

Initial Considerations

SOCIOLOGICAL CONCERNS

As I mentioned in the introduction, the terms *mom* and *momjit* are familiar to all Koreans, and have their roots in ancient history. Although I translated them in the introduction as “essence” and “function,” a more accurate definition (and the one the Korean populace is more familiar with) is “body” and “the body’s functions.” The implications of “essence/function” and “body/its functions” are similar, that is, both paradigms are used to point to a nondual relationship between the two concepts. There is a subtle but crucial difference, however, between the two models, “essence/function” and “body/its functions.” The term *essence/function* (which is often translated by East Asian scholars into the Chinese term *t’i-yung*) has a rather abstract, philosophical tone, connoting an impression of being somewhat removed from the nitty-gritty details of everyday life. My primary interest, however, is in the human being’s personal understanding and experience of nonduality. How are we able to access this nondual realm? It is only through our practice. What, then, is practice? It lies right within all the events that make up our ordinary, everyday lives. Practice occurs within our own bodies, which in turn are the breeding ground for many types of functions, such as consciousness, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, value systems, and so forth. Practice is the overall context within which all these various functions, or processes, are operating—right here and right now.

The terms *mom* and *momjit*, then, far from being removed from our daily lives, help us return back to our bodies, our most basic signifiers of what we experience on a day-to-day basis. Our bodies are performing their various functions at every moment. There is no way we can avoid experiencing these functions. These terms *mom* and *momjit* are priceless tools pointing to the nondual reality that exists within us at this very moment.

Within the field of cross-cultural studies, it is generally agreed that Asian cultures are *mom*-oriented, whereas the West is strongly influenced by *momjit*. It can also be said that traditional cultures of the past were by and large based on *mom*, while contemporary societies, whether Eastern or Western, clearly have a *momjit* bias. It should be noted that although Asian culture has its roots in a *mom* way of life, due to the influence of Western technology the Asian lifestyle is increasingly becoming more and more *momjit*-based. It is important to keep in mind, however, that *mom* and *momjit* should not be viewed as separate aspects, as they are essentially intertwined and interdependent. Yet the intriguing paradox of the paradigm is this: although each aspect cannot exist apart from the other, it maintains an identity of its own. Furthermore, within any given culture the identity of one or the other will be clearly predominant. Thus, in order to have a proper understanding of the model in its entirety we need to differentiate between the two parts which form its structure.

In traditional Asian society, the role of the individual was seen as crucial to the well-being of the society. If any one person neglected his responsibilities either to himself or to the world around him, he was not considered worthy of the respect of others. In matters of spiritual training in particular, it was understood that any individual's weaknesses or deficiencies needed to be addressed and corrected through his own efforts. This naturally required an understanding on his part of the proper use of his mind.

In our capitalistic, industrialized world, however, the individual is continually discouraged from making such use of his mental capacities. He is instead urged to follow the rules strictly as laid out by the social norms; as a result, the individual is becoming more and more like a machine. There is becoming less and less room for him to maneuver around in, and less and less space for him to listen to the dictates of his own consciousness. He is instead encouraged to expend all of his efforts in conforming to his society's various requirements and conditions. If he adapts to these requirements, he is considered a success; his own inner state is given little, if any, consideration.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

In our modern world, then, with its busyness and its "progressive" aspirations, the conscientiousness of the individual is rated very low on the scale of values. He is constantly being prodded, like a sheep in a flock, to respond to the influences of the extended world, *momjit*,

at the continuous expense of his own internal needs and values, *mom*. Even religious leaders often fall prey to this insidious and devastating imbalance of the natural order.

This does not mean, of course, that an inner realm does not exist within each one of us. We all have very active internal lives, yet often our experience of our own inner world causes us enormous suffering. What does it mean that an increasing number of people are seeking the aid of psychologists and psychiatrists in order to manage their lives? This fact, I believe, points to our inability to reconcile our own inner *mom* world with the *momjit* world, which exists outside of us. We insist on creating a separation between the two where none exists. We split *momjit* off from *mom* and then proceed to spend most of our time and energy catering to the distorted *momjit* we have created. For example, following our parents' teaching, we tell our children that they must always try to look happy in front of others, that they should smile, and say the right thing, and so forth. This manifestation of *momjit* represents a distortion of *mom* and prevents its natural expression, causing us deep, often unconscious, inner distress.

Such suffering, caused by the contradictions we make between our internal needs and the requirements of our society, must eventually seek an outlet, a means of escape. This will often occur on an unconscious level. Minor ways in which we may attempt to escape may be through forgetfulness or perhaps changing the subject of conversation. Other methods may be more radical, such as taking drugs or quitting one's job. None of these tactics, however, will solve the problem, for it exists inherently within us.

The teachings of Buddhism tell us that we must confront our suffering; we must face it and see it as it is, rather than attempt to escape from it. According to the Buddha, we cause our own suffering, through our attachments. We hear about something, or see something, and then we want to hold onto it as if it is a permanent entity that exists within a fixed time and place. It is our six sense organs (the mind being the sixth) that perceive these objects or entities, and thus they are the most obvious and immediate causes of our attachment. Yet if we look deeper, we will discern the deep desire that underlies all of our clinging. We are drawn to someone, to something, or to an idea because it appeals to us, and then we want to take possession of it and give it a permanent place in our lives. If our desire for these things did not exist, they would merely be like birds in the sky: they would appear before us for awhile and then they would eventually disappear.

HUMAN IGNORANCE

As we investigate further into our attachment, and seek its deepest origins, we may see that it is ultimately a product of our ignorance (Sanskrit: *avidyā*). Essentially, we may come to realize that all of our perceptions, desires, aversions, and so forth, are caused by a false idea of the self. We view our physical body as our self and we see it as permanent, just as we see physical objects, people, and ideas as permanent. Yet according to Buddhist teachings, the self is merely part of an ongoing process of creation and destruction, which Buddhism calls dependent origination (Sanskrit: *pratītya samutpāda*). The self is—and we are—only one link in a vast universal chain of interconnectedness and interdependence. None of us exists outside of this intricate, all-encompassing web, and therefore none of us can escape the cycle of death and rebirth. We are not permanent entities, firmly fixed at this particular place and time; rather we, just like every atom of existence, are participants in an eternal process of change.

Our suffering, then, whether we live in the East or West, in ancient times or modern, originates from our misguided attachment to that which is impermanent. All manifestations of *momjit*, whether they be objects or people or feelings or ideas, are themselves impermanent. By its very nature, *momjit* can only be temporary, yet in our ignorance as to the real nature of things we view it—and hold onto it—as eternal. Although a part of us is aware that *momjit* is impermanent—for example, we all know that one day we will die—we constantly emphasize and exaggerate its value. This helps to give it a greater sense of solidarity and enables us to fool ourselves into thinking that it will endure forever. Enlightened Zen masters tell us that if we can eliminate our attachment to the idea of an eternal *momjit*, we will be liberated, that is, released from all our suffering, and experience lasting peace, freedom, and joy. These qualities depict the realm of *mom*, which is utterly free from any attachment whatsoever. When attachment arises, then, it signifies the presence of *momjit*; when the attachment is eliminated, *mom* manifests spontaneously.

What exactly is *mom*? Although we have seen that *momjit* can be defined as fragmentary and partial, and capable of being fixed in time and place, *mom* cannot be placed within the confines of any description whatsoever. The closest we can come to describing *mom* is as a negation of *momjit*. Thus, for example, *nirvāṇa* (whose meaning is similar to *mom*) is referred to as neither arising nor ceasing. In this context, even birth and death are considered examples of *momjit*,

whereas *mom*, in comparison, may be seen as universality itself. This will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

ORDINARY AND ABSOLUTE ASPECTS

It is important to understand that *mom* and *momjit* may refer to either one of two radically different strata of reality and/or awareness: the ordinary and the absolute (the latter may also be called the religious). One way to view the ordinary level is to see it as pertaining to our mundane, everyday life. Another perspective involves viewing the ordinary level as the application of the absolute or religious level to our daily existence and activities. This latter approach helps to imbue our daily routine with a deeper significance, which may be of great value to those who are attempting to pursue a more spiritual way of life. However we view it, an understanding of the ordinary level is crucial in terms of our communication with others, for it is obvious that it is at this level, namely, the ordinary, that we perform all of our day-to-day activities and conduct all our relationships.

One of the simplest ways of understanding *mom* and *momjit* on the ordinary level is through the metaphor of a tree. Although I am not sure of its origins, this metaphor is an extremely apt model for our purposes here. A tree consists of roots, a trunk, branches, leaves, and perhaps flowers or fruit. If we consider the roots, or the hidden part, to correspond to *mom*, and the remainder of the tree, that is, the trunk, branches, leaves, and flowers/fruit, which are all visible, to be *momjit*, then we may have a clear idea not only of the identity of *mom* and *momjit*, but also of their relationship to each other. Thus, we may see that in this context *mom* is primarily the hidden, invisible aspect of an entity and yet one that provides support and nourishment for the rest of it. Correspondingly, *momjit* represents the external, visible part, that which performs various functions throughout the course of the life of the entity. It should also be clear through the use of this metaphor that the two aspects, whether they be *mom* and *momjit*, roots and branches, or foundation and function, are interdependent. If one were somehow separated from the other, neither one would be able to continue to exist. In the case of the tree, if the roots (*mom*) are cut off or neglected, the tree will die, and thus its function, or *momjit*, will also be denied. Similarly, the roots (*mom*) can never just exist by themselves but will eventually, with care and nurturing, be a springboard for the creation and growth of the rest of the tree (*momjit*). Applied to

the life of a human being, we may see that, for example, if a person experiences a deep emotion of some sort (*mom*), whether it be love or hate or fear or whatever, it must of necessity find a way of expressing itself through the words or actions of that person's life (*momjit*). If that same emotion is not able to manifest itself outwardly in the person's life, it will eventually cause him much pain and even damage. On the other hand, from the perspective of *momjit*, whatever action (*momjit*) a person undertakes is never random but is rather directly connected to some inner belief or value (*mom*) that he holds.

The insight the tree metaphor offers us is twofold. First, it helps us to understand that to place a priority on the external aspect at the expense of the internal is a grave mistake, for the internal always holds the position of higher value. You can chop off the branches of a tree if you wish, and you can even chop down the trunk, but in time, if the roots are healthy and receive the correct care, the tree will grow back. However, if you wish for the tree to grow you can never destroy the roots; it simply cannot exist without them. Similarly, in the life of a human being, if one merely pays attention to external appearances without nourishing his own inner needs and values, it is extremely doubtful that he will be able to find lasting happiness or peace. By discovering and nurturing his roots, however, or his inner sense of identity, he may create a firm foundation which will serve as an anchor to protect him from any outer difficulty he may encounter.

This understanding of the value of the internal over the external leads us directly to the second insight offered by the tree metaphor. This insight is essentially a variation or an expansion of the first: if you wish to correct any mistake, strengthen any weakness, and create and develop a strong, solid life (*momjit*), you must discover and return to the root itself (*mom*); you will not be able to achieve your goals without doing so. This truth is well illustrated by a story that appears in the book of Mencius, an extremely influential Confucian thinker of ancient China. In this story, a certain farmer went out to his rice fields one morning to see how his rice plants were doing. When he discovered that some plants were shorter than others, he interpreted this to mean that they were not as healthy, and he proceeded to pull on them in an attempt to make them taller. Later, he went back home to tell his family of his wonderful deed. When the whole family returned to the field the next day to check on the progress of the plants, they discovered to their dismay that every single one had perished overnight.

Even to those of us who have been born and raised in the city, the mistake of the farmer seems obvious. Yet the lesson the story

intends to convey is significant: by paying attention only to the external appearance of the rice plant, he sacrificed the life of the entire plant. If he had been able to view the plant in its entirety, he would have realized that in order to make it grow taller, its roots were what needed strengthening. To attempt a cure through means of the stalk was totally ineffectual—worse, it killed the plant.

The kind of care and attention needed here, that is, the nurturing of the root, is an act that cannot be completed in a day or a week. It requires much time and diligent effort. The tree has a certain principle of growth: it needs water, good soil, sunshine, and so forth. These different elements all must be recognized and valued. This same understanding may be applied to human relationships and activities as well. We need to look into our relationships and our activities more deeply. What is the root? And what are the branches, the leaves, the flowers? In my view, to care for others covertly, rather than in a direct way, may be seen as the root of a relationship. To help someone in an immediate, obvious sense will often be viewed by him with suspicion, but if you perform a service for him without his knowledge, then you are truly giving him something of value. The results may not be instantaneous, but they will eventually become known and will then produce a situation of benefit to all concerned.

In a similar vein, let us look at the example of two people meeting, whether for the first time or on a regular basis, on either a social or professional level. The meeting itself may seem like a very powerful event, as the two people are interacting with each other directly, on an immediate level of experience. This meeting, the external event itself, may be termed as *momjit*. However, what about what happens behind the scenes, after the meeting is over? Doesn't that have the greater impact? That is when each participant is afforded the time and space in which to mull over the events that occurred earlier, and to formulate his views accordingly. The interval that occurs after the meeting, then, may be termed *mom*, and it may be seen to possess the greater significance, the more long-lasting influence.

I would like to relate here a personal experience, which I feel reflects this understanding very well. When I first came to Stony Brook as an assistant professor in 1979, my field of Buddhism was placed as a subdivision within a larger academic field, the department of comparative studies. At one point during my first semester of teaching, the chairman of the department accused me of appropriating some funds which he felt had been earmarked for his own use. He stormed into my office one day and berated me vehemently for "stealing" his funds. In fact, these funds had been allocated to me so that I could

set up a scholarship for some students in Korea. After he made his accusation, I felt I had no choice but to seek the aid of a higher authority, the dean of the department, for guidance. After hearing what happened, the dean wrote a letter to the chairman informing him that he (the dean) had indeed designated that the money be set aside for my use in helping some students from my country. After he received this letter, the chairman's attitude toward me changed completely, and he began to treat me with warmth and cordiality. I felt uncomfortable, however, as I did not know the nature of his true feelings toward me. I decided to see what I could do to be of service to him, yet as I did not wish to cause him any embarrassment or discomfort, I made sure that none of my actions was overt or obvious. Instead, just like a parent who silently helps his children in numberless ways, I began to perform a few minor, unobtrusive tasks in order to make his life run a little more smoothly. Later, these small efforts had a very large impact on both our relationship and my career. Indeed, when the matter of my tenure came up for approval, the chairman's was one of the strongest voices in favor of my promotion.

This story well exemplifies, I believe, the inestimable value of *mom*. It acts unobtrusively yet persistently, and affects *momjit* in ways that cannot be directly or immediately perceived. Both of the references mentioned above, the metaphor of the tree and the story of the farmer, aptly point to the value of *mom* in relation to *momjit* and invite us to apply the implications of such a relationship to our own lives.

However, the drawback to these references is that neither one accounts for the religious aspect of the paradigm, that is, the aspect of nonduality. In recognition of this aspect, it may be said that even in an unhealthy branch or leaf of a tree, and even in the farmer's dying rice plants, *mom* can be found to exist. Although these metaphors and stories are not concerned with such a truth, the truth is there if one looks deeply enough into the matter. *Mom* exists in everything and everyone, whether healthy or unhealthy, visible or invisible, rich or poor, smart or stupid. There is not one atom in the universe that does not contain *mom*, nor is there one thought or perception in which it is lacking.

Thus, within a family, for example, *mom* may be seen to represent the respect shown by one member of the family to another. If one family member becomes ill, he must be tended to by another or others, no matter what his position within the family structure, until the other regains his health. I am the youngest in a family of eight children, having two older sisters and five older brothers. When I went to Korea in 1997, I paid a visit to my oldest sister, who is now

eighty-five years old. She was having some trouble with her teeth and required extensive dental work. When I went to see her, she asked me, "I am so old now. Do I really need to go to a dentist and have this work done?" I told her, "Even if you know you are going to die tomorrow, you should go see a dentist today. It is very important to always do whatever needs to be done."

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant said that the human being should not be treated as the means to an end, but as the end itself, that is, as the subject of one's awareness. The human being is not merely an outward manifestation of some mystical essence, but is the essence himself; he contains everything with himself, worlds within worlds. Even if he is sick, old, deteriorating, a criminal, stupid, clumsy, or whatever, he should not be treated merely as a means for achieving some future purpose. He is one link which connects to another in the ongoing process of the creation and development of the universe. This is what is meant by the Buddhist term "dependent origination."

As we said before, *mom* has two meanings. It is not only a part of the whole, or one side of a coin, which is its ordinary meaning or aspect, but it is also the whole coin itself, front and back. This latter is its religious aspect. It is important to remember here that this whole cannot be perceived through the five sense organs (or six, if you include the mind), just as you cannot see both sides of the coin at the same time. If you are attached to the sense organs as a means by which to identify something or make a judgment about it, you will never understand it in its entirety, its *mom*. Within this religious aspect, *mom* cannot be identified or expressed or described.

All of the various Buddhist terms, such as emptiness, suchness, *nirvāṇa*, enlightenment, and so forth, have the capacity to be structured within a system corresponding to that of *mom* and *momjit*. For example, when discussing Buddha-nature, which in this context may be equated with *mom*, the material, temporal aspect of Buddha-nature (its *momjit*) needs to be recognized and included. Although it is believed to exist in opposition to one's Buddha-nature, we have seen that this is not really the case, as opposition implies duality, whereas the relationship of *mom* to *momjit* is of a nondual nature.

People often tend to make the mistake of believing that *mom* is always an invisible aspect. As we pointed out earlier, this is not always the case; the determining factor must always be the context within which the issue is being discussed or investigated. For example, we may say that a pen is *mom*, that is, a visible aspect. However, its function, which is the writing, is *momjit*. On the other hand, we could also say that the desire to write represents *mom*; in this case the pen

now becomes *momjit*, as it is the implement needed to perform the function of writing.

Following this line of thought, *momjit* is often believed to be visible, yet again, this is not always so. We may say that the mental or emotional aspects of one's life, even though invisible, are *momjit*, for they represent the function or manifestation of one's deeper identity, his *mom*. Compared to one's actions, however, thoughts or emotions are the *mom*, the motivating force, and the actions themselves, existing as the manifestation or function of the thoughts and emotions, become the *momjit*. Similarly, take the example of one person offering service to another, which is a type of function and thus represents *momjit*. A visible manifestation of this would be his driving a sick person to the doctor, whereas the invisible aspect might be the prayers that he makes for that same person, or perhaps just his general feelings of concern. Whether visible or invisible, however, all manifestations of *momjit* may be defined as impermanent.

The *mom/momjit* paradigm originated as a means to help human beings deal with the fundamental problem of suffering. It is a device that was intended to be used to investigate this problem at a deeper level than is ordinarily possible. The terms *mom* and *momjit* were not created apart from this purpose. This is an important point. If one attempts to formulate a definition or description of these two terms on an abstract level, in isolation from the larger philosophical and religious issues concerning human existence, he will run into difficulties.

What, then, is the correlation between *mom* and *momjit* on the one hand and human existence on the other? We have seen that from a religious perspective, everything that is not-me is related to me; I am a part, however infinitesimal, of every speck of existence in the universe. Similarly, there is no *momjit* that does not contain *mom*. *Mom* is everywhere.

The value of a simile or metaphor is that once its meaning has been understood, it must be abandoned, for it is no longer necessary. Its only purpose is as a tool for understanding. The Diamond Sūtra, a landmark text of Mahāyāna Buddhism, utilizes the metaphor of a raft that takes one to the shore across the river. When one reaches the other shore, he must abandon the raft, for it has served its purpose and is not needed anymore. Another metaphor used quite often by East Asian Buddhists is that of a finger that points to the moon. In this case the moon refers to the experience of enlightenment, whereas the finger represents any device used to bring one to, or to "point" to, that experience. The message is similar to that of the raft: once

enlightenment is realized, the finger is no longer needed. Its mission has been accomplished.

Mom and *momjit* must be approached in the same way. They help point the way to a deeper understanding of human existence; once that understanding has been reached they should not be clung to as independent isolated entities in themselves.

SUFFERING

I am in agreement with the Buddha that even in the midst of all of our technological achievements and material comforts, the crux of the human condition is its fundamental suffering. Surely, there is no one on this earth who does not experience some level of dissatisfaction with his life. The Buddha delineated a fourfold list of sufferings, which included birth, sickness, old age, and death. He also mentioned the suffering caused by attachment to what is pleasant and aversion for the unpleasant. In my view, the majority of our suffering is caused by the great discrepancy we have created between our inner world of thoughts and feelings and the world outside of us, the world of human relationships. This discrepancy is usually the result of our self-deceit, which may be translated as our inability or unwillingness to view these two realms, the inner and the outer, clearly. Why do we suffer so much in this way? I believe it is due to the fact that we adhere to a value system that derives from a utilitarian approach to life, in which our actions are motivated by the primary purpose of achieving benefit for ourselves in some way or another. These benefits, whatever their nature, are all directly related to the world of *momjit*. Yet as we have previously discussed, *momjit* cannot survive without the presence of *mom*. Because of our attachment we cannot see this; therefore, it is only by detaching ourselves on all levels—intellectually, emotionally, and sensually—from *momjit*, that we may apprehend the *mom* inherent within these desires. Only in this way may our suffering be overcome.

DEFINITION OF MOM AND MOMJIT: A CLOSER LOOK

How can we describe *mom*? Words cannot accomplish this. Perhaps the closest we can come is to say that *mom* is what enables *momjit* to exist. The definition of *momjit* is more accessible; it is whatever can be

expressed, described, or defined, and is by nature temporal, momentary, and impermanent. With my hand, I am able to grasp and then release various objects. These objects, as well as my hand, belong to the realm of *momjit*. What is *mom* in this example? It is what causes my hand to grasp and release. One may say, "Oh, well, then, *mom* is the signal given to the hand by the brain." But the brain is not *mom*; it is *momjit*. What is it that gives the signal to the brain to open or close the hand?

The nature of any discussion about *mom* within the visible world, that is, in the ordinary aspect, will be utilitarian. The invisible aspect of *mom*, however, points to a soteriological concern, and in this context *mom* may be said to be universal and eternal. How is it possible for *mom* to have this added religious dimension? People normally do not have difficulty in understanding *mom* in its visible aspect—as the body, for example. To comprehend its religious dimension, however, presents a bigger problem for many.

Perhaps at this point we should discuss what is meant by the religious dimension. What does the word *religion* mean? Religions may be labeled Eastern or Western and will accordingly differ in many ways. In what sense, then, is something considered to be religious? A Buddhist might say that the religious aspect of something allows for the simultaneous existence of two fundamentally different or opposing conditions. It is in this way that we may begin to comprehend the religious dimension of *mom*. In this context *mom* is both individual, that is, partial and impermanent, as well as universal or eternal. Thus, its religious, or universal, aspect includes the ordinary or temporal. It should be clear here that *mom* embraces and includes *momjit* as well. This religious aspect may be equated with the Buddhist term *emptiness*. This emptiness does not mean the same thing as nothingness, however, but is rather an all-embracing completeness, which is empty only in the sense that it possesses no inherent identity of its own. As asserted by the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, within the religious aspect of *mom* each atom of existence is seen to arise within the context of another such atom, and ceases within the same context. Thus, it does not arise and cease of its own volition, as an isolated, independent, abstract entity, but is instead directly related to and dependent upon all other entities in the universe for its existence. Furthermore, it contains every other atom of the universe within it as well. In Hua-yen literature, which we will investigate in a later chapter, each atom of existence, each speck of dust, is said to contain the entire universe. Indeed, it *is* the entire universe. Similarly, the smallest unit of time (Sanskrit: *kshana*) may be considered in the same way. It contains all time within it: past, present, and future.

This is the mysterious aspect of Buddhism, according to Western scholars. This word *mysterious*, however, is misleading. In the West, it usually refers to something that has no logic, and is seen as superstitious or mystical. For followers of Buddhist thought, however, this awareness of the universality of time and space is not seen as a mystical or mysterious concept, although it does contain that aspect. If one accepts the truth of this awareness, everyone is seen as a Buddha and everyone and everything has value; nothing is useless. Furthermore, each moment, each action, each thought and word, has equal value, for each contains the entire universe within it. The opening of a flower in spring is the same as its wilting in autumn. Each thing includes all others. *Mom* and *momjit*, too, are contained within each other: neither stands by itself.

THE EXPERIENCE OF MOM

Although *mom* cannot be adequately described or defined, it can be experienced, and once its meaning is ascertained, then *momjit* will easily be understood as well. However, the reverse is not necessarily true; we cannot automatically grasp or comprehend *mom* merely through an understanding of *momjit*. In order to truly access *mom* one must first be "broken." This is a term I have discussed at length in my book *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment*. The experience of being "broken" is one in which all the individual's conceptual and conditioned ways of perceiving himself and the universe have been discarded completely. This is the experience that occurs at the moment of enlightenment; it is what enables the individual to access a radically altered view of existence. Only through the experience of being "broken" can one adequately comprehend the invisible realm of *mom*. For those whose suffering is great, and for those who feel intensely the need to solve their own soteriological question, it is not difficult to become "broken." For them the problem is urgent, and they are thus willing to go to great lengths to find a solution, even if it means (which it does) abandoning all their previously held theories and opinions about themselves and the world.

Those who do not suffer are not really able to understand the religious suffering of others. When people become ill, however, or experience a personal tragedy of some sort, they will often look for an answer to their pain in the spiritual world, and it is there that they will begin to discover for the first time a sense of spiritual "health." In this sense, then, those who seem healthy, living ordinary lives, may

be said to be spiritually "sick," as they have not yet accessed the deep inner world, the world of *mom*, which exists within them. A prolonged or terminal illness may thus remedy this situation, causing their inner eyes, which had previously been closed, to now open. Why is this? Perhaps it is because their selfishness has now disappeared. When one is healthy, he normally possesses a strong self-identity, often to the point of arrogance. If he becomes ill, however, this sense of self becomes weakened through his suffering, and once this protective shell is punctured, he becomes able to see the true picture of his life much more clearly.

In connection with this, I would like to tell you about a very well-educated man I know, who was sent to fight in the Korean War. He was assigned to a camp with many other soldiers who had had very little education—indeed, many of them could not even read or write. For three months my friend lived together with these men, eating and sharing the same sleeping quarters with them. During this time they all underwent an extensive military training. As my friend had nothing in common with the others outside of the sharing of their present circumstances, he had difficulty in establishing any real sense of communication with them. When the training was completed they were all sent into the battlefield. At one point they were attacked by North Korean soldiers, and although my friend and his comrades managed to escape, some of them were wounded in the skirmish. One of the men had broken his leg and my friend had to carry him on his back so that he could get safely back to camp. The journey was a lengthy one as the camp was quite a distance away, and they endured many hardships during their trek. Later, there was a second assault and this time my friend was injured in his shoulder. The very same comrade whom he had assisted earlier had recovered by this time, and so it was now his turn to carry my friend back to camp. This trek lasted for nine days; by the time they returned to camp, they both had to be hospitalized.

Each man, then, had saved the other's life. Since that time, their relationship was very unique; any difference that happened to arise between them was dismissed as being of no importance whatsoever. Prior to their shared experience on the battlefield, each had felt constantly irritated and annoyed by the behavior of the other. My friend had felt rather superior to the illiterate man and could not help seeing his actions as rather crude and ill-mannered, whereas the latter, in turn, felt extremely intimidated by my friend's intellectual achievements and elegant mannerisms. Yet following their ordeal they felt as if they were one body; each felt himself to be a part of the other.

Eventually, they were both discharged and sent home. Even after they ceased being military men, they still continued to maintain a correspondence. Twenty years passed, and yet there was no change in their relationship.

What is the meaning of this story? Through the sharing of each other's suffering, they were both able to penetrate and enter the realm of *mom*. Although they still continued to live rather ordinary lives in the mundane world of *momjit*, with all its distinctions and discriminations, this had very little, if any, effect on their relationship, for that part of their lives was deeply centered in *mom*.

Using another example to illustrate this same point, it is often the case that young married couples do a fair amount of bickering among themselves. They often come from different backgrounds, and may possess dissimilar sets of ideas, views, customs, and so forth. Yet as they continue to live together, sharing the experience of life itself with all its inherent conflict and pain (and joy as well), they will inevitably, inch by inch, gain closer access to the world of *mom*. In this way, their previous differences will seem to disappear as if into thin air, and as the years go by their relationship will deepen. The physical beauty of each partner may vanish, and the passion and excitement as well, but the relationship itself will improve as they begin to live within the realm of *mom*, where all such concerns are irrelevant.

We can see by these stories and examples that the *mom/momjit* paradigm may easily be applied to any aspect of human existence. One does not need to be a sage or practice meditation for many years in order to experience *mom*. Anyone and everyone can access its depths. In this sense, suffering may be seen as a blessing as it allows one an easy entrance into *mom's* world. The First Noble Truth of Buddhism is that life is suffering, yet the purpose of Buddhist practice is not to eliminate this suffering. As discussed earlier, when people are suffering they often turn to a spiritual or religious practice in an attempt to alleviate their pain. What happens, though, when one begins to immerse himself in a spiritual practice? He realizes not that his suffering can be eliminated but rather that he shares this experience with everyone else. He sees that all people suffer; it is the human condition. He later observes the suffering of an old person and a sick person, and he realizes that their pain is his as well. We all share this condition; it is not an isolated, occasional experience but rather an ongoing fact of life. To eliminate it is neither possible nor desirable, for it has a hidden value, which is that it can usher us into the realm of a vaster reality, that of *mom*. And *mom*, as we are beginning to learn, is a priceless treasure whose worth cannot be compared.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

What can we do to alleviate our suffering? As I see it, there are three methods. One is through intellectual theory. This works only if the suffering is not too serious, and is usually applied in the consideration of others' pain. Another way is by adopting the attitude of a parent toward a child. This, of course, refers to suffering that is directly related to another person. Just as with intellectual theory, however, this method is not always effective. The third approach to suffering is the one I consider to be the best. Here, one applies the *mom/momjit* paradigm to his own life, by which he may understand that all phenomena are *momjit* and therefore impermanent. This awareness may help facilitate his return to the eternal source, *mom*. Upon this return back to *mom*, which is really a kind of reversal of his usual position, he may now realize that there is a unity between himself and the cause of his suffering, whether it be another person or a situation. The sense of separation from that which is causing him pain essentially disappears. Through his deepening awareness of this sense of unity, his suffering may gradually dissolve. As Jesus Christ said so simply in Matthew 19:19, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

We should note here that there is a difference between *mom* love and *momjit* love. With *momjit* love, you love someone for various external reasons. For example, they may fulfill your ideal of a good person, or they may do kind deeds for you. With *mom* love, however, you see the entire universe, and all the people in it, as yourself and you respond to its needs automatically, with gratitude and goodwill. It is like the right hand just naturally coming to the aid of the left. If one hand is in danger, the other one spontaneously jumps in to help, without any need for thought. This kind of love is very difficult to achieve, much less to maintain. Sometimes, when under great pressure or in an emergency, a person will respond in this way, such as when a mother jumps in front of an oncoming car in order to save her child from being struck by it.

When you return to *mom* you can no longer act from a *momjit* perspective because *mom* is now performing your actions for you. Actually, although we are not usually aware of it, *mom* is acting all the time, in every moment, always doing its best, without any expectation of reward. As it is the source from which all else arises, it enables all things to be accomplished. When the disciples asked Jesus how they could attain salvation, he replied, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:25–26). We may here

substitute *momjit* for man and *mom* for God and say: with *momjit* it is not possible to achieve our goal; only with *mom* is it possible.

Society requires that we discipline ourselves in order to become successful. Yet our very use of such discipline can also place us in the deepest bondage, for the discipline has been externally generated and thus belongs to the realm of *momjit*. *Mom* can never be attained by using such methods; in order to reach it all our attachment to external remedies must be severed. Similarly, if a meditator is able to cut off his attachment to the *momjit* realm, he will undoubtedly gain access to the state of *samadhi*, that is, freedom from a dualistic way of thinking.

Most of us generally feel a great sense of separation between our minds and our bodies. We believe that the answers to our questions about life exist somewhere within our mental apparatus, and involve our belief systems and so forth.

This leads us to feel that our bodies have little, if any, relationship to our efforts to establish lasting peace in our lives. However, if we were to look a little deeper, we would discover that the truth of the matter is not quite so simple, for the fact is that our bodies actually have two aspects. On the one hand, they are as we see them, that is, vehicles through which we perform all of our daily activities, and lacking in any real sense of cohesiveness or purity. On the other hand, however, when we become aware, either through spiritual teachings or our own experience, of the fact of their essential impermanence, their lack of any real identity of their own, then we may begin to realize that they contain innumerable and immeasurable treasures within their depths, the likes of which we had never before imagined. The Hua-yen scriptures claim that the One is many. Viewed in this context, the body (the One) may be seen to contain the entire universe (the many) within it. It is truly wondrous; if we take the time and make the effort to listen to it, it will tell us all that we ever need to know. It can heal us by means of its omniscient awareness, but we must allow it to function as it will, without interference.

We may see from this that the teachings of Buddhism do not originate from some obscure, mystical, or abstract truth, but rather stem from what can be seen and experienced right in the present moment. By paying close attention to the messages of our bodies, we can be in constant contact with the truth of any situation or experience. The truth is always close at hand; indeed, it is immanent. The fact that it may be uncovered in this way shows us that our bodies represent not only the ordinary, visible aspect of *mom*, but its religious

or hidden aspect as well. The truth of any matter is nothing other than this invisible aspect of *mom*, which, as we said, may be accessed by means of the body.

STAGES OF ACCESS

Gaining such access to *mom* is not an easy matter, however; several steps are required. For our purposes here, we may describe three stages or levels (Sanskrit: *bhumis*) which must be passed through or attained, sequentially, in order to experience the hidden aspect of *mom*. At the outset, it must be recognized that we need to relinquish our attachment to *momjit*, to all of our bodily functions; this includes the five senses as well as the mind. In this context, the mind is considered part of the mind/body complex, as opposed to the invisible realm of *mom*, which transcends mind and body. We need to understand that it is not our minds or our bodies that cause us difficulties, but rather our attachment to them, that is to say, our tendency to view them as fixed entities, which we can control in any way we like. This is a grave misunderstanding on our part and therefore it is in Stage One that we need to learn how to diminish the role which our minds and bodies play in our life. Yet a preliminary step is necessary here if we are to find the strength and depth of vision needed to break our deep-seated attachments. This first step is the cultivation of a firm foundation of understanding concerning the nature and existence of *mom* itself. It is crucial that one be cognizant of the fact that there is an alternative to his suffering. This is why all religions place such a strong emphasis on the invisible world, proclaiming its wondrous glory. Without some glimmer of awareness of this world, which Western religions term God and Eastern thought labels emptiness, how can we ever hope to loosen our desperate grip on the mundane, material realm? Therefore, in Stage One the fact that there indeed does exist an invisible yet universal aspect of reality, which we are calling *mom*, is strongly emphasized. At the same time, our awareness of *momjit*, the world of our bodies and minds as well as the myriad objects within our perception, must be either substantially minimized or else completely negated. Again, the strategy here is that by stressing the universal, *mom*, one's attachment to his own individual suffering may be reduced. As we can see, at this stage the differences between *mom* and *momjit*, the universal and the individual, are asserted clearly. In Buddhist terms, in order to be able to detach ourselves from the *sahā* world of suffering, we need to be made aware of the existence of the *sukha* world of bliss. According to one sect of Buddhism, this *sukha*

world actually exists as the Pure Land to which practitioners will return following their death on the earthly plane. Western religions similarly espouse the greatness and invincibility of God (*mom*) as compared with the weakness and sinfulness of man (*momjit*), and offer us the Kingdom of Heaven if we atone for our wrongdoings.

Stage Two begins when we have more or less attained a certain level of detachment from *momjit*. This achievement enables us to discover for ourselves the existence of *mom* in its hidden aspect, which had previously eluded us. For practitioners of Western religions, to detach from self-concerns is to enter into the presence of God. For Buddhists, elimination of attachment represents an embarkment onto the path of enlightenment and indeed may lead directly to an experience of awakening, in however small or large a degree. Yet the danger of this stage is that just as we were previously attached to *momjit* and material concerns, now we may similarly become identified with our new-found awareness of *mom*, whether it be of God or of emptiness. This kind of attachment, if we persist in it, can create many problems in our daily lives. It is vital that we realize that this is not the final, ultimate understanding. Hopefully, we will be able to discern this error when it occurs so that we may summon the courage and determination to continue and complete our journey.

Stage Three, the final stage, is reached when we find within ourselves the means to throw off all attachment to *mom*. As implied above, this may not be an easy task, but it is a necessary one. It is this ability to negate both *momjit* and *mom* (defined as double negation in Buddhist thought) that enables us to see these two aspects in their correct relationship to each other. This relationship is one of nonduality, in which each exists within the other. At this stage, then, the Buddhist lives not as one who has merely had an enlightenment experience, but rather as the embodiment of enlightenment itself. He is not just a human being, but a living example of truth. The follower of Western religion will no longer consider himself to be a devotee of God; instead, he will have so completely merged with God that he lives not his own life but God's will. Thus, it becomes evident that at this stage all *momjit*, and this includes ourselves, exists as a manifestation or expression of the deeper, hidden *mom*. The *momjit* that is now perceived will differ markedly from the *momjit* of the previous stages: one who has attained this stage can for the first time see *momjit* in its entirety, for *mom* is now realized as being included within it. Thus, as we discussed in the beginning of this section, the body is not merely a framework for our flesh and bones, but contains within it an entire universe of possibilities and existences. People who have reached this level of understanding live ordinary lives in the everyday world, and

on the surface may appear no different from anyone else. Yet whatever they say or do will be a direct reflection of *mom*, universality, rather than of *momjit*, or mere self-concern.

In terms of the Christian religion, our reading of the Bible shows us that Jesus lived at the level of Stage Three. He was keenly aware of his oneness with God, his Father. At various times in his life he proclaimed, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me" (John 14:10). At the end of his life, when he was arrested by the Pharisees, he told them to read the scriptures, which stated that anyone who had a message from God was considered a Son of God. In essence, he was saying that everyone possesses the seed of oneness with God within himself. This is a clear recognition of nonduality on the part of Jesus. Furthermore, we may note the statement in Genesis that all humans are created in the image of God, yet another indication of the Judeo-Christian awareness of nonduality (Genesis 1:27).

In Buddhism, of course, the invisible aspect of *mom* is not perceived in such a personal way, that is, as a Creator or a Father, but rather is seen to exist on a more abstract level, as depicted by the use of such terms as emptiness, *nirvāṇa*, suchness, and so forth. This is due to the vast differences in both the culture and language of the people of East Asia as compared to the inhabitants of areas farther to the West. However, although East Asians were quite liberated in their understanding of nonduality, this did not, and does not now, necessarily help them to reach their soteriological goal, which is access to the realm of *mom*. They often remain helplessly trapped within the intellectual dimension of understanding, failing to realize nonduality on an experiential level. For those who struggle with this difficulty, the cultivation of faith may prove to be of invaluable assistance, for one who has faith possesses a deep inner sense of clarity, conviction, and certainty about his world that far surpasses a merely intellectual, rational understanding. One possessing faith carries within him an awareness of "existential nonduality," which is essentially an experiential embodiment of truth. One whose understanding is limited to "conceptual nonduality" will by contrast be sorely lacking in the necessary experiential dimension of awareness that is necessary if he wishes to access *mom*.

THE COEXISTENCE OF *MOM* AND *MOMJIT*

Earlier we spoke of *mom* as having two aspects, the absolute or religious and the visible, ordinary aspect. We may also use the terms *universal*