

## Emotional independence<sup>1</sup>

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Two very powerful forces often work on us in religion: past conditioning and present denial.

**Past conditioning** refers to 2 more forces at work:

- (1) nurture: childhood and schooling;
- (2) nature: our past lives.

When we had “good” parents or those who exert a strong influence over us, or “bad” parents or those who abused us in various ways. When we notice these similar “good” qualities in a religious figure (usually a monk, nun or lay teacher), we are likely to be drawn to them, no matter what they teach.

### Past conditionings

When we notice similar past “bad” impressions in a present teacher, we are likely to fear or even hate that teacher. Since these are strong past conditionings, we don’t really have control over them. It is as if we are caught up in the loop replaying an old familiar event.

It may be a deep feeling of respect or gratitude for our past parent, transferred onto the teacher we currently admire. Conversely, we may transfer negative emotions connected with such past bad experiences onto a present teacher whom we now fear or hate. Hence, such conditioned reactions are called **transference**.

### Present dangers

In the case of a “good” past parent-image being transferred to a present teacher, he may actually enjoy it and react in a similar expected way. This only reinforces the mutual attraction. Hence, this is called **counter-transference**.

This is very common in “uniformed” religions: where, for example, monks/nuns in robes are regarded with fear or awe, or “superior” simply by how they look. This may explain why some monastics today dress themselves to look good! (The original “robes” and their significance are sadly forgotten.)

The dangers of such an unhealthy emotional dependence is simply this: we become emotionally dependent on one another. We forget the teacher’s true role, the teacher forgets his, and we play the “parent-child” roles again. This is insidiously gratifying; it is delusional and will only harm both parties.

### Denial

Both parties do not see this mutually harmful dependent behavior because they are in **denial**. They are either unwilling or unable to see their current conduct as **dependence**, or

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<sup>1</sup> This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> reflection with this title. The 1<sup>st</sup> is “R180 110316”: <http://dharmafarer.org>

they feel so gratified with what they have always wanted that, like drug dependence, they are unwilling to see the dependence.

Human behavior is so sophisticated that such mutually dependent conduct seems to actually work fine. The teacher's reactivity is said to be "compassion," and the student's action is "faith." The foolish pious may even attribute "good karma" to them, when they are really sowing the toxic seeds of painful karma.

### **Subhuman states**

Such mutually dependent conduct may seem to benefit both parties (for the moment). The terrible reality is that their refuge is in one another, not in the 3 jewels: they are emotionally co-dependent. Hence, their minds are really in a subhuman state. It is an **asura** state when there is mutual exploitation; a **preta** state when there is strong dependence, attachment and jealousy; **animal** state when there is lust, sex and ignorance; **hell** state when there is anger and violence.

### **The 3 fetters**

The Buddha teaches that there are 10 fetters (samyojana) that prevent us from reaching the path of awakening and from progressing spiritually. Only when we break **the 1st 3 fetters**, will we be free from the world and take our first step on the path of awakening.

THE **3 fetters** we must break are traditionally said to be:

- (1) self-identity view;
- (2) doubt; and
- (3) attachment to rituals and vows.

In modern terms, we can call these as follows:

- (1) narcissism;
- (2) uncertainty;
- (3) superstition.

(1) A common and natural case of **narcissism** is that of an infant who cries out whenever he is hungry, fearful or soiled. The infant is helpless; hence, it needs to draw attention to itself for its own survival. However, such a behavior can be found in adults who feel they want personal attention despite their potential for self-care. Unconsciously, they feel helpless and so seek all the attention they can get to themselves. They are emotionally dependent on others.

(2) One reason for this is that they have deep-set self-doubt, **uncertainty**, about themselves. Basically, they are unable to love but crave for love. They do not understand that **love** is not something we ask for. Love is the unconditional and sustained kindness we show others. We only have love when we give it to others. It is what we **are** not what we **have**.

(3) When we are self-centred, we are likely to have powerful self-doubt (without even knowing this). Hence, we are likely to be **superstitious**: we believe and live in the notion that our happiness is in people and things outside of ourself. It is to **measure** people and things; so, we never **have** enough of them. Hence:

- we crave for attention but are not good listeners;
- we are supersweet but only for manipulating others;
- we measure people and things and react to them according to the “worth” we see in them;
- we pray for things we are unwilling or unable to work for.

Psychologically, superstition is the notion that happiness or security is found in what is outside, in others and in things.

### **Breaking the fetters**

To overcome narcissism, we need to learn, firstly, that measuring people and things is to limit ourself to numbers, and not seeing reality. The best things in life are **immeasurable**: kindness, love, goodness, happiness, joy. For this reason (amongst others), the Buddha teaches the meditation on lovingkindness as the cultivation of boundless and unconditional love, accepting others as we accept ourself in a wholesome way.

To overcome self-doubt, we need to be **wise**, that is, able to see ourself as we really are and the world as it really is. A good way to start is seeing ourself and the world as being **impermanent**. We are each still “work in progress,” we are (should be) growing in wisdom: everything is changing, altering, becoming other. We can only deal hands-on with **the present**, which then shapes our future; we keep doing this by watching and learning the present.

To overcome superstition starts with the understanding that things are **how we see them**. When our mind is positive or wholesome, then, we will see and seek what is helpful and good in life. Since our worries and problems start with how we **think**, it is something within us.

The solution starts with knowing how our mind works, directing our mind to working on the solution, and accepting ourself as we are. This is the best (and only) place to begin our journey to emotional independence and self-awakening.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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