***[The Eighth Vow - Empathic Understanding - Divine Mind]***

***Oh, Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have the ability to understand the workings of other people’s minds, the minds of all the vast multitude of different kinds of people scattered through myriad worlds and circumstances.***

May 23, 2021

We grow and develop behaviours that are important to our survival in our environment, be it at home, at work, or at play. We become very good at some things, but equally we can be terrible at other things. We might be able to get away with never seeing our flaws if we never had to deal with another person. However, whoever we are, whatever we do, whatever our age, we all need other people. When we enter into a close relationship with someone then we begin to see some obvious things and not necessarily a person’s strong points. All too often what stands out is another person’s flaws. And it can feel as though other people exist just to point out our own weaknesses.

Buddhist practice can help us live with different kinds of people from different backgrounds. The Buddha's enlightenment led to the development of training the mind, cultivating mindfulness and compassion, however, at the root of it all, is his teaching to wake up. We start by waking up to the suffering that we all know, and conclude with enlightenment which is unknown. We learn how to bear witness, not just to suffering, but also to enlightenment. As we take a leap of faith and ordain, we get a new name that points to our weakness and there is a good reason for it. Susthama is a Sanskrit name and breaks down into two parts; Su means *sweet*and sthama is close to the English word *stamina.*It means one who perseveres with the good. For someone who used to run away from problems it has helped me to stay with the messiness of life and to continue to develop a relationship with the good. An aspirational name can bring out a nascent quality that lies buried in us somewhere.

What I worked on with a name like Susthama is to be friends with the good. Anyone who has a relationship with the good can delve into the messiness of human lives and study them in detail. In looking at the particulars, we might awaken, just like Shakyamuni did to the process of dependent origination, and understand how it works in our lives. We might be open to seeing how our experience of something will lead to emotions which will lead to thoughts which will lead to words which will lead to actions which will lead to a reaction which will lead to more feelings and so on. Our thoughts and feelings may be impermanent and unreliable, but they are compelling. They can be overpowering and may lead us to do things that feel real and true in the moment, no matter how hurtful or mean. This is our karma. And sometimes our words, actions and behaviours can be the source of shame, guilt and sorrow, especially when we find out later, how wrong we were, so much so that we keep them hidden from others. But that is not the only reason we have secrets as we will see later in the explanation of the different squares in the Johari window.

A Johari window is useful to see the complexity of life in a simple way. It might be easy to categorise our qualities into strengths and weaknesses and to work on balancing them but things are more complex than that. There are things we know and other things we don’t know but not everyone knows the same things.

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| **FACTORS** | **KNOWN** | **UNKNOWN** |
| **KNOWN** | KNOWN TO ALL | KNOWN TO OTHERS BUT NOT TO US |
| **UNKNOWN** | KNOWN TO US BUT NOT TO OTHERS | UNKNOWN TO ALL |

The first square includes all the behaviours and patterns that are seen by oneself and the other. We feel most comfortable in the first square called ‘open’. Fellow feeling and patience are easy to practice when we can see the motives behind a wrong deed. Joy for another person's success is easy when we know the pain and suffering involved. In this square, we can see behaviours and patterns and we may even know other information that can help us understand more about that person. For example, we all know that the Buddha’s mother died giving birth to him. And we all know that he attained enlightenment.

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| **Relationship** | **Known** | **Unknown** |
| **Known** | OPEN: VISIBLE AND SEEN TO YOU AND ME | BLINDSPOTS: SEEN BY YOU BUT NOT TO ME |
| **Unknown** | SECRETS: KNOWN TO ME BUT NOT TO YOU | MYSTERY: INVISIBLE TO BOTH YOU AND ME |

We feel less comfortable with the second square called 'blindspots', and yet this square is where others can help us a lot. In the case of the Buddha, his father might have seen the impact of losing his mother on him, but baby Siddhartha was too young to know. He would have grown up, as we all do with behaviours that are hidden from ourselves, otherwise known as our blindspots. We may know in theory that we have blindspots, or perhaps we think we haven't got any because we can't see them, but when they are revealed to us we can feel challenged and humiliated, especially when others seem to see them as clear as day. Courage and equanimity are important qualities to cultivate in order to hear, accept and listen to feedback from others. Our encounters with an other can force us to wake up to the fact that we can’t hide from our fears and pretend that we are okay forever.

We might feel a degree more uncomfortable with the third square called 'secrets'. This is not the same as our blindspots because these behaviours are known to us but not known to others. As Siddhartha grew into a young man, he might have had feelings about losing his mother that he did not share with anyone, including his father. We may also hide certain aspects of ourselves from others out of fear or ridicule. Or we may have thoughts, dreams, fantasies, secrets, past experience and feelings that are too difficult to disclose that are only known to us and maybe a few others who also know to keep them secret.

Last but not least is the mystery square. It is an acknowledgement that there exists other information that is hidden from ourselves and others. In the case of Siddhartha, his father knew that a seer had prophesied that Siddhartha would become either a great ruler or a great holy man, but he did not know which one. Neither he nor Siddhartha had any idea of the invisible forces that influenced and shaped him.  There were other processes that affected him that were invisible to both him and his father that led to his enlightenment. These processes and mysterious forces can have a power over our lives without us knowing what they are. Other information and experience that belong to our early years, or our parents and ancestors' generation, that resides in our unconscious, is unknown and invisible to everybody. From physical and chemical processes such as pheromones, to spiritual processes like the nembutsu, Amida, the Dharma and a creative muse are included in the last square.

Two years after the Buddha attained enlightenment he went back to his hometown of the Shakyans. Anuruddha was among the group of men who heard the Buddha’s dharma and he asked to join the community of monks. One of the most difficult practices to accomplish is the practice of divine vision. Divine vision enables one to see into the fourth pane of the johari window, the unconscious. Once we see into the unconscious, then we can understand the workings of the mind and the reasons behind the actions. In seeing all the conditions that exist in the conscious and the unconscious mind, then we may arrive at empathic understanding.

Understanding that we know some things and don't know other things can help us appreciate that there are reasons why we act and behave the way that we do even if we do not know what the reasons are. It’s wonderful when both parties can see why, but when we can’t, then we can think of the johari window. Perhaps, over time, with practice like the one that Anuruddha did, or in an atmosphere of loving kindness and acceptance, we may be open to criticism and change our ways, or maybe we will open up and reveal the secrets that we keep hidden.

Anuruddha’s divine vision did not come easy. He had learned the eight thoughts of a great man from Shariputra and mastered the first seven but failed to master the last one. He was given further instruction from the Buddha, and struggled until he finally mastered it and became foremost in it. If we can face our fears, accept our humiliations, and persist with our struggles then our greatest struggles can become our greatest gifts.