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The Buddhist Path
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Paper #1**

Freedom from Negativity?

The title of this paper is posed as a question so that one can explore and investigate if Buddhism and meditation can bring the mind freedom from negativity. One of the most important things I have learned thus far, is that anger and hatred are based on projections and exaggeration, not on objectivity or *wisdom*. This strikes me as very important in my search for how to release negativity. If we can accept that things feelings do not come from wisdom, that it may be possible to realize that they are fundamentally incorrect.

Within Buddhism there are different sects and meditation practices that look at life and practices in differing ways. Each of these diverse forms of Buddhism present answers for dealing with negativity, anger and suffering, all of which affect us in our lives constantly. My search is to find which of these teachings can provide the most help and guidance to subduing and transforming negativity. In searching I also wish to discover the connections between the mind, our thoughts and feelings and how these aspects are affected through meditation.

Through the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism, we are guided on how to see the world and ourselves within it. However, it sometimes becomes difficult to see the world outside ourselves, and conversely, to see the world and include ourselves

within it. The Four Noble Truths address these feelings of confusion and sometimes suffering and offer almost a kind of plan of attack for overcoming the obstacles that can be faced while making these connections. The first and most important part of the Four Noble Truths is identifying the causes for suffering or the *dukkahs*. Many times within our lives, our minds are working quicker than our thoughts and we act upon things that have not been well-addressed. In Buddhism we learn that we must realize how we attach ourselves to these thoughts and how to free ourselves from them so that we can let go of our egos.

In *Vipassana*, the basic principles are about experiencing one's own reality. Much emphasis is placed on self observation and perception. This notion of self-observation is something many people, including myself often neglect. In individualized Western culture, especially in the United States, much emphasis is placed upon "doing." In such an environment, there is often little time for self-exploration, especially of one's thoughts. I think this can be attributed to how easily agitated and angered we can become over little things. We are constantly going through the motions of life, without looking closely at each motion, and when our path is interrupted or derailed, we are unhappy. What we can learn from these teachings, however, is that while it may be impossible to prevent anger and negativity from entering our minds, what we need to do is keep it from residing within our thoughts.

By closely observing our minds and our thoughts, we may be able to control our minds and curb the feelings of anger from further evolving. In "Pure and Simple," by Upasika Kee Nanayon, she speaks of "opening the way in the heart." In

this passage she explains the defilements that threaten our minds and that when we become close observers of our minds we can control these defilements. She also says that, “The Buddha told us to put the heat on the defilements, because if we don’t put the heat on them, they put the heat on us”(187). This notion of putting the heat on the defilements further emphasizes that we must be in touch with what, and not who is plaguing us. If we examine what these thoughts and feelings are, then we can uproot them. It is also taught that in becoming angry at another angry person, we are doing harm to ourselves. This seems like something to internalize, as the individual, egotistical by nature, does not want to poison himself with anger. If we observe a situation and realize that facing anger with non-anger will benefit both parties, a better outcome will ensue.

In reading about the Zen tradition, we have learned that Zen Buddhism is based heavily upon experience. It is not enough to read about Zen but the most important aspect comes in sitting and practicing. When the Zen tradition emerged it was supposedly to attract more followers, as it did not emphasize monastery lifestyles for all and placed more emphasis on the common man. Through this change, more people were able to have insights towards their true natures. When this occurs, people usually stop acting on their thoughts and examine their meanings. If they are in touch with their true natures, and they examine the meanings of their thoughts, it is likely that anger will be tamed and negativity can be avoided. If the individual does not “grasp” these thoughts than they can be free of them.

In reading about poetry, I came across this poem by Ryokan that struck me as very appropriate.

*Where beauty is, then there is ugliness;
where right is, also there is wrong.
Knowledge and ignorance are interdependent;
delusion and enlightenment condition each other.
Since olden times it has been so.
How could it be otherwise now?
Wanting to get rid of one and grab the other
is merely realizing a scene of stupidity.
Even if you speak of the wonder of it all,
how do you deal with each thing changing?
-Ryokan-*

In concluding with this poem by Ryokan, we can understand that he is saying that there is no escape from anger and negativity. As humans, we experience a range of different emotions, and anger is one of them. To this we must understand that while we can “free” ourselves from anger, we can never rid our minds of it. We can however, as all of the meditation practices suggest, refuse to make attachments to these feelings. We may feel them, and we may identify that we are feeling anger, but by refusing to allow the thought and feeling to stay within your mind, maybe it is possible to let it go, as if it never existed.