

Arhat Yoga

The Universal Foundation of
Religions and Spiritual Practices

Readings on Yoga and
Spiritual Cultivation

WILLIAM BODRI

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Top Shape Publishing LLC
1135 Terminal Way Suite 209
Reno, NV 89502

ISBN: 978-0-9998330-5-6

DEDICATION

For everyone, regardless of their religion or spiritual tradition, who treads the path of spiritual cultivation and is seeking answers. Inside are readings on the shared cultivation path within the world's great faiths that leads to transcendental attainments. The proper spiritual practices constitute a universal, non-denominational pathway constructed on the principles of cause and effect science and lead to a verifiable result. I've brought together readings on the main principles of this universal path. I apologize for any errors herein, especially in earlier works cited as new information has sometimes come to light and my opinion changed after their original publication, but the broad strokes of the pathway revealed are correct. Just as Saint Maximos the Confessor corrected the theological errors of Origen and Evagrius, Tibetan master TsongKhapa cleaned up the errors in Vajrayana Buddhism, and Shakyamuni Buddha cleaned up the errors seen in the cultivation practices of his day, I hope this work cleans up the errant ideas and perspectives about spiritual cultivation in today's world. I also hope that someday people will work to clean up this work as well.

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CHAPTER 1: ARHAT YOGA

THE ORIGINAL NATURE¹

The primordial substance, essence, energy, foundation, substratum or ground state of the universe which gave birth to everything is its fundamental substrate, and is known by many names such as the Ultimate, Supreme Reality, “Highest, Clearest, Purest,” absolute essence, original nature, fundamental essence, source nature, Source, true nature, absolute nature, self-nature, primordial essence, absolute purity, the Unmanifest, Suchness, the Supreme Beatitude, Self or True Self.

In religious terms It is sometimes called Parabrahman, Brahman, Nirguna Brahman, Shiva, *Purusha*, God, Father, Ein Sof, Ik Ongkar, Supreme Ultimate, *dharmakaya*, Buddha-substrate, *nirvana*, *Anama*, Allah and many other names to suit a respective faith.

Being the original essence/energy that is the most fundamental and primal essence, logic necessitates that It must be uncreated, self-so, pre-existing or beginningless because It doesn’t come from anything else. It has no coming into being. It doesn’t change unto anything else but remains what It is. It is the primal, primordial, fundamental, foundational essence before myriad other things were created, and Itself is pre-existing from beginninglessness rather than born. If It was created than its own source would have been the primordial essence, but It *is* the primordial essence or ground state of beingness.

Since Its existence does not come from any prior cause or conditions It is therefore self-so, uncreated, present before the creation of the universe of myriad things started. It is their primordial substance or essence, infinite and all-pervading. How could it be limited and bounded? Only phenomena are limited and bounded.

This primordial essence, energy, ground state, beingness or substance must, by logical inference, be a solitary singleness of one essence that is unmanifest into anything. It exists only as pure Itself. It must be a oneness, a single solitary whole that is alone (perfectly pure) rather than two or more things. It is a “One Without A Second.” Since It is the only primal existent, Its immaculateness necessitates that

¹ See *Traditional Theory of Evolution and Its Application in Yoga* (Gharote, Devnath, Jha), *Maya in Physics* (N.C. Panda), *Avadhuta Gita of Dattatreya* (Swami Chetananda), *Astavakkra Samhita* (Swami Nityaswarupananda), *Dasbodh* (Shri Samartha Ramdas).

It cannot have anything else besides It. It is the One Without Another, the Solitary One, the Pure One, the Immaculate without divisions.

This original essence must also be infinite because being limited by having borders would mean It transforms into something else at its boundaries, and then there would be two things instead of a single fundamental substratum. Therefore It is endless, infinite, partless, an unbroken infinite whole of single purity that does not undergo modifications such as by possessing any attributes (which would constitute impurities within It).

It cannot be superseded by a more transcendental reality but is the foundational, fundamental, primordial base of Creation – the only reality that is real in every respect. Other than It, everything else is ever-changing and therefore Maya, an illusion that is not what it appears to be, undependable due to impermanence. It is without changes, motionless, attributeless, without marks or signs, unsullied and unclouded by phenomena so It is continuous and everywhere the same, present in entirety everywhere. Being homogeneously pure and changeless It has no precedent stage nor consequent stage, no increase nor decrease, no coming into being or transformation into anything else. It is always just Itself and only Itself –immutable, pure, infinite, motionless, eternal. It is everlasting due to Its changelessness, and thus It is the sole unchanging Reality. It is what is *real* in life, your very source nature.

For understanding's sake It is sometimes described as formlessness, void or Emptiness without attributes (qualities), and thus akin to empty space. It is often referred to as being like undivided endless empty space since that is also pure, changeless, motionless, and without attributes or differentiation. As Moses Maimonides wrote, “you must understand that God has no essential attribute in any form or in any sense whatever, and that the rejection of corporeality implies the rejection of essential attributes.” Any changeable entity, on the other hand, has a beginning and an end as well as attributes that can be described.

What is a change? It is the appearance of another characteristic of a substance when a previous characteristic has disappeared. This is called mutation or transformation and thus is a change. Any changeable entity has a beginning and end, and must therefore decay whereas the primordial essence never changes since It is infinite, eternal, immaculately pure, motionless and thus has no divisions, differentiations, or attributes to It. Without borders, It must be infinite in size. Immaculately pure, It is a perfect whole oneness without differentiations. Changeless, It is motionless and eternal. When people think of It they often compare It to an emptiness like space, or the empty clarity of pristine awareness.

THE PRIMAL CONSTITUENT

All things, at their most fundamental level, are composed of this primordial essence. Therefore their composition, in the most absolute aspect, is only this highest fundamental substance-essence-nature-substratum-ground state. Ultimately there is only this original primordial essence and nothing else. It is the omnipresent, dependable, *real part of you* that can never be eliminated – your truest Self or self-nature. It is immanent – always there – and transcendent to all created things.

You are this fundamental nature. Since It never leaves nor changes It is your True Self, your self-nature, your unevolving inherent Self. This is what you are. *Everyone and everything* is this same True Self, the primordial substrate, the foundational substance. The real “I” in you is this unchangeable self-nature that is your utmost Self.

You are nothing different from this original essence. You are actually the one Self that is in All, that

is everything. You are It, It is you, you are one of Its aspects. Wholly being It you are also the rest of the universe, which is also the rest of you. You and It are no different from one another as is also the case with all other things. Being It you were never born and will never die. Therefore, you are ultimately beyond birth and death.

Just as gold can be made into various ornaments, those golden ornaments are in their primal essence only gold. From gold's standpoint, they are all just itself, namely gold, because gold sees no differentiation into anything other than itself. When clay becomes a jar the name "jar" arises but it is still only clay. There is only a modification, transformation or change in appearance. Similarly, from the standpoint of the fundamental nature there is nothing else in existence despite all the apparent forms we see. There are no phenomena at all because there is only Itself, the One. There is just the original nature - just Itself. All subsequent evolutes (energies, forms and phenomena) are just Itself no matter what their shapes, forms or appearances. They are only It.

The fundamental ground nature is therefore the Ultimate Source, the Ultimate Self, the True Self or true self-nature of all things. It is their fundamental substrate, their fundamental substance, their ground state of being, their absolute self-nature, their innermost Self. All things, at their ultimate compositional breakdown, have It as their absolute essence or substrate (substance).

A saying runs, "Although He existed in many forms He was single. He was there in all the elements and was all the elements." Thus the primordial essence is often called the source nature, fundamental nature or primordial substratum. It is the Self that is the Self of All. Ultimately there is only one entity, this fundamental Self. The universe is this pure existence only. True beingness is this one eternal nature.

EVOLUTES

Being pure and eternal in nature this ground state is changeless, being changeless It can never transform into anything else, and therefore It can never give birth to anything.

By a process therefore unknown, which Buddhism terms "Ignorance" since we don't know how it happened, this solitary essence somehow gave rise to evolutes that in turn gave rise to further transformations and even more evolutes. Through complex interactions of cause and effect, the evolutes produced innumerable subsequent energies, forms and phenomena.

During the process of gold being formed into jewelry the substance of gold never changes at all, only its outer form or appearance changes. There is nothing separating one piece of gold jewelry from another when you are just looking at the absolute substance - gold. Analogy: all the various forms of the world are still nothing but the all-pervading fundamental substrate appearing in various forms. No one can conceive of a cause at the stage of Creation but a state of diversity somehow arises in oneness that produced all these forms, but this diversity of apparent forms is an illusion because they are all still only the foundational substrate. They are not what they appear to be.

The evolutes in aggregate are called Manifestation, Creation, Triple Realm, karmic formations, Shakti, *Prakriti*, the Word, Logos, Holy Spirit, all things, All, universe, cosmos, attributes, forms, Indra's web, the Primal Illusion, Maya, Mara, samsara, and many other names. They are generated by the process we call creation, generation, production, birth, emanation, manifestation, mutation, change or transformation and in essence they are the original nature.

Evolutes are constantly in a state of movement, flux, transformation, change, no-rest or vibration as opposed to the motionless original nature that doesn't move because of its changeless immutability.

Due to constant change the realm of evolutes is characterized by impermanence, and what appears solid and unchanging is just an illusion of those qualities. The realm of Creation is a grand illusion lacking solidity like the reflection of the moon in water that looks firmly real but is insubstantial and cannot be grasped. It is just an illusory sign, an apparent reality rather than the core substantial reality. It is only relatively real to those of conventional minds.

On the surface phenomena may appear solid, still, and unchanging but due to the limitations of consciousness and the media of our sensory apparatus what we see around us is a blurred vision of the universe, an approximation of simplified, abbreviated, limited perspective. It is nothing like reality but a magnificent illusion that has come about that has maximized our evolutionary fitness. Evolution has shaped us to have abilities and perceptions that allow us to survive. But this also entails hiding from us stuff we don't need to know, which is the rest of the totality of reality, whatever reality might be, and the true reality is far, far larger than our limited point of view. Whatever data we perceptually acquire about the objective external world of things-in-themselves out there will always be illusory, partial, mistaken, an approximation because that information will be acquired through our limited perceptual systems that we cannot control or transcend. Whatever we perceive is a construction of our mind that allows us to work with the world in a useful way that allows us to survive (adaptive behavior), but our worldview is actually very different from objective reality.

We might perceive the calm surface of a lake but our limited vision masks a rapid dance of myriads of miniscule water molecules and energetic interactions. We cannot see all wavelengths of light either and can only hear sound in a narrow range of frequencies, so it is easy to understand that we never sensorially perceive the world in all its glory, nor register the fine details of the true nature of the conventional world. The actual world of Shakti is so much more than what appears within our mind. We may even misperceive the world due to faulty sense organs and on occasion we have perceptual illusions. In short, what we envision within our minds is not the true reality of the external world of Shakti. As to the absolute essence or ground state, we can never ever perceive the formless original nature. You can think about the original nature, but the images you make in your mind are a similitude of That which lacks all attributes, and are thus incorrect. God's *essence*, being free of all attributes like empty space, is thus unfathomable, unapproachable, incomprehensible and imparticipable whereas God's energies and attributes are accessible to us.

When the wind flows in the sky it does not distort the sky in any way. With the arising of wind you can in no way say that space becomes broken. There is no distortion in the sky if it becomes pervaded by darkness or light either. Similarly, when evolutes arise within the original nature there is no change or distortion within It. Nothing can produce an effect on It. However, new appearances do somehow arise just as the wind somehow appears in an empty motionless sky.

These evolutes, effusions, energies, forms and phenomena (subtle elements) comprise what we can call various planes/levels of existence in the cosmos, also known as realms of being, that are populated by innumerable diverse phenomena. Many spiritual schools maintain that the earthly plane has evolved from a gradual condensation, solidification, crystallization or emanation of higher non-physical energies and essences, with the ultimate foundation being the changeless original nature.

Religions, and especially spiritual cultivation schools, typically talk about five planes of existence in addition to the primordial original essence. However, there are many more despite the abbreviated discussion.

The causeless cause – the original essence – is in no way associated with whatever It inseparably pervades as part of It, meaning these realms. Inseparable means It pervades all evolutes that are, in their essential nature, It. It is the “I” or self-nature of all things so it is impossible for them to escape

It, for It is their absolute essence. Being the only existent, It is All.

Everything is the fundamental substrate. Evolutes, emanations, appearances or manifestations are Its physical or non-transcendental aspects, functions, or attributes. They are what we call conventional existence, an ephemeral realm of permanent/continuous constant change. Shankara said, “The universe is truly Brahman, ... for that which is superimposed (the universe) has no separate existence from its substratum (Brahman). Whatever a deluded person perceives through mistake is Brahman and Brahman alone.”

The two principles of the original nature and evolutes (Shakti) have no control over each other. The original nature is not involved in evolution since being perfectly pure, motionless and changeless It does not cause anything and thus is not the cause of any evolute. It does not perform any actions whatsoever. Nevertheless the universe has arisen and It exists always, everywhere and in everything as ever-present existential support. No change whatsoever ever occurs to It just as there is never any distortion in the sky when darkness or light pervades it. All changes only happen in the field of Creation, emanation, effusion, or manifestation. Evolution only happens to Shakti. It is from Shakti that all is evolved. In *Purusha* nothing happens. Shakti, however, is constantly in an evolving state of flux and transformation.

The primordial essence is the causeless cause that is no way associated with whatever appears within It. It is inseparable from everything, pervading everything, but the two principles of Parent and Offspring, Host and Guest, Mother and Son, primordial original substance and Shakti have no control over each other. *Purusha*, the original essence, is not involved in evolution since It does not create anything. It does not cause anything and so is not the cause of any evolute because changes never occur to It. All changes only happen in Shakti, the field of emanations. Evolution only happens to Shakti/*Prakriti*, from which all is evolved.

From the standpoint of evolutes, we must say that the generation of each and every phenomenon proceeds and is governed by universal natural laws of cause and effect. All production, emanation, transformation, mutation, evolution, generation or creation of phenomena can be understood as a relationship between cause and effect. The cause and effect laws of transformation/generation may be as yet unknown, but all things arise and transform through definite laws of cause and effect, stimulus and consequence. Cause and effect rules everything except the fundamental substrate.

Entities that are themselves evolutes serve as the cause for subsequent entities to appear within Shakti. As sentient beings with minds we have the ability to investigate and then understand some of these causative/transformation processes and make use of them to our own benefit. This is a necessity in order to live, so should we not also use this ability to make situations as good as possible? With consciousness we experience the world but we can also use our sentience to improve world experience, and thus should master the capabilities of consciousness in order to improve our lives. Such mastery requires learning principles (developing wisdom or understanding) and mastering skillfulness (of execution).

ALL PHENOMENA ARE IMPERMANENT

All the constituent forms of Shakti that make up the universe are continuously in motion. Thus their apparent natures are impermanent, transitory or temporary, which means that they each lack an unchanging *inherent* identity. They all arise and pass away, and therefore are unstable formations lacking a concrete identity, a constant core or “self,” a solid underlying inherent nature that is a fixed identity free of ceaseless transformations. Furthermore, they each exist only because of an infinite interdependence of causes and effects within the body of Shakti, so even their singular existence is an

existence dependent upon everything else in existence. In other words, they manifest because of a compendium of conditions where every element of existence enters in some measure into everything else that is. They exist because of a totality of infinite conditions so they are characterized by conditionedness rather than independent existence. They have no absolute metaphysical substrate for manifestation other than the fundamental essence.

This is why all the phenomena within Shakti are termed “unreal.” There are no persistent stable identities, no eternal universals nor independent particulars within Shakti. Entities are all impermanent components of a shimmering, dancing “Grand Illusion” that cannot be grasped as a constant, and thus are like a mirage. Phenomena lack “true reality” because they never remain the same identity whereas the original nature remains changeless, motionless, reliable, stable, eternally present. Phenomena, on the other hand, are never stable appearances because their existent identity continuously jumps from one interaction to another thus changing the form.

This lack of an enduring identity for phenomena, which all have ephemeral existences, has important consequences for the possibility of liberation from conditions that produce suffering in life, such as lower states of being, or the possibilities of confining it. Because phenomena, conditions, circumstances or states of being are impermanent and flexible, marked by conditionedness, we can change them by directly or by indirectly influencing the conditions that produce them. Because we have consciousness we can learn how to master their transformations to create better, higher states of being. This is our capability due to consciousness, and the changes we can bring about in phenomena are only limited by our wisdom, skills, efforts and determination.

All together the myriad individual phenomena of the universe comprise one single body, Shakti, whose most fundamental essence is the eternal original nature. Each phenomenon within this whole, or you can say the whole itself (All or Shakti), is constantly changing, mutating or flowing because of infinite interdependence – infinite interlinked dependent conditions causing ceaseless transformations everywhere. In other words, a single ripple in the tiniest of phenomena actually affects the entire universe.

Each entity that appears arises due to all previous and present ones, meaning that it arises conditionally in the form of a dependent origination. Despite what seems like a myriad of separate individualities the whole universe comprised of everything should be considered an effervescent, scintillating appearance that is just one body. Although in continuous, interminable flux Shakti must be considered one single whole. Transcending Shakti is the original nature, for underlying all forms, all changes, all forces, all matter, and all spirit is the One that never changes and always endures, the pure substrate and substratum that is the support of All always, everywhere and in everything.

As an individual you are part of the single unified body of Shakti, which is the Logos, and thus you form a unity with all the other myriad things of the universe. They are essentially your greater body, wrapped around you through infinite interconnections. Because of this relationship, how you act and behave, and even what you think (because thoughts are part of Shakti) will affect the greater universe. How are you conducting yourself?

Beyond your apparent form you are your True Self, your self-nature or the True I, and have the ability to fashion present conditions *and the future* in any way you want if you proceed skillfully with wisdom and daring. What do you ultimately want to achieve as a consequence for your greater body, which is your greater self? Your actions will produce consequences in many directions, so you should undertake a path of cultivation that takes you to mastering your consciousness and your behavior to produce the results you ultimately want.

The unity of Heaven (the cosmos) and man is one all pervading whole, so how will you devote your

actions within this one unity? What will you create? In which directions should your efforts be applied? There will always be consequences for what you think, say and do. Why not choose a path of effort where your consequences beautify mankind and the world?

INFINITE INTERDEPENDENT CO-ARISING

The creation of a phenomenon is called its appearance, manifestation, rising up, development or birth. Its continuance is called its continued existence, sustained existence, sustainment, sustention, preservation or maintenance. Its dissolution is called its death, disposition, departure, disappearance, disintegration or settlement. In Hinduism these three phases of existence are symbolized by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

There are laws that control the three phases of generation, sustention, and dissolution for each phenomenon. These are the laws of cause and effect (such as physics, chemistry, etcetera) that rule the transformations, mutations, evolution, interactions or changes for phenomena. All things arise and disappear due to cause and effect – arising entities are expressed conditionally meaning that they appear due to previous entities – and when we cannot fathom the reasons for an event/entity it is simply because we are ignorant as to the ultimate causes, but causes are there.

Furthermore, the existence of each singular phenomenon depends upon all other phenomena in the entire universal whole because all phenomena are interlinked in a giant infinite web of interdependent, intertwining causes and conditions that excludes absolutely nothing. All phenomena are infinitely interconnected, each having an existence that all others participate in. In other words, each phenomenon or element enters in some way into everything else that is. This is called “Indra’s net” of glittering jewels wherein each jewel in each “eye” of an infinite net contains within itself the reflection of all the other jewels in the netting. If we were to inspect one of these jewels we would find in its polished surface the reflection of all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number, and in each reflected jewel we would also find the reflections of all the others, and so on ad infinitum. Thus they all enter into each other; within each jewel are present all jewels. This represents the fact that everything in the universe conditionally arises in dependence on everything else, all things, elements or phenomena arise and disappear in a magnificently great chain of cause and effect that rules all changes, and therefore absolutely nothing is independent. Every thing has an existence that is dependently defined.

No phenomenon has an existence of its own – an intrinsic inherent existence – but always comes into existence in dependence upon *all other things* via an infinite network of causality defining uncountable interrelationships. So every thing is nothing (on its own since all other things compose it), and every thing is everything. The presence of all other things connected together creates a phenomenon, and so they all share in its beingness. You cannot say a phenomenon is a single thing because it is defined by and connected with everything else. A single phenomenon is a manifestation of infinite simultaneous conditions that exclude nothing, and so the conditions of an unknowably vast past and present come together to create it.

Thus one can say that “each phenomena contains the entire universe” since the entire universe is involved/participates in the creation and maintenance (existence) of every single thing as well as its transformation into something else. If one single object in the universe changes, then the entire universe as a whole changes simultaneously. You can also say that each thing within the universe *is* the (entire) universe because it holds within itself the entire universe and cannot be parted from the All; by grabbing a corner of a book you hold the whole book and by grabbing a tiny iota of the universe you hold the entire universe.

Simply put, the existence of each and every apparent thing is due to an infinite network of causes and effects, an infinite simultaneous co-dependence, so no thing exists separately on its own. Each thing lacks a substantive existence, an inherent existence all on its own, an ultimate existence in some sort of fundamental way because it only exists through countless other conditions making it so. Nothing has an independent self-nature, an underlying self-so existence. They all have conditionally defined natures, existences that manifest because of infinite contributing causes. All things are therefore said to arise, appear or manifest because of all others. Everything is “dependently arisen” because of being dependent on everything else, and each and every thing is therefore devoid of inherent existence, a self-so nature, an existence by itself. All things look like they have permanent essences, but are conditional appearances. If they had essential natures they would never change, and thus would not be ruled by cause and effect or subject to dependent origination either.

This dependent arising of phenomena is alternatively called simultaneous arising, infinite interdependence, interdependent generation, dependent origination, Indra’s net, linked interdependence, simultaneous co-arising, conditional existence and many other names. An infinite chain of cause and effect is responsible for the appearance of any single phenomenon, although for practical use we always limit causality chains to a smaller set of conditions. To master cause and effect relationships, we reduce this infinite immensity into a smaller number of simplified principles we can handle and still remain skillful in achieving the results we want.

What this essentially means, however, is that one entity or evolute cannot serve as the sole cause for a subsequent entity to appear, but sometimes we merely assume this is so. Actually, there is no such thing as a single cause or evolute being solely responsible for the appearance of any manifesting phenomenon. The entire universal cosmos, through infinite interdependence, gets into the act. Everything is responsible for the manifestation of everything else, which is infinite codependent arising. Everything has to be the way it is and operating the way it does for anything to happen, which is what we sometimes call karma. Karma just means that whatever manifests in your life does so because all past and present conditions come together to produce it. Everything happens the way it does as a consequence of everything else.

This fact that “everything gets into the act” to produce your personal circumstances in life is thus called your “karma,” but your life really should just be called a “consequence” of everything including your direct past. Everything that happens to you is simply a consequence of everything together producing that result, including your surrounding circumstances, but *especially* your past actions. In other words, any consequence/event in your life is due to a totality of circumstances and conditions, some of which you are not directly responsible for, but especially due to your prior actions in this life and in prior lives that give to you a certain body, personality, family, environment and fate.

The entire universe gets into the act to produce the events and circumstances that you will experience in life. Therefore you cannot just say blindly that your misfortunes are always deserved due to bad karma, or are a past debt that must be repaid. Sometimes bad experiences/circumstances simply happen as a result of infinite other factors working together, and they produce your life events within an infinite tapestry of universal outcomes where you are just a jewel in the net reflecting all the other conditions, and don’t directly deserve what happens to you in any way, shape or form.

What this means is that to prevent bad outcomes in your life, such as unfortunate results and suffering, there are uncontrollable and controllable factors to consider. To manage the controllable factors you need wisdom and skillfulness to guide your actions. Wisdom allows you to improvise technique according to principle, and skillfulness allows you to execute technique with efficacy.

Wisdom is the science and understanding of typical actions and results, patterns and regularities, and how to behave according to principles that encompass higher knowledge and understanding. You

need to study wise ways of thinking, speaking, doing and being to be most effective in life. Wisdom or understanding, which comes from study, learning and experience, teaches you how to properly act to get more of what you want to experience and avoid what you don't want. It involves forecasting with likelihood the short-term, intermediate-term and long-term results of external conditions or your actions, and then guides you to act accordingly. Since the only thing controllable is your consciousness and your behavior (your actions are your thoughts expressed), wisdom ultimately involves mastering/perfecting your mind and behavior (thought, speech and deeds) to create better outcomes in life. By thinking better and acting better you take steps to elevate the conditions of your existence.

Since the net total causes, conditions and circumstances that produce the generation or dissolution of anything are actually infinite, meaning that everything is conditionally defined because of an infinite crisscrossing of relationships that cause its appearance, this also means that things are not distinctly apart from one another. They appear to have separate appearances but are not separate at all. It is hard to then say where one thing ends and another begins because of being co-dependently linked in the grand unity of relationships. It is almost as if cause and effect are synonymous in some way – that an effect is latently present in a cause.

The implication is then that we ourselves are therefore nothing, no thing, since our bodies and selves are a bundle of causes that stretch far outside us rather than entirely independent entities. While the original essence has an existence that does not derive from anything else, our own existence is derived from everything else. We are then nothing at all other than appearances (without intrinsic, self-so, inherent identities) due to infinite causal chains, and we are therefore everything in existence. We are nothing at all, we are everything there is. Thus your actions can truly affect the universe, and one should therefore learn how to act more wisely.

Because of the intertwining of causes and effects, the destruction of something must be viewed simply as a transformation into something else, just as stipulated by the law of conservation of energy. A cause then never perishes but continues existing when it produces an effect by becoming the effect, which is a change in name and appearance. It is therefore useful to ponder/meditate on whether an effect is not somehow within its cause, or existent in the cause, because things are never purely themselves but only exist by incorporating other influences or elements, which are the non-thing, in their composition. There is infinite interdependent origination, infinite simultaneous arising. This is why there is no such thing as perfectly pure Yin or pure Yang in the universe, and even the composition of pure elements is said to have other non-element factors/aspects within them.

This vast multiplicity of interrelationships, however, is actually a singleness in total. It is a single oneness that internally appears as a changeable flux. To conveniently handle affairs and produce identifications we simplify this immensity into simple, cutout, localized cause and effect relationships. To change situations and circumstances to your liking you will have to master these relationships. It is your decisions rather than your situations, conditions and circumstances, that will ultimately shape your life.

Nonetheless, the appearance of any single phenomenon is determined from infinite prior causation with the whole cosmos getting into the act, and in Buddhism dependent arising is described as “this arises from that because of prior causes and conditions.” The appearance of anything is completely dependent upon causes and conditions, namely the mutual interpenetration of all phenomena in infinite realms upon realms, mutually containing and interacting with one another. The fact that phenomena affect one another is called mutual perfuming or mutual interpenetration. This is the *Hua Yen, Avatamsaka Sutra* or Flower Ornament view of Buddhism, which is that all phenomena are transitory and have apparent existences dependent entirely upon other factors, infinite in number, that all depend functionally upon each other. In Confucianism this is described in the reflexivity

phrase, “Man affects the Heavens and the Heavens affect (interact with) man.”

To understand the *Hua Yen* view imagine an infinite ocean and that we take out one iota from this limitless ocean. This tiny iota, *while in* the limitless ocean, is the ocean itself before separation. In other words, every iota of the ocean, when not seen as a limited drop, is the infinite ocean itself. However, when an iota of the ocean is separated from the infinite ocean then this iota only then obtains an independent existence as a drop, and begins to look like a finite existence rather than as the boundless ocean. With Shakti, it is impossible to remove any iota from within it to be placed elsewhere as an independent separate existence, for all new locations or circumstances are still Shakti. There is a total interpenetration or interfusion of all phenomena. Every phenomenon is Shakti.

A living being looks like a separate entity from everything else due to a superficial analysis (because of our ignorance), but its existence is actually within the ocean of Shakti and its very existence comes about because of innumerable interdependencies within Shakti. It is not a self-so independent or inherent entity but *is* Shakti. For an *atman*, soul, individual, being, entity or phenomenon it is the same thing. Furthermore, just as Shakti is the fundamental nature this means that an *atman*, soul, self or sentient entity is the fundamental nature and is actually the whole fundamental nature itself just as an ornament of gold remains gold despite a new shape or appearance. When clay becomes a jar, having changed only its shape, the name “clay” is lost and the name “jar” arises.

Because of the infinite interdependence of all things that begets simultaneous arising, causes and effects are neither absolutely different from nor absolutely identical with one another. Because everything is interlinked/defined infinitely through causation we cannot clearly say where one thing ends and another begins for all things share in the existence of any single particular thing, which also means that objects do not cease when they are no longer perceived by your mind. Your mind and field of perception are still defined by an infinity of conditions that includes the necessary continuity of those objects when you do not view them. On the apparent plane phenomena certainly seem different from one another whereas at their core they share the same essential identity because they are all Shakti that is the changeless source nature. The Tibetan master Tsong Khapa thus said of phenomenal identities, the world of “interdependent manifestations of appearing phenomena are emptiness lacking any inherent existence.”

All things arise within the One original nature. The One foundational substrate not just penetrates but comprises All as their ultimate essence, so from Its aspect no other thing ever appears at all – It remains solely Itself throughout all of manifest existence. *Nirvana* and samsara are therefore inseparable and interdependent; there is no difference between samsara and the realm of enlightenment. The All melts into a single whole, the Unity is Shiva and Shakti, God and Creation, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. This is a union like empty space and emanations that appear within it which, when decomposed, are found to be empty space that supports those appearances. Basically, Shiva and Shakti, God and the Logos (Creation) are the same. *Purusha* and the Holy Spirit, which is the ever-moving Shakti, are one. Shakti in some spiritual schools is called the “ocean of all languages” simply because it is the container for innumerable kinetic vibrations.

Christianity says, “In the beginning was the Logos (Shakti), and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. The same was in the beginning with God. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1-3). In other words, the Logos (Creation) and God, the fundamental nature, are the same thing. However, all created things don’t proceed from God but proceed from the Logos, Shakti, which has its beginning in God. Christianity does not say that the Logos is beginningless but that the beginning of Creation initially starts with the Logos and through the Logos all else is created. How the Logos appeared it does not say. This accords with the teachings of all the other spiritual schools.

Ramana Maharshi commented, “Iswara, the personal God, the supreme creator of the universe really does exist. But this is true only from the relative standpoint of those who have not realized the truth, those people who believe in the reality of individual souls. From the absolute standpoint the sage cannot accept any other existence than the impersonal Self, one and formless.” In other words, only the original nature exists and It is the true level of God. If you want a personal God as a Creator then you have to proceed to an emanated level, which is an evolute that serves as the Mother of all Creation. Thus Shakti, Ishvara, Saguna Brahman, or the Womb Matrix would be the Creator God.

In the absolute reality there is only the single Oneness of the pure primordial substratum. Whatever you perceive because of having consciousness (illumination or comprehension) is actually *That alone* despite apparent multiplicity. Within Aloneness arises apparent diversity, but the apparent multiplicity is nothing but an illusion superimposed on the single fundamental nature thus screening it. Although the fundamental substance seems to exist in many forms It is singularly one.

Because we have a mind, we can discern these truths. Insentient phenomena lack mental illumination so cannot realize anything. We can reason as to the origins of phenomena. We can discern the apparent multiplicity of phenomena and also discover the rules of cause and effect that rule them. We can then use our knowledge of these causal relationships to our favor, guiding phenomenal changes and complex interactions to be the way we want.

Guiding the changes of phenomena requires wisdom and skillfulness, training and application, which are factors you must cultivate in life. This is the Buddha and Bodhisattva way, which is to develop a high understanding of cause and effect principles, which is only possible because we possess consciousness and its abilities of comprehension. We can use consciousness to investigate and learn/understand so that our accumulated wisdom can be used to create better states of the future.

The principle that things are always changing and inherently empty of fixed natures means they are always open and free to evolve, and this flexibility to change is what gives us the fundamental potential to transform matters in the directions we want. As conscious beings, we have the ability to manipulate conventional reality to produce pre-defined outcomes in our minds, and thus are an antidote to entropy because we can create an intended order.

We are not enslaved to follow any predestined pathways, including the current programming of our minds that has become our psyche, if we learn how to detach from the currents of consciousness that normally impel us and guide our actions in deterministic ways. First, we can study and learn more to smash our limits and prejudices, thus opening up our horizons, fill in our blind spots and elevate our consciousness so that the new contents we learn produce better results in our mind-streams. If we train correctly we can also rise above our remaining set of predetermined notions, habitual behaviors and mental programming and thus transcend the preconditioning within us that automatically gives rise to “fated” results since one could predict them. Thus at critical decision points we can, through a mind that can detach from thoughts and view them as objects in the mind rather than impulses to be blindly followed, defy a current trajectory of fortune. We can do so by reconfiguring ourselves, our actions and our environment or circumstances in any way we want and by detaching from the thought-stream that would normally produce a fated outcome.

We can create a new future. Though the artful manipulation of phenomena as guided by Knowledge of cause and effect, we can create personal, global and universal results that are better for everyone. The results of our efforts will manifest as conditions allow; efforts always result in consequences although they might not be exactly what we want, hence we must learn to be especially wise and skillful in our efforts to derive the results we want.

What we presently experience in our lives are the results of the aggregation of the past deeds of man

and nature within a great unity of events and phenomena that of course also includes our own personal history of past deeds. Each of us has our own individual effect on the world along with a personal fate that we experience due to our past actions and the karmic efflux from our circumstances of family, friends, community, state, country, and world. In other words, the world we have made helps to make us.

All worlds/realms, including the residences of the heavens, are produced by phenomenal changes. They are the result of the actions of living beings interacting with phenomena. The reason why people share common environments and circumstances in these realms is because the residents share similar karmic seeds so can share in a similar presentation. Just as individual lives are the fruit of personal causes, the world's appearance rests upon the quality of common karma such as the aggregate purity of the consciousness of its inhabitants. We produce the world we inherit because it is built according to our state of consciousness or behavioral mindsets, which gives rise to our actions. Since our world, our environment is really our physical body of manifestation we have a common responsibility to improve things within it for the better.

CONSCIOUSNESS & KNOWLEDGE²

Of the many phenomena that have appeared within this endless web of interdependence called Shakti, which is the manifest universe, one is called life. Life evolved because the right causes and conditions eventually came together. Some forms of life have sentience and some forms of sentient life, such as ours, are capable of higher consciousness because of their anatomical structure and other circumstances.

Consciousness is what goes on within our minds, which exist because of the anatomical structure of our brain and nervous system. Consciousness is a processing activity involving sensation and mentation that is the result of the structure and operation of our nervous system that is composed of molecules and energy. It creates empirical Knowledge that consists of memories, recognition/identification, reasoning and apprehension (understanding) that can be of the mind alone or of the mind and senses conjointly. Our nervous system includes our sensory organs, brain, nerves, memory storehouse and life energy that produce conceptualizations, namely thinking and the perceptions of the five senses.

Consciousness means knowing and perceiving, or having the ability to generate Knowledge via perceptions and thoughts that are then stored in memories used to name, label, shape, identify, characterize, categorize or differentiate mental phenomena. Consciousness means the ability to cognize, which is to be able to mentally differentiate/discriminate and understand by giving meaning (names and conceptual labels) to phenomena that arise within the mind. Consciousness is therefore discrimination, which in turn requires having a memory, and comparison or reasoning abilities. Discrimination basically means the knowing of differences, which means making comparisons or differentiating things. You absolutely cannot do this unless you have memory. Discrimination – which includes the abilities of recognizing, reasoning and understanding – basically means the ability to generate Knowledge.

In order for a discrimination of beingness (a recognition of conscious existence) to manifest within a living being there must be a discrimination of a self. You cannot give rise to the idea of being a self unless there is also an idea of others. In other words, a self-identity or I-hoodness can only arise if there also arise concepts of not-self (things that aren't the self). For a sentient being to be able to

² See *Inside Vasubandhu's Yogacara* (Connelly), *Color Me Confucius* (Bodri), and Chapter 4 "Life Purpose" from *Buddha Yoga* (Bodri).

cognize its beingness (self-existence) it must be able to discriminate some other state as juxtaposed to itself (“others” or “not-I”), otherwise it cannot fathom that it is an existent I and that there are others which are “not-I.” It cannot simply assert “I am” without there being some sort of juxtaposition, comparison or differentiation. A sentient being becomes conscious of its entityhood existence as subject-only “I” only by knowing objects or “others.”

In order to be able to say “I am not this” or “I am that” there must be an “I” to say it, which is the ego, self-identity or I-thought. After the rising up of this I-thought by whatever mechanism produces it, all other thoughts can then arise, so it is actually the root thought. This means that the inner sense of being a witness or self turns out to be one with every form/thought that is witnessed/known. To say “something is” the “I” must be there first. If the “I” is not there you cannot differentiate anything so the I-sense of beingness must be there before anything else is recognized in the mind. It rises up first.

To put it another way, to become self-cognizant or aware of its existence, the consciousness of a life-entity must develop the sense of being an individual I which entails a self-notion, subject-notion, ego-concept or I-thought. In the *Diamond Sutra* this is described as the thought of being a self, person, living being or individual. Only with such an idea can a sentient being develop a self-awareness of self-existence (“I exist” or “I am”) that also requires thoughts that others are “not-self.”

If there is an *I-thought* of I-hoodness then there is always a sense of *other*. Only if there is an I-self can you even recognize the existence of others. We identify a pattern involving our thoughts, feelings or body and call it the “I” when the “I” is none of those identities. A living self, composed of a body with consciousness, is really just an agglomerative construction within the ocean of Shakti composed from an infinite number of conditions within Shakti, and thus a dependent construction or borderless drop of Shakti rather than a separate sovereign entity free of Shakti that exists independently of all else. To view the I-self as an independent entity is a misperception of reality.

Without an I-self there can be no knowledge at all, and then you have insentience or no-self. Basically, if there is no “I-witness” there is no self-awareness or awareness of others. The knowledge of being a self necessitates the existence of memory in order that an I-thought can find its beingness through a juxtaposition against “others.”

Memory is necessary for identifying, distinguishing, differentiating, classifying and comparing mental phenomena. Higher knowledge absolutely necessitates the existence of memories because they are used to make sense out of conceptual processes by giving names and labels to phenomena that lead to a recognition (or building) of a world. Otherwise there is only chaos within the field of experience, and no such thing as distinct entities or qualities of any type. In the universe, a potential takes shape and then is known through consciousness as a form or object, but without consciousness there is no such thing as the knowing of names and forms, and thus no pattern, phenomena or object in existence. Then there is only chaos, or formlessness. There needs to be consciousness in order for anyone to discern a form, pattern, object, mark, name, label or phenomenon. Thus, in some sense we might say that mental chaos – mental functioning without a recognition of the I-thought or others – is insentience even though there might be neural biochemical functioning going on. In that case there is only functioning, but not cognizance and hence no consciousness. An undifferentiated mass of consciousness containing no differences or distinctions is certainly a chaotic ignorance of non-cognition, and thus not consciousness at all.

Thus, memories are being accessed with every recognized experience, and there is also a sense of I-self going on behind (underlying) every conceptualized experience, but actually there is just a natural process going on within non-living, insentient Shakti without any definite, separate, self-so entity being involved that has a real underlying intrinsic nature of a separate “I” even though it believes

itself to be an independent living, sentient I. The I-thought or I-sense is something that naturally arises/occurs within the human anatomical body because of its structural design – brain activity creates the I – but it is an errant view (misunderstanding) about the way things *really are*. What really has arisen is Knowledge within a body that is an intersection of countless conditions, and Knowledge is not an I-self entity. Knowledge is all a point of view.

It is not a person but Knowledge that is actually the true experiencer of everything. The I-thought of a doer or experiencer is just Knowledge and that is what “understands.” There is no independent, inherent self-so self entity. There is just this Knowledge automatically being generated in a body vehicle and this body of Knowledge is doing everything, even thinking the thought “I am.” That whole body unit, called a sentient being, is just another phenomenon in the universe with the special characteristic that it automatically generates Knowledge as part of its functioning. We call it an “independent sentient being,” but it is certainly not independent and it is really the functioning of Knowledge that is doing everything rather than a “being.”

This is the meaning of the *Diamond Sutra*. Conventionally we call ourselves a living being, self, person, *atman*, *jiva*, and so on whereas we are just another phenomenon within Shakti (albeit having consciousness) that is ultimately the original nature. Conventionally we are an effusion that is connected to everything else in existence, like a single particle moving within a grand soup that doesn’t actually compose anything. We cannot see all the energetic connections of magnetism, electricity, gravity and other forces that permeate and compose us, but they are there. It is impossible to unravel the total causes and effects for our existence. We are like a drop of water in the ocean that in being a drop of the ocean is just the ocean itself. This is how we are connected to all beings and all things.

Self-delusion means to be confused about what the self actually is, meaning to be confused about the true nature of our existence and its absence of a permanent, independent, separate, inherent, intrinsic, underlying, innate self-so entity-being. There is no inherent self (person, living being, entity or individual.) amid everything that arises in a moment of consciousness. Furthermore, there is no “absolute” or “real” – meaning independent, separate or inherently self-so – self-entity within the universe of manifestation we call the All or Shakti. As the *Diamond Sutra* states, there is no such thing as a living sentient being within Shakti. There is only Shakti, non-living Shakti, insentient Shakti, just Shakti whose portions large or small – having or not possessing consciousness – are just Shakti while the “consciousness” within a “living being” is Shakti too and not anything transcendental outside of it. However, we can also call our consciousness the “consciousness of Shakti” since we are portions of Shakti; Shakti (the cosmos) is our greater body and we are its consciousness. If just one being within Shakti attains consciousness then that being is the consciousness of Shakti. When many beings/parts of Shakti attain consciousness they are all (part of) the consciousness of Shakti. Who knows what other things other than consciousness that Shakti has also developed beyond consciousness? Even consciousness is part of Shakti, an illusion of transcending Shakti that is the illusion of a sentient being. The ultimate question comes down to how you will choose to use that consciousness.

The I-self or ego-notion is an artificial construction that occurs within your body, and neither are your true self-identity or self-nature. The I-self notion of I-hoodness is a creation of your brain and its mental processing. It is the notion of being a unified, solitary self - a construction of the brain – that is at times quite fragile since it can be easily changed by psychedelics. The I-notion works at constructing a limited, conditional view of the world from past experiences that is constrained by neural limitations, and thus is chocked full of prejudices, approximations, inaccuracies, and false views. Too often the I-self notion assumes that the I is separate from the elements which make it up, which is all of Shakti, and thus the I-self concept is incorrect, false, an unreality that does not reflect the way things really are. You are not an independent being that just happens to be visiting or living

in Shakti. Shakti has created you and defines your very existence within the structure of its being, and your I-thought that develops inside you is part of the total natural processes of Shakti that have developed your body too. In some sense, it mechanistically arises within a certain type of body structure.

Any mental concepts that the I-self spins are accomplished through a mental process that we say is owned by an I, ego, self, soul, personality, *atman*, *jiva*, living being, personality, sentient entity, etcetera. These are merely convenient terms used to indicate a small self-structure that does not refer to any really intrinsic entity that exists on its own, but rather is a composite living structure - an conscious entity composed of a large agglomeration of non-entity components (that aren't its true self) and conditions.

The mental processes of the I-self are also just subjective rather than objective mental constructions you construct in your head. They have no independent existence, and thus are temporary conditional or relative truths rather than objective truths - subjective, imagined creations prone to error and hence not realities. Since they are not purely objective they are sometimes considered falsities or illusions because they are not entirely accurate. They are certainly "false thoughts" when they are wrong or errant. They are also "false views" or "false perspectives" when they embody incorrect notions or conceptions. Our perceptions of the external world, since they are incomplete and incorrect approximations of the world rather than unsimplified direct cognitions, are also unrealities, imaginations, illusions or falsities because they are inaccurate representations. Being representations within yourself that are shared by no one else they are actually personal fantasies of how the world really is.

The mind arises due to phenomena (such as the body and external environment) and the thought-forms within consciousness arise due to its existence, so thoughts are a conditional production of the mind. A purely objective reality can never be experienced through the mind, so all you ever experience of the world is a figment of your imaginative capacities, and thus an illusion that becomes "false thoughts" or "unreal thoughts." You never experience the world directly but only through the images and thoughts of consciousness, which are therefore illusions or mere-appearances because they are not what they appear to be, and thus erroneous imaginations from the aspect of appearance. Your perceived reality is also literally unreal because many of the qualities you project onto phenomena are only in yourself. Often being flawed or inaccurate cognitions your thoughts of the world are then mistaken, deceptive, and thus false – imaginations of something when it does not exist. Revealing the perceived reality but not the true reality, they embody the unreal.

Thoughts are just a creation of the mind, that is a creation of the body, that is a creation of molecules and energy coming together in a specific pattern or structure, that are ultimately Shakti, which is ultimately the original nature that emanates into a functional form that has consciousness which gives birth to thoughts, spinning a realm of reality in the head (a world of qualities we call experience) that is ultimately incomplete/partial, often incorrect, certainly conditional and thus illusory. You actually want to construct a view of the world that is as correct as possible, and interpret it in the way it and situations really are rather than the way you want them to be.

Precisely, the world you see is all a relative illusion of yours, a simplified approximation of the real world. You are living inside a mental dream, an illusional fantasy, but you don't recognize this fact. Nonetheless, you operate in a shared conventional illusion with others of like mind – humans – and thus the human worldview is a reality to human beings. This is what you have, which is the great magical treasure of consciousness that has somehow come about in the cosmos, and because you don't give rise to transcendental wisdom understanding you hold onto the illusion of separate beingness and existence as an intrinsic, self-so individual. Such an idea is a false thought, an incorrect view, an unreality.

You must see yourself for who and what you truly are, and also see/evaluate situations by what they truly are and not by what you want them to be. You must not engage in denial but accept the truth of situations, and never engage in irrational behavior. You must not distort facts because of liking or hating, or distort your thinking and adopt biases because of incentives, or shut your mind after an initial conclusion and refuse to revise your interpretations after new evidence. These are some of the many rules for using consciousness that involve false thoughts or incorrect thoughts.

The self-concept itself is just a construction of consciousness within the brain, another experience like all others *but the basic one that makes others possible* due to there being a self at their center that produces a first person point of view and narration. Without the self-concept consciousness cannot function. In other words, we think ourselves into existence as an I-self, and that I-sense is the basis of consciousness. Whatever arises as experience is just your own mind, which is happening as a flowing process via the constructed, constrained, conditional miracle of consciousness that is in turn dependent upon your anatomical body structure, composed of molecules in a specific pattern, and put together due to an infinite number of all sorts of all other interdependent cause and effect conditions.

The ego, self-concept or I-thought is a special kind of meta-thought at the center of all other thoughts. This I-thought gives you the sense that “you” are thinking “your” thoughts when in fact nothing of the kind is happening. During the process of thinking it is essentially the thought process itself that is doing the thinking, not a separate, stable, eternal “I” that is an independent, inherent *atman*, soul, *jiva* or sentient being. Nevertheless that I-thought must be there. However, the thinking process itself within the body, Knowledge, is automatically doing all the thinking and understanding without any self, *jiva* or *atman* being involved. The processes of consciousness, Knowledge, give rise to an assumed, apparent I-self that thinks it is the doer when that very I-self is just a product of myriad conditions which produce it as a result. So when you are thinking, it is *not you* who is thinking, it is Knowledge that is doing the thinking.

You know yourself in Knowledge, that knowing is Knowledge and the knower is Knowledge. It is all just Knowledge referencing itself in a circle. Therefore in a grand sense the Knowledge we generate through thoughts and conceptions, despite its usefulness, is all just a relative illusion. It is all conditional on what we already know and nothing is absolute within that circle of Knowledge. There is no such thing as an independent living being, there is only Knowledge knowing itself in a limited vehicle that can generate Knowledge that makes knowing possible. When we know something it is actually Knowledge knowing Knowledge, so as the Diamond Sutra of Buddhism explains, where is there a person in all this? It is just an automatic process going on.

Is there any true self at all? The true I-self is the only real witness, which is the unchanging, ever-present, unshakable fundamental nature. But it is actually insentient because It is not a being, hence saying that It is the True I is just a way of speaking to denote that fact that It never changes while everything else is going on, and is thus like an ultimate Witness. As Ramana Maharshi also said, “As all mental activities like remembering, forgetting, desiring, hating, attracting, discarding, etc., are modifications of the mind, they cannot be one’s true state. Simple, changeless being is one’s true nature.”

Thus there is an ego principle and cognizing principle within consciousness that generates thoughts, but both are just the operations of consciousness, operations of Knowledge doing its functional thing. The thinking process is not I, me, or mine but just something that is happening within a human structure (body) that develops a concept of being an embodied organism. This is just one of the infinite manifestations of the way things are in the universe, just another operation/process within Shakti rather than something transcending Shakti. It is part of Nature rather than separate,

apart from Nature.

This is called sentience or consciousness whereas most of the universe lacks this property or functional ability. But now you can understand that what we call consciousness is not actually a consciousness, but we conventionally call it consciousness. To be true consciousness it would need to arise within an inherently self-so sentient being independent of Shakti and produce a worldview transcending Shakti (independent of Shakti), but it is whole and parcel entirely part of Shakti as one of its functions, and arises within a being that is also just a transformational process within Shakti too. There is no such thing as a living being within Shakti. There are only “neutral” processes going on that we cannot say are either good or bad – just processes – and from the standpoint of the original nature there is nothing happening at all. Being living beings with consciousness, we only call ourselves living beings for identification’s sake but now you know the real nature of who and what you are. This is the enlightenment view, which is to know what you ultimately are.

We are ignorant because we pretend that we are independent when we are really dependently-defined entities within a giant soup of interconnections that define us, but we put tight borders on the self-definition of ourselves and become a fictional small self. Being only an intersection of countless conditions without there being anything that is truly intrinsically us, we are actually nothing at all – we are only what appears to be a limited part of the All when we are actually the All. From another viewpoint, we are an object within Shakti that happens to have consciousness. From another viewpoint, we are an agglomeration of the simplest particles and energies that have assumed a certain pattern, but when we look at our pattern/identity from the vast vantage point of Shakti there is no inherent pattern there at all. What true inherent, intrinsic pattern is there? There is only Shakti. There is no such thing as a pattern.

Furthermore, when we deconstruct an aggregated object like a flower we find that it is entirely made up of non-flower elements like magnetism, gravity, electricity, sunshine, soil, nutrients, rain water, atoms, etc. that co-exist to manifest the flower. Its existence depends on countless conditions or elements other than and different from itself. In other words, its entire existence depends on *elements that intrinsically are not the flower* – which are thus non-flower. What then is a flower other than a compendium, a conglomeration, an agglomeration of diverse conditions? There is no flower nature there within a flower, but all these elements connect to create what we call a flower. There is no such thing there as an inherently existing, intrinsically-so flower essence/nature that produces the flower. It is itself just a conglomeration of other conditions, in fact infinite conditions, and because its existence *is these other conditions* without there being anything of itself within its appearance/origination (that is purely the flower-essence) it is empty of being intrinsically so, empty of true existence. It is nothing in itself at all. It is just a karmic formation, which means a product of interdependent origination, an apparent nodal pattern appearing within an infinite Indra’s web of simultaneously-so intersecting conditions. Nonetheless, on the conventional level a flower is there as just a flower, full of floweriness, and thus conventionally/conveniently defined as a flower by sentient minds who recognize the flower pattern. But even that flower is just a transient impermanent appearance, a transformation that appears in the nature of a flowing dream. It is actually a borderless iota within the immensity of Shakti that, even though it appears as an iota like a drop that is within the vast ocean, is actually all of Shakti itself, and ultimately just the undifferentiated, patternless original nature.

Similarly, there is nothing unique and personal to any sentient being that is an intrinsic nature of that individual that materially exists on its own independently of Shakti. All sentient beings are *entirely* created constructions, composite constructions that exist through massive infinite interdependence of the entire cosmos of Shakti. All living beings are just patterns or processes within Shakti, and thus neutral (non-living) patterns or processes because “living” is just a word without any special meaning. We use to identify us whereas we are actually quite mechanistic and automatic as attributes,

constructions and functionings of Shakti. Our conditioning even defines how we behave – our behavior.

Nor is there any such *true thing* as consciousness because everything consciousness creates is an imagined order, an illusion or delusion, a fictional story, a fantasy or dream reality ... and those outputs are also Shakti. They don't transcend Shakti because they are productions within it, so they are part of the fabric of Shakti and thus inherently insentient processes. We call what we experience "consciousness" but there is no such true thing as consciousness; there is only (insentient) Shakti. Nonetheless we call the worldview that consciousness creates conventional (convenient) reality because it "works" for us and all beings who produce a worldview in a similar way. It is relevant to us and our culture and society, but it is not an absolute reality nor is it in honesty a truly accurate version of the world. However, those false thoughts, those conditional imaginations work for us and for all beings who share a similar mindset due to similar anatomical structures giving rise to a similar type of consciousness that is trained/conditioned in a similar way, and so forth.

We also pretend that changeable things are not transforming when every thing is absolutely transitory, impermanent, altering and changing every moment. We just cannot see the changes and so assume things are stable. We cannot even see all the infinite conditions that intersect to generate them. Because we cling to phenomenal states destined to change we thereby suffer when they do change. We suffer due to ignorance that caused us to assume and act as if they wouldn't change, which gave rise to mental attachment that hurts when it must be broken. We suffer again and again by denying the way the world really is, which causes us to use our minds wrongly by clinging to or holding onto thoughts that cannot stay, or should not stay, or are false/incorrect and so forth. We have to see things for what they truly are and teach ourselves how to use our mind rightly. A higher understanding can help you let go of the tendency to mentally cling to things, which produces mental suffering when they change or depart. Such insight can help you realize that suffering is often caused by the behavioral patterns of your own mind.

Mental constructs in our minds (thoughts, images, forms and phenomena) are not ourselves, there is no real inherent "I" to see them, and they also lack their own self-nature because they are just mental projections instead of real entities. Why let them bother you? We grasp after them as true entities when they are simply imaginations running through our brains, minor fluctuations in the brain caused by bioelectrical reactions. They are not a true reality but a neurochemical reality.

We ourselves are just composite phenomena, a process actually, made up of the same atoms and energies as everything else, but within our bodily form we produce thoughts, consciousness or Knowledge. Because they produce the "I" we can say that our "I" and our neurons, nerves and energy are actually the same thing. In other words, brain activity creates the "I." Together they produce the viewpoint of a being from an agglomeration that produces a function called consciousness that is essentially a special biochemical, bioelectrical reaction – a neurochemical reality – and it is just another reaction or transformation occurring within the larger soup of Shakti. The "I" is really a false "me" that cannot exist without its compositional factors of a body with consciousness, vital energy and so on.

An individual is a complex, tightly integrated process of extreme intricacy and complexity within the one giant ocean of manifest reality and not some separate, independent existence. Its thoughts are part of that ocean too. You are an iota of the manifest ocean, you are an integral part of nature rather than a self-so, independent existant. No objects of the universe absolutely exist, but only appear to exist through relations. Therefore you *are* one with everything. You are *all of existence*. Instead of being an iota of Shakti you can also view yourself as a microcosm that is the macrocosm.

You *are* nature. You *are* Shakti. We are one of its innumerable expressions, a flowing process in

continual transformation. We just happen to be a phenomenon, object or process that has consciousness that lets us make up thoughts such as “we are living beings” or “we are separate.” Consciousness is not outside of Shakti, it does not transcend Shakti. Who said consciousness is supreme since consciousness is just an illusion we make up, and that illusion is not above Shakti in any transcendental fashion but just another deterministic iota within the matrix of Shakti? So consciousness is not really consciousness (something outside of the world that views it), but we conventionally call it consciousness in order to indicate it. It has a status of equality with all the other members of Shakti, so from the aspect of Shakti it is not higher in any sense than any other aspect of Shakti. But to us it is the great miracle that separates us from insentient phenomena, and gives us life.

We are one of the manifestations, functions, attributes or phenomena within Shakti having consciousness, and there might be other things different or better than consciousness possessed by other living beings (or something entirely different than living beings that we cannot imagine), but we can only go so far as consciousness so we can never know we don't possess those higher attributes, qualities or capabilities. The real world is so different than the similitude we experience via consciousness, but our consciousness produces what it does and we should be happy for what we have because it is the great miracle and treasure of manifest existence. Consciousness is what we are capable of, despite its limitations, and there is no reason or use to complain about it and its limitations. We simply need to learn how to use it properly and master it to its fullest extent, knowing all its pros and cons, its perfections and faults. Our Great Learning, our principle for living, our quest for life with less suffering but with more joy, significance and meaning should be to master consciousness and all its capabilities that move us ahead and provide us with fulfillment. Our consciousness lets us know what we ultimately are, lets us experience a world of qualities through apprehending, and enables us to accomplish whatever we want according to our intentions. This is why it is referred to as the wish-fulfilling jewel in Buddhism.

There is no separation from Shakti because we exist through its totality by being defined through its totality, and are simply a *functioning process* within it lacking a self-so nature. There is no real inherent I that can create separation from being Shakti. In fact, nothing at all has its own selfhood. Phenomena are not themselves – they are composite, conditional creations that lack a separate, independent and permanent nature. All things including us have the same Mother and Father, namely Shakti and the original nature. However, Shakti (which is all forces and phenomena) and the fundamental essence together constitute the entire universe.

To be “a sentient being with consciousness” really means that Knowledge within a physical body can be generated and reference itself in a self-reflexive arc. Knowledge (thought) itself – and not an actual being, soul, entity, *atman* or life – is the ultimate experiencer of everything. It produces thoughts, interprets them, and produces an illusion of understanding. There is conceptualization and intellectualization going on, but no one who is doing the thinking. Knowledge is doing the thinking. Doing and thinking exist but there is no doer or thinker.

Yes, we have an experience of a bodily self, perspectival self, volitional self, narrative self and social self but there is actually no continuous, distinctive, self-so I-self within those experiences over time. These selves are constructed selves, and not your true self, that appear because of conditions. The experience of being a self is just an artificial construction of the brain developed through/by myriad conditions within the entire soup of Shakti. If there were no such thing as consciousness then due to the conservation of mass and energy you would just be some other portion of Shakti, and Shakti itself is ultimately just emptiness.

Again, there is no real *atman*, self or living entity that is the ultimate doer or experiencer of any thought or action. It is the Knowledge created within a certain body that is doing all the thinking, knowing and understanding, and the process is happening automatically. It is happening

mechanistically. The I-thought of being a personal soul self is therefore just a delusion or illusion. It is the illusion of a narrated dream. People don't even normally recognize that their sense of being a self is the result of infinite conditions coming together in the moment, for they think that feeling or certainty comes from the one thing of being a self, but the energy and interconnections that have gone into creating it are vast beyond measure. Nevertheless, you have this great treasure of consciousness that provides for you a world with qualities. What will you do with this great gift that will make you worthy of it? What sort of light do you want to be in the world? What do you ultimately wish to be?

Within you there is indeed a sense that there is a narrating "you" (self or observer) experiencing things (objects) which Buddhism calls the "residual conceit 'I am'" but this I-sense arises out of a particular anatomical composition of life that gives rise to a mental process, which is memory dependent, that colors all its output with subjective projections of likes and dislikes, special beliefs, accumulated prejudices and other falsities that do not objectively define reality. It sees the world through the filter of its collected passions, and thus wrongly projects impassioned concepts and emotions onto situations, objects and people.

In other words, thinking just happens but there is no one there thinking while it happens. Thinking creates a self where there is none. During thinking, Knowledge is experiencing thoughts, that's all. Knowledge is doing all the thinking and understanding based on its accumulated Knowledge as well as new sensory perceptions. Who understands this? No one – not a person or being – but understanding is still there.

Thoughts and perceptions are mental constructions that arise within a mind attached to a body without there being a real observer, on-looker, doer, witness, person-agent, or cognizer within the process. As Buddhaghosha stated, "There is suffering, but no one who suffers."

Various kinds of thoughts arise in response to different kinds of stimuli, but they all arise automatically, mechanically according to certain laws of cause and effect. We don't know those laws or principles for consciousness but they are there. Everything happening within the mind, and in the universe, is mechanical or automatic due to laws of cause and effect that rule all. Everything arises, is sustained, and dies away due to cause and effect including the contents of your consciousness.

The fact that thoughts come and go endlessly, arise and then die away, is liberating because this allows you the power to stop needless mental suffering within your constructed being. You absolutely can cultivate better habitual states of mental well-being when you learn to master your thought processes. This is one of the major tasks of a living being - to learn how to habitually manifest beneficial mental states all the time rather than afflictive states of mind. You want to learn how to engineer mental states you want.

Thoughts are expressed in a particular moment because the laws that govern consciousness cause them to arise, and they are replaced by other thoughts due to those same laws. What arises within your mind does so because of the mechanical functioning of Knowledge, that is all. You may not know the laws of cause and effect that rule the generation of thoughts within a consciousness, but they exist. Sometimes afflictions naturally arise within the mind-stream without our wanting them, which produce suffering. Since we have consciousness that naturally does this, the key therefore is to learn how to gain control of our thoughts (the thought-stream) to silence afflictions, thus taming the mind, and bring about better states of being.

The universe operates in generating phenomena like a vast, perfectly oiled machine operating according to all sorts of causality laws. Only the unmanifesting original nature without characteristics, which is pure like empty space, transcends all this and is without rules of transformation.

Even though all sentient beings say “I” in reference to their small phenomenal self, saying “I” only really refers to the self-nature that is the core-I, and thus saying “I” is actually the True Self announcing Itself. The I-self is just the absolute whole looking at things through a particular point of view. At the deepest level, all men who say “I” are actually referring to the same self-nature ground state. Or you can say it refers to Shakti, which therefore makes all sentient beings related siblings within the network of Shakti. Unfortunately, out of ignorance people see their I-ness as different than the ultimate being in others and with disrespect give themselves the privilege to hurt others.

Are we not brothers and sisters if we share the same parents? Since our Is-ness is not different than the ultimate beingness of others – since the Self in oneself is the same as the Self in another that is the Self in everything, the All – are we not then related? Of course! Do we not then have a responsibility to help one another ... to help the consciousness of Shakti that we are, to help the Self? Of course! Other sentient beings are equal to you in joy and sorrow. They all want happiness. Although you cannot feel their pain, because you should take them for your Self their pain is equally yours, and you should work to dispel it for it is pain like your own.

Harming another is hurting our Self because others are all aspects of Shakti which is you, your body, since you are Shakti. Shakti is your body and you are its consciousness while they are also a portion of its consciousness. You are an embodied Self, so why would you hurt others who are also you, your Self? It makes no sense to take the attitude that this is okay. You are equal to others in also being (part of) Shakti’s consciousness. Why would you harm part of your consciousness?

There isn’t any independent nature in phenomena that makes something a separate self. There isn’t any such thing as a self-so living entity, being or life. There are only portions of Shakti we point to, which aren’t permanent things or phenomena bordered absolutely (though they appear so), and we then conventionally say, “This is such and such.” Those conceptions, designations or configurations occur within a stream of consciousness that is itself simply a constantly flowing process of transformations. That process is going on within a phenomenon called a living being that is part of nature, part of Shakti, rather than apart from nature, and thus is inseparably linked with everything else in existence. Within Shakti there are simply morally neutral processes going on (since reality is neutral), flowing occurrences and transformations everywhere without any such true thing as sentient beings, and as to Shakti itself, from the standpoint of the original nature it doesn’t even exist. However, from the standpoint of conventional existence there are beings with consciousness, their consciousness gives consciousness to Shakti, and through consciousness they can build moral worlds with meaning and significance.

Our most fundamental essence, our core or true self-nature, is not the “little self” or “soul” of the manifest individual we normally refer to as “I.” It is the infinite, beginningless, primordial essence that is our self-so, uncaused, uncreated, always existent True Self. The great power of consciousness ultimately came from this Self of ours, and religions often teach meditation so that we try to mentally imitate the fundamental peacefulness of our ground state foundational nature. You are an embodied Self, so through meditation practice you try to be the Self unencumbered by your body, which means your mind is to become peaceful without bodily or mental pains. It is to become untainted and rest in its natural being, its natural state without thoughts.

The idea that our original nature is pure and formless, without attributes, is posed as the ideal mental state achieved through meditation practice, for it is taught that the natural state of the mind is empty like the original nature – equanimous, blissful, peaceful, pure. But this is no-thought, and perfect no-thought is a lack of consciousness, and thus existence. We should exist as lucid, pristine, wakefully aware and ready to give birth to thoughts just as the original nature has given birth to changeable Shakti that always offers something new. An idea sometimes posited is that clear, lucid awareness is pure consciousness that is entirely empty and free of thoughts, but actually it is full of fine thoughts

since alive awareness always presents some image of the world that requires conceptions for there to be recognition. The correct idea is that “pristine clear awareness” entails that the mental narrative of our internal dialogue is somewhat silent.

For instance, if you suddenly found yourself without the possibility of thoughts, how would the world appear to you? Would you see a world of separate objects? Could you recognize anything at all? You wouldn’t be able to cognize any objects or recognize anything, which is the same as in deep dreamless sleep. There would be no world of existence. Without thoughts, there would be no perception of anything. Being a being of consciousness your proper functioning entails the use of consciousness, so this is only a temporary way of correct being such as during a coma or deep sleep. Wrong cultivation is to cut off the function of consciousness! Proper cultivation is to tame consciousness, purify consciousness, master consciousness, develop all the possible abilities of consciousness and use consciousness skillfully. This is the true spiritual path.

What you see as objects, or the world, are only appearances within your mind. They are a projection only, a creation of your consciousness. You cannot experience anything outside the theater of your mind. Knowledge of your self is constructed in consciousness and your world is constructed in your consciousness. To you the world is your mind only and what you experience are mere concepts rather than things in themselves. The images in your consciousness are to you the world but they are not the actual world because they are just simplified mental representations. In other words, consciousness is only conceptualization so it never reaches real things. It is thus illusory, a make-believe representation, a story in our brain generated by millions of neurons, each a tiny biological machine that together with vitality generate the mind of mental states and consciousness experiences. We only have so much sensory input, mental processing capability and memory storage space so there is so much more outside of the mind than we can take in and represent as our illusion of reality. Through consciousness you never experience the real world, you only experience your own mind, and what occurs to you is a very limited function/product of your own mental tendencies that also add on qualities or judgments that don’t exist in the real world, but do for you because of prior conditionings.

The map of reality within consciousness is not the reality but only an imperfect representation without true fidelity. It is a construction of mental objects. Humans, having the same basic anatomical structure, create very similar mental representations within their consciousness because of what Buddhism calls “shared karmic seeds,” which basically means the same physiological structure including sensory apparatus that give rise to a similar functioning system of consciousness. Humans create a worldview within their consciousness that is somewhat similarly calibrated from individual to individual, and in interpreting that worldview humans typically share some agreed upon definitions. Other beings see and represent the world differently from us, some in better ways and some in worse. Who can say what is best? What we have is what works for us. Our task is to use it as best as possible, and train it to function better.

At any moment of time, when alive and awake you are only experiencing your own mind, you are only experiencing the conceptions of your consciousness and nothing else. Everything you see or experience is really only in your mind. Our experience of life is a function of our mind. For each of us, consciousness is all there is *and the only thing there is* because without it there is no self, no world, nothing at all except the oblivion of insentience.

Your conscious experiences are shaped at all levels not only by your biology but by prior conditionings/experiences that have produced particular habits in your personal consciousness, particular patterns in your mechanism of mental processing such as special ways of looking at things (mental perspectives) and specific likes and dislikes or other emotional flavors that you append to phenomena. Our own specific way of humans being conscious is just one possible way of being

conscious out of innumerable possibilities for sentient consciousnesses. Buddhism says that the common human way of experiencing consciousness, which is based upon our anatomy and social training, is due to “shared karmic seeds.” This is why we share a consensus reality.

In other words, each one of us possesses our own individual world/way of experience (consciousness) that is uniquely particular to us within the general schema of human consciousness. However, the general schema of human consciousness – our way of processing sensory and mental events - produces a common consensus reality. We share many similarities with others in how we think and process sensory phenomena, but this is mostly due to our shared biological mechanisms and common algorithms of consciousness as well as common social conditionings such as culture and education.

Do you want an example of conditioning? Then tell me which shape is rounder, Kiki or Bouba? The question is nonsensical, but because of conditionings within our mind that associate auditory sounds with visual perceptions (sound-shape associations we have already formed internally), most people would say that Bouba is rounder than Kiki, which many people imagine as being spikey due to sharp inflections in the sound of the name. Another example is the fact that the only thing you hear by virtue of having ears is sound. Only through training, learning or conditioning can you recognize what the sound is.

Your mind is your world of reality, and that reality is created based upon your memories, perceptions, thoughts and your nervous system that work together to generate the world of qualities that appears within your consciousness. We see/experience the world through the eyes of human consciousness, and so we see the world in the particular special way unique to humans. Other beings, such as animals and insects, see and experience the world differently than we do. (For instance, colors are not properties of things but the way objects appear to us because of our eyes and brains, a wa composition that the brain makes so that you can extract meaning from the world.) Humans also see the world somewhat differently from each other although we share extremely similar methods of conceptual fabrication due to our common structure.

Your own five senses certainly don't give a full picture of the world, for they don't paint for you all the forces that create for you the destiny of a moment. What you see is only an approximation or simplification due to your sensory limitations and mental limitations. It is a computation your brain makes so that you can make meaning of the world. The world you see, which is constructed in your head, provides you with a very abbreviated perspective and then you think that this is the way the world is when it isn't. You create within your mind a limited reality that is incomplete (since you don't have infinite knowledge because the finite cannot encapsulate the infinite) and simplified (because the true texture of the world is infinitely complex). You might even have faulty sense organs, such as cataracts in the eyes, which distort your sensory intake of the world *before* you even simplify that picture and superimpose extra mental garbage onto your perceptions to further pervert them. Basically, there is so much more outside of the little illusion we take for reality inside our minds.

Our past experiences (conditioning) that have been stored in our neurons as memories create special habits within our mechanistic process of generating thoughts and mental states that fashion our experiences to a profound degree. Prior experiences, the environment, teachings and other types of conditionings create fixed paradigms within the brain's neurons that become incorporated as part of our software of mental analysis and response. Our past experiences condition/configure our mind to work in a certain way and that way produces the (biased or conditional) projections we experience. In other words, my mind already possesses content based on prior experiences. When I perceive similar things the perception triggerries these memories or mental images associated with them so that they arise and color my experience. This is why our past experiences condition our mind to experience the

world in a certain biased way.

Even our behavior, in fact every behavior of ours, is subject to the laws of conditioning. We learn to do things in a certain way because of our parents, culture, religion, training and so on. Also, because of our religion, culture, environment and so on we often suppress ourselves with rules and regulations (conditioning) rather than transform ourselves (our drives, impulses or natures), and then those restrictions that become part of our psyche are like a wrapping, warping or coating of our Qi/Prana that works in a special way, inhibiting our natural Qi/Prana flow and biasing our behavior. This type of conditioning produces walls and limitations, as does the cocoon of groupthink that produces its own constrictions. It affects your thoughts, inner Qi/Prana flow and outer behavior. Becoming alive, meaning less mechanical or robotic in nature, happens when we abandon (detach from) these artificial conditioning patterns that control our mind-stream, Qi flow and behavior and live in a state of presence – absolute living awareness – where we do what is right and appropriate (virtuous) in every moment.

We experience things imperfectly (things are not perceived absolutely correctly) and incompletely through our senses because we lack infinite sensorial capabilities, infinite knowledge, and the mental processing within our brains is faulty in a lot of ways too. We think and act imperfectly because our conceptual processes and our Qi/Prana circulation also have faulty biases (as just explained). What we generally believe to be the raw inarguable aspects/facts of existence are images formed within our minds whose structure is deeply constrained by our biological capabilities and mechanisms of consciousness construction. We never see/experience the world, but only see an internal mental projection on the screen of neurons and the brain stem due to our limited senses and a particular form of mental processes unique to humans, namely species-specific. We never see/experience the real world directly; we only experience our mind. We never see the world as it really is, but only according to how we are.

It is not that the world/universe is made of consciousness or some such unknowable thing, but that *the world we see/experience* is made of our consciousness. We are never dealing directly with objects but with our mental ideas/images of objects. Externally there are still objects, phenomena, things-in-themselves that exist whether or not we personally exist, but for us they don't exist if we don't personally exist or lack consciousness. All we can ever experience through knowing is internal conceptualizations constructed through the habitual algorithms of conceptualization ruling the processes of our consciousness, and most of this is not under your voluntary control. It isn't that anything doesn't exist in the conventional sense, in the outside world of Shakti, but that we don't know what things *actually are* because they appear through the limited filter of consciousness. Of course what we have, imperfect as it is, is better than insentience, for consciousness is the great treasure of the cosmos, the wish fulfilling gem of the universe that grants you cognizance and the ability to do and experience whatever you want.

While a world of phenomena does exist outside of you, it is an existence whose appearance is only seen/experienced because there is a mind to know it. Your mind has formed various (limited or imperfect) sensory images of it and has thoughts about it to interpret them and give them meaning. Thus you form the perspective of conventional reality in your mind, and “experience the world.” Every human mind (with sense organs of similar capability) will see the world differently because each individual will think differently than the next and color whatever they perceive by their own emotions and past experiences that become entangled with their mind-stream, so the world and universe we see are *conditional* constructions, *dependent* constructions that have no absolute meaning other than what we ascribe to them.

Every being experiences life conditionally, which means dependent upon its prior memories of experiences, sensory apparatus, and thoughts generated at the moment. What you experience in the

present moment is your past conditioning manifesting itself in interpreting the present, such as by identifying what everything is for you. Despite everyone's conditioning being different because of different past experiences, beings of the same species will share enough commonalities in their perceptual sensory apparatus, nervous system structure and thinking processes/systems to think somewhat similarly, otherwise they could not harmoniously communicate with each other and get along well enough to live together in cooperative communities.

Knowledge is generated by knowing and involves the master self-thought "I," perceptions, conceptions (thinking, thoughts or intellectual operations), and the memories of names and forms that are used to identify and differentiate everything. Memories are marks of our experiences that are built into our organism to retain them in order to serve as the foundation for future actions and states of consciousness. Comprehension is capable of being stored in the body in the form of thought or idea, and that comprehension is called memory. Memory is essentially a set of names, labels and forms (patterns) built up over time from experience and applied to new appearances within the mind to derive new recognitions and conceptions. It lets us distinguish, differentiate, identify, recognize or make sense of phenomena within consciousness that then provides the fodder for new states of consciousness. This is also called understanding, comprehension, discrimination or Knowledge, without which nothing could be recognized or known. Without that, chaos would be our field of perception, or nothing at all. Without the illumination of consciousness there is no world, nor forms or shapes, nothing at all.

Perception of the world, which produces Knowledge, is basically the result of a process of informed guesswork. To perceive the world the brain works as a prediction engine to combine sensory inputs/signals with memories (prior expectations/beliefs on the way the world is) to make a best guess as to what has caused those signals. Subjectively perceived bundles of sensations are turned into objects through logical constructions that reference our memories, and that's how we see "objects." Some people see more colors than others, others hear a wider range of sounds, some are sensitive to a wider range of aromas ... we experience the world both incompletely and imprecisely but a world with qualities is what each of us experiences. The brain perceives the world by processing the sensory signals of its sense organs and uses its internal processes to give a best guess as to their identity and meaning. This produces comprehension, discrimination, identification, and so on. That best guess is always limited or reined in by the equipment and processes of consciousness, meaning that the picture and its meaning are conditionally derived.

In a sense it is all an illusion, delusion, or dream, but we call our built-up worldview "reality" because it proceeds according to laws and we all commonly agree about our species-specific illusions since we share similar cognitive equipment, consciousness processing algorithms and definitions. The concept of being a self is also a controlled illusion or delusion of the brain (subject to the tight physiological bounds that produce consciousness) for what we really are is just a part of Shakti without any tight ridges/borders between ourselves and the rest of the All of Manifestation.

We look like we are limited beings with a non-soft boundary but we are interpenetrated and co-defined by universal forces crisscrossing us everywhere to give us existence such as gravity, electromagnetism or the Higgs field. Our existence also depends upon the existence of the elements, sunshine, oxygen, water, parents, society and so on. We are like a borderless process in a giant network of infinitely interconnected borderless processes meshed together with each other, interpenetrating thoroughly, where each process is a "thing" while massive energy wavefronts are the glue holding everything together as both objects and the system in totality. There is a grand interfusion of phenomena due to dependent defining, and we cannot say where one phenomena ends and another begins, and thus they are neither different nor the same as each other.

Every thought generated within the mind arises due to connections with all the other contents of the

mind. The sense organs have their raw perceptual data turned into mental entities/images by the brain/consciousness, and then these mental events are further synthesized or appended to by memories, thinking and the intellect to next give rise to further ideas, emotions, judgments and volitional acts. The intellect is constantly bombarded by a stream of sensory reports and automatically adds words, names and label differentiators to make sense out of them. All these operations are simultaneously perfuming consciousness and its operations everywhere so as to generate new thoughts in turn, like an endless running stream or shimmering wavering haze that is always spinning to produce new thoughts in turn.

The sensory inputs and thoughts that actively perfume consciousness, and the consciousness which is produced and perfumed, live and perish together while engendering new next states of consciousness (thoughts) because of the blending; this is the principle of perfuming. By the perfuming stimulation of consciousness the seeds/memories that lie within neurons are engendered to sprout/express in response to the combinational aroma, flavor, blending, linkages, light or stimulation of the total mixture of inputs. Hence the term “perfuming” or “smoking” of consciousness, as what is produced takes on the aroma/flavor of what came previously.

As soon as the spinning of thoughts and seeds of memory are engendered to produce new thoughts, the consciousness which has been perfumed into existence acts in turn as a cause to perfume and mature other seeds of consciousness to generate new thoughts (states of consciousness). These three elements - thoughts that are born, the inputs which perfume/electrify them, and the dormant seeds which are stimulated (provoked into stirring) by this perfuming – all revolve in a cycle, simultaneously acting as operational causes and transformational effects. Consciousness flows ever onward through this process to produce personal experience, which is what we call our mind, worldview or even karma.

The conceptualizations appearing within the stream of consciousness are like the ripening of a dynamic process that keeps ever-flowing onward. The dynamic flowing of consciousness that creates our experience of the moment is achieved through a marvelous mutual influencing/perfuming of sensory inputs, memories, and conceptualization processes that produce its appearance as well as our knowing of that experience. The generation of a mental scenario within the mind is like a bundle of reeds that has been stacked together where each reed is supported by the aggregate of all the others in the bundle.

The experience of the present moment is a conceptualization arising through numerous conditions, and that ripening of multiple impressions produces further ripenings as the former consciousness is exhausted and a consequential one is built. The consequence of mind-moments being born and passing away because of transformation into something else is what appears to be an unbroken mind-stream of flowing experience, and these transitory scenes of consciousness are all due to unseen biochemical, bioelectrical reactions. Irritating nervous tissue in some specific way produces the stream of consciousness.

The causes of a mental state of thoughts, and the immediately subsequent thoughts that are its effects, are certainly co-dependent. Conceptualization is produced through the mutual influence of memories and mental processing, and the mental state that manifests in turn creates new memories and patterns of processing/producing conceptualizations and mental projections within the neural system.

Throughout all of this, it is useful to remember that everything we see and think is not the truth but just mental projections. The world to us is just an experience in our mind, something we have constructed, and not the real world because we have simplified the picture and added all sorts of additional mental garbage onto whatever is being experienced.

The intellect is the “organ of thinking” that must make sense of all this, and its abilities of discrimination can be compared to a great army general who is interpreting all the information he's receiving from his sense organ lieutenants and local processing officers/functionaries who are constantly issuing him reports. If we get rid of these sense reports then we have no more outside world, and then the only thing left for consciousness to work with is memory and the intellect itself, which is basically Knowledge functioning to produce thoughts that are more Knowledge. Knowledge is always just producing itself; there is no independent being, entity, soul or *atman* producing Knowledge. Knowledge is producing Knowledge all by itself.

To get any peace or quiet at all in the midst of this incessant activity, the army general has to separate himself from the ceaseless flow of these reports. The meditative act of “sense withdrawal” mentioned in Yoga, or “turning away from the senses,” “turning within,” or “cultivating one-pointed concentration to ignore distractions,” “cultivating empty mind,” “detaching from consciousness,” or “detaching from thought” is thus a means for developing greater mental peace and quiet.

This is the practice of meditation. It involves imitating the original nature. It involves no longer internally clinging to the mind-stream contents of consciousness such as ingrained perspectives or habitual prejudices – while continuing to let everything mentally arise – in order to gain the peacefulness of mental calm, equanimity, openness, acceptance, patience, tolerance, serenity, stability and tranquility. It involves helping you realize the naturally peaceful state of your mind free of irritations. It helps people with busy minds realize that the natural state of the mind is more tranquil and peaceful. It leads you to realize that you should learn to control any modifications of your mind.

Buddhism, in particular, talks greatly about the workings of our mental processes because as Arhats all spiritual masters can shrink their etheric bodies down in size just like devas, go into peoples' brains, and watch the Qi transformations as thoughts form due to the electro-chemical processes going on. This is done by all the Arhats, *jnani* or *jivanmukta* (spiritual masters) within all religions, and is a requisite part of their training process, but Buddhism does the most to describe some of the micro-processes involved with consciousness.

It is common practice among devas and the spiritual masters of all religions to read the memories that people store in their brain neurons, which is why it is said that no secrets are kept from Heaven. It is also common for spiritual adepts with higher bodies to train on how to change people's thoughts and emotions, *which is one of the primary ways by which spiritual masters and their deva students try to help individuals in the world*, though they are limited by the restrictions of karma that determine what a person is due to experience.

In the Buddhist *Vimalakirti Sutra* the brain is symbolized by Vimalakirti's ten-foot square room where miniaturized Buddhas (practicing the *amina* superpower of shrinkage in their deva bodies, or higher bodies that even the devas cannot see) arrive to teach an uncountable number of deva students who have also assembled inside the room/brain. In the *Avatamsaka (Flower Ornament) Sutra* the neurons, memory cells and neural pathways as they fire (when millions of electrochemical reactions/signals are stimulated to evoke a subjective experience) are symbolized by bright banners, wisdom flames, arrays of lights, jeweled lights, shining pores, magical displays, wisdom fragrances, supreme clouds, banner lights, wondrous adornments, flags, flowers, pleasant thunder, or melodious sounds and other wonderful analogies. Neurons with their countless tendrils that connect with many network patterns generate the mind when stimulated. As vital energy runs through them, which is symbolized in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* by fragrant wind or light, it produces mental states. Thus a higher subtle body is necessary for consciousness, and this is what leaves a physical body upon death. Thus the subtle body is called the soul in several spiritual traditions and the physical body is said not to be your true spiritual self.

Our experience as sentient life is all possible because of the great treasure of consciousness that works in the way described. In the universe, rare is the phenomena of life. With life, rare is the existence of consciousness able to form higher thoughts that enable beings to learn who and what they are. Rare are the living beings who can learn how to master consciousness, how to use consciousness to master phenomena, how to bring about better states of existence for themselves and others. Rare are the beings who can discern a spiritual path that enables them to generate higher bodies inherent within the condensed energy matrix of the physical shell, and which can rejoin beings living on higher planes to live more enjoyably for incredible amounts of time.

Furthermore, we have the ability to direct our consciousness in various ways, such as toward beneficial intentions. We can direct our consciousness towards producing and enjoying more beneficial mental states, and towards producing better external conditions that give rise to better mental and physical states for others too. Through mindfulness, watchfulness or awareness of the contents of our mind we have the capacity to liberate/detach ourselves from our prior conditioning that has become habitual (by creating inner personality coatings), and to liberate ourselves from the dominant mind-stream of the moment that allows a newer perspective and the freedom to create an even better mental state. We can mentally stand aside to realize what we are actually doing in the larger scheme of things, stop any errant behavior, and control our conduct so as to transcend our inherent animal nature through nobility.

PERFECTING CONSCIOUSNESS & CONSUMMATE CONDUCT

The great miracle, the wish-fulfilling jewel that you possess but inanimate matter does not possess is consciousness. Our experience of the world around us, and the mental happenings within us, occur because we are living bodies with the great treasure of consciousness. One of the principles of life is to master, control or develop consciousness in order to improve your own internal and external well-being, as well as the well-being of others. The journey is to extend your concern from solely yourself to a larger sphere starting with your family, then friends and then larger and larger connections with whom you more cooperatively interact with unlimited good intentions.

Improving the well-being and welfare of others through benevolent, beneficial behavior is one of the cardinal principles of spiritual cultivation. It is a tendency that abolishes selfishness and self-centeredness. Our efforts to do good deeds that help others improve the quality of their lives are performed not just to earn karmic merit, which is a return expected due to the principle that if you cause happiness for others (such as by relieving their suffering and distress) then as a natural consequence you will experience happiness in turn. It is not just done for the desire to express thankfulness or gratitude, the sense of wanting to pay back the members of contemporary society and their predecessors for all the kindnesses, sacrifices and hard work they have done on your account in order to feed you and make your life easier. It is not done because upon attaining the higher stages of enlightenment you can hear and feel all the cries of suffering in the world and want to respond to help out of compassion. It is not done because we have an obligation to act for the benefit of others out of the spirit of friendship, kinship because we truly are all brothers/sisters within Shakti and equally diverse embodiments of one Self; it is not done because my True Self is the same as the Self in others and so in helping them I am helping my Self. It is not done because others are a member of my own body, Shakti. We really are one, united in one nature despite our differences as particular persons, so you should treat everyone as you would like to be treated, but this doesn't motivate most people. Although I cannot feel their pain, it is not done because I should consider their pain as equally mine because they are part of my Self, and therefore I should work to dispel it because it is pain like my own. It is not just because you feel empathy and sympathy for humanity's suffering and as an antidote want to relieve the pains and problems of others once you discover their needs. It is not done simply out of pure kindness, compassion, benevolence or love of

others. It is not done because the more we care for and work for the welfare of others the more we forget our own sufferings and concerns since our own happiness grows greater when we bestow kindness and compassion. It is not done because making situations better for others makes the overall environment better for our self, just as a tide that raises all ships also raises our own. It is not just because beneficent altruism, compassion and sacrificing for others, acting for the greater good, is the highest degree of nobility and greatness of soul possible that raises us far above our animal nature and thus makes us spiritually transcendent. It is not just because contributing to a larger cause causes us to forget ourselves as well as our pains, troubles and sufferings when the sacrifice is worth the objective. It is not just because manifesting the force of giving in ourselves places us in line with the most fundamental force of the cosmos, which is the manifestation of Creation itself since its appearance is a type of *giving out* or expression of the original nature. Doing good deeds and manifesting blessings and virtue by working to improve the well-being and welfare of others is only done because you truly believe it is the right thing to do, and that doing is then obligatory simply because of it being what it is, just as virtue has worth for its own sake. The amazing thing is that sacrificing yourself to help others by improving the quality of their lives, eradicating their misfortunes through compassion, and benefiting the world by means of virtuous qualities is also, on the whole, not only in the best interest of all concerned but of benefit to yourself as well.

A Bodhisattva realizes that he or she is empty of inherent nature, and there is actually no such thing as an intrinsic person who can receive any benefit from any undertaking, including receiving/enjoying any merit from helping others. There are just processes (transformations) going on within Shakti occurring because of infinite interconnections, but because of ignorance some of the processes with consciousness think they are individual separate beings, which is conventional thinking, and some are incidentally experiencing great suffering in what they conceive of as their lives. The desire to benevolently help such individuals is the virtue of compassion, and you should pursue such a virtue for virtue's sake – because you *choose* to pursue a path of virtue, helpfulness, self-improvement and self-perfection towards consummate conduct. People want to exist somewhere they can be happy and you can create that world for them by seeding the world to make it more healthy. You can create meaning and find significance in life through what you do, and you can choose to live life in kind and loving ways or not. The ultimate is to become a source of positivity with the time given you, to be the best version of yourself, the highest you, a light you want to see in the world. In doing so you can find meaning in life and elevate yourself to exceptional purpose other than just existing.

Whether living in this realm or being reborn in a higher realm, even though you now know what you really are you will always live a conventional life in your denizen realm throughout the endless rounds of incarnations, long or short. In the conventional world of which you are part, whether you have inherent existence or not, the highest and most noble pathway is the pursuit of self-improvement/perfection, virtuous action and being. With this as one's basis an individual devotes themselves towards the challenge of accomplishment. The practice of virtuous ways, self-improvement and the task of improving the well-being of others through compassionate acts of benevolence, kindness and wisdom that serve their welfare and improve the quality of their lives – which is called “beautifying a Buddha land” – is that pathway. It is its own reward. In the universe there is actually no real reward at all and no one to receive it, but one takes on this challenge for the benefit of one's imagination.

On the spiritual path, you choose to do beneficial intentions for others simply because you choose as your ideal the magnificence of beneficence, wisdom, skillfulness, self-perfection and virtuous ways and in these pursuits all these other purposes and more are accomplished naturally.

The stream of consciousness is like an endless flowing river. Just as a river at no point is ever identical to any other version of itself (“you can never step in same river twice”) and no moment of

time repeats itself, no state of consciousness is ever the same as another despite a similar appearance. However, you can train your mind to be acutely aware of your moment-by-moment subjective experience of mental and material events – your seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touch sensations, your thoughts relating to the past, present or the future, and your feelings, perceptions and intentions/behavior – that are influenced by your past conditioning as well as physical laws, biological laws, psychological laws, volitional laws, and universal laws. With the capability of consciousness you can train in wisdom (understanding) and self-knowledge to understand what you are, your capabilities, and your potential for skills and accomplishment. You can use consciousness to improve your body and environment. You can even train as an “adept perceiver” to enhance your basic sensory-perception abilities and take them to new limits. You can also train your consciousness to consistently act in certain regular ways, and can direct your consciousness towards accomplishing any specific ends you choose, which is a key capability of life. In fact, the “Hero’s Journey” in countless cultures involves performing a series of challenging tasks to achieve a specific end, and Confucianism calls this life’s task of learning how to properly and effectively act in everything the “Great Learning.” We are all subject to this requirement.

Buddhism calls consciousness the flow of karma, which entails an external reality (the environment of situations we experience) and an internal mental experience of conceptions, emotions and sensations. The human subjective experience – whatever appears in our mind – has a structure that appears in a particular way due to our anatomical, neurological operating processes or patterns, and memories. You actually have the ability to expose yourself to different experiences to create new and useful memories, and reprogram or retrain your mental processes to regularly produce superior results of a desired type, and thus develop special abilities and valuable characteristics that you prize.

Thus, it is important that you train yourself by exposing yourself to the highest and best models of behavior, performance and outcome. This is because our karmic conditioning of what we are taught or absorb from the environment impels/trains us to act in certain optimal or non-optimal ways, experience particular emotions and feeling tones, and aspire to distinctive goals, purposes, objectives or aspirations that are either good or bad for us and others. By impressing our psyches with the best models we thereby provide the highest ideal as the targeted objective of behavior, namely how we wish ourselves and the world to become. The choice to do something – a volition, impulse or decision – and the formation of the plan to accomplish it depends precisely upon the contents of your consciousness. What is stored within consciousness as an ideology will carry over into ordinary life.

Consciousness has two aspects that are the focus of cultivation – automatic processes and deliberate processes.

Of the automatic processes there is the ability for sense organs upon *contacting* an object to transform their sensory inputs into images within consciousness; the ability to *distinguish* a worldview of qualities (meanings with conventional significance) from such mental objects without consciously thinking about it (discrimination, identification or perception); the ability for the mind to naturally generate internal emotional flavors or *feelings* of pleasure (like), pain (dislike) or indifference (neutrality) when it contacts such objects; the automatic urge, tendency, or intention that moves the primary mind to become involved with mental objects, meaning the involuntary *volition* or natural power that causes the mental continuum to cognitively “take” or become engaged with an object; the ability to pay attention – either little or much – to an object with *mental engagement* or attentive focus so that the mind stays on the object (as a form of concentration) and doesn’t move elsewhere.

Thoughts and feelings are no more than fleeting vibrations in consciousness that cannot stay, biochemical reactions that are changing every moment, but these irritations of the nervous tissues that can be broken down even to the atomic level can affect us substantially in positive or negative

ways. In addition to physical pain, we are particularly distressed by negative mental states, afflictions or defilements that cause suffering. We lack internal tranquility because of mental suffering and defilements; are often subject to excessive pride, conceit, hatred, anger, resentment, stinginess and malice; cling to delusive views and delusions; frequently succumb to fearfulness; and are commonly slaves to harmful desires and habits.

The root of suffering and mental defilements can be addressed in many ways such as by changing our negative emotional states to better ones when we can or by simply lowering their volume or frequency (taming the mind); by retraining ourselves so that alternative positive states arise for the same phenomena (such as by turning nervousness into excitement before an athletic event, nodding your head slowly in the affirmative when you get made instead of showing anger, or learning to detach from your mind-stream and the situation at hand so that you can reinterpret events with a more positive attitude that easily discards the automatic, habitual negative responses of your consciousness); by confining or limiting our yearnings/cravings which cannot be escaped/eliminated to a smaller set of permitted circumstances and thus reduce our range of negative states caused by irritation, suffering and deprivation; by changing our routines (habits or activities) so that suffering does not normally arise; by building up our tolerance and endurance for negative states so that in getting stronger emotionally we can better cope with them (developing grit, determination, persistence, patience and resilience); by engaging ourselves in a higher purpose, intention or commitment so that we touch moments of self-forgetfulness when absorbed in the effort and are involved with joyous effort when suffering arises so that we can thus ignore it despite its appearance (establishing vows and aspirations so worthy that sufferings are worth the price or we can ignore the distractions of our negative feelings and afflictions); by mastering mental stability and concentration so that we can ignore suffering, irritations or distractions when they appear by sustaining the mind on another topic; by developing continual mindfulness of our mind-stream so that we notice suffering when it immediately arises and can take steps to cut it off or transform it before it takes firm hold; to just allow afflictive emotions/feelings we cannot change to come and go as they please without any attachment or holding onto them so that they are sustained so they simply pass away without any engagement on our part while we work to transform consciousness over the long run so that we regularly generate less negative ones as our natural state, and so on. Among these various remedies are strategies of attacking mental affliction, suffering or defilement through the omnipresent mental factors of consciousness.

In the last option our consciousness is like a clear mirror that simply reflects whatever arises within it without sticking, as do the images within a clean mirror, so we experience negative and positive emotions as they arise but don't especially cling to them or stay engaged in holding to them excessively with attachment, and then they pass away. This is called mirror wisdom functioning. After pain and suffering is gone, for instance, you don't continue holding onto that state forever but move on and grow. You get used to a new normal and don't cling to the past. We can also use wisdom, insight or understanding to determine why negative mental states arise and then from that application of reasoning and analysis we can unravel those causes at their root, and make adjustments, so that afflictions are resolved and do not arise in the future.

Positive feelings, such as happiness and joy, are internal mental states that we can also train to generate at will independent/regardless of other mental states. Happiness is thus a choice because we can choose to be happy. We can also cultivate tranquility/serenity to manifest independent of (despite) our current feelings too and then become that way. The way to do so is to resemble the actionless peacefulness of our True Self that does not engage with, interfere with or hold onto anything due to effortlessness, and thus we can learn how to let thoughts go so that we become more peaceful and relaxed. We can also learn to detach from the unlimited desires that cloud the mind so that we develop a clear mind more absent of the many thoughts that normally clutter consciousness. Inner peace leads to happiness and contentment, so we must learn how to tame our minds.

Additionally, it is easy to convert a peaceful, clear mind to happiness any time you want. A clear mind also leads to better decisions and better outcomes. You also need a calm mind if you want to experience a flow state or operate with peak performance.

In cultivation we want to transform our physical conditions, environmental conditions, social conditions, as well as mental and behavioral tendencies that lead to suffering, such as physical pain or painful emotions, and let go of physical or mental sufferings when they arise so that they quickly depart rather than artificially remain longer than they must because we overly involve ourselves/play with them (cling to them). We want to have sufficient wisdom to avoid conditions or circumstances that would cause suffering or make us unhappy, and to be able to transform afflictive emotions at will, which requires training to develop that ability. We want to more frequently manifest beneficial states that are pleasant to experience and lead to higher well-being. Furthermore, we don't want to be overly ruled by either positive or negative emotions when trying to make correct decisions but want wisdom and logic to stand as the overriding principles for guiding our behavior.

To perfect our capabilities of deliberate consciousness, we want to learn how to master cognitive/mental skills *and* physical skills (since the body is controlled by thought) that help us survive, live peacefully with others, accomplish personal interests of will or resolve, and move forward towards higher goals. To master deliberate consciousness means that we want to develop mental skills, vocal skills and physical body skills since they are controlled by consciousness. Vocal skills include language or linguistic abilities; singing abilities; spiritual abilities (such as mantra recitation) and skills such as persuasion, communication, etcetera. Physical body skills include general physical preparedness; managing your posture and demeanor or form (including physical structure); mastering physical movements whether for sport or the ability to manipulate the physical world; mastering control of breathing and internal energy; perfecting athletic abilities, etcetera. The basic factors of fitness include flexibility, agility, strength, endurance and speed.

Intelligence is commonly defined as “the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly, and learn from experience.” Mental skills include the ability to report or know one's mental states and understand one's mental objects; focus attention and concentration to ignore distractions; conquer emotions and mental afflictions; develop specifically desired (types of) thoughts; control your behavior (including inhibition control of desires); visualize intentions; create imaginations (such as envisioning the work one must do to complete a goal or mentally time travelling into the future); create plans and strategies; anticipate events and plan for unfelt needs; remember facts or experiences over the short-term and long-term; access and control autonomic internal states; guide the direction of your body to manipulate the physical world; guide the movement of the internal energy within your body; make correct reasonings, deductions, inferences, or assessments for decisions and problem solving using deductive, inductive and dialectical thought as well as hierarchical conceptual reasoning; accumulate wisdom and knowledge, and so on.

One key to mastering deliberate consciousness is to transform the patterns within consciousness that are stored as your memories. The contents of our storehouse of memories are unconscious, beyond our knowing. We cannot climb in and change what they are or the way consciousness functions on an anatomical level, but we can create new models of behavior, reaction and so forth and impress them in our memories so that they become the new operating system for behavior. Such is done in sports training and other high performance fields where individuals must learn to act in very specific ways, especially under conditions of severe stress when normal intellectual processes shut down and the mind automatically defaults to its most basic responses or learned patterns. We want to store up as memories perfect models of behavior, perfect algorithms for thinking processes, and perfect emotional reward states so that they become the default operants in the process that generates thoughts, emotions, words and actions. This means we have to practice the consummate way of

doing things.

If we change our mental perspectives (way of looking at things) and standard templates of behavior, which are stored within our neurons, it becomes easier to conduct ourselves better in the world because we transform the roots of behavior. Those roots are the default/regular patterns of consciousness, stored in our neurons, that produce behavior. This then is the basis of virtuous living, propriety (proper behavior) and consummate conduct. Through persistent instruction or absorption you must adopt such standards. Also, by always being watchfully mindful of the contents of our consciousness we can police ourselves and achieve liberation from our prior conditioning too.

This is the second key, which is to become mindful of the real time workings of consciousness that are operating according to patterns produced by past conditioning. Mindfulness, watchfulness or self-awareness means becoming perfectly aware of our thoughts and emotions by using the illumination of awareness to shine on our mental products and processes that they might be corrected. If we are mindful of our thoughts, emotions and actions we can cut off errant behavior in real time and substitute better thoughts, emotions and behavior for the lesser. By becoming aware of our emotions we can try to change our emotional mental state or let emotions occur without friction and pass away, thus allowing painful karma to be exhausted without residue. If we are not aware of our mental afflictions and ways of normally responding we are likely to act impulsively, which is often unwise and destructive to our well-being and the well-being of others.

We should become mindful of our current emotional state so that we can control emotions and eliminate afflictions rather than delve into them. We should also be clear of our intellectual operations so that we act with higher wisdom - namely logic, reason and skillfulness that lacks prejudice or bias. Or, by watching our own thoughts with detachment (like a third person observer who doesn't engage with them) we can empower ourselves to be able to let them pass away without acting on them when we notice they are errant, which is one of the reasons individuals practice meditation (mental watching) as spiritual practice.

Detachment means being able to step back and see what's going on in your mind or the outside world, seeing a situation for what it actually is and knowing what you are actually thinking or planning on doing. This is essentially the meaning of mindfulness, which allows you to see things from a new perspective of freedom that is liberated from both your own thought-train and society's standard way of looking at things. It is a way to train the mind to be used differently. Specifically, it is training to take your mental skills to a much higher level.

The key is that we are attempting remedies that deal with consciousness, training it to operate at a higher level, because when we suffer we suffer consciously, whether that suffering be physical or mental pain. By retraining our conscious operation we can avoid, eliminate, manage or mitigate suffering and produce better states in its place.

The purpose of self-improvement is to perfect your behavior with the goal of consummate conduct that produces ultimately excellent, exemplary efficient results because you will experience the results of all your actions as karma, so it is best that your actions be as excellent as possible. The *Upajjhatthana Sutta* states, "I am the owner of my actions, heir of my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever actions I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir." In the *Cula-kammavibhanga Sutta* Shakyamuni Buddha said, "Beings are the owners of karmas, heirs of karmas, they have karmas as their progenitor, karmas as their kin, karmas as their homing-place. It is karmas that differentiate beings according to inferiority and superiority." Therefore, right/correct consciousness that includes wisdom, skillfulness and correct virtue should guide man's actions. Right consciousness enables you to create correct views, proper intentions, correct speech, proper behavior, the right livelihood, correct efforts, proper mindfulness

and concentration for proper living and progress.

Another Buddhist sutra says that karma is such that the actions that lead to short life [such as by killing others] makes people themselves short-lived, the actions that lead to longevity make people long-lived; the actions that lead to sickness makes people sick, the way that leads to health makes people healthy, the way that leads to ugliness makes people ugly, the way that leads to beauty makes people beautiful, the way that leads to insignificance makes people insignificant, the way that leads to influence makes people influential, the way that leads to poverty makes people poor, the way that leads to riches makes people rich, the way that leads to low birth makes people low-born, the way that leads to high birth makes people high-born; the way that leads to stupidity makes people stupid, the way that leads to wisdom makes people wise.

Therefore in life you must work on perfecting your behavior to make it more effective and skillful for yourself in terms of cause and effect to attain what you want, and more admirable, noble and helpful for others in terms of intention, virtue, morality and compassion. Behavior is controlled by your thoughts, which in turn originate in the mind. Behavior shows you how your mind has responded. Perfecting your behavior so that you exhibit consummate, skillful conduct therefore involves perfecting the operations and functions of your consciousness because thoughts become actions, which become habits, which become your character, which becomes your destiny. You can change all these outcomes by attacking this process from the knowledge or understanding of how it all works.

When we are born with special gene gifts from a family, that genetic inheritance encompasses some of our past life character disposition and the skills/capabilities we previously worked to build. These became incorporated into our subtle body, which is what reincarnates, and those characteristics together with past deeds become the basis of our destiny. We should in this life work to perform excellent deeds, create excellent results, build excellent predispositions and character traits, and adopt excellent aspirations that we want to migrate with us from life to life, and that is spiritual cultivation. As a child we will absorb/acquire certain lessons, traits and characteristics from our family, environment and culture – residential influences – which is why those influences are very important.

To improve your behavior you can purposefully design a plan to acquire that which you want to acquire rather than just blindly absorb influences from your environment that become your conditioning, good and bad. You can, by intent, adopt and then deeply embed yourself with the highest virtues, values and ethics along with various high ideals, and train yourself to act accordingly. You can watch your thoughts with mindfulness for self-management and learn to cut off bad behaviors once born or prevent them from manifesting through the contents-of-your-mind awareness methods of Liao Fan, Benjamin Franklin, and Wang Yang-Ming. Those methods enable a person's life to become a noble one through constant self-assessment. You can train to develop new actions through deliberate, deep practice efforts. You can train to develop new actions/reactions or some other aspect of your personality through repeated visualization practice. You can adopt new behaviors through immeasurable emotions training and mental rehearsal that impregnates consciousness with the automatic flavor of the character traits you select to develop. You can add envisioned intent to all your efforts through "principal awareness," which involves maintaining a state of presence (that is alive alertness instead of the tendency towards just blindly and robotically following your mind-stream without real knowledge of what you are doing) while deeply identifying your activities with a higher meaning or goal and elevated emotions. You choose how you make sense of the world when through intent you embed actions with a higher emotional content and meaning. You can learn to be always aware with a pristine clear mind so that, at decision points, you can apply reasoning according to principle (wisdom) so that you always select the best course of action. There are many ways to go about perfecting your behavior.

We are all imprisoned by the mechanical patterns of thought, feeling and behavior we typically express because they are the grooved patterns ingrained as the defaults of our conscious functioning. We have developed certain characteristics, behavioral traits and mindsets due to influences from our genes, parents, environment, society, culture, teachings, country, personal experiences etc. that have become imbedded in our neurons as memories and therefore conditioned our patterns and processes of consciousness. Also, we are genetically programmed to have an active bias in certain ways, such as being predisposed to do things that help groups cohere. But genes are not destiny because you can change; genes can only predispose, they cannot predetermine. There are many other ways to be and perceive in the world, but you usually filter them out due to ingrained habits and preconceptions. We are also imprisoned by the momentum of our actions, which is a tendency often difficult to escape (which is why one practices stepping aside and viewing what you are thinking and doing with detachment so that you can see what you are really doing). Our personality or character (our habitual behavioral disposition) also causes us to think and act in certain regular repeatable ways. We are wired to think and act in a certain way but can learn to step out of this perspective. Mindfulness helps us notice our conditioned patterns, especially those that have turned into ingrained habits, and awareness gives us the opportunity to detach from them and transform them at the opportune time.

Mindfulness helps us with our self-regulation efforts and helps to independence us from our ingrained conditioning so that we can go against errant thoughts or behaviors, whether robotic in nature or not, and create better states of future well-being. Awareness, wisdom and willpower help us break our conditioned habits and standard ways of thinking or doing things so that we can elevate them, purify them, transform them, eliminate them and so forth. It is important to absorb the best models of behavior in ourselves when we are young and most impressionable as those habitual behavior patterns, unless changed, will become our default operating system until we work hard to change those reflexive, mindless defaults. If we change them then a higher perfection is possible meaning better states of well-being that include a degree of alleviation from suffering. The only other way to overcome our prior defaults is by cultivating a state of presence that can override reflex-based responses that normally arise due to the contents of our brains.

A moment of affliction emotions is created by consciousness and if mindful of it where you can recognize it you will be less likely to be swept away by it, such as by speaking in a loud voice when angry. The goal in life is learning to use consciousness in an elegant fashion where its natural output is excellent (because you installed excellent patterns) and its new outputs are equally ultimately excellent. The goal is that the behavior you express in life because of your thoughts is wise, skillful, compassionate and effective – ultimately a state of elegance, nobility, and elevation. The key is to learn to use the mind so that harmful states do not arise in your life, harmful states that have arisen cease, beneficial states arise (purity), and beneficial states that are already existing keep continuing rather than cease.

When unwholesome and intrusive thoughts, emotions or afflictions arise within consciousness you can try cutting them off or distracting yourself with different thoughts in order to break away from them (drawing your attention to something else). Another approach for dealing with them is withdrawing attention from them — not giving them attention by ignoring them entirely if possible, thus paying them no mind. If these strategies don't work you should try replacing/switching the bad thoughts with good (more elevated) thoughts if possible as is done in NLP (neuro-linguistic programming). For instance, you can try to reinterpret a situation in a different higher way. If afflicting thoughts negative or unwholesome still arise, another approach is to reflect on their unpleasant aspects or the consequences if you respond to them. This is called dissolving them through wisdom analysis or contemplation. To help silence them you ponder on the disadvantages, examine the dangers, or scrutinize the drawbacks of following such thoughts.

If the energy of an afflictive mental state is too strong when besieging us we may not be able to

change it through these various skillful means or willpower. Thus there are other expedient means to help change our mental state/emotions of the moment – prayer, mantra, calling mentally upon a saint or other great religious figure for help, NLP, ACT, homeopathy, and also breathing practices – alternate side breathing, kumbhaka pranayama, freediving breathing, Wim Hof breathing and so on since they can alkalize the body and thus change the biochemistry of your brain which affects your neural processes. The gradual methods for altering/retraining your thoughts and behavior over the long-term include positive reinforcement, modeling someone or a process to induce behavioral change, living in a perfumed environment to absorb those influences, and of course monitoring your mind and behavior through watchfulness or mindfulness practice.

In spiritual cultivation it is best to concentrate on controlling, perfecting or managing consciousness because it ultimately controls your deliberate behavior, and your behavior is the outcome of your thoughts expressed. Thoughts produce actions, so the key to better behavior is better cognition (wisdom), decision-making, a broader perspective and more self-control (discipline). You can take the best principles and insights from various fields, such as science and logic, and create mental models of the best ways to think that you can master, which is a form of mastering consciousness.

Another aspect of your existence to concentrate on mastering, controlling, perfecting, and improving is your physical body, which can be perfected through stretching exercises, dancing, athletics, medicine, diet, detoxification, skeletal alignment, physical manipulation and visualization efforts. There is the aspect of perfecting your movements by training consciousness and perfecting your physical form and abilities through actual physical practices. Your body of flesh is your “lived distance,” so it makes sense to gain control over this physical karma as completely as possible while also making it as excellent as possible in terms of its health, form, energy, and capabilities. The goal is not just excellence and elegance of health, energy, form, expression and movement but the ability to reach and maintain a living state of *flow* where we move friction-free with precision, elegance, and grace despite challenging events, resistance or opposition. While so living we should always be enjoying a lucid state of pristine mental clarity.

What are we ultimately trying to express in life other than skillful consummate conduct that achieves what we want? Through spiritual cultivation we are trying to train ourselves so that we can become master of our mood and always experience through life a natural mental state of happiness – peace, contentment, satisfaction, optimism, sunniness, confidence and other positive emotions. Thus we are trying to train our (internal and external) properties, traits, natural characteristics or character. We are also trying to train ourselves so that we can become master of external conditions. Thus we are trying to train our wisdom, skillfulness and behavior so that we can accomplish what we want, which involves learning and mastering various skills and mindsets. We are trying to train our self-control and discipline so that we correct bad habits and eliminate unfortunate tendencies. Through wisdom, self-control of behavior and better actions we hope to change our future fortunes. Deep inside, most of us also want to establish good roots within so that we always display kindness, virtue and a giving nature that helps others such as by eliminating their suffering, distress and misfortunes; eradicating their fears and worries; pacifying their excessive desires; helping them to taste tranquility; causing them to break the barriers of habits, leave misfortunate paths and avoid going along with bad things; inspiring them to improve themselves and cultivate merit; and help them derive the means of eradicating their own misfortunes and do great deeds.

We therefore train on how to develop the mind so that it has the skills of training, influence and persuasion that embody wisdom, skillfulness, kindness and compassion. We train in how to use the mind correctly so that we ourselves exhibit proper, consummate behavior. We train in how to change its programming (conditioning) that it has already developed by instilling within ourselves new mental habits (and behavior), perspectives, mindsets and dispositions or traits that can minimize the occurrence of pain and suffering when they arise, bear them gracefully or transform them into

something else, and which can always produce new and better states within us and around us. We train in learning, mastering and perfecting new skills of usefulness or personal interest. We train in how to change conditions, including our fate and fortune. We train in setting goals, objectives, aspirations or vows and in working towards achieving them even if they would require several or even endless lives for completion.

We are also endeavoring that instead of remaining complacent we always arouse vigor with benevolent intent that we then work to correct errant conditions for the better, especially when correction helps others. When we cannot avoid trouble we always work to alter/improve our environment, conditions, relationships or circumstances so that suffering does not arise, and therefore we can instead experience positive states such as peace, joy, harmony, and equanimity in its place. The key problem for the human condition is suffering, and we must learn how to use our consciousness to avoid it, eliminate it, minimize it, or bear it through various means including changing conditions so that it does not arise in the first place or never appears again for others.

Most humans in life seek prosperity (natural abundance and lack of want that entails no suffering); financial independence, freedom or abundance; a fulfilling career; to be surrounded by beauty; a high level of health and energy; peace of mind; frequent positive states of mental delight and pleasure; high status within dominance hierarchies and the social chain; loving relationships; good social interactions and high-quality friendships; self-esteem from appreciation or acknowledgement by others (a deep human urge is to be important, be great and be praised or appreciated); worthy goals and ideals; virtue and consummate conduct; feelings of personal fulfillment (self-actualization) or accomplishment/achievement (from success in one's endeavors, mastering certain dharmas or overcoming challenges etc.); and worthwhile life purposes that provide them with meaning. We strive to manifest these conditions through our actions, for ourselves and others, and this requires specific types of training for our consciousness. We strive to master consciousness to produce these conditions, and to banish states of mental suffering or better handle them with higher resilience.

There are no such things as rights, fairness, ethics or proper conduct in biology. These are imagined natural orders that don't truly exist. Our culture defines for us what is considered proper, virtuous or correct and these conclusions are also an imagined order without ontological validity. They are imaginations created by our mind where the only thing operating within Shakti is cause and effect rather than human values. However, we invent culture to help us live better and they hold for the conventional realm. Generations of humans have developed specific cultures to help us transcend our animal nature and ennoble us. We *are* animals, but we have the benefit of higher consciousness and its reasoning abilities that lets us improve ourselves to achieve states of superior being.

THE FIVE BODIES

Religions, and especially spiritual cultivation schools, typically talk about five planes of existence or being in addition to the primordial original essence that is our ground state substratum. However, there are many more despite the limited dialogue. Because we have higher consciousness and the fact that the cultivation path is naturally open and barred to no one, human beings have discovered the ability to cultivate bodies comprised of the energies/substances of these higher transcendental planes.

Each higher energy realm "closer" to the original essence, in terms of the layers/levels/sequence of causal evolution, is composed of more subtle, refined, fundamental, primordial, higher, or more transcendental energies than a subsequent evolute, which is considered denser or less pure. A denser evolute has all the higher energies inherently within it. As with all things, the energies of all these planes interpenetrate, and together comprise a single universal whole – Shakti, the Logos.

Of the five planes or realms there is the (1) material plane or chemical dimension, (2) subtle plane, (3) Causal plane, (4) Supra-Causal plane, and (5) Immanence plane that can be experienced by a human being who may possess a human body, subtle body, Supra-Causal body, and Immanence Body. These bodies are known by different names in different spiritual schools. Each is composed of a different energy or etheric substance.

As stated, all the phenomena of these planes exist because of a complex interaction of cause and effect spanning across all realms, energies and phenomena, in effect the result of a great mixing of infinite, co-dependent arising that is infinitely old - beginningless. In particular, one can consider the phenomena of our material plane a condensation of higher energies since once investigated their decomposition reveals space and an agglomeration of transcendental energies that seem solidified.

By the process of spiritual cultivation you can even generate a body composed of the energies from each of the higher realms. The process entails releasing a higher transcendental body from within the matrix of a body composed of lower plane energies/materials. Locked within the matrix of our material plane body is an energetic superstructure of vital energy or Qi (Prana), of similar shape, commonly called the soul, that is released upon death as a more perfected form of the physical body, but through the arduous process of spiritual cultivation you can attain its independence whilst alive and then have use of it *and* your physical body. This is the meaning of enlightenment and its concomitant, attendant mental state is more joyful and purified than that of the consciousness of the material plane, and the same goes for each new body you achieve. Enlightenment is actually a body attainment, not a mental realization attainment, but it is taught as a mental attainment in order to lead people to purify their consciousness in order to merit it.

All existences, objects, phenomena have within themselves etheric superstructures of more transcendental energies that can be released, and spiritual cultivation is the way to release that internal superstructure for human beings. When an individual acquires a particular body form composed of higher energies he/she then feels and expresses themselves as being that particular form although they also retain control over their lower body vehicle(s). The most fundamental basis of all these energies and phenomena is the one primordial original substrate, the most fundamental energy or essence of them all.

The physical body of the material plane is known as the food body, gross body, coarse human body, impure physical nature or body of flesh and blood. It is also referred to as the form skandha in Buddhism and *annamaya* (“foodstuff”) *kosha* in Hinduism. Although it is a solid phenomenon composed of atoms, space passes through the physical body with ease as the body moves since space is finer than matter, and thus a body moves through space without obstruction. It is not that a body parts space, such as parting air as you move through it, but that a body moves through it.

Although it looks solid, the matter of the physical body is mostly empty itself and is actually condensed energy. This is why the process of spiritual cultivation, and death, can free an energy-based copy of the physical body from within its denser shell. When the end of consciousness comes in the physical body it is because the subtle body within it, composed of its vital energy, has finally been released into the earthly heavenly plane around us that religions normally refer to as Heaven.

The subtle body is also known as the deva body, *yin-shen*, will-born body, astral body, impure illusory body, man’s soul, *suddha deha*, etheric body or body composed of Qi or Prana. It is referred to as the sensation skandha in Buddhism and *pranamaya* (“energy”) *kosha* in Hinduism. It is the initial fruit of the spiritual path and is the purer, more spiritual, more transcendental, more internal, truer element of human existence. Once you attain this body you are considered “twice born.”

The Causal body is also known as the Mental body, Wisdom body, Mantra body, body of vibrations, *pranava deva*, man's spirit, Grace body, or purified illusory body. It is composed of a higher energy known as Shen (within Taoism) that is more transcendental than Qi. It is free of all lower gross matter and impurities. It is also referred to as the conception skandha in Buddhism and *manomaya* ("mind-stuff") *kosha* in Hinduism.

The Supra-Causal body is also known as the Clear Light body, Dharma body, Buddha body, and is composed of what Taoism calls Later Heavenly Qi (energy, Prana or wind). It is referred to as the volition skandha in Buddhism and *vijnanamaya* ("wisdom") *kosha* in Hinduism. This is the attainment that people normally think of when they hear the word "enlightenment," and it is considered *nirvana* with remainder.

The Immanence body is also known as the Complete and Perfect Enlightenment body, or Great Golden Arhat body composed of Primordial Heavenly energy. It is referred to as the consciousness skandha in Buddhism, the stage of No More Learning, the *anandamaya* ("bliss") *kosha* in Hinduism, and the stage of *nirvana* without remainder.

GENERATION OF BODIES

SEP

The Yoga school says that the purpose of the spiritual path is to resolve the physical material body back into its most primal constituent components, which means cultivating higher transcendental bodies that are "closer" to the original nature in terms of their composition, namely the layers of emanation, until the composition of your ultimate body is as high as you can go. The practice of Yoga has the purpose of taking man back to his Source (source-nature) or self-nature, which is his True Self.

The Confucian school also says to trace all things back to their source, which can only be done by generating these higher transcendental bodies. It also gives names for these states of attainment.

Hinduism says to cultivate a state of bliss, which is only attained by possessing a higher transcendental body as your major body vehicle since its existence is considered blissful compared to a material body and the earthly world. Hinduism also says that "the *atman* must return to Brahman," meaning that you must achieve a higher body attainment as close to the original nature (Brahman) in composition as possible. The ultimate purpose in Hinduism is to reach the source of life and consciousness, which is the foundational essence.

Buddhism says you must prove that all things come from the original nature by cultivating to attain it, but you can only prove that all things arise from the primordial fundamental nature by cultivating transcendental bodies composed of higher and higher essences, each new one composed of a level of energy that is more primordial/transcendental than the previous. Each higher body leaves behind coarser elements from the old and is thus "closer" to the original essence.

Thus according to Taoism, out of a physical body you can generate a body of Qi, out of a body of Qi (the subtle body or deva body) you can generate a Causal body composed of Shen, out of a Shen body you can generate a Supra-Causal body composed of Later Heavenly energy, out of a body of Later Heavenly energy you can generate an Immanence body composed of Primordial Heavenly energy, and so on. These Taoist bodies are matched with the stages of the Taoist Immortals.

Islam explains this by saying that spiritual development means passing through various planes or levels of divine manifestation, and at each level we transmute by shedding a skin. This spiritual path in Islam is called "the return," and has the same meaning as developing a new body of higher

elements out of a body of coarser elements that belongs to a lower plane. In Islam the planes of existence are said to be like screens that separate us from the highest purity of Allah, the foundation of All. Islam says the purpose of spiritual cultivation is to engage in an “unveiling” or “tearing off of veils” to see God’s face and experience unity with Allah, the original nature or Parabrahman. This means to progress through a sequence of higher body attainments.

Christianity teaches that God wants us to return back to Him. Furthermore, we should strive to become uncreated in the sense of becoming partakers in the divine energies of God. We are also to seek communion with the saints (who have achieved heavenly bodies) who are more near God the Father Supreme because of the process of divinization, deification, beautification, ascension, transcension or *theosis*, which is the glorification of an individual to a divine level. This is achieved through your own spiritual efforts by cultivating an incorruptible, refined, transfigured body of glory and power, which refers to the subtle body and higher body attainments. Christianity simply fails to disclose that there are many possible bodies rather than just one.

Thus the various religions and spiritual paths of the world word the cultivation of transcendental bodies - which is “attaining the Tao,” realization (of higher bodies), achieving liberation, emancipation of the soul, transcending the earthly plane, the attainment of Arhathood (enlightenment), becoming a *jnani* - in different ways.

The spiritual cultivation path for attaining the higher bodies entails transformations within your physical body to purify impure elements of its own vital energy. The result is that you first purify the Qi/Prana of your physical body and gradually generate from within it a body of transcendental elements that can leave your physical body at will – the subtle (deva) body attainment composed of vital Qi energy that Indians call Prana. This “soul body” is already existent within your physical body as the vital energy part of its structure, which is why it is released at death for everyone, but due to spiritual practice you can purify its essence and enable it to be released whilst alive while still retaining a tether to the lower physical body so that both bodies can live.

Spiritual cultivation is essentially a pathway of Yoga to cultivate your pre-existing Qi/Prana so that you can produce this independent spiritual body as the initial fruit of the spiritual path, thus making you an enlightened Arhat of the lowest stage of spiritual attainments. When ordinary individuals die their internal body of Qi/Prana leaves their physical shell, but it is much weaker and much more impure than any body that is purified through the kundalini transformation processes of Yoga and spiritual cultivation. It is this subtle body, called the soul in Christianity, that is responsible for the energy of consciousness. It transmigrates from life to life bringing along with it the accumulated dispositions it has developed (*samskaras*) that become expressed as a portion of a new personality upon rebirth and hence are similar to hereditary traits.

On the cultivation pathway to generate the independent subtle body you must use your will to mobilize your Qi/Prana so that it circulates and spreads in every part of your body, making it go to your four limbs, internal organs, all bones of your skeleton, your tissues - everywhere. This is called cultivating your Qi/Prana, rotating your Qi/Prana, or revolving the “vital breath” of your body so that this Qi, Prana, vital energy, wind element, life force or kundalini energy penetrates everywhere. This is how you purify your physical nature and its inherent subtle Qi body.

You accomplish this via various spiritual exercises that stimulate your Qi/Prana and by moving your Qi/Prana with your will. If you cultivate the Qi/Prana of your body (your vita energy) sufficiently and in the right way, then out of your body’s Jing and Qi you can eventually generate an independent spiritual body formed of your Qi/Prana that can then leave and return to your physical shell as you want. This subtle body attainment, known as the deva body, is the first stage/fruit of the genuine spiritual path. It makes you an Arhat, Arihant, *jnani* or *jivanmukta*.

This generation process occurs when the physical body is “burnt out” through the continual application of the “fire of yoga,” and eventually produces the “divinized body,” “purified body” or “perfect body” that is the subtle body. Once again, this accomplishment is just the first stage of the spiritual path. This subtle body, composed of “pure elements,” is called the “house of kundalini” because moving the Qi/Prana within your body to cultivate its emergence is sometimes called kundalini yoga or *keriya* yoga, and these activities correspond to purifying your Qi/Prana. The subtle body (deva body) composed of Qi/Prana has free movement in the world although unseen by men, and its residential realm is called the earthly heavenly plane.

The next stage of transformation is that the subtle body can through a similar process generate from within itself a more transcendental Causal body, Mental body, Shen body, or purified illusory body that is entirely free from all gross matter and impurities, including those still remaining in the subtle body composed of Qi. It is a transfigured body higher in composition than the subtle body of Qi, so it resides on a yet higher plane and has access to other worlds of Shen called Pure Lands. The Causal body has dominion over more siddhas or superpowers than the subtle body.

The next transformation is that the Causal body, with more cultivation, can generate from within itself a Supra-Causal body, also known as a Clear light body, Dharma body, Buddha body or bliss body. With this attainment, called *nirvana* with remainder, you can identify with universal life that resides on the lower planes. In attaining this body you become a Para-mukta, meaning you attain Sivahood or what is typically thought of as the enlightenment or liberation that leaves the coarser physical planes behind forever.

Going further through cultivation, this body can generate a body of Immanence said to be close to God Supreme, meaning that it is the most transcendental compositional body attainment you can reach, and thus is equivalent to Complete and Perfect Enlightenment or the perfect *nirvana* attainment of No More Learning. It is a Great Golden Arhat’s body. Higher bodies are possible still so teachings only pose this body as the final termination target for your cultivation efforts.

This process of spiritual emancipation, liberation, release, *moksha*, self-realization, *nirvana* or enlightenment starts with your understanding that the ultimate evolutionary source of energy and matter, and thus life and its attendant consciousness, is the original nature or *dharmakaya*. You are essentially an evolute, emanation, or transformation of this ultimate foundational essence, which is thus your Real Self.

One proves this by purifying your body back to its most purified elementary forces, thus creating higher and higher transcendental bodies in the process. Each new body stays attached to the lower body from which it was generated, and each resides on a different plane. Each is capable of different powers and skills that you can master which can affect the denser plane(s) below its own level of manifestation (plane of composition).

A set of these bodies linked together, or these bodies together with all their *nirmanakaya*, or simply the highest body attainment you reach just by itself, is called the *sambhogakaya*. In Hinduism this is the *Vishvarupa*.

THE STAGES OF ATTAINMENT³

³ See *Nyasa Yoga, Move Forward, Color Me Confucius, God Speaks* (Meher Baba) and the story of Ramalinga Swamikal’s cultivation (Vallalar).

An individual who cultivates the subtle body (deva body) is called an Srotapanna. This is the first stage Arhat enlightenment attainment. It is also called attaining the first dhyana in Buddhism or *vitarka* (coarse mental grasping) samadhi in Hinduism. Its attainment is called a “birth by transformation” since it arises out of the physical body due to meditation work, morality and Qi cultivation efforts. After it emerges the Indian yoga schools call you one of the “twice born.” Jesus also explained, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven.”

With the subtle body an adept attains the eight yogic powers, or *siddhi*, because the subtle body composed of Qi/Prana can change its shape and form to become bigger, smaller, lighter, heavier and so on. This is why a subtle body can shrink itself to enter into someone’s physical body, and learn to read the memories stored in someone’s brain. Using this new body he/she can perform minor miracles (tricks) in the physical world such as converting a dry tree into a green one, stop railway trains or cars, fill a dry well with water and so forth.

The individual who cultivates the subtle body to a higher stage of purity is a Sadragamin, or second stage Arhat. This is alternatively called attaining the second dhyana or *vicara* (refined mental grasping) samadhi. Devas start out with a subtle body already whereas humans start out with a physical body and must first cultivate an independent subtle body, which normally is ejected from their physical shell upon death. Thus this higher stage of subtle body purification, where the Qi/Prana of your subtle (deva) body is refined to leave even more gross matter behind, is simply specified for the benefit of devas who already possess a subtle body. In other words, the first and second dhyana of Buddhism refer to subtle body attainments of different degrees of purity for bodies composed of Qi/Prana.

The individual who cultivates the Causal body is an Anagamin, or third stage Arhat. This is the third dhyana attainment of Buddhism or *ananda* (bliss) samadhi of Hinduism. Using this new body composed of Shen (a type of energy higher than Qi/Prana) he/she becomes capable of performing grand miracles such as giving sight to the blind, restoring limbs to the maimed, and sometimes even raising the dead to life (although at this stage the life restoration ability only applies to lower creatures rather than human beings). He can experience yet more of the different planes and worlds of the transcendental spheres, called Pure Lands.

The individual who cultivates the Supra-Causal body is a full Arhat, or “Buddha,” which is called attaining the fourth dhyana, “*nirvana* with remainder” achievement or *asmita* (existence) samadhi in Hinduism. With this body he becomes capable of raising the dead and even creating new life. He can generate many *nirmanakaya* emanation bodies to do simultaneous activities, and even project one into a womb to be reborn in the world of men. A reborn *nirmanakaya* is an individual who usually attains the Tao (achieves the subtle body attainment) at a very young age.

The individual who cultivates the Immanence body is a Great Golden Arhat, or Complete and Perfectly Enlightened Buddha. This is the Buddhist stage of No More Learning, or “*nirvana* without remainder.” Since you (supposedly) reach the highest body attainment that is as close to your original *self-nature* as possible, this is why enlightenment is called perfect “*self-realization*.”

These higher bodies starting with the subtle body are all considered stages of “enlightenment,” realization, spiritual attainment, spiritual salvation, divinization, *theosis*, ascension, transcension, deification, beautification, glorification or liberation. Devotees of all religions and spiritual traditions can equally cultivate to attain them. They are the natural result of spiritual practice and not the monopoly of any person, sect, spiritual school, tradition, practice or religion. However, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Taoism, Sufism, Confucianism, Yoga and other traditions have very different names for these common stages of achievement.

ARHAT YOGA

An individual on the spiritual path might cultivate prayers, mantra recitation, visualization practice, mental introspection, pranayama, concentration practice, stretching *asanas*, bhakti, *anapana*, *nei-gong*, kundalini yoga, sexual cultivation, sexual restraint (*brahmacarya* or celibacy), a proper diet, fasting, meditation, charity and good deeds and other cultivation techniques to attain the higher bodies, but if their cultivation of mind, body and behavior are insufficient they will not attain the first subtle body and rise to the spiritual realms during life.

Lacking sufficient cultivation, however, they will still achieve from their efforts a higher measure of good health, longevity, energy, mental clarity and an improved fortune in this life and the next as a result of their efforts. For instance, cultivation efforts that affect your Qi/Prana can cure a man of disease, and in the absence of a disease that has been cured through meditation and Qi practices one will see health improvements and the prolongation of one's life. Thus you will gain greater health and longevity from meditation practices, breathing practices and Qi-based practices. Furthermore, once they die such individuals will have an easier time of cultivating the higher bodies as a deva in the earthly heavenly plane.

One who practices policing their mind and actions through mental watching/witnessing will also cultivate their character and good fortune due to the pursuit of virtue and the avoidance of error. An energetic vigor for doing good deeds will also bear positive karmic fruit in terms of your Qi purification too. These attainments are therefore earned by human beings who cultivate to halfway between the spiritual and physical realms because of their efforts.

THE THREE REQUIREMENTS

The way to these transcendental spiritual attainments is essentially a Path of Yoga. In the final analysis, spiritual practice it is all Yoga in the end. It is Yoga, and entirely a pathway of Yoga. Spiritual practice is Qi and mind Yoga through and through, and the individuals who achieve success must work hard at specific activities that cultivate their Qi/Prana and mind. Furthermore, by nature they must be ethical, virtuous people.

There are three major requirements for success on this path.

First, you must cultivate meditation practice. You must cultivate an openness of mind that can accept all things and does not blindly cling to thoughts (experiences) or the thought-stream unless using the mind for concentration. You must cultivate the ability to focus and concentrate while ignoring distractions that waver your attention. You must cultivate self-awareness, mindfulness, or watchfulness of your mind-stream so that you are always in a state of pristine presence with lucidity and clearly know both your external environment and the thoughts of your mind. You must cultivate mental habits that reduce mental afflictions, disturbances and defilements, and the ability to cut off or transform such irritations when they arise. You must retrain your mental processes to refrain from thought entanglements where you become lost in doings of your mind-stream and follow its momentum with attachment rather than transcend it with a dispassionate knowing. You have to learn how to detach from what's going on and look at things from an outside perspective, and especially detach from your emotion-prone ego. You must cultivate the ability to let go of thoughts and the mind-stream so that you can experience more peaceful mental states where you don't get caught up in afflictions and the busyness of thoughts calms down.

Second, through various exercises and emotions you must actively cultivate the Qi/Prana (life force, vital energy or wind element) of your physical body. This is sometimes called Qi purification, kundalini cultivation, *kriya* yoga, Vajrayana practice, *anapana* or *nei-gong*. If you do not actively cultivate your Qi/Prana then the subtle body attainment will not likely be reached during this life. To

cultivate your Qi you might use methods that involve your breathing, emotions, visualizations, willpower, and other relevant cultivation factors.

Third, you must cultivate spiritual virtues, values, qualities and behaviors, which is the road of self-improvement, or *Samskara-kaya* (Perfection-kaya). You must work on improving your personality, mindset and behavior to eliminate imperfections. You must also engage in kind, compassionate, altruistic behavior that eschews self-centeredness and focuses on helping others.

Taoism symbolically says, “you need to perform 3,000 great good deeds in order to earn the merit for enlightenment,” meaning that only those who work on purifying their personality, behavior and unselfishly work on benefitting others can achieve the Tao. The spiritual path is not divorced from active compassionate, altruistic efforts to engage with society and help others reduce their sufferings so they can experience peace, joy and prosperity.

For your own benefit, in order to experience positive mental experiences such as happiness, joy and peace in life you need to cultivate supportive beneficial conditions, positive emotional states and let go of afflictive emotions and dissonant mental states. You have to become a better person in what you think, say and do. To appear in the world as a beneficial source to others (who offers kindness, compassion, empathy and altruistic help/assistance) you need to cultivate wisdom, skillfulness, discipline, patience and virtuous behavior. If you do not cultivate good behavior and virtuous ways, then no spiritual beings with transcendental bodies will help you achieve the higher spiritual bodies because you wouldn't merit them. Their help is necessary in stimulating, purifying and transforming the Qi/Prana of your present body so that you can eject a subtle body out of your physical shell. They must use their own energies inside you to move your Qi to help the process. Who will do that for you if you are not a virtuous individual? This necessity is why aspirants train under a qualified spiritual master.

If you do not cultivate your body's Qi/Prana, namely your vital energy or life force, then you will not be able to generate and free an independent spiritual body, made of Qi/Prana, from the matrix of your physical body shell whilst alive. You must engage in many spiritual practices to cultivate/purify the Qi or Prana of your physical nature so that your internal subtle body made of Qi can finally attain liberation while you are living. This is a feat of internal Qi Yoga. External spiritual help, in addition to your personal *tapas* or work at spiritual cultivation, is needed for emancipation.

Discipline is especially needed on the cultivation path. If you are a man you must cultivate sexual restraint/discipline so as not to carelessly dissipate your Jing (semen) while on this pathway. If you are a man and let the “elixir” (Jing or semen) leak then because of its dissipation your Qi/Prana will be lost upon ejaculation, and then that energy will not be available to open up your body's Qi channels, which is necessary for strengthening the integrity of the subtle body duplicate of your physical body. “Without water in the boiler there will be no steam in the pipes. Without gas in the tank there will be no power in the car.” If you lose your Jing you will lose your Qi/Prana, which is why men typically feel weak after ejaculation (or physical excess). Without this Qi/Prana you will not be able to purify your inner subtle body incorporated within the matrix of your physical body. This is why men practice celibacy on the spiritual path.

If you do not cultivate meditation practice then you will always become too engrossed with your thought tendencies, habitual behavioral patterns and lower-level mindsets like an animal. You will not be able to transcend your animal nature tendencies or passions and ennoble your character if you don't learn how to free yourself from prior tendencies such as recurrent thought patterns, ingrained mental perspectives and conditioned decision processes, which meditation helps you accomplish. You will not be able to focus and concentrate your ordinary monkey mind of distractions that typically jumps from subject to subject, nor quiet the afflictions that constantly bombard your mental

states. If you continue to tightly hold/cling to thoughts as a habit this will also prevent the vital energy within your body from arising and move in the ways that transform and purify your inner Qi life force, so people practice meditation to learn the practice of mental detachment. Detachment is not being bound to your thought-stream and its momentum, being free of engrossed entanglement that does not admit a different trajectory due to higher thoughts and perspectives, but being able to step away or distance yourself and see things from a new perspective. It frees us from being a hostage to the emotional and behavioral imperatives of our thoughts. It also means being able to let go of personality patterns, walls of limitations, layers of resistance and other patterns we've built up that control our Qi/Prana and suppress the free flow of our vitality.

Also, without a mind of openness and tolerance you will not be able to accept all the good and bad that you will see with your spiritual bodies. Without a mind of awareness that knows its own contents – which frequently contains bad thoughts and negative emotions – you will tend to become more arrogant, contemptuous and critical of others after you attain your deva body, and thus unwilling to help them when you are unwilling to look at your own problems and where you must improve yourself. Thus you will tend towards arrogance and pride rather than humility, and develop the tendency to abuse others using your powers.

You will also not be able to find mental peace if you do not use meditation to train yourself to rest the tendency of consciousness to relentlessly produce thoughts and desires. Only when the flames of desire, craving and afflictions are extinguished can your mind experience true peace, contentment and tranquility. Of course there is naturally a limit to this because without desire or craving there is no action, and then there is death because there is no will to eat, drink, procreate or live. Lastly, you should cultivate an empty mind centered on the pure self so that you can remain impassive to (detached from) emotions when necessary and temperate in the face of pleasure (restrained, disciplined and levelheaded).

If you do not cultivate witnessing meditation practice where you always watch your thoughts to improve your behavior then you will never cultivate virtue, propriety and the consummate conduct (in accordance with reason and wisdom) required of the spiritual path. You will never become able to transform your habitual mental tendencies so that you can manifest more beneficial states of mind free of afflictive emotions. You will never naturally refine your Qi/Prana to a higher level of purity, refinement and excellence.

If you do not cultivate focus and concentration skills so that you can develop mental stability, you will always flit from thought to thought without ever being able to discard mental distractions, settle mentally, and find mental peace. A wandering mind is usually a distracted, unhappy mind whereas a mind in concentration can accomplish great things and experience great enjoyments, such as states of flow and bliss. If you do not cultivate witnessing meditation practice you will not become able to free yourself from strong attachments to concepts, emotions, or typical ways of thinking and doing things so that learning and self-correction are easy. You will not be able to abandon language to create a lucid mental state of blissful presence where words don't seem to be there (because the thoughts are more quiet) yet there is knowing. You will not be able to detach from what's going on and look at things from an third person outsider's perspective that can abandon problems caused by an emotion-prone ego.

Without concentration skills you will not be able to remain focused for a long time so as to be able to solve problems that arise in life, and then you will be unable to do great deeds. Concentration and commitment to a course of action (which is also a form of concentration or "staying-with-itness") are key skills necessary for success and achievement for many types of life ventures including the path of spiritual cultivation. Perseverance, persistence, discipline, determination, steadfastness, tenacity, resilience, endurance, willpower, backbone, patience, forbearance, commitment, focus and

grit are all matters of concentration, the ability to stay with something and “stick with it.” You cultivate these traits through concentration skills, such as visualization meditations. Cultivation does not just mean to learn detachment from thoughts so that they do not control you and distractions do not bother you. It means to cultivate your personality, psyche or character to develop these traits of mental strength and toughness so you can resist failure (giving up) when you are faced with overwhelming odds, hopelessness, fear, surprise, attack or oppression.

If you do not learn to cultivate an open (empty) mind that can accept everything then you will not be able to bear what you see with your subtle body when you become a deva, including all the hidden bad thoughts and actions of other sentient beings. It will then be difficult to practice kindness and compassion, which are primary prerequisites for success on the spiritual path. No one can become a Buddha if they do not cultivate a mind of kindness and acceptance.

Basically, “emptiness” meditation practice is necessary for cultivating your Qi/Prana, changing your personality and behavior, and attaining the subtle body.

CULTIVATING MEDITATION⁴

Most spiritual schools promote the spiritual path as seeing/realizing the original nature, which is empty of attributes (like a void) and therefore sometimes called “Emptiness,” to encourage the meditation practice of quieting thoughts to experience silence. They say many things to promote the practice of meditation such as “the original nature is consciousness without consciousness,” “the Self is pure Knowledge,” “Brahman is the only witness,” “the Pure Beingness is the same as awareness,” you are the embodied Self so your mind should be as empty as the original nature, and so forth.

They often make analogies about the original nature being like pure consciousness, the ultimate “Witness,” the true self knower, empty mind, and so forth in order to encourage the meditation practice of letting go of thoughts while maintaining clear awareness of the mind-stream so that thoughts eventually still. They want people to become aware of awareness itself, which is only available because we are sentient and have a conscious mind. They teach that we need to detach from mentally clinging to thoughts so that we can let go of situations, and so that thoughts can die down to reveal the natural peaceful state of the mind. Then we can experience a higher state of mental peace that is akin to the natural pre-linguistic state of the mind before thoughts are born.

They also want people to look at their minds so that they learn how to control their own thoughts and emotions, especially mental afflictions. Part of the spiritual path is to gain as much control as possible of your mental processes and develop the mind’s cognitive and other conscious skills to their fullest.

They commonly make the analogy that a relatively empty clear mind, pure consciousness, or pristine awareness “that knows thoughts” is similar to the unmoving original nature devoid of transformations, which is like continuous empty space without attributes, and that thoughts are similar to the Shakti, energy or the Logos that arises within It and transforms effortlessly. They often say that the fundamental state of the mind is emptiness, the natural state of the mind is being empty, or the fundamental nature of the mind is unborn or unmanifest, the nature of the mind is free of defilements just as empty space is, and so on, as yet another way to encourage the mindfulness or emptiness meditation technique of maintaining full awareness of thoughts while being detached from such contents.

Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra said, “The meaning of ‘pure prayer’ has the same sense that is given

⁴ See *Meditation Case Studies*, *Visualization Power*, and *The Little Book of Meditation*.

to it by all the (Christian Church) Fathers. Pure prayer means prayer that is free of thoughts, prayer that does not introduce any outside elements; it contains no mental forms, shapes or images. Pure prayer is not the personal property of monks or a small group of individuals. It is for everyone; it is the one activity that is the most fitting to the human person.” Thus even Christianity espouses the practice of meditation but calls it “pure prayer” or “centering prayer.” Different religions use different terms to refer to the same spiritual practice of the mind remaining clear and aware but undistracted by its own inner movements and by things outside itself.

Thus the world’s religions commonly extol mental detachment pathways such as “transcend your thoughts,” “don’t become attached to your thought stream,” “don’t get entangled inside your mind-stream and lose your state of presence,” “let go of your thoughts and ego and surrender everything over to God,” “be still and know the Lord,” “let go of your past conditioning to become alive in the moment” and even the surrendering method of religious reverence that quiets the mind, reduces mental chatter and thus serves as a form of emptiness meditation via such mechanisms. Furthermore, the more you can let go of your thoughts and refrain from holding onto your vital energy, the easier it is for your Qi/Prana to purify/transform because the easier it is for spiritual beings to use their own Qi/Prana to help you transform your own without your mind clinging to your Qi to provide resistance.

Advaita Vedanta says that in the motionless original nature (Parabrahman) somehow there arose movement in the form of a manifestation of energy (wind), which paradoxically occurred in the universal substrate that never undergoes any modifications. The real inherent nature of that energy is therefore the unborn substrate that is like the void of space, from which all other phenomena are also somehow born. The original nature does not depend upon the energy that arises within it and of it, but that energy depends upon the original nature as its support and foundational essence. As John 1:3 states, “All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being.”

In the same way, it is said that thoughts somehow arise out of the emptiness of clear awareness, the substrate of pure consciousness. They arise through a process we don’t fully understand – as determined by the laws of nature acting in our brain that determine how neurons interact and determine conceptualization – but thoughts indeed arise to produce a conventional world of phenomena in our minds. They mentally produce for us a conditionally derived world of appearances within our consciousness that we then take as reality.

The picture of reality they create is a quite limited and simplified picture of the world, fraught with errors as well as misleading subjective biases. Thus there arises disparity between a person’s views of reality and the actual state of things. Also, the thoughts and images generated by the mind never stay but exist in the nature of a flowing dream. The same holds for external phenomena themselves since being impermanent they never stay during any instant even though they falsely appear to be unchangeable.

Most spiritual schools promote just meditation and other non-Qi practices since most practitioners will not succeed at generating the subtle body, but meditation practice will still help the faithful improve their lives in many ways such as by stabilizing their mind and emotions and improving their mental clarity, health, longevity, behavior and fortune. Furthermore, spiritual masters normally want most people to refrain from Qi/Prana energy work that will attract the attention and participatory interference of devas who will often cause troubles due to a lack of self-restraint, so they encourage meditation practice that will get all these other benefits instead. For countless reasons, meditation is the foremost spiritual practice.

Meditation practice always leads to a purification of your Qi/Prana to some degree, as does virtuous

behavior. Your Qi/Prana will automatically start to move when you let go of your mind/thoughts that tend to affect it, and it will then start to undergo a purification process due to better circulatory movements just as churning milk can create different products. If you let go of holding onto your thoughts and Qi/Prana it becomes easier for higher spiritual beings to assist you in these purificatory transformations by using their own energy to move (and thus transform) yours. By meditating you will therefore start to purify/transform your Qi/Prana. One of the natural results of more purified Qi is that you will experience greater longevity in this life and in Heaven before that eventual heavenly demise and rebirth too. Virtuous conduct and positive emotions also purify your Qi/Prana and start purifying it of a coarse animalistic nature, but are not as directly powerful in purifying your Qi as meditation practice. Virtuous conduct and positive emotions embed your subtle body with tendencies such as *samskaras* that help determine your character in a subsequent rebirth.

Meditation also trains people to focus their awareness on their mind's inner doings so that individuals can more easily police their thoughts, words and deeds (behavior) and become better human beings, which will improve their fates and fortunes, including their well-being throughout their next incarnation. Meditation is the basis of introspection, self-policing, watchfulness, witnessing, self-correction, self-improvement, mindfulness or self-regulation practice that trains your focus, attention and awareness so that you can bring your thoughts and actions under greater volitional control, thereby improving your life and fortune.

In order to encourage the practice of meditation the original nature is often described as empty of attributes, formless, without marks, stainless, pure, undifferentiated, without qualities, alone, transcending phenomena, imperceptible, undiscernible, unknowable or unfathomable by thought, and even as an undisturbed state of consciousness (though it is an insentient substratum). These analogies with space and an empty, clear or pristine mind of awareness are deliberate. The description of an empty original nature is used to promote the practice of “meditation without attributes.” It also prompts cultivation of a mind of dispassion that can, in imitation of the original nature, freely give up craving and desire (that always involve dissatisfaction) to become calm, peaceful, and equanimous or simply go against emotions to act in the highest proper moral way. It also prompts cultivation of mental openness, flexibility and emotional detachment so that your Qi/Prana can start to arise and purify your inner subtle body. Tirumalai Krishnamacharya said, “Knowing all objects to be impermanent, let not their contact blind you. Resolve again and again to be aware of the self that is permanent.” Many such instructions from spiritual masters are available, such as “Rest your mind in your essential nature” or “Let go of your mind and see what you turn out to be.”

Thayumanavar also instructed, “Ever-permanent, without any blemish, without any ignorance, without support, ever-full, undecayingly pure, far as well as near, like the Light beyond the three luminaries (Sun, Moon and Fire), the One Charm that includes all, overflowing with Bliss, undiscernible to mind or speech, standing as the Colossus of Consciousness—on that vastness of the beginning of Infinite Bliss, let us meditate.”

Spiritual schools also commonly say that to recognize God (the original nature) is the ultimate aim in life. They say that the crown jewel of spiritual studies is that one should stabilize in the One Without Qualities that is similar to empty space without borders – your original nature from which everything is born, the ultimate father of manifestation. This gives rise to forms of meditation practice that are images of emptiness in some way, and thus are called “emptiness” or “empty mind” meditations.

These are all didactic devices with an ulterior motive. No one can possess consciousness without a body because the anatomical structure of the brain and nervous system are required to produce thoughts. Thoughts are needed for there to be Knowledge, awareness or consciousness, and all we can ever know or experience are our thoughts. Therefore emptiness or empty mind does not mean

having no thoughts at all, which is insentience. It means to allow thoughts to arise, to be, and thus not to obliterate consciousness, but to use consciousness in a way that mimics the original nature itself that allows things to arise without obstructing them. Thus we allow thoughts to be born and disappear without clinging to them, obstructing them or becoming entangled in them that then loses our sense of clear awareness or presence.

No concept can accurately image something pure, infinite or empty of attributes and the original nature is Utter Emptiness that has no image. We can only mentally know images rather than a true ultimate purity because any mental image is already a mark, sign, or pollution. Thus we can never consciously fathom the original essence using thoughts, and therefore there is no such thing as “realizing your original nature” through some mental experience. We can never directly know through consciousness the beingness of the original nature although we can talk about it, and people confuse an understanding of these facts with self-realization. Attaining enlightenment is attaining the first spiritual body, the deva body, and then subsequent bodies thereafter are climbing the stages of enlightenment.

Within the Egyptian religion the imperceptibility of the foundational substrate is called the Veil of Isis to represent the fact that the original nature is veiled through the superimposition of an apparent reality – Shakti as well as our thoughts, which are also a part of Shakti – and thus inaccessible to conception. Basically, thoughts restrict our knowledge to something second rate. Then again, we *are* the foundational substrate in manifest form so we know/realize It all the time via the simple knowing of anything at all. Knowing is knowing It. To perfect ourselves we therefore must perfect our knowing, our powers and abilities of consciousness. Nonetheless, the idea is for people to try to cultivate emptiness in order to let go of their thoughts and Qi, but not to cultivate an enforced mindlessness that suppresses thoughts. The spiritual path involves developing all the powers of consciousness and mastering all the possible *dharmas*.

Images of emptiness formed by the mind are not real emptiness but just images/conceptions. Therefore, “Nothing can be said about the condition of the absolute nature using thoughts.” It is inscrutable, unfathomable by thoughts. Nevertheless, teachings on the original nature give rise to the meditation practice of natural empty mind whereby you imitate the original nature without a body by letting thoughts arise and *knowing them* with an awareness that seems to transcend them (since it knows or views thoughts, and thus is thought outside of the mind-stream), but is also just thought itself too. It is colloquially said one can “become one with the Father” or “find Union with the Supreme” and so on so as to also encourage meditation practice like this.

Spiritual practitioners in some schools are also taught to try to envision the original nature as something so grand and vast that their existing mental structures cannot accommodate it, so their cognitive stream is thereby interrupted and they experience the peace of mental stopping in this way. All sorts of tricks like this are used in spiritual traditions, such as posing the attributes of God as something incredibly wondrous or transcendently enormous in order to quiet our cognitive functions as we ponder this, which can lead people to more peaceful, quieter states of mind. This is a natural outcome of awe or reverence, which is why reverence is practiced within many religions. The original nature needs no worship, for It is insentient, It is you, but reverence quiets your mind and produces many benefits.

While consciousness is often described as a duality of pristine clear awareness and transitory perceptions and conceptions – where the background of empty mind is considered to be pure awareness that is empty, pre-linguistic consciousness absent of thoughts – states lacking in thoughts include non-existence (annihilation) or a non-experiential state such as sleep or coma where there are no thoughts at all. Actually, even in deep dreamless sleep or within a coma there is mental activity, but it is not very discernible. Some schools will say there are states of no mental content whatsoever,

but is that really so, and of what benefit would that be for existence other than rest? Only if you are physically or mentally annihilated, extinguished or exterminated are there no thoughts at all. What is the point of that existence? Then you are insentient Shakti. Thus, pristine clear awareness seems like it is absent of thoughts but it is a state filled with thoughts and is itself a thought state. It is just that the thoughts within this state of clear awareness are finer than the coarse thoughts of inner narrative consciousness.

From the standpoint of the foundational nature there is no difference between you being an insentient portion of Shakti or a sentient living being, so consciousness is the great treasure of existence/manifestation, and we should develop it as much as possible as that is part of our beingness. In a sense it is actually the antidote to entropy because it brings order to where there is no order, and yet its order is no order at all. Order is a conventional illusion we establish, and thus just an imaginary way of viewing things.

The reason that meditation practice is promoted is because it leads to the purification of your Qi, the purification or transformation of your Qi leads to the attainment of the subtle body, the subtle body is the first heavenly spiritual attainment, and its attainment serves as the foundation for higher body attainments that are essentially the true spiritual path of transcendence that leads to better lives with less suffering and consummate union with your spiritual Self. As you progress upwards along this spiritual hierarchy of being, your more transcendental bodies live in more pleasant realms with more pleasant circumstances for longer periods of time than an ordinary human life span. To enable you to enjoy this is why the spiritual path has been established, and this result is called liberation.

Meditation practice also leads to a more flexible and open mind that doesn't cling to its conditioned processes of consciousness that it developed over time due to genetic, environmental, educational, cultural and other influences. Through the meditation practice of witnessing your thoughts, like a distanced third party who has emotional detachment, you train in developing openness, flexibility and adaptability of your mental states – thus mimicking the infinite transformative powers of Shakti – and can gradually perceive more *objectively* without the *subjective* interests, desires, judgments or preconceptions you normally incorporate into your thoughts that are unrealistic and misleading, thus displacing you away from a more direct cognition of reality that more perfectly accesses knowledge of things as they are.

Of course an “unbiased” mind of presence operates according to its internal algorithms that absolutely contain misleading biases, but it does not cling to its habitual processing algorithms that produce the results of interpretations, cognitions, decisions and so forth. The mind of presence is willing to change and is open to new things. If you practice cultivating a quiet open mind of awareness akin to a lucid, pre-lingual state of presence, you thereby create through alive awareness an always ever-present opportunity to be fully awake and open to every experience. The fact that you can abandon clinging to the thought-stream and experience an alive peacefulness due to being *in presence* rather than being in your automatic programming gives you an opportunity gap to be more creative rather than robotic. Cultivating the ability to be able to detach from your thought-stream, preconceptions, prejudices and perspectives, to take a step back and see what's actually occurring, allows for new ideas, opinions and facts to influence you. It allows you to escape the clutches of a narrow inflexible mind. Thus you are then always more open to new ideas and external influences that can change your fate/trajectory including the influences of higher beings with more wisdom.

If one also acts with deliberate wisdom to override your automatic programming you've developed through your conditioning, this will change your situation and fortune for the better too. Even a spiritual master has frozen conditioning affecting his mental processes, but by always cultivating a mind that does not cling he opens himself up to the opportunity to accept new points of views and ideas. He gives himself the opportunity to make decisions outside of his predetermined pathways,

patterns and ways of normally responding that are locked into his neurons and normal mental functioning routines.

The nature of our consciousness is that thoughts are born and perish from moment to moment, ever streaming through the mind like a violent torrent of water that flows onward without rest. Sometimes the volume of thoughts is loud and sometimes quiet, but the stream is continuous. It is an endless dynamic continuum. The sequence of thoughts that arise in the mind flows onward without interruption, never giving rise to mental peace and this produces an ever-present field of experience with qualities. Thus we can say that the mind is a field of becoming, and this is how we experience the external world and karma. However, meditation practice can give some pause or volume reduction to the ceaseless flow of thoughts and somewhat silence the torrent of consciousness so that you can taste the natural pristine nature of your mind that is peaceful and thereby change your karma because you are no longer controlled by thoughts. It is a way for you to slow down thoughts and find internal peace, called mental bliss. When that happens your Qi/Prana will start to transform.

Basically, consciousness receives inputs from the visual, auditory and other senses, and because of these impulses is then continually stirred to help perpetually maintain its onward flux. Consciousness is continually perfumed by new impressions added to the prior thought-stream that then continually forms the seeds for new thoughts to be born. Every thought eventually perishes but before doing so serves as a cause for new thoughts to arise. Thus a thought (in the mind) never remains continuously single nor can one refuse to leave even when you concentrate on holding it with stability.

Concentration, which is being able to stay with a mental subject/activity for a long time such as holding a thought with stability, is the basis of many active accomplishments. Its importance has given rise to various forms of spiritual concentration practice such as visualization exercises to hold pictures in the mind for long periods as a form of mental training. By practicing concentration you can learn to ignore or banish distractions within your mind that would normally interrupt your focus, attention and commitment. Furthermore, a focused mind tends to be a happy state of consciousness whereas a wandering mind tends to be a distracted, unhappy mind. All these points prompt the practice of meditation with attributes, namely concentration exercises in order to learn mental stability and master the capability of consciousness to attain focus and sustain attention.

Contrast the ever-moving, ever-changeable, ever-vibrating Shakti that produces all phenomena within the original nature that is all-pervading and omnipresent like space. Note the analogy with energy and spotless empty space, and the analogy between empty clear awareness (said to be the natural state of your mind) and the thoughts that arise within consciousness. Such analogies are often highlighted in order to motivate the practice of meditation – meditation with attributes (such as concentration practice) and meditation without attributes (such as emptiness practice).

It is also often explained that in the empty motionless original nature (Parabrahman) that is continuous without attributes, somehow there arose movement in the form of a manifestation of energy (wind), which cannot occur in the original nature/essence that never undergoes any modification, and yet did occur so as to produce phenomena. Analogously, the natural state of our mind is like the pristine peace of the original nature that is free from emotion, excitement, desire, and other perturbations, yet they arise within it. It is this naturally pure, pristine state of our mind that can seem to know without words being there, because it is very quiet and crystal clear, that we need to learn how to cultivate. As explained, thoughts are there whenever we know but are just very fine when the mind is extremely quiet.

It is also sometimes said that the natural state of your mind is like a clear light able to illuminate phenomena when they appear. Therefore the base of human consciousness is sometimes called “uncreated light” by some religions. Even with these expedient explanations, meditation is

acknowledged to lead to a resting of thoughts that reveals the “natural state of your mind” which resembles the original nature absent of forms. This natural state of mind absent of thoughts is often called pure consciousness, luminous mind, or pristine awareness. To realize that the natural state of consciousness is empty/quiet is one of the purposes of meditation and spiritual practice.

Thus we have three forms of mental training often used in spiritual schools: concentration practice to develop stability of the mind; witnessing practice where you watch your thoughts so that you can correct your thoughts, attitudes, perspectives and behaviors that originate as your mind-stream; and emptiness meditation which brings mental peace by imitating the original nature.

Naturally there are other forms of meditation practice and mind training as well, such as contemplation practice that exercises your mental powers of rational logic, analysis and discrimination for various purposes such as analyzing your mental processes, afflictions and their roots. When we make efforts to learn how to use our minds in new and different ways so that all its capabilities unfold we attempt to fully employ the gift of consciousness that is the core of the spiritual trail. True spirituality involves making use of all your mental processes, cognitive capabilities and developing mental and outer skills to their fullest. This is called mastering *dharmas*.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT TOWARDS VIRTUOUS CONDUCT⁵

The first stage of the spiritual path is a virtue provisioning where you try to eliminate impure thoughts, bad habits and inclinations, and abandon evil deeds. In their place you are to cultivate more ethical, virtuous ways. Thus it is a push for self-improvement efforts that evolve us towards higher purity in thought, word and deed. You try to apply wisdom and certain ethical and moral principles to your way of being in the world. You try to transform any unwholesome patterns of thought, feeling and behavior that have become ingrained within your neurons and thus already condition (have programmed) your habitual operations of consciousness. Basically, you look at what you are with true honesty, having created your own pattern, and then become responsible for that pattern and reworking it into something not just better but more magnificent. You work to elevate it as much as possible and transform it into what you want as an ideal, and try to act in the highest possible manner free of any negative influences you’ve previously adopted.

At this stage you commence upon a path of cultivating virtue and higher values that transcend your basic animal nature, and when countless people work at cultivating moral behaviors our societies achieve civil harmony and humanity rather than chaos. You work on purifying your thoughts, words and deeds and practice mindfulness of your inner and outer behavior to police them so that they can become more noble, admirable, sustainable, efficient. It is not that you suppress your errant tendencies, and thereby wrap yourself with a layer of protective inner Qi coating that stifles your Qi flow because it is of the nature of suppression. Rather, you try to retrain your tendencies and transform them into something higher and better.

The goal is to cultivate a stronger moral, ethical and virtuous basis of inner mental and outer physical behavior, along with a livid, lucid beingness and a contagious joy for life. Happiness – a sunny, optimistic disposition – should be your natural state. Because we live in societies of interconnections, another goal is to develop the habit of performing good social and civic deeds in mind, body and speech, such as altruistic efforts on behalf of others.

This foundational phase is also a stage of study and seeking where you first start to study spiritual

⁵ See *Color Me Confucius*, especially Chapters 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11, *Liao Fan’s Four Lessons*, and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*.

cultivation teachings, and you increase your stores of spiritual wisdom by studying spiritual texts so that you understand the principles of the cultivation path. This will also help you live a morally virtuous life.

Christianity and Judaism use the Ten Commandments for ethical guidance, Buddhism speaks of the Ten Wholesome Actions, Moslems look to the Koran and Sharia for ethical guidance, Confucianism has the Five Virtues and Five Relationships, and Hindu ethics are to be found in the Vedas and Upanishads while Yoga distinctly points to Yama and Niyama. All schools and religions champion certain character virtues, values, ethics and codes of conduct and have various scriptures on ethics as part of their foundational teachings.

Basically, ethics involves concepts of right and wrong behavior, meaning that there are things you should do and things you should not do, things to refrain from and things to strive for in terms of your relationships with yourself, others, society, circumstances, insentient phenomena, the environment, the universe and so on.

The primary rules of ethical restraint involve being respectful of others and therefore not doing to (imposing upon) others what you would not want them to do to you; not aggressing against another person or their property, health or liberty. Basically you refrain from using your power to harm others or yourself. The primary ethical principles include more than just this short list and can be found in most basic religious teachings.

For instance, in Hinduism the *Mahabharata* says, “This is the sum of duty. Do naught to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain.” In Judaism the *Talmud* says, “What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men. That is the entire law; all the rest is commentary.” In Buddhism the *Udanavarga* states, “Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.” In Christianity the *Gospel of Matthew* says, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the Prophets.” In Zoroastrianism it is said, “That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.” In Islam a Hadith runs, “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.”

The list of basic disciplinary rules also includes restraints of self-control such as injunctions not to steal, lie, kill, commit violence (non-injury), engage in cruelty, engage in sexual excess, overindulge in sensual pleasures and so on.

The active principles include treating others as you would want to be treated yourself, offering charity and kindness in compassionate concern for others’ welfare, acting with honesty and integrity, instituting and enforcing justice rather than letting evil thrive, doing what you know is right rather than wrong, and more. Cultivating ethics is the act of cultivating admirable values and virtues that ennoble your character and raise you above your animal nature, which consequentially purifies your Qi, conduct and fortune. Different religions and individuals have proposed diverse lists of “virtues” as ideals for consummate conduct and self-perfection. They raise you above your animal nature by requiring you to gain control over your passions and desires so that they don’t rule you. They entail elevating your thoughts, words and behavior, which is also called purifying or spiritualizing them, and this also nourishes your vital force (Qi/Prana).

Wisdom demands that ethics be applied according to common sense that considers circumstances, and not according to literal inviolable rules written down in ancient religious texts. Such an approach locks down society into ancient social attitudes, thus imprisoning and ossifying society, as happened in Confucianism, Islam and Judaism which failed to update themselves and adapt to psychological and other evolutions in society. Jesus became a role model of proper behavior when he spoke of rescuing a mule on the Sabbath even though Jewish religious law said it should be a day without

work. As another instance, while normally you would not lie you would not tell an intended murderer the location of his prey. As another example, it is immoral to refuse an unapproved drug for someone destined to die if they cannot use it. The well-being of others is central to ethical decision-making rather than whether or not you break some written law, rule or code of conduct.

Rules and codes of conduct can be natural developments of societies or imposed on them by governments, traditions, or religions, which will perfume the people in a certain way over time. However, in reality ethics must be deeply internally cognized so that they become part of your being and you do what is right regardless of other urgings or pressures. Ethics and virtue must become deeply engraved, basic mental patterns. Wisdom and compassion are to be your goals and guides to true ethical behavior and ethical altruism. One of the best principles for an ethical life is to simply refrain from harming others, namely don't do to others what you wouldn't want done to yourself.

To cultivate the road of self-improvement required of the spiritual path, which means purifying your behavior and the thoughts that give rise to it, which are in turn due to ingrained habits of consciousness that have formed due to your prior conditionings, you must always be watching your mind and policing your actions. You must try to eliminate automatic bad habits and form new good habits in their place. You want to eliminate internal mental and emotional afflictions that interfere with the determination of, and execution of, wise and skillful behavior. You want your attention to always be monitoring your behavior in order to bring it under voluntary control and in line with higher ways. This is why you need to learn meditative introspection, witnessing, mindfulness or watching practice, and try to bring that habit with you into regular daily life.

The main way of transforming errant behavioral habits that lack virtue, wisdom or skillfulness is through the method of inner watching, introspection, or mental witnessing wherein you continuously watch and police your thoughts and behavior through heightened awareness. You learn to do this through the practice of sustained meditation. When bad thoughts or actions are noticed/witnessed you try to immediately cut them off and/or replace them with something better. When the right thoughts arrive to do good then instead of remaining complacent you should also rouse yourself with vigor to perform those good deeds.

Another way of nudging towards new good habits is through the immeasurable meditations, such as found within Buddhism, that involve perfuming or impregnating your mind, body, Qi/Prana and behavior with boundless positive emotional impulses. By permeating your consciousness and Qi/Prana with positive perfuming, these character traits are bound to take root and bear fruit in this life and the next. Cultivating a sunny disposition can be accomplished in this way.

Yet another method, called principal awareness, is embedding any activities you perform with positive intentions that position them in your mind as performing a nobler, higher mission. You don't perform activities robotically but ennoble them with a higher idealism, such as building a brick wall for a cathedral while thinking "I am building a cathedral" rather than "I am building a brick wall." While brushing your teeth you don't do it mindlessly but feel deeply at the same time, "I am creating a bright smile for others." The principle of clear presence or awakesness is that there are no "ordinary moments" in life that you should allow yourself to experience with a deadened mind on auto-pilot. Your sensory channels should be fully open and your mind fully alive and awake, brimming with pristine awareness as you perform activities but viewing them, when appropriate, with a much higher calling. Just as you should perform rituals with emotions, you should perform the actions in life that need to be performed while also touching upon the highest underlying emotion. By elevating all your actions to a higher state of purpose and bringing the highest possible emotions to the forefront, instead of acting mindlessly and robotically, you can change your outlook on life, your personality and fortune.

There are many others methods that help you transform your character tendencies and habit energies, cut off bad thoughts and deeds, create good thoughts and deeds in their place, and purify your mind.

You are trying to act with wisdom and skillfulness, improvising your technique according to principle, which means that you should try to surmise the likely outcome of events if you act in a certain way and then you should act in the best way possible after evaluating all your alternatives. You want to adopt best practices wherever possible, work to improve situations for the better by cutting off errant ways while supporting what is good, and act in a way that is not just expedient for the moment but best for the short-term, intermediate-term and long-term whenever possible.

All mental states that produce thoughts, words and deeds are accompanied by distractions, disturbances, defilements or afflictions. Cultivation practice and wisdom can help you dissolve mental afflictions at their root so that they no longer arise, help you cut them off if they do arise, or transform them when they appear. Despite the vicissitudes of life you must work to cultivate away recurrent afflictions and defilements to create mental purity and achieve the inner peace of your natural mind, a state called bliss or equanimity, and you must work to cultivate the Qi/Prana of your body to attain the subtle body and higher.

Eliminating mental afflictions that commonly arise within your mind is part of the spiritual path. Remember, on the pathway of spiritual transformation there must be physical health, mental health, ethical health, and intellectual health as your foundations.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF QI/PRANA PRACTICE⁶

In spiritual cultivation you proceed from study to practice, and from practice to study. You should mix study and practice together to achieve the final result just as you must mix flour and water together to make bread. You attain the goal from perfection in study and practice together because study alone will not strengthen, purify and then liberate the inner subtle body from your physical nature, which normally happens only upon death, and practice without a guide will lead you nowhere also. In other words, study alone will not get you to the first dhyana attainment, which is the deva body achievement, because it is only achieved through cultivation practice, and haphazard cultivation practice without adherence to principles will produce no substantial progress either.

For the generation of an independent subtle body during life you need meditation work and energy work on your inner Qi/Prana. Furthermore, if you are not a virtuous person, spiritual beings will not help you in this process either and their help is absolutely necessary, as is the assistance of a qualified master to oversee the process and guide you. Therefore, it is impossible to succeed unless you have a good teacher and are also a virtuous human being who is also devoted to improving himself/herself by perfecting his/her behavior.

The principles of effective cultivation practice differ for each type of spiritual technique. They always take into account the welfare of your mind and body – you are never to hurt your mind or body through practice! You are always to preserve and improve your health and well-being otherwise it will be difficult to proceed and succeed. Remember, the deva body is a duplicate of your physical body, so don't harm your body or disfigure it in any way. In particular, you should not devote yourself to harmful physical sports that produce frequent physical injuries, undertake extreme ascetic practices that tax or risk your physical body, and you should never ignore taking care of medical conditions.

⁶ See *Nyasa Yoga, The Yoga of Siddha Tirumular, Yoga Yajnavalkya, etcetera.*

The main objectives of spiritual practices are normally to calm your mind and stimulate the Qi/Prana of your body into moving so that this purifies your Qi/Prana and gradually strengthens your inner subtle body of Qi/Prana to the extent that it can finally leave your physical shell while you are alive. Then it becomes your main body of being although still attached to your physical body, which you learn how to control using that new body. This is sometimes called “attaining control over the life process within your self” because Qi/Prana is the body’s vital energy or life force.

You should practice as many different types of spiritual exercise as possible, each of which works according to different principles for transforming your Qi/Prana. Through *simultaneous* practice of many *different types* of practice at the same time, each which affects your Qi/Prana via *different principles*, you will maximize your chances for real Qi/Prana transformations that will purify its nature and produce the independent subtle body quickest. Since you don’t know which techniques will work best for transforming your Qi/Prana, the use of multiple techniques simultaneously, each of which works on affecting your Qi/Prana according to different principles, is highly recommended.

For instance, one might during a single day practice meditation, Mantrayana recitation, pranayama, yoga stretching with visualization on your muscles, and inner *nei-gong* work (*anapana*) to move your Qi. This is an example of practicing multiple techniques simultaneously rather than just one method. Using multiple methods will mean that each of them will have an effect on transforming (purifying) your Qi/Prana via different principles. The harder you work – the more types of methods you practice and the longer and more consistently you practice – the higher your chances for success, and the quicker your success if success is to come. Success is the result of consistent effort applied across time. The longer and deeper you practice the more profound will be your results.

Some of the major principles of practice for different spiritual exercises are as follows:

Mantra Recitation: Reciting mantras (or prayers) and then listening to the sounds quiets your mind. Mantra recitation also transforms your Qi/Prana, which is typically accompanied by sensations of heat or warmth, because spiritual beings will respond to each particular mantra due to their individual vows to protect/help those who recite them. Different mantras, prayers, and spiritual songs (as well as books, passages, and spiritual texts) are “answered,” “protected” or attended to by different enlightened masters who assume commitment and responsibility for them by transforming the Qi/Prana of practitioners who use them, so a good one is one that you feel moves the Qi/Prana within your body. Certain sounds within mantras often strongly resonate or move the Qi/Prana within particular body parts, and therefore also affect your Qi/Prana in that way. To make this practice even more effective, combine mantra/prayer recitation with visualization efforts, generate emotions at the same time to move your Qi/Prana, think of an ideal way of being, and using your willpower (or other methods) try to stimulate/vibrate the Qi in different areas of your body according to the sounds. Then mantra or prayer recitation becomes the more effective method of Mantrayana practice.

Mantrayana: Certain mantra sounds work best at naturally vibrating (stimulating) the Qi/Prana in certain sections of your body through resonance, such as the three consecutive sounds within “Om Ah Hung” (or “Ohm Aum Hum”) affecting the Qi/Prana in your head and arms; chest region; and abdomen and legs, respectively. “Aim Hreem Shreem” (where “Aim” is pronounced “I’m”) can be used to move your Qi/Prana in the same body sections respectively. Or, you can try to feel each syllable in your body *as an entire whole body* with each recitation. Or, for instance, when reciting “Ah” you might feel the energy start in your head and move towards your feet as you hold the syllable, or start from your feet and move upwards, or start within your stomach area and move outwards everywhere, and so on for each syllable respectively. You can recite one, two, three, four or five syllable mantras to cultivate the Qi/Prana of that many different sections of your body respectively, and if you hold an emotion at that time, or within your mind at that time hold the ideal of being one

with/like some spiritual great, the practice will impress your Qi/Prana with the influence of those extras. You can recite mantras on certain *bindus*, *marma* points, acupuncture or acupressure points too. If you recite mantras while trying to feel, move, excite or stimulate the Qi/Prana in different areas of the body, which can be helped by also simultaneously using emotional excitement or other enervation techniques, and if you also put your mind/will on those areas to move your Qi/Prana in conjunction with reciting and feeling those sound syllables within you, you will quickly stimulate your Qi into moving and building a stronger subtle body. Adding visualization efforts to the body section at the same time - such as by using your imagination to mentally flood an area with bright light or change its color, etcetera - will also help to transform its Qi/Prana. The best mantras have sounds that actually move/vibrate your Yin Qi or Yang Qi because those energies resonate in particular sections of your body just as “Om” seems to vibrate in the head and “Ah” resonates in the chest. “Ram” (Rang, Rahlam, Rah) and “Vam” (Vah, Vang, Lam, Lang, Lah, Nam, Hum, Hung) are also very useful sounds for particular body sections such as the top/bottom or left/right sides of the body. Some mantras are constructed to call for Qi/Prana help from higher spiritual beings, some work on transforming your *Yang* Qi/Prana through direct resonance, some work on moving your *Yin* Qi/Prana, and some work on moving both your Yang and Yin Qi/Prana. Therefore, mantras can “raise your kundalini,” move/stimulate both your Yin Qi and Yang Qi, and particularly vibrate the Qi/Prana in certain sections of your body. This is how you quickly purify the Qi/Prana of your inner subtle body. Thus it is said, “A person who becomes an expert in sound yoga can attain the supreme reality.”

Meditation: A variety of meditation practices might be tried. Please see *Nyasa Yoga, Meditation Case Studies, Easy Meditation Lessons, The Little Book of Meditation, Color Me Confucius, Twenty-five Doors to Meditation, Buddha Yoga, Meditation Techniques of the Buddhist and Taoist Masters* as well as the *Vijnana Bhairava* and Adiswarananda’s *Meditation and Its Practices*. Many religions promote different types of meditation practice that can be tried such as “emptiness meditation” where mental focus is directed toward nothing, and thus thoughts are abandoned and one’s mental realm becomes quieter.

Yoga Asanas/Martial Arts: Correct posture is an indispensable requirement for the successful practice of sitting meditation and pranayama exercises. Any comfortable posture held for spiritual practice is an *asana*. That pose is best which continues to be comfortable for the greatest length of time while allowing you to cultivate your mind, emotions and body (Qi/Prana) correctly, although sometimes unusual or uncomfortable positions are used for specific purposes. Stretching your muscles by holding an *asana* posture will also make it easier for your Qi/Prana to move through them. You can either practice stimulating or moving your Qi/Prana when your body is held motionless in *asana*, *bandha* and *mudra* positions (explained in Yoga texts) that stretch muscles, or when the body is moving (as in dance, martial arts, gymnastics, sports or athletics). This is called “combining your breath” with your practice, although “breath” means your internal energy or Qi/Prana in addition to respiratory breathing. In martial arts you are often instructed teachings like “feel like you are a tiger hunting,” “feel like a river flowing,” “feel like snake slithering,” “feel as strong as a mountain” and so on when doing certain movements in order to stimulate, arouse or excite your Qi/Prana (as done in Nyasa Yoga) and thus activate the Qi/Prana of your subtle body so that you can connect with it and cultivate it. This is an equivalent to “move in tune with your breath,” only in this case you are trying to arouse different types of Qi feelings through different imaginations or emotions. Done correctly, this will activate Yin or Yang Qi within your subtle body, and thus the martial arts teaching is true that “you can become enlightened through the proper practice of *tai jitsu*.” Thus you should always practice combining your Qi/Prana vital energy with your physical practice in order to more quickly cultivate your inner subtle body, and you can use various types of emotions or visualizations/imaginations to stimulate different types of Yin or Yang Qi into arising so that you can directly access the cultivation of your subtle body and not just your physical nature. In yoga, if you also combine visualization efforts on the particular muscles being stretched, and mantra practice on those same muscles in order to stimulate the Qi/Prana within them, and add emotional content

during your practice session so as to stimulate your overall Qi/Prana into moving, you will greatly enhance your efforts. To transform a body into the healthiest state possible, diet, medical/nutritional remedies and physical manipulation are also important. For optimizing your body's structural alignment, first undergo chiropractic treatments to align your bones, next undergo AMIT therapy to activate all your muscles, and then engage in either passive stretching exercises (Yoga, Pilates, etc.) or active exercises (dance, martial arts, Ginastica Natural, athletics etc.) in conjunction with inner Qi/Prana exercises and mental work.

Pranayama: Pranayama breathing exercises can stabilize your mind and have a therapeutic effect on your body. They can oxygenize your blood, increase blood flow, and temporarily alkalinize your body to thus affect your internal chemistry and therefore mental states by altering your consciousness. The first important step to breathing exercises is to master the *asana* of a stable posture and then afterwards pranayama. Pranayama is ultimately the control of the Prana/Qi of your body that is attained in stages. Pranayama expertise begins with the regulation of your respiratory breath(ing) and then proceeds to gradually gaining control over the life-currents or inner vital force of your entire body, namely your Qi/Prana. In other words, pranayama aims to help you start gaining control of the life-currents of Qi/Prana within your body through control of your breathing and breath, and then you can direct your internal energy within you to go to any area of your body you desire. It is especially important to open up the lower regions of your body from the pelvis to the feet, and the hands and fingers. By learning to move your breath in certain specific ways you can end up stimulating/moving your Qi/Prana, which will end up purifying it. Eventually you can simply grab/move this Qi/Prana by your will, which then becomes *anapana* practice, *nei-dan* exercises, kundalini yoga, *kriya* yoga or *nei-gong* work. When pranayama is attended by the mental recitation of any mantra, it is one hundred times more powerful than when done alone unattended by any mantra recitation. If you simultaneously visualize Qi/Prana currents moving or held stationary within your body during pranayama practice and try to feel these energies, this will also increase its power. You can even visualize that the pranayama efforts are purifying you by making poisons leave your physical body and making it as transparent/clean as crystal. Pranayama attainments depend upon the intensity of the practitioner's efforts. It is recommended to practice them two to four times per day when you are not tired, worried and have an empty stomach. Wim Hof breathing practices, freediving breathing practices, and other forms of breathwork can improve your pranayama results, and especially lengthen the amount of time you can remain in *kumbhaka* pranayama breath retention states that are one of the most important types of pranayama exercises.

Kumbhaka Pranayama: The *Yoga-sutras of Patanjali* states, "Regulation of breath or the control of Prana is the stoppage of inhalation and exhalation, which follows after securing that steadiness of posture or seat." This is *kumbhaka* pranayama. Yoga texts have many exercises for *kumbhaka* breath retention, which can be learnt therefrom, and more advanced exercises involve moving your body (rather than sitting stationary) while holding your breath. There are many different *kumbhaka* techniques. If a breath retention technique is not practiced according to rhythmical ratios of exhalation, inhalation and retention, but for the purpose of holding the breath as long as possible, follow these principles: hold your breath as deep within your body as possible, for as long as possible, using as little force in as few muscles as possible, and then forcibly expel it as quickly as possible. Or, *use whatever classical instructions are provided within the instructional text you are using.* Combine with freediving or Wim Hof breathing exercises in order to learn how to hold your breath longer, and periodically measure and record on a graph the length of your retention period so that you can track your progress and try to improve upon best efforts.

Anapana, Nei-gong, Kundalini Yoga: Kundalini Yoga, *kriya* yoga and *anapana* practice involve moving the Qi/Prana of your body in various ways via your will (thoughts), which is also basically *nei-gong* or *nei-dan* work. You train to push your Qi/Prana by using your mind such as by rotating/moving it hundreds to thousands of times per session in certain ways. You might focus on a body region to

bring Qi/Prana into that area, or use your will to move it in various ways all over your body and especially in particular areas you select for that session, which might be selected according to a schedule. The entire purpose is Qi/Prana stimulation to open up the Qi channels (*nadis*) in all your tissues, and to circulate your Qi/Prana over the molecules and molecular bonds of your atoms again and again and again. Masters will do this to your body continuously during the Twelve Year kundalini transformation process if you have the merit. Another method concerns fixing of the Qi/Prana in the various locations of the body and taking/moving it slowly, step-by-step, and stage-by-stage, to other sections of your body. For instance, Yogi Boganathar suggests leading your Qi/Prana from the big toes to the ankle, knee, thigh, genitals, navel, heart, neck, uvula, nose, space between the eyebrows, forehead and crown of the head; *Yoga Yajnavalkya* has a different sequence for how to sequentially move your Qi to open up all the sections of your body. The *Nitya-natha-paddhati* explains the “sixteen containers” where you can lead and concentrate your Qi/Prana: big toes, anus, rectum/sphincter, male genital organ, lower abdomen/entrails, navel area, heart, throat, uvula, nasopharynx, root of the tongue, base of the upper teeth, tip of the nose, base of the nose, point between the eyebrows, and eyes. You can also *hold* your Qi/Prana at these or other vital points. A common introductory practice only is to also work on moving your Qi/Prana up and down your spine into your brain hundreds of times per day, or to circulate it in circular orbits (loops) and to hold it in various places. Also, specific activities of Qi/Prana practice in various parts of your body will bring different results/delights to a practitioner in accordance with their ability to move their Qi/Prana to these spots and rest it there. However, just as in martial arts you should practice moving your Qi/Prana hundreds to thousands of times per day for the quickest results of spiritual practice. To become enlightened (attain the higher transcendental bodies) is not a matter of study, worship, meditation, mantra, behavior or other efforts ... it is about inner energy work. As the famous Zen text *Transmission of Light* said, “In the distant past, Ananda had awakened the aspiration for complete perfect enlightenment in the presence of the Buddha called King of Emptiness, at the same time as did the present Buddha Shakyamuni. Ananda was fond of intellectual learning, and that is why he had not yet truly realized enlightenment. Shakyamuni, on the other hand, cultivated energy, whereby he attained true enlightenment.”⁷ Thus, while you need to cultivate meditation to practice empty mind (i.e. King of Emptiness) so higher beings can more easily move your Qi/Prana with their own (because they don’t have to fight your thoughts and their grip on your Qi circulation) when they enter into you to help transform your body, the key to success is *inner energy work* that involves moving the Qi/Prana within you and gaining control over its properties and movements. Many practices for doing this are revealed in *Nyasa Yoga*.

Visualization Practice: Practice holding images steady in your mind for as long as possible to build your powers of concentration. The ability to hold a stable concentration leads to a stronger mind that can ignore afflictions and distractions. One should especially practice holding images of Qi/Prana – such as flames, fires, lights, the sun, etcetera - in your abdomen, heart, brain, and other areas of your body as is done in Jainism (flames in the abdomen), Orthodox Christianity (flames in the heart), Buddhism, Taoism, Yoga, Vajrayana, etcetera because this will cultivate your Qi *and* mental powers of focus and attention. If appropriate, add stimulating emotions to such mental images in order to help move your Qi/Prana or impress it with certain characteristics. One yogic practice is to also visualize your Qi/Prana at certain points within your body and then take/move/lead it step-by-step, and stage-by-stage, to other locations.⁸ This will move your Qi to those areas and thus will help remove various disorders in those regions, or open up your Qi channels (*nadis*) in those areas, because visualization together with willpower can lead your internal energy to those areas. Qi/Prana flooding a region will tend to warm it and soften it. Also, you should practice visualizing light and/or colors at certain points within your body, and sometimes in special shapes. Another Yang Qi practice is to inhale to fill your entire body with breath, hold that state for awhile while feeling your Qi

⁷ *Transmission of Light*, trans. by Thomas Cleary, (Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2002), p. 9.

⁸ See *Yoga Yajnavalkya*, trans. by A. G. Mohan (Svastha Yoga Pte Ltd., 2013).

everywhere within you while visualizing that all your flesh is red in color, and then visualizing that your bones are shining with a bright white light as you exhale. Afterwards, you hold the state of empty exhalation while maintaining the visualization of your bones giving off a shining light.

Sexual Cultivation: As practiced in several cultivation schools, since sex is a standard biological function you can use it as part of spiritual practice in the cultivation path. Use the emotional excitation and happiness-joy-bliss from the passion of sexual activity, which stirs your Qi/Prana, together with physical sexual congress to move the Qi/Prana in various regions within your body. Sexual excitement and sexual relations can be a powerful force for moving your internal Qi/Prana, which is why many masters encourage their students to marry because sex can then become available as a method to transform their body on the spiritual path. It is one of the fastest ways to transform the Qi/Prana of your body and open up your Qi channels (*nadis*), but its pursuit (without marriage) usually leads to all sorts of problems, violations, misconduct and abuse so it is not allowed in most cultivations schools. There are dangers such as pregnancy, permanent disease, emotional problems, and hurtful social reactions. The alternative is celibacy, which is the standard default that requires extra efforts of restraint together with ardent pranayama practice and inner *tummo* heat cultivation exercises and other techniques to help move the Qi while reducing sexual desires, such as by doing an extensive number of prostrations on a vegetarian diet that reduces desires. This cultivation need for pranayama exercises and sexual restraint is emphasized in the story of Shiva opening his eye to burn Kamadeva, the god of lust, and turning Kamadeva's body into ashes. Similarly, in the *Surangama Sutra* Uchhusmma was given the name "Fire Head" because a man's face often reddens when he restrains from ejaculation for a long time and Uchhusmma cultivated sexual restraint by envisioning that his body became a mass of raging fire (along with joyous emotions at the same time), a technique through which he cultivated the Qi/Prana of his body. However, the story of the supreme Hindu ascetic Rishyashringa also bears relevancy for it teaches that the rains must fall to end drought in a country, and so a courtesan became this celibate yogi's partner for sexual relations in order to improve his spiritual cultivation. For non-celibate cultivators, men should try to prevent ejaculation during sex so as not to lose their Qi/Prana (and end sexual activity due to tiredness) whereas women are free to orgasm. In Tibetan Buddhism the nuns do not take a vow of celibacy because their school allows them to use sex in the spiritual path as an effective way of cultivating their Qi, and sexual activity as a means of inner Qi cultivation is also taught in Taoism and the Kaula yogic schools of India. However, it is difficult to find the right partner for sexual cultivation due to the necessity for karmic compatibility, sexual compatibility and the requirement that practitioners must first have sufficient merit to be qualified. This means they must have performed lots of pranayama, mantrayana, *nei-gong*, inner energy and inner body visualization work such as the white skeleton visualization of Buddhism and other methods within *Nyasa Yoga*. A typical sexual cultivation effort with a partner should last two to three hours continuously with minimum male ejaculation. The Tibetan female adept Yeshe Tsogyel has left us teachings on this topic. If done correctly, sexual yoga turns into Yoga directly.

Bhakti Yoga: As practiced in Christianity (by focusing on Jesus or the Virgin Mary), in Hinduism (focusing on Krishna, Kali and other deities) and other religions, the purpose is to self-generate ardent devotion to such a deep extent that your emotions end up moving your Qi/Prana all over your body. The ardent emotional states are also a form of "immeasurable emotion" practice taught within Buddhism. The basic principle of envisioning that you become one with an ideal can therefore also be used for personal development to move you in a direction of obtaining character traits you desire. Bhakti devotional practice is meant to stimulate certain emotions and your Qi/Prana into moving. States of deep crying are connected with Yin Qi purification, while joyous states are connected with your Yang Qi cultivation. Simple reverence, as practiced in religious ceremonies and rituals, is also a form of meditation practice for quieting and purifying the mind that also affects your Qi/Prana. During states of religious reverence you give up thoughts in a type of surrendering.

Diet: Eat the right foods, minerals, herbs, and supplements to bring about a state of optimal health, including detoxification as necessary. Some foods, such as spicy cuisine, will make your Yang Qi arise while others will cause a cooling reaction within your body, thus affecting your Yin Qi. At times one can ingest certain foods to adjust the Qi/Prana of their body rather than just eat for health and perfect growth. This is a special knowledge within Chinese cuisine. For instance, during winter one can drink warming teas such as Pu'er, and during Summer cooling teas such as Jasmine tea to help adjust the body. The most nutrient-dense foods you can eat include red and green vegetable/fruit powders, nucleotide-rich acid foods, and organ meats. You should always avoid GMO foods, sugar and vegetable fats in your diet. Some schools use fasting as a spiritual cultivation method because the lack of food forces you to depend upon your inner Qi body for sustenance, just as holding your breath during *kumbhaka* pranayama forces you to rely on your inner Qi when you “break the wall” and hold your breath longer than your normal capacity.

Yin Qi Cultivation: The emotions of fear, fright, anxiety, sadness, helplessness, depression, guilt, embarrassment, shame, disgust, sneakiness, greed, and chills all raise your Yin Qi. Individuals who cultivate are provoked into situations that cause their Yin Qi to arise. When you are doing something wrong - such as stealing, or spying on others - your Yin Qi normally arises. The daily or weekly practice of introspection to find personal faults and errors, feeling *ashamed or guilty* about them, and then engaging in confession and repentance to help correct them is a wonderful way to periodically arouse your Yin Qi as well as correct your behavior. Imagining that you absorb lunar energy from the moon (cool moonlight); water visualizations; meditating or conducting sadhanas in cemeteries; performing ghost, Hell, purgatory (*preta*) or death sadhanas; observing sorcery or witchcraft practices; watching someone experiencing pain or being tortured; cultivating within a room of mirrors that makes you feel cool or coldish; visualizing or imagining that you undergo age regression; fantasizing that you transform into a young girl (femininity practices), etcetera are all methods of Yin Qi cultivation. Times of sickness; thoughts of suicide; attending funerals or cremations; working in an ossuary; visiting or working in a hospital; working or visiting a mental asylum; eating cold minerals such as calcium; visiting limestone (or other “cold” mineral) formations; eating Yin foods or medicines; “seeing ghosts” or having scary visions or “bad” drug trips; having people learn your embarrassing secrets or just being embarrassed, etcetera are all situations that arouse the Yin Qi/Prana of your body because your Yin Qi is stimulated into moving and temporarily dominates your physique. It is most common to cultivate your Yin Qi by reciting the mantras/prayers (or performing the sadhanas) of female Buddhas, the Hell Buddha Ksitigarbha (who deals with sickness, death, purgatory and the hells), performing cooling water visualizations that “wash” your body’s Qi (Yin Qi is cool, not warm), visualizing that you are the color blue or black or white, performing lunar energy absorption sadhanas, or reciting certain mantras at midnight during a new moon (no light) in a Yin location, etcetera. When sadhus in India sit under the hot sun surrounded by burning coals or burning cow dung, they are using special methods to cultivate their cooling Yin Qi so that they can stand the heat (while Tibetan yogis cultivate warm Yang Qi in the snow so they can stand the cold). When you sit, walk or live without clothes and thus become ashamed or embarrassed of your nakedness this causes your Yin Qi to be stimulated (until you get used to it), and is a practice done in the Aghori and Jain traditions. When individuals are told to go out and spend nights in scary places such as graveyards, deserted forests, wild mountains, cemeteries or haunted locales where apparitions appear their Yin Qi is stimulated into arising, which also happens when they are told to conduct frightening sadhanas involving dead bodies, ghosts, demons, Yakshas, and the like. The initial phase of the white skeleton visualization, when you visualize that your corpse decays in a disgusting manner, gives rise to your Yin Qi which is done prior to visualizing your skeletal bones shining brightly, which gives rise to your Yang Qi. The female Mahavidyas of India – Kali, Tara, Tripura Sundari, Bhuvaneshvari, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi and Kamala – as well as the nine manifestations of the goddess Durgha represent different types of Yin Qi cultivation. The phases of the moon represent different types or stages of Yin Qi cultivation. Tara, Kuan Yin, and Zhunti are prominent female Buddhas within Buddhism with appropriate mantras and practices

as well. In ancient times the cults of female goddesses such as Isis, Demeter, Diana etc. provided Yin Qi cultivation methods too. Many countries even have Yin holidays – such as Halloween, Mexico’s Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*) or China’s Tomb Sweeping Day – which are used by Buddhas to help transform the Qi of large communities of people on a vast scale. When people suffer scary nightmares or “see ghosts” this is sometimes due to spiritual beings trying to frighten them to provoke their Yin Qi into strongly arising, and when Zen masters report irrational strong fears of death this is due to the influence of Buddhas and devas as well who try to make their Yin Qi arise. Christian Hesychasts often end up deeply crying during their prayer recitations so their internal emotional movement is a type of Yin Qi cultivation, and if done frequently they must protect their lungs and kidneys with proper diets and supplements, otherwise they will weaken from the excessive weeping. When you are sick it is easier to cultivate your Yin Qi since your Yang Qi is depleted at that time. Any adept going through the Twelve Year kundalini process will pass through many Yin Qi experiences, such as half hour periods of shaking uncontrollably with chills that is a Yin Qi blessing by spiritual beings. Men undergoing the Twelve Year process will often experience Shariputra’s goddess flower lesson that he experienced within Vimalakirti’s ten-foot square room (symbolizing his brain), and which is revealed in the Buddhist *Vimalakirti Sutra* in order to help aspirants pass through this stage of Yin Qi transformation. It explains why Ramakrishna, Arjuna and Hercules ended up wearing women’s clothing for a brief period of mental feminization (it is only imagined during specific meditation practices for brief periods of time), and why the legend of the Greek Tiresias said he experienced a (mental) sex-change into a woman for seven years. The methodology can be further understood by reading *Shikhandi and Other Tales They Don’t Tell You* (Devadutt Pattanaik), *Nyasa Yoga and Meditation Case Studies*.

Yang Qi Cultivation: Anger, pride, courage, triumph, confidence, euphoria, sexual excitement, exhilaration, enthusiasm, joy, cheerfulness, awe, optimism, love, strength, mirth, aliveness, attending weddings or other happy ceremonies or festivals, active exercise, fighting, masculinity practices, standard meditation practice, sunshine visualizations, pranayama cultivation, etcetera are all situations used to cultivate the Yang Qi/Prana of your body. Some foods cause a heating/warming reaction within your body that is also Yang cultivation. When Tibetan monks sit in icy cold weather and melt the snow around them, they are using special methods to cultivate/activate their warming Yang Qi, which is called *tummo* meditation practice. The capability is based on performing special breathing exercises in conjunction with special concentration and visualization exercises. Fire visualizations and kundalini Yoga exercises are typical Yang Qi cultivation methods.

Five Elements Qi Cultivation: While it is said that there are two basic types of Qi/Prana – Yin and Yang – one can also think of the body as being composed of the Qi/energy of five elements, or the different Qi energies of the nine planets, or the Qi energies of other diverse component factors that each have unique signatures. Thus, methods have been developed to help you cultivate the Earth element Qi of your body such as through muscle exercise and diet, both of which affect the composition of your physical body, or the white skeleton visualization that focuses attention on your bones. The Water element of your body can be cultivated by emotional exercises (immeasurables absorption and projection) and visualization or *nei-gong* practice on your glands. The Fire or Warmth element of your body can be cultivated by breathing methods, kundalini practices and internal fire visualizations, and there are various ways to cultivate fire samadhi. The Wind element of your body can be cultivated by various pranayama, Mantrayana, meditation, kundalini, *keriya* yoga, *anapana*, *qi-gong*, *nei-dan* and *nei-gong* exercises that move/mobilize your inner Qi/Prana. The Space element can be cultivated by emptiness meditation practice and by imagining that your body becomes an empty sack or boundless bodiless light. Wisdom can be cultivated by study and development of your various mental powers. In astrology the planets represent various types of Qi or energy, and you can construct relevant exercises to try to stimulate a *planetary characteristic Qi/Prana* within you as a means to cultivate/purify your subtle body. In the martial arts there are also *animal form* cultivation practices where you focus on having the energy of a certain animal when performing certain movement

practices because you want to stimulate your Qi/Prana through those powerful envisioned characteristics. Then you try to link the now strongly energized/activated Qi/Prana (due to the envisioned animal) that is essentially emotional Qi/Prana with your limbs during movement. You do this over and over again to synchronize the limbs of your physical body Qi/Prana with those now vibrating/aroused energies, and thus use this as a way to cultivate your ether body. Thus martial arts can help you produce the subtle body, which is why it is said that you can become enlightened through the proper practice of the martial arts.

Immeasurable Emotions Cultivation: The four Buddhist visualization and emotional immeasurable practices of infinite joy, kindness, compassion and equanimity are meant to help you cultivate your Yang Qi/Prana. They symbolize the four dhyana/higher bodies, and by dwelling in them (regularly cultivating them fully) you will slowly change your personality over time to develop in the direction of those personality characteristics. You will also impregnate your cells and internal organs with those emotional energies, as proven by the fact that organ transplant recipients start taking on some of the personality traits of their donors after a transplant. You can also practice to cultivate emotions such as tremendous (immeasurable) courage, valor, vigor, generosity, authority, positive energy, stamina, mirth, and almost anything else to help you change your personality and fortune as you gradually develop those characteristics, which start to flavor your Qi/Prana. Such exercises will help to permanently change the *samskaras* or predispositions within your subtle body that reincarnates. By engendering such large emotions, and holding those emotional states in mind and body like meat soaking in a sauce that then permeates it with the flavor, through the force of permeation over a long period of time you will slowly affect the Qi/Prana of your body, your thoughts and finally your behavior. It helps *immensely* if you watch your behavior and then act in those particular ways (which express those character traits or emotions) when opportunities arise because a character trait only takes hold when you practice expressing it rather than just think about it. It takes vigorous effort to put the full-body emotional feelings into effect in your real life until those characteristics become an essential part of yourself. The results will appear in this life and as character traits in subsequent incarnations. To make greatest use of this technique, during practice sessions (or during daily idle moments such as waiting in line somewhere) imagine suffusing, permeating, perfuming or saturating yourself with the Qi/Prana/aura of the character trait you strongly wish to cultivate, imagine also projecting it into your outer environment, and simultaneously try to *feel the Qi of that characteristic within you and everywhere*. When opportunities arise then retrieve that feeling and act that way because there must always be a regular consistency of actions (*praxis*) to solidify your learning and intent. Consistently visualizing that you are a wrathful deity, like Yamantaka for instance, is another type of immeasurable practice designed to raise your Yang Qi/Prana, but it will also increase your pride and aggressive tendencies if you are not careful of the *yidam* you select and how you practice. When choosing a *yidam* or deity for Buddha mindfulness practice, such as a holy one like Jesus or Krishna or Dattreya, you must be selective as to the types of emotions and thoughts you practice generating and holding onto during your practice sadhana since they will influence your Qi/Prana because you are actually cultivating those same characteristics. For instance, many Hesychasts recite the Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,” that produces a feeling of humility. Note the difference between this and the feeling from reciting alternatives such as “I give myself to you, Jesus Christ the Lord” or “Come to me, Jesus Christ my Savior.” Performing activities while holding onto a “principal awareness” of their importance or purpose when viewed from a higher level is also another way to change your Qi, mindset, perspective and personality.

Breaking Barriers to Feel Truly Alive and Live in Your Higher Bodies: When yogis (individuals who have practiced lots of spiritual cultivation) fast they are forced to live off (depend upon) their subtle body to maintain their vitality, thus strengthening their inner subtle body. When you practice *kumbhaka* pranayama and hold your breath longer than your normal limits, subsequently passing through a state of difficulty that then opens up into a visage of greater mental clarity and lightness, you have forced yourself to rely on your inner Prana/Qi. When you encounter layers of resistance in an activity, like

running, but push through your pain threshold and surpass resistance when you “hit the wall,” you force yourself to depend more on your inner Qi subtle body to move forward, and then you are living within that body. When as an athletic professional who has practiced deeply you play sports and go beyond your normal capabilities to hit a state of “flow” where your activity seems mindless and grooved to use less effort, you are synchronizing your physical body with your inner subtle body. When you practice the four formless samadhi – such as the samadhi of infinite space, infinite consciousness, infinite emptiness and neither thought nor no-thought – which each require more subtle mindsets and finer (lighter, almost invisible or subtle) thoughts, you are forcing yourself to center your living presence in your subtle body, Causal body, Supra-Causal body or Immanence body respectively, which strengthens the circulatory flows of the energy within those bodies respectively. Each is constructed out of more transcendental energy and operates from that level in your brain to produce coarse, fine, finer and more sublime (thread-like) thoughts within consciousness that are more progressively akin to the stage of pristine awareness we call “clear mind.” Basically, there are various ways that involve your mind, body and breathing to force yourself into relying on your higher bodies composed of Qi, Shen, Later Heavenly Qi or Primordial Heavenly Qi that are already embedded within the matrix of your physical shell. You can, through various means, force yourself to survive on your inner subtle body of Qi in order to strengthen it (by fasting, pranayama, etc.), which is spiritual cultivation. You can force yourself to switch over to living in or tapping into your Qi body through physical exertion that takes you “past your wall.” You can also try to directly cultivate the higher energy bodies by - during meditation - centering in the unpurified substrate of those bodies by accessing the formless samadhis of Buddhism, each of which corresponds to a higher stage of finer thoughts we call “emptiness cultivation.” The finer the degree of your thoughts (the more quiet your mind becomes where you even seem to “know without knowing,” but of course thoughts are always there so it is due to more sublime thoughts), the higher the energy composition of the body vehicle you are centering with or tapping into that is producing those inputs within your consciousness. Therefore by trying to center in a clear lucidity with extremely fine thoughts (which is the definition of meditation practice) you are cultivating one of the higher body vehicles within you. There are many methods of breaking through physical and mental barriers to access your higher bodies, methods of strengthening or relying upon these inner bodies composed of higher energies, and many techniques for synchronizing your breathing, thoughts, and physical movements with your Qi or Shen of your higher bodies. Many such techniques are very apropos for sports professionals because they involve going past your current physical limitations, and transcending your physical nature to tap into higher forces. The method of breaking barriers or coverings is also called *detachment* or *non-clinging* because it involves letting go of mental perspectives you’ve built, breaking through physical and mental walls of limitations, transcending or eliminating layers of automatic patterning (internal personality suits) you’ve developed over time, transforming your past conditioning and your learned behavioral traits that control/warp your inner Qi/Prana flow and bias your reactions. Thus, detachment means letting go of any artificial patterning you have developed and freeing your vitality to flow as it truly should without conditioning so that you become more alive. For instance, confidence is something people already have but is covered over by ingrained habits and learned patterns of tension. If you can let go of (detach from) those patterns, such as your normal patterns of fear reactivity, you will automatically have more confidence since confidence Qi is naturally inside you and just being blocked. The ability to detach from what’s going on and look at things from an outside perspective, to get out of your head to step back from entanglement in the momentum of your thought-stream and the situation at hand, is the meaning of learning detachment through meditation. It means being able to step aside and see things more clearly as if a third person observer. However, it also applies to “letting go of” or “becoming detached from” subtle patterns of protective Qi coverings that you have learned/adopted as suppressive coverings within your psyche, and thus they permeate your inner Qi body. Such barriers define you, and thus help to create your fate by binding your thought and energy to a certain restrictive pattern. Whenever you break away from such false coverings your Qi/Prana begins to flow more freely within your body, your vitality rises extraordinarily, and you feel more alive as a result of becoming free of your prior conditioning.

Whenever you break free of (detach from) a cocoon of groupthink, defy egoistic urges or animalistic urges to satisfy desires and break free of those habit energies as a new way of being, free yourself from past learned conditioning of any type (such as the brainwashing you adopt from picking up errant social notions), or like an observer can stand aside from your running situation/mind-stream to realize what you are actually doing and then pause to act differently, you can then chart a new course for life and create a new future destiny. Because of detachment or “distancing” you can separate yourself from conditions and return to focusing on your broader life purposes. You aren’t just breaking away from your thought-stream or the Qi/Prana within you. You are breaking away from the mechanistic within you that *seems living* but is just another inanimate process belonging to Shakti for Shakti is *entirely inanimate*. We only call things “living” out of ignorance, and for the convenience sake of identification. You are just a process within Shakti that has consciousness, and your consciousness is also a process within Shakti that does not transcend Shakti. However, can define your own predetermined future due to deterministic cause and effect ruling Shakti by breaking free of your current programming (the current thought-stream with its known predictable ways of determining conceptions and behaviors) and go in a new programming direction of your choosing (even thought that too is really entirely mechanical).

You will always be a slave to your genetic, cultural, and mental conditioning etc. since cause and effect rules all including the fact that you are influenced by such conditions, but you can choose/create the programing you want to follow in order to experience whatever you want. You can choose the future you want to enjoy and then create it, mechanistic as you somewhat are. By viewing yourself and your thoughts, actions and situations from a level of independence and higher standpoint that lets you see them for what they are, you give yourself the ability to break free of the momentum of following events that have a particular fate, or a life that has a particular fate. That fate can always be changed, although there are limits as to how far it can be moved.

This is the purpose of meditation training in awareness, watching thoughts, or mindfulness. It means not getting caught up in the thought-stream and blindly following it without presence. Through detachment, mindfulness, awareness or independence *you can take back control and define your own path again*. By not mechanistically clinging to (following, going along with or getting entangled within) your thought-stream but always rising above it like a separate individual who independently views it by standing outside of it, you can realize what you are actually doing and where you are actually going. Through such transcension you can break away from your currently destined fortune and create a new one at that very moment if you practice follow through. *This is spiritual cultivation*.

This is the crux and core of spiritual cultivation, which is so cultivate so as to personally move to a better/higher state of being, and to use one’s powers to also create better states for all others since they also have consciousness. One works to decrease suffering and engender positive states of joy, kindness, compassion, sociality and more. You can create any new fortune of your own choosing, such as more positive emotional tones and environments, living conditions or achievements. You cannot escape having a fortune since Shakti is absolutely ruled by cause and effect which means that a line of thoughts and actions will always produce a fated result once embarked upon, but you can always create *the very fortune or fate you want or change a course of action destined for a particular result* if you are wise, skillful, and put in the requisite effort. You become *more truly alive* - freeing yourself from the mechanistic following of your thought patterns that seems as if it is aliveness but which is mechanistic in nature since it is part of Shakti - when you progressively shed more of the coverings and veils that normally control you and instead defy urges, habits, mindsets and predispositions to rise above them and create a new fortune.

Thus, emptiness (a mind that does not cling and is somewhat quiet of the narration that impels) is the highest state since it is the barest state, the most natural state, the unconstructed state. But emptiness co-exists with phenomena, so being neither empty nor attached to expressive phenomena

is the highest state of being. Neither real nor non-real, neither thought nor non-thought, this is the state of living in presence with pristine awareness and the independence of detachment. Being in that state is not a weakness but a state of *presence*, and sometimes it is called emptiness. It is not a nihility of thought but a vivid lucidity of clear awareness where the body feels blissful/comfortable (because its energy runs smoothly due to cultivation) and there is very fine (almost quiet) thinking going on, and this is how you be/exist as your living condition as you go about living and doing what you want or need to do. Thus it is called aliveness. It is existence, consciousness and bliss.

You must choose your future – the future you want in terms of how you want to live, what you want to experience, how you want to be, what you want to associate with, what you want to accomplish, etcetera – by standing aside from your thought-stream, and then selecting the highest objective, ideal or aspiration after due consideration of possible objectives along with the ways/means to get there. Since you are not really a “sentient being” but only so in the conventional sense, the highest state is to recognize what you really are (the enlightenment view) and be truly empty, like the original nature, yet actively manipulating Shakti as a living being to accomplish what you wish.

All things are controlled via cause and effect, following rules that control the transformations of phenomena, but you can manage/use them to create/accomplish whatever you want even though, technically speaking, your choice decisions are also really inanimate events within Shakti that are also somewhat deterministic because they are ruled according to conditioning. There is no escaping Shakti and the fact that you are not really a living being, personality or entity. There is no such thing in Shakti, there is only Shakti – the neutrality of scintillating Shakti where its conscious components think they are independent beings separate from Shakti when even their consciousness is Shakti.

In truth, there really isn't any such true thing as consciousness either, which is why Buddhism calls conceptions “false thoughts.” They are simply part of Shakti, not something transcending Shakti, and thus neutral or inanimate activities and processes without a separate, independent, self-so living being behind them. They do not provide you with “truth,” but your personal version of truth for your class of sentient beings. You are a collection of simples in a particular ever-changing pattern (meaning that there is no absolute pattern at all), or an agglomeration of interdependent conditions – a process stretching through time – without anything *inherently you* being there. There is no intrinsic, inherent self inside those conditions, inside that process or inside any collection of simples no matter what the pattern of the agglomeration.

However, your consciousness does exist within Shakti, faulty or incomplete that it is, so you can enjoy it. You are an object or process within Shakti with the property of consciousness, which is the great miracle of the cosmos. The point is that you can enjoy awareness to experience Shakti because consciousness is all we have. Knowledge is all we are. In particular, suffering often afflicts consciousness so you should learn how to make things better (master the conditions of Shakti) so that you reduce or eliminate suffering, and thereby enjoy Shakti more frequently and to a higher degree. The great goal is that everyone else enjoys it more too. This is the point behind eliminating suffering within the environment by our actions that alter conditions for the better, and the mind by taming or mastering consciousness. By mastering wisdom we will better understand patterns and regularities and thus know how to act, and by developing wisdom, knowledge and skills we will become able to better conditions for our selves and others (achievement).

Unfortunately, consciousness usually gets caught up within its own mind-stream whereby you lose perspective/comprehension of what you are truly doing. You lose your perspective because you get caught up in things, which is why you should cultivate mindfulness of your thought-stream that produces a knowing of it, a meta-perspective. Otherwise, by becoming entangled within it and blind to what you are doing you will often make bad decisions and perform sub-optimal actions that will produce inferior states of being.

You actually become more robotic or “more insentient” by forgetting your self and getting entangled with blindly following your thought-stream like a robot under command. This is how you can commit great wrongs or errors by losing your perspective. This is what is meant by becoming more “mechanical” or “robotic” through blind entrainment, and the perfect example of this is succumbing to (automatically acting upon or becoming engrossed in) your most animalistic urges and desires or the habits encoded within your brain. This is a type of attachment, as is uniting yourself to some blind impulse or object of desire that so occupies your heart and mind that you long for it and feel you cannot live without it. Attachment means that you identify yourself with whatever fills your mind through the senses. In religion this is “occupying your heart by another God” because your whole being becomes cleaved to something other than spiritual ways.

The remedy for becoming more sentient, more alive, more independent of the forces normally controlling you and thereby touching upon free will and your highest spiritual status is by gaining perspective ... detaching from conditions by always engendering a wiser, greater perspective that sees conditions for what they are and then acting in a higher, better way than what would normally just naturally occur.

You are wired and conditioned to act a certain way but can learn to step out of this perspective. You become more independent, more alive by reversing this tendency of entrainment. You ennoble yourself and transcend the pulls of materialism by cultivating mindfulness, detachment and distancing that makes you more independent of the thought-stream of urges, emotions and desires. Through cultivating meditation you train yourself to be able to detach from the heat of the moment (the stream of events or your mind-stream) and switch your perspective to become an observer more “outside of” your circumstances and thought processes so that you can better see what is truly happening due to your detachment and higher visage. From a higher perspective that observes/knows your mind you can better adapt your behavior to perform better in any situation and get on track to achieve what you truly want.

By always watching one’s thoughts that are transpiring, and therefore standing apart from the momentum of circumstances and the situation at hand because you are viewing everything from a higher (more detached) perspective - a higher level of awareness, degree of understanding or more independent viewpoint - you become more and more *truly alive*. This is because you are more free of conditioning influences because less conditions/energies can influence you, and you can therefore you become less robotic/automatic by succumbing to them. This is the liberation offered by cultivating higher spiritual bodies that are progressively closer in composition to the foundational nature. Accordingly, the more you can detach from the physical body, the less you are prone to base animalistic desires and urges. The more you detach from the subtle body Qi within you, the more you are less prone to getting carried away by likes and dislikes or particular emotions. The more you detach from your Causal body energies inherent within you, the more you can transcend ordinary thinking and attain to higher perspectives that view things differently, and so on. The less you are controlled by such things the higher your stage of attainment.

Normally individuals become entrained with their body sensations or coarse materialistic thoughts and urges, but when you stand apart from them and transcend your physical nature (through mindfulness or the awareness that sets you apart by putting you at a higher vantage point or perspective) it is as if you are centering yourself in your next higher body, your subtle body. You thereby become a *heavenly being*. If you can let go of your emotions, desires and passions within your vital energy and transcend them, you can center in your Causal body of conceptions/mentation, which is higher than the realm of emotions, and you thereby become a *spiritual being*. If you can rise above entrainment with your thoughts, you can rise to your Supra-Causal body of enlightenment, and thereby become an *enlightened being*, a *sage*. Yes, the subtle body attainment is the enlightenment stage

of being a Srotapanna, but for convenience sake we identify the stage of Buddhahood enlightenment as the Supra-Casual body attainment. The next higher attainment is the Immanence body.

The highest degree of freedom, though still subject to influences, is to be composed of the highest state of Shakti, and next to be just the Unmanifest original nature itself. But then you have non-existence. But wait! Being the original nature is also being co-existent with the manifestation of Shakti (It permeates Shakti), which is what you already materially are. You are Shakti, in fact you are part of the *consciousness of Shakti*. And you are also just the original nature in absolute essence. Being both, you are neither just the void nor the non-void of manifestation, neither just the unchanging true reality nor do you entirely fall into the unreality of transient Shakti.

The more you detach from entrainment in your experiences (of the body, sensations or emotions, conceptions, impulse, etc.) and transcend the doings of consciousness with a higher perspective the more you become alive, awake, aware, *real* – the highest state of being/ existence that is presence/existence, consciousness and bliss that through non-attachment straddles both existence and non-existence, the void and non-void. This is the highest state of beingness in manifestation. The only thing more pure is being wholly the empty, unmanifest, pure original nature, but It has given birth to the cosmos that is just Itself, meaning that despite appearances Shakti is *ultimately pure*, so the highest state is not annihilation or extinction but also manifest existence since it is essentially the pure original nature in the state of appearance.

In existence you are lucky enough to have consciousness and can therefore choose to perform any actions, aspirations, deeds or vows you desire. Your existence, however, and the rules of transformations within Shakti are subject to cause and effect. Therefore you need to learn the wisdom of how to proceed, and the skillfulness of doing so correctly to achieve what you want. Then you have to perform those actions with perseverance until you achieve your goals. You should learn to master the highest and best methods for whatever you desire, in fact for every aspect of your life. The apex of perfection is not to be a naked sadhu who silently sits there without possessions and simply survives, accepting all that comes his way with indifference, for that is akin to nature without consciousness. The meaning of detachment is to know your thoughts and situation from a higher perspective, like a third person observer, and thus to always cultivate higher body vehicles you can center within for the perspective of awareness that put you out of the lower, and which better enable you to achieve your objectives. If you think of yourself as a third-person video game character it becomes easier to observe yourself and the world to see what you are really doing without your ego getting in the way. When you attain the subtle body and through it view your lower physical body, it is easier to manage your behavior for the very same reason.

The highest ideal is to use one's mind to master the changes of phenomena, along with compassion, and then to take the necessary optimal steps to improve phenomenal states for yourself and others who are *also the consciousness of Shakti* subject to the same pains and sufferings as your own. This is just ordinary life. This is just *being ordinary* but not overly attached to whatever happens, and yet adapting to whatever happens and reacting in ordinary ways. This is living life. You don't try to cut anything off other than afflictions, suffering and unwholesome states of being. If you need money for your objectives then you pursue money. If you need status in society so that your words are heard then you pursue status. If you need power to affect changes then you pursue power. This is all ordinary life. The highest is to master them for high ideals and objectives, for Buddha vows and considerations rather than for base, selfish, materialistic enjoyment.

This is spiritual cultivation, and to move society ahead along these lines is an act of great merit. Your highest, most perfect state is to be a perfection that straddles both existence and non-existence, which still exists using consciousness to affect conditions for the better but is always detached from the results (as if your next higher perspective was the pure original nature itself). This requires you to

cultivate the highest spiritual bodies possible so that you can always gain a higher perspective and also have access to greater powers of achievement.

A transforming process within the Shakti sea of interconnected processes is what you are, but you have a body and the gift of consciousness that can know qualities of experience and perform actions. How to live life? You must learn to use your gift of consciousness in the highest, best ways possible. You should maximize its capabilities and learn to control it. You will always be subject to the processes of consciousness that produce your consciousness since it is dependent upon them, and thus always conditionally mechanical/automatic in some degree, but you can choose to learn the highest and best ways of thinking, experiencing, feeling and behaving as your ideal so that consciousness is predominantly filled with positive enjoyable states. And you can also cultivate higher bodies that live in more pleasant bodies, in more pleasant realms, in more pleasant ways. Is this not the purpose of spiritual cultivation? Is it not then a path of learning to maximize consciousness and its end-product, which is circumstances and behavior? Consciousness is produced only because you have a body, so self-cultivation also involves taking care of the body and its vital energy as well. It actually involves perfecting the body and its vital energy. The vital energy of every body is actually the next higher body attainment.

There are many other forms of Qi/Prana work that can be practiced in conjunction with meditation to help you transform your Qi/Prana and quickly purify and strengthen your inherent inner subtle body. Religious practice strengthens it as well but not so much as the path of Yoga herein explained.

Thoughts can move your Qi, but emotions can do the job better. Visualization and willpower can move your Qi, but sounds and willpower can do the job better. What is better than simply reciting sounds is reciting rhythmical sounds that can produce a resonance of standing wave Qi energy within you. Reciting rhythmical sounds + arousing relevant emotions + visualization efforts is even more powerful as a cultivation method, and there are quite a few ways to add various principles together to produce very powerful types of Qi/Prana movement, purification and transformation. Many cultivation methods have been developed based on these principles such as reciting prayers/mantras while holding the image of being one with a deity, individual or situation in your mind and while simultaneously giving rise to pertinent Yin Qi or Yang Qi emotional states (such as those corresponding to relevant character traits). You can analyze all sorts of cultivation methods using this type of analysis ranging from bhakti yoga, to sexual cultivation, to kundalini chakra visualization methods, to martial arts practice that involves internally moving your Qi and controlling your breathing while NLP-imitating a master's mindset and movements, to special mantrayana techniques and so forth.

The key to the subtle body attainment is a firm resolution to maintain consistent deep practice according to a consistent practice schedule. In order to establish some variety that will help you maintain continued practice the schedule might be keyed to the different days of the week, some astronomical phenomena, a specific period of time, and so forth. The target objective is not just transformation of your physical body, but your ability to start controlling your Qi/Prana by your mind/will. Successful practice also requires that you understand the principles underlying the effectiveness of the practice, as explained.

PHENOMENA ARISING DUE TO PRACTICE⁹

With spiritual progress it is common to see visions, hear unusual sounds such as voices and heavenly music, smell beautiful odors, or feel sensations of energy moving within your body. Most of the

⁹ See *Meditation Case Studies*, Chapter 4 & 6 and *The Little Book of Hercules*.

visions and sounds are illusions projected into your brain by devas and spiritual masters. They do not appear because you are in any way psychic. The inner vibrational sensations of energy movement, or feelings of hot and cold etc. are due to Qi/Prana transformations within your physical and subtle bodies, some of which are caused by spiritual beings moving their own Qi/Prana inside you to help you get the transformations going, and others caused by yourself. Thus one can experience a Yin Qi or Yang Qi blessing due to ardent efforts.

Some people may seem to become psychic, but their “psychic talents” are usually due to devas who happen to be working on their body to help transform their Qi/Prana.

After a true kundalini awakening initiates, the first 100 days will entail continuous and powerful Qi/Prana movements throughout your body 24 hours a day. If you do not go through this then it is not the true kundalini experience. This occurs at the commencement of the Twelve Year period for the production of the deva body attainment while living. It can only happen if you are a virtuous, moral person and do lots of preparatory cultivation work. You will likely hear many inner sounds/voices and see many illusions or visions during this time. The process will continue for twelve years, and involve the assistance of countless masters and their deva students who will visit your body to help transform your Qi/Prana for the generation of the deva (subtle) body attainment. This happens in every religion, and the students going through the process are usually tricked into believing they are fighting with ghosts, devils, demons (at a time of Yin Qi cultivation) or being visited by angels, saints, gods and deities (at a time of Yang Qi cultivation). Students will pass through many worrisome, fearful, anxiety-ridden, agonizing Yin Qi states and many states of sublime bliss (Yang Qi states).

Unfortunately, the spiritual masters (usually the great ones within your tradition, and their deceased predecessors who also attained higher spiritual bodies) will also use you during this long period to teach others how to find memories inside your brain and alter the thoughts and emotions of human beings, and being undisciplined this will be a period of intense suffering for you. This is why no masters describe this period and the process since they don't want to dissuade people from the path. At the end of the process one attains the deva body and thereby becomes an Arhat.

ARHATS, BODHISATTVAS AND BUDDHAS¹⁰

Arhats: The Arhat is one who attains one or more spiritual bodies, but primarily works on his own salvation and on satisfying his own personal interests and pursuits in the universe. He is more focused on the “I” rather than “We.” Having attained the initial fruit of a subtle (deva) body or even more bodies, he primarily resides in his highest body while still using his lower bodies to do what he wants. An Arhat is not especially enticed by physical sensual attractions/delights and worldly profits anymore since the material realm is the lowest realm of his existence that is no longer his primary sphere of residence. He identifies with his highest body as his self, and his lower bodies are like appendages. He or she does whatever they want without any special commitment to other human beings. They develop skills and talents according to their personal interests, whereas the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas do so in order to make their capabilities in special skills accumulate into a powerful force that can succeed in accomplishing goodness on a vast scale.

Bodhisattvas: The Bodhisattva, having attained one or more higher bodies, is an Arhat who then spends a great deal of time trying to help others in various ways that better the human condition. He or she believes their life and efforts should enrich the world in some way. They work on accomplishing personal vows, offerings, responsibilities, aims or missions they have voluntarily

¹⁰ See *Culture, Country, City, Company, Product, Person, Passion, World*.

chosen, and working on these Noble Aims is the road of Bodhisattva Yoga. Those vows set up an entire framework of actions, goals, mindsets, perspectives, and behaviors that they adopt as a personality in itself, and by committing themselves to their vows they become the antidote to pain, suffering and entropy in the world. Their goal is to improve the quality of people's lives. While free to leave projects at any time because their participation is voluntary, the Bodhisattvas don't abandon people but involve themselves with all sorts of compassionate activity (some of which constitutes just "hit and run" efforts) to help them and the world. They therefore live lives full of excellent deeds. In personal training, they try to master various skills and *dharmas*, taking upon themselves the road of Perfection-kaya to master chosen paths with excellence. They work to master various *dharmas*, excellences or skills such as various bodies of knowledge, personality characteristics, powers and functions. They try to learn how to proceed wisely according to principle in all activities (to do so with skillfulness and effectiveness for the result they want), which is Wisdom-kaya (the science of positive, effective action), and undertake to perfect their wisdom in order to accomplish great deeds and liberate beings from suffering. They try to become masters of preventing problems, solve problems at the root so they are eliminated, and devote themselves to creating flourishing states of happiness, harmonious peace, welfare, prosperity, abundance and well-being that remove suffering. Thus they try to become masters of the Greek concepts of *arête* (excellence or virtue), *phronesis* (practical and moral wisdom) and *eudaimonia* (human flourishing and prosperity). They master helpful intercession and influence by deed or presence in some form, which include active *nirmanakaya* projections, and this is Compassion-kaya. They work to always better perfect their character, views, perspectives, efforts (actions) and intentions. The Bodhisattvas focus on self-correction and active learning of what they must cultivate in themselves to move forward, trying always to rise above their basic animal nature. They try to transform their errant habits and transcend fixed traditions or prejudicial thoughts geared to narrow divisions of caste, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, creed (or any other such distinguishing characteristic) so that they can help all beings without prejudice. They start to practice skillfulness (expedient means) in thought, word, deed and appearance or demeanor, thus mastering their presence and functioning. They strive to detach from fixed concepts of morality and prejudices as well as rigid dogmas of purity or codes of conduct in order to flexibly contribute to the well-being and spirit of others. They see all errant situations as diseases that they aim to cure, and because diseases are not the same they recognize that remedies must vary according to the situation, and vow to master them all. They try to transcend all their current patterns of feeling and thinking to employ new and better ones, not being wed to any except what is best for the situation at hand as well as good for the intermediate-term and long-term too. They understand that as a conscious manifestation of the original essence they are basically a cosmic function or process that can choose its own activities, and work to master their skillfulness and intercession in the directions where they choose to intercede as saviors who improve lives and liberate beings from suffering. They find fulfillment not only in executing their vows but in associating with like-minded others committed to similar difficult tasks.

Buddhas: A Buddha is one who, having attained the higher bodies and presented now with the gift of a long life ahead and the many skills the bodies make available, takes upon himself permanent vows to accomplish long-term missions and aims. They take upon themselves a constancy of purpose, which then entails voluntary obligations of behavior. By taking on such responsibilities their life acquires meaning. They perform devotion (bhakti) to those aspirations, aims, principles and missions they wish to commit to and catalyze an identity by sacrificing themselves to undertakings that are so high in value that they are willing to pay a price of suffering to achieve them. Buddhas therefore become willing to permanently take upon themselves the sufferings and burdens of the world. They take the suffering of other beings upon themselves, swallowing poison like Shiva as well as insult, pain and criticism like Jesus and Maitreya, in order to relieve the bad conditions that affect others. Like a peacock that eats poisonous insects but as a result manifests glorious feathers in its body, they will assume troubles on purpose to produce beautiful results in return. Thus they will take upon themselves the burdens of the world and select roads fraught with difficulty and suffering in order

permanently improve situations for the better, such as by creating systems that automatically solve problems without their involvement. They create an identity for themselves through their self-determination. They know that any sufferings they assume will end in the long run, or be as dreams once they attain an even higher body and work the lower body as an appendage, so they know that the bag of troubles they hoist upon their shoulders as a burden is light because it is ultimately empty. Thus through their various bodies they demonstrate a fearlessness/courage of commitment and act without delay. Committed, they don't frighten of troublesome responsibilities but are willing to suffer to accomplish the tasks they have chosen because the goals are so meaningful, noble, worthwhile and fulfilling. Like a strong tree that grows roots and branches everywhere, they will take upon themselves a permanent presence in order to spread their influence, and strive to establish peace, prosperity, harmony and direction for all humanity. They try to model themselves on the ceaseless vitality of cosmic processes so that they can continue to maintain their compassionate commitment despite intermittent waves of weariness and fatigue during the ups and downs of events and circumstances. They have the potential to become like a cosmic function and so strive to become an unstoppable field of blessings that is like a force of nature. They exhibit the desire to help all men, and based upon their wisdom therefore manifest activities in response to the needs of men. They inspire people to take up the diligent cultivation that leads to spiritual liberation and which involves efforts of self-improvement, cooperation and collaboration with others, charitable activities, spiritual cultivation, and the promotion of culture and civilization. They teach individuals and societies how to behave and what they must cultivate, help to establish those conditions, teach all sorts of individuals and *dharma*s, support all sorts of projects to improve basic human conditions and the cosmos, try to make every situation better than how they found it, encourage others along the paths of virtue and achievement, and try to realize all aspects of God. They try to improve culture and civilization to improve people's quality of life and lifestyle so as to create the best possible life or living state for others. Although settled in the original nature, they never settle in one phenomenal state too long but make sure conditions always evolve forward and move ahead so that everyone progresses. Those at these upper stages are truly transcendental with unbelievable skills they've attained due to incredible practice efforts at self-improvement, and they enjoy exceedingly excellent states of sublimity.

Every higher spiritual body lives longer than the average human lifespan, so upon achieving the higher body attainments you must choose appropriate tasks, goals, aims, vows, responsibilities, commitments, or offerings to give your longer life purpose and meaning, which will be a reflection of your Compassion-kaya, Wisdom-kaya, and Perfection-kaya. Action-kaya, which is what you choose to do in the world/universe, is a result of discovering and then coming into balance with your own inner Why. People become vibrantly alive when they are authentic to their own beliefs and directly connect their life with their innermost dreams or strong sense of purpose. This is when their life truly becomes a heroic venture, and meaning is found in the doing.

While it is idealistic to assume that you can master all *dharma*s equally, in practice people will always be better at some things more than others when given a limited time. Therefore it is best to work at *specializing in some specific fields* of interest or help for others rather than trying to become a jack of all trades who is master of none. In the human world, large conglomerates that try to do everything are eventually broken up because they become unprofitable from the loss of purpose brought on by their sheer size. Specialization produces skills and most any talents can be learned, but the learning always requires a committed effort.

HEART SUTRA UNDERSTANDING¹¹

One needs to understand that your physical, subtle, Causal, Supra-Causal, Immanence body, and higher, are all essentially the pure fundamental essence, and the pure fundamental essence is not different from these bodies. It supports them, It permeates them, It is their inherent absolute substance.

In Buddhism it is said that the form, sensation conception, volition and consciousness skandhas are the original nature, and the original nature is the composition of these skandhas. The skandhas and the fundamental essence are not different from one another. You are these bodies because without a body you do not exist, but you are also essentially the original nature. It is you, you are It, and when you say “I” this is actually pointing at your self-nature, the original nature, your absolute fundamental self-essence.

Thus in one sense you cannot be termed as the five *skandhas*, bodies (*koshas*) or coverings, nor energy, nor any type of material essence, nor an agglomeration/collection of simples, nor the intersection of endless interdependent causes and conditions – you are just the original nature, and It is you. In another sense that is the apparent realm of ever-changing manifestation, you *are* essentially a limited mass of energy, bodies or simples within Shakti that has formed a temporary pattern that is always in transit because it is always transforming into something else. In another sense you are *nothing yourself* because you are an infinite interdependence of conditions without anything being there that is inherently yours or you, and from that sense you are then all of Shakti just as an iota of the ocean within it is the ocean. You are then all of existence, and part of the consciousness of that existence since it is your entire body. What about all the separate individual appearances you see? They are you.

Whether it be Shakti in total, or portions thereof – the objects/phenomena of the universe, including you, have different forms, names and functions but every one is not essentially different from the one primordial substratum.

The manifestation of All is in One, the One original nature is in All, the All melts into a single whole, and there are no divisions in the totality of reality. Phenomena are all defined by infinite interpenetration, an infinite crisscrossing of simultaneous cause and effect relations that originate (produce) phenomena via innumerable co-dependent arisings. They are all defined by dependent origination and all are characterized by emptiness, which is the lack of an inherent self-so separate nature. This means that essentially you are the full body of the manifest universe – the All – or you are ultimately bodiless, birthless and imperishable since you are the fundamental essence.

What is there therefore to fear? You now know what you are and have the freedom to move in any direction because no one binds you. The only obstacle is circumstances, namely cause and effect relationships, that might provide you with obstructions but which also can be overcome through wisdom, skillfulness and perseverance. So celebrate your life with joy and make of it whatever you wish, to go in whatever direction you want, to accomplish or experience whatever you desire. However, you must also recognize that for your pursuit the laws of cause and effect that define Shakti can limit outcomes and provide obstacles to your gratification. Nevertheless, you are Shiva, you are Shakti, so become of yourself whatever light you want the world to see. Make the connection with your potential and work towards it until it becomes real for you. Barriers that block your aspirations can be eventually overcome to create or accomplish whatever you continually exert

¹¹ See the *Heart Sutra* of Buddhism, *Avadhuta Gita of Dattreya Avadhuta* (translated by Swami Chetananda), and *Astavakra Samhita* (translated by Swami Nityaswarupananda) which contains approximately the same message.

yourself towards, so aim high and work to develop whatever you want because no one ultimately blocks you.

At the heart of all things is the original essence, the true substance of everything, the fundamental substrate, the core inherent nature. It is thus said, “There are many bodies but their governor is one.” Similarly, “the universe appears as manifold but there is a single intuition as its soul.”

All beings and bodies are equally the True Self, *your* True Self. All bodies and phenomena are equally aspects of It. Therefore, all things and beings are an aspect of *you* because you are the universal Self. As a drop of the ocean of Shakti therefore you *are* also Shakti since Shakti is one body – and being conscious you are part of the aggregate consciousness of Shakti. In a sense you can say that the universe is truly alive, one being with consciousness since most of its animate nature is its body, and some parts of it have consciousness that in net aggregate are its consciousness. As with other sentient beings, your brothers and sisters, you have the miracle of consciousness that allows you to guide phenomena within the All – you can transform your body of Shakti - to produce anything desired so that you can experience an absence of suffering, joy, happiness, bliss and lucidity if you choose to cultivate the conditions necessary to experience those states of consciousness. Insentient universal phenomena, which Christianity calls “darkness,” are incapable of comprehension but you have illumination.

That being the case, with your higher capabilities do you not have an obligation to help make situations better for your brothers and sisters, such as by improving their circumstances to relieve their sufferings and hardships when you can? They are you, so of course you should make efforts to help yourself. Or, you can think about it in terms of doing for others in terms of helpfulness what you would want done for yourself, especially when you have the ready resources to render assistance.

Within the realm of Shakti, you own absolutely nothing, can hold on to absolutely nothing, and can guarantee absolutely nothing because you are defined by bigger conditions that wrap around you and define your existence. But you can learn to create, control and improve conditions for your own purposes even though you are actually nothing but a part of nature, a functioning process within Shakti that has existence only because of Shakti’s totality. Lacking a self-so nature, a real inherent separate I that can establish an independent existence apart from Shakti, a separation from being Shakti, you are just one of its transforming processes that has originated because of its totality. Being produced because of the totality of Shakti, therefore you have a role to play. Your role is that you can create conditions. You can master the changes of phenomena to produce new states you want due to the fact that you possess something we call consciousness. What is it you want to see in the world as a source of light for others?

Although you yourself are a phenomenon in equality with all others, you possess a special characteristic called consciousness that has come along with your existence. It can produce a world of qualities and flowing experience within a mind-stream that is just a bunch of bioelectrical flickerings. Those bioelectrical flickerings, those subtle vibrations, manifest as thoughts, speech and action that change conditions in the universe. They manifest as your personal experience. Because of your pattern of construction – which is an agglomeration of simples and energy wrapped by a blanket of infinite surrounding conditions that interpenetrate you – your mind-stream is definitely formed via some often errant processes that also embody limitations whereas there is so much more outside of it.

It is unfortunate that we easily get distracted by those bioelectrical flickerings and become entangled with insignificant whims and desires rather than stay centered in our clear witnessing awareness that is our very beingness of conscious existence. To get lost within the stream of consciousness is a poor strategy for your existence since it never allows you to gain a true independence of thought but

simply keeps you bound to the momentum of the thought-stream like a mechanical robot destined to follow the karma of causes and conditions automatically because he cannot step out of the fray. This strategy can never produce real satisfaction, contentment, true rest or blissful peace. If you are going to pursue joy and happiness for your self, why not by working to transform conditions for the better that will improve the mental states for your larger self-being Shakti that has infinite consciousnesses within it?

All things are transformations of Shakti, which comes from the original nature, so this is what you ultimately are. This is your substance, your inner being, your unchanging true existence. You are conditionally defined within it, an intersection of infinite conditions coming together spanning the past and present. Also, being the original nature you were never born and will never die. You are pure existence itself and are free to chart any course you want in the universe because consciousness gives you that functional ability. That right comes with consciousness. What will you do with it?

You can accomplish any vows, missions, purposes, objectives, goals, aims, responsibilities or offerings you therefore choose, and there will always be consequences to your actions in the field of Shakti, the realm of manifestations. Why not take the chance to be worthy of life? Why not be a light to the world that you want it to see? You are in a great game that never ends and can choose to make your participation as worthwhile as you want. It is inevitable that you must adopt a mindset of never-ending, continuous self-improvement and self-perfection and develop an intrinsic motivation that turns into your own personal vows or purposes for your existence. Everyone should come to believe that their life, their work, their existence is enriching the world in some way. You need only point your consciousness in that direction of development and then start work on creating the light you want others to see in the world so that you leave golden footprints everywhere. As simply an agglomeration of simples or conditions, you must define your own purpose for existence.

You are a living object with consciousness, and thus can change your properties and develop volitional control over your behavior. You can change both your characteristics, properties, traits or aspects as well as your functioning, activity, behavior and development or evolution. You can do this while insentient objects cannot and living beings with lower levels of consciousness cannot either. You are a person, an animal sentient being, who can use higher consciousness to master the changes of phenomena, and with that ability can bring about better states of being for yourself and others. Although conditioned to think and behave in certain ways, consciousness gives you the ability to change your habits and behavior so you can learn new skills or Knowledge that lets you accomplish goals and vows of your choosing. Your lived space is a physical material body composed of condensed energy that has the potential to release from within itself the sheaths of four higher transcendental bodies, *koshas* or *skandhas* through the process of spiritual cultivation. Your lived flesh is thus an embodied organism that has the potential within it of four higher transcendental bodies that can be generated out of its matrix. Once liberated, these higher bodies that are closer in essence to the original nature will each reside in higher planes and have various energetic powers over lower realms, including the ability to help people in various ways if you exercise kindness and compassion. Within all this, you are actually a mereological collection of simples in composition (atoms, muons, form elements, etcetera) lacking anything that is inherently a separate self-so distinctive you, and your transient pattern just happens to produce the great miracle of consciousness. With the great gift of consciousness, imperfect as it is, you can experience a world of qualities in your mind-stream that you can learn to master for advantages such as the altering of conditions. You can use the sentience of your ever-changing pattern to experience or accomplish whatever conditions or missions you wish in the universe, and need only decide what is meaningful and worthwhile as your purpose or aspiration before applying your will in those directions. You are essentially a patterned agglomeration that has appeared as the nodal intersection of infinite cause and effect conditions. In being only the intersection of infinite interdependent conditions *without anything that is inherently you*, you essentially are actually nothing yourself at all, and thus are inherently empty of self-so existence. Your

appearance is just the intersection of conditions, so you are nothing that is your own, nothing at all. Being empty of any pattern of inherent existence, thus you are actually free to become whatever you like and will transform according to your conditioning such as wherever you put your own self-development efforts. You are also Shakti, but since you have consciousness you are therefore the consciousness of Shakti with the right to manipulate your greater body of Shakti in endless transformations via mastery of your “individual body” that produces thought, word and deed. Whether you are considered all of Shakti or just a part of Shakti, your real nature transcends the patterned collection of simples that composes your construction within the realm of Shakti. You are inherently the original nature, ultimately free of birth and death, conditions and karmic formations yet able to give birth to all things and transformations. You are free to grow, develop and evolve in whatever ways you wish; you are free to become whatever way you wish; you are free to act in whatever way you wish; you are free to work at achieving whatever you wish. Being at your foundational level just the empty, pure, undifferentiated original nature, at that ultimate level there is the annihilation or extinction of personhood, entityness, selfhood, or individual beingness. At the ultimate level there is just the True Self, your true-I, your absolute self-nature. Thus, this is what you ultimately are. And yet you are an appearance that has somehow arisen/developed out of exactly that, and have consciousness of your existence, so there isn’t really any such thing for you as ultimate annihilation or extinction. You are the formless original nature, and when It expresses Itself that is you. The small-you that you are is It, and is also Shakti.

You are therefore neither a non-existence nor real existence (you are not the spotless absolute nature because you have an apparent existence, but it is not an inherent existence so it isn’t a real existence but a transient existence produced because of intersecting conditions), and thus “neither real nor non-real.” You just don’t have selfhood in the way you typically imagined it, in the way you were conditioned to expect. You have apparent existence with consciousness along with an inherently equanimous and blissful nature due to being the original essence, which is like unchanging empty space. If you cultivate you can also experience a bliss of peacefulness in your body and mind, and act to bring bliss to others. So you are neither entirely formless nor of form, neither with thought nor without thought, neither real nor non-real, being nor non-being. You are all of existence and the separate appearances you see are therefore you, part of your body that you can influence in various ways. Other phenomena that you see are not the same as you in conditions yet are not different from you in entity/essence.

To realize this and center yourself in this realization is the highest achievement. To stand apart from falling into either emptiness or thought, to be detached from either emptiness or thought is the highest mode of being and existence you can achieve. That being so, be courageous in life to take active steps to become what you want to become and achieve what you want to achieve in life. Be fearless and move ahead. Work towards achieving a personal ideal you set including self-perfection, self-achievement, personal excellence and well-being.

This is the enlightenment view – you are a sentient being, an object or process with consciousness, a set of bodies, a collection of simples, the intersection of conditions with no self inside them, the entirety of Shakti, the original nature, and neither pure being nor not-being – this analysis of what you ultimately are is the view of enlightenment. Realizing these facts is considered self-realization, realizing what you are. Understanding this is realizing your self-nature.

All Buddhas come into the world in order to enable sentient beings to realize their self-nature, to understand what is their true self-nature as you have just been told. Afterwards, beings must arouse the courage within their consciousness to start mastering conditions to accomplish and achieve what they want. Buddhas come into the world in order to enable sentient beings to tread the pathway of culture, civilization, cultivation, conduct and dharma that leads them to higher existences within their own environment or more transcendental planes where beings devote their efforts to make things

better for all. They come on account that they want sentient beings to awaken to the view of the Buddhas and take upon themselves similar purposes, vows and commitments, and so they come into the world. They want to enable sentient beings to attain the higher transcendental bodies of enlightenment, to produce a better world for themselves and others, and so they come into the world.

From the standpoint of the original nature there is nothing else in existence other than just Itself just as ornaments of gold are nothing but gold and a jar of clay is only clay. From the perspective of gold there is no such thing as a (gold) necklace because there is only gold (there). Thus, there is no such thing as cause and effect, dependent arising, manifoldness (manifestations of phenomena), production or destruction, laws of physics, living beings, consciousness and thoughts, holy teachings, stages of life, a path to enlightenment, wisdom, karma, suffering, attainments, codes of conduct and so on. There is only the original nature present that is absent of all these appearances. Within Shakti there is no definite thing either; there is only neutral scintillating energy without good or bad, virtue or evil. There is no soul, *atman* or entity who cultivates, no one who is released from bondage, no one who transmigrates through reincarnation ... there is only Shakti transforming in various ways without separate individual self-so patterns. Or, you can say that the apparent living beings are just *Purusha* in Its various forms that delusionally seem bound, released or transmigrating.

There is only the fundamental substrate rather than its evolutions. Ultimately then, there is no master nor student, no teachings nor self-realization. There is no state of virtue and no state of vice, no state of bondage, no state of liberation, no coming and no going, no change and transformation. There are absolutely no modifications within *Purusha* the fundamental essence.

Then again, within the world of Shakti these all exist in a conventional sense. Our mind names and labels these things for identification purposes. Thus, you can say they are neither truly existent nor non-existent.

From the aspect of the foundational substratum you can say Its purity means It has no cause or effect, is free from cause and effect, transcends cause and effect, is beyond the relationships of cause and effect, cause and effect do not truly exist, cause and effect are ultimately empty, and so on. Imagine if the entire universe was just empty space alone with nothing inside it. In that case, where would there be cause and effect? There would just be an endless void of nothingness – nothing at all.

However, in the conventional realm of manifestation there is indeed cause and effect. Thus you can say that there is interdependent origination, simultaneous co-arising. Conventionally, there are better apparent states of being that you can bring into existence for yourself and others, so why not do so? Why not create states absent of suffering but full of joy, bliss and well-being for all?

For us, appearances (forms and phenomena, including life and consciousness) certainly *do exist*. You cannot say they *ultimately exist* as inherent truths, but only conventionally exist as empirical truths that are only temporarily true but not really real in the sense of never changing. Why are you then attached to inferior states of being rather than choosing to move ahead in the conventional realm and make things better for yourself and others? Our task to live, survive and thrive is to master conventional states of existence. We must master our consciousness that experiences them, and use it to master the conditions themselves to bring about what we need or desire.

Phenomena do not exist in the entirely pure foundational substance for within It there is only Itself. However, phenomena appear in the unreal, non-self-so, transitory realm of causality that lacks inherent existence, and only because you have a mind. Without a mind, to you as an insentient phenomenon nothing exists, and so nothing does exist. With a mind you carve out a world within Shakti and identify meaningful patterns when the realm of Shakti is really only a realm of disorder

without inherent self-so patterns. Without a mind there is only the undifferentiated mass of Shakti containing no differences or distinctions, no multiplicities of any type. The patternless realm of Shakti, chaos, is not even really chaos but is just inherent emptiness.

Even though we have a mind, phenomena never really appear to us in all their dimensions either because we are limited by what we can see, feel, hear and so on. Due to the lack of extra senses, and the limitations of our imperfect sense organs, you always experience the world incompletely and incorrectly. You experience the world conditionally according to the limitations of your sense organs and mental processing capabilities, which produce a simplified map of the outside world you build inside your brain that also involves additional subjective factors you have added to the picture that are not under your voluntary control.

What you experience as the world with qualities is only an illusion within your mind. Your approximation of reality is inaccurate because it lacks details, and it becomes biased and prejudiced when you further add likes and dislikes, desires, interests and preferences onto the simplified image, but this is the nature of consciousness. Consciousness is what it is, so there is no use complaining about it. There is just the task of mastering what you've got. You must work with what you have without complaint for nature has produced this capability in you along with its limitations. There's no fretting about the limitations and inaccuracies of consciousness because that's what consciousness is. You can only correct it, improve it and work to master it.

Through consciousness you know the world via constructed images, and thus you never directly perceive reality. The worldview you create of qualities isn't real but just an approximate illusion that works for you and is conventional for other humans as well because they share a similar anatomical structure that produces a similar form of consciousness and internal stimulation.

Phenomena appear as wavering illusions in space, constantly changing and ultimately ungraspable. Not being changeless, they are fundamentally unreal, inherently unreal. They don't exist in the way they appear to be. They appear due to conditions, meaning only because there are conditions that produce them, and so in being dependent on conditions they do not ultimately exist in some fundamental inherent way. They have no self-so natures of an independent existence. However, they do exist non-transcendentally (conventionally) for as long as they do exist, which is always fleetingly momentary since they are ultimately transitory. Why not learn to become a master of them and guide their possible changes to more auspicious states of being? Even if ultimately unreal, what we take for reality and experience as reality is to us reality, so why not master the changes of the reality we experience? After all, conventionality is the only thing that ultimately matters, not the original nature, because this is our *conscious existence*, and without consciousness we are insentient existence in some form or another that is ultimately the same as extinction or annihilation. That is not the bliss posited by *nirvana* or Advaita Vedanta, for such bliss of unmoving, unperturbed peacefulness is meaningless without a mind. No-thought is equivalent to nothingness and non-existence rather than salvation. So why not choose a positive purpose that improves situations for everyone, and guide people on how to better their lives and prosper on earth? Why not help bring that about?

You cannot say phenomena don't exist, but you cannot say that they exist as "inherent realities" (non-changing ultimate entities with an independent self-so nature) either. They are all conditionally defined through an infinite number of interconnections with physical laws, environmental conditions, and so forth. But, their changeability gives you a freedom – the potential to change any conditions you encounter for the better. This is the key to eliminating suffering in the world and for yourself and others.

Although you perceive a universe of objects, what you are actually perceiving is the original essence alone. Actually, nothing but Itself pervades It. The name "universe" is superimposed on It, but what

we call the “universe” or “Shakti” or “The Logos” or “All” is really nothing but the original essence. Thus you can say that the original nature is neither with attributes nor without attributes. You cannot say It is pure (without phenomena). You cannot say It is impure since the phenomenal appearances don’t really exist inherently and are actually It. Although stationary, untransforming, and unmoving without activity you cannot say It is inert because phenomena have somehow arisen.

This is all summarized in the *Heart Sutra* of Buddhism, but few people understand that this is its meaning. The basic idea is that phenomena don’t inherently exist but only apparently exist, in a conditional way, and only known because of consciousness that constructs them in the nature of a dream, and that dream is not really a true thing called consciousness that transcends Shakti. Consciousness is itself just another component of Shakti that we conventionally call consciousness when it really isn’t any such true “transcending the material world” function, and thus it is also phenomenal insentience though it represents sentience.

The original nature is the one true reality and existence – single, beginningless, eternal, imperishable, bodiless, infinite, omnipresent, all-pervading, immaculate, pure, indivisible, uninterrupted, unchanging, and without phenomenal stain. Yet appearances somehow arise within It, but from the standpoint of the original nature there is nothing else at all except Itself. Should your mind not try to be like your fundamental self-nature that is fundamentally peaceful but free, able to produce conventional reality? Can your mind be like the original nature that lets phenomena/appearances arise without interrupting them? That freedom and bliss is the state we want to experience through meditation.

If you can give up all mental craving like the original nature you can become blissful, happy and free. The True Reality is blissful, peaceful, tranquil, and devoid of sufferings caused by any agency. It is untouched by the grief and misery of the world, free from passion, jealousy, hatred and the rest. Can you practice so that your mind is like this? After all, you are not an inherent being, ego, self or life but a construction of the original nature that has illusory consciousness that is actually an insentient process. In the highest sense there is no individual that suffers, commits karmic deeds, attains *nirvana* and brings things to perfection. There is no doer of deeds. You can say that within Shakti there are deeds and *nirvana* but there is no individual who attains it. This is the principle put forth within the *Diamond Sutra*. And yet conventionally we exist, an agglomeration or collection of molecules and energy in action that produce consciousness.

The primordial essence, the ultimate universal ground, is by nature equanimous, stationary, blissful and free. So should be your consciousness, but it should not be held still and thought-less but be allowed to enjoy wonderful mental states just as the original nature has given birth to the wonder of Shakti. Non-existence, insentience, nothingness, no-thought, emptiness are not the path.

Because the mind should be free, one of the principles for operating it properly is that we should not desperately try to cling to impermanent phenomena as unchanging because this will only create mental suffering. Phenomena are a mass of interlocking conditions/inter-relationships following one another in an unbroken succession until they sufficiently change and transform into something else. The only thing unchanging and eternal is the original nature, empty of phenomena like boundless space.

You can say that phenomena are one and the same as the original nature, or that they are the original nature, or that they are essentially the original nature, or they are inherently the original nature, or permeated by the original nature, are ultimately empty, or they don’t truly exist or inherently exist in some fundamental way and so on. Some religions simply say that the attributes or operations of God are identical with His essence, and we are creations of this immortal essence that is able to experience something of the divine.

Men are free to arrange phenomena as they deem fit within the universe although the results of their actions will always be bound to the rules of causality. All things are bound to the net of causation that orders phenomena in the Shakti cosmos, thus ruling them. Causality structures the infinite network of apparent existence, which is why it is called origination through dependence. The realm of causality binds the field of emanations, but not the original nature, so the Great Learning for a sentient being is learning how to master the field of manifestations to gain any results desired – whether they be *Artha*, *Kama*, status within dominance hierarchies, relationships, health, peace of mind and so on. This requires the pursuit of wisdom and skillfulness. This is what you should be pursuing in life, and in particular you should be learning how to cultivate the transcendental bodies that provide you with a better, longer-lived existence in more pleasant realms with many more capabilities. To successfully cultivate this outcome requires virtue and merit, learning and wisdom, and then practice effort.

Since phenomena appear *for us* (because we have minds) we must learn how to master them in every situation if we wish to live better lives with less suffering. The transitory nature of conventional reality, rather than the ultimate reality that is unchangeable, means that there is always the hope and chance for change to occur within situations, for they must ultimately change, and our job as beings with consciousness is to learn how to produce more fortuitous states for ourselves, others and the future through those possible changes. Because phenomena are transitory and change this gives us the opportunity for altering phenomena for the better. If phenomena were not transitory but fixed, then no conditions could ever change because everything would be obstructed by everything and we could not improve ourselves, evolve or advance our fortunes.

Without doing anything, the original essence sustains the whole universe. As the universal support, It is essentially the ultimate Doer of all things that acts without acting. Armed with all this true knowledge, this *prajna* transcendental wisdom of understanding, recognize that now is the time for you to also become an active doer yourself.

In summary, the original nature is neither impure nor pure; It is empty of everything and yet contains emanations, manifestations or appearances. It is neither all/everything nor none/nothing. It has neither increase nor decrease, did not come into being and is not going anywhere. It was never born and will never die, and does not come from anywhere or anything and go anywhere or transform into anything different. It is devoid of above and below, an interior and exterior. It is eternal and everlasting, immutable, dependable and true. Somehow Shakti, or samsara, has appeared within It and all emerging entities compose themselves within the all-encompassing Shakti of manifestation. Nevertheless, “Brahman is everything and everything is Brahman,” everything is fundamentally the original nature. Even so, if you say that “Maya/samsara does not exist,” its appearance and *your life* is there in front of you, so this isn’t true. Of course, if you say that “Maya/samsara *really does inherently* exist” then how can that be so in a realm of infinite change affecting everything where nothing stays but only appears in the nature of a dream?

Shakti and the original nature together constitute the entire universe, which is the fundamental nature in absolute essence. Everything is ultimately empty, lacking an inherent and independent self-so nature, and what you experience of phenomena is like a dream or illusion called consciousness that approximates its appearance. Despite deceptive appearances, the only thing ever really present is the permanent original nature that is the transcendental, metaphysical, spiritual truth while Shakti is the apparent truth.

That is your True Self, your true self-nature, your primordial self-essence and It is the primordial universal ground. In Buddhism It is often called Emptiness to denote that it lacks phenomena and is purely Itself – nameless Aloneness. We can create whatever we want using consciousness starting

from nothing (emptiness), so the lesson is to be confident and courageous to celebrate life and make great art!

So do great things! Put fear aside and grab the reigns of fearlessness. Be bold and creative to take great risks, but temper your courage with prudence. Create wonder for the world! Everything you see is nothing but the Self, and it is the Self in everything you see and experience, so be courageous and withdraw from nothing. Become fearless like the original nature. Choose what you want to accomplish in the universe and then start working towards achieving that. You can. Start from now.

Our fundamental nature is without fear. In freedom and boldness It has given birth to all things that will continue transforming in endless ways throughout eternity. Can you not imitate the courageous, blissful outpouring of your fundamental essence? Of course you can for that is what you are! You need to determine what personal Dream has value that exteriorizes/expresses your sense of life purpose, meaning, aliveness, mission, fulfillment or direction. You determine what you will make of yourself. You are the one who determines how you will develop and what you will develop in the conditionally-built realm of Shakti. Life runs on the principle of causality and can go in any direction you want when you start putting in the effort. Your choices and actions will therefore determine the direction and outcome of your life.

Since you are essentially *The One*, what then is a high, overarching mission worthy of being pursued by you? What is worthy of your life? The answer is to be the light you want to see in the world, to be a source of positivity to the world, to aim in the direction you want your life to go, to become the Buddha you want to be. Imagine who you could be and then aim single-mindedly in becoming that. Talk like that person, dress like that person, act like that person, think like that person, practice being that person until you become that person and do what that person should be doing.

From the aspect of emanations there are uncountable phenomena in the cosmos, including other living beings with minds within Shakti who, because of their own possession of consciousness can generate thoughts, perceptions, feelings and memories like you. They can know aspiration, joy, achievement, bliss, and fulfillment. Without a mind you are just another insentient portion of Shakti, but because of a mind that can think and know you can cultivate higher bodies, higher vows and higher abilities to accomplish whatever you want in the universe. What goals are worthy of you as you can essentially live forever in some form or another? You are essentially the undying original nature and can cultivate in any direction you choose.

Your thoughts and actions interact with all other living beings, so start learning how to bring the best to all situations and start doing so. Grab hold of the process of causality and do something wondrous while evolving towards transcendence. Be at your best, be the light you want others to see, the Dream within yourself that reconnects you to your greater transcendental Self and the joy you want to see in the world everywhere. What is it that can be your most significant imprint? Make a vow to become that Buddha or Bodhisattva and start upon the requisite pathway of learning, practice, merit-making, virtue accumulation and cultivation Yoga.

ARHAT YOGA