

Siddhartha's Existential Crisis/ Buddha's Resolution

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"In the past, monks, and also now, I teach Dukkha and the cessation of Dukkha." Buddha

Dukkha is the focus of all Buddhist doctrine – The Four Noble Truths- because Gautama Siddhartha's original crisis, told in the story of the Four Sights, strongly brought Dukkha to the forefront of his awareness. This is how the legend of the Four Sights is significant. The lesson of them is that besides ordinary pain, as when people are in physical pain and emotional pain, there is an existential sorrow- the grief, alienation and despair resulting from one's awareness of life's inherent groundlessness.

This paper will provide a brief definition of Dukkha and its variations to explore Siddhartha's psychological and emotional response to the legendary Four Sights. The experience of the Four sights, which became the impetus for his seeking a life of renunciation to answer his question about Dukkha and its cessation, will also be described in this paper. Siddhartha's Awakening became the basis of his resolution of that question prompting the Four Noble Truths. In this paper, the primary focus is to advocate that Siddhartha's response to the Four Sights is best understood what modern psychology calls an existential crisis or crisis in understanding life.

In order to understand Buddhist doctrine, it is critical to understand the Dukkha principle, which is based on the fact of suffering; its reality, cause, and means of cessation. While the principle of Dukkha is one of the most important concepts in the Buddhist tradition, its meaning is complex and easily misconstrued.

What is the Meaning of Dukkha?

Dukkha, expresses one of the most important concepts in the Buddhist tradition. Although Dukkha, Pāli; (Sanskrit: *duhkha*) is most often translated as suffering, its philosophical meaning is more complex and is also commonly translated as anxiety, stress, or unsatisfactoriness. In fact, this concept contains a cluster of interrelated connotations including sorrow, imperfection, unease, anguish and alienation. In Sanskrit, this term is formed from the prefix 'd', which is related to the English 'dis', plus the noun 'kha', which means happiness or ease. With 'ease' meaning freedom from concern, anxiety; a quiet state of mind and the prefix 'dis' gives a word the opposite meaning: perhaps dis-ease, could be a better translation of the Sanskrit term, *duhkha*, than suffering.

Types of Dukkha

The question which determined Siddhartha's quest was "What is the cause and cessation of Dukkha?" In analysing the nature of suffering upon his Awakening, the Buddha explained three basic kinds of Dukkha:

1. *The pain of physical and mental pain:* We are all familiar with these.

- *Pain
- *Illness
- *Old age
- *Sorrow
- *Lamentation
- *Distress
- *Despair

2. *Pain of change*: The Dukkha caused by change:

*We desire to have what we want to remain, but it doesn't, we can't hold onto it.

3. *All pervasive pain*: is a subtle form of Dukkha inherent in all conditioned things and is the most difficult to recognize.

*Deep down, we feel that life is not on 'solid ground' and that our very existence is insecure, constantly transforming and unsubstantial or *Anicca*. Even our thoughts and mental images as well as our emotions are impermanent. All the mind's constructions, objects or forms are fluctuating and transforming entities. There is also no permanent or substantial self to be found or *Anatta* - no-self. All identifications, cognitive constructions and overlays are dynamic, ever-changing, complementarity and ultimately unsubstantial; grasping, 'having' and attaching to a self or experience is inherently unsustainable and ultimately creates dis-ease, grief and sorrow. Like the familiar idea expresses: If we try to grasp our life experiences like water in our hand, the minute we close our hand and cling tightly to hold on, and keep it, the water seeps through our fingers.

While it might be a crude survival mechanism, this illusion or even delusion highlights that ignorant unenlightened human aspiration is driven to find inherent and lasting happiness and a self. Therefore, we think that we will be satisfied and happy when our cravings and our most valued aspirations and objects are obtained and held on to – in essence 'frozen'. The latter includes good health, material prosperity, meaning, personal value and purpose; therefore, unenlightened human nature tends to try to maintain and protect all one's desired possessions including a self. However, when conditions in people's lives inevitably become precarious, uncertain, unreliable and even catastrophic, they are generally forced to acknowledge existential insecurities. Then, like Siddhartha with the first three sights, they are struck with the fact that life is capricious, groundless and even catastrophic. Normally, these existential insecurities that life is volatile and ultimately insubstantial are ignored or denied and people live on rationalizations that life is stable, predictable and death is still a lifetime-away or even never occurs because of an eternal life of a soul. It is when we realize that these assumptions are false that an existential crisis with Dis-ease or agitated mind and emotions arises.

In fact, in his teachings, the Buddha often reminded people that our physical life is finite and uncertain; we can die at any moment, and we shouldn't put off our training for Awakening. There are numerous sections of the suttas emphasizing this point of physical transience and impermanence. For example, in the *Sīha Sutta* (Discourse on the Lion),

‘Now, there are gods who are long-lived, beautiful, and very happy, lasting long in their divine palaces. When they hear this teaching by the Realized One (anicca), they’re typically filled with fear, awe, and terror. ‘Oh no! It turns out we’re impermanent, though we thought we were permanent! It turns out we don’t last, though we thought we were everlasting! It turns out we’re transient, though we thought we were eternal! It turns out that we’re impermanent, not lasting, transient, and included within identity.’ And in Sutta Nipata, the Buddha said, *“The world is afflicted by death and decay. But the wise do not grieve, having realized the nature of the world.”* Life is impermanent, uncertain and does not persist.

Buddha’s life as a Spiritual Allegory

While there is little dispute that there was a historical man who became The Buddha and taught the Noble Eightfold Path, what is known about the life of the historical Buddha can only be sketched from legends. Also, the many of the traditional stories of Siddhartha seem best understood as allegorical. Scholars tend to agree that the editors of the final versions of the many biographies of the Buddha made their own additions and shaped the contents of the texts according to their own interests, to support their own philosophical and religious ideas. However, after thousands of years of the continued use, with spiritual success, of the Eightfold Path, this validates the original experience of Awakening by the Buddha from which he developed the program based on his insights.

The most important theme in the story of Siddhartha is about how he was brought up with every material luxury yet came to realize that lasting happiness and contentment are not created through material comforts, and he had a psychological crisis. With the Three Sights in the village, he struggled with the issues of illness, death as well as helplessness and debilitation associated with old age. So, the point of the stories is about the large impact that these three fundamental facts, common to all living beings, had on the intelligent and sensitive Siddhartha. The Four Sights stories are an effective way of conveying the importance of these existential issues.

The Four Sights

There are different versions of the story, but all of them share the basic theme. The Four Sights themes are: aging, disease, death, and hope.

When Siddhartha was a young man, his father, the King, had created a life of opulence and ease for him in the family palace because he did not want Siddhartha to be unhappy and leave, as, at his birth, had been foretold could happen. The stories go that despite his father’s determination to ensure that Siddhartha did not encounter any examples of suffering, however, when he was 29 years old, he asked his attendant to take him around the village just outside the palace walls. Prince Siddhartha, an intelligent man and curious about the life outside of the palace, ventured out of the palace to the village in a chariot, accompanied by his charioteer Channa.

The story goes that Siddhartha first saw a decrepit old man, revealing to him the

consequences of aging. When the Prince asked about this person, Channa replied that aging was something that happened to all beings.

The second sight was of a person suffering from a debilitating disease. Once again, Siddhartha was shocked at the sight, and Channa explained that all beings are subject to illness and pain. The fact that no one can remain always well and live a pain-free life further troubled the mind of the Prince.

The third sight was a rotting corpse of a person who had recently died. As before, Channa explained to the Prince that death is an inevitable fate that happens to everyone.

After seeing these three sights, Siddhartha was troubled in his mind and sorrowful about the sufferings that he had seen and that all must endure them in life. Then, Siddhartha came upon the fourth sight; a wandering ascetic who appeared calm and contented. This sight gave the Prince hope that he too might be released from suffering.

The more Siddhartha dwelled upon the Three Sights, the more despair and sorrow he felt about the futility of life. Siddhartha thought: *‘What use is my youth and riches and learning, if death will claim it all in the end? Even kings grow old and diseased. Even they surrender to death.’* Here, Siddhartha experienced Samvega. That is a Buddhist term which Bhikkhu Thanissaro defines as: *‘The oppressive sense of shock, dismay, and alienation that comes with realizing the futility and meaninglessness of life as it’s normally lived; a chastening sense of our own complacency and foolishness in having let ourselves live so blindly; and an anxious sense of urgency in trying to find a way out of the meaningless cycle.’*

Aftermath

The story continues that these revelations —old age, disease and death— shocked and troubled Prince Siddhartha deeply. Upon returning to the Palace could not stop thinking about the Sights even though several enjoyable events have been arranged for him. He desperately wanted to know if there was a possible way to not suffer these inherent dreadful things. As a result of Siddhartha’s continuous thinking of the first three sights, he decided to leave the palace in search of an escape to the suffering of all sentient beings.

Having been inspired by the ascetic, *‘Like that monk, I must give up trappings that bind me to things that hold no meaning and lead a simple life. Only then can I bring peace to men.’* Siddhartha decided to give up everything and search for the answer to the question, “Why do people suffer and how can it be prevented?” At the age of 29, he left the palace, accompanied only by Channa. After a short distance, he sent Channa back with his possessions and continued on, began an ascetic life, and, at the end of over six years, he attained Awakening as Gautama Buddha.

While often in the traditional story, Siddhartha developed the profound insights of impermanence and the ultimate dissatisfaction of conditioned existence immediately after the Four Sights, in fact, they were insights the Buddha gained through Awakening.

Also, in other early Pali suttas, while the general themes are the same, Siddhartha Gautama's actual going out of the palace and having the physical encounters with the Sights, were not mentioned. Rather, Siddhartha's Sights into old age, sickness and death were abstract considerations or psychological insights. *'Even though I was endowed with such fortune, such total refinement, the thought occurred to me: 'When an untaught, run-of-the-mill person, himself subject to aging, not beyond aging, sees another who is aged, he is horrified, humiliated, & disgusted, oblivious to himself that he too is subject to aging, not beyond aging. If I — who am subject to aging, not beyond aging — were to be horrified, humiliated, & disgusted on seeing another person who is aged, that would not be fitting for me.'* As I noticed this, the normal young person's intoxication with my youth entirely dropped away. ' In any case, the reported psychological and emotional crisis of Siddhartha remains the same whether the story is about his visiting the village or pondering such themes.

Life Encounters of Siddhartha as a Child

As we see, the theme of all of Four Sights stories is that Siddhartha, at age 29, was horrified by Old Age, Illness and Death for the first time. These sights shocked him greatly, finally causing him to seek an ascetic life. However, interestingly showing young Siddhartha's sensitivity and giftedness, there are other stories describing when he was a child, he experienced similar incidents, within different contexts, regarding suffering and impermanence in life.

The stories explain that despite his father's determination to ensure that he didn't encounter any incidents that would upset him, on several occasions the young Siddhartha was confronted by the fact that the Three Sights are an inescapable part of the life condition.

The swan

A Sutta story tells how one day Siddhartha was walking in the woods with his cousin Devadatta, who had brought his bow and arrows with him. Suddenly, Devadatta saw a swan flying and shot at it. His arrow brought the swan down. Both the boys ran to get the bird. As Siddhartha could run faster than Devadatta, he reached the swan's injured body first and found, to his surprise, that it was still alive. He gently pulled out the arrow from the wing. He then got a little juice from medicinal leaves, put it on the wound to stop the bleeding and with his hand gently stroked the swan, which was very frightened.

When Devadatta came to claim the swan, Prince Siddhartha refused to give it to him. Devadatta was very angry to see his cousin keeping the swan away from him. *"Give me my bird! I shot it down,"* said Devadatta. *"No, I am not going to give it to you,"* said the

Prince. *"If you had killed it, it would have been yours. But now, since it is only wounded but still alive, it belongs to me."*

Devadatta still did not agree. Then Siddhartha suggested, *"Let us go to the court of the Sage and ask him who really owns the swan."* Devadatta agreed, so they went to the court of the Sage to tell him about their quarrel. The Sage, hearing both boys' version of the story, said, *"A life certainly must belong to he who tries to save it, a life cannot belong to one who is only trying to destroy it. The wounded swan by right belongs to Siddhartha."*, who compassionately and wisely nursed it back to full health and then released it back into nature.

The snake

Another story in the suttas is that one day the Prince saw one of the town boys beating a snake with a stick. He immediately stopped the boy and told him not to hurt the snake. The prince was kind to everyone. He knew that people, animals and all other living beings, like to be happy and don't like suffering and pain. Siddhartha always took care to be kind and caring to any creature and was gentle with his horse and other animals. Because he was a prince his life was very easy, and Siddhartha could have chosen to ignore the problems of others, instead, he felt empathy for others, and he liked to help them.

The Ploughing Festival

The suttas also tell the important story that one afternoon Siddhartha's father took him, when he was a child, to the annual Ploughing Festival. It was a merry event for all, as the both nobles and average citizens partook in the function. The king started the ceremony by driving the first pair of plows of gold and silver with beautifully decorated bullocks to level the land and make it ready for the new seeds that year. Young Siddhartha left the celebration and sat down nearby in the shade under a rose-apple tree and watched everyone. He noticed that while people were happily enjoying themselves, the bullocks worked terribly hard to plough the field. They did not look happy at all.

Then young Siddhartha noticed various other creatures around him. He saw a lizard eating ants. But soon a snake came, caught the lizard, and ate it. Then, suddenly a bird came down from the sky, picked up the snake and so it was eaten also. Siddhartha realised that all these creatures might have thought that they were happy and secure for a while, but they ended up suffering and dying. Even as a child, Siddhartha thought deeply about what he saw around him. He learned that although he was happy, there was a lot of suffering in life. He felt deep sympathy for all creatures.

When the king and the maids noticed that the prince was not among the crowd, Siddhartha's attendants hurried to find the child and were surprised to see him sitting in deep meditation. The King, hearing about it, rushed to the spot and saw the boy and saluted him, saying - *'This child is my second homage'*. This deep meditation was a very significant event for the young Siddhartha. It was quiet and peaceful under the rose-apple tree, contrasting the noisiness of the celebration. The conditions were right

for meditation, and the Prince, sat relaxed with folded legs and naturally began a focused awareness on exhalations and inward breaths which easily created for him that one focus of mind known as Samādhi. He, in this way, entered the First Jhāna (serenity and joy) or a meditative state of deep stillness and concentration.

The significance of this meditation became apparent later in Siddhartha's life. After leaving the palace and for over six years following an ascetic life searching for his answer about Dukkha, Siddhartha gave up the traditional path of yogic austerities and kept meditating beneath the Bodhi Tree. There he remembered, in his childhood, attaining the calm and serenity with happiness of the first Jhana at the ploughing festival and upon further reflection, he concluded, *'That is indeed the path to awakening.'* Which upon he continued to deepen his meditation until he achieved Awakening and became The Buddha or Awakened One. With his Awakening, Siddhartha choose not to ignore the Dukkha of others. Instead, he felt empathy and compassion for others, and he was moved to help them. Soon after he began to teach the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path.

Buddha's Existential Crisis

The stories of Siddhartha show that he had empathetic and existential concerns about sentient beings existence and experience throughout his life, and at a certain phase of life, these concerns became very personal for him. With the existential realization that he and all the people that he loved as well as all other sentient beings will experience old age, illness and finally death, Siddhartha experienced a crisis, and felt Samvega, the sense of shock, anxiety and spiritual urgency to reach liberation and find escape and cessation of the suffering in this world. This experience is very similar to what psychology now calls an Existential Crisis.

A Psychological Explanation of Existential Crisis/Depression

This section will briefly discuss the definition of existential crisis and comparison to the descriptions of Siddhartha's psychological and emotional response to his crisis of clearly, deeply and personally comprehending the consequences of the three sights. An existential crisis is when a person questions if their life has meaning, purpose, or value or *'What is life all about?'* Existential depression may occur when a person comes face to face with issues of life, death, freedom and the meaning of life. For instance, several existential questions could be asked by a person, such as *'What is the meaning of life? Is it only to work, have a family, and then die?'* *'Is there a god that cares about us? If so, why do innocent and good people die early and without meaning?'* Existential depression may be characterized by a unique sense of hopelessness that our lives may be meaningless. There is also a premise that existential depression is a form of a spiritual crisis when someone questions and intensely examines their overall belief system, or what existence in life is for. In summary, they may question if life makes any sense at all.

Existential depression can also be found when people have periods of deep reflection about the meaning of their life and the very purpose and meaning of existence. Existential psychiatrist Irvin Yalom believes this existential crisis can center on a

person's concern and attempts to make sense of four main topics: death, isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness. It can be experienced at different life stages.

A theory developed by psychologist and psychiatrist Kazimierz Dabrowski states that existential depression can be a positive catalyst for change and growth. That it forms part of the process of 'positive disintegration'. His idea is that people, especially gifted and creative people, learn and grow in a positive way from their traumatic experiences and life crises.

There is also existential anxiety that includes feelings of panic, agitation, or dread about the nature of an individual's or human existence. Any related thoughts such as 'What am I doing with my life?', may result in a panic attack or other symptoms of anxiety. Someone in existential crisis may experience existential aloneness; the feeling that there is no one else who can relate to how they feel in their lives.

It is easily seen that the descriptions of the thoughts and behaviours of Siddhartha in the Aftermath, his Samvega, are more cogent to the descriptions of Existential depression and anxiety than the traditional story of his feeling angry and betrayed by the King, his father, for hiding these sights from him as he grew up.

The Responses of Siddhartha's Crisis showing Anxiety and Depression:

- Ruminantion: After observing the Sights the prince was very upset and he kept on dwelling unhappily about the sights for a long time.
- Symptoms of depression: After seeing the three sights, Siddhartha was troubled in his mind and sorrowful about the sufferings that he and others must endure in life. For example, he lost interest in previous pleasurable social activities and he felt agitated and restless.
- Re-evaluation of life values and goals caused by depressive reaction: Siddhartha thought: *'Even though I was endowed with such fortune, such total refinement, the thought occurred to me: 'When an untaught, run-of-the-mill person, himself subject to aging, not beyond aging, sees another who is aged, he is horrified, humiliated, and disgusted, oblivious to himself that he too is subject to aging, not beyond aging. If I — who am subject to aging, not beyond aging — were to be horrified, humiliated, and disgusted on seeing another person who is aged, that would not be fitting for me.'* As I noticed this, the typical young person's intoxication with youth entirely dropped away.'
- Re-evaluation: Siddhartha thought: *'And what is ignoble search? There is the case where a person, being subject himself to birth, seeks happiness in what is likewise subject to birth. Being subject himself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, he seeks happiness in what is likewise subject to illness... death... sorrow... defilement.'*

- Reaction to situation with Depression: He could not accept the fact that humans become old, ill by disease related to old age, leading to a lot of suffering and then death, as he witnessed the old man being in pain. He felt helplessness and hopelessness. He developed a bleak outlook— that nothing will ever get better and there's nothing he could do to escape the situation of the inevitability of the Dukkha of life.
- Questioning of previous Faith, Beliefs and Revaluation: in fact, these incidents made him reflect on life deeply and he did not accept the fact that people are born to suffer in life like in a tragedy. A life destined to aging, illness and eventual death- what is the sense! He returned to the palace troubled and obsessed with this existential dilemma. The fact that the man who had died had become old, weak with disease and later died in a sorrowful way, left a great impact in Siddhartha's heart. Perhaps there is a way out of the suffering provided by God and the holy life would show him. He became aroused to the idea that the futility in living a life of material happiness is best given up in favor of the religious life of finding the answer to this horrible inheritance of all living creatures, and so he wanted desperately to begin a religious life as he saw in the wandering ascetic.
- Radical life change motivation: this became his motivation to leave the palace, his family and the responsibilities of being a prince because he sought a creative solution for the higher dilemma which had to do with the meaningfulness of life. After over six years of investigating and following the religious life with important gurus of his time, it was through his genius and innovation that he creatively discovered the radical solution to the dilemma and the cessation of suffering- his Awakening.

The Ending of the Crisis through Awakening

So, it was only upon Awakening that the Buddha formulated the three universal characteristics of life: Impermanence, No Self and Interconnectedness of all life, or Dependent Origination. Out of compassion for all sentient beings, Buddha formulated the teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path in a way that other people could understand his insights into the cessation of suffering, which were created from his Bhavana search of over six years.

In fact, the Buddha never claimed any divinity, he identified himself as an Awakened human being. He began his spiritual search created by his existential crisis of the inherent perplexity and sorrow in life. Of all the creatures that exist on this earth, only a human can ask these questions. The nature of Siddhartha's questions, emotions, search and dilemma have been and are still shared by other sensitive, intelligent and questioning humans. Therefore, understanding Siddhartha's legendary life reactions, pain and aspirations is important because it reflects a universal question -What is the nature and meaning of life? - that has been asked throughout history by many thoughtful, perplexed and sorrowful people.

This questioning of the existential meaning of our existence is given an answer by the Buddha that is unique and does not fly into the suppositions of supernaturalism and divine forces that, in fact, the Buddha did not believe are involved directly in the existence of creatures on this earth. The Buddha was by most accounts agnostic and saw the continual metaphysical and philosophical debates about unanswerable questions as not only unfruitful in solving the issue of meaningfulness in life but as a distraction to a solution of that issue. Therefore, he did not participate in those discussions that were and still are so common for the human mind to enjoy the speculation and identification of different possible scenarios regarding these issues.

The Buddha put suffering as the focus of his inquiry. The Four Noble Truths are; the truth of suffering (Dukkha), the truth of the origin of suffering (Samudāya), the truth of the cessation of suffering (Nirodha), and the truth of the Path to the cessation of suffering (Magga). However, in the discussion of the central point of Dukkha in the Buddha's teachings there is wide disagreement about the meaning or the origination of suffering. Since most people try to understand the Buddha's teachings from the common perspective based on duality, substantialism and egotism, suffering is only physical pain or the pain of not getting or keeping what you want or have -unhappiness in the secular, material sense of disappointments in life. In the past, using this perspective, the Buddha's teachings had been interpreted as a pessimistic theory because there is no possibility that one can always have or keep what he/she wants; therefore, suffering is inevitable. In other words, suffering is life. Nonetheless, this is not the focus of the Buddha. The focus of the Buddha was the existential sorrow and the alienation of not understanding the nature of life, and therefore, of being overwhelmed by the sorrows of existence from birth until death.

This existential meaninglessness creates Samvega; anxiety, agitation, a malaise, unhappiness, disillusionment and alienation, or Dukkha. In believing that life has no certainty, no meaning, there arises a futility and meaninglessness of life that asks why are we on this planet and why is life sometimes so arbitrary and heartless - as in the old question; 'Why do the Best People Die Young'. There are wars, famine, accidents causing debilitating injury and death, personal abuse, as well as illness and many maladies that are always present in life.

People are surrounded by these as well as ignorance and senseless aggression, anger and hostility. In all these things there is nothing one can apparently change to remain secure, and, therefore, life is not only perplexing but existentially baffling and troubling. Siddhartha was overwhelmed by the Dukkha of the universality of old age and death and illness, consequently, he had an existential crisis.

As we saw the Four Sights and Aftermath, what bothered Siddhartha is the unknown reason behind the suffering of all sentient beings. Not only human beings but all sentient beings live short lives and often have many senseless difficulties and sorrows in life. This troubled Siddhartha greatly and being a young, healthy, vibrant and sensitive person, this existential condition of life became an obsession. He became depressed, his vibrancy became low as Siddhartha thought that his life, as well as the life of his family, other humans and all the animals who wanted to live happily, were

going to be filled with misery and there was nothing he could do to prevent it.

This was the existential crisis that he faced after going out and seeing the Four Sights. Therefore, when his son was born, he hoped to find the answer to prevent this crisis from happening to his family- to everyone. The anxious sense of urgency for him was to leave the palace in order to try to find a way out of the sorrow and meaningless and to answer this existential dilemma as apparently the wandering ascetic had.

Scholars assert that throughout history the existential dilemma of death has not only been the preoccupation of Siddhartha, but religions have been founded on finding a solution for the desired continuation of the self with a belief in the soul and God and eternal life. Also, to avoid the precariousness of life problems magical methods have been invented to forgo these fears. Philosophers have also questioned the problems endlessly. Scientists have also written extensively on the question of 'What is life?' in trying to find a scientific perspective of understanding the reason of our existence, on this planet, within this immense and timeless universe. Yet, Siddhartha's quest and Awakening has been, for over 2500 years, the foundation, the Path and deliverance for millions of people because it cogently answers this existential dilemma.

Conclusions

Siddhartha's quest, resulting in his Awakening, has been one that humanity has shared for eons: the malaise of agonizing over what is the meaning and purpose of life? Most people try different remedies to this crisis:

- Making drastic changes with hedonistic acting out and deadening one's ability to feel and think. To bring more distractions with sensual intensity into one's life, like bringing back the excitement of youth, buying fancy cars, getting an 'exciting' new job.
- Continuing to suffer but accepting the meaninglessness of life and living with that acceptance of muddling through a baffling and distressing life.
- Taking up a faith-based religion which promises a heavenly existence and union with the divine upon death. Rejecting rationality and giving blind faith to a certain set of beliefs, which gives one denial and hope while covering up the despair, the fear, the sorrow.
- Finding the answers that the Buddha discovered; the key to unlocking the answer to an existentially meaningful and content life. However, as the Buddha realized after his Awakening; *'This truth which I have realized is profound, difficult to see, abstruse, calming, subtle, and not attainable through mere sophisticated logic. But beings revel in attachment, take pleasure in attachment and delight in attachment. For beings who thus revel, take pleasure and delight in attachment, this is an extremely difficult thing to see: that is, the law of conditionality, the principle of Dependent Origination. Moreover, this also is an extremely difficult thing to see: the calming of all conditioning, the casting off of all clinging ... cessation, Nibbāna.'* It is an insightful truth that

takes time and effort to ripen to fruition.

Buddha discovered the answer, not in the common dualistic framework, but in the non-dualistic, transcendent Awakening, where separation and alienation are no longer possible. In other words, he became aware that the normal structuring of our world is dependent on our cognitive processes and abstract categories of sensation are constructed by the way we perceive, name, categorize, and differentiate them. Our 'world', as well as our 'I', is subjectively constructed.

In addition, the Buddha's Enlightenment was a life-altering experience which gave him a radically new perspective. Awakening, or pure experience, unveiled for the Buddha the cognitively-based, dependent, complementary relationship of the subject-object world. In other words, his enlightened mind became liberated of the dichotomy of subject and object. This was a crucial distinction between mind and mind events. Dukkha, as existential malaise, was no longer possible because he understood it is a manifestation of ignorance created through the dualism of subject/object, identification and separation. With Awakening; alienation, disillusionment, the anxiety about death and the perplexity of the purpose and the meaning of life ends.

As D. Kalupahana explained, *"This state (state of Enlightenment) is said to be without thought, not because all consciousness is gone, but because there is no thinking in terms of substantial entities. Hence there is nothing to grasp on to as a real object. It is supramundane knowledge, not because it constitutes a transcendent intuition, but because the dispositional tendencies, the character of the fundamental consciousness is transformed. Instead of consciousness looking for an ultimate real subject or an absolutely real object, a person deals with the world of experience as it has come to be. Such knowledge reveals things as they have come to be. Unperturbed by any mystery, not looking for the hidden something, a sage leads a life free from influxes. [...] It is a state of happiness not punctuated by suffering. It is the highest state of release enjoyed by the enlightened ones. The doctrine of the Great Sage pertains to this state of freedom and happiness.*

Once the perspective of non-dualism or emptiness was achieved, this was the end of Siddhartha's search to answer the dilemma of existential insecurity and sorrow. With Awakening, one experiences the Bliss of the Buddha and lives life with wellbeing, compassion and wisdom while still appreciating the mysterious nature of existence.

The Buddha's Awakening was achieved through Bhavana or meditation, through the gradual development and cultivation of his mind, of letting go of the layered cognitive constructions until finally he broke through to the point of seeing without the illusion created by the cognition veil. The question of existential angst was answered in the sense that it doesn't exist except in the realm of our cognition or ignorance. This was his liberation, and this is what he taught.

So, Siddhartha, earnestly struggled to resolve some basic existential questions about

life and all sentient beings existence on this planet and the conditions that create the special human suffering. This earnest young man, through his unique intellectual abilities together with a sensitivity, kindness and compassion for all sentient beings on this living Earth, was able to finally elucidate cogent, powerful and significant doctrines about understanding our experience of living. It is through the Right understanding of his doctrines that people are set free from the world of Dukkha.

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