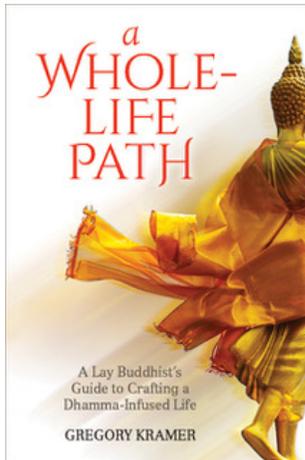


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A WHOLE-LIFE PATH: A LAY BUDDHIST'S GUIDE TO CRAFTING A DHAMMA-INFUSED LIFE, BY GREGORY KRAMER, OFFERS AN EVERYDAY APPLICATION OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS FOR THE MODERN WORLD



[July 7, 2020], [Seattle, Washington] For author and meditation teacher Gregory Kramer, every aspect of everyday life provides an opportunity to practice the Buddha's teachings. In his new book, *A Whole-Life Path: A Lay Buddhist's Guide to Crafting a Dhamma-Infused Life* (Insight Dialogue Community, September 2020), Kramer offers an in-depth, nuanced guide to the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path to inspire lay Buddhists to experience the Dhamma (Dharma) teachings every day, in their real, messy, modern lives.

Gregory Kramer is a longtime, esteemed teacher of insight meditation, the creator of [Insight Dialogue](#) (an interpersonal insight practice), and author of *Insight Dialogue: The Interpersonal Path to Freedom* (Shambhala Publications) and *Dharma Contemplation: Meditating Together with Wisdom Texts*; *Seeding the Heart: Practicing Lovingkindness with Children*, among other works.

Through astute observations, an extensive knowledge of the Buddhist-source text and more than 50 inquiry and meditation-based practices, Kramer gently prompts readers to look closely at personal and societal issues such as climate change, social injustice, cultural bias, economic choices, and interpersonal relationships through the lens of the Buddha's teachings.

Kramer's whole-life approach to the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, the inspiration for the book, grew out of his own desire and struggle to turn the teachings he was studying into lived experience. For a long time, Gregory Kramer felt a disconnect between inspiration he felt in his Buddhist study groups and his life in the real world.

"I assumed the [Buddha's] teachings really applied to my life, but it wasn't clear how I could implement them," he says. However, he continues, "The tougher life got, the more I felt called to put the teachings to work."

In the mid-2000s, Kramer's health and life took a serious turn, when he was diagnosed with an incurable form of cancer. This experience brought an enhanced intensity to his work. With death on his shoulder, the path came even more urgent and alive. The book's fruition was at risk, but the power of its teachings was elevated. Following a few years of treatment, Kramer was able to begin writing again, finally bringing the dream of this book into reality.

Written with the lay Buddhist in mind, *A Whole-Life Path* provides an accessible approach to living a life infused with freedom, a path offered by the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. Gregory Kramer's book is a "fully immersive, always-on engagement with the Noble Eightfold Path," so that, as the author states, practitioners can "engage the Buddha's Path as a *whole-life* path."

Endorsements

A Whole-Life Path: A Lay Buddhist's Guide to Crafting a Dhamma-Infused Life has been endorsed by Buddhist and mindfulness luminaries, teachers and authors including **Tara Brach, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Bhikkhu Bodhi, and Kamala Masters.**

In *A Whole-Life Path*, Gregory Kramer offers laypeople a brilliant and practical guide for bringing Buddhist wisdom alive in our relationships, work and through each moment of the day. Reading this book will help you realign with what matters most to your heart. -- **Tara Brach**, author of *Radical Compassion*

If you want to understand the Buddhist Eightfold Path, illuminated in wise, clear, practical ways and a modern perspective, *A Whole-Life Path* will serve you well. Working with real problems, ranging from climate change to intimate relationships, Gregory Kramer shows how the core teachings can be a guide to wisdom and wellbeing in every part of life. -- **Jack Kornfield**, author of *A Path With Heart*

A Whole-Life Path is a thoughtful and thorough exploration of how Dhamma practice can infuse every aspect of our lives. Gregory's unique perspective, born from years of practice and study, combines an impressive breadth of application to our lives in the world with a profound understanding of practices leading to the highest peace. This work is worthy of careful study as we investigate the causes of suffering and the possibilities of freedom. -- **Joseph Goldstein**, author of *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*

The gift of Gregory Kramer's new book is its peerless translation of the Buddha's original teachings into wisdom for more skillfully engaging *every aspect* of our everyday, lived experiences—including the roughest edges of our ordinary lives. In the voice of a gentle and trusted guide, Kramer offers a map for doing what we do with clear intention, and, with increasing attention to how we do it, unfolding in these pages a whole-life path marked by the potential of liberation within the inner work of each instant. It just may be the perfect companion for deepening the practices we call mindfulness in these

unprecedented times. -- **Rhonda Magee**, author of *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness*

This remarkable book offers a perspective on the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path that is at once solidly rooted in the canonical texts of early Buddhism, yet astutely attuned to the needs of contemporary readers seeking to navigate our frantic, directionless culture.

Kramer's treatment of each path factor is immensely insightful, marked by an abundance of detail and enriched by personal insights...drawn from decades of study and practice. While he bases his explanations squarely on the Buddha's discourses, he does not merely regurgitate old formulas, but provides an expanded view of the Path that extends its relevance beyond the domain of individual, private practice. -- **Bhikkhu Bodhi**, Buddhist scholar and translation

Reading this book gave me a deeper appreciation for the teachings of the Buddha. As I read, my heart welled up with enthusiasm for the opportunity to take a more thorough look at these eight areas of my life. It was wonderful how Gregory would connect these precious teachings to the challenges we are experiencing in this day and age— individual and social injustices, unconscious biases, and a need for greater compassion, including for the earth itself.

As a woman, a mother and grandmother, and biracial person of color, the concerns I have for humanity were given respect. Even for those who have been “on the path” for what seems a long time, I found this book offers an opportunity to up-level one's practice in new ways. -- **Kamala Masters**, co-founder, Maui Dharma Sanctuary; guiding teacher, Insight Meditation Society

Wise, innovative, clear, and rich, Gregory Kramer's *A Whole-Life Path* brings the traditional Noble Eightfold Path to modern-day life, offering practical and essential methods for how to live our happiest, most wholesome lives right here in the spin of things. Drawing from a lifetime of practice and deep meditative insight, as well as experience in bringing these practices home, Kramer goes right to the heart of the matter...Especially in our time of uncertainty and groundlessness, this book is a must-

read for all who are looking for a clear path towards happiness, wellbeing, and sanity no matter what. -- **Devon Hase**, author of *Hot Not to Be a Hot Mess: A Survival Guide for Modern Life*

About Gregory Kramer



Gregory Kramer teaches meditation, writes, and is the founding teacher of the Insight Dialogue Community. He is the author of *Insight Dialogue: The Interpersonal Path to Freedom*, from Shambhala Publications; *Dharma Contemplation: Meditating Together with Wisdom Texts*; *Seeding the Heart: Practicing Lovingkindness with Children*; and other books and articles. Gregory has practiced meditation since 1974, and studied with esteemed monks, including Anagarika Dhammamma, Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thero, Achan Sobin Namto, Ven. Punnaji Mahathero, and others. Since he began teaching meditation worldwide in 1980, he has pioneered online meditation and contemplation practices. His primary focus since 1995 has been developing and sharing Insight Dialogue, an interpersonal form of Buddhist insight meditation, and groups are now active worldwide. He also developed Dharma Contemplation, a text-based contemplation practice.

Gregory holds a Ph.D. in Learning and Change in Human Systems from California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). He co-founded “Harvest With Heart,” a hunger project in the Northeast United States, and Spiritual City Forum, an interfaith dialogue program in Portland, Oregon.

Formerly a composer and NEA Composition Fellow, he has made significant contributions to music technology, and holds multiple patents in the field. He is recognized as the founding figure of the field of data sonification. He founded the International Conference on Auditory Display (ICAD), published the first book in that field, and edited numerous white papers and journals on the topic. He holds patents in sonification and has lectured internationally in the field. Gregory lives in Orcas, Washington, is married and the father of three grown sons and has seven grandchildren. To learn more about Gregory Kramer, please visit gregorykramer.org. To learn more about Insight Dialogue and the Insight Dialogue Community, please visit insightdialogue.org

Excerpts from *A WHOLE-LIFE PATH: A LAY BUDDHIST'S GUIDE TO CRAFTING A DHAMMA-INFUSED LIFE*

Excerpt One: (pages 10-14)

Word count: 1106

The Human Predicament

You and I are so sensitive. Virtual clouds of nerves wrapped in skin, we are drawn to or repelled by every touch. The slightest changes of light trigger responses in the eyes; the slightest changes of air pressure alert the ears to the unexpected. Molecules from afar touch the nose; those nearby touch the tongue. Electrochemical changes in the brain register as thoughts that touch the mind. And when what contacts our senses is perceived as another person, neural and hormonal processes that evolved with the brain itself activate. All of these things are happening right now, as you read these words. Your sensitivities and mine are meeting right here.

This is how we meet the whole world. Placed in an environment in constant change, we organisms seek air, food, safety, and the comfort of others. Affection and loneliness, competition and fear, anger and isolation join the sharp and soft touches of the material world. But that world is out of our control. Hungers drive us, but we can't have what we want. The fragility of the body assures a constant flow of pleasure and pain, injury and illness, aging and loss. We feel belonging and isolation, protected and traumatized. This sensitive life culminates in our own death and the death of those we love.

The body-mind's sensitivity is the seedbed of longings and their occasional gratification. The entire organism tenses against the world's sensory and social onslaught, hungering in vain for stability and settling instead for temporary pleasant stimulation. We interweave with others to satisfy cravings and enhance protection; relationships and groups also become loci of action. Pings of pleasure cause a reflexive grasping as we struggle, individually and collectively, to hold on to what we like and avoid what we don't like. This tension forms into a core sense of self, an "I" or a "we" that would be protected and satisfied. The self's appetite keeps us off balance as it clings to one thing (or person or group) and then another. Gripped by its project of satisfaction and becoming, the body-mind is blind to the fact that its suffering is self-inflicted.

There are no moments, no events, no interactions, no relationships that do not affect the body-mind. Every thought and action, here and now, combines with all we have done and said to

determine the direction and tenor of our individual lives and society as a whole. Learning, memory, and family and cultural conditioning collude to form how we perceive the world. There is no moment when we, as individuals and as a society, are not navigating the body-mind's responses to the world, because every moment conditions the next.

The question is, how are we navigating these responses? If we choose to let wisdom guide us, our responses are intentional, and our movement through this life is conscious. If we choose to ignore our power to learn, our responses are habitual, and our movement through life is unconscious. Depending upon which choice we make, there is suffering or there is peace; there is cruelty or harmlessness.

The Promise of the Noble Eightfold Path

The Buddha recognized the suffering born of the body-mind's endless appetite, and despite the enormous challenges presented by his own untrained mind, he found his way clear to setting down the burden.

He described the human predicament in the Four Noble Truths. The first noble truth is the suffering (*dukkha*), at once blunt and subtle, of the driven life. His second noble truth recognized that suffering is born of the sensitive body-mind's endless appetite. The organism's longing for pleasure and stability is the urgent energy, the hunger (*taṇhā*), that drives suffering. His third noble truth, that cessation of this hunger will free us from the self-inflicted pain of *dukkha*, provides a wholly new vision of human and social possibility: we need not be prisoners of our own ignorance and craving; a profoundly better life is possible for ourselves and for all. The fourth noble truth names the Noble Eightfold Path as the wisdom that, when applied intentionally, leads to a diminishing and even cessation of the ignorance and hunger that has been so painful for ourselves, so limiting to our relationships, and so harmful for society. The wisdom inherent in the Buddha's path allows us to navigate the body-mind's responses with greater dignity, choice, kindness, and the joy and equanimity intrinsic to awareness.

The Noble Eightfold Path, described by the early Buddhist texts and carried forward in multiple Buddhist religions, draws from the exceptional experience of an exceptional teacher. These teachings were offered as practical guidance for navigating the tangles at the intersection of the human organism and its changing environment, and the perspective is offered by someone who successfully traversed the path from bio-psycho-social reactivity to freedom of response

within this very body and mind.³ The Buddha’s eight path factors—right view (sammā dittṭhi), right intention (sammā saṅkappa), right speech (sammā vācā), right action (sammā kammanta), right livelihood (sammā ājīva), right effort (sammā vāyāma), right mindfulness (sammā sati), and right samādhi (sammā samādhi)—provide guidance for developing the mind and acting in the world. The teachings have been tested for millennia. They offer a wiser, more effective navigation system than whatever we might cobble together from our family, cultural, and formal education.

A Whole-Life Path: An Immersive Path for Buddhist Laypeople

How much of the Path’s full promise we experience depends on how we engage it. When we dabble in the teachings, we can experience a fraction of its liberative power, but not enough to fully escape from the body-mind’s relentless habits or offer our highest gifts to a suffering planet. To bring about the profound shifts we aspire to, both within ourselves and in our world, we must bring the teachings into every corner, every facet, every moment of our lives.

Historically, an immersive life has been available mostly to monastics, whose vow essentially stipulates a whole-life engagement with Buddhist principles and practices. But the

Buddha’s eight path factors can be applied to the totality of our lives as laypeople if we break down each path factor to its essences, then recast it with the assumption that each must encompass life as we actually live it today—with other people, sex, money, social injustice, technology, jobs, complex financial systems, and so on. A whole-life path is one in which the eight path factors are understood and intentionally applied in such a way that, taken together, no moment and no aspect of our individual or collective lives is left out.

³ This combination of the Buddha’s humanness and his liberation is condensed as “Refuge in the Buddha.”

Excerpt Two (pages 18-20)

Word count: 662

Six Tenets for a Whole-Life Path

From the beginning, my experience of the Buddhist path was inspired but fragmented. Formal meditation could be peaceful; daily life was agitated and crammed. Meditation retreats felt great,

but I felt a split upon re-entry into everyday life. Elevated states gave way to the messy and confused “me” I was trying to improve. The beauty of giving and the power of morality, like the blissful states described in the discourses, felt a long way from my rumpled life. I longed for continuity, and I unconsciously believed it would manifest as a continuity of the mindfulness I experienced in sitting meditation practice. Yet how could that kind of continuity ever develop given my jumpy mind and busy life?

At the same time, it was painful to encounter my own unkindness. Experiences of pride, longing, and hardness made my mind hurt. The Dhamma sometimes felt far away. I had to consciously bring in questions that would reorient me: “Is this greed? What does it feel like?” “How am I fabricating a self right now around this conceit?” “Am I doing this nice thing out of kindness, hunger for praise, or both?” I didn’t know it at the time, but I was beginning to regard the Dhamma as a reference point outside the system of my conditioned views and personal Obsessions.

As I continued to study the Dhamma, the teachings continued to excite and inspire me. I assumed the teachings really applied to my life, but it wasn’t clear how I could implement them. Any time I interpreted a teaching as merely a description of my mind and life, the spark of conceptual interest I’d felt quickly faded. When I received that same teaching as a practice, something to be tested in my messy life, it invariably sprang to life as an embodied, richly textured experience. Likewise, when I interpreted the teachings as guidance for a unitary, heroic individual, they felt narrow and far away. As I learned to implement the Dhamma interpersonally and socially, the teachings became freely available and compelling to me.

The tougher life got, the more I felt called to put the teachings to work. I learned to tap into Dhamma wisdom in the midst of illness, death, emotional defeat, and the falls from grace that came with my privileged callousness. The Dhamma rose up in the hospitals I was staying in; in my kitchen, bedroom, and studio; and in all my relationships. When I excluded teachings that were difficult to absorb or held certain teachings at a distance, my path would reflect my narrow personality more than the Buddha’s uplifting wisdom. When I included my present experience of shame, regret, or loss in the light of the Dhamma, something always opened up beyond my fabricated worldview—always.

Gradually, a workable whole-life path emerged. As I reflected on how this emergence was happening, I saw a set of tenets naturally underpinning the path:

1. Ground in the Dhamma.
2. Engage all the teachings as practices.
3. Exclude no moment, experience, or teaching.
4. Find each teaching in the here and now.
5. Let all the teachings in fully.
6. Engage the teachings individually, in relationship, and socially.

These tenets have served me well as I've sought to apply the Dhamma to the whole of my life: to meditation, intimate relationships, work, and to my participation in the human family. They've applied, more intuitively than explicitly, in times of struggle, when my mind has been unruly and my actions unskillful. Rooted in my experience of the subtle beauty, piercing intensity, and aliveness of the teachings, these six tenets have provided the grounding I need to skillfully meet life's complexities.

These tenets aren't abstract principles or directions to be followed. They're principles of engagement—a means of engaging the Dhamma regardless of what we're experiencing or doing. Taken together, they support a working relationship between formal Buddhist teachings and our lived lives. From this relationship, our whole-life path—what we do and how we live—naturally emerges.