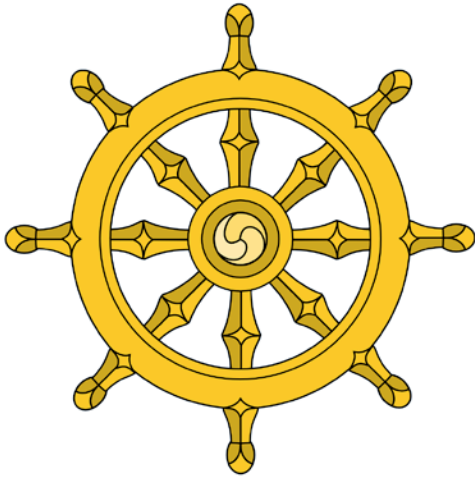


My Buddhist Primer

By Romana 03/14/2019



Introduction

There is a problem of reference in talking about Buddhism. It has to do with labels, which are an integral part of my life. Buddhism also adds even more labels, which can be confusing. While I often talk about my life, my coming death, and future rebirth; this is just for having a convenient reference. I was labeled *Dennis* at birth, but I recently changed my label to *Romana*.

While my writing might seem a little too serious, there is humor built-in. Reality consists of an infinite number of beings in infinite states of existence, all seriously trying to prove that their lives are true. I think it's a grand comedy. Personally, my life seems more like an opera.

I started life fully governed by Asperger's syndrome. I did not understand much about reality, but I did think everything was objective. The lives of conventional people were a mystery to me. I was very oppositional, especially if someone told me there was a god. My social and spiritual connections were near zero.

I might have gone on like this for the rest of my life. When I graduated from high school, I developed a libido and wanted a woman in my life. After college, I served an enlistment in the Air force. I was changing, but my progress was slow.

Miraculously, I got married, and was thrust into social situations I had not been raised to handle. My dear wife died after thirty years of marriage. After feeling lost, I returned to my meditation practice and began a new phase of my life.

Why am I taking this disciplined journey? I don't have ambition in the traditional sense; instead, I seem to run on intuition. My Buddhist practice has become totally entwined in my life. I naturally question everything, but now I do it with discriminating wisdom.

Am I high on something? No, I never take mind-altering or psychedelic drugs ever.

A few years ago, I deduced that I was a two-spirit, non-binary person. This has led me to an unexpected place, where I feel very much like a native shaman of old. I also outgrew my reliance on teachers and gurus, many of whom don't meet my standards. I'm now able to process a lot of teachings on my own. I learned to live fearlessly with low anxiety.

Human beings label all parts of reality. Many labels are inaccurate, but they persist. I will use common sounding words in uncommon ways, since they are often defined differently in Buddhism. I will talk about reality in ways that might sound impersonal and negative; that is an effect of enlightenment. Enlightenment is a way of seeing things the way they actually are, instead of pursuing sugary fantasies that are not very accurate.

Some of my writing might be described as *Crazy Wisdom*. Crazy Wisdom is seeing relationships between things that few take the time to notice.

I am 76 years old at this moment and have 24 years left, at best, so my devotion to my practice will become more marked. I even follow a variety of precepts and commandments. I want to live with discipline in a world where people often have no standards, even if they profess to be extremely religious.

This three-part essay will deal with my changing view of reality.

Part One will discuss the Buddhist background.

Part Two will discuss how creation arises.

Part Three will discuss my developing spirituality and logic.

Part One: Background

By Romana 04/13/2019

History

The historical Buddha was born 2700 years ago in a place called Kapilavastu, located in what is now modern Nepal. His name was Siddhartha Gautama, though he later became known as Shakyamuni, the sage of the Shakyas. The Buddha's life became seeped in myth. Writing was not developed until 400 years after the Buddha's death, so the teachings were transmitted through an oral tradition. No one even knows what language the Buddha spoke.

The Buddha was considered to be the fully-enlightened person of our age. He trained followers to be meditators, who practiced awareness and discriminating wisdom. This seriously challenged the status quo set by ruling monarchs. Over the ages, governments have often sought to restrain Buddhists.

The Buddha was once asked if there was a god, which he refused to answer; instead, he said that religion was about helping people, while the existence or non-existence of any beings was philosophy.

Over time, the Buddhist trinity came to be defined:

- The Buddha – the teacher or guru
- The Dharma – the teachings
- The Sangha – the community of practitioners

As a Buddhist, it is my job to extract authentic teachings from all the hype, myth, and cultural contamination. I believe that, like many Buddhists, I can rediscover teachings through meditation, contemplation, intuition, and study.

Things to Consider

I'm speaking from my point-of-view. However, my beliefs are in constant change. I am going to show how meditation changed my life, but what worked for me, may not work for anyone else, or even be relevant. Before I even think about helping others, I need to work on myself first.

The idea of being a Buddhist should not be taken lightly; it's a lot of hard work with no guarantees whatsoever. Buddhism is not a deity-centered religion, so people who wish someone was in charge, doling out favors, can become greatly disappointed.

Buddhism is an experiential religion based on personal observations. Scripture is a collection of many such observations made by practitioners over centuries of time.

There are many caveats, such as good outcomes in life are not a reward, while bad outcomes are not a form of punishment. There is no concept of original sin, but there is the idea that we are always subject to the consequences of our actions, with no neat tricks or shortcuts to get around it. People are not born defective, and everyone deserves to pursue a meaningful path in life.

Stories

I think all realities unfold like stories. There are stories within stories. There are no new stories, since everything that can possibly happen has been done an infinite number of times. Popular stories are:

- Magically created beings, worship a magically created savior, who expounds on the insubstantiality of all existence.
- Persecuted people flee to a new land, where they attempt to create a utopia to their liking. However, they freely persecute neighbors, and even their own people who are not standard. No matter how many of their own people are ejected, there will always be some of those remaining who eventually become viewed to be non-standard.
- A narcissist attracts droves of followers, who follow blindly to conquer new lands, killing thousands of people. It is all for nothing, because everyone dies without solving any problems. Wars never end wars.
- A scientific society creates starships and establishes relationships with diverse beings throughout the galaxy. This society is relatively non-materialistic, and is more suitable for autistic and non-binary beings, rather than binary beings who erroneously think reality is fixed and unchanging.
- A couple deeply in love get married and expect to live happily ever after. However, they did not account for unrealistic expectations, sexism, bad behavior, sickness, loss of income, and death.

A Non-theistic Religion

While Buddhism emphasizes ethics and integrity, it does it without any familiar theistic references. Individual Buddhists can believe what they want, but my personal form of Buddhism itself does not support theism, atheism, salvation, worship, reincarnation, or sin and redemption. I do not deny the existence of hell beings and celestial beings, but I do not believe that, under ordinary circumstances, such beings have any impact on my life.

Buddhism is built on a psychology that is different from western psychology. Western psychology often puts the blame for the world's problems upon the individual, while Buddhism sees possibilities for enlightenment, spiritual growth, and wisdom.

How Did I Become a Buddhist?

I attended a public ceremony called a Refuge-ceremony. Among many words, I recited the vow that *I Take Refuge in the Buddha, I Take Refuge in the Dharma, and I Take Refuge in the Sangha*. It was understood that I was expected to do all the work, and that no one was going to rescue me.

As part of the ceremony, I received a calligraphy that gave me a Refuge-name. My Refuge-name is *Jigme Khyung*, or Fearless Garuda.

Buddhist vows are not considered to be earthly vows, so they can't be easily altered. I will talk more about this later.

The Three Yanas

Modern Buddhism is divided into three yanas, or vehicles. These are the Hinayana, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana. These are not necessarily distinctly separated, especially since so much information is now intertwined on the internet. The Hinayana is the basic place where Buddhists begin, in which teachings are often solidly stated. The Mahayana includes all the teachings of the Hinayana, but they are presented in a more universal, less solid fashion. The Vajrayana includes all the teaching in the Hinayana and the Mahayana; however, the teachings about Buddha Nature are far more sublime.

It is said that there is no teaching that is better or more important than any other teaching, but the interpretation of such teachings becomes more sophisticated moving from the Hinayana to the Vajrayana.

The Basics: The Four Noble Truths

When I started my practice, I was much more excited about the glamour of the Vajrayana, than the need for me to learn discipline. The *Four Noble Truths* did not seem that interesting at that time. Now that I'm more mature, I constantly work to integrate these teachings into my life.

- **The truth of suffering** - life involves suffering or dissatisfaction. Even the most privileged lives involve suffering or dissatisfaction of some sort.
- **The truth of desire** - suffering is caused by desire, specifically unenlightened desire.
- **The truth of the cessation of desire** - when unenlightened desire is ceased or eliminated from life, suffering ceases as well.
- **The truth of the 8-fold path** - desire is enlightened through right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration, right understanding and right resolve.

I have been aware of my failures to properly embrace right speech, right action, and right effort. I always have neuroses to deal with.

The Three Marks of Existence

I consider this teaching to be my most relevant. When I am experiencing a life issue, I go over this in my head. These are like rules for all created beings; there's no such thing as an uncreated being in Buddhism.

- **Annica—Impermanence:** The Buddha taught that everything eventually falls apart, because things do not have a solid, inherent reality of their own.
- **Dukkha—Unsatisfactoriness:** Beings suffer, because they refuse to find ways to deal with things that they can't possibly change.
- **Anattā—No Self:** All things are without any essence of their own. Subjective interpretation fills in the blanks. I only exist relative to other things; reality is a projection into my mind.

Cause and Effect

As a physicist, I have been trained to study systems of cause and effect. I believe all physical reality is created through principles of cause and effect; no prime mover has ever been required. Some of the systems of cause and effect are:

- The order of physical matter
- The order of organic life
- The order of weather systems
- The order of large systems of mass
- The order of physical laws
- The nature and functions of the mind
- The order of sentient karma

All the systems of cause and effect collide, creating a variety of landscapes and structures. Some of these will be living beings. Recently, I have come to suspect that there really is no distinction between all the systems of cause and effect. I'll discuss this later.

Karma

Karma is an abstract system that attempts to measure causes and conditions leading to effects and consequences for living beings. Karma and biology go hand-in-hand; they are not usually separate. Karma is not real, but neither is anything else. I don't think I have a soul, but I see how karma could be mistaken for one. This answers the question: do animals have souls? My answer is no. The difference between me and other animals is that I have the ability to process more subconscious information.

I once took a class on karma. The teacher thought that karma was fairly solid, being passed from life to life to animate various bodies, but I came to realize that that was an over-simplification.

When I was born, I received a measure of karma. It came from several sources, including general karma for a human being, and even past lives. Karma transmits general information for functioning, plus a variety of memories and emotions. I received both male and female karma. My karma and my subconscious mind are the same. I was born on the autistic spectrum, which indicates my karma was not standard.

My troubled birth was not a form of punishment; it was just my lot in life. It took me most of my life to realize that karma is impermanent and can be changed through discipline.

Past Lives

I don't believe I own any past lives. This is the same as saying I don't believe in reincarnation. However, I do have past lives in my karmic chain. I can remember some events from those lives, but it does not imply that they belonged to me. I have even undergone past-life regression under hypnosis. I had some interesting experiences. My hypnotist said I seemed like one of her most authentic patients, but I think it all verged on pseudo-science.

Habitual Patterns

Karma that is repetitious and cyclical in nature is called habitual patterns. Really problematical habitual patterns are called neuroses. Meditation and contemplation can help me deal with my neuroses by me peering into my subconscious, so I can label my neuroses as having no factual basis. I used this technique to overcome about 95% of my Asperger tics. Dealing with my anger management issues was more difficult, since meditation alone was not enough. If I don't take the correct dosage of my testosterone blocker, my personality takes on a nasty edge, no matter how hard I try to behave.

Samsara and Nirvana

Samsara is the set of realms where phenomenal existence takes place, being powered by karmic loops...habitual patterns. The repetitive cycles of existence continue, because most people never develop the means to deal with and solve issues in their lifetimes. Countless generations experience exactly the same problems. Samsara is *conditioned* by repeated habitual patterns. The reason I'm a Buddhist is because it has given me the tools to deal with my neuroses.

Nirvana is the stateless, unconditioned reality. It is not heaven, but I can dwell there for moments while meditating. One description of Nirvana is that it is uncreated primordial intelligence. Some think Nirvana is extinction, but I think it's creation.

I think that created states arise as bubbles in Nirvana that become the cast out seeds for realities that evolve into places like universes. It is all like a mind trick, since I have never left Nirvana in the first place.

Indoctrination

Besides institutions, media is now used to reinforce habitual patterns. Media has become materialistic, because it is constantly trying to sell things or ideas. Subliminal programming is a hidden message within a regular message. Electronic subliminal programming is supposed to be illegal, but I doubt anyone is testing for it. Even if there is no subliminal message, there is constant repetition. The endless use of beautiful women in media, for no particular reason, is another form of subliminal programming.

There is now a flood of information trying to convince there is something that I can't do without. This can range from car insurance, beauty products, mortgages, to medicines

Not long ago, I was easily swayed by media, but I have now built up immunity to indoctrination. Here's how I do it:

- I mute all television commercials; however they are presented to me.
- Sometimes, there are commercials in movie theaters that I can't mute. In this case, I concentrate to tune them out.
- I never listen to radio programs that have commercials, including pledge drives. If all else fails, I can always tune to satellite radio.
- As a Buddhist, I have become very non-materialistic. I'm no longer tempted by any schemes that offer fame and wealth, especially not those that offer something for nothing.

Meditation

There are many kinds of meditation. In Sanskrit, meditation is called *Dhyana*, while its important component, contemplation, is called *Samadhi*. Meditation is used to help me examine my issues without being bogged down with a lot of personal baggage. My meditation is often focused on an object, which helps me to be less self-centered. One type of meditation is called *Shamata*, calm abiding, which is transformed, over time, to *Vipassana*, insight.

Some types of meditation are done with open eyes, while others with closed eyes. I personally close my eyes on the in-breath, and open them on the out-breath. This helps me to avoid drifting off into some fantasy. I am quite prone to do this.

Lately, I often feel like I'm in *Samadhi* all day long. This is not dangerous, so long as I maintain awareness and don't tune out.

Chanting

Chanting is a form of meditation where I use my voice. Interestingly, chanting causes the water molecules in my body to vibrate at the same frequency as the background radiation in the universe. Please note that, while the text can seem to invoke teachers and gurus, they are but mirrors that reflect the words back to me.

Chanting is often sequential text. It can also contain mantras, and a chant can be a single mantra. Mantras are recited repeatedly, so that their message is better retained by my mind. Here is a chant from the Sadhana of Mahamudra, by Chögyam Trungpa:

*Think of us poor, miserable wretches.§
With deep devotion and intense longing§
I supplicate you.§
The time has come for you to arouse yourself and do something.§
The tradition of meditation is waning§
And intellectual arguments predominate.§
We are drunk with spiritual pride§
And seduced by passion.§
The dharma is used for personal gain§
And the river of materialism has burst its banks.§
The materialistic outlook dominates everywhere§
And the mind is intoxicated with worldly concerns.§
Under such circumstances, how can you abandon us?§
The time has come when your child needs you.§
No material offering will please you§
So the only offering I can make§
Is to follow your example.§*

Mantra

Here is a mantra called the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa*. Again, it is not a type of worship, but a device to get me to embrace certain objectives. It is recited seven or fourteen times.

Grant your blessings so my mind will become with the dharma.§

Grant your blessings so that dharma may progress along the path.§

Grant your blessings so that the path may clarify confusion.§

Grant your blessings so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.§



My Shrine

My shrine is not an altar, since I never worship anyone. It is my personal visualization of my devotion to my Buddhist practice, and a reverence to all the practitioners who preceded me. The centerpiece is a *thangka* or scroll, which depicts the goddess Tara in her white manifestation. Tara is the goddess of transcendental wisdom. Images of Tara are found in many cultures, including some that do not practice Buddhism.

There are two oil candles, a complete Buddha stature made in India, and the head of a Thai-style Buddha. There is the statue of a tiger, a crystal ball, a bell, and a dorje, or thunderbolt. There are seven cups that are filled with water to represent my offering. When the water is emptied, it is always given to plants.

High above to the right, there is a bow with arrows, which represents discipline. There is an Asian-style dragon curled around the bow, which is my personal joke.

What About Love?

The basis for creation is the desire for interesting experiences. This is also the basis of love, but things often go horribly wrong. I think the world I live in is become a very dark place, where the three poisons rule. The three poisons are greed, hatred, and delusion. These poisons are hell-based.

One of my goals in life is to transform the three poisons to the three virtues: benevolence, love, and wisdom. The three virtues are heaven-based. I will explain later why I follow such a path without any expectation of any reward, privilege or auspicious rebirth.

Love doesn't seem to just happen; I think it has to be selected.

The Cycle of Life

I once thought everything was totally objective. In that context, the Buddhist cycle of life made no sense, and smacked of theism. Some time ago, I had a major insight during meditation: there was no objective reality at all; everything was subjective. While the paradoxes never completely went away, Buddhist teachings suddenly made a lot more sense.

The Buddhist cycle of life is Life, Death, the After-life, and Rebirth. The words may seem trivial, but the concept is not. I will discuss this in Part Two.

Realms of Existence

Buddhists like to label everything, so reality has been subdivided into realms of existence. Such clean distinctions do not really exist, and I as a Buddhist do not own the right to define realms for my own use. Karma is a key discriminator, since rebirth in a hell is more complicated than being punished for being *bad*, just as rebirth in a paradise is not a matter of simply being *good*.

I presume that one arrives in any realm by being born there. Also, all realms are impermanent. The Nirmanakaya is the lowest realm, usually divided into six parts: hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, and lower gods. These six parts are also referred to as Samsara. The human realm is considered the best for enlightenment. I prefer to say human-type realm, since I'm sure there are a lot more than one. I think I was born into the wrong human-type realm.

The Sambhogakaya, or bliss realm, is the middle realm of existence. It has form, but none of the solidness of the Nirmanakaya. I can do bliss meditation, where I experience all the joy of the bliss realm. I don't ordinarily do this, since such meditation is not enlightening.

All the many traditional Buddhist paradises occur here; however, the deities are all wisdom deities. There are no savior deities. The most famous paradise is the Pure Land, or Sukhavati. Like nearly all realms, including hell realms, there is a Buddha at the center of Sukhavati. This Buddha is named Amitabha, or Amida. The purpose of this paradise is to help beings recover from suffering experienced in other realms. No one is saved here. I did an auspicious rebirth Sukhavati ceremony for my mom, and for my last cat that died.

Personally, I feel most compatible with the realm known as the Copper Colored Mountain. Crazy wisdom rules!

The highest realm of existence is the Dharmakaya, or formless realm. This realm is beyond description, sort of merging with Nirvana.

Skepticism

Buddhists tend to be skeptical by nature. I'm extremely skeptical. Using my photographic memory and analytical skills, I have correlated hundreds of teachings to derive what I thought was important. I also encountered many troubling deviations from the teachings among Buddhists, including sex scandals. I find it amazing how Buddhists can elaborate about the teachings and how to use them to develop mindfulness and overcome habitual patterns; yet, not really do anything about it.

Buddhism has long embraced celibacy and monasticism. I don't think anyone can deal with the problems in the world, while avoiding them. Conjugal relationships and intimacy are important, but no one is very good at it. Children should be important in themselves and be raised to build an enlightened world; rather than just being bodies for future incarnations.