



The
Purpose
of
Life

*The Essential Teachings
of a Buddhist Master*

Jacqui James

The
Purpose
of
Life

*The Essential Teachings
of a Buddhist Master*

Jacqui James

AUKANA
BRADFORD ON AVON

First published 2008

Aukana Trust

9 Masons Lane
Bradford on Avon
Wiltshire
BA15 1QN
England

e-mail: info@aukana.org.uk

www.aukana.org.uk

Telephone: (01225) 866821, International: +44 1225 866821

The Aukana Trust is a registered charity (No 326938)

Copyright © Aukana Trust 2008

All rights reserved

Acknowledgements

The publishers would like to thank **Jim Vuylsteke** for the preliminary editing of the text, for typesetting the book, and for his invaluable assistance and guidance throughout the production process; **Garry Phillipson** for editing suggestions, writing the foreword and back cover text, and much helpful input; **Trevor Day** and **Felicity Cowie** for editing suggestions; **Sue Moyers**, **Mary Valiakas** and **Ellen Foster** for proofreading; **Jason Rebello** for designing the cover; **Peter** and **Susan Case** for technical advice; and **Tom Whyte** for creative ideas and suggestions.

Typeset in Bembo 11/13.5 and Amerika Sans 18

Printed in Great Britain by Cromwell Press, Trowbridge

Cover printed by Opalprint, Midsomer Norton

Cover photograph copyright © Trinn ('Pong) Suwannapha 2007

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-9511769-9-3

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	1
Real Buddhism	5
Awareness	17
Vipassanā	27
Loneliness	37
Of Wizards and Wise Men	47
Women—Their Bodies, Minds, and Meditation	61
Thinking	75
The Power of Patience	87
One Key to Wisdom	99
Evenmindedness	111
The End of Growth, The Beginning of Learning	121
The Spiritual Mind	131
Surrendering	141
The Purpose of Life	153
Meditation and Work	163
Seeking For Happiness Brings Unhappiness	173
The Only Way to Practise	183
The Path	195
How to Become a Spiritual Adult	207
<i>Glossary</i>	217

Awareness

‘Awareness’ is a word you hear used time and time again when you come across meditation. You are told to be aware when you sit meditating. You are told to be aware of what is going on, from moment to moment, during the day.

But what exactly is awareness? Awareness is being conscious. There are many things of which you can be conscious. You can be conscious that it is a dull day. You can be conscious that you have a headache. You can be conscious that your friend is wearing a red dress. You can be conscious that your boss is in a bad mood. You can be conscious of sounds or smells or a stiff leg. You can be conscious of worrying about the health of an ailing relative. Which of these things is it important to be conscious of if you are a *vipassanā* meditator? Are all these things important? Or are only some of them important? Or are they perhaps all irrelevant, and there is something completely other that happens to you that you should be conscious of?

Before we go into depth as to just what it is a meditator should be aware of, let us take a look at the opposite of awareness—ignorance. For one of the best ways of finding out what awareness actually is, is to define what it is not. Therefore, we must take a close look at ignorance.

It is best to talk of ignore-ance rather than ignorance because ‘ignorance’ in the English language usually refers to someone who is intellectually stupid, and that certainly is not the meaning of the word ‘ignore-ance’. Ignore-ance is the refusal to acknowledge the presence

of something. It is to become conscious, for a very brief moment, of something which one finds so terrifying and so threatening that one turns away from it instantly, refusing even to acknowledge its very presence. That something may be a memory or anger or an idea someone is putting forth. Whatever that something is, it is always interpreted as painful, so painful that one just does not want to deal with it, and so one turns away from it.

A person who drinks heavily does so to ignore. He wishes to ignore the suffering he feels inside. I once knew a man with this problem. He drank more heavily when his troubles increased. When there was trouble at work, he would start drinking at midday and drink himself into a stupor by early evening. When there was trouble in his marriage, he would turn to drink to blot out the hurt he experienced from the continual rows with his wife. The bored housewife takes the odd tippie to smother the pain of boredom. The travelling salesman often drinks heavily to blot out his loneliness. Always, there is the attempt to smash out, to get rid of, to ignore a feeling which is unpleasant and looks threatening. One can ignore unpleasant feelings by blotting them out with drink or drugs or socialising or work. Or one can just pull the mind away from them and refuse to acknowledge their very existence. That way one thinks the problem of painful feelings is solved. Only a few have the wisdom to realise that the problem enlarges with the ignoring of it.

When individuals start to meditate, if they are employing drink as their way of ignoring what is happening to them internally, then they are encouraged to give up that extremely heavy-handed way of dealing with inner pain. Until they do give up drinking, they cannot really get started on the meditative path. *Vipassanā* meditation is all about facing up to and looking squarely at whatever is going on inside us. So right from the start of the meditative path, people need to give up all the coarser ways—such as drink and drugs—that they use, in order to blot out the inner pain, despair, and emptiness they frequently experience.

When we take a look at the less coarse way of ignoring, that of pulling the mind away from the unpleasant object and developing instant amnesia about it, even here we find ignoring can be divided into three types. For ease of explanation I am going to call an extreme case of ignoring ‘coarse’, a not so intense case of ignoring ‘medium’, and a very subtle case of ignoring ‘fine’, and give you an example of each.

This is an example of a coarse display of ignore-ance. From time to time I go up to a meditator and say, 'What is the matter with you?' 'Me?' he says, looking startled, 'Why, nothing.' He is not just saying that because he is being secretive and does not want to tell me what the problem is. He really believes that he is fine, that he is all right, that there is nothing wrong with his inner world. The whole of his face is covered with a greyish black haze, which is indicative of an extremely negative mental state. Always, there is hatred present in a person's mind when that greyish black haze hangs over his or her face. And apart from the hatred there will be a mixture of other hindrances running as well, like worry, and sloth and torpor.

Occasionally I like to check up to see if another meditator is capable yet of being aware of an external mental state. An external mental state is somebody else's mental state, whereas an internal mental state is your own mental state, and a *vipassanā* meditator is training himself or herself to become aware of both internal and external mental states. So wishing to find out whether a particular meditation student is able yet to detect another's mental state, I will ask her the question, 'How is so and so, the one you've been working with all afternoon?' If she can read the other meditator's mental state, she will say something along the lines of, 'Oh, she's running hatred, and it's shown in the way she's banging and crashing around.'

A great deal of ignoring is going on if a meditator is running strong hatred (shown by such things as the greyish black hue covering the face and the banging and crashing) and yet he himself is totally unaware of anything amiss and is surprised, if not shocked, that I should imply that he is somewhat off beam.

Ignore-ance of a medium or less severe nature is present when meditators know they are off beam, but when asked, 'Why are you in a bad mood?' they say, 'I don't know.' They are unaware of what mental action they performed that brought about the negative mental state, but they are conscious that they are in a bad mood. So there is less ignore-ance in this example than in the previous one. These meditators are conscious of the bad mood, therefore admitting there is suffering in the moment, but not conscious of what they did to bring about that bad mood.

The third kind of ignore-ance, fine ignore-ance, is even less blind than the two mentioned so far. It shows itself in the following manner.

I ask a meditator, ‘What is the matter with you?’ and he says, ‘I am feeling off beam because I am worrying about my work load.’ And he mentions how he is conscious of the negativity that is running in his mind. He is conscious that there are the hindrances of worry and hatred present, and he is conscious of the comparison between now, where he sees himself as continually overloaded with work, and the future, which he pictures as having lots of leisure time in it and very little work. He says he is conscious that this continual comparing, between what he has got in the present moment and what he wants, is craving for something other and hatred of the present situation. And he is conscious that because there is craving present, he is suffering. But somehow he has got locked into the hatred, and he does not know what it is he has missed—what vital factor in the chain of events he should have been conscious of, which he missed, which would have stopped him from getting locked into hatred.

What he was unconscious of, what he ignored, was the unpleasant feeling that had arisen due to the overwork. He did not like that feeling. He found it threatening, and so he quickly ignored it. The moment a meditator blots out from consciousness a feeling that he or she does not want to face, hatred for that feeling starts to build. And suffering is experienced.

All of this is fine ignore-ance. Fine ignore-ance is present when a meditator is conscious that he is in a bad mood, conscious of the hindrances of worry and hatred, conscious that he is comparing and that comparison is craving or hatred, and conscious that he has become attached to that hatred. Can you see that the meditator who had fine ignore-ance operating was conscious of so many more things existing in his mind than the meditator who was caught up with coarse ignore-ance, who was not even aware that he was in a bad mood?

From what has been said so far, it should be becoming clear that there is a definite link between ignore-ance and life appearing empty, meaningless, frightening, and painful. Therefore, if you get rid of the ignore-ance, you will also get rid of all that prevents life from being vital and totally satisfying. But how do you get rid of ignore-ance? The answer is simple: by developing awareness. You have to become aware,

you have to become conscious of many things that up until now you have been oblivious of. However, you have to become conscious only of *certain* things. You do not have to become conscious of everything in the world. That would be an impossibility, and it would not be useful to you in your task of overcoming suffering. You do not have to become conscious that this morning it rained. You do not have to become conscious that the Bantu are an African tribe. You do not have to become conscious that oranges cost less in a supermarket than they do in the village greengrocers. You do not have to become conscious that your allergy to cats is due to having been attacked by one in a past life.

But you *do* have to become conscious of hearing as a separate and discrete event. You have to become conscious that when there is hearing present, nothing else exists in your world. At that moment in time there is no rain, no Bantus, no cheap oranges in supermarkets—all there is, is hearing. You have to become aware that that moment of hearing is consciousness. It is ‘hearing consciousness’. You have to become aware that hearing is born, it lasts for a split second, and then it vanishes. This is called the birth and death of hearing. You have to become conscious of this birth and death of a moment. In the same way you must become aware of the other four senses, those of smell, taste, touch, and sight.

Apart from becoming aware of a sense consciousness for the split second that it exists, you need to become aware of what follows on from that. It will be a perception or a feeling or both. For example, you may hear a nightingale singing, which you find wonderful. Labelling the sound as ‘nightingale singing’ is the ‘perception’ and the pleasure that wells up in you at the sound of that bird singing its heart out is ‘feeling’. You have to become conscious of the perception and the feeling and how they too only last for a split second, how they too, like hearing, are born, exist for a while, and then die.

Next, you need to become conscious of your response to that feeling. Do you want more and more pleasant feelings? If you do, you will make the mind move towards the sound. You will hold the attention on the bird song. You will not let it move away. You will keep bringing it back to the birdsong so that you can experience more and more pleasant feelings. You need to become conscious that this is craving for pleasant feelings. And that the more frequently you lock on to the

sound, the greater the disappointment when the bird stops singing because the pleasant feelings also stop.

You need to become conscious of how craving produces suffering within you, for you will have no desire to give up craving and the attachment to it if you do not become conscious of how it leads to suffering.

Finally, you need to become conscious that there is nothing wrong with hearing, or the label you put on the sound to identify it. Nor is there anything wrong with the feeling that follows. Whether that feeling is pleasant or unpleasant, it is all right. What you need to become conscious of is that it is how you *react* to that feeling which determines whether you live in a world that is a hell or a world that is a heavenly place to be. If you react by trying to get rid of the feeling or trying to hang on to that feeling, then you condemn yourself to living in a hell state. You choose it. You do it to yourself. Nobody else does it to you. No god or demon out there does it to you. It is *you* who does it to you. You choose the type of world you live in.

Vipassanā meditation is an exploration into the world we create for ourselves. When we start to meditate, we set out to discover exactly how we have created that world and what we must do to change it into a heaven world. For it goes without saying that those who choose to meditate earnestly have already come to the realisation that theirs is not a heaven world, and that they are doing something, they know not what, which is turning their world into somewhere they would rather not live. You, in common with all other beings, wish to live in a world which is light and bright and happy. You know also, even if that realisation has not yet fully formed, that you *can* do something to bring about such a heaven world.

Having defined exactly what awareness is not, having also defined what it is a *vipassanā* meditator must be aware of, you then ask yourself: 'What do I do to bring about a higher level of awareness? How do I increase my consciousness of what is going on inside me?'

Besides attempting to increase your awareness by doing one or two periods of seated meditation each day, you can also increase your awareness during the day by trying to be more conscious of objects

around you.

How many of you, when you enter a room, notice the colour of the walls? Do you notice any plants or flowers present? Consciously note everything when you come into a room—the colour of the furniture, the houseplants, the tables and chairs (are they in the same position as they were the last time you were there?). The lights—how many are there and are they all switched on, or are some of them off, and are the same ones off this time as last time? Is the floor clean or dirty? What is the dirt—spilt tea or dust? If the curtains are not drawn, is the sky as light this time as the last time you were in the room, or is the sky overcast, or is it blue, or is it night outside? And sounds—are there more or fewer sounds? Are the sounds of cars or human voices or radios?

This action of deliberately focusing the attention on the room makes you locate on the activity you are presently engaged in. It helps to cut off being caught up with the past, with thoughts of the family you have just left or the work problems of the day. Paying attention to objects around you brings you right into the present moment.

Having paid attention to the environment around you and got yourself into the present, the next step is to work your way inwards into yourself and focus on what is happening inside you. Is your body tense or relaxed? Is your mind quiet or are there many thoughts buzzing around? Are you still caught up with worries about things that happened during the day? If so, be clearly conscious that the hindrance of worry is present. Be conscious that when you are noting that your body is tense, at that moment all there is in your world is tension. There is no worry, no buzzing thoughts. Be conscious that when you are aware of the worry, the body tension has finished. It has died, and a new moment has been born which is called 'worry'. This is being conscious of the rise and fall of things. It is this continual awareness of the rise and fall of things which wears down craving and hatred.

If you look at a friend's floor and are aware that it is dirty, and then you are conscious of the mind spinning off and starting to worry about your dirty kitchen floor and how you have been meaning to clean it for days but just have not been able to get round to it—be aware that you are *doing* the act of worry as your way of trying to cover up the unpleasant feeling that arose when your eye came into contact with a certain external object, that object being the dirty floor.

Being fully conscious of the meeting point between data coming in through the senses and what you choose to do with that data is where *vipassanā* meditation really lives. You can respond to the data with hatred or you can respond with craving. In either case you choose to live in a hell world. Or you can remain equanimous, letting the data float in and then out, past your watching, alert attention—not grabbing it, not trying to push it away, not being disturbed by it whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. If you can manage this equanimous approach you will find you suddenly are living in a heaven world.

What are the benefits to you personally if you practise becoming conscious of things that you were previously unconscious of?

To start with, as your awareness of what is going on inside you deepens, you will find that you are rather disturbed by this heightened awareness. You will be disturbed because you will think that the meditation has made you worse, more angry, more restless, less concentrated. But it has not. It just makes you more conscious of what has always been present in you but which previously you had not the courage to look at. Then you settle down to the new you. And you realise that to become more conscious of the chaos that has always been present in your mind is a benefit because you cannot possibly do anything about sorting out the chaos if you are not conscious of its existence. That is the first benefit of increased awareness.

If you continue to practise steadily, you will raise your capacity. But you only raise your capacity to be more and more conscious if you work at it daily. This means meditating *every day*—not missing the practice for six days and then on the seventh having a binge of three hours seated meditation in the hopes that this will make up for those lapsed six days. If you continue to practise steadily and in the right manner, you will find that the world you inhabit becomes more alive, more dynamic, more interesting, richer. You will not be one to complain that most of the things you do each day, like travelling to work, are meaningless, grey areas in your life which you complete as hastily as possible and usually in a state of amnesia because you take refuge in a mental fog to escape a crushing sense of boredom and greyness.

I read a story once about a man who worked on Manhattan Island

in New York. In order to get to work every day he had to catch a ferry, and he found that after he had been to work a few times, he knew the route very well, and so he started to block off from it, and he did not register any of that journey to work. It was one of those grey, foggy patches in his day. He then took up meditation, and he was amazed to find that his journey to work was extremely enjoyable because he started to notice the sparkling on the water. He started to notice the smell of the water. He started to notice the people in the boat. He started to become conscious of his journey to work, which previously he had just ignored. He was amazed to discover that every day was different. He had assumed that he knew the journey off pat and therefore it was boring and therefore he cut off from it. As soon as he started to meditate and started to be aware of changes in himself, changes in the elements, changes in people around him, as soon as he became aware of change, his journey was no longer boring but extremely interesting, even though he made that 'same journey' every day. For him, it was no longer the same after he took up meditation.

And you will find that once you have been practising this meditation for some time, if your walk to work is one of those grey, foggy patches in your day, you will notice that it changes beyond recognition. That foggy patch will start to have recognisable objects in it. There will be the occasional screech of brakes, the colourful dress of a child, the bark of a dog. And there will be feelings in response to those sense impressions. You will notice yourself feeling again. Previously, you would have sworn you were dead emotionally, all your feelings washed out. Now, all of a sudden, you are rich in feelings once again. They are not all pleasant, but at least you are coming to life—your world is enriching.

The benefits of becoming more conscious of what is going on inside you are all positive. You will learn, however, to redefine what you understand by the word 'positive'. It is a positive experience to be more conscious of what is going on inside you, even if what you see there is unpleasant. It is a positive experience to start letting go of that unpleasantness—the training teaches you that you must let go in order to lessen your suffering. It is a positive experience to have your inner world become more alive, richer, more three-dimensional.

These are all benefits from practising awareness of your inner world.



The Purpose of Life

'Our task in life is to become aware that there is no end point that we are supposed to be getting to—that experiencing what is happening in our lives right now is the purpose of life . . . Living contentedly with what one finds in the moment is nibbāna.'

Between these covers you will find a vivid and frank account of spirituality. This book is grounded in [Jacqui James's](#) experience of searching for and realising enlightenment, and subsequently teaching the Buddha's way.

In straightforward language Jacqui explains what genuine spirituality means, and in the process explodes many myths. There is a searching examination of Buddhism, asking: what is essential in the journey to enlightenment, and what is just tradition and folklore?

The emphasis throughout is on how modern women and men can apply the essence of the Buddha's teachings. Jacqui shows how this can improve life beyond measure, how it leads onward towards enlightenment, and why this is the purpose of life.

£8.95

ISBN 978-0-9511769-9-3

