



## **NUTRIMENTS FOR THE SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

If we load our consciousness with toxins and violence we should not be surprised by what occupies the driving seat. If we fill our consciousness with nutriments that foster the energy of mindfulness, we can look forward to enjoying life with a different energy. The Buddha talked about four kinds of nutriments – edible food, sense impression food, food of desire and consciousness food. I begin with the Buddha's Son's Flesh Sutra and end with the story of a Thousand Sword Thrusts. The bottom line between these stories is awareness about the consequences of our consumption, so that we do not create internal violence to our systems - or to the systems we interconnect with.

### **Introduction**

We have all heard the expression "You are what you eat". I would like to enlarge this statement to "You are what you consume," for we consume much more than edible food. We also consume with our senses, desires and cravings. This consumption then feeds our consciousness which "eats" everything we put into it. If we fill it full of toxins, violence and other negative energies, then it is this accumulation in our consciousness that then drives us. On the other hand if we feed our consciousness with mindful nutriments, then a different energy occupies the driving seat of our life, one that guides us to live a life full of love, compassion and joy. This is the energy of mindfulness.

Shariputra, one of the Buddha's disciples, was very clear about this when he emphasized that Right View (the keystone of the Buddhist Eight Fold Path), is also the understanding of nutriments. His point was that we understand what has come to be, only by identifying the nutriments that caused it. If we wish to change what has come to be, we cut off the supply of nutriments that caused it. Very simple in theory, yet often difficult in practice, as we have become addicted to consumption habits that are not easy

to relinquish. That is, until we become aware of the dire consequences of consuming in a manner that is dangerous for the state of our health and consciousness.

The Buddha talks about four kinds of nutriments:

1. Edible Food
2. Sense Impression Food
3. The Food of Volition
4. Consciousness Food.

### **Edible Food**

Much of our suffering and poor health comes from eating in an unaware manner. We often use food to get out of states of despair with “binge” eating, but this does not work and is not the way to deal with suffering and pain. Perhaps a useful maxim to follow is that it is not wise to be unhappy and live alone with a fully stocked fridge! We bring into our physical bodies so much food that is not good for us. Indeed it is often poisonous to our well being. If we know how to eat mindfully, then we know how to be with ourselves, with others, and with the environment. We must recognize what is good for us, rather than create an internal violence to our system with toxic foods that then cause chronic illness. Before eating, look at what is there on the table, where it has come from, how it has been prepared, and whether it will truly nourish you.

To communicate to his monks the necessity of eating mindfully the Buddha told a very graphic story known as the *Son's Flesh Sutra*. A couple with their young son were crossing the desert. They ran out of food and water when they were half way across. They realized that they would all die, and then the parents made a terrible decision. The only way the mother and father thought they could survive was to kill their son, dry the flesh and eat him. In the days following as they walked out of the desert, they cried every time they consumed parts of the child – a painful consumption full of suffering. The Buddha asked his monks:

*Do you think the parents enjoyed eating their son's flesh?*

He continued with the lesson of the story – that if you eat and destroy life, and the environment, then you are eating the flesh of your children and destroying the planet.

Furthermore, that if you eat in a way that harms your body then you destroy both your ancestors and your descendants, for they are all in you. The Buddha concluded to his monks:

*Eat in such a way that you are able to maintain compassion; do not eat your child's flesh.*

This is a very profound teaching and so pertinent to the modern day. In a world full of hunger, malnutrition and 40,000 children dying every day from starvation, we must deeply examine the consequences of consuming alcohol and meat, because the vast amount of cereals that could feed starving children are used instead to make alcohol, and to feed livestock. The Buddha's message is very clear – we must cultivate an awareness of the consequences of our consumption.

The Son's Flesh Sutra reminds us to look deeply into where our food comes from. If we consume in a way that is not mindful, then we add to suffering. If we take foods that do not nourish us and keep us healthy, then we again add to suffering. We do not eat unnecessarily, or to excess, when we look at edible food from the perspective of our children's flesh. In presenting some edible food guidelines, the intent is to seek harmony with nature, our own and that around us on the planet. I will be specific about the edible foods that support meditation and the cultivation of the energy of mindfulness. Such edible foods can be thought of as a garden, within which our mindfulness can better take root and flourish.

In order to shift our patterns of consumption from a non-mindful state to a mindful state, we need a great deal of support. Part of that support can be engendered by an awareness of the consequences of our consumption, yet we also need the support of friends, family and sangha, so that a shift from meat eating to vegetarianism, from cooked food to raw food can be effected. It is helpful if pot luck vegetarian meals are organized on a regular basis with friends, that certain mealtimes with family are conducted in silence, while everyone contemplates the nature of the food consumed. This support is essential to bring about the shift in consciousness that enables us to consume mindfully. Only by changing our consciousness can we shift over to purer and purer foods, and this is a step by step process which we will now begin.

I have referred to the consequences of meat eating and alcohol consumption with respect to the use of cereal resources that are not made available to alleviate the suffering of starving children. Once our awareness contemplates on starving and dying children around the world, then we can begin to make a shift in our consumption of both alcohol and meat. Furthermore, we need only think of the inhumane suffering caused to animals that are bred for the meat we eat, then we can start to change our food habits. The neatly packaged meat available in supermarkets does not reveal the suffering of the animals that have been force fed on grains, and injected with steroids before they end up on your plate. If you see deeply into their suffering, you cannot eat them. If you see deeply into the suffering of children dying from malnutrition, and the violence caused by alcohol consumption then you cannot take that next drink. This is the shift in consciousness I am talking about. If we also know that alcohol consumption damages our body and internal organs, feeds the negative seeds of anger and violence that are within everyone, then you will take the steps not to consume alcohol. If you try to embark on a fruit and vegetable diet and your consciousness is still with meat eating, alcohol, and mounds of cooked, spicy food then it will not work. We have to retrain ourselves mentally, as well as physically, in order to shift deeply ingrained food habits that do not support our body or our state of consciousness.

Another factor to consider from the outset is that, if we are serious about embarking on the pilgrimage of meditation, we must realize that the practice of meditation in and of itself draws *prana* – life force energy - into our body and puts our physical being into a high energy state. We defeat the purpose of meditation if we load the body with foods that take *prana* out of the body. It is advisable to clean up our physical system with appropriate food so that we can get the maximum benefit from our meditative practice. Our body is in fact a very precisely tuned self-regulatory system, but our food habits so often breach the body's system limits, and this directly impinges on the quality of our mind and consciousness.

We have grown accustomed to liking our food cooked, tasty, and spicy. Yet we fail to realize what cooking and additives do to the nutritional value of the food consumed. Cooking converts raw food, which is composed of simple proteins, into complex proteins. Immediately there is a demand on the body to use energy to facilitate

the conversion of complex proteins back into simple ones, that the digestive system is designed to handle. There are food “receptors” in our throats, which differentiate between simple and complex proteins. Our digestive system naturally handles simple proteins, so complex proteins have to be converted back into simple ones. Once complex proteins are recognized, then the food receptors program the manufacture of specific enzymes in the pancreas, so that the re-conversion process takes place. Cooked food places demands on the body’s energy reserves that raw food does not; in fact 80% more energy is required to digest and flush out cooked food than raw food.

Cooking also depletes whatever vitamin and mineral value was in the food in the first place. It destroys all the enzymes naturally occurring in raw food, and so we lose the triggers and information from nature that support our metabolic machinery. Furthermore a reliance on cooked food in our diet produces a build up of mucus in the body, without stimulating the processes and enzymes that can deal with the mucus. We load up our food with additives and taste sensations, to cover up the fact that there is very little nutritional value in the cooked food that we eat, and the entire process consumes more bodily energy than it replaces. That is fine for our taste buds, but not only are we ingesting food of doubtful nutritional value, we are also creating excess mucus throughout our physical system. Mucus is a result of cooked foods that the body cannot properly digest and it provides a receptacle for the accumulation of bacteria, which are not conducive to our well being. And so we become sick.

Raw foods such as fruit and vegetables do not produce such consequences. They are wholesome, balanced, full of *prana*, and do not require extra energy from the body to process and digest them. The time taken to digest raw foods is approximately 12 - 18 hours, the Western cooked food diet takes between 80 - 100 hours, with meat and fried foods staying in our digestive tract for up to 100 hours. The longer that waste stays in our intestines the more likely the decomposition will cause illness, particularly with respect to meat consumption. Compared to most carnivores the human intestinal tract is double the length (proportionately). With a shorter intestinal tract, carnivores excrete the meat they consume, in one third the time a human does. So the toxic build up from meat caught in the intestines does not afflict carnivores in the same way it does humans, particularly as the meat consumed by humans is cooked and much more toxic than raw

meat. Physiologically our evolution has been from predominantly vegetarian eaters, and our physiology is not designed to have meat lodged in the intestines for 100 hours. Throughout our evolution as a species, our bodies have been genetically programmed to process raw foods. The cooked food, and meat regime, of the standard western diet deviates too far from the consumption that maintains our optimal physical and mental health, and is a direct cause of the many degenerative diseases that afflict western society. Despite the expensive propaganda and powerful political and economic clout of the meat and dairy lobby, meat and dairy products are not good for our health.

Raw fruit and vegetables actually rejuvenate our system, and cleanse it at the same time, and a diet that predominantly relies on fruit and vegetables in the raw state is ideal for chronically sick patients. The shift from relying totally on cooked foods to a 75:25 balance between raw and cooked is a reasonable and manageable step to take. It is unlikely that we can suddenly reprogram generations of bad food habits, so we must set realistic goals. Another popular misconception about food consumption is our general attitude towards milk. When children are ill, the established practice is to send them to bed with a glass of hot milk. Then we wonder why they do not get well! Our physiology changes after we are weaned from mother's milk, or a cow's milk substitute. After about three years of age, once weaned, we cannot digest cow's milk completely. Only part of it can be digested, the remainder that cannot be processed emerges as mucus, and in young children, if there is excessive mucus, the body's response is asthma. Medical science treats asthma with a mixture of steroids and antibiotics that only make the patient sicker. Why not deal with it by withdrawing the nutriment that causes the build up of mucus in the first place, which then triggers asthma to deal with it? In other words remove the patient from dairy products, place them on a predominantly raw food diet (75%), with the remaining balance made up with rice and lentils.

It makes sense in terms of Shariputra's dictum that if we know how things come to be and wish to change, then we remove the nutriment that caused what came to be. Once milk is processed into yoghurt it is more digestible, as the lactose component has been broken down. In adulthood we can no longer manufacture the lactase enzyme, which breaks down lactose, yet we still consume vast quantities of milk while at the same time we are lactose intolerant. A peculiar triumph for the Dairy Lobby. In addition, milk

is a somewhat scary product to ingest these days as dairy cows are increasingly being injected with Bovine Growth Hormones (BGH). BGH is injected into cows to radically increase milk production at great cost to the suffering of the animals, and also to us, as it is believed by independent scientists that BGH is linked to carcinogens that can kill human beings.

Diabetes is another form of chronic disease that is often triggered by the body to deal with the awful and poisonous food we ingest. A 90% raw food diet would immediately reduce symptoms, as it gives the pancreas less work to do. Asthmatic and diabetic sufferers should always consult with their doctors, and continue with medications until such time as they feel significantly better as a result of their dietary shift. With the supervision of your doctor there may well be a case to reduce or eventually eliminate medication.

Dr. Dean Ornish, the noted heart specialist, has developed a dietary profile and meditation program very similar to the suggestions I am providing for the reader. His books (Ornish 1996a, 1996b) catalogue the incredible reversals in heart disease experienced by his patients after following his food guidelines. Furthermore he has demonstrated, with impeccable control samples, that post operative recovery is enhanced when patients undergo radical life style changes with respect to diet, meditation and quality of relationships (Ornish 1996a). These results have lead over 40 major insurance companies to cover his program as an alternative to surgery. It is not surprising that Dr. Ornish's inspiration came from his exposure to the teachings of Swamy Satchidananda on yoga, meditation and vegetarianism. These teachings turned his life around at a moment of great personal crisis, and he decided to take the benefits of his own experience into his medical practice. The results of the Ornish program have been systematically attacked by the American medical establishment, as his low-tech approach is at odds with the \$20 billion a year bypass surgery business in North America.

Susannah and Leslie Kenton wrote a wonderful book titled *The New Raw Energy* in 1984, and is a classic compendium to the case I am building, as is the *Fit for Life* book written by the Diamonds in 1985. The Kentons document one hundred years of meticulous research by prominent scientists, many of them Nobel laureates, on the clinical uses of a raw food diet. They note the poor health of modern populations, the

crisis levels of degenerative diseases that are directly associated with our contemporary lifestyles and food habits. While modern medicine is very sophisticated it cannot adequately deal with degenerative diseases. The research that the Kentons draw on demonstrates conclusively that a raw food diet is the best medicine to eradicate the poor health of modern society. They recommend the elimination of most of the cooked and processed food we consume, also the high protein and fatty diets we follow. The elimination is of food types, and states, that endanger our health through the progressive degeneration of cells and tissues (Kenton, L. and S. 1984,34). Raw foods, which are fresh and wholesome, are in harmony with our biological nature and support the body's self-regulatory and healing power, and can thus reverse the effects of food consumption that has brought about sickness. They document clinical studies of the healing effects of a raw food diet on long term chronic illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, arthritis, cancer, heart disease, hypertension, circulatory ailments, obesity and mental disorders.

While I recognize the benefits of a vegetarian, raw food diet in keeping compassion alive and supporting meditative practice, I am also aware that this general argument does not suit all beings in the same way. Deepak Chopra's excellent book *Perfect Health* published in 1991 draws on similar principles to the argument presented. He explores the implications of an Ayurvedic life style and correlates body types with different dietary regimes. Dr James D'Adamo, a highly respected naturopath, in his book *One Man's Food...* examines the genetic history and evolution of human groups and recommends a distinctive diet for each blood type. He draws on a growing body of information from genetics that links blood type, geographical origins and physical evolution with different optimal diets. Consult these books and more to broaden your own knowledge. Not only are they full of great recipes, they have all the scientific facts and figures to substantiate the general argument reported here. Do experiment with your diet and find what most supports you in health and meditation. If you consume something that you had best avoid, your body will inform you within hours. So listen to your body, be mindful and responsible about your consumption. Remember that the bottom line of food consumption is to keep compassion alive within us, so that our actions, thoughts and speech are guided by compassion. This means reducing as much as possible the violence, destruction and suffering brought to living beings, and this applies

equally to both producers and consumers of food. Without the component of compassion we are not able to relate to the true nature of our interconnection with all living beings and the planet. The Buddha's *Son's Flesh Sutra* is a graphic reminder for us to eat in such a way so that the seeds of compassion are continually watered within us.

Not everything in the fruit and vegetable field serves our bodies. In making our selection of the foods to eat, we must consciously consume foods that are high in "life force" or *prana*. Certain foods that are high in *prana* can be called positive *prana* foods, others take energy out of the body and are negative *prana* foods, while other foods are neutral – they neither add nor subtract *prana* from the body, these are known as zero *prana* foods. Negative *prana* is associated with foods that agitate the body and act as nervous stimulants. These are the foods and additives that excite rather than calm the body. Heavy spices that bring a sweat to the brow activate your appetite for more of the same, but also deplete your *pranic* reserve banks. Spices agitate your body and thus your mind. They are not a good foundation for meditation. Garlic, onions and chillis entice us to savor their flavor, but they too are negative *prana* foods. Thinking this of garlic is hard to swallow, if you will pardon the pun. Garlic is a very powerful medicine, for its design *is* to agitate the physical body and extract energy, particularly during fevers. But we have made it into an essential component in the dishes we love to eat, that only drive us to eat yet more of the same kind of stimulants. The end result is that *prana* is taken out of our body with this kind of consumption. The eggplant family is also to be avoided for similar reasons. Stimulants such as coffee, tea, alcohol, cigarettes and drugs locate energy in the wrong channels and supercharge the body with excitable energy. They ultimately rob the body of energy and make us feel tired and dull, and make it impossible to focus and meditate. Except for potatoes and tomatoes, which are zero *prana* foods, all other fruits and vegetables are positive *prana* foods.

In particular the vegetables that grow on creepers, such as beans and ashgourd, are highest in *prana*, while those that grow underground like carrots and beets are not as high. Soya beans provide a rich source of protein, and their derivatives – tofu and bean curd – can be added to salads, rice and grain dishes. Sprouts grown so easily from green mung beans, alfalfa and other seeds are also high in *prana* and are very easy to grow. Cover the beans with water, allowing them to stay soaked overnight, and rinse them in

the morning and let them dry, with repeated rinsings every twelve hours for the next two to three days. Then “Hey Presto!” you have bean sprouts that you can add to salads and also to cooked rice and lentils. The only deficiency in this diet is an inadequate supply of vitamin B 12 complex. That can, however, be taken as a supplement. Do ensure that you take it in capsule form rather than tablet, as the body can better absorb the capsule, as the major part of the tablet form is simply excreted from the body.

A useful food profile that fully supports meditation is one that follows the harmony of the body. Until approximately noon each day our bodily system is in a state of cleansing and purifying. Huge breakfasts full of fries, meat and coffee interfere with this natural process, and make us feel very dull afterwards. In the mornings we do not need to eat very much at all. After morning meditation we simply need to take fruit and fresh juices with a few nuts that have been soaked overnight. For lunch we are most supported for meditative practice with a meal that consists of 50% raw food and 50% cooked food. Always ensure that raw food is freshly washed. If possible it is always better to buy organically grown produce, as modern agriculture uses a great variety of chemical pesticides and fertilizers that contaminate vegetables and fruits. A good method is to put half a teaspoon of baking soda in a pail of water, add some fresh lemon or lime juice and wash fruit and vegetables in it.

From 12 noon until 8.00pm our bodies assimilate what has been ingested. After 8.00pm our bodies are in a natural digestive phase, and it is best not to eat anything after 8.00pm. This is bad news for midnight fridge raiders! The evening meal should again be balanced between raw and cooked food, with an overwhelming emphasis on raw food, mostly vegetables. It is always better to eat the raw food first, as this helps to generate the enzymes for digesting cooked food afterwards. In case you may be thinking this is an awful and tasteless food profile to follow, do consult the recipes in the books that have been recommended, and be surprised at how much you will enjoy a simplified diet.

Once you have knowledge and awareness, you can plan a different dietary path for the steps you take on your spiritual pilgrimage. To meditate deeply, it is necessary to change food habits. Only you can do that – for you are the one in charge. I can only outline the consequences of particular kinds of consumption for your physiology and consciousness.

### **Sense Impression Food**

We also consume through our senses. Our sensory organs (eyes/nose/ears/tongue/fingers/mind) provide six doorways for us to consume sense impression foods, and in our busy daily lives we expose ourselves to so much damaging consumption. The images from the media, advertising, telephone calls loaded with gossip, toxic ideas in the mind, are invasive energies that seriously deplete our energy banks. These are all nutriments; foods that nourish the negative seeds of anger, despair, greed and envy that lie within. They make us weary and lethargic. A toxic conversation over lunch enables you to consume the energy of malevolence, character assassination and gossip. It is no wonder that your tummy will be upset and you feel tired afterwards. Your body is drained not so much by the food you ate, which may be of doubtful nutritional value, but by the toxic conversation you digested, that had no kindness or love in it. We consume so many poisons in our conversations, and this is not a healthy consumption.

Our children consume violence, fear, hate and desire every time they watch television. There is really no debate about television and media violence, as it is absolutely clear that such violence is an energy that penetrates and affects our children very deeply. The high school shoot-outs and murders in North American schools are there because neither students, parents, nor society pay attention to the necessity of guarding their sensory doorways. This example is extreme, yet it shows clearly that we have created a very dangerous environment for ourselves. It is not difficult to see that violent nutriments from the external environment must be eliminated, and replaced with the energy of mindfulness at every level of society. The high school murders are not a teenage problem, they are a societal problem of systematic violence penetrating to the consciousness of young people through their sensory doorways. A societal solution is therefore necessary, one that deals with anger, frustration and hatred and provides an alternative paradigm for being, and a methodology that impacts the internal environment of violence and transforms it. There are so many physically and mentally ill young people, because they do not know how to protect themselves from ingesting the toxic foods that pour through their senses. The best minds in America are now at work on how

to do this, yet Shariputra's dictum from the time of the Buddha still applies. If we do not guard each sensory doorway we will get sick.

We can protect ourselves through meditation, and by cultivating the energy of mindfulness within us. Walking meditation is a wonderful practice to do, in order to come back to the present moment of the heart. In that space, the toxic consumption of every day life, through our senses, has no doorways to pass through. We can also protect ourselves by being with others who are committed and solid in their practice of meditation, in whose presence we feel calm and clean. We come to a stop through meditation, and look deeply at the effects of toxic foods that come through our senses, and then take the steps to restore ourselves. We know deep down that all our misperceptions about reality originate in our senses, that knowledge based on the six doorways constitutes a collective illusion. That is why we guard ourselves with the constant pilgrimage to the heart. That is what meditation is for, to go back to our breath, and bring our body and mind together.

Mindfulness is our protector, and we must use it to prevent the ingestion of toxins through the six sensory doorways. By being mindful we can distinguish that which is good for our organism and spiritual well being, and that which depletes it of energy. We can say "This is not good for me", or "This is not good for my children," and then begin cultivating an alternative consumption that is good. But we cannot see deeply into the interconnection between nutriment and consciousness, until we first of all come to a stop. That is the first meditative step. Without mindfulness we are exposed to all kinds of energy sucking elements that activate and indulge the seeds of craving, anger, despair and violence; which drain us of life force. As we begin to understand the effects of sense impression foods that suck away our energy, then we can stop, place ourselves in a meditative state and with insight cut off the toxic nutriments that are effecting us. We then make a choice to cultivate the sense impression foods that nourish us in a positive and wholesome way.

### **The Food of Volition**

Volition refers to our cravings, desires, attachments and possessiveness. It describes that state of consumption wherein we cannot be happy without the object of our

desires. We are then driven to search for, strive, and fight to realize, or obtain, that “something” we crave for. This makes us suffer all our lives, as we are never happy with what we get or achieve, as there is always that “want” for more. We need the insight that the food of volition is in fact the obstacle to true happiness, for we also have within us the capacity to “be”, to live fully in the present moment. Meditation takes us there. Yet this capacity is obscured and covered up by habit energies, by acquired and inherited addictions, and emotional afflictions. We must be prepared to release these obstacles rather than feed off and be driven by them. Once again that comes about by stopping through meditation, seeing deeply into the suffering caused by cravings, and then surfacing and clearing our internal obstacles through the practice of mindfulness. Our attachments and identities often drive us to very dangerous behaviors.

I remember a startling interview several years ago on the TV program “60 Minutes.” Barbara Walters was interviewing Christopher Reeves, star of the “Superman” movies. He had suffered severe spinal injuries when thrown from his horse during a show jumping competition, and had been left totally paralyzed. Yet his recovery process inspired millions with his fortitude, and the new opportunities he saw for himself from his wheelchair. Christopher Reeves remarked to Barbara Walters, at one point in the interview, that the accident had made him realize that he was not the body. This was not his identity as a person, as it limited his sense of who he was, what he connected to and what he could now do. He said this quietly and with calm assurance, and for me at that moment, he *was* Superman, though not of the Hollywood genre.

It made me reflect deeply on what we do with our identities, whether they control us to the point that we discriminate, and even kill in the name of identity, or whether we note it as a factor in our development and remain uncontaminated by it. In the painful break up of the former Yugoslavia, the attachment to identity was such a powerful force that people were driven to kill those not of their immediate ethnic identity. A formerly multicultural country became a killing ground for Serbs, Croats, Muslims and Albanians. All in the name of identity inflamed by real, or perceived, historical injustices. This is repeated all over the world, such is the control exerted by attachment to identity. Yet identities with ethnicity, with the body or other qualifications of self, are in fact false identifications, for they do not refer in the least to who we truly are. While we are driven

by attachment to identities we are prevented from connecting to our true nature, that boundless consciousness that knows no separation. Reconnection to our true nature is through meditation, entering the consciousness of the heart, and flooding whatever identity we hold, with love. Then that identity cannot drive us to do harmful things. The identities we hold are indeed part of our evolution to where we now stand, but merely observe them, do not inflame them. Fill them with love, and in this way you will not allow them to drive you to discriminate and do hateful things to protect a particular identity. We must see clearly that there is a particular process at work in our mind, and take the steps to short circuit it. Whatever we think we are, then our intellect and mind will work overtime to reinforce and protect that identity. This is such a limitation of each person's potential, and it takes meditation to short circuit this mental process. This is where the silences and stillness of meditation comes in.

There is a wonderful story about Socrates taking a walk in his favorite park in Athens. He walked with a cane and would absent-mindedly swing it in his hands. Inadvertently he struck a citizen with the end of his cane. The man angrily demanded of Socrates "Who are you?" But Socrates walked on, deep in contemplation, unaware of what had happened. The citizen then stepped in front of Socrates, forcing the sage to come to a halt, and once more shouted at Socrates "Who are you?" To which Socrates mildly replied "That is just what I was thinking about," and continued his walk, leaving his astonished questioner speechless.

### **Who Are You?**

There is a simple process that you can do with a friend, that brings home all that I am writing about identity. Decide that one of you will be A and the other B. Gently bow to one another at the beginning and end of this process. A begins and asks B "Who are you?" and listens to B's reply. Then A repeats the question and once again listens to B's reply. B must answer differently each time. This question and answer continues for about ten minutes, then the partners switch and B asks A "Who are you?", listens to the reply and then continues asking the same question for a further ten minutes.

The questioner is free to vary it somewhat and can ask "Yes, but who are you really?" or "What are you?" The respondent can also refer to what she does, or what he

thinks happens because of their existence. The answers run through the identifications we have with family, background and relations (the body); with ethnicity, language, color (body again); with our status, profession, sports, hobbies and interests; with our dreams and fantasies. Until finally there is nothing to say, other than to softly begin to sketch in who you truly are. In this exercise there is scope for insights to emerge about self and other. The process can be quite exacting as you help your partner go deeper in the expression of his identities. At the end, once you have acknowledged your partner with a bow, you can relax and chat. Discuss with your partner how it felt to disclose identity after identity, and to liberate herself from the socially constructed identities we hold as absolutely definitive of “US”. Perhaps there is a glimpse and feeling about the unbounded nature of our consciousness, about a state of self where there is no separation. Try it and just experience for yourself where this process leads you.

Our ego takes its definition from the various false identifications and attachments that we wear as masks, hiding ourselves under carefully manufactured personas as a convenient statement of ourselves. In actual fact this is a pale and very limited reflection of who we are. In meditation we release the hold of attachment to identities, and begin to experience true freedom and interconnection. Simply because we have stepped away from the bondage of living up to a set of identifications that are false, that do not reflect back to us our true nature. Part of what takes place in meditation is the removal of all false identifications, so that you are left with freedom to truly be yourself, and from this point onwards you begin to experience more and more freedom.

It is our identities, falsely held, that lead us to discriminate. How can we step past this barrier? In December 1998 I had been invited to teach a two week meditation course in Santiago, Chile. Part of my preparation was to attend to Christmas gifts for family and friends before I left Canada for South America. So my son Iain and grandson Callun, who live on Vancouver Island, received their Christmas gifts very early. Iain called me before I departed to thank me for the packages, and asked what he and Callun could get me for Christmas. I thought for a moment, and then said that the greatest gift they could give me would be to bring love and joy to someone they had discriminated against over the last year. There was quite a silence at the other end of the telephone line, then Iain

laughed and said that there was quite a list! I encouraged him to just choose one! And they did, and in the process brought great joy to an entire family, to themselves and to me.

When we consciously take a step to bring joy and love to someone we have discriminated against, this energy eradicates the stranglehold that false identifications have placed over our lives. For we discriminate against others in terms of the identities that we hold dear. My son and grandson taught me a great lesson, that provided insight into this issue. For there is a deeper aspect that had not occurred to me. When we bring awareness to our acts of discrimination, and then take active steps to cross over the divide of separation that discrimination creates, we do something very deep for ourselves. We stop discriminating between our sense of self and our true nature – which is Divinity. The attachments to false identifications disappear with the conscious act to bring love and joy to someone who has suffered from our discrimination.

I told this story about my son and grandson to the participants in the meditation course in Chile. I asked them if they would kindly do the same; look deeply into their false identifications, see where they had discriminated against another person in terms of their socially constructed identities, then take the active step to bring love and joy to that person. They all did this and experienced extraordinary liberation. I ask of you, gentle reader, to do the same.

### **Consciousness Food**

Consciousness is the fourth source of nutriment. It is like an ocean, fed by the six rivers of the sensory organs, by the edible food we consume and by the food of volition. It consumes and eats all the time and is a product of all the physical and mental aspects of what we ingest and consume. Our consciousness, so created and constrained, then shapes our lives because we feed off it. It then defines how our body, mind and spirit operate. If the nutriments from edible foods, sensory inputs and volition have loaded our consciousness with toxins and negative energies, then that is the sum total of what then drives us. The collective mix of toxins manifests in our form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and evolving consciousness. This is our life as it is, and in understanding how it has come to be (Shariputra's Right View), we begin to understand

that toxic overload destroys any possibility of congruence between our speech, thoughts and actions, and between our body, mind and spirit. Yet by knowing how the different nutriments contribute to the consciousness that feeds us, we can then make clear choices about the nutriments to consume and those we must exclude.

The Buddha has a story that emphasizes this. He tells of the capture of a dangerous bandit who one morning is brought before the king. The king orders his soldiers to take the bandit outside and to thrust three hundred sharp swords through his body. At noon the king asks “How is he?” and is told that the bandit is still alive. The king then orders an additional three hundred sword thrusts to be driven through the bandit’s body and so it continues throughout the day and night. The Buddha then told his monks:

*That is how we deal with our consciousness every day.*

We thrust thousands of sharp swords into our consciousness with the nutriments we consume and ingest. The Buddha pointed out that mindfulness was the only way to stop the sword thrusts, to stop the suffering and destruction to ourselves, to others, and to the environment. The Right View argument from Shariputra considers reflection and investigation on the nature of our nutriments to be absolutely crucial. Being aware and mindful of all that we consume, transmutes the unwholesome seeds from our ancestors and conditioning, and provides fertile soil for wholesomeness in our being to flourish. Be aware of the consequences of all that you consume.

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