

On Your Way Home

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Preface

This book approaches the Buddhist teachings from a Western mind that thinks logically. It is a guide that enables the reader to attain Nirvana.

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Part I

1. Suffering

Conventionally, we can state that you are reading this because you have senses through which you perceive. Through these senses you perceive a body that contains the sense organs. You also perceive an environment in which your body moves. A human body is created through the sexual intercourse of two fertile people of the opposite sex. Birth is what we call the moment when a new body comes from the womb of the mother, and is no longer directly dependent on the mother for food and oxygen. Yet, your body already existed in your mother's womb, and before that as an egg- and sperm cell, which were also created, etc. Human life is growing, planting, and evolving.

We try to gather knowledge from our perceptions in our quest for survival. We are able to convert these perceptions into knowledge, through our ability to think, remember, and imagine. Your thoughts are based on perceptions through your senses. This means that your environment created your thoughts, you didn't create your environment through your thoughts. So the world is not what you think, you think something about the world.

The moment at which you emerge from your mother's body, is particularly seen as the moment at which you are born as a person. You even get a name which you can identify with. As you grow up, your identity grows too. This process, which is made well known by Carl Gustav Jung (1903-1955) and Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), is called 'individuation' in Western psychology, and leads to self-realization and self-actualization.

Your identity grows by repeating and reinforcing certain ways of thinking and acting. In your mind you justify these ways of thinking and acting, because they are rewarding for you. While developing and expressing yourself, you risk to consciously, or subconsciously, ignore indications that your actions might be harmful to others, or harmful to yourself in the long run.

In your upbringing, you take on the behavior of those that raise you, and you try to give meaning to the things you experience. The people who raise you will

determine your worldview at first, through the things they communicate to you. If it turns out that their explanations are insufficient, because their communication does not reach you, by the way they communicate with you, or because the content does not resemble the things you experience, you will experience further desires for meaning in your life. These desires will further determine your thoughts and behavior, whether or not by the influence of other people around you. That way you come to your own worldview.

The stronger you are convinced of your worldview, the more difficult it is to be open to the possibility that your view does not totally correspond with reality. People can take extreme measures to protect their worldview, because if their view does not correspond with reality, it means that their life has been built upon false assumptions. To figure out if your worldview corresponds with reality, you only have to check if you experience any frustrations in your life. If you experience any frustrations, your view does not match with reality. If they did match, you would accept the situation the way it is, and not experience any frustrations. To resolve these frustrations, you can try to match your view with reality. Alternatively, you can try to change the situation to match it with your view, but this implies that there is someone or something that has control, existing separate from reality, and that you are that.

Either way, you have to figure out how your view differs from reality. If you would be able to transcend or dissolve your view, even temporarily, you would experience reality as it is. In such a case, you can retrospectively figure out how your view differs from reality. Independent of your view, this book will enable you to understand what holds this view, because if you know what holds that view, you have transcended that view.

You are aware of a body, you feel it when you pinch your arm. Being aware of the body from which you perceive, makes you identify yourself with that body. If you look at a mirror, you see a reflection of that body, and through identifying with that body, that reflection is mentally converted to yourself. It is your mental reflection on your physical appearance. If you identify with a physical and mental self, you perceive your surrounding from a subjective experience of reality, through which you will experience self-centered emotions.

Emotions are explained in psychology to be reactions to the interpretation of stimuli from your environment.¹ If you identify with a mental self, you interpret stimuli to figure out what they mean to you. A positive or negative emotion to stimuli affects our perception. In this way, emotions are an important instrument for our survival. The reasoning and understanding of emotions determine your

future evaluations of sensory perceptions. Which means that it is possible for people to develop emotionally.ⁱⁱ

Identifying with a physical and mental self, makes you aware that you exist and are living a life. You can add substance to your life, by gaining and retaining possessions. You can separate material and immaterial property, and you can make a distinction between exteroceptive possession; that which comes from outside your body, and interoceptive possession; that which comes from your body. So, you can have exteroceptive material possessions, like a car, a house, etc. And you can have exteroceptive immaterial possessions, like a reputation, power, a certain position, and social contacts. You can also have interoceptive material possession, like an appearance, physique, and health. And finally, you can have interoceptive immaterial possessions, like an identity, ideas, ideals, beliefs, opinions, theories, and views.

Your environment is constantly changing, so trying to hold onto possessions, as they are, while your environment changes, causes loss of these possessions. You identify with possessions, and as a result, you experience negative emotions when you lose it, or when it wears out. You identify with possession, because you think it is yours. Use of the word 'my', or 'mine', in speech and thought, is possessive, and expresses a desire for possession. A desire not to be, or not to have something, can become a negative emotion, if you cannot change it enough.

You can only possess something, if you identify with it. Before you can identify with something, you first have to identify it. To identify something, means that something can be distinguished from not-knowing. To be able to distinguish something from not-knowing, implies that you are able to grasp it. It is this ignorance, in combination with the desire to grasp, that gives rise to the dissatisfaction that is experienced throughout life. In Pali, the word 'Dukkha', refers to this dissatisfaction, and all the negativity that comes with it. The first Buddhist texts were written in Pali language.

So that what holds a view, is suffering from the constant dissatisfaction of trying to identify with it. If you are able to liberate yourself from this suffering, you have transcended your view, and you will experience reality as it is. That is what the Buddhist teachings and this book is for. To understand how you got trapped in this suffering, you have to work your way back to through that what you are trying to identify with.

2. I

The word 'I' refers to the ego, the sense of self that you identify with. But your identity cannot exist by itself, you must identify with something. That is why René Descartes (1595-1650) came up with his statement; "I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am." That Descartes could think, was the reason that made him believe that he existed. Being the 'I', is a mental construct, and therefore it needs logic to make sense. You cannot be an 'I', without thinking that you are this. If you say, 'I feel, so I am,' you say this because you think so. You cannot speak without using the mind. Speaking is thinking out loud.

The philosophy of 'I think, therefore I am', originates from the Western focus on the clear thinking of 'why'. Which is in contrast to the Eastern philosophy of life, that is more focused on the cause of experience. Thinking in terms of 'why', has made you become convinced of yourself. The previous happens, because you look for a reason, which can be found in thinking. This type of thinking is passed on by the mental evolution of your previous generations, through the upbringing, and the environment in which one lives. Western society has developed in a way in which self-development and individual growth play a major role.

Because you connect your identity to your ego, which originates from your own thought, you need insight into your own way of thinking, to recognize that you are 'I', is just a mental fabrication that you hold on to. People who believe in themselves, cannot do so without logical reasoning. Without reasoning, a person has no identity. Therefore, gaining insight into your own way of thinking, is an intensive individual process. It is a changeover to the causal 'what do you experience through what', instead of looking for a reason in the 'why'. From an intellectual exercise, to experiential knowledge.

3. Thinking

Your identity traps you in a self-centered experience of reality, because you distinguish between yourself and an experience. You experience the world mostly through your 'I', instead of directly through your senses. If you have a sensory experience through stimuli, you immediately ask yourself what you think of that experience, because you make a distinction between the experience and yourself. This process often takes place on a subconscious level, because you got accustomed to do so.

You have learned to perceive through your thoughts. And because you ask yourself what you think of a sensory experience, you are distracted from that experience. Your thoughts take precedence over the experience through your senses. When you ask yourself what you think of something, you try to give meaning to your experience by using concepts. In other words, there is a distinction between ourselves, and stimuli, when that experience is filled in by concepts. How you value these concepts determine what they mean to you.

For a better understanding, imagine eating a lemon. You may find the taste of the lemon awful, because of the sour. From your 'I', the subject, you call the sour, the object, awful. However, if you dislike the taste of the lemon, this creates a negative emotion that affects your perception. You find the taste of the lemon awful, because it is sour. However, sour is not awful, sour is sour. From your ego, you try to give meaning to that what you experience, by assigning a certain value to it. In the case of the lemon, that value is 'awful'. You make the concept of 'awful' your own, by applying it to sensory experiences that you dislike. Considering something sour as awful, makes you distance yourself from the sensory experience, the sour, to interpret it as awful. 'Lemon', and 'sour', are in addition to 'awful', also concepts.

If you let go of the desire to give meaning to your sensory experiences, you will become one with that experience. Though, through thinking in concepts, we are able to verbally express to others what we experience. So thinking is not wrong, but now we know that the value of words lies only in our perception.

The next part will go into the cause of your mind trying to grasp reality and separating itself from it by doing so.

Part II

4. The Universe

In the broadest sense, we can say that the universe exists of entities. An entity is something that has an existence, so everything that exists is an entity. These entities mean something to us, because we identified them. We experience space, time, matter, energy, gravity, etc. You gave these entities meaning, or you have derived this meaning from scientific publications, the media, or people that you spoke with.

The well-known scientist Albert Einstein (1879-1955) explained, in his theory of relativity, that space cannot be separated from time. Without space there would be no time, and vice versa. The theory of relativity also explains that matter has gravity, and that the mass of this matter determines this gravity. The greater the mass, the stronger its gravity. Mass causes space-time to curve, and this bending of space-time is gravity. To make the previous understandable, an example with a bowling ball will follow.

If you place a bowling ball on a trampoline, the trampoline will bend through the mass of the bowling ball. Now, if you place a tennis ball on the edge of the trampoline, you will see that the tennis ball will roll towards the bowling ball. This happens because the mass of the bowling ball bends the trampoline, which is gravity. So, the greater the mass, the greater the bending of space-time, and thus its gravity.ⁱⁱⁱ Mass is solidified energy, and is a property of matter. Einstein showed that mass equals energy, in the well-known formula $E = mc^2$.

The 'zero-energy universe' hypothesis assumes that an equal amount of potential negative energy is present in the attraction that exists between all 'positive' energy particles. Therefore, according to the zero-energy universe hypothesis, the total amount of energy in the universe equals zero. A zero-energy universe, is the only universe that can come out of nothing.^{iv} Stephen Hawking (1942-2018) wrote, in his book 'The Theory of Everything: The Origin and Fate of the Universe' (2002), that two particles of matter that are close to each other, have

less positive energy than the same two particles far apart. Since you need positive energy to separate the two particles, the energy of the gravity that keeps the particles together is negative.

In the example with the balls, a certain amount of energy is needed to separate the tennis ball from the bowling ball again. For instance, by moving your arms and hands. If you have to add energy to separate the balls, the gravity of the balls must have negative energy, because the balls have not changed when they are separated again. The amount of positive energy you need to pull them apart, is proportional to the amount of negative energy that attracts them.^{viii}

The potential negative energy of gravity cancels the positive energy of all matter, because the gravity of matter is determined by the mass of matter, and energy equals mass. This phenomenon applies to all particles in the universe, because energy equals mass, and therefore, the total amount of energy in the universe equals zero, according to the zero-energy universe hypothesis.

5. Life

In biology, scientists figured out that life involves the process of metabolism, by means of enzymes, in one cell, or in multiple cells that are linked together, which are called organisms. An organism lives in an environment, by using that environment for its metabolism.

Human life is dependent on nutrition, oxygen, a certain temperature, and sexual intercourse, for its survival through metabolism. Humans get these from their surrounding. Without a surrounding, there would be no life, but without life, there would also be no surrounding that would surround life. Life is thus mutually dependent on its surrounding.

Through our senses, we experience a body that contains our sense organs. Without senses, you would not perceive a body, and without a body, you would have no senses. Therefore, your body is mutually dependent on your senses.

6. The Self

In Buddhist texts, the origin of the self is explained by the twelve links of dependent origination;

- *Ignorance – impulse, action*
Before you can identify with something, you first have to identify it. To identify something, means that something can be distinguished from not-knowing.
- *Impulse, action – consciousness*
By trying to identify, you try to give meaning to that what you experience.
- *Consciousness – form and name*
By giving a name to that what is being experienced, the form, a separation arises between an experience, and the naming of that experience.
- *Form and name – contact*
Through seeing, sight is perceived. Through hearing, sound is perceived. Through smelling, smell is perceived. Through tasting, taste is perceived. Through touching, touch is perceived. And through thinking, a thought is perceived.
- *Contact – feeling*
By making a distinction between your senses, and the identified perception, you can attribute a feeling to that perception. A feeling can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- *Feeling – desire*
A desire for a pleasant feeling, and an aversion to an unpleasant feeling, emerges.
- *Desire – attachment*
From this desire, attachment to sounds, smells, tastes, touches, sights, and ideas arise:
 - attachment to sense impulses; music, food, beauty, health, etc.;
 - attachment to your actions and behavior;
 - attachment to the belief from which you act;
 - attachment to your beliefs in relation to; religion, economics, politics, astronomy, ethics, aesthetics, own superiority classified by gender, race, education, intelligence, knowledge, experience, power position, etc.;
 - attachment to your self, your egocentric experience;

- attachment to your belief of the self. It can be physical, mental, spiritual, etc.
- attachment to your character traits;
- *Attachment – becoming*
By attaching ourselves to our desires, we identify ourselves with these desires, therefore, we become these desires.
- *Becoming – birth*
From becoming your desires, our self is ‘born’ mentally, because you think that you exist out of everything that you identify with and attach to.
- *Birth – death (extinction)*
Birth and death should not be seen in a physical sense, because what is dying is only the thought of living.

You try to identify with something, because you assume that reality has an essence, because you can give meaning to it. However, the meaning you give, is entirely created by you wanting to give meaning. Let’s see if we can find that essence.

7. The Essence

Let us take a look at a flower, to figure out the nature of our experience. If you are standing in front of a flower, and you close your eyes, you cannot conclude with certainty that the flower is still there. Most flowers consist mainly out of roots, a stem, leaves, and seeds. That what you interpret as a flower, is only an organism created out of different cells, molecules, and atoms. You attribute these elements to a flower, because you want to give meaning to your experience.

However, every element of the flower emerged dependently. All elements consist of matter, and are therefore dependent on gravity. Without gravity and matter, the elements, and that what you conceptualize to be a flower, would not be there. The flower also has to be somewhere, therefore, it is also dependent on space and time.

Furthermore, if you do not perceive the flower through sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, or thought, the flower does not exist for you. The sense organs, through which you perceive, are also dependent on matter and gravity. And because your senses are dependent on your body, your perception is also dependent on this. And because your body lives, it is also dependent on its surrounding.

So our entire experience is of dependent arising, and because of this, we cannot really identify anything. Everything is dependent on something else, therefore, nothing has an essence. So you suffer, because you constantly try to identify with something that has no essence.

Part III

8. Nirvana

Through realizing dependent arising, we attain Nirvana, which is called Nibbana in Pali. Everything that is distinguished through our senses has been formed. So form does not limit itself to thoughts, when a flower is seen, it is formed, even without thoughts. However, because we cannot really identify an object, that what is formed, is empty of an essence. Though, after we abandoned the identification with form, we realize that there is still an experience, even if it is empty. Our experience is empty, because form is empty. But because we still experience, you naturally try to identify that what made our experience possible. Conventionally, we can call that what made our experience possible 'formless'.

The following is an example to clarify the above. In the image below, you can see both a young woman and an old woman. For the young or the old woman to form, our mind has to identify them, by interpreting the lines in the picture. If one forms, the other is formless.



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Now follows an example to clarify the scope of the formless. We know that a flower grows out of a seed, because we can observe this when we plant a seed and wait for the flower to grow. This means that the flower is already present in the seed, but the conditions for the flower to manifest (form) have not met yet, as the flower needs to grow first. We can say that the presence of the flower in the seed is formless. So the flower was always there, just like it will never really go, as the remains of the flower will fertilize the soil

Through realizing dependent arising, we know that any form is empty of an essence, therefore, the formless is also empty of an essence. Identifying the formless is dependent on our experience, but from our experience we cannot identify the formless, because we cannot look beyond our experience. So if our experience is empty, the formless is also empty.

If we do not identify with anything anymore, we attain Nirvana, and liberate ourselves from 'samsara'. Samsara is the cycle of rebirth and accompanied suffering, that is described in Buddhist texts. This rebirth occurs whenever someone tries to identify with a form, and every time when someone tries to identify with the formless. We now know that form is empty, and therefore really nothing. And we know that the formless is also empty, and therefore also really nothing. There is also really no coming, or birth, as the manifestation of form is already present in the formless. Just as there is no going, or death, as form will continue formlessly when the form dissolves. So nothing does not come, and nothing does not go. Nothing is permanent; everything is impermanent. We are dissolved into nothingness, as we were nothing to begin with.

Through insight in the above, your awareness is thrown back and forth between neither perception, because form is nothing, and nor non-perception, because the formless is also nothing. Until you realize that this going back and forth is also experienced from some point. That point is the state of 'neither perception nor non-perception', where there is stillness of the mind, this state is also Nirvana.

So Nirvana can be attained in two ways. One way is the realization of nothingness, by fully realizing the nature of being; dependent arising. Through this realization, you realize that there is no coming, and no going. This way is called liberation through the intellect, or 'paññāvimutti' in Pali. 'Paññā' is the base, and refers to the intellect, or cognitive side of consciousness; the faculty of thinking. Ignorance is the cause of misunderstanding or confusion in the intellect.^{ix} Through realizing the true nature of being, ignorance is dissolved, because one realizes that form and the formless are of dependent arising, and therefore empty.

The other way is through liberation of the mind, or 'cetovimutti', by becoming aware of the state that is 'neither perception nor non-perception'. 'Citta' is the base, and refers to the (emotional) mind, the affective side of consciousness; the faculty of feeling. Grasping is the form of dissatisfaction in the mind, through the desire to grasp.^x By getting to the state of 'neither perception nor non-perception', this desire is abandoned, because there is no perception to grasp.

Part IV

9. Practice

Ultimately, if we stop distinguishing between right and wrong, we will grow together.

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