

# From Confinement to Our Spiritual Awakening



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**Text written by Alfredo Sfeir-Younis in the midst of the Coronavirus world confinement crisis.**

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Therefore, monks, you must train:  
“Strong must be our desire to  
undertake a high virtue”.  
“Strong must be our desire to  
undertake an elevated mind”.  
“Strong must be our desire to  
undertake high discernment”.  
“This is how you should practice”

***Lord Buddha***

# ***Preamble***

Confinement has been the most widely used mechanism to alleviate **COVID-19** in all countries of the world. Today, the most preferred medicine is called "*social distancing*"; in simple, to stay at home.

The net benefit produced by this instrument has been severely questioned by many doctors and specialists, and by people in general. For now, the official response has been that "*it is the only way.*"

However, it must be said, explicitly, that confinement is also a source of many other crises and of an endless number of negative effects, which are born as a result of these crises.

In other words, people recognize that this pandemic has gone far beyond health; it has also generated a human-emotional-spiritual crisis.

Being confined does not correspond to the genetic codes of human nature or any living being (such as animals). Therefore, the health crisis should not be the only focus of attention; although, it certainly is.

Many people have reacted against the policy of confinement, by promoting a rebellion in the opposite direction to this instrument as a possible solution to the pandemic: violation of social distancing.

The result is visible. This mentality is partly responsible for the virus spreading rapidly and more strongly in many countries, and for the present and future magnified economic and social effects embodied.

This attitude does not only respond to a desire to liberate oneself physically. This search for physical freedom represents a certain balancing mechanism generated by an inner crisis people have,

and which are neither recognized nor attended by the health authorities. In brief, for many, the confinement has great negative connotations.

We know that history is written today with thousands of deaths and millions of people living in fear, depression, stress, uncertainty and hopelessness. People are facing multiple forms of negative interference, all at the same time. We have been weeks and months waiting for this pandemic to end.

The virus has changed us in many ways. However, now is the time that we change the virus. As *Lama Gangchen Tulku Rinpoche* told us, we have to go from the **Corona Virus** to the **Karuna Virus** (Karuna means compassion in Sanskrit).

Today, in spite of all the problems, we have a great potential to transmute the virus through our own spiritual transformation. We have the opportunity to transmute the negative emotions into a new spiritual awakening.

Today, we are at a turning point, forcing us to restore a new "*normality*". This means building a new future, defining how we are going to "*regroup*" as a planetary society, and explaining where spirituality fits into this regrouping process.

For this reason, confinement gives us a great opportunity to contribute to our '*collective spirituality*', and to make a powerful spiritual appeal. Thus, it is in our hands that this confinement becomes a spiritual awakening.

This note is part of an important effort to begin "*a spiritual reconstruction*" (i.e., a regeneration of the soul). For this, we need to break down our barriers, our fences, through eliminating ignorance, fear, misconceptions and, very importantly, excessive interventions by our discriminating mind.

Also, we need to share "*the cognitive realization (sense)*" not only of the quantity but of the quality attributes of our lives. Both are the essence defining the spiritual content of life. Without this

cognitive realization, the collective spiritual regeneration of our collective soul will simply not happen.

My Spiritual Teacher and all the lamas I have come into contact with have told me in a very explicit and categorical way: this is the time to meditate, to do yoga and to practice silence.

Before this period of confinement, many people complained that they had no time for anything. How many argue that they do not meditate or practice yoga because they simply do not have time? I have taught some people a 3-minute meditation, and they didn't practice because of the lack of time. Today, time has stopped. Time has shrunk.

Today, Divinity gave all the time. All the time for you and your family. But Divinity has given us time in a very special way. While before the pandemic time was lacking, in a world that seemed to us of infinite time, today, it gives us infinite time under the circumstances of zero time. Time has shortened for the making of far-reaching decisions. Time has shortened to do nothing. The time has shortened between life and death.

What a great paradox!

# ***A Buddhist Practice: Samvega and Pasada***

We are living a world full of emotions. Within this pandemic, for the most part, and let's be honest, these emotions are mostly negative. Fear, loneliness, depression, loss of the sense of belonging, isolation... This is the time to transmute these emotions. In other words, moving from negative emotions to a new spiritual awakening.

Today, we have to recognize the need to establish a new spiritual awakening. Many people wonder about how to do it at a time we are experiencing many negative interferences and emotions during this pandemic. We are born in a world full of individual and collective emotions. There are several transcendental emotions that refer to ourselves like birth, disease, aging, and death.

In addition, there are other emotions to deal with, such as loneliness, the lack of resources to survive, the despair that some feel due to being confined...

In Buddhism, there is a fundamental teaching focusing on creating a path and a spiritual practice that would allow us to shift the realities unfolding from our negative existence towards our spiritual awakening. The teaching shows how to use the same negative feelings and energies of those experiences and emotions, and to walk towards our individual and collective enlightenment.

Generally, people stay in the negative, knowing that the negative is the source of more negativity. A cult to negativity is created.

This Buddhist practice is called ***Samvega and Pasada***.

To explain it in more detail, let us go to the life of **Prince Siddhartha**. He was a materially wealthy person. He was a prince, in a palace with all the comforts. He was married and had a son whose name was Rahul.

One day, his foreman, his only Master, approached him, and through the window showed him 4 situations of human lives: a sick man, an old man, a dead man, and a poor beggar. He also saw the Ascetics. For someone who lived in isolation from that reality, this represented an accumulation of negative emotions. He got a lot of anger, hopelessness, shock, and a great sense of alienation. He reacted very deeply to illness, aging, and death.

That moment of shock, and raw, clear and transparent awareness, is called Samvega. Sa-Vega, where "Sa" is a sense of urgency, spiritual strong movements, spiritual anxiety... A powerful and highly complex state.

In a sense, it surfaces when we are experiencing that state of shock. Confronted with this reality, the Buddha's inner soul decided to leave the palace. Leave everything, and go to the forest where the Ascetics were meditating.

He had to encounter those negative feelings. It was those feelings that motivated him to change. He demanded us to recognize these negative and non-ending cycles of negativity, which invariably repeat in our lives.

In Buddhism, these are called **Samsaric Cycles**. **Samsara** is a negative cycle that repeats continuously which, many times, we do not have the capacity to overcome. It was crystal clear to him that these states of aging and death were illusory in nature.

By leaving the palace, the **Buddha** needed to find the true meaning of life in a peaceful, mature and committed way. Motivation raised from those negative energies to eliminate meaningless cycles.

That wrath opened the inner space for personal transformation and, thus, the energy and clarity to defeat these states emerged. As we know, this led him to a great spiritual awakening and to create a new energy of peace, of tranquility, of serenity, to proceed with this transmutation. That new energy is called the Pasada.

**The Buddha** recommended cultivating these emotions daily. That is, recognize these negative emotions and the great sense of urgency in front of your life, Samvega, and create the necessary bridges of peace, serenity, and active commitment, Pasada, to reach a new spiritual dawn. A new state of consciousness.

In a way, the process of “realizing” comes from Samvega, from this negative energy, from this sense of urgency as a result of shock. It is through it, and in full awareness of it, that we can create a new future: through Pasada. Negativity can leave us in negativity. But negativity can also become the bridge, the springboard, for a new future. I have lived it many times.

It is the recognition, understanding and self-realization of the transcendental relationship that exists between Samvega and Pasada, which will allow us to regroup, create a “new normal”, and create a new paradigm in our societies. This will enable us to construct a new future.

But, all of the above-mentioned must be the fruit of a clear and serene trust, which allows us to get out of “that”, Pasada. The nature of the bridge between Samvega and Pasada also allows us to develop noble qualities:

- **Serenity**
- **Commitment**
- **Patience**
- **Regularity in spiritual practice**
- **Peace**
- **Self esteem**

**The Buddha** recommended 5 meditations that we should do regularly: get old and walk that path; be sick and walk that path; walk towards death; separation from what is most dear, detachment; and take responsibility for your actions.

Samvega and Pasada bring spiritual practice to life. A spiritual practice related to determination, commitment, the search of explanation and a more meaningful path. It seems vital to me to

say that the recommendation to practice Samvega should always be in balance and accompanied with Pasada. Samvega is also considered an expression of the "*vision*" of **the Buddha**, our emotional inspiration leading us to seek answers. Samvega is a very powerful Buddhist concept.

The ***Somanassa Sutta*** tells us that Samvega is the source of "*great mental relief*" (Somanassa Bahulo). Pasada is a serene trust, arising when a reliable way to approach Samvega is found. Pasada is the cure of Samvega. Pasada is a state of being. It is also a state of mind. In some translations of the Lotus Sutra, and in Zen Buddhism, the word Pasada is defined as pure faith, trust...

The important thing to retain here is that Pasada is not denial or resignation, or acceptance. On the contrary.

# ***Spiritual Awakening***

I would like to end by referring a little bit to our spiritual awakening.

Clearly, this can happen without us realizing it. Some will see it as a true miracle.

Buddha Shakyamuni had the ability to spiritually awaken many people. Its luminous presence caused the illumination of many. This was particularly seen by everyone when he taught **The Noble Eightfold Path**. Many disappeared. Thousands were transformed into Arhants. That is the power of the spiritual presence.

Still, during his last minutes of material life, he did this. But, for us normal human beings, spiritual awakening is manifested through many spiritual practices.

Yes, a lot of spiritual practice. So I would like to share with you "*the seven factors*", "*the seven practices*" of spiritual awakening (Pali: *Bodddhi-Awakening – Satta-Bojjhangā*):

**Mindfulness (sati), to maintain awareness of the present reality (the true dharma); the investigation of the nature of reality, relative and absolute, individual and collective, etc. (dhamma vicaya); the energy, determination and effort required, (viriya); full happiness (pīti); relaxation, inner peace, tranquility of the body, the word and the mind (passaddhi); meditation as a form of conscious concentration, (samādhi); and the equanimity and acceptance of reality as it is, without craving or aversion (upekkha + yathā-bhuta).**

Use the experiences and lessons of your life to build the inner power that Samvega generates for you. Make this confinement a new awakening in your life. This is a unique opportunity, which you should not waste.

Time is now, your best friend. Silence is your best tool.

Reach the highest state of Samvega and Pasada, through spiritual practice, constant meditation, reading sacred scriptures, performing your own spiritual retreat.

Explore what is not ordinary, but profound. This is the time to practice. This is the time to meditate.

# ***Suggested Meditation***

## **Sati**

**Om Muni Muni Maha Muni Shakya Muni Soha**

## **Vicaya**

**Om Muni Muni Maha Muni Shakya Muni Soha**

## **Viriya**

**Om Muni Muni Maha Muni Shakya Muni Soha**

## **Piti**

**Om Muni Muni Maha Muni Shakya Muni Soha**

## **Passaddhi**

**Om Muni Muni Maha Muni Shakya Muni Soha**

## **Samadhi**

**Om Muni Muni Maha Muni Shakya Muni Soha**

## **Uppekkha**

**Om Muni Muni Maha Muni Shakya Muni Soha**

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