

ZANDTAO MEDITATION

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Viveka-Zandtao

The Practice of Solitude

Reaching this coming together on my [inner journey](#) made me realise that I had grasped something on the *theory of solitude*. As I had already begun looking at [Bob Kull's book](#) it made sense that there was a practice there. I found fairly quickly that the practice of solitude was sampajanna as you will

see, and one practice that could be of interest is

Reading Bob Kull, I will be bouncing off his book to understand the practice of solitude. Before I comment on what he says there is a need to clear away the contents of consciousness relating to the practice of solitude. Until I retired my solitude was mostly concerned with holidays - when not on holiday there was always limited socialising because friendship was related to work (my compassion decision); that is of course putting aside Baissy-Thy. However there was one living alone in solitude disaster worth raising. It was after probate, and I had had a miserable UK year - trapped in the timely probate process and selling off the house; that year was the final nail in the coffin of living in the UK. I escaped on a plane to Bangkok, and spent a month on Koh Samet before flying to Kathmandu. It was my plan to spend time up the mountains - no desire as a mountain-climber but just wandering around the mountains; I had been in China so it was probably connected to a fantasy surrounding the mountain-dwelling monks of China.

This was not a new fantasy. In Chengdu travelling around was not easy for louai - couldn't jump in my own pickup and explore, but I did go on a tour up to the hot springs and a ski resort higher up. We reached the ski resort, and I was amazingly stupid. We had spent 6 hours in a Combi, so I booked in the hotel and escaped. There was nothing but the ski resort there for miles around so I walked up the edge of a small hill outside the resort, not high maybe 3 or 400 metres; the resort was clearly visible to my left. I wasn't going too high, not knowing where I was, but the resort was clear on my left. I was just away, away from the tour, away from the conformity of Chinese hotels - just free looking out from the side of this small hill.

Then the clouds came down blocking any view of the resort, so I began walking down the hill - conscious that the resort was to my left-side. After a while I should have reached the road but it was nowhere around - getting worried. My mind raced with some panic, I had on my Rab anorak so worse came to worse I could survive the night. In my concern I began walking faster, got hot, tied my coat around my waste and continued walking down through the forest. Suddenly I discovered the anorak was gone - snagged on

a branch somewhere; panic increased. I went back up to look for it - no luck. I continued walking down the hill jacketless and vulnerable - although not at that time cold.

Walking and walking going down the hill I was getting more and more scared, but the resort was on the left. I must meet the only road in the area that led up to the resort, every sense of direction and logic told me that. But the walking made no sense, why hadn't I met the road? Walking, resort to the left. No watch, no idea of time inside the forest but I kept walking, resort to the left, looking for the road.

And then, thank God, the road. Resort to the left I followed the road to the left going downhill. Going downhill! That made no sense, the resort was above me. Continuing downhill, nothing, no resort. Eventually I defied my own sensible logic, went back up the hill, and soon reached the resort. I had left at 2.00pm, it was then after 6.00pm. To this day including looking at maps, I have no idea what happened - maybe I got turned around looking for the anorak?

In the Ardennes before Baissy-Thy I had learned to trust myself when walking. I was reading Journey to Ixtlan, with the little I know the only book of Castaneda trusted to contain Yaqui wisdom. One morning I walked into the Ardennes to get lost - no maps, just going to walk and walk through the forest making sure there was no idea where I was - intentionally not following paths. At some point I decided to turn round and go back to the farmhouse I was staying in. Walking and walking contentedly, enjoying the forest, eventually I came to a road. It wasn't the direction I was walking in but no matter, I knew the road would take me to the village - to the farmhouse; after about 4km it did. Getting out the maps, I was about 1km from the farmhouse in the direction I was walking when I had decided to follow the road. I could trust myself.

So at the end of probate year and after a month in Koh Samet I was going to the Himalayas and was going to spend time on a mountain. Not going to live rough, I found a tour guide who would drive me up and then find an isolated guest house/family where I could stay - the guide said he could arrange that.

I had a huge backpack, and there was this wiry little guy who was going to carry it (the bag was a foot taller than his back packed for 3 months with computer) - the guide insisted that was part of the deal I had to pay for. We reached Dhunshe, a tourist spot with a view of Everest, and I was dumped at the hotel. I walked round Dhunshe - so beautiful, meeting the ragamuffin with her tame crow that she wanted me to photograph for money; she was lovely but I always resisted tourism ploys. Dhunshe was wonderful and I was looking forward to walking higher away from people, and finding an isolated house where I would be fed. And could wander the hills.

But that night lifestyle struck, and I lived on the toilet. Altitude yet it was only 2000m. I was on the toilet for 3 days, no sign of improvement, and the tour guide forced me to go back to Kathmandu where I stayed in a hotel for a week recuperating before going to Pokhara whose appeal was that it had a lake and was LOWER. No solitude up a mountain.

The previous year I had been to Lhasa - at the end of my year in Chengdu, and managed a few days at the wonderful Lake Namtso. Again forced to

take a tour guide, we reached the hotel and I collapsed on the bed with altitude. But I recovered enough to enjoy the lake and the daily pilgrimage which was walking around the hill that was at Namtso.


My stomach still gives me trouble - reflux and rumbling internal gas, but is not that bad. But altitude, and solitude at altitude, are definitely not for me. That's OK, I tried. It is not envy - can't do it, it's just admiration. Paths are just different.

Bob Kull's book begins with a description of his life prior to the 1-year solitude, and it makes the solitude in my life look minimal. He regularly flees back to nature in a far more self-reliant way than the cheap-hotel-solitudes that were my holidays. Again there is envy but accepting it is his and not mine makes it non-egoic, we all lead different lives. Have I done sufficient to relate to what he writes?

“But to be fully human, we need relationship not only with other people but with the nonhuman world, with our own inner depths — and with Something

Greater. For me, that nonmaterial Presence is mysterious and sacred” [RK p10].

For me this is upside-down, start with the relationship with something greater – sunnata, and then relate to others. This was born out in real life where up until upheaval I had no relationships with people – only NPC, because I was only NPC – conditioned. My recollection of who I was prior to upheaval was a conditioned immature mess reacting to life as a “good middle-class boy”. What makes me question that assessment a little is the Arts person I most respected. I left uni and began with a computer consultancy, and she was working there. She saw something in me, something I didn’t see in myself; it was because of what she saw in me that after the upheaval I went to the Arts centre – somehow reconnecting with her; maybe 6 months since I left the firm. Once I started on the path relationships were not NPC as they were always in some way connected to the path – when I was later a teacher relationships were around teaching. Essentially there were no relationships (prior to upheaval) - until I was being true to myself .

“Mysterious and sacred” - I am not sufficiently respectful about this, it just is. I am mixed. Being effusive about sunnata when it happens is like saying look at me I’m spiritual, I’m not good at that. After upheaval in Chiswick talking about bells and banjos really mattered, outside the Arts Centre I was maybe perceived as crazy? But it was real, the highs were real. Now the highs are less different because the normal bar is so much higher, when we see K2 and Everest from below both are magnificent but it is a marginal difference as to preference. And if we are up there it is wonderful but hey the wonder is just there. I always recommend this [clip](#) to understand what it is (I’m not into Ascension), but these people are effusive so perhaps they can convince others of the wonders of the path and its fruits. It is mysterious and sacred .

Bob's [first grace](#) came to him in wilderness:-

"In that moment of surrender, I felt lifted and found myself floating in a pool of clear light. Looking down, I sensed myself lying peacefully on the forest

floor. The world was no longer a hostile alien place, but my home. No true separation remained between me and the world.

"After that night of inner transformation, the whole world seemed vibrantly alive, and I lived for several weeks deeply integrated into the universe, glorying in the beauty of mountains, lake, and sky. There was also Something Else out there; Something nonphysical and beyond definition. I was part of that, too, and felt accepted and at peace. Those weeks were so filled with joy and wonder that I decided I would someday live alone in the wilderness for a whole year" [\[RK p15\]](#)

It is therefore not surprising he would eventually want to spend time in solitude in nature.

His highs in British Columbia did not last, in the same way as the bells and banjos of the Chiswick flat disappeared apart from writing. In Chiswick I resolved compassion, and my path led to teaching with its many destructive compromises. But there was some path even if limited bells and banjos. But


life is not about bells and banjos it is about path. Bob appears to relate to his path only in solitude so outside of nature brings questions. His BC highs led to depression but "The depression and the grief for what I'd lost eased only when I discovered Buddhist meditation practice and learned that peak spiritual experiences are inherently transient" [[RK p17](#)]. Did his path only offer him solitude?

"peak spiritual experiences are inherently transient" . I wanted to note that Bob used meditation practice as a way of keeping balance after the wonders of the [first grace](#), but this transience quote presents difficulties. What is peak? The peak spiritual experience is sunnata, and is not transient; but it is also not a [firstgrace](#) type of experience, no matter how powerful that first grace is. My own [first grace](#) experiences, the bells and banjos, were very much transient, but they are not the peak experiences of being connected with sunnata; these jhanas, piti?, are powerful but not the peak of sunnata. Such a first grace experience occurs at the beginning, it cannot be peak experience; it is of course transient as it is the start. How we feel spiritual experiences changes as we progress along the path. There is a very real

danger that people on the path try to relive the power of the first grace, they become attracted to that power - or search for that power, losing sight of the objective - following the path doing the best you can.

“a Chilean Navy patrol boat deposited Robert Kull and a kitten on a tiny, uninhabited, rain-and-wind-lashed island off the southern tip of Patagonia. At fifty-four, he intended to spend a year here alone” [[RK p119](#)].

Watch this [clip](#) for a glimpse of what he was doing; I have just watched it again after finishing the book - even more context. Apart from the important Summer holidays already mentioned, real travelling didn't start for me until 40 – travel with overseas teaching contracts. Arriving in Botswana it was the thing to do to get in a bakkie, and go round the game parks; that started it off. Camping that was practical for me – a tent, fridge (they laughed at my first trip the butter melted before we reached the campsite), stove, chair ; me and chairs was a travelling thing (later at [Jebel Shems](#)). Loved it, being in nature, not camping for that long – no more than a week or two as I enjoyed my space at home, but often camping alone – in Southern Africa the game

parks had amenities. This was the taste of travelling alone – travelling in solitude. Leaving Africa in 99, travel-teaching until retirement in 2006, this was the solitude that understands about Bob Kull – but his solitude is not practical for me, even unable to grow my own veg. Since his year of solitude Bob has done solitude a month a year, his [site](#) has photos and info; hopefully investigating solitude will help me get into [his book \(RK\)](#). ( it definitely did). Stuff like this is too late for me now, not regrettably – done enough. And writing is the path – not travel.

I have revised the structure of Viveka-Zandtao to have the two sections of theory and practice of solitude, but I had left space to consider pathivism at the end of the theory section. But somehow it was not connecting. It was the same, it was the path so it was just time and clear-thinking in meditation to find the connection.

The connection began with seeing that the essence of the practice of solitude is sampajanna. Sampajanna is one of the [4 Dhamma Comrades](#) that arises during [MwB](#). Now sampajanna is often translated as wisdom-in-action so

making a connection to practice is not a biggie (except I hadn't expected to go there). This does however seem important when you start to examine a possible arising of the Dhamma Comrades - in monasteries. We have already discussed monasteries as being integral to Stephen's life - less central in mine; but I have studied books and clips from monks, and do consider Ajaan Buddhadasa my teacher.

My most significant monastic experience was at Harnham where I gained understanding that monasteries fulfilled two important functions - they were the homes of teachers and refuges for the lay. To provide both there was a strong discipline according to the vinaya (Buddha's rules for monks). It seemed that the abbot insisted on a code of conduct that enabled the monks to concentrate on meditation and study in the solitude of the monastery. When I attended (as refuge), I followed the same rules - not disturbing the solitude. The practice of monastic solitude avoids conflicts prevalent in daily life, the routine reduced the requirement of a decision to be wise in daily life because many of the distractions of "daily life" are removed. But how much sampajanna is required in a monastery? Any answer on my part to this

question would be conjecture - a polite word for possible delusion - so I will make no further comments.

There have been various levels of participation by monks in daily life (before they chose to be monks). It is reasonable to say that monks as teachers are not teaching about daily life because that is not their specialisation. If monks were teaching MwB and they were considering the arising of the 4 Dhamma Conrades, then perhaps they would focus on mindfulness, wisdom and concentration. The question of how much they teach sampajanna could arise because of lay ceremonies and lay contact for other reasons such as funerals. Would it be reasonable to suggest that sampajanna arises depending on lay connection with the Dhamma?

Does it need daily life for sampajanna to arise? Other than teaching, meditation, study and refuge, would sampajanna arise in monasteries?

Let me then proceed with an examination of wisdom in daily life leaving this question for consideration by those who have more than a passing

knowledge of life in a monastery.

I have now reached Bob's island in Patagonia (Feb 2001). What you first notice in solitude is details, you have the time for details. In conformist world the 1%-satrapy requires work from you, in their terms you primarily exist for their profits. For most people this means that you have to make a life outside work so people are always living two lives – the life for 1%-profits and the “life of their own”. To make the most of the “life of their own” people rush from A to B, from person to person, from event to event, and worst of all they rush parenting. None of this is their fault it is the way it is. In all this rushing people don't have the time for details, but when you have control in your solitude you look for and see detail, detail in your daily life. Old people have always had this detail and the young laugh at them for being concerned with detail, but in truth this detail can be control and controlled observation; sadly of course because of ageing that control is waning away. Other people who have this control are writers, a specific group of writers – those genuine writers who have connected to the Muse and also managed to earn money from writing; many writers who earn

money are churning out script or copy prescribed by distribution - arguably they never connect to the Muse. If young people had time and had made space for their true selves, they would see detail. If young people were following their path rather than working in the 1%-satrapy, they would see detail. And of course Bob Kull has time to see detail, when you are alone you love seeing detail. Detail matters. But it is detail of the life around you, the cacophony of frogs, the variety of birdsong, sunlight piercing the clouds. Seeing this detail is a statement of respect and a statement of harmony, it is like saying - I am in tune with my path and can see the detail around me. For most people the detail is lost as is the path, there is no detail because there is no path.

Greta's young demanded a decent world, and the 1% let her talk but did nothing. Despite millions on the street there has been no response. Now the young blame the old for this because they have not seen that the 1% have ignored such decency before. For most of the old they have seen that the 1% will reject compassion and decency, so have turned to personal comfort and greed for solace – and the aversion of not admitting this. 1%-conformism

says that people are greedy, they point to looting and Covid-stockpiling as examples of this greed, but that conformism does not point out that genuine compassion and decency will not be heard. Greta's young now know it will not be heard, George Floyd's uprising (written 16/6/20) will soon know it will not be heard although apologists for reform will claim victory. The steady destruction of Gaia will continue. People who spend their lives following the path – being true to themselves – know how much they are limited from being in harmony with Gaia whilst working in the 1%-satrapy; if you want harmony then the choice is commune-living, compromise with the satrapy does not work.

“Perhaps the “tragedy of the commons” is our culture’s overriding metaphor. We realize that collectively we are seriously damaging the Earth, but we feel the technology and consumer goods that are the main sources of environmental degradation improve our individual lives” [[RK p72](#)].

Bob's tragedy of the commons discusses technology, and questions whether an individual's consumerism is contributing to Gaia's damage. The

compassionate and decent individual cannot opt out. Compassion and decency are harmonious virtues, virtues that Gaia can easily live with. As an individual can we know the difference between necessity, sustainability and excess? Bob in solitude questions whether he needs technology when previous solitaries have survived without. I would argue that what Bob questions could well be sustainable but it is a theoretical argument because the world is controlled by 1%-consumerism and that consumerism is damaging Gaia. I would argue that Gaia can sustain existing population living in harmony; existing resources, distributed reasonably amongst all peoples including those dying from hunger and war, could arguably allow a reasonable life for all. But we will never know because the whole question of harmony and the lives of so many individuals lacks any form of evidential clarity because of delusion - we choose not to look at these lives.

Let's examine the use of the word damage in this context. Whilst global humanity has suffered drastically, how much has Gaia suffered? None. In fact because the "normal" economic activity of the 1%-satrapy has been curtailed, gaia, the planet and non-human life, has made beneficial progress.

Gaia (G) including humans has suffered but gaia has not. Gaia (G) can sustain such damage, humanity can't. I personalise Gaia as making decisions, and the clear decision here is that gaia will not be damaged if humanity is. Humanity needs to heed this warning. Gaia can sustain such damage whilst humanity can suffer, but humanity will not die out because they are part of the life of Gaia. But what is considered as civilisation can disappear causing little damage to gaia. This is the way it is, and it is damage.

Slowly Bob Kull progresses his house, absolutely no way I could have done that. Camping in Africa is the best I've been practically, the rest of the time neshness took over. Maybe that's why I liked the camping, I made it my own. Yes, that's important. I could be there camping – Matobo, my tent, Maleme dam - it was comfortable, mattress, stove with attachments, camping fridge a reasonable level of comfort that I made; nothing like the SA laagers. But it was my comfort, I made my almost solitude in nature – a semi-Rhodie compromise.

Pathtivism is of course connected to sampajanna – it is path-activism, a term that is fundamentally the same as wisdom-in-action. Let me be clear what path-activism means. The movement/struggle is corrupted by the defilements – greed, delusion and avoidance, as a result activism is not clear and effective so being easily manipulated. Pathtivism asks that people focus on following the path, it suggests that the only activism is the path. Because the path is personal and because the path comes from nature (Dhamma), such collected path activism will work - faith in nature. At the same time pathtivism asks for 100% engagement, note I use the word engagement here and not activism. Following the path means 100% dedication to the path, but 100% engagement recognises that following the path has a duty of engagement. How one engages with activism is a personal choice based on the path, a choice that has no avoidance because it is the path; but the choice does not require every weekend to be carrying placards? Action needs to be wise so essentially pathtivism requires the development and practice of sampajanna, it requires the development and practice of all 4 Dhamma comrades and not disengaging from activism by ignoring the duty that shows itself in sampajanna. Pathtivism is the practice of sampajanna, the practice of

solitude?

However the Pathtivist Trilogy doesn't fit so neatly into this categorisation because of the way they were written. The Treatise began by comparing my spiritual life to the 3 tenets of Zandtao, it was a reflective history:-

- ✚ Improving the mind
- ✚ Harmonising our energy
- ✚ Taking care of our bodies

Reflecting and writing about my personal history is my fundamental style of spiritual writing. The Treatise started to happen soon after I retired, and I began to see these 3 tenets as important. So I wrote about how these tenets had developed in my life. It was not theory but based on experience;

experience is what matters. My daily life changed in emphasis throughout my life from outer to inner and vice versa, in terms of sampajanna it was never just about wisdom nor was it just about action; the Treatise itself was always about both leading to the importance of focussing on the path. The Manual began solely with a focus on the path and activism, in outer engagement I was examining how following the path could have improved working in the movement. Having examined this outer left space for the inner, and going inwards the path which was always important and at the core of my life grew in importance with regards to activism. From using the path as a way of improving activism it became clear that focussing solely on activism in any way was completely disenchanting, and following the path was the best approach not only for yourself but also for activism. Instead of just calling “following the path” I called it pathtivism because I felt this was the best way forward for activists – find out who you are (not just as activists), follow your path, and recognise the role of activist duty on the path.

As Zandtao, meditation had always been part of improving my mind; to give

back I had been developing Zandtaomed. I initially followed insight meditation as learned at Harnham monastery, but as my Buddhist studies became more focussed during retirement I began to study Buddhadasa more and more. Eventually Zandtaomed changed to Mindfulness with Breathing (MwB), but from pathivism and my experience, both personal and as an elder, I wrote the Companion. MwB with the Companion became my method for developing pathivism, so the Treatise and Manual of the trilogy developed the need for pathivism and what it is, and the Companion is the method for developing pathivism – how to follow your path. In putting the trilogy together, there was the importance of awareness of the path (path is given limited credence by society) - Treatise, the importance of wise activism - Manual, and how we develop the path, firstgrace might just happen but then we need to work at following the path - Companion. The path is what nature intended for us to do – the Dhamma.

I talk about the practice of solitude as sampajanna, and pathivism as sampajanna; but the Companion is concerned with the 4 Dhamma Comrades that include sampajanna. Following the path – the Dhamma - amongst others

means the development of these comrades, the emphasis is following the path – being who we truly are, but there is the natural duty ([dhammajati](#)) for engagement or activism. By emphasising the connection with the Dhamma we learn the best ways to be active – wisdom-in-action – sampajanna.

In Viveka Zandtao I have looked at solitude in my life, and in this section I am looking at the practice of solitude. Pathtivism is sampajanna and is very much concerned with the movement and activism. How much was pathtivism concerned with my own solitude, and how much is solitude concerned with the movement are interesting questions? There is ironic amusement. The movement is clearly collective. Whilst becoming a pathtivist is very much concerned with the inner journey, the practice of pathtivism is through collective action. Pathtivism is not egoic. It is not concerned with developing people who through following the path need to stand on podiums, be the heroes that people seek advice from necessarily, these are activists who recognise that wise collective action within the community is a significant way forward, and who recognise it is their duty to help. This is no individual ego from Hollywood standing up against the

system, this is just wisdom saying to work in collective action within the community.

Collective action is concerned with individuals collectively acting together. In the manual I have noted the failure caused by relying on individuals to represent, and I note with Occupy the desire was not for individualisation but for a recognition that the system responded to the movement; within the movement they worked at a collective identity that all agreed with. There was no majority vote in which the representative met outnumbered by the system as with trade union negotiation, Occupy especially asked the establishment to meet with the movement. Occupy was not satisfied with majority as a vote, it wanted collective agreement. How do people come to such agreement but through mutual education! This means all people must learn individually, and the understanding must pass from one to the other through those individuals educating each other. Whilst it is collective action it is individuals within the collective learning for themselves, following their own paths, not following charismatic voices, not abdicating personal responsibility to powerful orators, but being authentic and true to

themselves. They must be true to themselves on their own – solitude. Within collective action there is a need for solitude, solitaries who come together collectively to work in harmony. Egos cannot do this; this can only happen if people are following their paths, the natural harmony of people following their paths and working together. That is the message of pathivism for the movement, individuals coming from solitude working together, following their paths as nature intended. Whilst the collective action has the outer strength, its true strength comes from solitude within individuals with clear minds working together.

When I consider the Trades Council (a local council of representatives of different unions) I worked on, there was just division. Individuals came together as representatives to promote their own interest, quite often an interest that was a political faction – a member of a faction wanting to be voted onto Trades Council because that faction worked through the Council to promote their own agenda. The council was democratically representative – often by a simple majority, and individual representatives acted with integrity but there was no collective power because there was never any

attempt to reach unity together. This was not building a collective movement of strength to fight off the power within the 1%-satrapy, it was administration going through the motions. There was no collective strength because the individuals were not attempting to connect to the collective. Occupy had strength because of collective commitment, I would have loved to be a part of Occupy to feel the solidarity of individuals who had personally learned and then come together in solidarity. But solidarity begins with solitude not simply numbers, the Trades Council was just numbers – often working against each other for control. To build community we come from the strength of solitude to act in unison building genuine solidarity. When I was consolidating the theory of solitude (the first part of Viveka-Zandtao) I wrote "Solitude is a process from separation to Unity"; here in the world of collective action solitude has a similar role - the solitude of personal conviction moving to work together not only in unity but solidarity.

Here is a big one about the practice of solitude. "He said it never stops raining here and is so wet that clothes don't dry and wood won't burn. He was wrong on all counts. It rains a lot but not all day every day, clothes

slowly dry, and this wood, at least, burns. How often I get caught in anxiety or hope based on false information!” [\[RK p123\]](#).

Trust.

In solitude we learn what to trust, there is one thing to trust – the path. In solitude when we move from separation to unity, we shed clothes. We shed all the clothes that society tells us to wear – conditioning. We peel back layer and layer until we are left with who we truly are. And in that solitude who we truly are starts to connect with the world around so we learn that we can trust the path and nature - trust unity.

In a sense we distrust all that is not path but it is nowhere near as negative as that. In the path we trust, in all else we are circumspect; I have just realised “In God we trust”. I have absolutely no problem with that, except of course Trump would say “In God we trust”; has that phrase been appropriated and lost its meaning? To be honest if someone said “in the path we trust”, I would still be circumspect; it’s less commonplace but it is still words. If

genuine discernment perceives that someone means “in the path we trust”, I’m sold; that at least gives a modus operandi – develop path discernment. I remember after upheaval, life was all about finding the path, in myself and others. Because it was fresh, I met more who were interested in talking about the path – and maybe it was the time. After years of teaching and then retiring away from likely contact – in a white enclave where the only path is going to be discussed in a language I don’t speak, there is little to discern.

I start with only trusting the path in myself; that means distrusting ego and wanting to get rid of it. Mistakes are made if ego is ever trusted. Trusting the path sharpens you, and living in solitude comfortably maintains sharpness. Sometimes you go into solitude and then come out looking for good company, and that desire causes a mistake.

There are so many ways that trusting the path keeps you safe, and so many ways in which desire or ego exposes you. So-called friends exploiting me is a vulnerability. Following the path makes you a compassionate and decent person - I will discuss the word decent below. In some societies there are

leeches who look out for the compassionate and decent to exploit. Travelling I have met different societal reactions to compassion and decency, in the UK it was the hardest as compassion + decency = a mark. Where I am now compassion and decency are respected to some extent, I'm too old to choose to move now, but other than that it is one important reason I stay.

I don't trust any institution because institution and path are anathemas. For the rich business is probably trustworthy because they know the rules and have the money to buy legal protection. I have no such money so I know every purchase is a risk. Usually I am too small for them to misuse me, I am only involved in low-key transactions so there is nothing to exploit. I have more trust of government than business because government has a supposed objective – looking after the people; within government there are some people who do that. But the longer I have lived the more interference there is with the revolving door. To me it appears that government is now owned by the 1% - 1%-satrapy, and 1% are only concerned with their own profits. It amazes me how the new populist right attacks government but appears to trust business. How can anyone trust Trump or Bojo? They lie repeatedly. It

makes no sense, and shows how much delusion money in propaganda can buy.

It can never buy the path, and can never buy people who live in solitude. Following the path in solitude washes away any ego that would buy into such greed and delusion.

Let me discuss the word decent now. In Buddhism there is the word sila that comes from a description of the Noble 8-fold Path – right honesty, right speech, right livelihood. It is often translated as moral integrity, I sometimes use that translation but the word moral is associated with moral codes which is too restrictive. Decency was used by someone online, and I don't mind it. Except for this biggie it has a tendency to be used as a white word – decent white people. I have an image, a picture of people (a trope?) who use the word decent living in suburbia having a certain level of affluence and caring for those in that suburbia. A decent way to live. To me of course that has nothing to do with decency, decency has no colour and many Native American, black and brown people are decent. This non-racial notion of

decency that is not a suburban cultural delusion is sila. And sila is so important because sila is the only way societies can be stable.

There are many delusions surrounding law and order, and the uprising against the police are highlighting these delusions. There appears to be a priority of who the police protect. Is this true - the police in a 1%-satrapy protect the property of the 1%, and then protect the property of the white suburbs; outside these areas the police just keep a lid on it. Particularly in ghettos police keep the problems within the ghettos without attempting to provide conditions for a decent way of life for those people living there; in certain poorer white areas their approach is similar guided by the hidden ethic of protecting the 1% and white suburbia. Compassion, freedom of suffering for all, and genuine decency would not allow for this but the people who vote for law and order are compromised by their greed into voting for a system that criminalises others. It is not law and order that society needs but compassion and decency – justice being a part of both. Unless these apparent priorities are changed we will continue to live in a system that exploits. Just to add - one main reason the 1% need protection is

the abomination of their proportion of the wealth when so many don't have the opportunity to earn enough to live reasonably - sustainably; compassion does not mean people deserve a free ride. Society needs compassion and decency not law and order as repression, and compassion and decency come from trusting the path.

Trusting the path has other characteristics that I can discuss around the Four Agreements:-



Don Miguel Ruiz wrote the Toltec Wisdom book, [The Four Agreements](#);

please read it. In the first part the book discusses the process of agreeing, this could be considered the same as what is described as conditioning. From early childhood we are encouraged to agree with the way the world is, by adulthood we accept what is required to live in our communities and we follow the above agreements as a way of living in harmony with society and nature. In daily life is it not wise to follow these agreements – sampajanna.

When I describe following the path I always say “do the best you can”. Some talk of enlightenment and spiritual objective; I suggest meditation, study [MwB](#), and “always do the best you can”. If more motivation is needed then there are always the phala - the fruits of [dhammajati](#).

Social media is being misused by vested interests, and increased racism has impacted on society. Why is it successful? Because people believe in delusions spread on social media, when they cannot possibly know whether they are true or not. They are "making assumptions" – delusions, and then promoting these delusions. People don't know whether what is said is true but they are happy to present the delusions - share, retweet, resend. Bots

circulate populist lies, people then circulate the same lies; because the lies are repeatedly seen often the lies are accepted as truth. Spreading the lies is NOT “being impeccable with the word” and people “are making assumptions” about what is true because it is repeated so often. The way of social media is not the way of the 4 Agreements.

This way of accepting delusion I find very difficult. Sometimes people get carried away – sometimes I get carried away, but facebook have made a whole business of this delusion. What is worse. Populism without any sila has made great advances using social media, simply by spreading lies often enough people believe it. And these lies are primarily spread by money. Money pays for videos, bots and so on, and these “marketing tools” are winning over viewpoints. Accepting such delusions is not part of the path. With the path comes conviction, once there is an insight that’s it – conviction, trust. Suppose there is a load of stuff that contradicts that conviction, no problem – conviction wins, because path and insight is the truth. No amount of conditioning changes that truth. Quite clearly there is a danger of arrogance here, so I have to be constantly aware of ego – but the

path does that it lets go of ego.

Where will you find on facebook that trusting compassion and decency is the way forward? Where on facebook will you find “be impeccable with the word”? Where on facebook will you find “don’t make assumptions”? Nowhere. Why? Because fb promotes shallowness, that is part of its profit-making model. In general social media culture is shallow. I want likes, crazy. Likes matter. Marketing delusions are repeated so often they have become a conditioned happening. Out of solitude comes a complete rejection of this communal perversion. In solitude we learn to trust ourselves even if we have not progressed to following the path. In solitude we are not surrounded with fluff and flannel. In solitude we do not react to clickbait whether online or in real life, we develop personal discipline because we are alone and decisions matter for us. Because we are beginning to trust ourselves, a trust that eventually becomes trusting the path.

Social media is part of cultural overload. If we accept social media as presented then we have to answer everything - every post, tweet etc. In itself

that is control, we are being conditioned – being controlled. There could be discernment. If we “don’t take things personally” then we are not controlled by this vacuity. Do you want me to know? Then you contact me. If I want you to know I contact you – in real life (?) if necessary. There are many ways of communicating. This social media fluff and flannel has no control unless I give it control. I am on social media but social media does not control my life. When I was working these things had more control because it was a job requirement, but now they don’t. [My website](#) is my writing, I am invested in that – that has control over me because it is my way of giving back. But I am choosing that control. For some on social media – especially the young, this criticism about lack of control, might sound arrogant – or more likely old and cantankerous, but that is their conditioning and I “don’t take it personally”. Following my path I try to be compassionate and decent, I work at not allowing others to control me in the same way as I work at not allowing conditioning to control me. Being responsible for the actions in my life I must be wise in action – sampajanna. Cultural overload is a matter of control, it is your choice because you are outside the workplace - in the workplace you are not in control. Don’t bring the bad practices of the

workplace into your personal life. Control your actions and be free.

Trust is central to relationship and therefore discussion of trust is essential to solitude. It would have been interesting to see how Stephen connected his solitude and his marriage, but of course that is very personal and therefore not for mass consumption; the fact there was no mention in a book on solitude is notable. With Bob he has relationships he appears to rely on when not in solitude, maybe he will give some insight on solitude and trust in his book. Sadly I have never found trust in relationship. Initially seeking the cosmic other, I still feel love is found when two people are truly authentic and in their authenticity come together. When people are still conditioned, how can there be such love? Relationships exist between the conditioned, and it can be hard to understand their staying together. Despite the conflicts that must arise with conditioned egos, some couples find a mutually beneficial way of living together. Observing such long-term relationships one can perhaps see the mutual benefits, but rarely is there deep love throughout.

In solitude we are almost forced to be authentic especially if you are Bob Kull where survival is affected by failure to be authentic. When you are alone you cannot run from your own weakness; your weakness is in your own head, where do you run? I have mentioned the routine of rushing that makes up our daily lives, when you are alone there is no need for that routine and you are forced to see this rushing for what it is. What happens if you don't confront it? Insanity? The advantage of solitude is that we connect with the path that has skills to deal with such weaknesses. This connection became a learned behaviour for me when getting away from the "rat race" of education. There was almost a pattern to it. On the flight I would see people, usually in groups, going off to enjoy. In myself there was the false envy of group activity that I had long known. I envied their joy together going somewhere, but it was a false envy because I knew it was not for me what they were doing – they would have no solitude. Recognising this false envy brought me back to my being alone, and there would be short-term sadness. Recognising the position of sadness as ego, I would strengthen the connection to the path centring myself; on the path there would be found greater joy.

“I’ve been looking at how my frustration and anger affect me inwardly and how I express it toward myself, Cat, and my work. I miss so much and bring so much unhappiness to myself and those around me by being prickly and judgmental rather than content with the world as it is. Never mind the root causes, it’s just a habit to feed and express the anger” [[RK p128](#)].

There is no belittling of anger nor belittling judging the world instead of being content, solitude can help with a great deal of this. Why allow anger to disturb yourself and those around you? Throughout my earlier life I have let anger control me, so much so that others have manipulated me into anger; and the cases that immediately come to mind it did not take wise people – it was just too easy. Now there is occasional anger but it doesn’t control – the meditation approach “let it go”. The problem is not getting angry but letting that anger control - become attached. There is a Buddhist thing about not getting angry, and there is a need to question some interpretations of this avoidance. There is a Buddhist anomaly. Buddhists accept compassion, they feel compassion, say, for victims of war. Doesn’t war make these Buddhists

angry?

I have discussed the anger arising out of compassion [here](#). If anger doesn't arise from compassion, why not? Isn't it avoidance? Can you do anything about what you feel compassionate about? Can you do anything about the war in Afghanistan, the continuing occupation of Palestine? Do the best you can. But beyond that let it go, these injustices arise because of the way it is. Have you examined the way it is? Do you understand the causes of the war or whatever has made you angry? Use your anger to find out, question deeply. Do you have any delusions concerning war? Remember any country at war uses propaganda as a tool of war. Use your anger and examine this propaganda, know that it is conditioning, go beyond the conditioning and decide what right action can be done. But in the end what is the best way of dealing with this? Follow your path, develop the Dhamma, and do the best you can. Anger arising out of compassion can be a motivator for action, and if Dhamma is developed because of that anger then there will be wise action - the best result for anger.

Bob, why are you clinging to anger? Buddhists have read the [4 Noble Truths](#), why cling? Especially in solitude it can be seen that clinging brings suffering. Why be discontent with the way of the world? Tried to make it better? Done the best you can? If you haven't, the anger is with yourself and not the world. The way the world is doesn't change with anger, it can change with compassion and sampajanna (compassion is wise) but in the end the world is the way it is. Follow the path, develop Dhamma, and do the best you can; then where is anger?

Are we given [firstgrace](#) and compassion to be angry all the time? After firstgrace use the tools you are born with for [100% engagement](#) – however your path chooses the engagement. According to the book Bob has been engaged – it is up to him on his path to decide how much. Please don't judge by the state of the world, don't judge by an impossible target – when the Buddha was alive the world was not perfect. Know the way the world is, and do the best you can; the path is not meant to make you angry. In solitude this should be faced, what the world is, what you can do, how you can improve yourself; don't accept being prickly, judgemental and angry that is not what

[firstgrace](#) was for. Look at what the wonderful Greta did, mobilising, raising the question globally, and what did the world do? Nothing. Don't be so angry when this is just the way it is.

I later came on this similar journal entry which has such clear understanding. "Basic survival requires a competent ego, but it has usurped control and is no longer a servant/friend of my whole being — which includes spirit, intuition, and love, and finds joy and peace through relaxing into the flow of existence. The ego wants to dominate, and in order to justify its overbearing presence, it creates looming illusory problems to solve \geq [\[RK p141\]](#). Going into someone's writing particularly a journal in such detail is unfair - especially when there's no reply.

What I like so much about Stephen's and Bob's books are that they contain Buddhism-in-practice, certainly not Bob's expressed purpose maybe it was more of what Stephen was about. When you examine Buddhist discussion on the net, quite often you see discussion about the suttas - I sometimes refer to it irreverently as sutta snap. In my view clarity concerning the truth of any

teaching, including the Buddha's teachings, comes in the way it is practiced in daily life - sampajanna. If it is not practiced in daily life it hasn't been understood. In a small way that was my purpose in the [Pathivist Trilogy](#), it is about practice in daily life. Here Bob's practice is showing us what Buddhist teaching often talks about - how the ego takes over or tries to take over. The particular ego that Bob was talking of here was attachment to sankhara where there were many mental constructs around worry and fear - in this case concerning whether he would have enough water (situation for the quote on p141). In Bob's view the ego went too far, non-attached concern for whether there would be enough water as opposed to imagined scenarios that were too unreal and produced unnecessary fear that fed the ego. In the theory this is too much attachment to sankhara. Love it - putting theory into practice, not simply dogma.

At the same time theory is not real. From times in academia we know how unreal some theoreticians can be, the same is true of religious dogma. The truth of a dogma is how it is applied to daily life - whether it can be applied. And there is also an understanding of ditthupadana in this - clinging to a set

of ideas. In the [Manual](#) I was often critical of people who put the ideal of socialism before the practice of compassion, whilst in many situations they are similar many times putting ideals first is a failure. Typical of such restrictions is a Cuban intellectual friend who rejects socialism because it did not allow him intellectual freedom. If socialism doesn't bring with it freedom, why do we have it? I know I know I know. Freedom is a misused term of right-wing propaganda, and intellectual freedom is so often ego. But fundamentally if we are not free how can it be right? But all people must be free, and libertarian freedom in the US is simply a bully's charter for those with more money - and I am happy for socialism to limit such bullies. But it must all be based on the path - compassion and decency. When compassion (freedom from suffering for all) and freedom are in harmony, then I am happy with any ism (set of ideals) - within limits.

4NT in practice – “Late last night I saw clearly that suffering results from holding on — physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. There are many ways to do it and many ways to talk about it, but basically I’m either holding on or letting go. Doubt, hate, certainty are ways of holding

tight. Faith, love, wondering are open and loose. Yet aimless drifting can bring suffering, too. The trick is to stay open without clinging to the looseness” [RK p144]. No more needs saying, sampajanna – practice.

"Keeping company with the cat's-paws on the water, waves of loneliness and longing have swept over me all day. For whom or what? Susan, Patti, family, British Columbia and rainbow trout, Baja California and amberjack, sun and warmth? Perhaps the essence of longing is an awareness of the absence of people and places that have been important in my life; remembering the wonder I've been blessed to experience” [RK p151].

What is the essence of longing? I don't feel longing but maybe I refuse to allow myself to long as I know it is ego. The past is the past, it's finished. All events in the past have some sort of memory associated with them – sanna. In my writing I often recall these memories to analyse, learn and make a current point, so it is not the past but the present. I am now trying to search for longing, but can't attach to any. The past has happened, and it can't be changed.

Does longing come from dissatisfaction with what you are doing? To answer this question I have been trying to long but quite simply my life is now writing – that is purpose, path, authenticity. Because I have a path there is no longing for a change in the past. Why do I want to spoil writing by indulging in longing – for something that can't be changed?

So longing becomes only looking at improvement of the present of writing? As usual with that comes questions of being published – something I am ambivalent about; I want people to read my stuff but I don't want to change my writing lifestyle. I want to meet genuine people but I don't want to change my lifestyle – that is rural and distant from where such people might be. Am I writing this asking for a change?

Longing of course is a type of desire so the theory is 4NT, and I know attaching causes suffering so in trying to understand longing I am trying to create suffering. A bit self-defeating.

I suppose fantasies are longing, and I do play out fantasies – especially if I lie in bed and don't get up to meditate. I enjoy the fantasies, a bit like I enjoy nice dreams; but I don't want to go beyond the joy and cling deluding myself the fantasy might turn into reality. I fantasise too much at times – it is a weakness.

I remember the fantasy about Michael Crichton. He wrote a book about climbing Kilimanjaro, and at the end of the book there was a deep plea, a deep longing for understanding. My compassion jumped out to him, such a clear longing and he said something to the effect *keep away no help needed*. I fantasised about helping, stopped, and was a bit sad.

I fantasise too much, and this is a spin-off from writing fantasy – I write [scifi](#). The aspect of sankhara that I use and develop for creating the worlds that are in my scifi is also used concerning daily life. In daily life this is clinging – living out small fantasies, but for scifi it has a purpose. It is a kind of future-sanna. Throughout the [Pathivist Trilogy](#) I have used the memories of my life experience to draw conclusions that eventually led to the

completion of the trilogy. So in future-sanna I create worlds in order to fulfil a purpose. Honiti is the clearest example. With Honiti I wanted to describe a world in which love was elevated to a better position in society, where if love was found it was to be valued above all things and society evolved around the enabling of love. Honiti's future-sanna was a world in which love was valued as money is now. Once the future-sanna has been conceptualised I then add some substance to the concept to develop a world in which the concept has some sort of integrated reality – a kind of background. Then I tell the story around the concept as I did around Honiti's love. I sometimes have plot clusters, a series of plots that fit together but I don't know the details of each plot until I write them. In a sense I live the plot with the writing. Sleep plays an important role in this, it is as if sleep works out the next scene. I complete a scene, rest overnight, somehow the Muse creates the next scene, and I sit with the computer and write what happens next.

With Kolok the last scene was Sommwa helping Lance conclude that he needed to move to Ethinia, and the next scene follows from “All was not settled with Lance, she would need to watch the details when he arrived. But

that was not the priority now that he was clear. She must face Daasur” - beginning of Ch 6. I do not know how the interaction with Daasur will go except that Sommwa must confront Daasur for her mistake, and maybe she will return to the Council – retire? There is a conceptualisation around Kolok, that Kolok is a gaia, a living planetary entity, and a fantasy that the sensoids, Daasur, can communicate with Kolok. From afar the sensoids searching for distress amongst gaias felt Kolok, and the story has evolved from that background. I did not know there would be chi-worms when I started Kolok. I am looking forward to see what happens, but Zandtao-Viveka has sidetracked me since 29th May – now July 1. And for a while longer as I hope to finish Bob Kull’s Solitude. Now Aug 28, have finished Bob's book and beginning "[Investigating Faith](#)."

"Anxiety has gripped me today. I feel myself tighten against it, but know that only by surrendering to my own suffering and death will the clenching fear dissolve; only by letting the world come in and by flowing out to meet it. Of the teachings I've heard from meditation instructor Jack Kornfield, the need to acknowledge and accept anxiety has been most helpful. It's not my

anxiety. Anxiety is part of our human condition, and we need to learn to treat it as an old friend, or least a familiar acquaintance. Many therapists say to do something to avoid anxiety, but in such endless activity much of our experience — joyful and painful — is lost. Seems like a hard bargain” [[RK p152](#)].

I tend not to feel anxious yet Bob has mentioned anxiety again. I don't put my life at risk in solitude in Patagonia so I don't have legitimate fears like Bob has. I have a fear of being hit by a fascist racist [MAWP](#). I am 68, I live in a MAWP enclave, but in this enclave these MAWPS are reasonable – for MAWPs. But there are visiting MAWPs, and one threatened me so I don't gmix with them. These are people who talk about free speech but when one of their own at the thuggish end of their spectrum threatens they are quiet. The antifa I know of restrict, liberals censor, but I don't think any of them are violent – but maybe I am wrong now. I am anxious about being hit by violent MAWPS. I watch when you peel back their shallow arguments, you see their egoic shells exposed, and you see their ignorance turn to violence. That scares me. And why argue with them? As with most people with fixed

idealisms (ditthupadana) – and I include socialists, they don't listen; just with socialists you have far further to go before their egoic shells are exposed; mind you liberal shallowness is quickly exposed causing emotional outbursts but not violence. Once was enough to be physically threatened, as I said I have been amongst these MAWPs in their enclave but I fear the outside world entering the enclave, the outside world of increased WEGemony. The place was pleasant where I saw them, but there are plenty of other pleasant places without the risk of violence. I presume this is the "therapist avoiding anxiety".

Acknowledging anxiety. I'm getting old. In this Viveka I have more and more learned how much I value solitude, and also in this Viveka I have learned just how much I cling to writing. Writing is my path so clinging might only be appropriate in some ways, but I need to write – I need to publish on my website. Whilst I know how limited that is, it is sufficient for me; if someone chooses it is there. My body cannot cope as before, teeth are pulled monthly, I have a congenital heart condition. I do what I can – eat healthily, and have regular healthy healing treatments. And there is the rub, I

don't feel anxious because I do what I can. My physical heart comes from my father, and outwardly he looked fine for his age – even when he died of a heart attack. If it happens it happens. What I fear is not being able to follow my path – now writing. Now that is my choice, later it might not be, but I won't look back and say if only I had looked after myself. It is sampajanna, transferring the energy of anxiety into constructive action. If I am living the best I can. I would like to go to [Namtso](#) again with my own car, I never got to Maccha Picchu, but hey I did enough. There's much more I could have done and there's plenty less. So I am not torn up with the restrictions of age. I am alone but I tried for a partner; it didn't work. And a partner might mean I didn't have solitude. I acknowledge restrictions, I fear not being able to write, but I look at them, examine them, and see what I can do. No anxiety because I don't cling to the fear.

I cannot answer this question - am I losing new experiences? Each day of my life is new as I continue with my inner journey, but few would live my outer life as it would be deemed boring. Do I refuse to do anything I really want to do? NO. I don't feel as if I am stuck in a rut, but the only way I

would know would be if I forced myself out of my comfort zone. And as I am progressing I am not likely to do that. The older I get the more I see life a time for introspection, writing of course suits that. New introspection is the new experience!!!

Viveka-Sangha

Viveka-Sangha could be a significant outcome of this book. The path is real yet we have a conditioned society that fails to recognise this. Powerful firstgraces cannot be ignored yet how many people ignore weaker ones for fear of being mocked. Prior to firstgrace there is suffering, a suffering that can take people on quests (quests for the path) – eastwards? These are all aspects of the path that need celebration yet are often oppressed by a conditioned society afraid of the unknown. Writing of my experiences, celebrating those experiences, is a way of building community – the Viveka-Sangha.

Buddhists take the 3 refuges – Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. These refuges can be seen as celebrating the life and teachings of the Buddha, and supporting the community of people who celebrate the life and teachings of the Buddha. For pathivism there is similar – celebrating the path and those who follow it. Buddhist teachers establish communities – Buddhadasa at [Suan Mokh](#), Thay at [Plum Villages](#). For those who choose that way these communities are supportive, and are an excellent way of life. [Harnham](#) was my monastery of retreat at the time, and was supportive.

But the path of solitude has no such place of community retreat. Those that walk the path alone have no religious building or community of refuge. Path-followers, pathivists, walkers on the path of solitude have each other. Through recognition we see each other and support each other. Through Viveka-Zandtao someone might see a mutual understanding and gain fortitude from it. As a result they might gain solace in the Viveka-Sangha.

I am a member of the Viveka-Sangha, you might choose to join this solitude community.

Do we want [Viveka-Sangha](#) as an outcome? First of all there is no such active thing at the moment – could there be?

As already described Sangha exists in many different ways. Firstly there are the (Buddhist) monasteries as refuge – as well as teaching and places of learning. Monasteries have gone westwards as a kind of mission. Ajaan Chah wanted to work with westerners and there grew the [Forest Sangha](#). HHDL has monasteries in the West, there are other Tibetan monasteries not all supported by HHDL. And there are numerous online forums for Buddhists to discuss. There is no doubt that if an individual wished to relate to Buddhism traditionally they could.

So how could [Viveka-Sangha](#) be seen different to this? By recognising solitude. Throughout the first part – the theory of solitude – there was development of an understanding of solitude that moved beyond being alone – a process that moved from separation to unity. At the same time this solitude was recognised as non-dogmatic “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”. Whilst this quote speaks of the 4th foundation of mindfulness as Dhamma, Dhamma itself is not a particularly dogma-based term, and Unity of Nature is non-denominational. In pathivism I use path to describe this 4th foundation, and whilst pathivism is unashamedly developed from Buddhist study it could be considered non-denominational.

Non-dogma-based solitude could be the essence of [Viveka-Sangha](#). It is only when solitude goes beyond description or definition that it has meaning. Within many religions there are traditions of solitude, and Stephen described entry into solitude at Baekun Am as a respected process Korean monks went into - [\[SB Ch25\]](#). Whilst undoubtedly at Baekun Am they brought their dogma into the solitude, the solitude itself was intended as a process of going beyond the dogma to spirit. This could be what [Viveka-Sangha](#) is about – going beyond the dogma to spirit.

Sangha could be described as spiritual community, I don't think Buddhists would object to the 3rd refuge as being described as a Buddhist spiritual community, the more traditional focussing on the monks in monasteries.

Viveka-Sangha

could be a spiritual community of seekers in solitude.

In the context of [Viveka-Sangha](#), I want to talk of [firstgrace](#). In my own [firstgrace](#) I was totally isolated saved only by the creative Muse and the Arts people. Their community gave me the strength to understand some of what had happened with [firstgrace](#). Eckhart in the introduction to [Power of Now](#) described his own firstgrace where there was suffering, isolation and [firstgrace](#); it is my understanding that after a period of solitude he consolidated his [firstgrace](#) at Buddhist monasteries. I would describe Eckhart as being a teacher in solitude (not a teacher of solitude, that is for him to decide), I believe he avoids denominational appropriation. Bob Kull's [firstgrace](#) was in nature in solitude, and he returned later to consolidate.

Consolidating [first grace](#) is a process we all need to go through, making the path your own. And this consolidation is a solitary process. But early on the

path there are times of weakness – I became an alcoholic. Whilst I don't regret my learning process, **Viveka-Sangha** might have helped. Role models, a teaching community, advice or simple understanding could be offered by **Viveka-Sangha**.

With firstgrace I fear that the importance of the less intense experience might be missed. People are mocked for firstgrace experiences. Whilst I now have the strength to put mine in print, there is not one person in my enclave I have discussed it with. At best I would expect polite quietness, usually there would be mockery. When I joined childcare and then teaching, firstgrace as awakening would have been dismissed; but I did meet the less intense firstgrace as vocation. In teaching vocation often disappears under the pressure of the compromise with the corporate paradigm, but if that vocation were seen as firstgrace the non-religious could obtain strength through **Viveka-Sangha**.

What about the vocation of the Peace Corps? Commitment to NGO's, Oxfam etc. The 1%-satrapy wears these people down, increases escapism

through drugs and alcohol, and in general works against the path that these vocations are connected to. Would that these people associated their vocation with firstgrace and could develop the compassion and decency that could lead to the path?

I also met firstgrace as a commitment to the movement when I was politically active. There definitely describing this commitment as firstgrace would have been derided – religion is the opiate of the masses, but as any activist knows there were times when the movement worked with religious institutions in the struggle. But the movement was not focussed on compassion and decency, instead it was blinded by ditthupadana and egotism. Yet for some the commitment was some form of firstgrace.

One purpose of **Viveka-Sangha** could be to help with the consolidation of firstgrace.

Batgap is an example of **Viveka-Sangha**. Rick Archer interviews different people in different forms/stages of the process of awakening. Whilst Batgap

individuals have interacted with religious institutions, there is much that is discussed that could be described as the process of solitude. Such a resource of community confirmation is so important. Firstgrace is a common experience of these people, the differences in the way they consolidated this firstgrace into their paths is a wondrous tapestry of life especially in the context of society's hostility.

I mentioned education for solitude briefly earlier in the first part - inner solitude, but I now want to briefly point out the connection between solitude and learning. And the keyword to get this is concentration. Amongst the first things I wrote after retiring were Matriellez Study Skills, and in this I wrote “finding an insight”. Basically this was a maths study skill. As a maths teacher I recognised that the essence of a mathematician was problem-solving. As an exams teacher I spent my time looking for tricks to avoid problem-solving – a bit like avoiding teaching algebra to younger students. Both were indicators of maths ability at the respective stages that teachers avoided, because when students cannot do something there is potential for disruption.

In problem-solving what was needed was an immersion in the question so that all relevant information was gleaned about the problem, and from this there needed to develop the first insight (flash of inspiration) that enabled the problem to be solved using the appropriate taught mathematical methods. Considering usual school intakes you could count on one hand students who could regularly find this insight. As an exams teacher I taught method recognition to avoid this insight problem, many students obtained mathematical success in schools through method recognition. And because the benchmark of all schools is exam success despite the many self-realisation delusions that abound, I became successful at teaching method recognition as opposed to the genuine maths of insight; but to be fair I couldn't morally focus on those very few elite students even though I was pressured to do so.

Finding insight comes from concentration (one of the 4 Dhamma comrades) – concentration creates a connection to the source of insight, and here's the rub – it happens inside it is a process of going deep. So in many classrooms

it would seem impossible to find the insight because of the class dynamics. Managing these dynamics is concerned with achievement, and not with the development of insight; if student telegraph can enable the solutions it is accepted as a win.

And here's the connection with the viveka, concentration that leads to insight and learning happen in solitude. That sounds a stupid assertion for a classroom, am I just trying to prove a point? For my M Ed I studied something called reflection-in-action contained in my [quality ISM here](#); reflection-in-action at the time came from Schon "[Educating the Reflective Practitioner](#)". I am sure it is a rehashed buzzword somewhere within the ongoing recycling of educational and staff development; as I am not looking for a way out of the classroom I'm not going to try and find it. Basically it says that good teaching occurs when teachers can develop for themselves a way of taking a time-out whilst teaching to reflect on what is going on – in other words creating a space of solitude within whatever level of mayhem is their classroom - to reflect, to concentrate. This is creating a mindful moment to apply sampajanna – to speak in terms of the comrades.

Students also need to take these moments of reflection-in-action to learn – to find insights. Mostly this is what students do when they learn – not necessarily when they achieve. Group work increases achievement because more students achieve, but do they learn? I hope so as do the theorists but achievement is not necessarily learning. What happens for students is that within the classroom they consciously or unconsciously find a mindful moment within a space of solitude they create to learn about and complete the set task. Learning takes place in a moment of solitude, once learnt the task can be completed in whatever ambience the classroom has.

That's enough education. The Matriellez book stalled, and after my [centring summer of 2018](#) I realised that the vision I had been searching for as Matriellez was that the education process that is school and university is to provide the state of minimal conditioning so that it is easier for [firstgrace](#) to arise for people to begin following the path; at the same time schooling needs to provide the minimal agreements necessary to live in society. What the word minimal means here is minimal restrictions to enable people to

follow the path if they have firstgrace. There is a place for a chapter on solitude if I get round to it – it is 14 years since I left teaching and became a writer. No more on this here.

Solitude is an observation platform of conditioning. Even when on the path, in daily life it can be difficult to maintain the detachment necessary to see all the ways conditioning sucks you in. Throughout my working life it was necessary for me to take times of solitude to centre myself so that I could be aware of the conditioning I was subjected to. This was particularly the case when I became too immersed in the workplace because I was passionate about education.

Now in the solitude of retirement when I am not subject to the needs of the job description I can see patterns of conditioning. I see two types of conditioning – the natural survival conditioning of instinct and societal conditioning; the most obvious observed changes come with regards to societal conditioning. The purpose of natural conditioning is survival, conditioning of instinct builds egos and identity taking people through to

adulthood when it is hoped they let go of conditioning and mature. This purpose doesn't change much so this type of conditioning doesn't either. Societal conditioning has to change – it is dynamic. The purpose of societal conditioning is to accept the way society is - 1%-satrapy, and there are two dynamics of this conditioning. The first is that the 1% continually wish to increase their accumulation. The second is that 99% awareness of, and response to, the 1%-satrapy changes, and so to maintain their accumulation societal conditioning changes with the awareness and ensuing response. These societal changes are not a plan whereas natural conditioning is nature's plan. The dynamism is relational, a yin-yang dynamic between the interests of the 1% and those of the 99%, yet all within conditioning. This relational dynamic can be observed from solitude.

There has been a downgraded change in social behaviour brought about by social media being used to support populist interests leading to an increase in racism and sexism. It can be observed that public expressions of racism and sexism, that had once been repressed, have now been enabled leading to all kinds of ridiculous but dangerous expressions of individualism without

compassion (such as the Covidiot).

Here is a current futile intellectual response to defilements in society – conversational-leadership. These intellectuals have never examined their own destructive contributions to the failure of uniting the movement, to see their own vested interest, to see how easily through history their intellectual egos have been manipulated to destroy any possible unity.

Caring people are involved in such destructive intellectualism because they have not taken a time of solitude, stepped back and become detached, to see the way societal conditioning is manipulating them. Their egos focus on themselves, their intellectual ability to solve any problem whatever the power, so within the conditioning they continue the relational dynamics involving 15-accumulation and 99%-response.

Yet throughout all this time indigenous wisdom has said protect Mother Earth but these egos have become disconnected through societal conditioning. The path and times of solitude is the answer for these people,

but their conditioned egos are afraid of both.

I touched on solitude earlier on in retirement when I got into Cheryl Strayed and Robin Davidson, both are fascinating people. I read [Cheryl's book](#) as well as watching Reese Witherspoon's film - Wild. Cheryl had a purpose. Her mother had died, she was screwed up on sex and drugs, and she walked the 1100 mile Pacific Crest trail to sort herself out. She was successful, and apparently is [some kind of counsellor](#) and has done Oprah. One could describe her walking the Pacific Crest as looking for her path, but in her book there was limited verbalised spiritual enquiry – doing the trail was her path, I suppose.

With Robyn Davidson the camel lady had less of that apparent purpose of finding herself; [here](#) is a social picture of her. My recollection of her book [Tracks](#) is that she was driven to do the journey “cos it was there”. Her solitude mattered to her even to the extent that she begrudged meeting with her collaborator; from solitude I totally got that, is it understood by most? Interpreting the socialite fluff piece, these solitudes - she did [Desert Places](#)

as well - might well have given her balance. I met a mountain climber like that one time. He was taking kids (I was their teacher) around the Yorkshire Dales but although completely competent I felt his heart wasn't in it – it was up Everest (before everyone was up Everest). I loved mountains but never had to climb them – I liked being there, mountaineers climb them "cos theyaere there". Doing the solitude, the experience, the camels, and then having balance makes total sense to me.

I recalled these solitudes after happening to watch Ed Wardle – [Alone in the Wild](#). His approach did not seem to be about the path, he wanted to survive in the Yukon; it was solitude but survival not spiritual. I am no judge but he seemed to approach it sensibly. He took some food, had weapons, and there were times when you could just see he loved nature. But he was not on a spiritual journey it was about survival, and after 50 days he gave up because he could not get enough food. He saw it as a failure as he had intended to survive 90 days. He was a film cameraman so he was filming not journaling. During his 50 days he saw a moose and a caribou that he was not allowed to shoot, so maybe he could have survived “naturally”? Because he measured

himself by the 90 days he failed. Looking briefly at the internet I was unable to find any spiritual assessment as to whether his 50 days were purposeful – gave him a path; I would kind of like to know but it is his business.

There needs to be reflection on the different types of solitude, I have got sucked into Stephen's all-embracing feel of *solitude is spiritual* but it would be wrong to say this. But I think it fair to say that solitude is connected to spiritual because solitude is connected to the Earth – to Nature. On TV Ben Fogle has also met solitary people – [New Lives in the Wild](#). I find these people fascinating but what is evidently clear is that many of them are not spiritual; in fact with Ben himself when people have got spiritual I have felt he hasn't got it. Fogle's people all value solitude but that solitude for many/most (?) has no conscious spiritual element. Ed Wardle had the opportunity for spiritual connection but perhaps never connected because his mind was focussed on survival - attached? The spiritual need to have a relationship with solitude but not all those in solitude are spiritual – but being in solitude makes one closer to the spiritual door.

Being a tourist and travelling are very different. When I was travelling I avoided the tourists – even somewhat ashamedly I never related to museums. I remember walking Cornwall’s coast paths, there would be stages on the walk which were lacking in solitude. The path would descend to a town – often picturesque, but the town felt oppressive (at the time of the walk) because it was people. For a certain distance around the town there would be the increasing oppressiveness as non-walkers would take short walks as they extended the boundaries of the coastal town, but that elastic band would soon pull them back to the town. I would feel comfortable beyond the bounds of the elastic band.

When you travel most of the people you meet are tourists but you develop a nose for moving beyond tourist bounds. Travellers intermingle with tourists but move beyond guide books, participate a little in the lists of where you’ve been, but are looking for the “rejection” that characterises travelling – the rejection of the protection of people (of tourism), of society, of conditioning. The traveller seeks a space, it is a space that is not tourism, is not local, but is freedom. It does not have to be wild although wild has this space, but this

space is alone. And travellers meet travellers who know this space. They connect with deep conversation that soon gets lost, but the connection is indelible even if the face of the met traveller fades. There is spirit in this travelling that is connected with the solitude of viveka. But not all travelling is viveka, not all solitude is viveka. But solitude has the potential for viveka because solitude only has the conditioning that the individual brings; with people there is always conditioning – yet some travellers are trying to move beyond the conditioning. For Ben's people conditioning is rejected but for how many has the spiritual been accepted? Did Ed Wardle accept the spiritual? For how many of these solitary people was solitude viveka?

Centring was "central" to my solitude in travelling, and this centring was spiritual. It was a process of removal of immersion – of conditioning.

Firstgrace took me to compassion that began with a short foray into child care but led me to education. Education ought to be the way forward but has been controlled by what Matriellez called the corporate paradigm. Whilst there are some essential agreements in education, most is the miseducation of societal conditioning. Compassion accepts the need for agreement, desires

education but is worn down by the conditioning of miseducation. In solitude centring finds the compassion again. Meditation can also centre on compassion but I only found meditation my last few years of teaching.

Centring is of course finding your path again, the path given in [firstgrace](#). In the world of conditioning and conditioned people holding to the path is essential but difficult as it is continually under assault. Solitude removes the barrage of the onslaughts of a daily working life and it distances the conditioning. Having found [firstgrace](#) solitude has the space to connect again to that grace - centring is connecting to this grace again, to the path. Of course centring is also the process that found [firstgrace](#) initially – returning to the compassion of birth that natural survival conditioning initially distances. Centring is a spiritual process happening in solitude.

And this brings me back to Bob Kull's solitude within which there was a clear spiritual purpose. So far he has been about setting up camp, his [interlude\[RK pp155-166\]](#) spoke of approach to writing that included spirituality, there was his [firstgrace](#) and then he wrote this "Years ago, in

wilderness solitude, a mystic light shone into my soul, and I believed I'd have a clear relationship with that light forever; I would follow wherever it led. Returning to the world of people, I lost sight of the light, and lost my way. That experience was, perhaps, the most painful of my life. It was like falling deeply in love and then, for some unknown reason, losing my lover. But worse" [\[RK 223\]](#).

I understand his suffering at losing the light because I allowed the wonders of upheaval, of my [firstgrace](#) in Chiswick, to wane. Through [my centring summer of 2018](#), writing, and this Viveka-Zandtao I have found it again. In solitude I can see a Kammic design in the way my life has gone, even though throughout my second childhood I have felt a lack of sufficient focus. I have now recognised the importance of 100%-dedication to the path. It doesn't matter if I am being fanciful calling it Kammic design, but it is as if on the one hand there is a sense of a completed circle of life – [firstgrace](#), second childhood, reflection through meditation and study leading to [100%-dedication to the path](#); and yet on the other I am now ready to explore deeply a territory that I never had a previous inkling of. Fascinating! (assuming no

MAWP or intellectual interruption ).

Just had an excellent morning in bed embracing a new word - used once above. The understanding of this new word is worthy of a book in itself, when I understood that this word was 100% dedication to the path I got one of my sunnata signs – a radiating yellow sun inside my head. Such wonderful fruit - dhammajati.

I began by thinking about solitude and Fogle's people. I think those people are wonderful as well – not yellow sun wonderful but wonderful. When they have taken up solitude they have done this to lose the worst aspects of society – what most would term the “rat race”; this, to me, is part of the societal conditioning. Because they are not subject to this conditioning in their daily life – because their daily life is solitude, they receive some of the fruits of dhammajati. But their solitude is not necessarily spiritual because they still have their own lifestyle egos; they are still clinging to their lifestyle. But whilst those lifestyles of solitude are wonderful in themselves, closer to nature, they are not necessarily completely spiritual.

How can those lives of solitude be made spiritual? The answer to this question was this wonderful word. It is an old word, a spiritual word, it is the word QUEST. Their lives of solitude are not about a spiritual quest, their lives of solitude are about the lifestyle of solitude itself. If within their solitude lifestyle there was quest, then there would be path - not close to nature but path of nature.

But then consideration of quest went further. Solitude can enable 100% dedicated paths, because these lives of solitude are not subject to conditioning. In solitude there are none of the burdens of daily life such as responsibility and earning, so in solitude their quest can be 100% dedication to the path. To use Stephen's title the art of solitude is quest, and I choose to differentiate viveka from solitude by the use of the word quest – solitude + quest = viveka. Viveka is spiritual solitude.

➔ Next Exploring Quest bouncing off Bob Kull's book Solitude

Theory/Practice/Quest/Faith/Path/Heart



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