

**ART OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT
REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS
MONTH 8: Buddhism and the Nature of Suffering**



A. SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE “Buddhism & the Nature of Suffering” CD, Michael Stevens

1. The word “Buddha” means “awake”, and it is said that the Buddha “awakened” by discovering “the middle way” of freedom from extremes.

Sacred Questions: *In what ways have you found “a middle way” in your life? -In what areas of your life might you still experience ‘extremes’... especially in your spiritual life?*

2. Buddhist teaching is based on the “Four Noble Truths”:
- a. The fact of suffering [you cannot escape it]
Suffering arises from: [1] Ignorance [misperception – misunderstanding];
[2] Attachment [desire – grasping] and [3] Aversion [anger – hatred]
 - b. The cessation of suffering
 - c. The path to the cessation of suffering

Sacred Questions:

-How have you experienced these same “Noble Truths” in your life?

-Which of the causes of suffering do you most experience in modern culture, in your life?

3. The “Eight-fold Path” begins with the teaching on Wisdom as expressed in three ways:
- a. Right (Appropriate) View – understand the innate wisdom/compassion of the self
 - b. Right Intention – to be in alignment with true and compassionate viewpoint
 - c. Right Speech (expressed with the teaching: “Mouth open – already a mistake”)

Sacred Questions:

-Do you see any parallels between Wisdom as defined by the Buddha and Wisdom in your own or other faith traditions?

-How do the teachings on Right Intention and Right Speech challenge you?

4. Buddhism sees a connection between the outer/inner meaning to everything. The following ‘trinity’ of Buddhist practices has parallels in all spiritual traditions: *May I take refuge in the...*
- Buddha – there is a manifestation of Great Teaching through a Great Teacher
 - Dharma – the teachings of the Great Teacher remind us of what we already know (that which is inscribed in our hearts)
 - Sangha – the community of practitioners provides support and inspiration

Sacred Questions:

-What is an example of a truth that you have experienced in both an outer and inner way?

-When have you had the experience of hearing or reading something new and knowing that you already knew that truth at a deeper level?

-Where do you ‘take refuge’ spiritually at this point in your life?

5. “When the student is ready for the question, the teacher will appear.” The Buddha

Sacred Questions:

-There is a parallel to this quote in the Anamcara tradition, ‘The teacher knows you are ready by the questions you no longer avoid.’ Describe a time when you experienced the truth of this teaching in your own life.

B. FOUNDATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION Care of Mind..., May, c. 8, 'Collegueship'

1. "Sometimes people will come for spiritual direction when what they really need is therapy. It should become obvious within the first few sessions whether a person is primarily interested in deepening realization or in solving psychological problems... when therapy is needed, [the director] should make a referral but it should also be discerned whether therapy and direction should happen concurrently." p. 183
 - *How would you recognize the need for therapy in a spiritual direction relationship? Imagine how you might suggest a referral?*
 - *How do you find a balance between the spiritual and psychological dimensions of discernment in your own life?*
2. "In actuality, [psychological] referrals are quite few. They involve situations of imminent danger to life, limb or property. Most obviously one thinks of homicide or suicide... While extremely rare, this could occur... It is a well established fact that the best way to find out whether a person is contemplating such an act is to ask." p. 184
 - *How would you imagine broaching this subject with a spiritual directee? What kinds of resources you would turn to? Where would you get the support needed at such a time?*
 - *Carefully re-read pages 184-87 in May's book regarding these issues. What kinds of questions do these reflections raise in you?*
3. "Spiritual Directors would do well to have established some resource connections within the behavioral science community..." Psychiatrists are in heart-deep, if not always heart-felt need of their own spiritual help. Those who attempt to walk both paths need all the help we can get. p. 193/198
 - *Regardless of whether you will engage in formal spiritual direction, some of May's reflection on collegueship between the sciences could be useful for every human being. What insights into these issues have you gained since beginning this course on Spiritual Direction?*
 - *Ponder how the psychological and spiritual sciences complement and/or are at odds with each other from your perspective and experience. Allow yourself some time to journal your own feelings regarding the sacred dimensions of healing body, mind and spirit.*

C. DISCERNMENT-IN-PRACTICE "Reflections of a non-Buddhist on Buddhism" CD, Jack Kennedy. Following are the highlights from the 'handout page' that Jack refers to in his CD. Jack offers his responses to these teachings from his own experience and tradition. Take some time to note in your reflection journal how/where these teachings impact or resonate with you, challenge you or open up further questions... Consider creating a meditation experience on one of these teachings...

1. Learn teachings that move us out of self absorption and lead us to kindness and compassion
2. There are three invitations: Wake up, Wake up for everybody, Wake up for everybody quickly

3. Compassion is always seeking to make itself known in the Universe
4. Be willing to look into the eyes of someone I hate...
5. I awake to the inner connection to my own kindness and compassion seeking to be manifest in the Universe
6. I reclaim my innate awakensness
7. Teachings are already innate in our hearts from the beginning... the teaching is there to remind me when I forget
8. The teaching gives me tools that remove everything that is in the way of love... [translation: keeps you from who you truly are].
9. The question [motivation] of the student guides the process of that the teacher teaches
10. The teacher needs a teacher

