

WORLDLY SELF and NO SELF,

By

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INTRODUCTION

The authors have presented much of the content of this paper in various Dharma discussions and talks they have had with various people and groups both in Honolulu, Hawaii and in Vietnam. While this paper is in English, the content has been presented in both English and Vietnamese, depending on the audience. This paper attempts to present what is considered the core of Buddha's teaching and that which is essential for a basic understanding of the Buddha's primary contribution to mankind, i.e. the recognition of the four noble truths, the noble eight fold path to liberation from suffering, the impermanence and dependent originality of phenomena, and the reality of no-self.

This paper is about the self and how it is related to suffering. The two are not often associated, however we will show how the self arises and concurrently how suffering arises. Our discussion involves the use of language, yet we realize that the path we must follow to discover our true self is beyond the ability of language to describe, we must experience it.

The worldly self is created through social interaction beginning at birth that combines with the ego-driven self that we bring from other lifetimes. Thus the self is created and is impermanent, it is part of the phenomenal world that is constantly changing and illusory. The self is associated with the ego that is created through action and is part of our karmic inheritance that is carried from lifetime to lifetime. Both the ego and the self define whom we think we are and how we experience this lifetime. Our worldly experience, in this life and other lives, encounters many challenges, barriers and limitations that prevent us from acquiring what we want...thus causing us to be dissatisfied, unfulfilled, unhappy, etc. which is what is otherwise known as suffering. Suffering is therefore linked to the worldly self and ego and is not permanent nor is it inherent in our true nature. **When we realize this, we can cast off the fetters of self and ego and escape suffering.** The Buddha, twenty-six centuries ago, taught how this can be done.

WHAT IS SELF

THE SELF-CONCEPT

The worldly self is more accurately labeled the self-concept. It is who we think/feel we are in this world, based on how we experience our interactions with those with whom we associate, i.e. through social interaction. This is a process that begins at

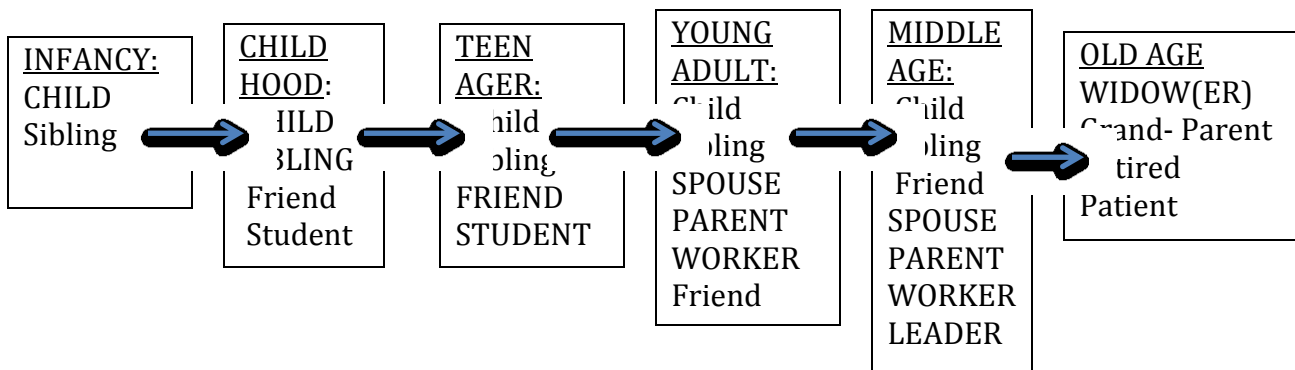
birth and continues throughout our lifetime. The concept of self begins with a clean slate, so to speak, when we are born. At birth we have no sense of separateness from our mother. But soon after birth we realize that we are separate and that our needs are not fulfilled automatically. We experience hunger and we cry in order to be fed. The experience of hunger is by definition suffering...a feeling of lack, of need, of dissatisfaction with what is. How this hunger is satisfied...through a loving, attentive mother or caregiver or through an inattentive, resentful mother or caregiver lets us know that we are loved and therefore lovable or unloved or therefore unlovable. As an infant, we are experiencing the beginning of a concept of who we are, as a separate being, in this world. This sense of who we are affects how we relate to others...lovingly, or resentfully. This, in turn, affects how others respond to us and the continuing process of developing a self-concept has begun.

Each person, with whom we interact, brings us a **new** sense of our identity based on their interactions with us. Thus, our self evolves and is really only an idea or concept of who we really are, since it is based only on how we perceive others' behavior toward us. George Herbert Mead called this the objective aspect of self or the "me". Sometimes we will have the feeling that how another person is behaving toward us is not consistent with who we think we are...and we will reject or resist acceptance of that. The reaction, rejection or acceptance, we have toward how others define us (me) is the subjective aspect of the self or the "I". As young children, our acceptance of how others behave toward us is automatic or even unconscious on our part. When we are loved or accepted by others we feel good about our selves and think that we must be worthy of their love and acceptance. When are unloved or rejected by others we feel that we must be unworthy and somehow lacking or defective. As we grow older, we (I) respond to others' assessment by acceptance or rejection. The sum of all of our interactions is accumulated into an overall idea or concept of who we are, what we are capable of, how worthy we are, how others see us as well as how we perceive our self. This concept constantly changes and evolves from the time we are infants until we reach old age. Our self-concept is impermanent and exists only in our mind, memory and emotions, in the way we think or feel about our self and others. It tells us about the world outside of our self...whether it is benign or harmful and how we relate/respond to it. The self-concept is associated with our experience in this lifetime, yet in Buddhist teaching (S: Dharma) we know that we experience many lifetimes.

Our worldly self is an evolving product of interactions with others within various roles we play in the various groups we encounter throughout our present lifetime. Our first group is our parents and our primary role as an infant. As we become

aware of our brothers and sisters then we play an additional role as a sibling. Our self now involves the interaction with these additional players in our family group and how we interpret our interactions in our mind and develop a more complex sense of who we are. As we grow a little older we encounter other children in both informal friendship groups or in more formal settings such as school. Our sense of who we are then becomes attenuated by the interactions we have with friends and with fellow students and with teachers. As we grow older, the number of groups, in which we participate, increases and the number of roles we play multiplies, thus increasing the complexity of our self-concept. Some groups are more central to our self-concept than others, because we are more involved with them than with other groups. Some groups, such as the family we are born into, are more permanent than others, such as being a customer in a grocery store. The more important and permanent groups, of course, have a more profound influence on our self-concept.

COLLECTION OF ROLES PLAYED DURING ONE'S LIFE CYCLE



NOTE: Major roles at each age are in Bold font. Additional roles are played as well. Some roles are more permanent, other transitory depending on age. Each person has a unique collection of roles at each age...these are those that most people have in common.

We carry with us our self concept as we interact in each group, thus giving us the sense that it is our real self, not realizing that it is a constantly changing accumulation of the various interactions we are experiencing within our role set, or collection of roles we play at any given time. This role set is impermanent; it expands and contracts with our life cycle...smaller in the beginning and at the end of life and large in the middle of our lifetime. By the time we reach young adulthood and move into our middle adult years, our role set is the largest and most complex. The complexity of the interactions we experience with and between all of the groups

in which we are involved is amazing. No wonder sometimes external conflict or internal conflict arises...because each group we encounter has its' own (sometimes conflicting) set of expectations for it's members, whether they are formal or informal. These expectations also change over time and in different situations our groups encounter. Thus, change is ubiquitous, and sometimes it is challenging and perhaps even unpleasant. We find ourselves experiencing the ups and downs of social interaction in groups throughout our lifetime. Buddhist teachings talk about suffering...which we will discuss in more detail later in this paper...but for now it is important for us to recognize that the role playing we experience in various groups throughout our lifetime creates in us a sense of self and in many ways it is the source of considerable discomfort, dissatisfaction, unhappiness and yes...suffering. While these interactions can bring us some happiness and satisfaction at times, they are always changing and the happiness soon leaves and may bring sadness or disappointment.

THE EGO

The ego in Buddhist teachings, is different from that defined by the well-known psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Freud said that the ego mediates between the id (instincts) and the super ego (conscience), and keeps us (mind or psyche) in balance. More recently, the behavioral sciences consider the ego an important tool in social adjustment, since having a good and strong ego allows us to have an "internal locus of control" meaning that we are independent and self actuating, as well as have a good relationship with our self. Those who have weak egos are believed more likely to be swayed or influenced by others, having an external locus of control, and may be either over-conforming to social norms or perhaps shiftless or unattached to social norms, perhaps even following a deviant path. Some behavioral theorists believe that those who engage in anti-social behavior are most often those with a weak ego development, or low self esteem. Thus, it is important for children to have positive reinforcement and interactions with others in order to develop a sense of pride and accomplishment and thus have high self-esteem (positive sense of self)...and a strong, resilient ego.

In Buddhism, the Ego becomes part of our worldly mind and overlaps much of what we call the self, as discussed previously. The Ego is part of the "I" aspect or subjective aspect of the self. It includes karmic baggage carried from one lifetime to another, and it affects how we feel and behave, in each lifetime. This is why we observe people's behavior as inconsistent with their upbringing, or social experience, in this lifetime. Karma has, for the more part, an unconscious influence

on our feelings and behaviors, since we don't know why we feel a certain way about things, or why we feel about ourselves or react toward others a certain way. The ego creates our sense of separateness from others, of being different. This is why the ego tries to build up our sense of pride, of specialness, and why it defends us against what it considers as other's unwanted or threatening behavior/actions. It initiates anger to protect us (our me) because we are afraid; it initiates greed because of a feeling of need; it initiates actions and feelings to compensate for a feeling of inferiority, or lack of what we want (i.e. what we are attached to). Thus, the ego-driven self is responsible for much of our suffering in this world, suffering because of attachment to old habits (even those carried from previous lifetimes), suffering because of fear and worry about the future or because of unfulfilled dreams or disappointments, or guilt from past engagement in unhealthy, unwholesome or destructive behavior. Attachment to various worldly phenomena is what keeps us on the cycle of death and rebirth. In the remaining discussion in this paper, we will include both the self-concept and the ego in what we refer to as the self.

THE EMPTINESS OF SELF

Since the self arises from various causes, it also changes and can also be extinguished by the changes and cessation of those causes. This was the subject of Buddha's discussion on cause and effect as Master Thích Thông Triệt explains:

"The law of dependent origination became a center part of his teaching and appears in several suttas often under the name of The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination (V: Mười Hai Duyên Khởi or Mười Hai Nhân Duyên). The Buddha summarizes it in four verses:"

*"Because this is, that is
Because this arises, that arises
Because this is not, that is not
Because this ceases, that ceases"*

Thus, the self is a concept and has no independent existence. This means that it is empty, it is illusory, it is impermanent. The self is a product of our ego and worldly mind. If you ask persons to describe who they are at a particular time they will have a different description from what they have at a different time. So what is "A permanent and real self"? among the schools of Developmental Buddhism, the Prajñā Pāramitā school called it "The absolutely pure and tranquil ego", Master

Nāgārjuna (3rd century AD) called it the “True Self”, Master Vasubandhu (5th century AD) called it Buddha Nature (Buddhata).

Master Thích Thông Triệt also explains how the Buddha, after his enlightenment, chose to teach the Dhamma, beginning with the Four Noble Truths (suffering, origin of suffering, cessation of suffering and a path to cease suffering or the Noble Eightfold Path). This was the beginning of the Turning of the Dhamma Wheel. "The Sutta on the No-Self was expounded by the Buddha after his enlightenment. The Buddha taught it to the five ascetic monks, led by Kondanna, with whom the Buddha used to practice. Together with the Sutta on the four Noble Truths, it forms the Sutta of the Turning the Dhamma Wheel. It is part of the Samyutta Nikaya 'The Connected Discourses of the Buddha', Annatta-Lakkhana Sutta, number 22.59. Upon listening to the Sutta on the No-Self, the five ascetic monks achieved the realization stage of an Arahant."

THE WORLDLY MIND AND THE SELF

Our concept of self depends on how we think and feel about whom we are. Thinking describes things, feelings, etc. using concepts...that are pointers that are not ultimately real. Words we use to describe our self are not who we really are, they are descriptors or indicators only. Thus our self-description exists only in our mind. The same is true with emotions or feelings about who we are...they exist only in our mind...although they may trigger a bodily feeling of warmth, coolness, pride or shame, etc. Thus, our self-concept is directly tied to our thinking and feeling about who we are. This thinking mind is also bombarded by memories of previous experiences that also define who we think we are. We may have had past experiences that are positive and therefore lead us to have a positive feeling and conversely with negative past experiences. These past memories are mixed in with previous lives “baggage” that have an unconscious influence on our feeling and perception of self. The importance of these past experiences, mixed with present life experiences, is that they lead us to feel, think and behave in a certain way, in this lifetime, that will add to our accumulated karma, whether it be positive or negative. In the following sections of this paper we will discuss how this accumulated karma as well as our tendency to create more karma in this life can be eradicated or stopped. This was part of Buddha's formula for deliverance from suffering.

WHAT IS SUFFERING

Suffering or dukka is a sense of unsatisfactoriness, or discomfort. Suffering doesn't have to consist of great trauma, although that is included, it can also include mental or physical discomfort. It may include a yearning for someone or wanting of something we don't now have. It may include discomfort with the present situation, such as impatience with waiting for something better, wanting more of something, or wanting less of something. It may include wanting to rid ourselves of physical pain or mental anguish. It may also include a vague feeling of unhappiness with the present situation. It may include worry about losing something we now have but fear that we will lose in the future. It may include anger or resentment. It may include unpleasant memories. Even sukka or happiness can lead to dukka or suffering, since when we are happy we worry about when we will be sad. When we are sad we wish we were happy. Thus, suffering is part of our dualistic world in which we go from high to low and back to high...fluctuating between two extremes...sad, happy. Much of our suffering comes in the context of our role-playing and interactions with others. We become attached to things and people and ideas which are expressed in anger, conflict, competition, impatience, etc. Suffering, according to the Buddha, is a universal experience...something we all have. It follows us throughout our lifetime, we all experience sickness, we all must experience death. When we are born into this world we are destined to experience suffering and death. Interestingly, suffering primarily comes to us through our development of a self-concept and ego. In a later section of this paper we will discuss what the Buddha teaches about the cause of suffering and how to rid ourselves of it.

IMPERMANENCE AND SUFFERING

Suffering may also come through change. We may not be satisfied with the way things are or we may be satisfied but concerned that things may change for the worse. All phenomena are subject to change. The law of impermanence was mentioned by the Buddha as universal and is one of the three characteristics of all phenomena (impermanence, suffering and no self). We experience change when we become ill or when we age as well as when we die. We are all subject to change...even the cells in our body are constantly changing. Our lifetime situations change constantly, people change their minds, they experience change as the planets rotate and as the seasons come and go. Even the seemingly unchanging stones and solid structures change and are subject to decay and destruction. While change doesn't necessarily cause suffering, it can be a factor in it. We can be dismayed by

changes in our body as it ages, we can be upset by changes in our family, when a family member dies or when a young person leaves home to go away to school. Oftentimes, we fear that the future may bring unwelcome changes to our pleasant current lifetime situation. On the other hand, we may impatiently wait for the day when our currently unpleasant situation will improve. We may want to become wealthy or famous or beautiful and we yearn for our life situation to change so we can realize these seemingly pleasant states. If we finally get what we want, we may worry about losing it. Even our concept of who we are (self) changes and oftentimes brings suffering because some of those changes may be unwelcome. Our relationships with others change as we experience changes in our family, friends, and associates throughout our lifetime. We may dread the day when our loved ones die, or we may long for past friends who are no longer with us. Thus the law of impermanence affects us throughout our lifetime. This law not only affects our body through our five senses, but more importantly it affects our mind. Our mind is constantly changing. The chattering mind brings us much suffering because we recall unpleasant experiences of the past and we also fear what might happen in the future. These thoughts may occupy most of what we think about each day and consequently bring us much dissatisfaction, worry and may even cause depression and guilt. We find that all of this mind activity or "chattering" creates stress and even psychosomatic illness. It also interferes with our ability to achieve a peaceful and a quiet mind. We will discuss later, how the chattering mind can be controlled.

SUFFERING AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

While suffering is unpleasant, even painful, it can be a catalyst for spiritual growth. We can learn from our mistakes, from our suffering caused by our "mistakes", and we can change our thinking and acting behavior so that our lives improve. Suffering is a way, not only of paying our karmic debts, but of learning how to grow, how to become more compassionate, less judgmental, more giving, more spiritually awake.

We begin to understand that we all have to overcome the afflictions in our mind, and that everyone, so to speak, "is in the same boat." We cannot look down upon others who are suffering and who have afflictions in their mind, because, just like others, we must learn from our own suffering caused by our mind afflictions.

Whether we realize it or not, our suffering is unique to us, we bring on our own suffering tailored to our unique needs. Others do not cause our suffering. We need to learn certain spiritual lessons and we consciously or unconsciously create the conditions that will bring about the suffering that will teach us what we need to

know. If we are ready to learn the lesson, then the suffering will cease...if not, we must repeat the lesson, until we "get it right."

With the above perspective on suffering, we learn that it is a natural process we experience in living on this earth. Everyone experiences it. We don't have to worry or be concerned about what suffering we must look forward to...since it will come to us "when we are ready." If we don't learn our lessons we have as much time as we need to repeat them until we have succeeded. This process can be described as an evolution of the mind in which we can ultimately become fully awakened to our essential nature, and to that of all sentient beings.

The following discussion will show how our connection to the world through our five senses and through our mind is the source of suffering.

THE FIVE SKANDAS AND SUFFERING

The Heart Sutra (Prajna Paramitra) describes the five skandas as: form, feeling, conception, volition and consciousness. Form consists of the six organs of the body and the mind that produces feeling (emotions) and sensations (bodily senses), conceptions, volition and consciousness. The body and the mind then provide us with the ways that we connect to the world in which we live. At birth, our connection to the world otherwise called "clinging" or "craving", through the body and mind gradually creates our sense of self. Our subjective sense of self (I) or ego grows through the various skandas until we reach adulthood when we have a fully developed sense of self that allows us to function in this world. Although the ego is important in our ability to function in this world, it also strongly connects us to this world in each of the skandas through clinging or craving. This clinging/craving that begins at birth brings us both satisfaction and dissatisfaction (happiness and sadness). This is what is referred to as "suffering." Even that which we experience as satisfying eventually ends, bringing us dissatisfaction. When we are happy we know that when the happiness ends we will be sad or unhappy. The clinging or craving we acquire through the skandas is the source of our suffering, and also the source of our cycle of death and rebirth in this world, as described in the Heart Sutra.

Master Thích Thông Triệt explains the connection between aggregates, self and suffering:

"Aggregate is the English translation of the Pāḷi word khandha (or skandha in sanskrit). A person is made up of five aggregates, the body ('Form'), and the four aggregates of the mind: Feelings and Sensations, Perception, Mental Formations, and Consciousness. Underneath these aggregates, are the egotistic self and its mental defilements that cause the person to cling to the phenomena of the world and be caught in them. Clinging and getting caught give rise to suffering in the unending cycle of deaths and rebirths. There is a pathway to ending the cycle of suffering and rebirths. If the five aggregates are still when we are in contact with external and internal phenomena, and there is no clinging from the ego, we dwell in our Holy Mind, or our Wordless Awareness Mind. That mind is still, equanimous and joyful. It is objective, devoid of ego, compassionate and wise."

The mental defilements mentioned by Master Thích Thông Triệt are those imperfections or afflictions of the mind that arise from our ego-driven self that bind us to this world and the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

"The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination depicts the twelve causal conditions that link together to form a chain of cause-and-effect (P: nidāna). They are the twelve causes or the twelve links in the chain that lead to human suffering and endless rebirths."

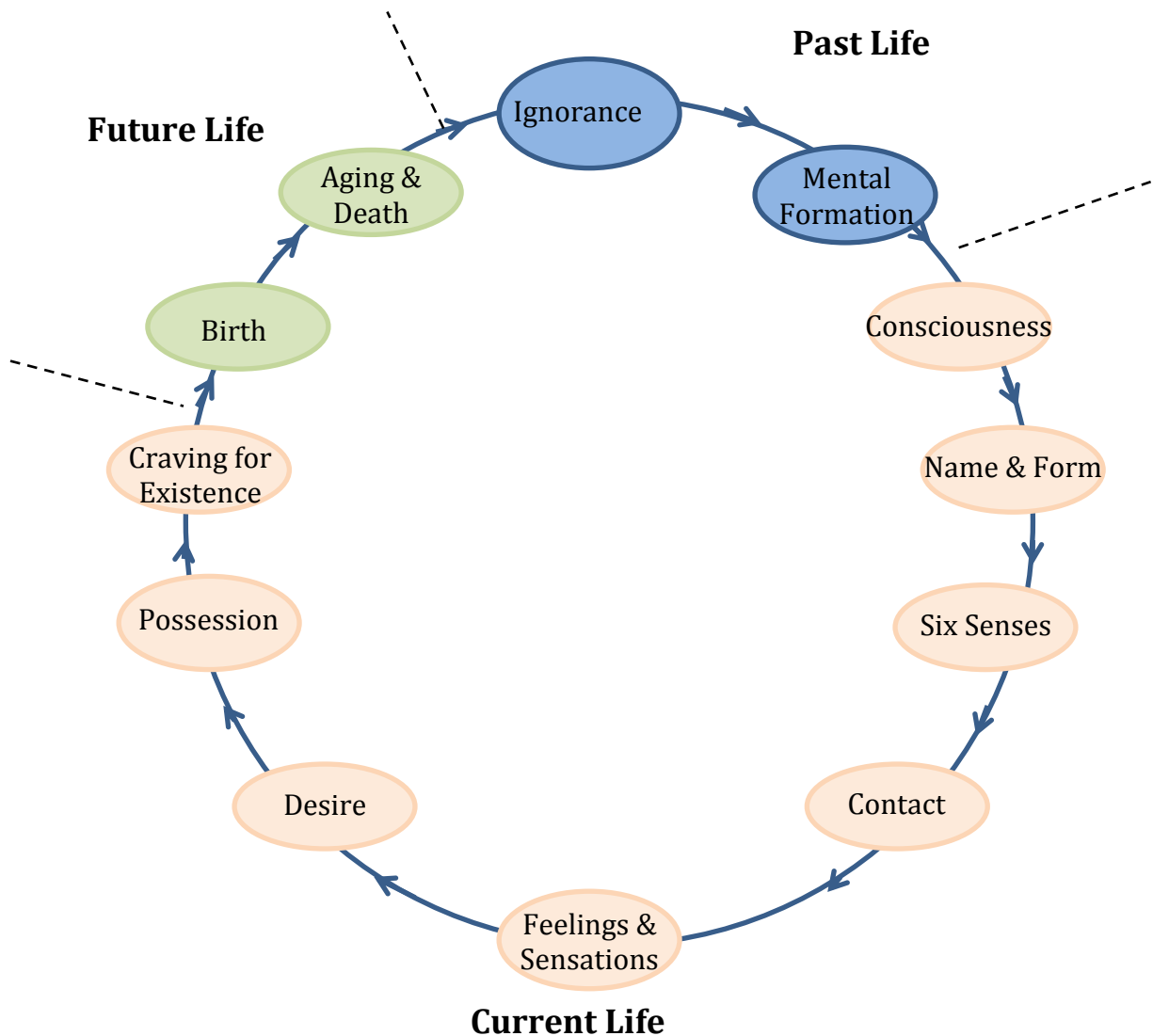
"Buddhagosa (S: Buddhaghosa, V: Phật Âm), a pre-eminent Buddhist monk living in the 5th century AD, grouped the twelve links of dependent origination into past, current and future lives. Ignorance and Mental Formations are causes that shape the current life and, therefore, are categorized as past life. The following eight causal conditions, from Consciousness to Craving for Existence, constitute the present life. Craving for Existence is the energy that causes future re-birth, that is the future life represented by Birth and Aging & Death."

"The twelve causal conditions form a closed loop, from Ignorance to re-Birth and Aging & Death. The twelve causal conditions occur ceaselessly, creating the endless cycle of birth, suffering, death and re-birth that forms the human condition. The energy behind the movement of causal conditions is the energy of change and transformation, also called the Change and Transformation Nature that is one of the true natures of worldly phenomena that the Buddha recognized when he reached enlightenment. The law of change and transformation drives all worldly phenomena in every instant."

"In order to end suffering and the endless cycle of deaths and rebirths, we can work on cutting any of the twelve links. When one link is severed, the whole chain ceases to exist."

The following illustration shows the Chain of Dependent Origination.

CHAIN OF DEPENDENT ORIGATION



This illustration shows how through the 5 Skandas (aggregates) we experience in this world, creating our **worldly self and ego** that creates craving for existence which in turn brings us back again into future lives, thus repeating the process until the chain is broken. This can be done as follows:

The end of suffering comes when we realize the emptiness of the skandas, that they are not our true self as we have been led to believe. These skandas that connect and bind us to this world can be severed when we have wisdom (prajna), knowledge that the skandas (that we cling to) are illusory and temporary. They are like a rainbow that we can observe for a short time, but we cannot hold onto. When we realize that we already possess our true self, and that it isn't our ego (that is built

on the skandas), we transcend the endless cycle of death and rebirth and this is the end of suffering. **Skandas are dissolved through the practice of wordless awareness.** This will be discussed more fully in a later section of this paper.

HOW IS SELF RELATED TO SUFFERING

As described previously, the subjective self (ego) is produced through the five skandas. The skandas produce clinging, and hence suffering. We each suffer by our self...in our own mind. While there may be such a thing as group suffering; each person in that group experiences their own individual suffering. Generally, suffering is experienced as an individual matter...it is unique to each of us, however oftentimes our suffering affects others and becomes their suffering as well. This can be seen when we look at the many difficulties, conflicts, wars that are happening in our world. Entire societies, or epochs can be seen as suffering.

What is it about the self that is related to suffering? First of all, the ego part of the self (I) sees us as separate from others...separation means that we yearn for connection or social interaction because we are lonely, or we wish we could be with those whom we love, etc. Then the Ego also tries to defend us from what it perceives as outside attacks...such as insults, complaints, or even slights. The ego defines these as unwelcome or threatening...hence we experience them as suffering. Also, the ego wants to build up our self esteem through making us appear special to others, better, more knowledgeable, wiser, richer, more beautiful, etc. This "wanting" makes us dissatisfied with the way we are or with our present situation...which in turn leads to suffering, i.e. not being satisfied with who we are or what we have in the present.

LETTING GO OF SUFFERING

When we experience non-thinking awareness and a merging of the self into the whole this is referred to as a state of 'no-mind'. D.T. Suzuki's book on No Mind explores this state in an understandable, yet thorough way. No mind is a state of emptiness or Śūnyatā where there is no sense of an individual separate self as such...but a sense of being part of a unified whole (Suchness). This in fact is what the Buddha refers to when he talks about our true nature or our Buddha nature or the awakened state. This is a state in which we exist in a transcendent realm, as opposed to our realm of form that we experience during our life on Earth. Since there is no way to describe this kind of realm, the only way we can know it is by direct experience. And this direct experience can be obtained through our

awareness practice. As we move along the awareness continuum, we progressively see that our self-concept is illusory and it disappears as we go beyond the realm of form. Of course, the self or ego or I is very tenacious and wants to survive and so we find ourselves engaged in a struggle to allow the ego or I to go. This, however, is less painful when we regularly practice and build our awareness...through wordless awareness meditation, for example.

Master Thích Thông Triết explains how wordless awareness allows us to realize a state of Wisdom and thus transcend the self and ego:

"People are capable of achieving Paññā Wisdom by meditating on themes that go beyond logical reasoning and using wordless awareness, by internalizing transcendental topics such as Suchness, Emptiness and Illusion. Paññā Wisdom is also considered as the Buddha mind completely cleansed of all mental defilements." "Paññā Wisdom is knowing without thinking and discrimination, but with the intuitive and analytical faculty of our enlightenment potential. It is not reached by developing consciousness to its highest level but by developing our enlightenment potential, that is our Buddha nature. This enlightenment potential is inherent in wordless awareness. Its knowing does not see duality, it is not bound by attachment, it does not have the idea of "self, me, I"."

THE SELF AND AWARENESS - WHO IS AWARE OF WHAT

As stated previously, our initial experience of awareness involves our self (as the subject) as we observe objects in our everyday life. We see ourselves as separate from the things or persons we observe. If we are meditating, we observe our breath, our internal bodily sensations and external factors such as noises, colors and shapes, smells, etc. We initially "see" these objects in and around us as separate. In awareness or Śūnyatā meditation, we learn to observe without naming these things, feelings, thoughts that we are observing...we just witness them as external objects. We can even be reflexive in our witnessing, in that we can observe our self as the witness engaged in observation. We, of course, are witnessing objects that we perceive, at the present moment...similar to watching a movie. We just watch, we don't evaluate, interpret, name, or in other ways think about what we observe. We don't try to remember what we observe. We just let objects come into our field of observation and do whatever they do and disappear, without any attempt to label, or analyze, or think about, or remember them so we can recall them in the future. Thus our mind is silent and our whole experience of witnessing is oriented toward the present.

AWARENESS AND THINKING

In the beginning stages of the awareness process we think about what we observe, even though we don't say anything, we silently see, hear, feel, smell or recall past memories, etc. and we can label and assess them and "contemplate" them. But as we progress in our awareness capability we surrender the labeling, assessment and contemplation of these objects, i.e. we stop thinking about them. We let our thoughts disappear naturally, quietly. Not trying to hold on to them (clinging). In the next stage of meditation, we learn to prevent thoughts from occurring by ordering ourselves: "don't talk". This technique is described in more detail in Master Thích Thông Triệt's writings on Śūnyatā meditation and the different methods of meditation. We learn to passively observe or notice things, persons, feelings as we are actively engaged in witnessing. We are watching what is going on in and around us (field of awareness). Our action is simply to be aware...awake. This is called wordless awareness by Zen Master Thích Thông Triệt. The process of wordless awareness begins with verbal awareness, as mentioned above, and then progresses to wordless awareness of the different sensations we receive: hearing, seeing, touch. The repetition of "don't talk" in response to sound allows us to hear, and just hear, in response to a visual object to see and just see, and in response to tactile stimuli is to touch and just touch without any thinking, analyzing, evaluating, discriminating in our mind. This activates the knowing (gnostic) area of our brain where our innate sensory areas of ultimate hearing, seeing and touching operate and consist of our "Holy mind" as opposed to the "Worldly mind" that operates in the prefrontal cortex of our brain (thinking area). Activating our Holy mind with the "no talk" technique allows us to codify "no talk" in our ultimate cognition that in turn closes our sensory doors during Samadhi meditation. This allows us to realize our Buddhita and to open up to our spiritual Wisdom or (Buddhata) Buddha Mind. Master Thích Thông Triệt calls this process " Śūnyatā Meditation."

"The Buddha states that one must diligently live every moment in Wordless Awareness, day and night without fail or falter, so as to live every moment awakened in the here and now. To dwell in Wordless Awareness we must eliminate in every moment the mental chatter that arises endlessly in our mind from chasing the past, expecting the future and comparing in the present. Mental chatter is a habit that we have forged since birth, so we must practice intensely to have a chance to eliminate it. Stop the mental chatter and Wordless Awareness immediately shines through, our mind instantly stops the agitated chasing after objects and quiets, the dark shadow of the ego."

PURE AWARENESS - NO SUBJECT/OBJECT, NO SELF

As our witnessing ability/skill increases we find that our sense of self and our ego gradually disappear and our sense of the other also disappears, yet we remain aware of what is happening...but there is no separation of us, as a subject, and what is being observed, as an object. This is called unification of the mind. There is just the experience of witnessing.

Initially, we are conscious of and able to witness our environment through our five senses or to witness thoughts and feelings as they appear...although as we progress, the thoughts and emotions and perceptions recede. This is the beginning of the experience of losing our worldly self. This is the process of purifying our mind of the various attachments that bind us to this physical world that keeps us in the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

The self is only a mental concept that we have of who we are that is constructed by our social interactions with our parents, siblings, friends, etc. as we grow older, from infancy to childhood, adolescence and adulthood. This concept of who we are (our self-concept) becomes more elaborate, well defined and solid until we actually believe it is real. Berger and Luchman describe how reality is socially constructed. When we behave as if something is real then in our minds it becomes real.

In the teachings of Buddha (P: Dhamma, S: Dharma), the self-concept is dependent on all of our interactions and activities, our culture, etc.; it doesn't exist independently on it's own. The subjective self (I) is our so called ego. The ego is constantly trying to build up and protect our self-concept. The ego challenges any perceived threat to it, because we believe it is who we really are. But, the Buddha says that the "false" self only exists in the phenomenal realm; the formative realm that we live in during our earthly existence. Our real self is not a separate entity but is part of a larger wholeness (Suchness) of which we are all part. Hui Neng, the sixth Zen Patriarch, said that "seeing into self-nature is becoming the Buddha." Suzuki, in explaining Hui Neng's teaching, "Unconscious or self-nature becomes conscious (aware) of itself by means of Prajna."

Also, as we progress spiritually, we become increasingly aware of our inter-connectedness with others. We can actually consciously experience this inter-connectedness in our everyday life. Thus, as we evolve spiritually through our practice, as we increase our awareness, we awaken to our true nature. Buddhists call it the "Buddha Nature." This is the outcome of our meditation and spiritual practice...to become aware of our true self, our Buddha Nature, that is innate.

Śūnyatā means emptiness, and the Śūnyatā meditation practice leads us to a realization of the emptiness of self as well as all phenomena, as taught by Buddha and by Master Thích Thông Triệt.

Unfolding or development of our awareness skill and ability leads us even further than to just witness without a self-concept. When our skill develops to the stage beyond conscious awareness, i.e. our brain/body receives input from our various faculties of sight, hearing, touch, etc. but we have gone beyond a conscious recognition of these stimuli, and we now have arrived at a stage of ultimate knowing (spiritual wisdom)...we have arrived in a state of Samadhi or emptiness or Suchness that opens up or awakens us to the Buddha Mind (enlightenment) and spiritual Wisdom that brings...

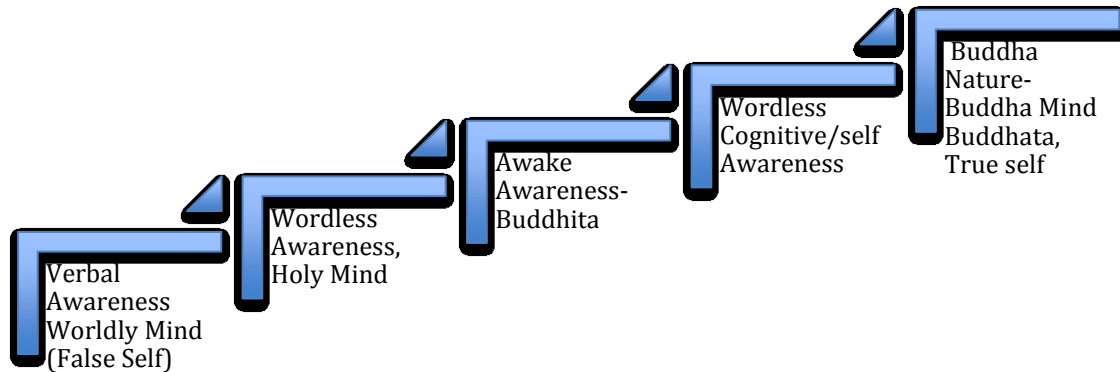
"intuition, premonition, creativity, innovation, as well as benevolence, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity, and is the foundation of paññā wisdom. This is the goal of Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path: deliverance from suffering."

Master Thích Thông Triệt's English translations of his books: Zen in the Light of Science, Zen and Contemporary Knowledge and The Processes of Cultivation, Realization and Enlightenment of the Buddha discuss in detail how wordless awareness and wisdom effect the mind, brain and physical body.

BEYOND THE WORLDLY SELF-TIED TO PHENOMENA

In fact, as we progress along the awareness continuum from verbal (worldly mind) to a holy mind; from non-verbal to awake awareness to cognitive self awareness; we transcend the formative world and experience a new world or realm. Yet, in fact we can still maintain our connection to the earthly world of form. Thus, while we awaken to the Buddha Nature (true Self), we also maintain our ability to experience the formative. Therefore, we have not really lost anything, we have just accessed an additional formless dimension of existence. We can exist simultaneously with a worldly mind (false self) as well as a world of no mind (true Self). No mind, sounds rather strange, yet it points to a transcendental world in which we can experience the ultimate awareness or Buddha Mind, with unlimited knowingness, and other limitless qualities, such as: compassion, loving kindness and serenity that we find so scarcely in our world of form. Our world of form, then becomes the dream and the transcendent world the reality.

AWARENESS PATHWAY TO BUDDHA MIND
(Process of dropping the False Self and Experiencing the True Self)



EXPERIENCING THE HOLY MIND AND AWAKENING TO TRUE SELF

As our awareness progresses, we are more likely to experience the benefits of awakening, such as increased interest in spirituality, less materialism, more compassion and loving kindness, greater generosity, and enjoyment of meditation, less talking/thinking. Eventually, as we unfold spiritually and awaken to our true Buddha Nature we will experience these benefits more often. The Buddha was able to live in this enlightened state continuously while he lived in this world.

NO SELF, NO SUFFERING

In the previous discussion we have shown how the self develops and how suffering develops and how they are connected. While we cannot say that only the self causes suffering, it has as its root cause the five skandas that connect each of us to this earthly realm through our body and mind. While important to our earthly experience, the five skandas are essentially empty, temporary and illusory, as is our earthly experience as taught by the Buddha (S: Dharma). When we become aware (awaken) to this, our suffering recedes and so does our ego driven, dualistic self. We become more connected to each other and to the One (Suchness) of which we are all part.

HOW THE EXPERIENCE OF WORDLESS AWARENESS CAN CHANGE OUR LIFE WHILE WE CONTINUE TO LIVE ON EARTH

It is difficult to imagine how we can experience wordless awareness in its fullness as we grapple with our daily struggles. This quiet activity can be practiced at any time and anywhere during our daily activities and is often a good excuse for just taking a quick rest from our busyness. When we eat, we can "notice" our food, and not carry on a social conversation. When we drive, we can just "notice" our driving rather than talking on the phone. When we walk along the sidewalk, we can look at the people, at the activities, at the buildings, at the trees, the sky, etc. and notice how they look rather than thinking about them or our next appointment, or feeling regretful about our behavior with a loved one. We learn to quietly observe without thinking. This is what is called **silent or bare (non-verbal) awareness**.

The simple, yet powerful, dispassionate, non-judgmental, observation of our surroundings, as they ebb and flow can actually bring us to a great appreciation of the many wonderful and beautiful things and experiences in our environment and in our life. Thus, we can develop a sense of gratitude for what we have. This reduces our hankering for something else in our life. When we really see others as they are we can begin to appreciate them more and they in turn can reciprocate.

When we accept our present situation as it is, we don't feel an urge to make big changes, we feel a greater sense of appreciation and satisfaction, and as Buddha would say, less suffering. Acceptance of what we have and who we truly are and our present situation in life leads us into a new kind of world...while we still live in the same old world. We have a new aliveness, a new energy, new attitude. We are more clear and productive in our work because we limit our multi-tasking, competitiveness and greed. We actually see our family differently; we can accept each of our family members as they are, with all of their zits. And we can accept ourselves as we are...realizing that inside is our true spiritual nature.

Master Thích Thông Triết has written several books describing the Buddha's path to enlightenment, as well as ways in which we can follow the His Noble Eightfold Path to purify our minds and to release our karmic baggage and to awaken to our true innate self, our Buddha Nature. **The key is wordless awareness**. Some of us choose to develop our awareness through meditation, which may be the preferred route, however some of us feel we don't have time to spend sitting in meditation, but we can take short rests throughout the busy day to just be quiet and aware, others of us feel that we can be more aware at the same time we are engaged in our daily activities. These are ways we can meditate while walking, working, etc. There

are many possibilities on how to become more aware...just being silent, or reading this paper or some of the suggested books can help us along this path of unfolding awareness. Basically, all we need to do is start by observing our present situation, the activities, the things, the people, etc. in our life. We can also take advantage of the Śūnyatā Meditation practice that shows us how to become more aware. This leads us to a greater understanding, appreciation and acceptance and to greater satisfaction with our life. Once we have begun our awareness journey (or the Noble Eight-Fold Path, described by Buddha), we will feel the need to open up more and to become more committed to the practice of wordless awareness that will eventually awaken us to our true nature (true self).

SUGGESTED READING:

D.T. Suzuki: No Mind

The Prajna Paramita (Heart) Sutra. Translated by Master Lok To

The Sutta on the No-Self, The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, Anatta-Lakkhana Sutta, number 22.59

Master Thích Thông Triệt: English translations of his books: Zen in the Light of Science, Zen and Contemporary Knowledge (to be released in 2019) and The Processes of Cultivation, Realization and Enlightenment of the Buddha discuss in detail how wordless awareness and wisdom effect the mind, brain and physical body.

English website: snyatameditation.org