal sense. In one sense it is a matter of conservation and transformation of energy, in another sense more a matter of sharing and balancing energy. There are in fang-chung shu similarities with tantra as well as more western, occult techniques. Fu refers to the movement of Tao, literally, returning. The universe is cyclic, the flow of energies through manifestation likewise. All outpourings are ultimately fulfilled and return to their source, both personal, collective, and universal. Hsin-chai refers to the purification of the

mind and allowing the heart to unfold, to listen to the intuition rather than the (common) senses.

Ju ching refers to the cultivation of silence prior to meditation, the process of quieting one's surroundings and one's mind, entering the silence. Ming refers to enlightenment (luminosity), to know and understand the Tao. Enlightenment comes not through knowledge, nor even understanding, but through wisdom. Ming also refers to destiny in the sense that all consequences are the natural outcome of their causes, and one should accept the inevitability of natural outcome, to work with the flow of things rather than against it. T'ai-chi refers to the ultimate reality. Tao-chia refers to philosophical or mystical Taoism and its emphasis on union with the Tao, while tao-chiao refers to religious Taoism and its emphasis on immortality. Tao-tsang refers to the Taoist canon of writings. Tso-wang refers to subjective meditation (meditation without object), embracing the flow of energy in meditation without allowing the mind to disturb the flow. Ts'un-ssu refers to more objective meditation, or concentration on some (worthy) object.

Tzu-jan refers to that which is true to itself, being spontaneous in the sense of being in accord with the Tao, embracing wu-wei or uncontrived action. Wu refers to the central concept of non-being or emptiness, being in the higher sense, beyond the senses. Wu-wei is another very central concept of philosophical Taoism, the notion of acting only in accord with the natural flow of things, i.e., non-intervention. In wu-wei one approaches the Tao. Yin and yang are the polar energies or manifestation of the Tao. In apprehending the nature of yin and yang one begins to apprehend the Tao. But in not apprehending the nature of yin and yang, one truly embraces the Tao.

Section 6.224

Shinto

- Shinto is the "ancient native religion of Japan." In the tradition of Shinto, Kami is all and all is Kami. Kami is God; Kami is the underlying power of creation and sustenance. Kami is life, cause and effect, and oneness. "Space and time, spacelessness and timelessness, all is Kami."

† Commentary No. 1254

Shinto 1

Shinto is the ancient native religion and indigenous tradition of Japan, the way of the gods, and the poetic reality of the senses. As a religion, Shinto is relatively diverse and means various things to various peoples at various times. Historically, Shinto would seem to be strongly related to Buddhism, with substantial influences from Taoism and Confucianism. There are also elements of yin-yang, folk religion, and naturalism. And for a while Shinto was also the official (national) religion of Japan.

There are a number of Shinto scriptures, none of which are considered "revealed" scripture but have considerable value nonetheless, e.g., Kokiji (Record of Ancient Things), Nikong (Chronicles of Japan), Yengishiki (Institutes of the Period of Yengi), and Collections of Ten Thousand Leaves. There are approximately 30 million Shinto adherents, mostly in Japan. Many adherents are also Buddhists. Japan (nippon) is the "land of the rising sun" and of course objectively the sun is the source of energy for the whole world and subjectively the inner source as well. There is some emphasis on the sun, e.g., himachi (awaiting for the sun, a tradition of remaining awake all night on certain nights, in ritual devotion).

As a word, Shinto means "gods" or "spirits" in the sense of the way (conduct) (power) of the kami. Kami refers to the underlying energy of something, the sacred, spiritual, living quality of beings and places and things. This underlying sense predates Buddhism and has survived the Buddhist influence, indeed has contributed to Buddhism. Shinto is also sometimes perceived as shen-tao and relates to the way in the same sense of Tao. But more objectively Shinto embraces the concept of kami. In the tradition of Shinto, kami is all and all is kami. Kami is God; kami is the underlying power of creation and sustenance. Kami is life, cause and effect, and oneness. "Space and time, spacelessness and timelessness, all is kami."

Some people think that Shinto is pantheistic, as adherents tend to perceive "gods" almost everywhere, in people, animals, plants, even places. But it is probably more correct to say that Shinto is not pantheistic, and that "kami" is

simply the sacredness of all lives and all things. But Shinto does tend to be ritualistic, involving many and various rites, festivals, and shrines. And yet there is little in the way of religious doctrine, theology, or congregational worship. It is a religion of personal practice and practical significance. Some people think that Shinto involves the worship of particular trees, rocks, mountains, and other objects, but it is probably more correct to say that Shinto involves the worship of the (one) sacredness that connects all things and is perceived (particularly) in particular places and things. There is no need for reason, there is simply a flow of kami.

Like most religions, there is a "higher" Shinto and a "lower" Shinto, though most "adherents" would not perceive it in these terms. In the lower sense, there is some emphasis on amulets and ritual celebrations and personal evocations, e.g., for safety and good fortune. In the higher sense, there is simply an embrace (acknowledgement) of the "kami" (the sacredness of God-in-all). While "nature" is important in Shinto, along with purity, sincerity, and tranquillity, it is really the underlying sacredness that matters. The real value of Shinto festivals and rituals is the assimilation of the gods, i.e., the embracing of sacredness in daily life. Shrines are (perceived as) gateways that facilitate that assimilation (embrace). The central role of the sun (God) is to unify all of the manifestations of kami.

† Commentary No. 1255

Shinto 2

Shinto has three main divisions, (1) state Shinto and (2) domestic Shinto, and (3) sect Shinto, but these are not in any real sense mutually-exclusive. State Shinto simply celebrates or embraces kami in a more nationalistic sense and at times has received funding from the Japanese government. Domestic Shinto simply emphasizes kami in its more personal, private sense, and usually involves a shrine and rituals within one's home.

In sect Shinto there are numerous sects including thirteen ancient sects, each with its own founder, which have obtained relatively more official status. According to The World's Living Religions, there are five groups of Shinto sects, (1) three pure Shinto sects, (2) two Confucian sects, (3) three mountain

sects, (4) two purification sects, and (5) three faith-healing sects. Each contributes substantially to Shinto as a whole. The pure Shinto sects are Shinto Kyo (Shinto Sect), Shinri Kyo (Divine Reason Sect), and Taishu Kyo (Great Shrine Sect). The Confucian sects are Shusei Ha (Improving and Consolidating Branch) and Taisei Kyo (Great Achievement Sect). The mountain sects are Jikko Kyo (Practical Conduct Sect), Fuso Kyo (Sacred Guardian Sect), and Ontake Kyo (Great Mountain Sect). The purification sects are Shinshu Kyo (Divine Learning Sect) and Misogi Kyo (Purification Sect). The faith-healing sects are Kurozumi Kyo, Konko Kyo (Glorious Unity Sect), and Tenri Kyo.

In the higher sense, Shinto is a very mystical religion, with emphasis on the sacredness of the universe and the process (facilitation) of the adherent's attunement to that sacredness, embracing the presence of the gods (God) and the flow of (sacred) (natural) energy. The process of attunement (communion) involves truthfulness and purification (refinement) such that a person's material nature can be overcome or transcended and the inherent divine nature revealed. Thus much of the ritual of Shinto involves honoring the presence of God. And because (where) Shinto is also embraced in the practical sense, the more common divisions of worldly and spiritual are not so much in evidence.

There are many and various Shinto concepts and notions with broader spiritual (not merely religious) value (see A Popular Dictionary of Shinto). Akaki suggests purity and cheerfulness of heart. Junrei suggests religious pilgrimage. Kakuriyo suggests the hidden world of kami and spirits. Kami-gakari suggests the descent of the kami, or the inspiration-revelation of inner spirit. Kami-mukae suggests the evocation of the kami. Kigan suggests prayer or supplication. Kotodama suggests "spirits residing in words" or words having mantric value (words embodying spiritual power). Majinai suggests magic. Makoto suggests true-heartedness (sincerity) (wholeheartedness) (conscientiousness) (loyalty). Misogi-harai suggests the process of purification and spiritual discipline.

O-kiyome suggests spiritual healing and more abstract purification. Sankei suggests pilgrimage (visiting a shrine). Seimei suggests purity and brightness (cheerfulness of heart). Sengu suggests the transference of kami from one shrine to another (i.e., qualification). Shinbatsu suggests (bad) karma (i.e., perceived

(improperly) as divine retribution). Shin'en suggests a sacred garden or precincts of a shrine. Shingaku suggests heart-learning. Shinmei suggests sacred brightness (kami). Shintoku suggests divine virtue or the influence (benefits) of kami. Shojiki suggests honesty (uprightness) (veracity) (frankness). Shojin suggests diligence (devotion) (making spiritual progress). Shusin suggests ethics. Tsumi suggests pollution (sin) (destructive action). And tsutsushimi suggests an attitude of propriety.

Section 6.225

Zen

- Zen is often considered an outgrowth of Buddhism, but is more properly considered as having elements of Buddhism and Taoism. In a sense it embraces the more mystical dimension of both and it is difficult (and not necessary) to discern where Buddhism and Taoism meet in Zen.

† Commentary No. 591

Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism is an aspect of the Buddha dharma that is concerned with self-discipline, meditation (dhyana), and attainment of enlightenment (bodhi) (self-realization) by direct intuition. Zen advocates (?) self-contemplation as the key to the understanding of the universe. That self-contemplation is not a matter of rational process, but is rather one of allowing the true self (the soul) to manifest through the properly qualified mind. The problem of achievement, then, is the cultivation of the no-mind.

Most religious disciplines involve scriptures and doctrines (assumed facts and rationalizations); Zen is more concerned with the process of realization, without regard to particular interpretations. In seeking the truth through introspection and intuition, the Zen adherent (?) subordinates the particulars (doctrines) (scriptures) to the process (mind-to-mind and soul-to-mind training) and its consequence (the awakening of transcendental wisdom (prajna) (the conscious realization of the wisdom of the soul)). While Buddhism is more a moral philosophy than a religion, Zen is more a true philosophical endeavor than a moral philosophy. While orthodox philosophy implies rational, discursive thinking and conceptualization, Zen (and true philosophy) implies spiritual realization without the entanglements of thinking. Though the Zen process is not strictly anti-rational, it is (in principle) wholly non-rational.

The Zen process includes meditation upon the meaning of various paradoxical or non-logical statements (koans) (riddles) which, in a sense, trains the mind to overcome its dependence on rational, logical processes (and other attachments that impede realization) and to rely instead on the silence (non-articulation) of Zen. Each koan is (typically) a demonstration of reality (fusion) that transcends the veils of objective (rational) experience. The quiet sitting (zazen) eventually leads to a state of enlightenment (satori) in which the non-abiding mind allows a total personal transformation, from being wholly absorbed in the outer (personal) world (of distinctions, illusions, and separations) to being absorbed in the world (fusion) of the soul (where (objective, rational) discrimination is replaced by (subjective, intuitive) (non-rational) discernment (realization)).

This mental tranquility (fearlessness) (humility) (spontaneity) of the non-abiding mind (non-discriminating consciousness) can be applied to the outer world experience (i.e., the silence of Zen can be articulated), but only where the reality of fusion (of subject and object) is maintained. Things (objective distinctions) belong to non-reality. Reality is (subjective) being, that includes the object and subject without distinction. The no-mind exists at the point of tension between the lower (concrete) (objective) mind and the higher (abstract) (subjective) mind, where the intuition (buddhi) of the soul can qualify the entire personal existence (personality). By comparison, the bulk of humanity sleep (dream) in the objective world, while the self-realized student (no-mind) is awake to the realities of being. The energy conveyed through satori is a great qualification and realization. Those who have achieved such realization are not wont to return to the delusions of the ego (self-centered duality), but strive (?) to remain self-realized (aligned with the soul) throughout the variety of daily experience and expression (i.e., to remain en rapport without withdrawal from the outer world).

What is called Zen is really an essential aspect of any spiritual path, regardless of particular religious or philosophical forum, for the essence of Zen is equivalent to the essence of the timeless (ageless) wisdom.

† Commentary No. 1339

Zen 1

Zen is usually considered an outgrowth or dimension of Buddhism, but it is more properly considered as having elements of Buddhism and Taoism. In a sense it embraces the more mystical dimension of both and it is difficult (and not necessary) to discern where Buddhism and Taoism meet in Zen. So whether Zen is perceived and considered and embraced in Buddhist or Taoist terms, it does not matter. The word "Zen" is derived in a round-about way from dhyana and implies advaita (non-dualistic) meditation.

While most religions and philosophies can be more or less effectively described in words, Zen is not so easily apprehended or described. There is, like in the

case of most religions and philosophies, an outer or popular version that is appealing by virtue of its glamour, and an inner or less popular but more meaningful version that is not appealing at all, but simply there for those who can embrace it, who are genuinely drawn to it. Zen is properly a non-intellectual tradition. It pertains to enlightenment and expounds vague principles, which if apprehended and embraced, do indeed lead to enlightenment, though not from doing but from being. Most people who approach Zen do so for the wrong reasons and in the wrong way, i.e., through glamour, and simply create more barriers. Those who are successful in approaching Zen, are drawn to Zen without glamour and simply leave themselves behind. For any sense of self is just another barrier.

Most people do not appreciate that much if not all of what is ordinary and commonplace, even necessary for most people, does in fact constitute a barrier to enlightenment. One simply cannot attain enlightenment while being immersed in the senses and/or in thinking, being entangled in materialism, sensualism, or egoism. So in a very real sense Zen is about breaking down those barriers and simply allowing enlightenment to emerge in its own way. Enlightenment is seeing the truth of things, particularly the truth of one's own nature, not intellectually so, but truly so. So enlightenment does not convey the ability to convey this understanding. One simply understands, without even believing that one understands (if one believes it, then one has simply created another barrier).

Words are barriers. In Zen one tends to use words that are paradoxical, but not contrivedly so. Words that are not words. Words that stimulate without conveying information in any ordinary intellectual sense (i.e., non-correlative expressions). It is not making anything important, not having any attachments, yet remaining quite effective in living and functioning in the world. Words and concepts are a matter of conditioning. In Zen one learns to be unconditioned and unconditional. Through transcending words and concepts. Through becoming aware of ourselves as we are and not as we have been conditioned to perceive ourselves. Through overcoming preconceptions and eventually even our own perceptions.

In principle there is gradual enlightenment and sudden enlightenment and various degrees of enlightenment. In practice there is simply a gradual growth

in the ability to be enlightened. Sudden realizations are simply (small) indications of alignment with something higher (greater) (deeper) (less superficial) than oneself (Tao). Anyone who claims to be enlightened is not. Anyone who believes in his or her own enlightenment likewise. True enlightenment is simply enlightenment. It has no degrees or measures. It does not come and go. It just is. To be oneself. To forget oneself. To be. To breathe.

† Commentary No. 1340

Zen 2

Enlightenment or self-realization is not actually profound. At all. If one thinks it is profound then one simply pushes it away. But the effects (more properly consequences of the process) of enlightenment are indeed profound, as the whole (human) nature is transformed, though the evidence of this transformation is not readily apparent to those who have not embraced enlightenment.

Enlightenment is not graspable. One can expound the intellectual consequences (little realizations) that are evoked through enlightenment, but one cannot actually apprehend those realizations except through enlightenment. There is no difference between enlightenment and true compassion. In Zen there is nothing to be learned, but there is much to be unlearned. In the thunderous silence there is much and there is emptiness. There is no going and doing, there is simply a coming home, a progressive lifting of the veil (overcoming delusions). Thinking is heaviness, helpful in some ways and to some extent, but ultimately obstructive. Not-thinking is enlightening, revealing in a more subjective, more meaningful sense.

There is at least one rather substantial misconception about Zen, and that is that enlightenment can be transmitted from master-teacher to student. In the vulgar (common) sense of Zen this may be so, but it is not true enlightenment. True enlightenment comes not from an external teacher but from the living-master-God within. Outer teachers may be helpful in the preliminary and preparatory phases, but no teacher can convey (actual) enlightenment. Teachers can convey ordination, energy, encouragement, stimulation, even psychic adjustment, and many related "things" but teachers cannot convey the actual

essence from within. They facilitate. But they do not transmit enlightenment. It is simply there, to be found by the properly prepared student who seeks through non-seeking.

The three traditional Zen practices are za-zen, koan study, and achievement of satori (enlightenment). The first (za-zen) is crucial to calming the whole of the outer person, koan study (more properly non-study) is simply one means of transcending the intellect and ego, and satori is not something to be sought as much as allowed. Za-zen is a place to sit. For sitting meditation. A place and regular (frequently recurring) practice of quietude and meditation. Breathing, relaxing, sitting. Not thinking. Just keeping the mind at a point of tension. But while za-zen is crucial, one does not achieve enlightenment simply by virtue of za-zen. It is only when the student has actually undergone the self-transformation that enlightenment is possible, so one must also refine the personality nature and "do" the work. Meditation is necessary but not sufficient. Only when the work is embraced can one begin to approach the Self. There are no quick and easy methods. It one finds enlightenment effortlessly, then that simply means that one has done the work (indeed, enlightenment can only be achieved effortlessly). Koans are simply one means of breaking through dualistic consciousness. If the koans are embraced intellectually then they afford nothing of actual value. But if (true) koans are simply embraced, then the truth is revealed in the form of samadhi (power).

The Zen lexicon is relatively modest (principally, minimally za-zen, koan, and satori) and embraces much of Buddhist and Taoist (non-intellectual) principles. In the final analysis, Zen is a way of life, an end in itself, an intrinsically spiritual path that transcends materialism and egoism and leads to the Self.