

Changing our Mindset as Agents of Change



by Robert Sachs, author of *The Ecology of Oneness: Awakening in a Free World*

The late, great rock/jazz artist, Frank Zappa, wrote thought provoking lyrics. In one song, he wrote, “What’s the dirtiest part of your body?...Some think it’s your nose, some think it’s your toes. I think it’s your mind.”

In Eastern medicine and philosophies, mind is foremost, the origin of what manifests and/or how what is manifest is worked with, managed, for better or worse. In the mind science of Buddha-dharma, all Buddhas or enlightened beings have spoken of Three

Poisons that need to be addressed first and foremost. These poisons are all generated by the mind; ignorance, attachment, and aggression. They are at the core of greed, jealousy, power mongering, even indifference to what is in our world and the actions we take as part of it. Without addressing these, without a transformation of the mind and its conflicting emotions, no solutions we come up with will prove sustainable.

Too often, when looking at or confronting injustice, corporate and or state sanctioned greed, and the use of power to manipulate and suppress the rights and access to life's necessities for our fellow humans and the other species whose voice we often ignore, our efforts are often tainted by the same Three Poisons which have spawned these predicaments. Furthermore, to the degree that they are, the results will either be sustainable or corruptible in the short or long run. Perhaps not seeing the full picture and some of the other less seen moving parts, our recommended solutions are naively optimistic or myopic in scope, and our zealousness to make a difference pushes the tide. In seemingly desperate times, it is hard to step back from the ambitious intent of complete and total change when it is clear that if we do not reach our utopian goal, suffering will often linger beyond whatever solution we come up with.

So, how do we avoid the many pitfalls the Three Poisons are guaranteed to produce and create more viable solutions with a maximum potential of beneficial impact? Although it is of merit to turn within to address the Three Poisons, work with our own minds through prayer and meditation, if everyone did such, much needed compassionate work would not happen. Alternatively, if everyone was solely outwardly focused, much may get done, but as mentioned, the Three Poisons would eventually raise up more issues to be addressed. With this in mind, how can we be more skillful and create more easily addressed future dilemmas where our efforts in mindfulness leave some openings for better change to come?

I do believe that as agents of change in a more progressive, sustainable direction, mindfulness training through meditation, contemplation, and prayer need to be a part of our daily lives. We need our minds to be receptive and grow beyond egotistical ambitions. The same is true for those of us who may struggle with the value of such introspective processes, lead with their hearts and feel compelled to act here and now.

For both types of activists for a sustainable future, I offer time-tested methods in Buddhist practice; namely, enlightened aspiration, what is known as aspiring bodhicitta or awakened heart, confession, and Dedication of Merit. These three methods are contained in every Buddhist meditative practice. They are peerless routines well worth adopting as part of daily life and as a means to bring focus and clarity to the purpose of which you are engaged.

Aspiring Bodhicitta is about altruistic intention – where you have the sincere wish that whatever you are about to do, you want ALL beings to benefit. This involves overcoming partisanship. All unskillful action that harms others comes from confusion and the illusion that doing so, doing what only advantages oneself over others, will result in happiness. Such action produces limited rewards, which sooner or later come crashing down. But, just as greed and power mongering bring harm, so does jealousy and a mind filled with revenge. Fairness and justice go a long way in facilitating an even playing field. But then there are a host of other variables which still may yield disparity. In this, we should celebrate those whose efforts yield unimaginable success and support

those whose efforts and lives are tormented by poverty and unhappiness. Bottom line: we want a win/win world. We do what we do “for the goodness of all concerned,” as a good friend puts it.

The concept of confession is a heavy one, laden with all sorts of dogmatic trips and feelings of guilt. But, let’s be honest. So often our actions do not yield exactly what we want them to. We start with good intentions, try our best, and then some new variable rises or the end of our efforts create an unintended effect, possibly worse than the problem we set out to solve.

Confession is about being a mensch, a Yiddish term for someone who is down to earth and honest. We are willing to be transparent about our own dalliance with the Three Poisons and don’t try to rationalize the results by doubling down on them. With such honesty, whether our egos feel bruised or not, we more quickly see the holes in the plan, the causes for the enterprise not going in the direction we wanted. Without such a step, we linger in the stew of rationalizing, and worst still, self-loathing. In fact self-loathing as a result of disappointment is the surest way of not being able to change course for the better.

Finally, there is the Dedication of Merit. This idea rounds off and completes the process of the previous two methods. In the beginning, you have an altruistic intention that whatever you do will benefit everyone. You do whatever your action or cause is and in looking at the result of what you do, you openly assess and accept the limitations, problems, even failures of your actions. But, did anything good come from what you have done?

Dedication is the wish that if there were good results, that those results benefit, spread, and grow limitless. For if something good grows in this manner, it is like a powerful, positive virus which can infect, inform, and inspire other fields of action.

As agents of change, we must first confront the mind states that spawn the problems that we face. We are all infected by the Three Poisons in varying degrees. The inner work is best accomplished by contemplation and meditation. But, in the course of the actions that follow, there are tangible behavioral shifts which are best accomplished by including in our change strategies the setting of altruistic intention, the honest acceptance of successes and failures with a commitment to do better, and the sincere wish that whatever we accomplish that the greatest number of beings can enjoy the results and sustain those results for the generations who follow us. In considering these three behaviors, we may say to ourselves that, of course, that is what we want. But, if we commit ourselves to making these three tangible through daily practice and/or ritual or formal action in the midst of the noble activity of the change you seek, the imperative to act in such a way is reinforced. And the power of our actions and their benefits will, similarly be reinforced, and grow.

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