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Viveka-Zandtao

The Theory and Practice of Solitude

Viveka (Pali word) - Viveka can be translated 'utmost aloneness, perfect singleness, complete solitude.' [[Happiness and Hunger p30](#)].

Preamble One of the few from my past mentioned hearing Stephen Batchelor

on a podcast "[On Being with Krista Tippett](#)". I had come across Stephen because he was interested in going beyond dogma but had not engaged with his writing as he was well-read and philosophical; I was into the beyond dogma. Later on facebook a Buddhadasa Chatuchak post from [[Happiness and Hunger](#)] spoke of Viveka. Somehow I got into the book [Art of Solitude](#) - a comfortable read and this Viveka-Zandtao started. With my increasing personal solitude coinciding with Covid isolation and personal MAWP segregation, I started with my own experience of solitude, and then bounced off quotes from Stephen's book about solitude (ignoring what is not solitude - no value or slight given or intended by this).

Surprisingly bouncing off the Art of Solitude and journeying from the known to the unknown produced a well-rounded consolidation of solitude leading me into a two-part investigation of the theory and practice of solitude, the practice being how I respond to [Bob Kull's book](#). It then took me into quest.

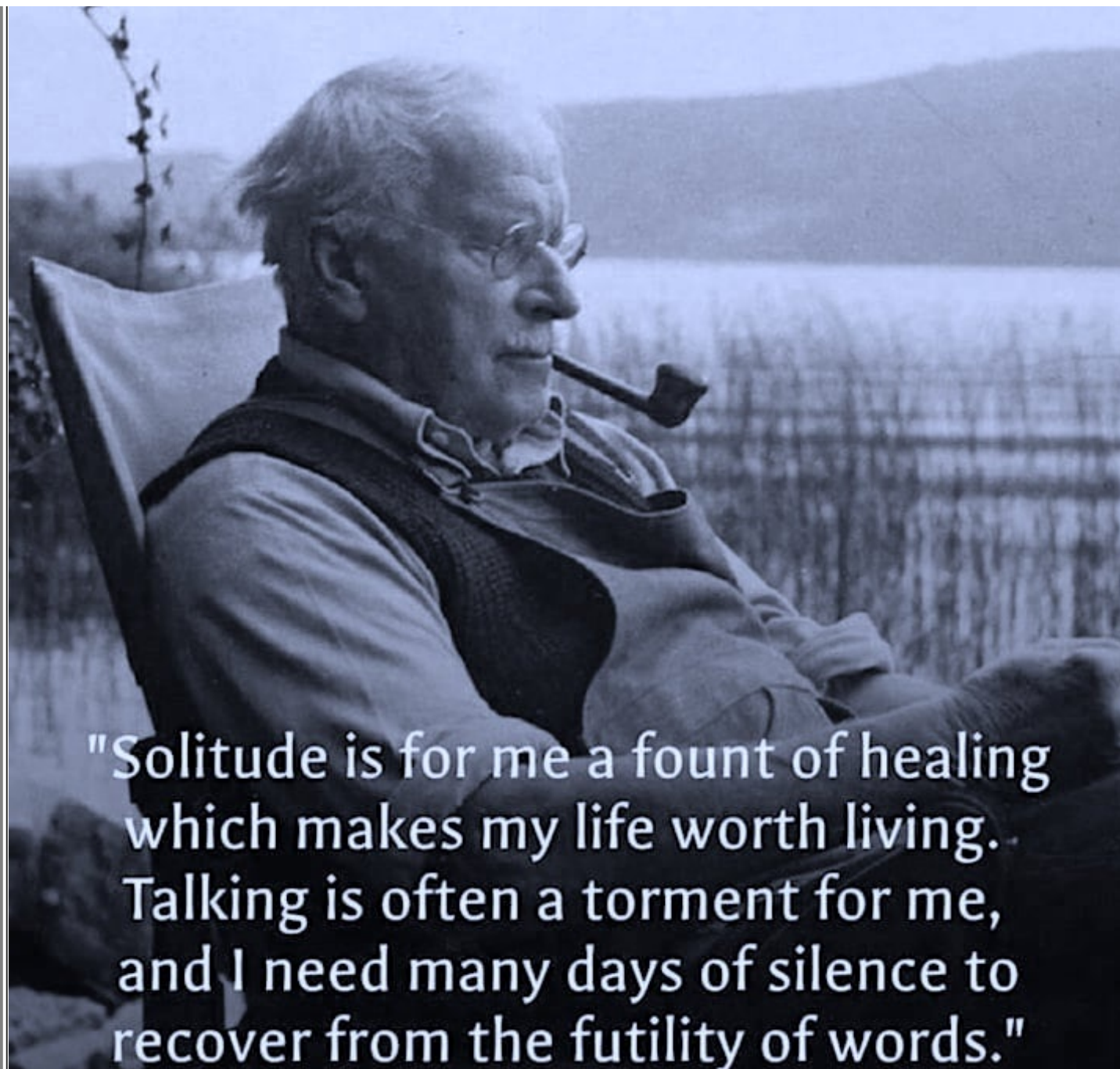
This is a seriously unfair way of writing. The style started with [Pirsig](#) and seemed to work well with his Chautauqua; but these writers, Stephen and

Bob, are writing about spirit - not philosophy. Examining and expanding on detail has no intention of criticism. Their thoughtful approach opens doors for me to investigate and comment. There is so much wise content of theirs that I ignore - quite simply because it is so complete there is nothing to write, nothing to bounce off. This approach is meant to be humble but if someone took details in my writing examined and expanded them I am not sure how I would take it. But intention is what counts. I can see why people stick to the suttas - no vulnerability but a journey into solitude in real life seems to me to have so much more to offer. I hope there is interest and learning in this enquiry.

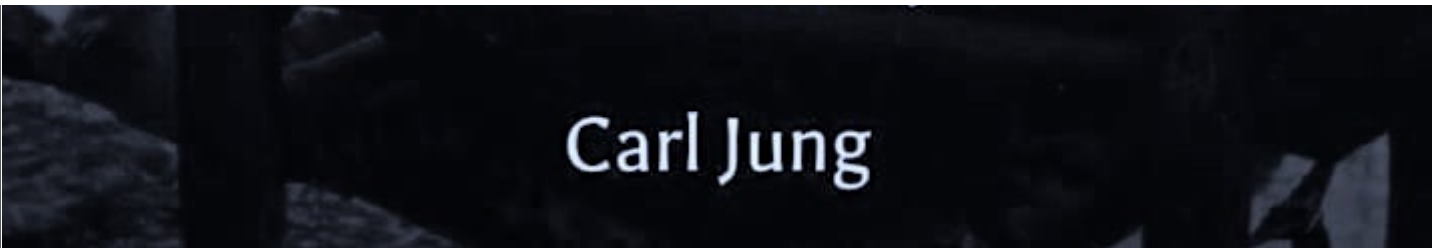
[Note - my eBook reader reckons [Stephen's book](#) has 255 pages, that is what my page references refer to. My reader reckons [Bob Kull's book](#) has 891 pages.]

The Theory of Solitude





"Solitude is for me a fount of healing which makes my life worth living. Talking is often a torment for me, and I need many days of silence to recover from the futility of words."



Carl Jung

Banging on Life has always been alone, fortunately never unhappily alone. As a child and teenager there was alone amongst schoolfriends and alone pounding the streets of my hometown, a completely non-descript suburb of Manchester - what I see it had going for it was the middle-class education and safeness (but only one view). For me the words spiritually-alone and despairingly-lonely are the two ends of the spectrum of solitude, the height of aloneness would be the voidness Buddhadasa describes as being at home with the three vivekas (solitudes – physical, mental and spiritual) [Happiness and Hunger p30]. And the loneliness of despair is just so difficult to conceive of – to drive some people to suicide? My conception is limited, the heart goes out to anyone who is in such an awful predicament; would that we lived in a world that cared – that had compassion?

Batchelor opens his [book](#) with Wordsworth being in bliss at being alone contrasting a despair in hell. It seems a tautology to say that blisses have occurred when alone – conceiving of a social activity that can bring the level of bliss that a harmonised mind touching the muse or sunnata could attain seems an impossibility. But my life experience is limited especially when reading of Stephen's journey; maybe [Ch 6](#) [p47] on peyote is a not-alone bliss? UK life was reasonably well explored until 40, travelling for 14 years opened the mind the way travel does, and retiring to contemplative bliss in Thailand seems a fitting end (described amidst my path in the [Pathtivist Trilogy](#)). But describing current life contentment as bliss is being way too poetic (Wordsworth-like?), but as Buddhadasa might say from his just-quoted piece "I/we hunger for nothing so is there a greater happiness?" Equally conceiving of ongoing bliss 24/7 seems unnatural although what is now experienced as normal and daily might well have been seen as ecstatic when first starting on the path.

The teenage loneliness was lacking in emotion. There was definitely no connection to the world of bliss whose experiences have since enveloped

being at times, but equally there was no despair. If there is a word to describe a neutrality of loneliness/aloneness (the centre of the spectrum) as the sameness of the suburban streets blurred consciousness that word would be appropriate, but such a possible definition is neutral – neutral walking. Walking also extended to the Mersey, and thanks to teachers the Peaks and Pennines, but there was no soul blossoming amongst such natural beauty – even that appreciation was little more than neutral. But there is such gratitude to the experience of beauty that seeded later natural understanding, involvement – even immersion.

For this time of neutrality there was never a choosing. One thing our appalling miseducation system can provide is a place to hide amongst peers. In this there was another neutrality, there was neither popularity nor bullying - there were just peers, friend-images (NPC). There was a friend at 17 and 18 but that could have gone so wrong - a pleasant person but

My worst period of loneliness – the nearest to the despair end of the spectrum that was reached – occurred after uni in the start of the middle-class job route.

After uni there was Clapham bedsit land. A kind old lady offered space in her house, and there was just misery of enforced loneliness; coming to London, just work, no NPC (non-player characters) to surround me, just misery, fear of being alone – even fear of drinking alone. Luckily it was brief, a work colleague said share a flat, and there was the peer, the image of friendship; how did he put up with me? World of work was a failure, barely surviving the sack in the first job and justifiably sacked in the second; what was required there meant nothing to me. But unlike academia being surrounded by so many NPC's and minimal requirements, this work-world needed discipline, and for that there was no desire. Eventually the drink became dominant leading to the sack – not sacked for drunkenness though.

Fortunately that sacking was the beginning of what was described as upheaval in the Trilogy, and there was the beginning of aloneness, the positive aloneness that Batchelor describes throughout the Art of Solitude. Working from then on there were always colleagues – and when working overseas colleagues were colleague-friends, and for some of the adult time (described as second childhood) I did not live alone. But work was not the

authentic me, even though at the time of upheaval the pro-tem authentic choice of 30 years was compassionate work and not a dedicated spiritual journey. This compassionate work grew increasingly more distant from the path – never too far except for the drink, and when that distance was too much early retirement eventually led to the deeper authentic aloneness that is now life.

Following upheaval independent freedom was integral to my life, but with age there was an increasing need for space. A younger social life was barely disguised alcoholism, and once that need for alcohol was lost being sociable was difficult. Colleagues were not into the path, without drink social conversation mattered little, and gatherings became increasingly uncomfortable. Now there are none. What took the form of social conversation with MAWPs ended up being the defence of socialism against the right whose self-righteousness and arrogance demanded agreement. The freedom people could not allow my freedom to think.

This aloneness did not make me difficult to work with (I hope). Because

work was accepted as path to some degree - because of compassion, work was dedicated – although a separate space from work was almost an addiction. Even if nothing was done in the space, infringement was fought vitally – without space work was overbearing; this was helped by formal meditation later in life. Mind you, meditation is of course an alone activity. In truth writing this is because aloneness and the path are companions, how can it not be that way at least some of the time? But unlike Stephen I have never lived in a monastery, and retreats are not a regular part of life.

Solitude and love must be compatible - there must be balance, without love there can be no comfort in solitude. Do we know about our love? An important aspect of our path is knowing our love. Love has to be lived. Moving from a search for personal love to comfort in solitude was a lover's journey. Throughout engaging in personal love spirit and entrapment were in conflict, but that could just have been personal choice. Love is freedom. There cannot be restriction in romantic love, I feel such empathy for that girl's conditioning being destabilised. Can love not be restrictive for life? How can such power and passion not restrict the other? Only life and learning

can give answers to this. For Thay there were the 4 Brahma-Viharas, what he calls the 4 Qualities of True Love; there is harmony in this love and solitude. And there is love of nature.

And there is the question of solitude and social responsibility – or better Gaia responsibility. There is nothing in solitude that says there cannot be activism but this activism is built from the path that shows itself more clearly in solitude. It does not mean the action is some egoic Hollywood hero - person against machine, social action is community-based and works through collective action and community organisations. But the path brings with it a recognition of complete disenchantment with prevailing social systems that are controlled by the 1%, many responses to the 1%-satrapy grow out of aversion and conditioning. Solitude makes this clearer as the only ego to be confronted is your own, and it is far more difficult to hide delusion in solitude. And solitude brings with it truth, it is far harder to hide the defilements that are the source of lies. Solitude brings truth at all costs.

Finding Solitude – there is little of the magic of Stephen's finding solitude,

nor was there a knowledge of purpose that could take orders at 21 (?) – a time of drink and ignorance at uni. But solitude was learned in a tenement cottage in a village, possibly near Baissy-Thy in Belgium. A personal connection was made with a Belgian teacher who was gracious and took me around, a house 5 km from the cottage, a party in Brussels, days in the Ardennes. What was he met with? Ingratitude, shameful ingratitude. All that mattered was raw newness to the path and firstgrace; courtesy was nowhere – now there is shame why was I not grateful then? Feeble excuse – 23 years old

But solitude was learnt. Solitude in nature was learnt in the forest of the Ardennes, but solitude in the cottage was longer. There is little memory of the cottage buiding itself. A neighbour complaining that the beautiful village was spoiled by an overgrown garden at the front. A room that was never reclaimed from the spiders. Most meals were cooked but there is no recalled image of a kitchen; shopping - a backpack, and an hour's walk to a supermarket and back.

But there was being with solitude. Simple basic daily routines creating

structure but having no substance. And writing, learning through writing. There was no choice of books, just a British Council library in Brussels. Any book. An author wrote of parliament's black rod, and the pen was active for hours with ridicule plus. Exploring through writing. It is what this Viveka-Zandtao is, only then it was pen and lost papers. Solitude and the way to learn, writing means a book is rarely read to the finish – such disrespect. Summer holidays when teaching, cheap hotel rooms, travel and writing stemmed from this solitude and learning method along with isolated walking as learned in Ardennes. All of this structure, meaning, fashioning of writing and learning approach happening in two months of Baissy-Thy solitude – a short time after the solitude of the Chiswick loft, a solitude that was notable in a life that had a Cobol cubicle and walks on Chiswick High Road. There is a strange anomaly of this, as solitude increased friends started. With starting the path real relationships developed with genuine communication as opposed to being surrounded by innumerable peer-images, without these relationships the path might have been stalled.

Solitude has a downside. Whilst for most of life until this point these peer-

images were NPC – as I was to them, if NPC are closer contacts they become conditioned egos. Following the path means eschewing the ego – letting it go and throwing it back, as the path and ego are not at all compatible; in solitude egos are simply uncomfortable, abrasive and difficult to be with. They are a driving force for creating solitude. In upadhi-viveka, spiritual solitude, the self, collection of egos, is the greatest difficulty, but at least in Viveka-Zandtao the egos belong to Wai. To a lesser or greater extent giving back egos has to be a part of any path, what egos survive – hopefully none but egos are deceptive – are egos that do not cause issues such as the ego that gets immersed in UK drama series; or else solitude will not be comfortable. Other people's egos take on greater significance because they are a source of abrasion and discomfort, as said above, being a driving force for creating solitude. Solitude is a respite of avoiding egos.

I hate this question of ego and that is why it creates solitude. A writer knows that what is written creatively does not belong to them, it is nature (the muse) writing. Putting out what has been learnt on the path is a natural duty, what has been learnt is not owned it belongs to nature. If writing or teachings help

others that is great. If the teachings inspire someone to learn with Zandtaomed, that is great. But that is all. There is no better, there is no more knowledgeable, it is just out there to help or not. But ego of others cannot accept that, it makes comparisons, it cannot let the writings and teachings alone, ego has to be better. Their way is better than yours, their path is better than yours – note it is not a path if such comparisons are made. Ego wants to draw in the path and compete, and by drawing it in makes it part of the ego's domain. But the path just is, it is just there – on offer as is the duty, not competing, not better. And this drawing in by ego is abrasive and uncomfortable, and from the outside when comparisons are made it appears both are egos. And the way of not being perceived as ego is solitude. When people see you alone there is no competition because you are alone. Who is solitude competing with? In the end the path goes to solitude, in my case when the second childhood was over there was a move to solitude. And this solitude it just becomes more peaceful the less contact with egos there is.

And the ego is such an obstacle to learning. The ego reads teachings and of course is threatened because teachings say let go of attachment and give it

back to nature. So the path wants to learn, it sees teachings and is attracted, but the ego is threatened. Ego wants to make the path compete; when the path does not compete the ego tries to draw it in often criticising the path for egotism. There is no way of dealing with this. Try to explain and the ego has engaged the path. Stay in solitude and the ego criticises for weakness. There can be no social measuring, no comparison. To follow the path someone learning needs to examine the teachings; if the teachings are appropriate, study and maybe seek the help of the teacher. To compare teachers is entering the realm of ego. Study any teachings, do they ring true? That is all that counts.

"Be impeccable with your word" is one of the Four Agreements, and it has a downside - gossip. How much harm does gossip do? Solitude can provide a situation that is "free from gossip". There are many factors that affect this. If you live alone, are you trusted by your neighbours? There is usually xenophobia in communities, especially small rural communities; are you trusted enough to be free from xenophobia the fear of strangeness (xeno) that is non-conformity? If you can establish sufficient trust then solitude can make

you "free from gossip". My solitude is quite unique and in a rural community, they don't know who I am. But I think they have sufficient trust because I was a teacher. Is there gossip? Probably. Gossip based on xenophobia, I suspect some. Harmful and restrictive gossip, I think not. In solitude I work on the need to be accepted by the small community I live in - in solitude. Where you live people must accept you, that is your duty - to be accepted in some way; "don't make the assumption" that you have the right to live in a community because you live there.

What is so interesting about this reflection is how much solitude was a part of my life. When reflecting on solitude in this way, perhaps any reader will see that the solitude that can be experienced in society can be connected with the spiritual solitude I later called Viveka. If any of this experience does ring a bell with you, please pursue it - there is nothing better than the path.

Bouncing Off Quotes

“The solitude which I love and advocate is primarily about bringing my

emotions and thoughts back to myself, restricting and restraining not my footsteps but my desires and my anxiety, refusing to worry about external things, and fleeing for dear life from servitude and obligations: retreating not so much from the crowd of humanity but from the crowd of human affairs” [\[SB p44\]](#).

This was a solitude described by Michel de Montaigne. It contains within it a perception of solitude that could be closely seen as imprisonment or enforced isolation (Covid?). Fleeing from servitude (wage-slavery), obligations and enforced human affairs needs little explanation, this fleeing is neither imprisoning nor likely to require any enforcement, but “restricting and restraining” sounds punitive. If one enters solitude with “desire, anxiety or concern about external things”, then these egos are likely to disturb the upadhi-viveka or citta-viveka (mind). As a Buddhist, learning about the [4 Noble Truths](#) recognises that attachment to desire and attachment to anxiety or concern for external things causes suffering; restricting and restraining such is also attachment and causes suffering. It seems intrinsically part of upadhi-viveka that there is no such restriction or restraining.

The solitude of younger years did contain the restraint of lust and the desire for love but they were never enforced but timely – perhaps between the suffering of spirit that usually came with such desire and relationship. In old age such desires have passed their ability to control having been enacted throughout life in one way or another - mostly. Anxiety or concern about external things has a similar dismissal - mostly; how can compassion not be concerned with the defiled world? But what is to be done? Can an old man lacking the energy of youth contribute to the struggles of the young when new generations are not understood? When new generations do not listen or do not understand you? Can an old man offer more than advice? Can an old man change the control in the system and the complete disenchantment with that system? If such systemic exhaustion is not part of the old age, can life have been lived with compassion at the forefront? Living life has dismissed the anxiety and concern about external things not by their removal but by the exhaustion at trying to remove them. Why repeat what has failed? Is there complacency? Maybe. Could more have been done? Undoubtedly. Would that have been more effective? Not without more control. In solitude there is a

duty to express this understanding in some way, a duty of knowledge, a duty similar to the requirement of compassion earlier in life, but this duty in later life can be enacted in solitude – especially as the defiled world makes no intention to listen to such. Many listen to Chomsky – nothing wrong with him; but where does that get us? One hopes by recounting the ways that led to disenchantment there can be help for the young in regaining control but the conditioning of the young usually ignores such knowledge. However Zandtaomed is always offered as is the Pathtivist Trilogy.

I mentioned complacency - in this case with regards to repeated failure. Any complacency always needs investigation because it could so easily be ego eg the ego of laziness and blame. So whenever inaction and complacency arise, there is the usual question of determination and effort; but going beyond that is the acceptance of complacency as a possible ego. So the ego aspect needs investigation, and there are three aids to complacency:-

- 1) Focus on humility in the heart
- 2) Is there any upadana - clinging? Search and see if there are any signs of

upadana in your body - in your actions.

3) Seek humility in nature, know your place. I see the first chakra as grounding in nature but if this is not enough, then go out into unspoiled nature and feel its grandeur and your insignificance.

Perhaps my comments on Michel de Montaigne have been unfair (see NB), here is a quote at the end of the chapter. “To tell the truth, confined solitude broadens my horizons and expands me outward: I throw myself into the affairs of state and into the wide world more willingly when I am alone” [SB p46]; his solitude was temporary so not “restricting or restraining”, mine is more permanent and stable.

[NB - This section is not a fair reflection on de Montaigne's views - see later].

“And as long as we do not understand self-medication as one among other ways of managing our solitude, we lack the context in which to integrate it into disciplines of caring for the soul” [SB p71].

I never associated my alcohol addiction with solitude, in fact to begin with it was the opposite; it was a requirement of the peers – the NPC groups of uni. This then developed into the drink after work that characterised drinking until it was knocked on the head. But that does not make Stephen wrong in my case.

Let's explore the drink as it is understood, and then perhaps go into solitude. Drink began as connections with NPC's. But it carried on after upheaval. Why drink when the path had been started? When there were path activities there was no drink, but the compassion decision was made. This decision whilst strongly spiritual on one level – compassion – was not a decision for a spiritual life. Whilst the compassion was active during teaching, spiritual solitude only occurred during the Summer break - there was no drink then. There was one year – the theosophical year – when there was no drink hanging out with two friends who were not NPC peer-images. When drink started again they just disappeared, probably they could not tolerate the state of the person drinking. The excess of drink was connected to spirit but not the solitude side of spirit. Spirit and teaching could not exist in harmony even

though there was a consciousness that teaching was path. The solitude coming during holidays was significant for balance.

But this alcohol was self-medication. Whilst teaching was compassion it was compassion in a 1%-satrapy, so it was corrupted. But there could have been harmony, teaching and spirit-at-home – not an unreasonable compromise. But life still sought experience at this time, not some form of spiritual seeking that was Stephen. There was a spiritual seeking in this experience, but a life experience as well – a life experience that was social (described as second childhood in the [Trilogy](#) (Treatise)). I loved the solitude of the holidays but I could only reach that holiday-state after a few days away from work.

Getting into solitude was a stage – a break. Getting on the plane alone was difficult, people hiding always travelling in groups apparently enjoying themselves together. Then the jet lag, being there alone in the hotel, before being there – before being in the place where the time alone would happen. There was a transition from working – school, students, stress and earlier on alcohol – to calm and aloneness that was the destination. It was probably

always like that – ever since Ardennes and Baissy-Thy. It was harder when younger because 20's always meant people in some way – still not disabused of the cosmic other. Eating was always hard, finding a restaurant where being alone did not make me feel lonely was sometimes impossible esp in tourist destinations; you start in destinations and move away from tourists to find the peace. That was the beauty of the game parks - eating alone was fine, and because it was camping eating together was also alone as well, campfires open people up. But the best was the Wahiba, alone in the desert was special – take care you need to carefully choose people to be alone in the desert.

It was as if the teaching brutalised the spirit, and space was needed to harmonise. Of course in the earlier years the spirit was brutalised by the alcohol – a reinforced brutalisation. But there were 16 years of teaching when there was no alcohol, and the pattern of teaching and gaining experience continued firstly through politics outside teaching and then through travel. Travel is a form of aloneness, and holidays were travel, not spiritual solitude. That solitude appeared through the mid-life review and individualised exploration of the M Ed for a number of years in Botswana, then through

meditation that started after leaving Botswana. Meditation and teaching were in harmony for 5 years but failed in Nigeria where every time there was meditation there was a desire for resignation; working was stressful there - hard but there was saving for retirement. Soon after starting in Nigeria, I realised I had the financial wherewithal to retire at the end of contract; so my time became preparing for solitude - and meditation was put in abeyance. If I had meditated better, the compromise there might have been easier.

But there was solitude during the holiday, and that seemed to suffice for balance.

So was the self-medication of alcohol about solitude? Not really – about path and spirit though. For some of those in trouble with alcohol there is a path that can be found beyond the bottle, please look for it.

Abstinence, is it a solution? What is the disease that leads to these self-medications? 1%-satrapy control and conditioning has to be the start of the disease – the cause. Would there be self-medication if this cause was

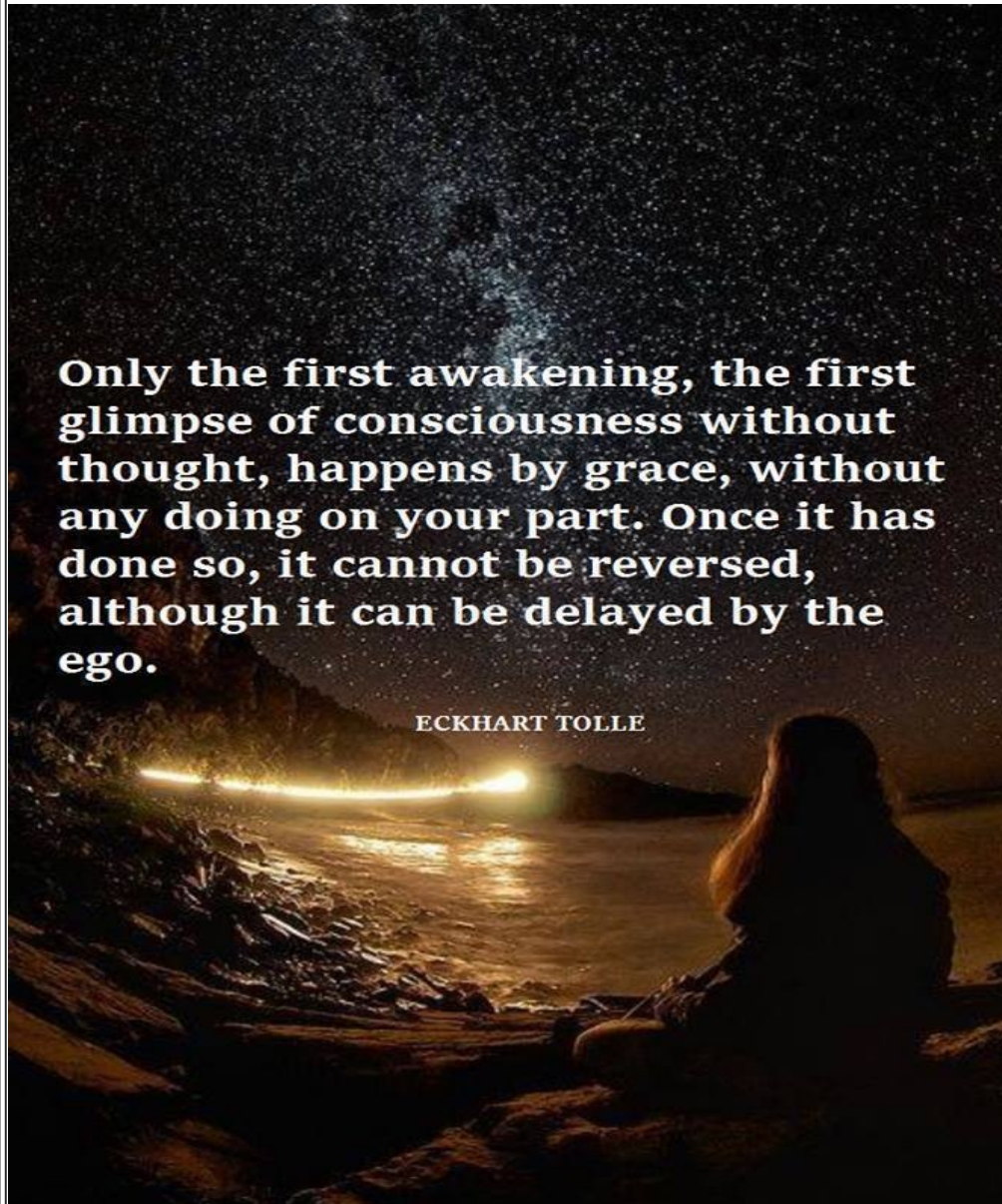
removed? To begin with. But there have been centuries of this disease of exploitation – longer? What would happen if there was hope for the authentic? What if people saw others on the path with an open mind? Would they choose self-medication? Deep trust in compassion makes the answer to that a resounding no. However there is no foreseeable end to the 1%-satrapy, and with that as underlying social causes abstinence as a solution for the few who will escape by following the path is appropriate.

In considering self-medication there was examination of the second childhood of teaching, there was little continuous solitude. But retirement came. This was a balance of finance and the inner journey. The distance between path and work was widening although that was not apparent in work. The sense of peace felt on holiday was shattered with the return to work, but professionalism shrouded that. When the financial possibility appeared there was no stopping the inner journey, but whilst it was comparative solitude it was not solitude. Inner journey is of course mostly done in solitude but there were still outer factors present in Thailand, now in solitude they are not there. Firstly there was teaching, initially at home most days and then in schools for

a few hours. Secondly there were the MAWPs (Male Arrogant White Privileged). To begin with I didn't see them as MAWPs, they were expats making the decision to retire in Thailand. This had an element of the travel, the escape from conditioning – path factors. But this was my delusion. They were strong egos who had been smoothened by sabaie-sabaie. Even in Thailand with its strong Buddhist tradition few are on an inner journey. These are men accepting the delusion that women can be bought, and having the right-wing values that such a lack of compassion demonstrates. Solitude in Thailand came only when teaching ended and the finish of MAWP-contact, both of which ended on the same day – sadly it ended a particularly beautiful beach at the same time. Without these two factors, there is solitude in Thailand. But there is now the duty of Zandtaomed, such students are the part of my life that is not solitude.

It is not for me to know kamma but it does seem that an active life on or around the path ends in solitude - reflection and creation. From birth nature conditions us through instinct whilst sadly the defiled world exacerbates that conditioning because it suits their control. The natural order can often send its

first grace early in adult life:-



Only the first awakening, the first glimpse of consciousness without thought, happens by grace, without any doing on your part. Once it has done so, it cannot be reversed, although it can be delayed by the ego.

ECKHART TOLLE

From then on life is for experience as our awakening follows the path or ego prevents it. This time for experience is a vital time, a time of energy, a time driven in part by instinct and desire, but hopefully more by the path. Whilst this time might contain periods of solitude, permanent solitude for reflection and creation does not seem natural – or else why have the natural vitality? But having gained that experience what do we do with it? Give it back to the youth, through creation, wisdom and wisdom-teaching – eg the wisdom of the indigenous elders. Unfortunately not only does our society discourage awakening on the path, it actively discourages listening to elders. The active discouragement is not listening to the puppet elders whose life is still "in action", but this discouragement also means the young do not listen to the elders who take their less vital time, their time when the vital energies are focussed into reflection, to provide for the young. It would be natural order for this wisdom to be sought by the young; but through conditioning instead the young guide themselves persuaded by the images the defiled world offers up and reveres. But the young have been deserted by this defiled world – Teal's millennials, and quite rightly these millenials must find their own

paths, not the servitude they have been conditioned for. In the natural world the young can find their path using advice from genuine elders, but in the defiled world the conditioning of a system offers them the conditioned as teachers and these teachers offer them nothing but unconscious wage-slavery. Elders find permanent solitude offering wisdom to the young who go out to find it, to the young who have the energy to find it. Their search is meant to be this way; young people, do not look for the sign that says this way, look inside and trust the inner guide that seeks genuine wisdom – the genuine wise elder.

Having discussed wisdom in this way, expressing humility is almost a requirement esp for the egos shouting “who is hE to?” To describe another as wise is a personal choice, experiencing insight is known. Insight is a glimpse of wisdom, and many of us have insights; if your choice of meditation is vipassana insight is more likely. A collection of insights could be called wisdom. What is the purpose of wisdom? Primarily to help others learn. If there is anything written that helps others to learn, that is great; if not, then the young must search elsewhere. No problem, no egoic offence.

But if the student has insight then that causes happiness, and is a signpost to study more. Because they are nature's gifts of insight, both in the writer and in the student, there need not be ego describing the writing as wisdom, but no matter how often this is explained egos cannot accept it. When learning spiritually the hardest work is to leave the ego behind. Study even just read with a learning mind, and if there is no learning or insight read something else. No judgement anywhere. But as with all such possible egoic discussion, remember that to avoid errors check:-

- 1) Humble heart
- 2) End upadana
- 3) Ground yourself in nature

“He lets go of one position without taking another—
he's not defined by what he knows.
Nor does he join a dissenting faction—
he assumes no view at all.

FOUR EIGHTS, 4:5” [[SB p73](#)].

This touches on so many of the important issues evaded by much that is Buddhism – covered by the word “engagement” - by extending view to action. It is not so much what it says but what is not said concerning natural duty - dhammajati:-

1. nature itself;
2. the law of nature;
3. the duties that must be performed according to that law of nature; and
4. the fruits or benefits that arise from the performance of that duty.

4:5 connects to solitude because being comfortable with dhammajati is integral to the stability of solitude, and that comfort comes from how we deal with the kilesa - although there are many descriptions of defilements (kilesa) three can be considered sufficient – greed, aversion and delusion. One example of the position and aversion talked of in 4:5 could be:–

 This 1%-satrapy is a defiled world (built from greed) and an alternative aversion is socialism.

The first natural duty of Dhammajati is to connect to the Dhamma. At this Buddhadasa page, Buddhadasa is quoted as saying "The Dhamma itself will bring about a revolution in our hearts".

1%-satrapy could be a description of the conditioned position we grow up with, and socialism could be the dissenting faction that many join once they recognise this position. As people grow and become aware politically they recognise the 1%-satrapy whether as capitalism oligarchy etc; it is then common in this type of growth process to accept socialism as the alternative.

Do either of these political views give us a society in harmony with nature? But what arises on the path but Dhamma and compassion – a revolution of the heart that gives freedom from suffering for all; no specific view at all.

As we develop on the path we begin to recognise kilesa in the defiled world. What do we do with this knowledge that has arisen on the path? For some this means collective action and protest, they consciously choose to engage in political action; for others there is no such choice or requirement. Which is the answer? And here's the answer

.... Nope – no answer. Except follow your path. Apart from completely addressing the question of what conditioning both personally and in society is, apart from completely addressing the question of the effects of kilesa both personally and in society are, there can be no prescribed answer – discussed throughout the pathivism manual that ended up with complete disenchantment. No answer apart from doing your duty as your relationship with the Dhamma sees fit.

How does this relate to solitude? Even in solitude we are not separate, our duty to the Dhamma (dhammajati) needs to be fulfilled; if we have not been engaged then we will feel the absence of that fulfilled duty in solitude.


Engagement, however our paths choose, will disturb our solitude if there has not been wise action. Follow your path, natural duty and be sufficiently active that compassionate solitude can be a stable end to life.

4:5 starts ch 10 which discusses philosophy and ends with “No amount of probing the essays will ever capture who or what Montaigne is. That would be “like trying to seize hold of water in your fist: for the more tightly you squeeze something whose nature is to run everywhere, the more you lose what you want to hold on to.” Is he compassionate? If philosophy is ever discussed without compassion or dhammajati, can it ever have meaning in daily life? Can it be learning?

Of course it might be fun (“joyful, lively, or playful - I would almost say more sexy”) in solitude.

“Solitude has nothing to do with huddling inside a dark, cool cell high above the bustle of farm life below. Once the novelty wears off, you discover how seclusion magnifies the pressures and demands you feel. No matter where you hide your body, you cannot escape those timeworn habits of mind that keep reasserting themselves” [[SB p81](#)].

If you haven't dealt with these pressures and demands, how can you survive solitude?

“I cannot help but see the void (of a monastic hall overlooking Indian patchwork fields - ) which I am standing as a metaphor for emptiness: the absence of compulsive reactivity, a precondition for the unimpeded space of paths that allow human flourishing.

.... That “solitude” is a synonym for “nirvana” or “emptiness” is implied by the opening lines of the Four Eights, which read:

The creature concealed inside its cell—

a man sunk in dark passions
is a long, long way from solitude.
Hard is it to let go of what drives us,

hard to be free from the wants
that cleave to the thrill of being alive,
hankering for what's gone and to come,
hungering for those delights now—no one else can save you.

FOUR EIGHTS, 1:1–2” [[SB p81](#)].

1:1-2 just reminds me of the theme of Buddhadasa’s [Happiness and Hunger](#),
paraphrasing “how can there be happiness with hunger?”

But equating solitude with emptiness (sunnata) sounds fanciful. Even in
solitude can we be alive and completely without desire? Solitude is not
without desire but it is without the desire associated with daily life. In daily
life perhaps there are people completely attuned to sunnata but that is beyond

my understanding; how can they be so completely lacking in hunger there?
But in refuge, perhaps so?

From the book (SB), so far there is no clarity as to whether Stephen perceives any more than fancy in comparing solitude to emptiness (sunnata). Perhaps a personal reflection on the distance from emptiness solitude is for me could help consider this fancy. Without being too specific there is not freedom from hunger just freedom from the hungers that society offers. When people age and hanker for youth there is no understanding, how can they want such a turmoil of desires? When old men lust for young women there is not understanding, how can they want to live with such immaturity? When the old desire vast wealth there is no understanding; how can they not see the destruction of life disproportionate wealth means? When the old desire a beautiful home as a measure of status there is some understanding, but there is no such home so why bother?

But when it comes to the desires that still exist there would be distress if they were taken away. If there were no writing there would be distress. If there

were no meditation there would be distress. If the internet were lost for more than a few days there would be distress. If there were no trips to the beach or the lake there would be distress. If there were no TV there would be distress. If my pension were removed or lessened there could be some form of distress – not being able to afford my minimal lifestyle. If all were removed (meditation cannot be removed) coping would be a problem, of course money is the main issue - being alone without support. So in my case solitude is far from sunnata even though its recognition is a part. To me saying solitude is sunnata would be fanciful, is that what Stephen meant? Maybe the book (SB) will make it clear.

These desires (last paragraph) are not dissimilar to a spiritual life (except for the TV), sufficiently close for many to consider the life spiritual if such a question were ever asked. Satiating the desires could be seen as spiritual so there is no hunger and therefore happiness. But is it? Because there are needs there is still hunger so it cannot be called sunnata. But “doing the best I can” (4 Agreements) is a reasonable compromise with a "complete spiritual life", and happiness is present.

As an afterthought the writing of the last three paragraphs forced me to get out of bed as the ideas were stopping me from relaxing and sleeping. This is not complete freedom – sunnata, void of writing self.

There might be another factor affecting Stephen's solitude and sunnata. At present I have no spiritual desire; I follow the path "doing the best I can", but there is no long game - discussed [here](#) in the Companion. Stephen has taken orders so more than likely will have been taught a spiritual desire – long game. This might be enlightenment, Nirvana/Nibbana, etc. If he is feeling fanciful he might be taken towards the long game or maybe he is there, only he knows. But if we believe there is a long game, does that not affect the way we act? Do we not desire the target? Do we "reach" the target before reaching it? Do we get frustrated at not reaching the target?

"Mindfulness, I discovered, was not an aloof, detached regard. Its practice served to sculpt and shape the inner contours of my solitude" [[SB p89](#)].

Quoting myself, "So was the self-medication about solitude? Not really – about path and spirit though." Is there clarity between solitude, path and spirit? How does this relate to mindfulness sculpting and shaping the inner contours? Is "inner contours of solitude" descriptively poetic or is there more to solitude - to me or to Stephen?

Solitude is a lifestyle but as such is not an essential indicator of the spiritual; consider the loner life of adolescence described above, it could only very loosely be connected to the spirituality of later life, far from certain – a very loose spiritual indication. Through meditation there arises dhammas, Stephen speaks of one, mindfulness, here. Through MwB Buddhadasa describes the arising of 4 Dhamma comrades – panna/wisdom, sampajanna (wisdom-in-action), concentration (samedhi) and sati/mindfulness; Stephen will likely recognise for himself the three other comrades as arising either as mindfulness or developing from mindfulness. The path could be seen as an inner guide and outer practice arising from the 4 Dhamma comrades. At some stage on the path a choice of a solitude lifestyle might be made - such as the choice I made, but once the choice is made with the inner guide as part of the

4 Dhamma comrades the inner life is sculpted and shaped – the inner art of solitude with 4 Dhamma comrades as Artist. The outer practice of this work of art comes from sampajanna (wisdom-in-action). It is not unreasonable to connect the Artist to sunnata. Does the path have to be solitude? For the inner path to be sculpted and shaped it is likely that mindfulness/ 4 Dhamma comrades is the Artist – although not necessary it could be shaped and sculpted naturally; to be a creative artist requires some sort of solitude to connect with the Muse – sunnata. I would be happy and exact calling this connection the Art of Solitude – pure Poet or Muse, is this where the book is going?

“To be able to die at peace, a philosopher needs to die to his attachments to the world. This, for Montaigne, is “true solitude,” where one’s thoughts and emotions are reined in and brought under control. “To prepare oneself for death is to prepare oneself for freedom. The one who has learned to die has unlearned to be a slave”” [SB p95].

Paraphrasing, to die at peace is true solitude with freedom, slavery unlearned,

no attachments, thoughts and emotions reigned in and under control. This seems a natural end to life. Nature is not cruel. OK, birth ageing sickness and death have suffering, but most of the suffering usually attached to these are fear (egoic). There is no fear with freedom, slavery unlearned, no attachments, thoughts and emotions reigned in and under control. To die at peace without fear seems natural - or at least a natural objective.

In my previous discussion of de Montaigne his solitude was temporary, but this quote on death is concerned with true and stable solitude. My discussions of the quotes were valid but were not complete or fair. This is a failing of this bouncing process - this style of writing, but this paragraph addresses that failing; previously a note was added.

But dying in peace requires something else, that your legacy is in place. This is a particular problem for me because my writing has not been published so administrative measures need to be taken to ensure the website carries on after my death.

““I paint with my back to the world,” she told an interviewer in 1997. She had no interest in what others might think of what she was doing. By becoming a selfless channel for inspiration, she sought to reveal them. Since her paintings originated in inspiration, she refused to take any credit for the finished works. She accepted only the blame for their failure” [[SB p103](#)].

““The best things in life,” said Agnes (Martin), “happen to you when you’re alone.” She never married, lived with a partner, or had children. Solitude was the site of her inspiration” [[SB p104](#)].

Art did not begin for me in solitude but in the joy of being with artists. At the time of upheaval ([first grace](#)) a new and fantastic world opened up, a world of which there was no previous experience. In the Chiswick loft there was the reality of bells and banjos, but in life up to that point there was no indication anywhere that such a world existed. In my fragmented world there was only middle-class values, only the blinkers of qualifications and conformity. Would I have been able to talk of such a world without the reinforcement of the artists I then somehow met?

My immaturity took me away from these people – along with the decision to focus on compassion and not my writing art. But they gave me something that never appeared in the world of education, knowledge of the solitude and connecting with the Muse. Such a connection was real. Even the description of the Muse as watching the air vibrate as it filled with presence belongs in the funny farm for most people, yet is real but different for every genuine artist.

For the artist and the connection with the Muse here is the process for the writing of Kirramura. It was the last Summer before travel, Africa and the change of mid-life. The day had a writing pattern. Rising late maybe early afternoon, there might have been cycling to walk on the Downs, and an evening of TV waiting for the connection. Then the joy of going to bed lying there and waiting. Then the “guys” would come. There was this still presence and yet it appeared vibrating. Lying on my back I willingly felt pushed back into the bed, and at some point - perhaps there was a slowing - writing began.


For years I have sporadically written until now in retirement I am a writer; there was one polite rejection at 24 and no other attempt to engage with publication. With the [website](#) at least there is now a record, a place where they might be read. I am not a true artist like Agnes because of my journey through compassion. It doesn't matter (although I would prefer) if the writing is recognised as quality - even though it is there to be read, because it was written it has a natural quality. There is a complete absence of trust of the commercial world so it is only ego if thoughts of failure arise. Doris Lessing had the quality that demanded of the marketers to sell her work, my writing doesn't have that. But it is real writing, connected to the Muse, not the pulp of Archer or Cartland. I can understand the crazy system guy who ranted arrogant at me. Presumably he thought advice should be taken from the commercial. No, not an absolute no - maybe there are circumstances but This is writing, that's the end of it. His writing was for money, did it shame him I didn't care? Did he want me to conform to commercialism to whom he had accepted servitude? Who knows where his nastiness came from? The bitter memory of his vitriol just added to the distrust of commercialism, he had no joy. Because of teaching there was never any compunction to sell for

money - now there is pension (Covid-permitting), sadly for Agnes I suspect there was the need for money to survive. Sometimes there is regret that there was never that ascetic artistic drive but my path was so much easier. Could there have been depths to fathom? Maybe so. But there is joy in the existing solitude and the depths that have been found so why any beating up? Losing an ear for artistic ego? A blood sacrifice to fix the bike? Or just joy?

Because of regular meditation later in life there are only the remnants of guys as the highs and lows of life have balanced higher up the joy axis. But the MUSE is connected now as a matter of course. How lucky to have that.

Agnes said “I don’t think of anything. Nothing goes through my mind. I don’t have any ideas myself and I don’t believe anybody else’s, so that leaves me a clear mind. Gosh, yes, an empty mind, so that when something comes into it you can see it” [[SB p104](#)] That’s admirable.

“I inscribe the Pali word viveka (solitude) onto a sheet of paper in Roman script. Carefully following the contours of the letters, I trace concentric lines

of different colors around viveka until the word radiates a multilayered halo”[[SB p111](#)]. Stephen has reached the word "viveka" – no surprise there. Amusing. Ranting guy would say "Cheat! Liar?" 

“Ask “What is this?”, then open yourself completely to what you “hear” in the silence that follows”[[SB p117](#)]. I should quote the whole of Ch16 [pp112-117] as I have read it so often.

There was a fear in my stomach, dismissed – fear is ego. Then the writer ego happened “what should I write?” – let that go. Apprehension, could this be big? Then let that go and stopped; to be continued. In this chapter there was already a long moment over “Stop making a difference between who you think you are and who you think the Buddha is”[[SB p113](#)]. There was avoidance whilst I wrote this. Any more avoidance?

I haven’t done “What is this?” yet but it’s good already – it’s not solitude though. There is a phrase that describes it – a dose of zen, someone like me needs a dose of zen every so often. My first dose was way back with the Arts

people - I wrote Hexoto then. I have talked about what they meant to me but not spoken of who I was for them. Not only was I Wai Zandtao scifi writer, I was the young maths guy straight from uni. There was painting going on. To me everything was black and white, and they wanted me to paint in grey areas. But it wasn't just about me, they were open and learning about a mind that respected art, wasn't art but had a clarity that was black-and-white; it was such a wonderful mix for me. Painting grey around the black-and-white was a dose of Zen.

Maybe 8-10 years later I started getting a different dose of Zen at Brockwood Park. Later in his life Krishnamurti had a schedule of gatherings during each year, in India, the US and at the Krishnamurti school in Hampshire. With a friend I would go and listen to K in the tent trying to keep awake. Phrases like contents of consciousness come back from that time. My mathematical mind would develop understandings, there would be a structure of understanding, and then boom "contents of consciousness" would blow it away. Dose of Zen.

I have looked at Zen since retiring – Brad Warner and a bit of Dogen, even

practising Zazen for a while. That was a tepid dose of Zen, a gentle difference to the more structured pathivism (Buddhism plus) that is now my usual journey. Here is a mixed meditation I have been using that now has “What is this?” wafting across destabilising it; this is not a dismissal. Breathe in the colours through each of the chakras, then for each chakra in turn let go of any attachment, and give it back to nature. Then build the concepts for each chakra developed in “[Chakras by the Bootstraps](#)”. But as you reach the yellow of the solar plexus chakra vedana starts to move, and sukha moves up with you (the second tetrad of [MwB](#)). Somehow you reach the 6th chakra where there can be light from sukha. This is joyful so let it go by getting into upekkha (no positive or negative), and there is 3 prongs of atammayata:-

- 1) No concocting ayatana
- 2) No conditioning of egos
- 3) No attachment to +/-

Then I let the state of atammayata fuse upwards with sunnata coming in through the crown chakra. This is a fanciful but nice meditation.

“What is this?” just gives all this structure a dose of Zen, no more black-and-white, make it grey. Open it up – stop having structure. This dose will take away the structure, and then I will build another that Zen will dose away again. Structure and no structure produces the grey that will get a new structure, dosed into no structure, and then get greyed again and so on. Like the koan ripping up the logical mind yet the structure isn’t just sankhara no matter how concocted the structure might sound. It’s all learning – good fun. How many meditation teachers would cringe at this? Zen teachers would cringe at the structure, Theravada would cringe at losing the structure; I’m learning – maybe learning could be better (is there a cringing chorus from both?) but no problem. There’s progress.

Since reading Ch16 I have been on a Zen rollercoaster needing the dose of Zen being disturbed for a day or two, now it is over – probably. That is because there is the structure – no pain just a dose of medicine. This structure takes me along step-by-step – slowly but surely most of the time following the path. But it is the path, each step is infinite, each insight infinite.

To explain unity the analogy is the sea watching the waves of individual ego disappear back into sea very quickly unrecognisable in the power of unity the sea represents. I have an analogy here that plays for me but does not have the same integrity as the sea analogy – or maybe that is self-criticism. What we all say is that there are many paths but they get there, the problem is finding the most suited path. The message, if the path is failing choose another one. Zen is not my path, a dose of Zen is a necessary part of my path but we're all different; you don't have to choose Zen. This following analogy could be wrong as Zen is not my path but it is put forward because of my concern for the pain I have heard.

OK here is the analogy and it comes from Dedekind cuts – a maths technique. How many numbers are there between 0 and 1? You take a cut and there - 0 and 0.5 and 0.5 and 1. Maybe that is 4 numbers? Take another cut 0 and 0.25 and 0.25 and 0.5. More cuts 0.000005 and 0.00001, and more and more and more. How many numbers between 0 and 1? No answer, maths calls this infinity. How many number between 0 and 10? $10 \times$ infinity? That makes no

sense because it is still infinity. How many steps between 0 and 1000? $1000 \times$ infinity making no sense again.

My structure makes me take baby steps, each step is infinite – the infinity of insight; I take 1000 infinite baby insights to reach 1000. It is a gradual path of wisdom but it gets there. Zen says “What is this?”, and you persevere and persevere and persevere. The mind grapples and for those whose path is Zen they do the 1000 and get it. I have my jhana rewards but a Zen reward for 1000 must be a BUZZ. But that 1000 is not the end as the end is infinity ie no end. How many 1's to get to infinity? How many 1000's to get to infinity? They both never get there, they are both paths.

I spoke of pain, and here's the pain. I have listened to questions to two different Zen teachers – no names but this is NOT referring to Stephen. The Zen teacher says “What is this?” (as an example – remember I have not heard that Stephen does the following), sit there and go where “What is this?” takes you. Then the question, I have sat there and sat there and sat there and “What is this?” still leaves me confused and disturbed, how do I get to 1000? You

can hear deep pain in this question. The path is there to quench suffering not to create it. The Zen teacher hears the pain, has compassion for the pain, and knows by Zen method the answer is to persevere more. So the Zen teacher shows compassion, repeats the process and asks for determination. You can hear the unspoken cries of pain and frustration at the answer, but out of respect the questioner does not voice it. But an answer could be baby steps, how do I get to 1? Getting to 1 is hard, how do I get an insight? If baby steps works, getting an insight will be confusing and disturbing but maybe that pain will be less because the method is more suited. It is beyond my kamma to know all people and be able to say which method suits which person, but it is not beyond my kamma to say for some there are baby steps as opposed to the leaps of 1000. Maybe the day after the question the person got to a 1000, or maybe they never tried baby steps, and to this day are at 0 – or worse have given up.

"What is this?" No answer, and now no disturbance; the dose has worked.


I have tried several times since to look into the “what is this?”, but nothing

happened (6 days later) – no deep engagement. I am comfortable with the very real “dose of zen” being needed, but that my baby steps are sufficient so long as I don’t hide behind structure. Each to their own.

“I entered into and dwelled in the first meditation, which is accompanied by thought and reflection, by rapture and well-being born of solitude So the meditator suffuses her body with the rapture and well-being born of solitude, so that no part of her body is not suffused by that rapture and well-being" [[SB p136](#)].

Is this next pedantic? The need to replace “born of solitude” with “born in solitude”. The jhana/rapture is not found because we are in solitude. It is conceivable that jhana could occur within a group meditation, the collective energies of such a group enhancing the meditation experience. The jhana occurs because the mind is in the correct state, not diffuse and attached to egos, but focussed, calm and clear in a natural state. Such a state of mind won’t happen in a pub, is unlikely to occur under most social conditions, is more likely to occur in solitude, but will not necessarily happen because of

solitude. The way the text has been translated makes me want to say this.

But what about being “born of an art of solitude”? This refers again to the Muse – sunnata. If the solitude is occurring in order to practice the art, then it is the artist performing the art, the connection to the Muse, that is creating the artistic solitude; rapture is arising as a consequence of the art. Does the solitary writing of Jeffrey Archer (in King’s Cross ) give rise to the rapturous muse of Doris Lessing?

“Johannes Vermeer and Agnes Martin have left behind pigment-coated canvases secured to wooden supports that have achieved iconic if not transcendent significance. Painters and writers need solitude to forge and refine the vision of their art” [[SB p141](#)].

Works can be imitated in classes or collective situations, but “solitude” is needed “to forge and refine the vision”.

“To be alone at your desk or in your studio is not enough. You have to free

yourself from the phantoms and inner critics who pursue you wherever you go. “When you start working,” said the composer John Cage, “everybody is in your studio—the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas—all are there. But as you continue painting, they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you are lucky, even you leave” [[SB p142](#)].

I see so many parallels with meditation but [MwB](#) has an advantage over art as it has a methodical approach (note next paragraph). Sat on the stool is not enough even though there is apparent solitude. The mind can chatter and travel into the past or future or into imagination – scenes you’d like to see or be in, this is not meditation but just sitting. Your mind is full of contents and chatter, memories and thoughts, “phantoms and inner critics”. To wear a Theravadan hat, cognition is attached to the khandhas – body, feeling, memories and perception, mental processes. As you become more practised with the method of breathing, the mind slows and recognises these contents gradually letting them go back to the nature they came from. As contents are removed, then there is recognition - only the Dhamma (4 Dhamma

Comrades) attachment and khandhas, what is conditioned to be believed as self is just another ego-attachment and that is let go and returns to where it came from. There is what you might call a pure solitude, there is unity, khandhas just there and a sunnata connection that gives it all meaning. It is an art to do this, to feel unity.

At the beginning of the last paragraph I said MwB has an advantage because of its method. But is it true there is an advantage? Wai starts to write usually first thing after meditation or after contemplation in bed. The next step of the story is “kind of” there, not details but a feeling/an image of what’s next. As the writing starts the details come into focus, it is as if the actual bashing of the keys connects to the Muse bringing out the words, details and storyline. So starting to write is the breathing; as you breathe the mind slows, lets go of the attachments reaching the state where there is connection, as you write life comes to the next step and out comes the story. There is no I in either process.

“You resume your silent conversation with the work. This is a two-way process: you create the work and then you respond to it. The work can

inspire, surprise, and shock you” [\[SB p143\]](#).

Does Wai have a conversation? No. It is more that Wai is a conduit. As the keys are bashed the story unfolds. It is more that Wai corrects for context, consistency, clarity and occasionally elements of style, this correction becomes refined as the story is proofed and reproofed – but by then there is not the pure Muse, just the Muse that is always there – even when watching tv.

“For Martin it is crucial to understand the response you have to your own work, to know how it makes you feel. In this way, “you discover your direction and truth about yourself.” The solitary act of making art involves intense, wordless dialogue” [\[SB p143\]](#).

When I was writing [Kirramura](#) I was looking forward to the “guys”, if they are there now they don’t bring the rapture. But rapture is not the objective creativity is. Being the story, seeing where the story goes is enjoyable but joy is not the word.

Let me talk about meditation – the 2nd tetrad – and the jhanas of vedana. Back at 23 these jhanas as bells and banjos were the business, it was as if that was what the day (24 hours) was about. I went home from work for them. As compassion kicked in and the second childhood started, these jhanas were less and less, years into the work esp. with the alcohol they had gone, not destroyed but fused with daily life. In 2nd tetrad you get used to these jhanas happening – it is as if they need to happen for balance. But instead of being them, being the joy, you step back and watch them happen – upekkha. As you step back you let go of 3 prongs of atammayata – no ayatanas concocting, no attaching to conditioning, no reaction to +/- . ? t?? story unfolds it unfolds, you watch it unfold whilst you are bashing the keys. Wai is meant to write the story, that is all there is; atammayata is meant to be so that there can be connection with sunnata. Wai, the artist, is the conduit of the Muse, the khandhas that are Bill are the conduit of sunnata, the 4 Dhamma comrades. It is intense and wordless but connection rather than dialogue.

I don't always finish a book when writing starts. Kolok was started in 2018

but then I got involved with the manual and companion – trilogy. Coming back to develop the story just recently I read the chapter on Laura, it was wonderful. Maybe it's not great for others but I liked it; I would like others to like it but that is not the judge – the judge is if it is Muse. Back in the Arts Centre in 1974 Hexoto was written, and it was typed for me. I am slowly transcribing and refining it for Zandtao and I like seeing where it is going. Once a story is out of me it is gone, there is only recall of a synopsis. Sometimes catching the wisdom I am amazed, it is as if it is more than me. I suspect when younger it was formative - “you discover your direction and truth about yourself”, now it's just writing; but as well there is meditation for direction and truth that was never present in the time of the early writing.

There is an interesting thing to consider, the contradiction that is the hierarchy of sunnatas. The hierarchy I am considering is sunnata through meditation, sunnata as Muse for creative writing, and sunnata as muse for blogging; the contradiction is that sunnata is not differentiable. This was going to be a good contemplation but compassion got in the way as Trump is talking of troops including the military and "civilian forces" to control the

uprising in the US.

There is a word that can shed some light on this question - supermundane. The 4 brahma-viharas of metta - loving kindness, karuna - compassion, mudita - empathetic joy and upekkha - equanimity are supermundane. They are variously described:- Thich Nhat Hanh - 4 Qualities of True Love, Divine Abodes and Highest vehicles.

Can we be sunnata? That is a nonsensical question, it is a question from the ego. That is why this is a good contemplation - to help remove ego and delusion. What's the best we can do - brahma-viharas, atammayata, insight and creativity - highest states of mind. We are talking about stuff that pushes the boundaries of human contemplation, that is why I use the vague phrase "connected to sunnata". With 4 brahma-viharas we are talking about highest states - NOT higher, highest. Are we in the highest state during meditation? Sometimes. Is Wai Zandtao in the highest state when connecting to the Muse? Sometimes. Is Zandtao in the highest state when writing blogs? Mostly no. Mostly the blogs are writing based on insight that can have arisen as a result

of being in the highest state. Is there a hierarchy of sunnatas? Definitely not a useful question from sankhara, because there is comparison it is not valid. Knowing sunnata is not possible. Is highest state possible? Yes but talking of reaching it contains ego. Is the highest state of atammayata, creativity, insight and 4 brahma-viharas different? And we can see ego again - comparison, highest state is. Thank you, intellect, for a good contemplation, there is improved clarity.

“The classical definition of the first jhana describes it as “born from solitude.” To train the mind to dwell in sustained collectedness clearly requires removing oneself from the distractions and pressures of daily life. But this is not enough. The solitude that gives birth to the first jhana is primarily a state of mind” [[SB p151](#)].

Some of my pedanticism confirmed here – wonder where it is going.

“Have I reached jhana yet?” Whilst jhana occurs in solitude I don’t want to get bogged down in discussing jhana – [this](#) looks a good dogma read on it. To

avoid any dogma partisanship here is an encyclopaedia definition Britannica:-

“(1) detachment from the external world and a consciousness of joy and ease
(2) concentration, with suppression of reasoning and investigation
(3) the passing away of joy, with the sense of ease remaining
(4) the passing away of ease also, bringing about a state of pure self-possession and equanimity.

Ch22 ([\[SB p144\]](#)) is concerned with attending retreats with the specific purpose of attaining jhana, personally I don't like this. Jhanas happen or they don't – going looking for them is a good way of preventing them from happening. When there are targets – reaching 4th jhana, there is measurement and feeling of failure; not the purpose of meditation at all. For a long time I avoided consideration of the word jhanas because of the Buddhist hype until it struck me that the bells and banjos of Chiswick, the “guys” when I was writing, were just different forms of jhana; especially in Chiswick there was no preparation. Here is dhammajati, an important description of the path and where it is from:-

1. nature itself;
2. the law of nature;
3. the duties that must be performed according to that law of nature; and
4. the fruits or benefits that arise from the performance of that duty.

I now see jhana as a fruit. Samadhi (concentration) is one of the 4 Dhamma comrades that come from MwB, that is enough for me at the moment.

And I have discussed them, I have discussed the jhanas!

Pathtivism (from my trilogy) means following your path, in the end that is the most beneficial activism. Throughout the manual I looked at activism, and through complete disenchantment came to realise the best activism is

following your own path. Duty (see dhammajati) is a requirement but most importantly for the motivation to follow the path are the fruits. On the path there are moments of great joy and more importantly great peace. Apart from comradeship (very valuable) activists don't have that joy and peace, in fact with the required social agitation maybe there is personal agitation as well. Following the path is the right thing to do, good for society and "fruits" for you, in the world of wage-slavery the only fruit is consumerism which is not at all satisfying. Follow your path.

Path and jhanas have fruits in common.

Solitude and jhanas lead to serious consideration of the duty of dhammajati. Duty is concerned with giving back, nature gives so that is given back to all of nature. Whilst we are locked away with the focus of getting into states of jhana we are not giving back – not necessarily following our duty; if this is preparation for following duty after jhanas it is legitimate – part of the inner and outer cycle of life. We cannot do our duty if we are messed up – not in a good state of atammayata. Buddhists are stuck in discussions of engagement,

for me there is no discussion there is 100% engagement; that is duty. But that doesn't mean we live on the streets 24/7 holding a placard protecting Mother Earth. Duty is about gaia and compassion for others, developing jhanas and spiritual bypassing per se is not duty. Who has the answer as to how to do your duty? Your path.

Ch 23 on ayahuasca and alcohol ([SB p154]).

It came as a deep surprise that Stephen had been drinking wine, and that it feels bodily correct for him to stop after ayahuasca. Alcohol in solitude is not a good thing – it is never a good thing. Words like demonic arise but basically you with alcohol is not you, if it is not you it is not path.

Buddhist moralising came out and grabbed me. Refraining from alcohol is one of the lay precepts but the lay precepts seem to be the jump-off point in Buddhism. I used to hate moralising, it has the feel of someone superior telling you how to behave. I used to hate it especially when drinking, because the so-called morally-superior would be critical of the drink. But these

morally-superior were the conformed and conditioned, hiding behind the conforming and conditioning to tell others what to do – teachers were definitely good at that. But where is any superiority if there is conditioning? Conditioning is not you, it is what instincts and society wants you to be. How can there be any superiority when it is not you?

I am now big into sila – moral integrity, it is the first thing I understood after retiring. Sila is the core of social order, genuine personal sila, not some imposed moral code. It is interesting to recall that as soon as I left the world of work I began to embrace sila - I was free to choose sila. Was it the absence of the world of work that enabled sila or the presence of some solitude? I see no social stability unless there is a basis of sila and compassion. Before I could trust myself to be acting with compassion and sila, I had the imposed discipline of Buddhism, 5 lay precepts and all the numbers - 3 kilesa, 4 ariya-sacca, Noble 8-Fold Path to name just a few of the numbers. But now my path is the discipline.

Maybe that is the connection to solitude. In the world of work I was moving

further and further from my path. As soon as I retired and began to follow my path there was sila. Path was able to choose in solitude. In the world of work, the restrictions of your employment prevent your path from deciding because as an employee you cannot choose. This is an important aspect of using the term wage-slavery to describe employment, employees do not make the decisions. It is only the 1% who decide, and so when we look at the world and see its defiled state, we can legitimately blame the 1% and its satrapy because employees cannot choose. Independent artists, those who have not compromised their art and lifestyle for financial reward, immediately reject - aversion. The creativity of artists does not conform, many like this of artists, but unfortunately this non-conformity is initially based in aversion as with the intellectual socialist. Years of working with the Muse in solitude brings the sila that is true but free and independent.

In the world of work ordinary people do not choose, they get up, go to work, come home, look after their families, and then go to work again – as a friend once said go to work to pay the bills to go to work. There is no choice. When socialist activism demands that people rise up and throw off this yoke of

employment, I ask how can they? They are just looking after families, these are the people of the 99% the world over. So the possibility of choice in the conditioned world of employment is only for the 1%. And what do they choose? Their accumulation over the welfare of people, over compassion, over Mother Earth.

Except those who follow their path and escape the conditioning. In the world of employment 100% can follow this path but few do, conditioning can keep all (1% and 99%) within the defiled world. In the end, even the unconditioned require money and have to choose a job, but the path will always question wrong actions although sadly there is always the easier route of compromise that ego takes. In the solitude that is free from the restrictions that come with earning money, the art, the path, the compassion gives rise to sila and recognises that sila is the only way for social order.

Ch 24 [p159] Stephen offers various quotes where de Montaigne examines his own character. This is a strange approach for me. In solitude human interaction is limited, actions matter but character is not of interest; isn't


character a judgement by others? This lack of identification with character is also a Buddhist thing – anatta, or for me a question of following the path there is path and ego, any ego is hopefully let go and whisked back to nature. However actions are reflected on hopefully in real time (the Dhamma comrade of sampajanna or reflection-in-action of my Med). Recent actions are especially examined to ensure that they are right (Noble 8-Fold path).

But to be perfectly honest there is much reflection of past actions that arise. This process started with my life review and became an “art” form with the Pathtivist Trilogy, and even in this bouncing off the art of solitude there is reflection on the way of solitude in my life. There is a huge danger of ego in this past reflection, the ego of shame. I am ashamed of many actions prior to upheaval but I tend to see them as not the path and therefore beyond my control. Since upheaval I am especially ashamed of actions when drinking, but I tend to see them as not mine because of the drink. And I am ashamed at how far I drifted at times from the path since upheaval, that ego is the hardest to shift. These egos transform to determination so are perhaps a healthy reminder.

Where is character in this? Character is not a path word but a word of ego. In solitude character is irrelevant because character is how we are perceived. Solitude, if it becomes a path methodology – the art of solitude, is concerned only with path, action and “doing the best you can”.

“I spent nearly four years at Songgwang Sa, training as a Zen monk under the guidance of Kusan Sunim. For three months each summer and three months each winter, I would meditate ten hours each day” [[SB p166](#)].

There is always more to learn, there are always other ways things can be learnt. After my probate year I spent 3 months in Asia touring; touring is an exaggeration more like the tukey family who live with me – the tukey rests for a long time then chases after the jingjok and rests again. One of the decisions I reached concerned learning and taking (monk) orders, if I ever stopped learning I would take orders; taking orders is always there but the longer it goes I wonder what kind of clash would happen if I did take orders. Better I don't stop learning. Travel is a great teacher, there are so many

wonderful places and so many great people on the road, but you don't have to walk every blade of grass to learn; just enjoy where you've been and who you've met. There's so much more that could be done but 

There is the stream-entry question but there is much I haven't learnt about what I do know needs to be done. Perhaps stream-entry begins with quest and faith?

“Questioning and not-knowing ceased to be anything exceptional” [SB p167]. In this process I am questioning what I know about solitude bouncing off what has been written, is there a question of what is not known? Can I question what is not known? There are contents of consciousness that have been questioned throughout. Hopefully by the end of this there will be no contents left, there will be no respite in the known, only opening up the unknown. Sounds out there, man, it will be interesting to see if it isn't.

“Solitude is converted into religious capital. Withdrawal from the affairs of the world becomes a political asset. The hardship of renunciation generates

revenue, power, and renown” [[SB p169](#)].

This sucks - religious capital, but it is written to elicit that sort of response. What is the purpose of solitude? Of renunciation? Followers respect solitude and renunciation because they cannot do it – or they are afraid to do it. I admire Bob Kull’s solitude. I’m afraid to do it because I cannot do it, I don’t have the mechanical aptitudes. I would be a total fool to try. But I have a form of solitude in which I am learning. When I used to travel at the end of contracts I knew my holiday had started when I had gone through the temporary fear of solitude, a fear I would always go through after being surrounded by so many people during the term. I sometimes feel I should go to a hotel to experience that fear again except I am not surrounded by people, I am not stuck in a rut demanded by wage-slavery. I am on the path and learning, what is there to escape? The TV sometimes.

Then there is renunciation. Do we have the control to renounce? Years ago the demands of orders would have been a difficulty for me, now on occasions my daily life assumes the demands of a renunciate but without the imperative.

What is the imperative for? To experience the routine of the renunciate's life to see that it is better. How much better would it be if the decision was arrived at without the imperative? For followers neither solitude nor renunciation are expected to be their daily life, for followers there is no path just conditioning. Organised religion accepts having followers because it is a purpose of organised religion to give succour. Such succour is needed so solitude and renunciation can be of the category "not to be experienced" as with Bob Kull or for Stephen's monks. I just hope there is enough in those organised religions that says to the followers there is more to life than succour, the path is there if you want it. Followers, just take the step into solitude, just renounce.

Ch26 [[SB p167](#)]. Surprisingly I have never read Aldous Huxley's "Doors of Perception" as Morphon was a Brave New World theme; Morphon was a serialised story written for the magazine of the Arts centre and is lost! Ayahuasca is on my "if I stop learning" list - below the 10 hours a day for 3 months meditation at Kusan Sunim's temple. If I get stuck

One of the lay precepts is to refrain from taking drugs that will affect the mind. I lived with alcoholism for maybe 15 years, and I don't ever want a drug experience that can affect my mind like alcohol did. Yet for most of that time with alcohol I was in control of my work. Refraining from substances that affect my mind is a very clear precept to me, there's no refrain it is a personal imperative. Having experienced that alcohol impact on my mind I am scared. People have spoken of positive experiences with LSD, I have seen minds that lack integrity, minds where LSD has created that fracture. Jump starting the path is what the first grace does, it seems to me - based on my fears - that jump starting the path with ayahuasca is there if all else fails. Give me a stool and solitude any day, I have enough experience, however minimal, to process without ayahuasca. Priority is following the path, if the stool doesn't do it join an ayahuasca train - if necessary.

This is a quote from "The Doors of Perception" after Huxley had taken the mescaline:-

“We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all

circumstances we are by ourselves. The martyrs go hand in hand into the arena; they are crucified alone. Embraced, the lovers desperately try to fuse their insulated ecstasies into a single self-transcendence; in vain. By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude” [SB p171]. The way we experience is always alone. Is conditioned life simply an attempt to minimise the loneliness of experience through shared conditioned ego? I was always alone because of the path once started. Whilst awakening to the path is a wonderful experience, it can never be explained to anyone who has not experienced an awakening, and even though there are all the different awakening experiences no explanation is needed to those who have. Awakening in whatever form is just known. Before the path I was surrounded by NPC's, but always alone without knowing it. Unlike my teenage years there was never a desire for solitude at uni, I just wanted to be surrounded by NPC's. We never knew each other, there was never a common understanding except just sharing uni, we were there together; away from uni I just walked all over the suburb and the Mersey or buried myself in scifi. Starting employment aloneness returned. There was a sort of work ethic that united other workers, whether for house, promotion or a sense of personal

achievement people worked to get the job done. I went into work and collected beer money waiting for the pub because that was when I met people. I played football for the firm because I met people, it was all about running away from being alone. When I left the first job I was left alone, there wasn't the interesting people up West in sleepy Kent – not even a football team. It was not just the booze that took me to the bottom, unconsciously something took me to the bottom - a place where I could face my fear of being alone. Then I came out on the path alone and awake having found something of the authentic me, a me who could only be found by facing being alone inside. Wow, that's new yet I have revisited that upheaval so often.

It's true, I was always running from facing being alone – the natural state of aloneness that mescaline showed Aldous. I was alone as a teenager but never conscious enough to understand what aloneness meant. I got to uni, adult consciousness was slowly coming in, and I was running from being alone. I was alone back at the parents but I could just wait to return to uni – alone but waiting, no need to face it because I could return to the NPC's. The world of

work changed that. I have always thought that it was the discipline of work that was the problem, following the middle-class trip into the office and then finding it meant nothing. This was true but it was not the only dynamic. During the discipline of work I was required to sit there alone completely disinterested in what I was supposed to be doing – and cocking it up. I had done the middle-class trip but had none of the middle-class motivation. What did I do all day? Wait for the pub. At work I was alone and couldn't face it. In sleepy Kent I was alone all day, did no work, and was found out again – in the first job they thought there was potential. The action that got me the boot was deserved because of the lack of work. The lack of work was because I was lonely in the evening – no NPC's at the pub, and the office was where I met people. I remember a stupid game. On the white board we wrote meaningless phrases that people say – *these things are sent to try us*. We would number them, and then have conversations by number – maybe 15 of them. There were two of us in the office, the other guy resisted the playing because of work but he enjoyed it – and he had earned his stripes. I was just so lonely and unable to face aloneness. Getting the sack made me face it. Running to the parents was no respite, I had learnt to be lonely there without

facing aloneness; I had learnt to be interim there – the Dubai stopover. But there was no escape, solitude had me – it was just a question of when. The risky plan of coach to London, no job, nowhere to live, and a visit to an employment agency that resulted in Chiswick a day or so later were mere details, from the moment I was sacked solitude had got me. From the moment I left the first job where the people were more than NPC, solitude was inevitable - it was just the details that hadn't been scripted. The bells and banjos of Chiswick had to happen because the path had sufficient control to make me face aloneness; it could give me first grace because I was in aloneness. “every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude”, I was just never meant to hide from that solitude.

This raises the question, are we all just running from solitude? When I look at the old men here, throwing their money at younger women, are these women just able to make them feel they are not alone? Are you not alone if you have eye-candy? You are definitely not alone if you are always busy.

Let's start with minds, they cannot be still because then they face aloneness.

So they spin and spin, chatter, chatter, chatter. Meditation is feared because we sit and face being alone. Solitary confinement is a punishment because we cannot face being alone – face being who we are – face being who we are conditioned to be. Because it is the conditioning that is spinning in the mind, if we catch the conditioning we see it for what it is – an ego, we let go the ego and we are left with solitude – facing aloneness – and facing that aloneness means that we are starting on the path. And if there is firstgrace there, there are bells and banjos as rewards for awakening – reward for starting who we are meant to be as an adult.

Facing aloneness means we see the thoughts spinning, that is just the conditioning. Consciousness attaching to thoughts given to us, thoughts given to us living on the surface because they are not our insights – not from our path. With our thoughts spinning around we spin around, spinning thoughts make us “busy”, give us the need to be busy. So we have our routines – work, commuting, kids from school, kids to play, night out with the girls/guys, we fill our time with busy-ness because in busy-ness we don't see thoughts spinning around our heads – we don't have to face aloneness.

Have you seen the travel bug? Australians jumping on a train to do Europe in a day. It is like the thoughts in their minds making their bodies spin around and around Europe – around the world. Don't get me wrong travel broadens the mind, when we travel we meet people. When we are travelling we change because we are not trapped in the facade that is the routine of our lives. But the travel bug, thoughts travelling around our minds, aren't there similarities?

Solitude ends conditioning. When we are alone what is conditioning us? We are alone, no parents providing upbringing. We are alone, no requirements for employment. We are alone, no friends (peer conditioning) to make us escape, no drugs to hide behind. We are alone, we can begin to see the path without all the chatter from conditioning.

This notion I have just described of "waiting for first grace" intrigues me - as does first grace itself; I have written of first grace as if it is a recognised actuality, yet my only reference is the Eckhart Tolle meme. It was probably a month between the time I was kicked out of the firm in middle-class

conformity disgrace - it was far from disgrace I was laughing. I feel for the poor manager; he was youngish, totally bought into the conditioning, was well into the suburban way of conditioning, and my confused state had forced him into an action that was really not part of his life. And with that inner turmoil of his I was laughing. It was probably a laugh of joy at the beginning of the period of "waiting for first grace", it was a laugh at the escape that I could never have consciously come to, it was not a laugh of defiance or anything personal - there was nothing personal happening. It was just conditioning unravelling.

It was fortunate that my life was bereft of content even though I was nearly 23. That lack of content meant I could get on a bus up North and get back on a similar bus South a month later in almost the same state. What if I had fallen in "love" - I was not capable of loving then? If I had met someone who could tolerate me I would have done as I was told, whatever was needed to maintain that tolerance. But instead a Xmas and New Year passed with only one recollection - outside a pub *this was not for me any more.*

Because I am convinced that the path is the only way - [#pathivism](#), it concerns me greatly that the [first grace](#) can pass people by. For Eckhart his awakening, described in the introduction to [Power of Now](#), was unavoidable but listening to [Batgap](#) there are first graces that motivate but only come to fruition later - much like [mine](#). But how many more don't bear fruit in a society that mocks awakening, that mocks the way nature intends society to live in harmony - people following their paths? This is why the awakened talk about being awake so that if it happens it can be recognised; mockery mostly washes off.

I have discussed [firstgrace](#) as if it is an accepted thing; but is it? I was of course attracted to a first grace happening because I was completely unconscious – there was no “doing on my part”. I have always felt a sort of cheat, the bottom I hit was minimal, and then after the early wonders I slipped away – including the booze. Perhaps because I never earned it, I never valued it.

To try to understand first grace I listened to Eckhart [here](#) to see more what he

was getting at. Stillness/sunnata is always arising and asserting itself but ego/thought creates a barrier that prevents it; Eckhart describes this as happening because of the grace of God – Nature’s grace, kammic grace, law of Nature ([Dhammajati](#)). This first awakening that I have been calling [firstgrace](#) arises as stillness/sunnata asserts itself through all the natural instinct and societal conditioning that masquerades as ego and thought – sankharic ego. “It cannot be reversed” but can be held up by ego – in my case the booze ego for a long while. It is my understanding that stillness/sunnata is always naturally asserting itself, so what does this first grace mean?

In [this talk](#) Eckhart speaks of pain creating more suffering for yourself and others so that eventually the awakening comes to show the delusion of suffering. The [firstgrace](#) is special because it is the first, but is not a special process for sunnata which naturally asserts. Once there has been awakening there will never be that shattering of deluded suffering again, but does that make the person awakened? I think there are different views on this. From my experience definitely not. There was some sort of awakened vision after the upheaval but it wasn’t until well into retirement that there was the level of

maturity that might merit the description of “awakened”. Some might say that at times in my life I went through further awakenings, I am satisfied to explain this with the word “insight”. These insights, some more powerful than others, built into the mature awareness that I now classify as following my path. First grace plus ongoing insights equals what? You choose your words for your own process, I am following my path doing the best I can.

This next, arising from Eckhart's talk, is about “waiting for first grace”, the crack that Eckhart discusses at [18.00](#) – it also explains the laughing a bit more. There was a density preventing me from finding my path. This density comprised of the middle-class conditioning, the arrogance of uni, the arrogance of the good first job, the alcohol, the fear of facing aloneness, and suddenly there was the sack. For everything my limited life was supposed to be about the sack was serious, it destroyed the factory belt of conformity. The limited construct of me that I had never subscribed to but which conditioning had channelled me towards was just cracked open. This density that was shallow because of all the fragmenting was cracked by doing something that density could not accept – you are so poor you are sacked.

And what came through the crack – joy which showed as laughter. This was the joy that was anticipating firstgrace – waiting for first grace (abeyance), the knowledge the path had that the sham density was over – the shallow conditioning was cracked aside leaving nothing, no conditioning – nothing. There was an emptiness of self – so in a sense the voidness of sunnata, but it was all unconscious – unconscious emptiness as opposed to conscious emptiness that can arise in meditation. Conscious emptiness has the direction of the path, packing bags and jumping on the bus was a conditioned reaction – running home, it was empty but not path – not voidness. And it remained an interim unconscious emptiness until somehow I formulated the decision to get back on the bus, get a job and meet the path in the Chiswick loft. The sack which I previously brushed off was significant in that it cracked my limited fragmented density.

From the Unknown 

Above (“Questioning and not-knowing ceased to be anything exceptional” [SB p167]) I asked about questioning the not known, I kind of thought

"questioning the unknown" might end this Viveka-Zandtao. Then last night there was a weirdness "out of the known into the unknown", and I felt a broadening out as if the known was broadening out into an unknown. This weirdness lasted through the night, I offer observation and no explanation.

I took the unknown to meditation and asked "What is Solitude?" This began with physical solitude that meant people facing themselves – prisoners finding religion? Whilst facing aloneness was part of my upheaval (first grace) and the bells and banjos happened alone, the solitude I discuss here has moved on from there. But such solitude would be about facing the density, the stream of thoughts and conditioning that need to be cracked at firstgrace. From firstgrace onwards solitude means the path, as you face yourself there is constant questioning about following the path.

Huxley's peyote led to him saying "always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves" – quoted from Stephen above. We are always alone, what we experience is alone inside – even if we experience together. For many life is concerned with running away from experiencing alone – escapism through

drugs, surrounding by family, always surrounded by people. To begin coming to terms with life we face the fact that we experience alone and begin an inner journey as well as the usual external journey.

But that solitude is only the beginning, starting the inner just begins – it is not an end. Once we open into the inner landscape there is much that is similar – the spinning mind as the thought stream spins around creating the density Eckhart spoke of. Even when the density is cracked, after the first grace quiets down thought can still be spinning. Meditation can quieten thought, having a calmer inner space is part of the inner journey.

But then in solitude we can start considering oneness, unity etc. Solitude at the beach gave me a wonderful understanding. As the waves roll in I watch the Trump-wave raising its white mane of surf - the self-important orange, and then disappearing again into the unity of the sea totally lost as an individual. Watching the sea can make Unity understandable. Watching ants march along one can see separate bodies but one creature. In solitude and meditation I have experienced a sense of oneness.

Today I asked “What is Solitude?” and it led to a process similar to the [MwB](#) tetrads. In meditation the known had stretched out into the unknown. This stretching was mushroomy - not out of body, it was not a huge mushroom; it felt larger than me but not universal yet there was no perceivable edge. This could be oneness but there was no feeling of other presences just a presence that was larger but including me. This oneness wanted understanding, all people, all life, the planet, and the Unity that was Gaia – One Life that includes all life, One Life in which there is no separation.

“This is her first real experience of solitude” [[SB p187](#)].

This finishes up a description of a woman who first leaves home and uses a raft to cross a river – raft being a metaphor for (Buddhist) dogma. But it made me think of how society avoids solitude currently, and started me comparing solitude with rites of passage that used to occur. If you please excuse the sexism a rite of passage “makes a man of you”. In Africa warriors were sent into the bush, and were expected to make weapons hunt and survive - even

kill a lion; in our society moving into adulthood is mollycoddled. In a way it is understandable years 16-21 are years in which young people are breaking away from parental influence, are expected to rely on themselves and as a result can screw up. The career path, school, uni, job is a controlled environment to make that transition thoughtless and conditioned. That control is not the intention of a rite of passage, what we have now is a period of minimised disruption, minimal questioning of conditioning. Much of the current millennial dilemma is that this mollycoddling is not being backed up by the 1% who are taking too many profits and not providing jobs even for the qualified. Instead of the factory belt tranquillising these difficult years, it has changed to a debt-creation scheme indenturing the intelligent young lifeblood of our society whilst not proving the job as end-objective.

The characteristics of rites of passage would be to provide solitude in which the individual tested their mettle, testing as examinations does not offer this but makes a transition bumpless. Another characteristic of a rite of passage is to present a challenge during this solitude, the intention of this would be to make the individual dig deep for personal resources, a recognition that

individuality does not exist until it is grappled with. To follow the path the individual must face a challenge in solitude, a challenge that often has a characteristic of suffering. With the lack of a rite of passage the transition is made without a challenge, without suffering, and only superficial learning – without the depth of learning that grappling and survival skills can provide. Whilst Bob Kull was past the age of such a rite of passage, his year of facing survival has the purpose of grappling and developing deep inner personal resources. This is the type of educated quality that Pirsig - ZAMM and others would bemoan the lack in what goes for our current education system. Attempts to develop qualities such as gumption are recognised as necessary but don't fit within the testing model, a model that suits the 1% because of the failures it creates – see Matriellez. The corporate paradigm would like gumption with conformity, and whilst this is not a direct oxymoron it effectively is. The corporate paradigm would encourage a rite of passage if it could guarantee the required conformity as well as developing the deep personal resources, but yet again this is almost a contradiction. Nature provides instinctive conditioning during childhood intending for this surviving ego and identity to fall away with maturity - perhaps during a rite

of passage, sadly societal conditioning whose primary goal is to conform to the 1%-satrapy has made that falling away less and less natural so that the mature egoless path is very rarely found. A return to solitude with a possible modern-day rite of passage could be encouraged within our education system, and rites within nature would be obvious. Unfortunately such limited opportunities that are offered can produce tragedy because of the ill-discipline of students, an ill-discipline in which students do not follow instructions and teachers are blamed. The Pennine Way in a tent would be a sound rite of passage facing solitude, requiring personal resource without the dangers that killing lions required. Travel and a gap year (and Peace Corps?) are the nearest we have but these have become protected moving away from solitude and independent self-realisation.

Examinations could at least contribute to such a process of learning by grappling with deep resources. This might be done through investigating critical and creative thinking as a question model. But the underlying paradigm works against this. It is what I have always thought of as the Ken Robinson dilemma, what might pejoratively be called the creative robot

dilemma, but what Ken would hope could be resolved within schooling. Ken was exalted by the system – Sir Ken, yet demanded critical thinking, but unlike people like me he never focussed on the reality of the 1%-paradigm that educational priority is conformity; instead he posed questions “nicely”. To be fair to Ken most teachers would love to perceive of themselves as educators who lead out, but it is not practical for career-orientated lifetime teachers to focus on the miseducation nature of the corporate paradigm because teachers are not policy-makers and the paradigm is not looking to create change. Educators for solitude could be a movement within education that might try to develop a modernised rite of passage of self-realisation through genuine solitude. It certainly sounds a nice catchphrase that could get funding!!

“*Nibbana-dhatu* is a negative capability. In letting go of—“negating”—reactivity, one discovers a greater capacity—“capability”—to respond to life. To experience *nibbana-dhatu* is to experience freedom from those attachments and opinions that prevent your own imaginative response to the situations you face in life. *Nibbana-dhatu* is not the end point of the path but

its turning point [[SB p190](#)].

This negative capability is present whenever one is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason [[SB p190](#)].

Your responsibility lay in the world: not just in helping others live more autonomously, but in serving as an embodiment of solitary self-sufficiency" [[SB p189](#)].

Stephen talks of “solitary Buddhas” as being people who “awaken to nirvana” naturally – not because they have followed Buddhist dogma. I very much like this especially if I refer to the (not-particularly-Buddhist) discussion I had on [first grace](#) in which I used Eckhart’s way of describing awakening as the ever-present stillness rising into consciousness. Stephen describes this discussion as awakening to nirvana but I have changed his quote using the italicised *nibbana-dhatu* as I couldn't accept the quote with Nirvana as a whole. Nibbana is the Pali for Nirvana (Sanskrit) but that is not the issue. Buddhadasa talks of [Nibbana for everyone](#) in which Nibbana is not this great walled-city at the end of the rainbow of enlightenment, but that during our

lives it is not unusual for us to experience glimpses (dhatu) of Nibbana at particular moments of presence. To be clear I don't know whether Stephen and I are saying the same thing – I could not accept his original. I am comfortable with discussion on "glimpses", and Stephen's quote makes sense to me with considering "glimpses" - Nibbana-dhatu.

What I very much like is the idea that there are Dhamma solitaires (solitary soldiers) who through these awakenings and understandings are out in the world “**helping others live more autonomously**”, and especially that these solitaires need not have followed the teachings of the dhamma. There are two uses of the word Dhamma and dhamma that also need addressing for clarity. Dhamma is the Pali for Dharma (Sanskrit), and again that is not important. Now the dhamma is the body of teaching (the raft of Ch 28) but the Dhamma is what is important because it is the understanding behind the teaching. Teaching and understanding are very different. Although understanding is a correct word it does not convey the full meaning of Dhamma, wisdom might be better but still falls far short. Dhamma contains the 4 Dhamma comrades but again that falls short of understanding Dhamma; it is not meant as a word

to be understood.

But the spiritual understanding of the Dhamma does not require having adhered to the teachings of the Buddha. When Stephen talks of John Keats' negative capability he is describing an aspect of the Dhamma that was defined by Keats. But Keats' definition had no connection to dhamma teaching, and yet is part of Dhamma, a nibbana-dhatu.

I feel caught in Buddhist semantic “awfulness”. I am connecting one branch of Buddhist teaching (Theravada and Buddhadasa) to another (Mahayana and Korean) whilst also trying to include Keats' negative capability. Putting this all together might appear semantic intellectualism. Essentially what Stephen is getting at, and what I fully support is that there are these solitary people who have gained wisdom, and are living independent lives encouraging us all to be autonomous. How they get there is nature's design, and not because they followed any particular dogmatic script.

I like to call what these independent people do as following the path. And I

have taken that a step further in the trilogy by describing the need for path activism, activism focussed on following the path, to change our defiled world because of the failure of existing activism. The 1%-satrapy has more-or-less complete control. Earlier this year Greta came on the scene and millions of kids demonstrated – nothing happened, because the 1%-satrapy does not have to listen. Now in the US there is an uprising (initially against the police because they killed another black person George Floyd), how much will the 1%-satrapy listen to this? There are token changes already but it is much more than these tokens that are required if there were deep listening. What is heartening for me is the strength of community activism shown within black movements explained and typified by Miski Noor. Community activism is not the path but it is compassion - as opposed to following a doctrine, and compassion is a quality of the path - a step in the irght direction away from views. People following their path will be compassionate. People will gain no control in elections, politics and the various isms that have appropriated their compassion - why we need to focus on the path and compassion is discussed throughout the manual. If people become these independent solitaires following their own paths, then the conditioning that

has become the human downgrading of fake news and the rest will not have an effect. So for the step further I have called these independent people following their path an ism - #pathtivism, it is activism (sampajanna – a Dhamma comrade) coming from wisdom that is needed if the defiled world is not going to increase its defilement.

Ch30 on meditation starts with Stephen saying “I do not regard myself as a particularly accomplished meditator” [[SB p199](#)]. When he describes his meditation routine in Korea, it makes my own practice pale by comparison; he does not however describe his current daily routine. I am far more effusive about meditation than Stephen but this is because of my personal history; I am not trying to assert that meditation has more of an impact on my life. My main reason for giving meditation the fanfare is the amount of time I have been on the path without regular meditation. Meditation was short but significant in the Chiswick flat. I remember preparing myself for the guys – the bells and banjos (jhanas) – by some sort of sitting, but I cannot recall what. I would then be taken over and usually write; I remember the loft space, the guys, the bells and banjos but not what I did. Once I left the loft I

began working in child care, and that took my attention except with the Arts people. I think the centre was closed when I was in Baissy-Thy, I had some close contacts who I then lost through immaturity, and by then I was in the midst of teaching, the beginning of alcohol, and the lifestyle that meant path and nature during Summer vacation. Moving to Brighton and then finishing the drink meant I had more time in nature with the South Downs, they always brought me back closer to the path. There were occasional jhanas during that time but the time I really recall them was when I wrote Kirramura – described above.

Things started to change during my mid-life review in my mid-40s. I was doing an MEd by distance learning, and became reflective. I loved being in Botswana, Southern Africa's natural beauty is encapsulating; but day-to-day there was little to do as people I knew were drinking and chasing the women. But I have a great fondness for that time in my life. I particularly remember Shashe Dam where I would go, sit and reflect under the reeds. At the time of the review there was sporadic meditation but nothing regular. I left Botswana, visited Thailand, decided to be Theravadan Buddhist and developed a

connection with Harnham. From that trip to Thailand, being a Buddhist meant meditation to me, and from Harnham there was this Insight meditation booklet that became the basis of my practice then. I remember for my final years at work meditating most mornings except in Nigeria because every time I meditated I wanted to resign; I didn't and the money helped me retire early. Nigeria doesn't seem so bad now. The kids were lovely, many of the staff I worked with were caring, but the owner and administration ruined it for everyone; as soon as I start to think of them the pain comes. Who was I to care about education and the kids, it was the owner's school? But in the end kids always survive and find a way into life, whatever the schools do to them.

Meditation kicked off in retirement (at 54); for 30 years there had been connection to the path, then retirement, meditation, studying Buddhism and eventually becoming a writer. All are connected – meditation, Buddhism and writing; this was my path – neither of the three leading. What would I study, what would I write, they just happened, and if they didn't happen in meditation I would ask and have what to do next. There was no plan other than this path, and the robustness of this path I put down to meditation

because if there were doubts meditation ended them. But that is overall, there was no daily consequitor. Meditation is when I get up for 45 minutes most days. Over the last couple of years I have developed bhavana – a mini-Stephen in Korea. At the most there have been 4 sessions, 45 mins, rest, 45 mins, rest but usually two or three. On my probate holiday I had made a decision, if I wasn't learning I would take orders but the question has never arisen.

As Zandtaomed I started as an insight med teacher, then became a teacher of MwB; I had a serious student for a while helping me to much of the Companion. The trilogy started as an autobiography based on the 3 tenets of the Treatise, then I examined activism in the Manual leading to complete disenchantment and pathtivism, and finally MwB with the companion being the methodology that could help follow the path. It is all about path, writing, studying Buddhism and meditation practice and teaching. To separate meditation from that path would be totally arbitrary nor would that path be what it is without meditation. After the mid-life review path took me to the writing, it is just an intellectual question to ask if I would have reached here

without meditation, the path is what I do and that includes meditation.

I have not investigated meditation in the way Stephen has in [[SB Ch 30 from p199](#)] – it is not solitude but maybe I will; but I have no problem with this conclusion describing the path “To integrate contemplative practice into life requires more than becoming proficient in techniques of meditation. Never be complacent about contemplative practice; it is always a work in progress. The world is here to surprise us. My most lasting insights have occurred off the cushion, not on it” [[SB p204](#)]. I don’t perceive my meditation as examining character in detail although sampajanna is so important; of course character is how others perceive and because I am retired in solitude such perception is limited – especially as those around me show little interest in compassion or path.

[[SB Ch 31 from p205](#)]. I note that for Stephen ayahuasca is nirvana and ends Stephen’s attachment to Buddhism. Powerful; its power raises questions about what he means? Especially, can ayahuasca be nirvana? Thailand screams heresy. To be perfectly honest I don’t believe it or I would take

ayahuasca, but there is meaning to be taken. Is Stephen's nirvana nibbana-dhatu again? Might well be. By following my path can I experience nibbana-dhatu? If I didn't think so I would be taking orders. Take ayahuasca?

After a night's disturbed sleep I must note that reading ch31 freaked me primarily indicating a fear of taking ayahuasca at my age – and always has been after the alcohol. Ending the attachment to Buddhism on reflection is not a problem as this is just ditthupadana – attachment to an ism. In Ch 28 Stephen spoke of Buddhist dogma as the raft to get to the other side but it then being a burden if not let go; this is the attachment to let go once there is the wisdom of the "other side". There is an additional attachment worth mentioning for all especially early in the journey – attaching to insights. One purpose of insight is to knock you on the head and say wow, what about this? It is nature's gamechanger but the problem is it is not a gamechanger for life – only a gamechanger for the particular time. Because of the power of insight, and perhaps the personal nature of it, we attach – cling (upadana), and say that's the way to go now when in fact the time of the insight has passed.

But attachment to Buddhism is the same as following any creed, it is just following a set of words that are teachings. Buddhism as with any other sound set of dogma is there to inspire wisdom. It is the wisdom that matters and not the words of teaching that inspire. Hopefully what we learn from the words is the wisdom the Buddha sought, wisdom – the collection of insights we gain during our lives. If Stephen hasn't ended attachment to words then this was a good signal from ayahuasca.

Stephen's ayahuasca biggie disturbed me during the night, why do I need sleep to knock ego on the head sometimes? “I feel a confirmation again. It is as though the purging has forcibly opened and inscribed in my flesh a passageway for new possibilities to emerge. This purified space is nothing other than nirvana. The medicine lets you contemplate, feel, taste, and savor nirvana. The path of your life originates here. Nirvana is the uterus of the world. The very fabric of what I am is womblike, as if my thoughts and flesh are the matrix out of which I am born each moment” [SB p210]. This was the disturbance. My fear initially rejected it and questioned Stephen, but last night taught me to accept these revelations from Ayahuasca for Stephen, face

it as a truth for him, and learn to understand what that truth is. (Saves having to take it ).

To understand it I turned to atammayata. Buddhadasa translated it as unconcoctability, lugubrious lacking snazziness but deep. Atammayata is a state in which there is no concocting of conditions – sankhara, and I speak of 3 prongs of atammayata:-

- 1) No concocting ayatana
- 2) No attachment to conditioning
- 3) No reacting to +/-

These are things I am sure Stephen has worked on. In my case because of my weakness there are gaps in the 3 prongs. I have had glimpses (nibbana-dhatu) as a result of atammayata but no way is it the whole hog. For me, Stephen's description of ayahuasca has purged so that sounds like a vision of the whole hog. This purge has provided a huge glimpse – "a panoptic vision and experience of nirvana". Using my own interpretation, perhaps what happened

is that atammayata created a partially-purified state, and ayahuasca is showing the completed job – showing the "vision and experience of nirvana". A speculation.

“The path of your life originates here” . I take two meanings from this. The path of your life originates in nirvana, and the path of your life starts from here. Nirvana is the uterus, Gaia is the womb from which all paths emerge. That is oneness that contains all paths, all paths that kamma gives us.

Now what happens in daily life? Does one remain in the state of atammayata that the Ayahuasca vision or otherwise has shown? Or does one return to the daily life where ayatana, conditioning and reactivity eat away at the state of atammayata? One can take from the vision the greatness of the nibbana-dhatu, it is an experience that has to be such a strong motivational carrot that the path is mapped out by the vision. But the carrot and vision have to then be consolidated through the practice that leads to the state of atammayata. Ayahuasca does not change daily life, you do. The vision is there and it says “look what can be done”, this is where your path can take you, and through


interpretation this is how you do it.

Thus ends my fear of the need for ayahuasca. Do I need the vision for motivation? I am not complacent, do the best I can; is that an answer to that question? But the question is similar to taking orders, if I stop learning I must do something. And so far I haven't stopped. By facing Stephen's ayahuasca I have greater clarity but of course that is only concerning his words of the experience. But I have dealt meaningfully with my fearful response.

In Stephen's final chapter he talks of a compunction of solitude – to give back. Solitude is not about running away but about learning and once we learn we give back. It is duty to give back, part of the laws of nature – dhammajati:-

1. nature itself;
2. the law of nature;
3. the duties that must be performed according to that law of nature; and
4. the fruits or benefits that arise from the performance of that duty.

For giving back we have to examine the delusions in this defiled world, and see what we can do. Through our own activism we address these delusions but the priority is to follow the path. Through the path we can be certain our activism is true because we can receive the fruits of the path. That is where focus should be; focus on the path, follow your path, be autonomous. Here is a description of the path:-

	The Path to End Suffering
	The Path that goes beyond Conditioning
	The Path of Compassion Insight & Creativity

Follow the path and enjoy the fruits. With the awareness of the path, if we can beneficially change awareness will tell us how. Stephen's path gave him joy and he is able to give back. Following the path there will always be opportunities to give back. But each day we can get up and follow the path, and feel the wonders of nature – experience nature's fruits. Solitude helps us follow the path, helps us understand the delusion, helps us end some suffering whilst seeing tathata and not attaching to it. Seeing tathata helps your path to decide with compassion, that is a decision of your solitude. Because of the suffering in daily life compassion always questions, and in solitude the path provides the answers. Just follow the path.

And where does the path of solitude take us? From the known to the unknown 🐼, exploring the creative.

To the unknown is a good journey. I lay there thinking about it, and there was a clarity:- the unknown was a space of no thought and not thought is stillness. Then in meditation I examined solitude, solitude on my own – not bouncing off Stephen, because of Stephen I have examined the known, now empty of contents I can examine the unknown.

There were two journeys of solitude leading to the same place. Both journeys started with solitude as physical isolation, but then began an inner journey of solitude:-

Khandha solitude – khandhas rupa/body, vedana/feeling, sanna/perceptions and memories, sankhara/mental processes, vinnana/ consciousness of the other 3 khandhas. So this journey of khandha solitude began in the body letting go of vinnana of the other 3 khandhas in turn. As a result there was a

solitude that had no connection with khandhas, it was vinnana without khandha-vinnana. This was the unknown – no knowing, space of no thought.

Atammayata solitude – unconcoctable solitude, 3 prongs of atammayata, no attaching to ayatana, no conditioning, no reacting to +/- . So this journey of atammayata solitude began by letting go of ayatana, then conditioning, and then reacting (same as khandhas). This was then the state of atammayata, the state of consciousness (vinnana) where there was no “3-prong-vinnana”. This was the unknown – no knowing, space of no thought.

But there was still attachment, attachment to the desire for the unknown, attachment to khandha solitude, attachment to atammayata solitude.

Consciousness stepped back from these solitudes through upekkha – no reaction to the state of consciousness. This stepping back then enveloped the states of solitude, upekkha solitude – no reaction.

[Then I had gas and lost it but throughout I had to say stop writing – must write that, however I have been able to record the stages of the meditation

enough.]

Today was a bringing together, a consolidation of strands. My earlier trip to the unknown led to oneness and Gaia. Yesterday's focus was on the individual increasing solitude, put the two together. From being separate people in society, there is physical isolation, and then with either khandha solitude or atammayata solitude consciousness steps back to the space with no thought. But when we consolidate this approach with the oneness and Gaia, then we can see that solitude is a process of moving from separation to oneness or Unity ironically through increasing solitude. Solitude is a process from separation to Unity.

From here we can begin to look at Buddhism and its relationship to this process of solitude – from separation to Unity. Paticcasamuppada – dependent origination – looks at the stages of attachment:-

- (1). With ignorance as a condition, mental concocting arises;
- (2). With mental concocting as a condition, consciousness arises;
- (3). With consciousness as a condition, mentality/materiality arises;
- (4). With mentality/materiality as a condition, the six sense bases arise;
- (5). With the six sense bases as a condition, contact arises;
- (6). With contact as a condition, feeling arises;
- (7). With feeling as a condition, craving arises;
- (8). With craving as a condition, attachment arises;
- (9). With attachment as a condition, becoming arises;
- (10). With becoming as a condition, birth arises;
- (11). With birth as a condition, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and tribulation arise. Thus the mass of suffering arises.

Atammayata is unconcoctability, and suffering arises (11) because in 1)

concocting arises with ignorance as condition. In terms of the 3 prongs of atammayata we have conditioning arising throughout, contact arising from ayatana in steps 4 and 5, and craving arising from vedana in 6 and 7 where the vedana is feeling that arises as a reaction to +/- . The process of atammayata solitude is simply using the natural law of paticcasamuppada to end concocting, and move from separation to unity.

Suffering arises from conditioning by the law of paticcasamuppada, but suffering is one of the 3 characteristics and is usually associated with the 4 Noble Truths. In this defiled world there is suffering (NT1), then with craving as attachment to desire (NT2) there is suffering (this can also be seen in the law of paticcasamuppada) and quenching craving ends the suffering (NT3). The Noble 8-Fold path (NT4) is the methodology, a way of life in which if followed suffering does not arise.

Desire arises from the 5 khandhas with consciousness (vinnana) clinging to one of the other 4 khandhas, so because there is no desire in the process of khandha solitude suffering (as described by 4NT) does not arise as solitude

moves from separation to Unity.

Anatta – no-self – is also one of the three characteristics. Not attaching to self is the same as removing I and mine from the 5 khandhas, and this removal occurs during khandha solitude. The 3rd characteristic is anicca – no permanence. When you look at paticcasamuppada you see concocting arising but with the process of atammayata solitude such temporary concoctions do not arise or are let go. In this process of solitude from separation to Unity the three characteristics of Buddhism can be recognised.

Finally let us look at the 4 foundations of mindfulness through MwB. During MwB we condition kaya, vedana and citta, (sanna and sankhara being part of citta and with consciousness/vinnana makes up the 5 khandhas), so we could see khandha solitude as removing attachment to the 5 khandhas, 3 of the 4 foundations of mindfulness. Moving from the known to the unknown, the place of stillness, the space of no thought we have moved into the realm of Dhamma – the fourth foundation. This Dhamma is the Unity of Nature, the end of separation, the endpoint of the process of solitude.

Using [Art of Solitude](#) Viveka-Zandtao has examined the process of solitude moving from separation to Unity, and has seen that it incorporates much Buddhist teaching. With the greatest respect I feel Buddhadasa-like. In his talks he focusses on details, using his insight to jump into grander teaching, and then incorporating the different Buddhist teachings collating them together showing their interconnectivity. I like to think I have done some of that with solitude.

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