

Personal Background

Hello Dear Friends,

In looking back, I have spent a lifetime searching for meaning. From Australia, the search led me overseas where I studied at a Christian liberal arts college both in England and the United States. For two decades I then worked for a religious organization in the United States.

Later, I had the opportunity to teach English in the Czech Republic (eight years), South Korea (four years), and for one year in Saudi Arabia.

Finally, in returning to Australia, I completed two Masters degrees with an emphasis in spirituality through two accredited institutions (Sydney College of Divinity and the University of Newcastle).

And so, as I look at the background that I have been privileged to experience, two themes clearly emerge. The first is *education* and teaching; the second is a life's pursuit of *spirituality*.

It was within my Christian heritage that I was first introduced to Buddhism through a respected and internationally-known Christian meditation teacher (with a Catholic background). There were times when he would quote from the *Dhammapada* in his meditation talks.

This source piqued my interest, and from that small, indirect beginning, my interest in Buddhism and Buddhist spirituality has grown over the past four years.

Some of the highlights of these four years in my Buddhist studies have been:

Discovering Buddhism Program – from the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). A fourteen module program.

The Foundation of Buddhist Thought Course – a two-year program in Buddhist studies created by Geshe Tashi Tsering of Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London (have completed two modules: "The Four Noble Truths" and "Relative Truth, Ultimate Truth").

Vipassana Fellowship – completed an established 12-week online course in mindfulness meditation as found in the serenity and insight traditions of early Buddhism. Presently I'm a member of *Parisa* which aims to support a dispersed community of meditators. It provides (1) continued support beyond the initial mindfulness meditation course and (2) material to support a deepening practice. *Parisa* also includes access to the current 12-week course when in session.

Having acquired many books on Buddhism, having participated in the above three online courses, and having taken Refuge, I felt ready to go further in my studies.

And so this is why I enrolled in the *Masters in Buddhist Studies* programme at the University of South Wales. My purpose was three-fold: (1) to gain a more comprehensive background of Buddhism, (2) to become a more informed Buddhist practitioner, as well as (3) to pursue the aspiration to write articles (and even basic books) relating to Buddhism.

I continue to be inspired in how Buddhism communicates its vision of existence through three great images:

Perfect Vision is a vision, first of all, of our actual present state of bondage to conditioned existence as represented by the Wheel of Life. It is also a vision of our potential future state of Enlightenment as represented by the Buddha, or the mandala of Buddhas, or a Pure Land. Finally it is a vision of the path or way leading from the one to the other – a vision, if you like, of the whole future course of evolution (Sangharakshita, *The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path*, revised edition, 2007).

In other words, a way to wisdom, compassion, and freedom from suffering has been made available for all to personally investigate. And this is what I would like to do more deeply in the *MA in Buddhist Studies*.

In closing, a few further personal details. As we presently see the streams of refugees coming into Western Europe, I am always reminded that I am the son of one of those refugees. My Ukrainian father was able to escape from a German prison camp in the Ukraine during World War II. By hiding during the daytime, and travelling on foot at night, he walked and made his way to Switzerland where he was granted refugee status. In 1950, my parents immigrated to Australia from Europe. My wife, Eva, and I live near the city of Brisbane, in the state of Queensland, where at present we are both freelance writers.

"Learning to meditate is the greatest gift you can give yourself in this life. For it is only through meditation that you can undertake the journey to discover your true nature, and so find the stability and confidence you will need to live, and die, well. Meditation is the road to enlightenment." (From Rinpoche, Sogyal, *Glimpse after Glimpse: Daily Reflections on Living and Dying*)

Alexander Peck