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### The Mandala of Our World

There is an ancient Tibetan proverb that was recently discovered in the deepest caverns of the Himalayas: So there was once a Buddhist coroner who only lasted six months before he was fired. The reason? He wrote the same cause of death on every certificate..., "Birth." \*pause for laughter\* Birth is of cyclical nature in his faith, much like the *mandala*. In Tibetan, Vajrayana Buddhism, the creation of mandalas are a reflective, spiritual practice. Before beginning the process, monks will recite sacred chants over an area. They will then take dyed sand and, by hand, pour a beautiful, complex design of intricate, nested shapes, all forming a circle. The outer ring of this circle represents the universe, the inner ring helps to free the mind of suffering, and the "secret" balances mind and body. The process of creating a mandala is painstaking and requires much patience, but the product is a beauty like no other. After completing their work, sometimes taking several months or years, monks quickly sweep it up and release the sand into flowing water. The practice is believed to take so much spiritual strength and passion that allowing the sand to flow sends healing and compassion throughout the world. Buddhism is a belief system founded not only on self-liberation, but also on enlightenment with the goal of compassion and community; these teachings can be applied to almost every issue we face in modern society and in turn, lead us to an age of peace and prosperity.

Shakyamuni/Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, based his teachings on four basic principles known as, "The Four Noble Truths", which tell a story of the journey from the suffering of the common man, to the enlightenment experienced by those who spread the wealth of the mandala through streams and minds. The first of these principles introduces the human condition, and the reason behind the creation of the mandala: "Life is full of *dukkha*," which translates to, "Life is full of suffering." In Western eyes, this may seem pessimistic, but the same message runs through almost every part of our society, every single day. The U.S. and most "developed" countries now have 24 hour news broadcasting channels. These channels preach the same truth of suffering by informing us on issues such as poverty, inequality and discrimination (i.e. racism, sexism, homophobia, and recently islamophobia), global warming, gun violence, murder, terrorism, human trafficking, and world hunger. The list goes on. But this is not the only suffering that Buddha references in the First Noble Truth. *Dukkha* refers to not only physical and mental pain, it is feeling unfulfilled. *Dukkha* is the cycle we fall into of earthly reward, momentary pleasure, and then eventually dissatisfaction. This motion has become the foundation of our society. In order to sustain a capitalist market, people must *need*. In Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations", he writes that, "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer." The consumer has always been the most important role in our modern capitalist society. They set the demand, they buy the products, and their confidence in buying and spending determines the entire value of their own currency. The supplier needs to make these consumers feel like they are missing something in their life and make them feel *unfulfilled* or else they won't want or purchase their product. Contentment and happiness are the enemy of business, and business runs the world.

In fitting relation to the previous example of consumerism, the Second Noble Truth states that the cause of *dukkha* is desire. Buddha's philosophy is centered around this idea, this is the cause that mandalas aim to eliminate. Desire, to a certain point, is necessary to sustain a physical life; We crave food when we need energy, water when we are dehydrated, and socialization when we are lonely. Other than these fundamental needs, all else does not serve the human mind, rather it degrades it. We cannot grasp to material items because they are impermanent and so is the happiness they bring. A storm can destroy a house, a new clothing item will go out of style, emotions are fluid, perceptions change, and human life is not eternal, yet advertisements and businesses push that we must continue to rely on these items for happiness. **Research shows** that 40% of happiness actually has to do with intentional action, and only 10% has to do with the situation a person is living in. In a study done at the University of California Davis, Robert A. Emmons, PhD, conducted a study in which subjects were split into two groups, one writing daily about things that they were grateful for, the other writing about things that they were bothered by. The term, "grateful for" is a contradiction to desire, whereas, "things that people are bothered by" connects to regret, unfulfillment, and essentially, *things not going the way they wanted*. Gautama Buddha once used similar terms to describe suffering. He said, "**Not getting what is wanted is *dukkha*.**" By the end of the study, those who journaled about the latter reported 25% less happy than those who journaled about the former. Innovation, growth, development, all words used to describe the Capitalist unfulfillment with the things that it has created. In our society, we have an abundance of homes, office buildings, restaurants, money, etc. but rather than seeing this abundance and distributing it to those in need, we "journal about the want" by making more and more. Even without the appreciation of this development, the desire of the ruling party continues to take the vitality from our planet, the homes and neighborhoods of the disenfranchised, and the lives of those forced to work for

unhealthy periods of time, all in the name of “progress”. Desire not only brings dissatisfaction to the mind, but when played out on the macro level, it poisons and destroys the Earth we walk on, and the feet that walk it.

In another study, this one done in 1992 by the neuroscientist, Richard Davidson, experiments were run on Buddhist monks, each having practiced mental training for at least 34,000 hours. The monks were told to either meditate or remain neutral while they ran a series of MRI scans and brain tests. When they had completed them, the results showed that while in meditation, their brains oscillated in a way indicative of flexibility and resilience. In interviews, these monks spoke about experiencing intense gratitude and compassion as they meditated, the scans showed that their immune system and health center were activated through these emotions. This information falls under the Third Noble Truth: There is a cessation of suffering and the cure is enlightenment. On the journey to lasting fulfillment, this is the point to take a step back, observe, and questions about what it means to be enlightened and how can we learn from those who have achieved it. The third noble truth is to take the mandala within. These techniques and philosophies are becoming popular ideas in non-buddhist culture, through the title of mindfulness. The “Mindfulness Revolution” started gaining traction in around 2014, when organizations and workplaces started practicing meditation and talking about why living in the present moment is beneficial in so many ways. These of course are very old ideas, dating back long before the common era, but are evermore relevant as the issues of suffering grow past the individual, and into the very basis of global society. In Japan, a country often praised in Western nations for its “advancements”, a way that modern Capitalism has caused *dukkha* is known as *Karoshi*. *Karoshi* refers to death from being overworked, and in 2015, roughly 2,300 people had it on their death certificate as either a heart illness, brain illness, or suicide. On the other hand, in Bhutan since 1971, the government measure’s the country’s prosperity not on GDP or Gross

Domestic Product, but on GNH, Gross National Happiness. The world is on different levels when it comes to the cessation of suffering, but it is becoming more and more common to see true progress.

“For the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world.” The Fourth and final Noble Truth is also known as, “The Noble Eightfold Path”. This path includes factors of wisdom, ethical conduct, and concentration. In short, Buddha believed in two major traits as being of the most importance: Wisdom and compassion. Buddha was altruistic and did not believe in war, oppression, or segregation. Compassion in his case meant living a life of giving to others, spreading love and gratitude. He also valued pairing this with intellect and curiosity. It is the balance of these two that takes the philosophies of Buddhism from within, and turns them into meaningful action in the human race. After realizing the truths of *dukkha* in the world, many find that the best way to feel truly fulfilled is to help others who are affected so much by the systematic suffering ingrained in our society. With the ever growing age of connection through modern technology, transportation, and information, activism and humanitarianism are becoming more and more prominent and making change in the lives of those same people. According to national data taken in 2012, non-profit organizations account for 11.4 million jobs in the United States alone. In addition, 44,000 people work for the United Nations, more than 250,000 people have served in the Peace Corps, and non-profit workers make up 7.4% of the world’s collective workforce. This is the sand being spread into the river, each grain is a person spreading compassion and wisdom around the planet.

This paper ends where it began, with the enlightened. The journey from suffering to peace and prosperity is messy and elaborate, with nested and interwoven issues. This complex mandala represents the universe and all that is within it, but it is the hard work and patience that goes into understanding it that transmits the positive energy that heals our world. Although the

intricacies of Buddhism are infinite, the most important thing to keep in mind was something spoken by the Buddha himself, “Radiate boundless love towards the entire world — above, below, and across — unhindered, without ill will, without enmity.” Because in the end, all of our work must be swept up and released into the flowing river called Earth.

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