Article

Giving Up Our Cultural Addiction

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Abstract: This article will begin with an overview of the sources of our cultural addiction to patriarchal culture and its values in Western cultures. Of particular importance to this was the development of the daughter languages of Sanskrit with their dualistic structure. A further major source lies in the Biblical Genesis creation text and subsequent Western philosophy and theology. These things together supported the delusional consciousness which led to individual suffering and the exploitation of others and the earth. The article will then look briefly at some of this addiction's manifestations and their effects and then explain how Buddhist practice can help with the withdrawal process and foster a 'new' way of life although it must be acknowledged that there are real questions as to whether Buddhist practice will be used extensively enough to do so in time to save us from ourselves.

Keywords: patriarchy; Sanskrit; Logic of Domination; Genesis 2–3; success; Four Noble Truths; compassion/karuna; non-violence/ahimsa; wisdom/prajna

Sit, be still, and listen,
because you're drunk
and we're at
the edge of the roof.
-Rumi

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Our cultural addiction is well aged and has become ever more toxic over time. It is now killing us. The term 'addiction' is technically used with reference to the habitual use of a substance which it is toxic and physically and psychologically difficult to withdraw from. It is also commonly used to reference non-substance behaviors, e.g., his addiction to baseball, her addiction to watching T.V. This article will use it in the non-technical sense to reference a culturally and socially mandated way of life which we are socialized to from birth onward and which is highly toxic and also physically and psychologically difficult to withdraw from. This article will begin with an overview of its sources in the development of patriarchal culture and its values, then look briefly at some of its manifestations and their effects and finally argue that Buddhist practice can help with the withdrawal process although it must be acknowledged that there are real questions as to whether this practice will be used extensively enough and in time to do so.

It must be stressed that the arguments in this article are not directed against boys and men but rather the culture to which they have been socialized as have girls and women although differently (Chodorow 1978). It does, however, focus on males since it was, and still is, this gender that is the focus of the events and developments which will be discussed below. Females received quite different and equally problematic treatment which will not be discussed here beyond proposing that both genders have been denied their full humanity under patriarchy. It will be argued that this culture has been harmful to all humans as well as to other beings and the earth. It will then be argued that Buddhist practice can provide a powerful response to patriarchy, one which can lead to a better life for all life. The sources of all patriarchal cultures historically or world-wide will not be discussed, rather the focus of the article will be on Western culture.

Patriarchy existed prior to the Western developments although not all cultures were patriarchal. Merlin Stone (1976) discusses the Myth of Hathor, a female cobra goddess

dating back to 3000 B.C.E. In Egypt, “One text preserved the story that Hathor had been the serpent who existed before anything else was created. She then made the heavens, the earth and all life that existed in it” (201). She notes in her discussion of the Genesis creation story that in all the areas surrounding the creators of that story the belief was that a Goddess created male and female in pairs and simultaneously (219), as the male god did in Genesis 1. However, cultures that were already male dominated had to change this assertion of female power. Thus, the work of Merlin Stone supports the reading of Genesis 2–3 as a reworking of the Hathor myth where the serpent, symbol of growth, wisdom, and the eternal, had to be degraded to an evil beast who tempted the woman to bring sin into the world and consequently the male was placed by God to dominate her. Genesis 2–3 will be discussed further below.

In the following discussion of language. I will draw heavily on [Anthony \(2007\)](#). First, it will be argued that central to the development of the Western cultural addiction is language. While Anthony maintains that the Proto-Indo-European language (PIE), the mother of half of the languages spoken in the world today, may have originated in the Eurasian steppes (wastelands), now Ukraine and Russia, in a “maximum window [which] extends from about 4500 B.C.E. to about 2500 B.C.E.” ([Anthony 2007](#), p. 80). However, he acknowledges that there is considerable disagreement amongst scholars about its antiquity which could range from 8000 B.C.E. to 2000 B.C.E. (16). The spread of its influence has been traced back to sometime between 3000 and 2000 B.C.E. with the violent incursion of the Aryan people from the Central Eurasian steppes into the Ganges basin (India) and later into Persia (Iran). They called themselves “Aryans” and were an ethnic and religious group, not a racial group. Anthony argues that there is clearly more than one racial group involved.

The Aryans were a sophisticated people who had learned how to fix wheels to planks thus creating wagons and to harness horses to those wagons to pull them. With this they were able to migrate from their homeland westward to India and Persia. While they left no records scholars have been able to develop a picture of their culture through their language.

“[T]he proto-lexicon contains [...] clusters of words suggesting that the speakers of PIE inherited their rights and duties through the father’s bloodline only (patrilineal descent); probably lived with the husband’s family after marriage (patrilocal residence); recognized the authority of chiefs who acted as patrons and givers of hospitality for clients; likely had formally instituted warrior bands; practiced ritual sacrifices of cattle and horses; drove wagons; recognized a male sky deity; avoided speaking the name of the bear for ritual reasons; and recognized two senses of the sacred (“that which is imbued with holiness” and “that which is forbidden”).” ([Anthony 2007](#), p. 15)

Their language in its early form lives on through its daughter language and it was through this that the picture of their culture was able to be constructed. PIE developed into Sanskrit which is the mother language of languages now spoken by around one half of the world’s population. Two of its more influential progenies are Greek and Latin and from them a large body of related languages developed including the one in which this is written, English.

Many of the world’s languages are structured differently than PIE descendants, therefore the sense of self and of reality for those speaking them are perceived differently. Importantly, this calls into question the accuracy of the perceptions created by any language. As we will see, Buddhism rejects all human-produced languages as accurate representations of ‘reality’. The structure of PIE and its English daughter language is subject/predicate and tensed ([Anthony 2007](#), p. 19). The subject/predicate form opens the possibility of linguistic dualism. We find this both in fundamental dualisms in English (e.g., male/female, mind/body, powerful/weak, good/bad) as well as in the ability to separate a ‘thing’ and some ‘thing’ it has. For instance, ‘him,’ and ‘his ideas’. In many cases what ‘he’ has, e.g., ‘his fear of spiders’, can be separated from ‘him’ without in any essential way changing ‘him’; it is some ‘thing’ he has, not what he is. The example of Chinese, a non-PIE language, given by [Hall and Ames \(1995\)](#) provides a linguistic contrast.

Chinese functions on a holistic pattern captured by the yin/yang symbol: “*Yin* and *yang* are not dualistic principles of light and dark, male and female, action and passivity, where light and dark exclude each other, logically entail each other, and in their complementarity constitute a totality. Rather *yin* and *yang* are, first and foremost, a vocabulary of qualitative contrasts which are applicable to specific situations, and which enable us to make specific distinctions” (261). Here, we have a good example of how language results in different perceptions and different ways of understanding. The structure of English enables division and the naming of separate ‘things’ while the holistic pattern of Chinese resists that possibility as the example of *xin* below demonstrates. Chinese language, and thus perception and understanding, are much more integrated than is the case with Indo-European languages.

The Chinese *xin*, (*shin* in Japanese) carries a sense that can be expressed in English as heart-and-mind (192–93). This distinctly human quality is not an aggregate of two things, heart + mind, but a quality which must be developed over the course of one’s life, somewhat analogous to the development of an artistic talent. *Xin* is “a correlative image which precludes any final separation between reasoning and imagination, reasoning and experience, reasoning and rhetoric, reasoning and feeling [...]. In this tradition, thoughts are, irrevocably, embodied actions” (224).

While the structure of English and other Indo-European languages is not universal and certainly not necessary, it is foundational to the formation of the toxic symptoms from which we are now suffering. Its dualistic linguistic structure facilitates the creation of logical dichotomies which have become culturally organized into what Karen Warren (1988) analyzes as the Logic of Domination. There are three main features of this logic. The first is Value Hierarchical Thinking. This can be charted where “A” has greater value than ~A (see below). Second is Value Dualism which provides an oppositional conceptual framework where A and ~A are mutually exclusive and ~A is defined in terms of deficiency and lack. Third is the Assumption of Domination which explains, justifies and maintains subordination of the “inferior” (~A) by the “superior” (A) on the grounds of an alleged superior/inferior relationship (Warren, *passim*).

The chart below situates some of the conceptual divisions which are formative of Western cultures, their ideology, and their practices. This chart can be extended to include class, sexuality, race, values and much else but the specific focus here is on aspects of the male/female dualism as they relate to the formation of patriarchy with male dominance of all else. The argument to be developed is that it is patriarchal culture and its value ideology that is the ‘substance’ to which we are addicted and from which we must now withdraw. The addiction rests on three main aspects of our culture, first is its dualistic linguistic structure, second its historical pattern of socialization of boys and girls in which the cultural virus is passed on to a new generation (see Chodorow 1978) and the third is religious dogma to which I will return below. In it, maleness and masculinity are “normal” and superior and all else is defective and lesser.

A _____	~A _____
Norm—superiority	Other—deficiency and lack
Male/soul	Female/nature
Mind/spiritual	Body/material
Active	Passive
Culture	Nature
Intellectual labor	Physical labor
Public Sphere/polis	Private Sphere/domus

But why is it that maleness is accepted as normal and superior? There are several sources that have contributed to the formation of this virus which will be mentioned briefly, but the main focus will be on the Biblical Genesis 2–3 account. Because this is now as it were ‘built into’ the culture and its practices, it has affected and continues to affect peoples’ lives although scholarship has refuted many key points in its popular understanding. This has historically had widespread circulation among ordinary people and, as religious dogma,

had, and has, extreme credibility. Thus, it has affected their lives and continues to do so although scholarship refutes many key points in its popular understanding.

The Genesis account of creation is a written text and as such it is read as dogma (McGilchrist 2019). This contrasts with oral culture spiritual thought and practices which were and still are understood as metaphorical and so function to inspire rather than to inform (Armstrong 2019). This contrast will be significant when we come to the discussion of Buddhism.

Genesis 2–3 is the most widely known and influential Biblical (*The Bible: Revised Standard Version* 1952) creation account. It was written around 1000 B.C.E. Genesis 1 depicts the simultaneous creation of male and female by God and was written later, around 600 B.C.E. In Genesis 2 God created the man from dust and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”. Later God decided the man needed a “helper” and so he took a rib from the man and created the woman from it. While the word “helper” in the original text is also used to call God the “helper of Israel” (Trible 1979, p. 75) it has been understood here to indicate inferiority. The fact that the woman did not get the “breath of life”, she is made only of a rib and so is ‘mere matter or nature’ (~A), is also taken to support her inferiority. In Genesis 3 a serpent convinces the woman to eat from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which the man was forbidden to do by God but the woman was not. When she does, after giving three reasons for doing so—“the tree was good for [spiritual] food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desired to make one wise” (3:6)—she achieves moral knowledge. After she gives this ‘fruit’ to the man and they cover their nakedness, a moral act, God realizes what they did and casts them out of the garden. He tells the woman that she will give birth “in pain and suffering” and further that “your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you” (3:16). He says to the man that, because he listened to his wife, he shall spend his life toiling in the fields until he dies and returns to the ground (3:17–19).

While this is a most cursory report of the popular understanding of this text it does capture the key points that are taken to indicate female inferiority and male superiority over females as the will of God. The fact that obtaining moral knowledge is an advancement in human development is not acknowledged. This interpretation had widespread influence in that the general population was illiterate until well into the modern period, but they were religious and this account was presented them as dogma, something which was true, and that they had to accept.

While very few people were philosophers, philosophical views have also affected people’s lives. Ancient Rome was a highly patriarchal society at the time of the development of systematic philosophy. Elite males’ consciousness had developed individualism, that is the understanding of oneself as separate from others, free, and agentic. Mythical warrior heroes such as Achilles and Ajax and intellectual heroes such as Socrates and Plato were highly regarded. Plato (428–48 B.C.E.) developed a dualistic ontology consisting of eternal forms or essences which the mind could have access to and a lower mundane realm of matter. But his student Aristotle (384–22 B.C.E.) rejected dualism for a monistic theory which, when applied to humans, greatly enhanced male primacy. His theory was that the ‘form’ of a material object is not given by Plato’s eternal essences but rather by its potential which for humans would be contained in the sperm. The potential can be actualized under the right circumstances. His monistic theory about human reproduction had powerful influence which was not challenged until the 18th century.

This theory was that the hotter male body can refine sperm/seed so that it contributes the ‘form’, or ‘potential’, of the new being. The seed is placed in the cooler female body which does little more than contribute the material stuff for the new being and serve as an incubator for its development. If all goes well a perfect new being is produced, that is a male. But if there is some problem with the process an imperfect being, a female, emerges. This theory is the precursor of the one-sex model in which the female could have become a male had the genitalia dropped out of the body as it did with the male, but because it did not, she was irrevocably inferior. This theory has also supported the importance of

the male bloodline in all forms of inheritance as well as the ownership of the child by the father. (Laqueur 1992, chp. 2).

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–30 A.D.) returned to Plato’s dualism to develop his theology. Essential dualisms in his work were God/man and spirit/matter. For humans, spiritual interests were much more consequential than material ones since moral laws were in God’s mind. Thus, there was an ongoing conflict for men between the desires of the body and the struggle to access and live in accord with God’s laws. A major cause of this conflict was the purported Genesis 3 temptation of the man by the original sin of the woman which was now understood as concupiscence/sexual desire although there is no reference to sexual enticement in Genesis 2–3. Sexual temptation, allegedly initiated by the woman, is now represented in all women who must be controlled because of it (see Capellanus 1984). Nevertheless, sexual union was necessary, and God ordained that the man should be the head of the family, its patriarch.

Much more could be said about the development of patriarchal culture in the West. However, the above very cursory accounts outline its Biblical religious grounding, reflected in later theology, which gives such power to the development of male dominance in Western culture. While the developmental process will differ in other cultures the development of male social dominance is, for all intents and purposes, ubiquitous in the contemporary world with very few exceptions. However, in this account the focus is on Western culture and its prevailing ideology. There, while it is now being questioned, it is still widely taken for granted that males are superior and so socially dominant but not all males qualify: race, national origin, sexuality, education and much else can qualify or disqualify any particular man or group. Underlying and driving this is the ideological value system that informs the culture and guides much male behavior. That value system is the pursuit of “success” understood as the attainment of wealth, power and status.

While it is clearly not the case, the cultural Horatio Alger myth continues to be perpetrated that success is obtainable by anyone. With hard work—and a lot of luck—anyone can have wealth, power and status. Just go to this school, get the right job, invest in that stock, invent something and sell it, etc., etc. and the world will be yours. But when we look closely, we see that only a rapidly lessening few men (World’s Richest People 2021) obtain “success” and that the cost of this to others and the environment is huge and growing (United Nations Climate Reports 2021). Here, by ‘cost’ the reference is not to the effort required but to the resources that are necessary to produce something that can garner wealth, power and status. The source of those resources necessary for obtaining success is implicit in the Logic of Domination. It indicates that success could involve the exploitation of anything on the ~A side of the Logic of Domination. At the root here is the belief that the patriarchal male (read white, heterosexual, educated, etc.) is fundamentally different from all else which is inferior and lacking awareness, intellect, reason or rights. Descartes’ (1596–1650) “cogito ergo sum” is the ur-expression of this division; it is the male who thinks. In this process the earth and all it contains, including many other humans, are regarded as a vast repository of natural resources lacking cognitive capacity or any form of rights and so there for the taking.

But the A ~A distinction is not an accurate depiction of reality. Everything that makes up a living being, from the tiniest ant to the largest dinosaur or whale, and of course all humans, comes from the earth. As the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh writes of the earth in his poetic book *Love Letter to the Earth* (2013) “You are the mother of all beings” (102). All beings are equally born of the earth. They contain the earth and cannot be separated from it.

As well, the earth and all it contains, including human creations, is a vast interconnected system. As we are beginning to realize, if we intervene in one part of the system other parts of it are affected. For instance, when the habitat in China of bats and their predators was destroyed by humans, they moved out into the human habitat and infected them with the COVID-19 virus which humans are susceptible to, but bats are not. The virus spread killing millions of humans, causing grief and stress over their personal losses,

disrupting their economies, causing job and business loss, eviction from homes, poverty and hunger, social unrest, degradation of the educational process and a multitude of other calamities not the least of which is the mass of garbage resulting from the need for one-use disposable ppe/personal protective equipment.

The COVID-19 pandemic is just one of a multitude of examples which could be cited of the disruption of the ecosystem by humans and the consequent effects on their lives and the lives of others. Global warming, with its fires and devastating storms, human death from heat, melting ice and sea rise, species extinction, toxic pollution on the earth and in the air, negative effects on agriculture as well as chemical spread into waters, massive pollution of the oceans and many other negative human-caused issues are on the verge of causing rapidly increasing and irreparable damage to the earth (Wallace-Wells 2019; United Nations Climate Reports 2021) that all beings, humans included, depend upon for their very existence. While humans are gradually becoming aware of the ecological crises, little is being done about them. It is still easy for most to look around and think things are fairly normal or will soon return to “normalcy”, once we get the COVID-19 pandemic under control.

A quote from Rumi, all of whose work references religious spiritual experience, opened this article and it is certainly pertinent. However, here the non-religious spiritual practice of Buddhism will be offered as a challenge to both patriarchal culture and its values. Buddhism is a non-religious spiritual practice in that it lacks all the fundamental characteristics of the 3 religions, the Abrahamics, in that there is no God, no sin, no salvation, no absolutes, etc. (see Smith 1998; Orr 2018). In fact, ‘religion’ is derived from the Latin ‘re’ meaning ‘again’ or ‘back’, and ‘ligare’ ‘to bind’ and so ‘religion’ means to be bound back to God. In contrast, Buddhism can lead practitioners to the experience of one’s interconnection with all that is the earth which Thich Nhat Hanh wrote about in his *Love Letter to the Earth*, and which enabled him to say, “I have arrived. I am home” (Nhat Hanh 2013, p. 64). It is a powerful practice which over time can help change awareness, experience, and behavior of the practitioner. If widely practiced a ‘new’ egalitarian way of life could develop with health and contentment for all that is the earth. While this would be ‘new’ for us it was the norm for many indigenous peoples of the Americas before the invading Europeans destroyed it. As Ronald Wright argues at length in his ironically titled Massey Lectures *A Short History of Progress*, “Europeans did not find a wilderness here [...] they made one” (Wright 2004, p. 113; see also Leacock 1977; Watt-Cloutier 2015). However, science holds that our time to achieve this is very short. One problem among many, carbon emission, would have to be reversed by 2030, now in less than 9 years, and that seems unlikely (United Nations Climate Reports 2021) But we can try.

Full instructions for Buddhist practice will not be given here (See Nanamoli and Bodhi 2009, pp. 145–55 for an introduction). Below are the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths (Nanamoli 1992), which are the fundamental teaching of Buddhism accepted by the major schools of Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths summarizes our addiction and its cure on a medical model. A brief explanation of each Truth will be given.

The First Noble Truth is diagnostic; it states that human life is suffering/*dukkha* which is a psycho-spiritual ailment which may have physical symptoms. It is on the psycho-spiritual level that *dukkha* is addressed.

The Second Noble Truth is *dukkha*’s etiology. It is caused by the three poisons or ailments, the *kleshas*. These are:

1. Greed or clinging/*raga*, that is clinging to what is harmful such as the patriarchal worldview, its values and its practices. That worldview affects humans as individuals and so must be addressed on that level by each person. Thus, this process addresses one’s individual constructed sense-of-self or ego. In this one must address ideas and attitudes which range from the trivial to the most momentous, ones that deal with such things as what makes one physically desirable; to what acquisitions, if one acquires them, will make life satisfying; to how best to obtain power; should one go to war; accept a religious dogma; and a vast list of other ideas and attitudes.

2. Anger or aversion/*dvesa*, where we avoid acknowledging the way things really are, in our case patriarchy's poisonous nature and its damage of the earth and all of its life. The most difficult of the aversions to overcome is avoiding dropping the constructed sense-of-self in its entirety which is the third *klesha* below.
3. Delusion/*avidya* is one's false understanding of ones' sense-of-self and the delusions it contains. The early spiritual concern with the harmful consequences of one's constructed delusional consciousness is found in the Yoga tradition which began in India around 5000 years ago and became central to Buddhism. But it was not until the publication of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality* that Western scholarship began to take the notion of social constructionism seriously. Now the view that consciousness is largely socially constructed and this through the socialization process and the acquisition of language, which is taken to represent 'reality', is widely accepted. Thus, the root cause of suffering/*dukkha*, which is grounded in the patriarchal worldview and its value system, is identification with one's delusion/*avidya* of a separate, atomistic, reified self.

The Third Noble Truth is the prognosis, that *dukkha* can be overcome. In a well-known passage the 17th century Zen master and teacher Dogen succinctly states the meditation process and its outcome: "To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly" (Tanahashi 2000, p. 36). Our focus here will be on only one aspect of the study of the self, that is as it relates to the mind. As stated, our minds are delusional not only in the sense that they are constructed and contain a great deal which is problematic but more importantly in that we tend to regard them as a 'thing' with inherent qualities such as reification and individualism. This 'thing' is what we are; it is our self. Thus, one must "forget" or "drop" the mind/self but in so doing one forgets, or loses, the self. To 'forget the self' in the sense this requires is extremely difficult. It is the experience of what Buddhism calls 'no-self'/*anatta*. It brings to consciousness that one is not *svabhava*/essentialized or eternal but rather *sunyata*/lacking any reifying essence or unchanging nature. Thus, it is experienced as a form of death which is the worst form of *dukkha*.

The issue here goes back to language and the Indo-European languages' construction of reality. As Loy (1992) explains, it is the use of language to reify perceptions into self-existing things that is problematic. The 'things' that we perceive, including our 'self', are not an accurate perception of reality, they are created by the workings of the mind grounded in language. And, as we saw above, the 'things' the mind creates can vary greatly depending on the language we use, our culture and other factors. What we must do in Buddhist practice is deconstruct these delusional creations which are covering the reality of the impermanence/*anitya* and interconnectedness/*pratityasamutpada* of all things, including our 'self'. In doing this we are "actualized by myriad things", that is, we drop the delusional body and mind and experience grounding in that infinite interconnectedness with all things. However, the reluctance to face this 'form of death' and be "actualized by myriad things" is powerful, it makes one feel as if they will fall off a cliff and die if they do. Here, Loy says that the only solution is to just drop over the cliff and die. However, the result of this action is that "[i]f each link of *pratityasamutpada* is conditioned by all the others, then to become completely groundless is also to become completely grounded, not in some particular, but in the whole network of interdependent relations that constitutes the world and all else. The supreme irony of my struggle to ground myself is that it cannot succeed because I am already grounded in the totality" (174). What we experience here is not a physical death but the 'death' of the delusional sense-of-self the formation of which was traced back to Genesis 2–3 and ancient Rome where elite males' consciousness had developed individualism, the understanding of oneself as separate from others, free and agentic.

To summarize this, as Loy has explained regarding the Third Noble Truth, our *dukkha* /suffering can only be overcome by dropping our constructed and delusional sense-of-self which, as noted above, historically in the West traces back to the widespread belief in the male's reception of the breath of life in Genesis 2–3 and the elite male's the sense-of-self in ancient Rome. That core sense-of-self was believed by those whose consciousness was defined by it to be, in the Buddhist term, *svabhava*, that is essentialized and so unchanging. However, Buddhist practice can foster the abandonment of that sense-of-self through the *experience* that one achieves of *sunyata*. *Sunyata* is frequently understood as 'empty' in a nihilistic sense of being an empty void. But that is not the case. As Dogen explains it, "To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things". That is, one drops the self, i.e., the *svabhava* or essentialized self, when they *experience* the interconnectedness/*pratityasamutpada* of all things which includes their 'sense-of-self'. But it is not a new 'self' which is experienced. That experience stands on its own as *experience*, but it can inform the 'self' of *Samsara*. So, as Nagarjuna explains, 'the middle way' of Buddhism is the experience of *samsara* /cyclic existence by one who has had the experience of *nirvana*, i.e., the *pratityasamutpada* of all things. Having dropped the delusional self, one can now act with compassion/*karuna* and wisdom/*prajna*.

Nagarjuna (in Garfield 1995) explains the 'middle way' which is available to one in *samsara* who can now understand and act in accord with their *experience* of *nirvana* and who may act as a *bodhicitta*, an enlightened one who is able to lead others to the path of enlightenment.

There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence [samsara] and nirvana.
There is not the slightest difference
Between nirvana and cyclic existence.
Whatever is the limit of nirvana,
That is the limit of cyclic existence.
There is not even the slightest difference between them,
Or even the subtlest thing.—XXV, 19, 20

Or as Garfield puts it, "So nirvana is only *samsara* experienced as a Buddha experiences it. It is the person who enters nirvana, but as a state of being, not as a place to be" (333). Thus, the result of the process of enlightenment is that one can find the "middle way" between the experience of nirvana and that of *samsara*. That middle way is that they can hold the awareness of nirvana, the ultimate truth, while they function on the level of *samsara*, the conventional truth, to deal with its problems. However, those who practice Buddhist meditation will not automatically and immediately obtain full enlightenment. This is not an all or nothing process but something one develops with practice over time. However, the practitioner can now begin to see *samsara*, in this case patriarchal culture, and understand it for the delusion that it is. Thus, the practitioner, drawing on the wisdom/*prajna* they have developed, which is grounded in compassion/*karuna* and non-violence/*ahimsa*, will be able to begin to address the crises we face in a manner grounded in these capacities (Orr 2018). There is no given way or one correct way to do this, no rule or law to guide one but rather the understanding of ones' "self" as grounded in the whole as well as the awareness they develop of what is needed in a particular situation.

For instance, one may decide against buying a gas-powered car and get an electric one and solar panels to power it with the sun. Or develop a green career. Or act against belittling someone they disagree with by trying to befriend them and talk about their disagreement instead. But in some cases wisdom/*prajna* may call for acting against compassion/*karuna* or against non-violence/*ahimsa* and, for instance, lying which is a form of violence. For example, there is a tale of the Buddha coming across a house on fire which he knew contained children. He also knew that they would not come out just because he told them to, so he lied and said he had toys and treats for them outdoors. That brought them out but at the cost of a lie which, however, was based in good intention/*cetana*.

These are just a few examples of the changes in one's life and the difference they can make which are endless. And, in addition to showing the importance of one's intention/*cetana* they also show that right action can call for the use of scientific or other knowledges which are especially important for dealing with the crises with which we are now faced. These types of changes and others may have a positive effect on the crises that face us if enough people make them, or they may not. There is no guarantee.

The Fourth Noble Truth gives the therapy for the relief of suffering/*dukkha*, a life lived in accord with the Noble Eightfold Path, which is right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration/meditation. These should form an integrated practice of one's life. It is important to stress that the path is the *integrated practice of one's life*. In the examples above buying an electric car can be "right action", a good thing, but one must attend to how they get the money to pay for it, "right livelihood" and so forth. We also must be aware that Buddhist practice has been reduced by many to "Mindfulness", or "McMindfulness" as Purser and Loy (2013) call it. It has become both a narcissistic feel-good fad which generates huge profits for those selling clothing, meditation cushions and other equipment and a corporate tool for getting employees to work harder, do more and take personal responsibility when things do not meet their demands. But, again, there are no universal laws which will determine the 'rightness' of one's actions. One can only strive to have them grounded in the compassion/*karuna*, non-violence/*ahimsa* and importantly in the wisdom/*prajna* which meditation will foster, and which may culminate in enlightenment and the incentive to act for the betterment of all (Orr 2018).

This article has provided both an overview of patriarchal culture which is the addiction we must overcome and an overview of a powerful tool to facilitate withdrawal, Buddhist practice and its outcome in changing the practitioner who in consequence can work to bring about positive changes in the world. This practice facilitates an awareness of the true nature of patriarchal culture as an historical construction and the delusional nature of that construction which causes *dukkha* for the earth and its beings including human beings. This delusional construction is grounded in both language and cultural practices and transmitted to children through their socialization (Chodorow 1978). Buddhist practice, in addressing all aspects of one's being, can facilitate release from all forms of our psycho-spiritual suffering/*dukkha* and lead to a life for the being who practices which is grounded in compassion/*karuna*, non-violence/*ahimsa* and wisdom/*prajna*.

As well as many Buddhist centers available for learning and practice, there are currently many works dealing with a range of aspects of Buddhism and its practice aimed at non-scholarly readers as well as magazines and other resources. They identify and critique aspects of our toxic culture in ways that could incentivize readers to pursue the practice with the goal of challenging and changing that culture and its effects. Among the many informative and inspiring books, and this is just a few of those available, are those from the (Dalai and Alt 2020) addressing climate change (2020); the invaluable works of David Loy which critique all aspects of Western culture from a Buddhist perspective (Loy 1992, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2015); and a wide range of works by other highly respected teachers and scholars. To name just a few, Gross (1993); Macy and Brown (2014); Salzberg (1995); Stanley et al. (2009) and many others. "McMindfulness" by Purser and Loy (2013) identifies and critiques some of the misuses of the practice.

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