

Timo Schmitz

**A Divinely Way to Philosophy
Vol. 1**



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'Right Intention' a.k.a. 'Right Thought' in Buddhism – From emotional theory to practise

When doing self-study on Buddhism, the second section of the Noble Eightfold Path *samma-sankappa*, which is translated as 'right intention' or 'right thought', is an interesting challenge. It suggests that thoughts and feelings have to be separated to be aware of the impermanence of everything to be able to gain mindfulness and awareness. It is easier said than to be done. We can easily say, "hey, let's separate the two things", but in practise it is quite difficult at first. So we have to know, what is the source of our feelings? Where do our thoughts come from? What's the relation between thoughts and feelings?

When we talk about affective feelings, we can talk of emotions and moods, which is described very often in psychology. Non-affective feelings should be left aside here, because they are neutral, and therefore do not inject a certain assessment without an emotive stimulus.

Modern study of emotions goes back to William James who published a theory on the creation of emotions in 1884. While traditionally, people believed that a situation triggers an emotion which leads to a reaction inside the body, James suggested that the situation triggers a reaction which then

leads to an emotion. The word emotion here is defined as perception of a physical change. If this is true, every kind of a specific emotion has to have a different physical intensity, which means that every emotion, such as anger, fear, pride or prudency has to have specific physical patterns by which we can differentiate between them (Meyer, Reisenzein & Schützwohl, 2001, p. 143). James' student Cannon criticised the theory, by proving that the same visceral changes are able to cause different emotions (Meyer, Reisenzein & Schützwohl, 2001, p. 154). At the same time, Cannon criticized that visceral changes are far too slow to be the source of any feeling. Several tests with animals were conducted, in which it was proved that even after the separation of the viscera with the central nervous system (CNS), cats and dogs were able to show anger or happiness to the outside world. Meyer et al. (2001) indicate that James only stated that visceral reactions are important for the experience of emotions and not for their expression, and we do not know whether the animals were able to experience the feelings after the surgical intervention, even further, we even do not know for sure whether animals have feelings at all (p. 158).

Several theories have assumed a post-cognition of emotions, which means that we can feel an emotion at the moment which goes back to a previous event, and we use to interpret it on our situation in which we are now. Zillmann conducted several experiments on this theory, suggesting that sexual excitement might cause aggression

(1971), and disgust might be an indicator on humor (1979). In Zillmann's book 'Connections between Sexuality and Aggression', he describes the experimentation in which people were triggered aggressively, after a sexual clip was shown and the excitedness was investigated in a pre-test (p. 208). Those who saw the film clip tended to deliver stronger electroshocks to the annoyer than those who saw an aggressive film. This 'sex-aggression transfer' was one of the major milestones for the 'excitation-transfer theory' which states that the excitation from one stimulus might lead to the excitatory response to another stimulus. According to Zillmann, this does only work in case that the person is not aware of the preceding situation as cause.

Despite modern scientific research on emotion, the issue has been a matter of debate in philosophy since millenia. As philosophers such as Socrates focussed on reason, emotion was always put in the background and even was regarded as a threat to reason and thus a danger for philosophy (Solomon, 2008). Aristotle rather saw the rise of emotions from the views of the world around us (Strongman, 2003, p.10). However, we can clearly say that the credo in antiquity was the opposition of feeling and thinking, not only in the Western world, but also Confucianism mainly focusses on the fulfillment of duties, rather than on individual feelings.

Another fact is the ability to regulate emotions. We can show emotions, but we do not have to. On the other hand, emotions appear because they want to be felt. The goal of

'right intention' is not to suppress feelings or to reason that feelings are unnecessary, but rather that we are aware of our feelings and know where they come from. The next step is to be aware that our feelings and thoughts are often mixed up, and that we can think, judge and reason without emotional affection, if we do the separation of feelings and thoughts correctly.

If we ask for the need why we should separate our feelings and thoughts, it is evident that the mixture of feelings and thoughts trouble our view on reality. The way we see our reality depends on how we see our environment and how we think. And if we allow that feelings mix up our thinking, our view on reality can get emotionally biased, e.g. think of all those who praise how bad everything and anything is, no matter in which situation. This judgment is consorted by a feeling and even further by the qualia of the certain feeling. For instance, Schwarz & Clore (1983) tested the judgment of well-being. In the experiment, moods were induced on sunny or rainy days and people had to judge their happiness and satisfaction with their life. If they were not made aware of the environmental situation, more satisfaction appeared when being in good mood (thus on sunny days) than on bad-mood-days (rainy days). However, if the interviewee was informed about the weather, the 'rainy day bad moods' suddenly disappeared and the effect was eliminated. The reason for this is evident. Since life satisfaction changes at any time, people probably use the appraisal processes to evaluate their situation and

therefore take the recent environmental state into consideration. If one knows that the weather is bad, one is aware that it is a bad factor for evaluating and more clear assumptions are made (like “oh, I just feel bad because of the weather, but I’m fine”). In this case, same as in Zillman’s experiments, the effects of mood manipulating only work when the subject is not aware of the manipulation.

As a consequence I assume that mindfulness can lead to more objective judgments, since we get aware of mood distractors - a very important impact of ‘right intention’ and the way towards happiness that is praised so much in Buddhist literature.

In Buddhist terminology, mindfulness is called ‘sati’ meaning lucid awareness, in the sense of “understanding of what is occurring, before and beyond conceptual and emotional classifications” (Chiesa, 2012), as well as the development of one’s own memory.

Several scientists have suggested that emotion derives from instincts and thus are instinct processes, such as McDougall (1926) or Plutchik (1980), who suggested primary and secondary emotions. Although the ideas of psychologists about the production of emotion - whether they are the response to physiological processes, cognitive processes or instincts - more or less have their points, I want to focus mainly on their regulation. Of course, this does only include non-reflexive behavior - as reflexive behavior derives from sensory information that directly

goes from the thalamus to the amygdala, as LeDoux proposed.

The fact that we develop emotions, no matter where they derive from, does not imply that we are their slaves, as we can see due to 'jealousy'. Jealousy arises if one fears losing one's partner, mostly as a rival appears, and one wants to avoid the loss with all means. Jealousy itself is just a feeling - an affection. If we react in daily life just after affections, we will show the behavior that emotional psychologists have found. When we are angry, we start to destruct things, when we are sad, we cry, etc. But luckily, we have a regulatory system - our ratio. In daily life, affection and ratio come together and we think that the feelings that we have are ours. Indeed, they either appear as a result of physiology or cognition. So when we feel jealous, we see the danger, in our body are processes activated and we have an emotion as result. However, everybody knows that when we are angry, we can try not to hurt someone or not to scream, so we can regulate ourselves. This shows that regulation works, although suppression is no solution. If our ratio is above affection, then we can regulate it very well. We realise that due to the complex processes, an emotion appeared, and we can think, "Why do we feel the emotion?", "Is it really necessary?", "Is the danger that I feel really existent?". We can control it when we separate feelings and thoughts. As Zillmann showed through his experiments, we often do not know why we feel in a certain way. Therefore, I want to emphasize, we often have feelings

that do not belong to us, but are induced by others. Maybe someone makes a note on jealousy, and the next time when we are in a critical mood, the cognition tells us that we have a reason to be jealous. But as we all know, our cognition is very bad. We are even that bad in finding out the sources of our mood that it makes no sense to attribute our recent mood to any event, but thanks to the mood, we select emotions. If we are in a bad mood, we prefer to listen to bad emotions rather than to the good ones. Another point is the sensory failure that we know from Buddhism. Every human-being has its own cognition, but our senses are not objective, but subjective. This means that we construct our reality, and even further, we interpret information in our situation that is not there, but we use this information from experience. Someone who was often disappointed probably triggers jealousy very early, even in a situation where there is no reason for it – which leads to tensions in relationships. If our emotion is, as James proposed, the result of our physiological change, and if we are not good in estimating the source of our emotion, as Zillmann showed in several experiments, then our emotion is seemingly not our real emotion to our current reality. However, we often think that the recent feeling has to do with the recent situation, and we attribute feelings into a reality that does not exist as such. If we are aware of this ‘betrayal’, we use our thoughts over our feelings, and we do not mix our feelings with our thoughts. We can do this through meditation. In meditation, such as

shikantaza, we are just sitting and allow all emotions and thoughts to come to our mind. We try not to suppress emotions, but to deal with them and we try to control ourselves (Schmitz, 2015). And then we try to separate them. We can also do breathing exercises, in which we relax. We try to get aware of 'what are my thoughts' and 'what triggers my recent state?' If you try to track back your emotion, you might fail, and you get aware, it is not the real emotion of your reality now. Maybe you can track back your emotion, but use your thoughts to rule over your feelings. Be aware of 'which are my thoughts?' and 'which thoughts I just do have because others told me?'. In this way, if we are jealous, we first should think 'Why am I jealous? What is the source?'

The dissociation between heart and mind is another topic that has to be covered. In traditional Chinese thought, the heart and the mind are one, and thus when saying 'shi yan zhi', one might say "poetry expresses intention" or "poetry expresses emotion" (Chen Eoyang, p. 245). However, we do not need to speak of one mind as such. The dissociation gets clear when we take a look at the 'two-mind theory' that was introduced in the Shurangama-Sutra (compare Schmitz, 2015). This dissociation can be scientifically explained with the emotional theories. If we feel a physiological change, but we feel that our correspondent reaction is against this, then we have a conflict. This means, if our affection and our ratio is contrarious, then we have a heart-mind conflict. In contrast to classical Chinese

thought, the Indians had a close brahman-atman tie, where the self is the “ultimate substrate of all being” (Venkoba Rao, 2002, p. 316). As an atman and therefore a self does not exist in Buddhism, the self can be reduced to “physical and psychological constituents and processes” (Coseru, 2009/ 2012), although they share a “general view of mental processes as hierarchical and discrete” (Coseru, 2009/ 2012) as the Brahmanical traditions. Therefore, I assume that the Shurangama Sutra - which was probably composed in China - tried to solve the problem that the Indian sutras had a different idea of mind than it was found in Chinese thought. The creation of a two-mind-system therefore probably was a result of terminological transformation, in which different systems of thoughts were syncretized (compare Schmitz, 2015).

To go back to the factor of reality in the emotional conception, I just wanted to clarify again that our reality is constructed - and actually we construct more than we even think (something that the early Yogacarins even put in a strict sense, where they doubted their own cognition, as they thought that nothing is really real and everything derives from the mind), and that we can use meditation to philosophise about our feelings and thoughts - and separate them step by step, as the Buddha taught us to go for right intention and give up wrong intention, such as ill-will and bad emotions, to attain happiness, receive happiness and give happiness and therein develop further. This can be effectively done through meditation, breathing

exercises, but has to be further developed in post-meditation.

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Impermanent Reality – a philosophical story

This text covers the thoughts that arise while looking out of a train's window on a rainy pre-spring day.

Passing by, things are passing by, people are passing by, and we are just passing-byers. Passing by, where things arise and go down, where the mist covers the field, that comes as soon as it disappears. Rain crashing on the glass, just to drop down, making its way to an unknown destination, just like people hurrying not to get wet and yet can their hurry save them?

Passing by, just like things come and go, now I am here but in a second I leave, just like this people will leave and go their way, one time seen and then nowhere, like they never were, but still they are. They have stories from all directions, of ups and downs just like the wind. And while the wind grows, it is evident, we have to grow, but for what? And why do people always look back to what they never can be – to what they never were and to what they never will be again? Tired of circulating, tired of not moving forward, they pass by in masses. And I ask myself, this ride will be past just like everything that happened, just like this rain, just like this wind, just like this field, this biker on this bicycle track who did not see me passing by in a train and probably never will see me again – why we still

hurry for something to grasp, in a world of impermanence? Why do people hurry for something that leaves them in despair? Why do they adopt? We all have our possibilities, our chances, our knowledge, our own character - all what we need is in ourselves - but yet we are too limited to see, this path, just like the track of a train, always moving faster, always moving forward, it has a destination, just as we have, but our cry for liberation, our path to happiness, we ignore.

Passing by, so many people, one day all along, I don't know their lives, their ways, their motivation, they are running fast from point to point to go their ways - disappearing in a station's mass.

Passing by, I see flowers on the field, the rain is slaking their thirst. Traces of the cold are left, but the snow disappeared, the landscape changed, nothing is as it was before. Are we attentive of the beautiful nature - the fog, the fields, the flowers and the small lives that are still hiding?, but the nature feels its sore. Because so many see it while passing-by, knowing that everything arises and goes down, that everything changes in any second, that joy and pain are next to each other, and they follow their routine, their schemata, their busy life - without leaving a photo in their heart.

Published on 15 March 2016

Preserve the books you have!

During life time, we accumulate a lot of books, and some of them are on our shelf and we know we never need them anymore. However, when we clean the shelf, what shall we do with them? I think the best solution is selling them somewhere or giving them away for free, but never throw them away. Books are the soul of humanity, if you throw a book away, it is as if you throw a person away, or as if you hurt a person. I am not referring to your schooling books or personal notebooks or something, I am referring to real printed books you bought. You might think that they are a mass ware, and yes maybe now many people still have the book, but when time passes, the particular book is not printed anymore and many people who are interested in it won't be able to read it. Maybe the book inspired your journey, why don't you let others do the same? I even experienced myself how terrible it is if a book is not accessible anymore, that I really want to read. Luckily, many books are digitalized now, however, it sometimes requires a lot of patience to find the digitalized version. For instance, I am interested in Turkmen language and its literature language, tribal development, dialects, etc. and thus I searched for two Russian books from the Soviet Union (Поцелуевский А. П.: Диалекты туркменского языка, Ашхабад, 1936. Поцелуевский А. П.: Основы синтаксиса туркменского литературного языка, Ашхабад, 1943.), however both books seemingly just were printed and

runned one edition (or maybe two) and then never again, and for a long time it was so hard to get a copy of the book (it took me 5-6 years). Luckily now they are digitalized, but for many years it was difficult to read this good works, although this writer has a good reputation for exploring Turkmen language and is probably one of the best in his field.

And there are many other writers who wrote lots of interesting works and they put a lot of effort in it. But for what? Over 70 to 100 years later, some works are already not available anymore. It is like a soul of knowledge and wisdom vanished!

However, luckily there are people sharing old content and preserving it. For instance, someone uploaded a 1957 Soviet video about Abkhazia on the internet. Although one might classify it as Soviet propaganda video, it reveals a lot about the customs, tradition and living of the people during that time, and it helped me a lot.

Some stores even have specialized on old books, and one can buy books for a low price that were already read (I once saw a website which sold Soviet 1920s short stories and novels very cheap).

Sometimes even seemingly simple works can have a worth for science, such as the primary school book written by Korean writer Wŏn Yŏngŭi, published in 1907 to teach students Classical Chinese. This work is very unique, since all sentences were written for this very book, thus it contained completely new stuff (which is unusual for text

books of Classical Chinese, as they normally mainly teach old Confucian texts). The example phrases in that book are that easy to grasp that it is often picked up in modern school books for high school students in South Korea who are interested in learning Classical Chinese today, and is even a field for science since it is designed differently than other text books of that time and even has “lessons on the history and customs of the Chinese, Indians, Vietnamese and Thai, and even two on Mohammed and Jesus” ¹, which was quite unusual in patriotic Korea. Again, luckily this book is digitalized, but this example shows again how worthy a seemingly normal book might be.

Books as the soul of humanity are the most worthwhile treasure that we probably have, since the understanding of the world as we know today is mostly conducted through written documents and it is logical that most of our knowledge about the past is transmitted through written works. We take up a lot from the past, but we don't think of the future. How will anyone be able to understand our present life later, if we erase it and the bestsellers from today might be shadows in the future, simple names with the notion “his/ her works are lost”, which in fact equals a lost soul, a voice that got silent - and stays silent.

Therefore, don't throw books away, but share them with those who want to preserve the soul of the world!

Notes

1. Kuiwon (歸源): Book Review - 蒙學漢文初階(몽학한문 초계) - 元泳義(원영의), 23 June 2014, <https://kuiwon.wordpress.com/2014/06/23/book-review-蒙學漢文初階/> (retrieved on 24 June 2014).

Published on 18 April 2016

A modified version of Metta – from the perspective of a practitioner

Today, I want to give a brief overview on my meditation technique, a modified form of Metta, that I use to practise sometimes, but it takes some time (plan 15-30 minutes). This article is not meant to be a meditation guide, I just want to inspire you to practise loving-kindness and show you how I do it as a practitioner myself.

At first, I normally sit in my meditation posture on a soft place, e.g. my bed. After putting myself into a comfortable position, I close my eyes and concentrate on breathing. I try to control my breath and prepare for the first step. At first, I imagine myself. I am looking on myself from the outside, and I am accepting myself as I am. I think, self-acceptance is very important to strengthen one's self-confidence. Before you can love others, love yourself. I spend some minutes on pointing out my advantages, my skills, reasons to be happy, reasons to be alive. At the same time, I accept my imperfections and forgive my own mistakes. After that, I put the 'imagined' self into a pleasurable environment, a spot, a place I like a lot. Now, that I am in my 'comfort zone', so to say, I imagine not only me, but also my family at this spot. One does not need to take the family only, but you can choose the relatives you like, and then forgive them for their mistakes, for the times they made you uncomfortable, but point out the lucky

moments. Now, I add my friends to the scene. I just do the same as before, I think of their positive points, their advantages, and forgive them for the negative, for the quarrels, etc. When feeling at harmony and peace towards my most important environment (which are family and friends), then I add my enemies into the scene. At first, it is best to take one person a time, and think of why I hate the person. It is good to go into it in detail, while still trying to control breathing (not to get tensed). Then, after finding the root of my discomfort towards them, I think of their advantages, their strengths. See that these people also have good sides, so it is time to focus on them. I think it is important for all of us to deal with uncomfortable situations and even further to deal with people who give us an uncomfortable feeling, and try to see other perspectives than just our negative side that we see in them. Therefore, forgive them for their pain they gave you, for the suffering, and strengthen the good sides. Can you see that the person is just a human-being, just as you are? That person has mistakes and imperfections, just as everybody else - even you, yourself... and I, myself.

After considering this, I feel a positive attitude towards the whole scene. As next, I see where my imagined spot is placed in the world. I see how it is integrated in the world, and that there are many human-beings, animals, plants, they all live their way, and then I try to see their pain, their suffering, and embrace them. I see that I am just a small

part of it, but I am an integrated part, I cannot be separated out of it.

As next, I imagine the scene again and focus on the part where I placed myself and tell myself: "I am practising loving-kindness towards myself". Then I focus on my family and say to myself: "I am practising loving-kindness towards my family." Next, I focus on my friends and say: "I am practising loving-kindness towards my friends." I keep in mind to control my breath and make sure that I am not tensed or upset or let the mind wander away. Then, I focus on my enemy/ enemies and say: "I am practising loving-kindness towards my enemy." And at least, I say: "I am practising loving-kindness towards the whole world, even the whole universe." It is important to repeat these verses until feeling calm and relaxed (maybe one or two more times). Least, I focus again actively on breathing. After that I open my eyes, and move my body - I realize I am still there, inside the world and I never left, but I am ready to put the core of the practise into daily life.

Honestly, this description is just the way in which I do it and I do not know whether it helps you or not (or even discomforts you, who knows). However, I just do it in this way, because it helps me and affects me positively, however, I did it by trying myself. Metta itself is not an invention by me, so probably many other people maybe do it the same as I do (although I don't know, and as I developed my ideal way through trying, I don't know whether there is any manual or inventor who already described exactly this

before). Anyways, the importance of Metta is taking the steps. Metta in its original description focusses on six steps. One shall practise loving-kindness towards oneself, a good friend, a neutral person, an enemy, altogether, and the entire universe. There are several traditional accounts as well as modern teaching varieties. The discourse on Metta in Buddhist canonical literature is conducted through the Cunda Kammaraputta Sutta in the Anguttara Nikaya within the Sutta Pitaka; the Vatthupama Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya within the Sutta Pitaka; but most importantly the Metta Sutta - or Metta Sutra in Sanskrit - which is found in the Khuddakapatha within Khuddaka Nikaya in the Sutta Nipata.

My modified daily practise just puts the main core into the smallest practise unit, which means that the intensive meditation practise of loving-kindness, which has a lot of steps, is just practised in a shorter version, with the same goal - fighting arrogance, practising gentleness, and sincerity and thus reaching individual harmony and peace.

Liability Exclusion: The article describes the author's meditation practise as narration, not as instructed guide. Therefore, the author takes no liability for any consequences or accidents that could arise through using the article's content as instruction. Putting the described things into practise thus is done at the practitioner's own risk.

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