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Relational Buddhism: A Psychological Quest for Meaning and Sustainable Happiness – Maurits G.T. Kwee¹ (DEC09)

Abstract

In a quest for meaning and happiness this chapter gives an account of the Buddha as a practitioner of psychology, offers his way as a “new” Buddhist Psychology, and highlights a relational meta-view on the Buddhist teachings (the Dharma). According to Buddhist Psychology meaning is derived from the compassion and care for relationship with others in harmony within ourselves. Based on the pan-Buddhist essentials (core teachings), it goes beyond the “old” Buddhist Psychology (*Abhidhamma*) by reformulating the Dharma as a “social-clinical-neuro-psychology”. By emphasising the empty nature of “Transcendental Truth” and expounding “Relational Interbeing” that corroborates the Buddhist “not-self”, the psychology of Social Construction turns out to be a Buddhist teaching variant. Taking a psychological approach implies explaining the traditional interpretations that view the Dharma as a sky-god-like religion and a philosophy that regards the “self” as empty and the “positive” as an illusion. While deeply respecting all Buddhist denominations, Mahayana’s cosmology is inferred as an exoticism that might have outlived its usefulness. All of this implies a Kuhnian paradigm shift that requires a different language game in the Wittgensteinian sense. In order to regenerate the Dharma in daily practice, a psychological interpretation of some Buddhist keywords as well as a new “linguaging”, vocabulary, and idiom are presented. The Dharma postulated as a social constructivist psychology, a provisional premise de-colonized from Judeo-Christian thought, seems adequately equipped to serve secular societies of the 21st century.

Introduction

The quest for happiness had always been a central topic in the Buddhist tradition since its inception some 2600 years ago. As expounded by the historical Buddha in his way (Dharma), the focus is on practical methods to liberate human beings from emotional suffering as imposed by existential misery due to “the slings and arrows of outrageous *misfortune*”. The Buddha provided his students with a number of meditation practices enabling freedom from attachments through modifying activities which meaningful intentional activity (Karma) one is not always aware of. Most notable and currently well-known is the technique of mindfulness meditation meant to awaken the mind, i.e. to become aware of the “Dependent Origination” of correlated fluctuations of what the Buddha summarized as Body/Speech/Mind phenomena (thus spelled to communicate the wholeness of the referents the concept alludes to). Functionally interlinked they manifest as feeling-thought-action on the intrapersonal level and in “Relational Interbeing” (elaborated later) on the interpersonal level. The essence of mindfulness is not to prescribe morality, but to train introspection, i.e. to observe and describe pre-conceptual experience

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(before a conceptual subject-object dualistic division sets in), in order to be aware of Dependent Origination and Karma whose daily rebirths depend on a willy-nilly choosing and interpersonal relating.

The pinnacle of the Buddha's training method is to instill the embodied social practices of loving kindness (or warm friendliness), empathic compassion (which is not pity), and shared joy (which is not laughing at someone). These practices come to maturity in equanimity or even-minded balance (which is not indifference) through meditation in action (which is not navel staring). This has the potential to provide sustainable happiness, a graceful/blissful happiness of being at ease within oneself and with significant others despite existential suffering. Thus, from a Buddhist point of view meaning is derived from warm friendliness, compassionate caring, and harmonious relationships in balance with oneself in order to eventually secure everyone's enjoyment of a relative sane and happy life on the planet. This Buddhist variant of Positive Psychology is based on the ubiquitous principle of Dependent Origination which accommodates "the negative" by discarding the positive versus negative values' dichotomy as a pseudo issue. Balancing the Yin-and-Yang Buddhist Psychology offers a scope that happiness is a relative quality that co-dependently originates with unhappiness and which therefore cannot possibly exist in an absolute sense or in isolation.

In striving to cater the masses, pious and "sky-god" devotional habits and rituals have crept into the pristine Dharma which began as a "non-theistic" discipline declaring that the existence or non-existence of a god is anathema. Thus, when the Dharma was encountered and thoroughly studied by western scholars in the 19th century, it was categorized in western terminology and inferred as a religion and a metaphysical philosophy, while in present-day terminology it can also be classified, and more appropriately so, as an applied psychology. Buddhist Psychology matches best with relatively sane people seeking wisdom who, in the absence of severe psychopathology, advertently wish to deal with "existential neurosis" which is a type of emotional suffering due to the adversities of life itself (illness, aging, death, and birth). The first to recognize that the Dharma is a secular psychology was C. Rhys Davids (1900), who wrote on Buddhist Psychology based on a Pali scriptural text (a small part of the higher teachings known as the *Abhidhamma*, the third canonical book written by numerous anonymous scholars post the Buddha until the fifth century). Since then the Dharma is also viewed as a psychology, however up until today only by a minority. Recently Buddhist Psychology came out of this fringe position to become accepted by mainstream psychologists (e.g., Kwee & Ellis, 1997; Gyatso & Beck, 2006; Kwee, Gergen, & Koshikawa, 2006).

The present account reformulates the Dharma as a 21st century New Buddhist Psychology. Going beyond the psychology of the *Abhidhamma*, this is a "social-clinical-neuro-psychology" based on a social constructionist view of the Dharma which reconstitutes the mind as a manifestation of relationships. In the framework of a "Relational Buddhism" it emphasizes the empty nature of "Transcendental Truth" and expounds "Relational Interbeing" that corroborates the Buddhist "not-self". Grounded in an understanding that relational processes stand prior to the very concept of the individual, the psychology of Social Construction turns out to concur with the Dharma. In developing a relational account of human activity, tools are provided to redefine and revision ingrained religious and metaphysical views of the Dharma. (Extended accounts can be found in Kwee, 2008, Kwee & Kwee-Taams, 2006a, 2006b; the main tenets in this chapter are derived from *New Horizons in Buddhist Psychology: Relational Buddhism for Collaborative Practitioners* (Kwee, 2010).

Dharma and Psychology

From a Buddhist perspective, the greatest progress in psychology as a science is the unveiling of illusions blurring our daily lives. Illusions are ubiquitous, part of human

nature, and mostly beyond our control. Well-known are the various optic illusions like that of Müller-Lyer and there are many more we are not aware of; after all we have no eagle-eyes and we cannot smell like a dog. At this point in evolution, self-deception is inherent due to our limited and sometimes deficient mental apparatus. For instance, healthy people tend to underestimate the likelihood for future injury or illness which runs counter to the known statistics (unrealistic optimism), whereas depressed individuals seem to have a more realistic outlook toward risks (realistic pessimism). Generally, one is biased to becoming truncated by the positive illusion of optimism, which is not per se disadvantageous: viewing one's self in a favourable manner is a sign of well-being (Taylor, 1989).

A traditional, dual or polar, understanding of positivity is that it co-exists with negativity like the flip side of one coin (Wong, pers. comm.). However, what is considered to be positive or negative is, on a deeper level of reflection, far from static. As one man's meat could be another man's poison what is positive depends on the dynamics of relativity. Thus, positivity as a dualistic construction is an illusion. Existing by the grace of negativity, positivity is an abstraction that is personal, relative, and seemingly irreducible to neurology. To avoid an illusory positive, a Buddhist view proposes to "see things as they become", a seeing that strips off all illusions including I-me-mine/self identifications considered to be false. Less known but with a probably big impact on our trade is that the Dharma views "true self" as an illusion. Such self has to be unmasked to make a science of Buddhist Psychology possible at all. Peeling the "false self" layer by layer by digging into it deeper and deeper and putting aside conditionings and instincts, both Buddhist Psychology and mainstream psychology could not find a nucleus or essence of a "true self". Brain research fails to detect a CEO mastermind or some homunculus (Feinberg, 2000). Even though thought and affect have their equivalents in functional hard-wired processes in diversely activated and widely distributed areas of the brain, there is nobody and nothing of a static substance inside behind our eye balls. It is therefore appropriate to say "*it* senses, feels, thinks, behaves", similar to "it rains" as advised in mindful awareness meditation. The fruit of mindfulness is the ability to penetratingly see and thoroughly understand that emptiness is in the core of "true self". This is called an "awakening" to Buddhahood. Awakening is fostered by cultivating "pure" perception which precedes "intuitive" perception and "reasoned" perception. It was in the interface of the latter two types of perception that Kahnemann (2003) conducted his cognitive-behavioural research on decision-making which was awarded a joint Nobel Prize for Economics.

Buddhist Psychology makes a distinction between a relative and an ultimate level of reality. The existence of a relative or "provisional" self as an abstract construction is not denied neither is the referential use of the self incorrect (like in "myself" or "oneself"). The Buddha used the metaphor of the lute to elucidate self's emptiness. Music can only be produced by the unique combination of its constituents, the strings, box, and bow. Thus, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. In the same vein, a mind deconstructed in its modalities (feeling-thinking-doing) disintegrates like a decomposed body. It is like a chariot that is nothing but a temporary assemblage of its constituent components. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) dealt with this issue: where does inherent essence or quality reside if the bike is torn apart in its 10.000 pieces? Such is also the fate of a self that is composed by modalities when deconstructed. Emptiness is what ultimately underlies the illusion of self where one's identifications with a name, birthday, or passport provide the magic of solid continuity where there is none. To contend the ultimate, the Buddha expounded the wisdom of the "Three Empirical Marks of Existence" (Kwee, 2003):

- (1) The world is in a flux of impermanence whereby nothing remains the same, thus the true nature of things is empty.

- (2) Constituting Body/Speech/Mind, the self – existing in impermanence – lacks inherent existence and is thus also empty.
- (3) Due to craving for permanence/perfection and concomitant behaviours of grasping/clinging existential neurosis emanates.

The Buddha started his quest by deeply empathizing existential suffering and its causes, contended that they can cease, discovered how to cease painful emotions, and pointed on top at the cultivation of what is known as the prime Buddhist values: genuine kindness, compassion and joy. While Positive Psychology seeks happiness by living a hedonic, engaged, and meaningful life, Kwee (1990) – from a Buddhist perspective – submitted what has become a foundational tenet of Positive Psychology:

Up until now, psychological interventions and psychotherapy were mainly directed at eliminating negative conditions rather than promoting positive experiences, let alone spirituality. If psychology wishes to prevent and treat disease effectively, it will be necessary to develop new methods and instruments. (pp. 14-15).

Buddhist Psychology thus precursed Positive Psychology in making the shift from “negativity” (being problem-centred and repairing damage) toward “positivity” (emphasizing appreciation and enlarging assets) through meditation in action.

Research in Positive Psychology pointed out that the eudaimonic – engaged and meaningful – life is significantly satisfying ($p < 0.001$; Seligman, 2004), while the hedonic life is only marginally satisfying. Hedonic pleasures – ecstasy, rapture, orgasm, thrills, and the like – habituate like chocolate. Joy ensued from winning a lottery does not warrant lasting happiness. Prolongation of happiness requires dishabituation and amplification by skilfully spacing, varying, savouring, and “mindfulness”. The inclusion of the latter is not surprising considering its favourable outcome (e.g., Baer, 2003; Grossman et al., 2004; Shigaki, Glass, & Schopp, 2006; Toneatto & Nguyen, 2007). From a Buddhist perspective the Disney-like pleasure of raw feels is relative and to be enjoyed but not grasped or clung onto. If the temporariness and inherent unsatisfactoriness of hedonism are not understood, craving and greed are its consequences. These are hindrances in striving toward authentic happiness that will naturally appear if one is truly liberated from hoarding and attachment. Contentment, the middle ground between joy and sorrow, reflects the Buddhist way of life that concurs with the “chaironic happiness”, a term coined by Wong < www.meaning.ca >, which, in contrast to hedonic and eudaimonic happiness, is not related to positive events or personal virtue, but refers to happiness amidst adversities.

The Buddha: A Psychologist?

Needless to say that “psychology” and “psychologist” did not exist in the Buddha’s time. Psychology as a science emerged out of religion and philosophy and is based on Descartes’ 17th century artificial split of mind-or-body. This formally started in 1879 when Wundt opened the first psychological laboratory in Germany. There is an interesting analogy with the present status of the Dharma that is even today usually only regarded as a religion and a metaphysical philosophy or as a philosophical psychology at best, while it might better be inferred as an applied “social-clinical-neuro-psychology”. At this juncture in history, we are on the verge of transforming the Dharma from Theravada (the teaching of the Elders, one of 18 early Buddhist schools extant, practiced in Sri Lanka and South East Asia) and Mahayana (the “great” vehicle that allowed metaphysics slip through the back door, practiced in the Himalayas and northern Asia), into a “Neoyana” (a term to denote the new vehicle of contemporary psychology) within the framework of the Buddha’s “skilful method” (*Upayakaushalya*) that allows the Dharma to adjust itself to changing mentalities across times and cultures. Upaya legitimizes the Dharma’s past

variegated appearances as a religion and as a philosophy as well as its present manifestation as a psychology. Seeds of psychology can be traced in various passages of the Buddha's discourses < www.metta.lk >.

The Buddha dealt with self (or rather not-self) which is a core subject in psychology. Unlike the proliferation of self psychologies, Buddhist Psychology is the only not-self psychology to date. This could well become a foundation to establish a unified science of psychology, similar to what has been established in the exact sciences, where we find one science of physics, chemistry, and biology. As in the "Three Empirical Marks of Existence", the Buddha observed that suffering develops due to existence's pervasive impermanence and that the illusion of a perfect self/I-me-mine comes about by clinging to a non-foundational "empty" concept. As one's craving for permanence and grasping for perfection are in vain, the Buddhist advice is to detach from an eternal self or soul and to only admit a self as a "provisional" device. Such relative or empirical self serves a practical purpose as an index in daily life, like for instance having a name or an I.D.-card. The Buddhist awakening implies an in-depth understanding that, ultimately, there is no self. Whatever one says about an identified I-me-mine/self, it cannot ever be the same in the next moment of a flux. Self is thus empty and cannot be something else than an airy reified abstraction that cannot be captured in a non-abiding world. Awakening to not-self does not imply that one becomes an out-of-orbit, aimless, and vegetating organism without any desires; on the contrary, "empty of self" one preferably leads a life full of affect. It is incumbent to admonish not to confuse clients – plagued by a distorted self-image/self-concept – by zeroing in on not-self. As the Buddha exemplified in the following Jataka story < www.metta.lk >, life is lived conventionally as well:

Once, the Buddha spent a rainy night in a tavern. The inn-keeper was an opponent of the Dharma. To test the Buddha he gave him a room with a leaking roof. When the Buddha asked for another room, the keeper sarcastically asked: "How can a little bit of water disturb someone who has conquered all suffering?" The Buddha smiled and countered: "Indeed, a little water means nothing for someone who has conquered suffering, but if I want to sleep I don't want to swim..."

Another pointer indicating that the Buddha is a psychologist and that his Dharma can be inferred as an applied psychology is the illness metaphor in the awareness of the "4-Ennobling Realities": (1) there is suffering, to be understood (diagnosis); (2) suffering is due to ignorance, to be abandoned (cause); (3) there is a way out of suffering, to be realized (prognosis); and (4) this exit comprises an "8-Fold Balanced Practice", to be cultivated (therapy). This eightfold practice is indicated here as "balanced" view, intention, speech, action, living, effort, mindfulness, and attention. The metaphorical illness refers to a "dis-ease" of the mind rather than of a physical disorder and the cure is not the prescription of medication but the practice of meditation in order to act, think, and feel wholesomely (Kwee & Holdstock, 1996). The prime "dis-eases" alluded to in the Dharma are the three poisons *greed*, *hatred*, and *ignorance* (on the working of the psyche) which are to be *dis*-solved by increasing the positive qualities of kindness, compassion, and joy through daily balanced practice guided by a keen teacher.

The Buddha's holistic notion of Body/Speech/Mind concurs with the view of a 21st century mental health professional who endorses the World Health Organization's definition of a human being as a Bio/Psycho/Social system (Engel, 1977). Karma (intentional/meaningful action) impacts anyone's Body/Speech/Mind as cause and as effect, and requires to be dealt with in a "this-worldly" manner. After all, according to the Buddha: "In this fathom-long living body with perceptions and thoughts lays the world, the arising and cessation of the world" < www.metta.lk >. Obviously, by the world is not meant the world out there (in the Buddha's era of the iron age conceived as flat) or

somewhere in the beyond, but the world within the meditator's psyche with its data, called *dharmas*, the smallest units of experience which include "perceivables" and "thinkables" continually entering our sense doors. These are observable in mindfulness meditation. Because the Buddha dealt with the psyche and its concomitants, it is applied psychology which will strike the reader as his prime topic. Furthermore, the Buddha did not only discard religion by discarding the Brahmin (Hindu holy men) god delusions, he definitely did not show any interest in metaphysics either < www.metta.lk >:

The eyes and forms, the ears and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and tangible things, the mind and mental objects... If someone should set this "All" aside and proclaim another "All", it would be just talk... Because this would be beyond the limits of his abilities

It is a historical datum that the Buddha presented his Dharma as a non-theistic response, contending neither theism nor a-theism, to polytheistic Brahmanism (better known by its colonial name Hinduism). In his criticism the Buddha was quite humorous. In a discourse (*Tevijja Sutta*; < www.metta.lk > a Brahman named Vasettha discussed the Hindu teachings of the Vedas about the union with Brahma (the Creator) with the Buddha who asked him whether he or his teacher or his teacher's teacher even back to seven generations ago had ever seen Brahma. Vasettha's denial sparked the Buddha's derision of the opponent's logic by comparing his behaviour with a person loving a lady on sight but not knowing her name, complexion, dwelling, descent or, looks.

In his discourses the Buddha expounded not other-worldliness but this-worldliness and did not satisfy seekers of an eternalistic "all" or annihilistic "nothing". By keeping a middle way ("neither all, nor nothing"), he refused to formulate a final truth as this would not lead to an understanding how the mind works or would help to liberate from existential suffering.

From Philosophy to Psychology

The Buddha is renowned for his "classical unanswered questions", like on the questions: "Is the world and this universe eternal or finite?", "Are the soul and the body identical?", or "Will a liberated person exist or not exist after death?" According to the Buddha, these metaphysical questions will not lead to meaning. They will likely lead to speculation and generate religious issues which are not conducive to liberation or happiness. In line of this reasoning, for the Buddha dogma and creed are anathema as well as the soul, transmigration, and reincarnation, since all of these can neither be confirmed nor denied. In the *Kalama Sutta* the Buddha conveyed a charter of free inquiry < www.metta.lk >:

Do not believe on rumours or hearsay, because it is reported to be good, ancient or practiced by tradition... because it is in the scriptures or because of logic, inference or metaphysics... because the speaker appears believable or you are shown the testimony of an old sage. Do not believe in what is fancied, because it is extraordinary, it must have been inspired by a god or other fancy being... because of presumption or custom of many years inclines you to take it as true... just because of someone's reputation and authority or because he is a guru.

Thus, the Dharma is a discipline of free inquiry, a set of practices for students, who take nothing on blind faith and who do not own a personal holy figure or impersonal godhead. If the Buddha's words are inferred as hypotheses, the Dharma suggests a research-like method. The Buddhist community was and still is studious, rather than religious in the western meaning of the word. Consequently, it is against all forms of theism. There was no involvement in religious practices of Brahmins and god is simply not a subject matter.

Non-theistic not only means neither theistic, nor atheistic; it is even not something in the middle, but a non-conceptual embodied experience of emptiness. Meaning is constructed on the basis of this emptiness, which is also a scaffold to practice the revered Buddhist pro-social spirit. Thus, the Dharma is neither gnostic (god can be known), nor agnostic (god cannot be proven). God is simply irrelevant in the Dharma. The pan-Buddhist view acknowledges that the Buddha did not establish a religion, did not contend to be a godly/omniscient manifestation (messiah, saviour, or prophet), and did not derive inspiration from any deity or other external power. Nor did the Buddha claim to be other than a fallible human being. He not only discouraged rituals but also his adherents' wish to worship him. By not exceeding the interpersonal realm, the Buddhist spirit does not hover in the sky. To reiterate, it comprises down-to-earth kindness, compassion, and joy to be cultivated in meditative equanimity: to be spiritual is to be social. In other words: to be pro-social, which requires lots of energy and effort, is spiritual enough.

Regardless of the metaphysical beliefs cherished by Mahayana Buddhists, a New Buddhist Psychology is not concerned with the cosmological order of the universe. It shows more allegiance with the pan-Buddhist views, based on the Buddha's pristine contentions, which is almost exclusively concerned with the nitty-gritty of ceasing human existential suffering (by deconstruction onto emptiness) and the quest how to come to meaning (by reconstruction of the pro-social/positive values). The unadulterated interest is in developing an art of skilful responsiveness to the human predicament, which is a down-to-earth craftsman's approach comparable to the approach of a horse trainer. The Buddha was focused on sensing-feeling-thinking-doing-relating, i.e. what is effective to buoy contentment and how to alleviate anguish? Therefore, one might ask whether the Buddha was perhaps a psychologist *avant la lettre*? The scriptures refer to the Buddha's psychological insight on the mental effects of meditation, like in the *Sallatha Sutta*. If hit by an arrow, the untrained mind touched by bodily pain grieves and laments, while the skilled meditator will not be distraught. The untrained mind experiences two kinds of pain: a bodily and a mental pain. He feels pains as if hit by two arrows. But the meditator, if touched by bodily pain, grieves and laments not. He feels only bodily pain, not mental pain, as if hit by just one, not by a second arrow. In another narrative on a man shot by a poison arrow (of greed, hate, and ignorance), the Dharma is depicted not as a navel-staring philosophy but as an applied psychology. The man would die if instead of treating his greed or hatred immediately, one would first quiz the archer's name, caste, home, arrow's type, etc. < www.metta.lk >.

Viewing the Dharma as a psychology is a paradigm shift comparable to what western psychology has gone through in its evolution to become a science. William James (1842-1910), the founding father of American psychology, was one of the first who recognized the psychology that inheres in the Dharma and agreed on the notion of Karma (the interplay of intentional/meaningful cognition-affect and manifest interpersonal behaviour). He also acknowledged that compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. James (1890) broke new ground for psychology by addressing the functional value of mindful awareness that operates in the space of "pure" (pre-conceptual) perception:

And the faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is *compos sui* if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education *par excellence*. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about. (p. 424)

In 1904 he had the (later) monk Anagarika Dharmapala teach in one of his lectures at Harvard, on which occasion he allegedly said to the man from Sri Lanka to take his chair. After the lecture (apparently on the modalities of sensation-emotion-thought-behaviour-

awareness), James declared that this is the psychology everybody will be studying 25 years from then on. After James it was Maslow (in the 1950s) who recognized that the Dharma is a psychology.

Dharma as Contemporary Psychology

Since its encounters with western civilization, the Dharma got moulded into western categories. It does not exactly belong to: religion (according to De la Vallée Poussin; 1869-1938) or philosophy (according to Stcherbatsky; 1866-1942). As mentioned earlier, C. Rhys Davids (1857-1942) found out that the Buddha dealt with psychology and psychological issues. In her footsteps two other books saw printer's ink: *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Kalupahana, 1987) and *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology* (M. de Silva, 1979). These three authors are philosophers, not psychologists per se (although the latter also practices as a Buddhist therapist). Worth mentioning are the seminal writings by three vanguard psychologists: Mikulas (1978), P. de Silva (1984), and Kwee (1990), who linked the Dharma with Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy. It was only recently that Kwee and Kwee-Taams (2006b), who stand on the shoulders of these giants, offered a contemporary psychological account of the core Dharma that builds on - and goes beyond - the archaic *Abhidhamma*.

Their New Buddhist Psychology respects (not excludes) all previous Buddhist traditions by reformulating the quintessence of the Theravada (originally an oral tradition during four centuries, whose scriptures in Pali, called *suttas*, exceed the size of the bible 10 times) and the much later Mahayana (a written tradition in Sanskrit, whose scriptures, called *sutras*, exceed the size of the bible 50 times). All scriptures have been written by anonymous authors living in communities of brotherhoods as from the 1st century Before Common Era. The historical *suttas* and the later metaphysical *sutras* narrate the Buddha's discourses which rest on the Dharma's basic tenets. Obviously, the Mahayana writings, although composed in a discourse format, cannot be the Buddha's pristine words. Nevertheless, all Buddhist scriptures comprise commonly shared insights pan-Buddhist core principles, acknowledged by all denominations, through which if intensely gauged and deeply understood, an awakening à la the Buddha might be accrued (see Table 1; the reader is referred to Kwee [2010] for a full discussion of these fifteen subjects.)

Table 1: Pan-Buddhist Core Concepts/Terms/Themes of Buddhist Psychology

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- (1) The Four Noble Truths, here called the *4-Ennobling Realities* (as social constructions)
 - (2) The Eightfold Path, here called the *8-Fold Balanced Practice* (of relational processes)
 - (3) The Skandhas (psychological modalities of mind or self: feeling-thought-action)
 - (4) The "ultimate not-self" of "emptiness" and the "provisional self" for everyday life
 - (5) The notion of Karma: intentional/meaningful thought-feeling and concomitant action
 - (6) The "*dharmas*": the smallest "units of experience" ("perceivables" and "knowables")
 - (7) The "sixth sense": the mind's eye that perceives *dharmas* during mindful awareness
 - (8) The experience of Nirvana: a state/trait of extinguished unwholesome thought-affect
 - (9) The "three poisons": greed, hatred, and ignorance on self illusions and god delusions
 - (10) The Immeasurables: social meditations to augment kindness, compassion, and joy
 - (11) The three "Empirical Marks of Existence": suffering, impermanence, and not-self
 - (12) The Dependent Origination (of Relational Interbeing): a pivotal causality hypothesis
 - (13) The "twelve meditations" with mindfulness (observe and watch) as the general factor
 - (14) The foundations of mindfulness: the fluctuations of body/feelings and mind/thoughts
 - (15) The *patthanas*: 24 functional conditions and relations linking feeling-thought-action
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A key practice is mindfulness, phrased here as a metonym “there is no way to mindfulness, mindfulness is the way”. It comes down to striving at awakening to Dependent Origination and at choosing for wholesome Karma by: cultivating a sharp awareness by being attentive and remembering to watchfully observe in a receptive, focused, and compassionate way the stimuli entering consciousness via the senses and any feeling-thinking-doing passing in the spaces of Body/Speech/Mind. Thereby, noticing receptively (free of intentional interference) the internal stimuli attended to in a neutral mode (free from interpretations and evaluations) while surfing from-now-to-now without any direct goal (free from craving, grasping, and clinging), in “suchness” like a mirror. Mindful awareness is a *conditio sine qua non* for the twelve meditations, eventually meant to transform Karma, which attend the body (its breathing, behaviours, repulsiveness, elements, decomposing, and feelings) and the mind (its hindrances, aggregates, sense-bases, awakening, the *4-Ennobling Realities*, and the *8-Fold Balanced Practice*).

Contemporary Buddhist Psychology covers Body/Speech/Mind, the three levels of existence discerned by the Buddha. In present day terms these three layers require scrutiny by research in social-clinical-neuro-psychology (Kwee, 2007). At the neuropsychological level Austin (2009) reviewed studies from a Zen Buddhist perspective. Typically, the interest is in the topography of meditation and awakening (Hanson, 2009) as well as in subjects like: the EEG study on the “free won’t” of habitual responses (Libet, 2004), the neuroprosthetics technology (via implanted brain-computer interfaces) showing that the mind’s conation is capable to manipulate a cursor to command fresh behaviors (e.g., drawing or operating a TV remote control) (*Nature*, 442), the search for the Buddha’s “sixth sense” (the mind/brain that perceives the mind) in terms of neuroplasticity and dynamic brain circuitries (Varela, et al., 2001), the neuroimaging of not-self (“perceiving without perceiver”; Malach, et al. 2006; see: < www.weizman.ac.il >), the neurological correlates of awakening, supposedly the left prefrontal area connected to the left amygdala, specialized in positive affect (Davidson, et al., 2003), and the offsetting of age-related cortical thinning due to meditation (Lazar, et al., 2005). Notwithstanding the interesting findings, the present social constructivist Buddhist purview cautions for any claims of truth based on neuroscience. It is doubtful whether the cortical data accrued by techniques of brain scanning of reason and emotion will exceed the usual speculative guesswork and could really open up human mind to inspection.

On the clinical front research is accumulating on mindfulness in line with the growing interest of (mental) health professionals (Baer et al., 2004; Bishop et al., 2004; Germer et al., 2005; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006; Kelly, 2008; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009; Didonna, 2009). The practice of mindful awareness implies to be both technique and result of a nondual observing of *dharmas* (with small *d*). Since its start in 1979, Kabat-Zinn’s “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction” has been researched to such an extent that the American Psychological Association’s predicate “probably efficacious” applies. It has proven to be a valuable clinical component/adjunct in the treatment of chronic pain, anxiety disorders, binge eating, fibromyalgia, psoriasis, cancer, coronary artery disease, depression, obesity, prisoners, and non-clinical stress (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2009; De Vibe, 2006; Giommi, 2006; Kristeller, 2006). Relapse prevention studies on “Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy”, found to be effective in ex-patients with three previous depressive periods, have lead to its acceptance among cognitive-behaviour therapists (Segal et al., 2002; Teasdale, 2000; Ma & Teasdale, 2004; Kuyken, et al., 2008). Without vilifying or belittling the impact of these findings in sparking mainstream psychologists’ interest in meditation as an intervention, from a New Buddhist Psychology point of view, concern is expressed that, while earning the status of a pill, these “Buddhist Lite” approaches are drifting away from the Dharma as a Buddhist teaching.

The Dharma and Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy had a confluence at a historical summit in 2005 – 101 years later than James predicted – at the 5th International Congress

of Cognitive Psychotherapy/IX World Congress on Constructivism, when the 14th Dalai Lama had a meeting of minds with A.T. Beck, the founder of Cognitive Therapy. On this occasion Buddhist Psychology and psychologists were accepted in the mainstream area of the field (Kwee, et al., 2006). The confluence was further evidenced by the invited presence of the Transcultural Society for Clinical Meditation that was well represented via eight symposia on Buddhist Psychology. It is worth noting that much earlier another founder of Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy, the late Albert Ellis, declared Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy's allegiance with the Dharma (Kwee & Ellis, 1998; see also Christopher, 2003 and < <http://transcultural.meditation.googlepages.com/home> >).

Dharma and Social Construction

Uncovering “things as they become”, there is a Mahayana school named after the Flower Garland Sutra (Hua-yen), the only school originated in China started by Fa-tsang in the 7th century, which postulates notions strongly resembling those of Social Construction. The *sutra* reveals that the metaphysical realm is empty through a Lucy-in-the-Sky-with-Diamonds tale on a quest for wisdom through a developmental journey to awaken and become a Buddha (Cleary, 1993).

Sudhana (Good Wealth), a young rich merchant's son, followed the Bodhisattva (a Buddha-to-be) of Wisdom's advice and set out to learn the blissful course of conduct. During his wanderings far and wide, he encountered 53 teachers/friends (like a monk, physician, banker, king, brahmin, animal, slave, merchant, fool, boatman, boy, prostitute, and queen) symbolizing phases, principles, and virtues. Moving forward he discovered that life in itself is a teaching as each meeting is an enchanting educational adventure, meaningful to discover practices, dedications, contemplations, and meditations. Then, after a journey full of danger, after he gave up striving to attain or not attain Buddhahood, he met, high on a steep mountain, the Future Buddha from whom he learned to understand generosity, and who made him merge with the Bodhisattva of Virtue in radiating interconnectedness of “Indra's Jewel Net” that reciprocally mirrors appearing images in each diamond at every crossing of the net symbolizing the infinite interconnectedness of all beings. He then vowed to practice loving kindness, compassion, and joy, and to dedicate his life to benefit humanity. Ecstatic, Sudhana is able to see with an increased blissful clarity “the reality of things as they become in Dependent Origination”. Becoming equal to Virtue and all aspects of wisdom and compassion and delightfully experiencing the interpenetration of all beings on earth, he whispered: “there is no other, we are Interbeing” (the entrance of one into all and all into one, the non-obstruction of all phenomena, the non-duality of all Buddhas). But this was not yet the end. Climbing further, he finally arrived at the Cosmic Buddha's “Tower of the Highest Wisdom”. Standing in front of the door to enter this top room, he held his breath and opened the portal to find out that the universe is an empty bubble beyond dual projections and binary conceptions.

In full, humans are “biochemical-sensing-moving-thinking-emoting-relational-beings-in-Dependent-Origination”, whose minds usually function at the pre-rational, irrational, and rational levels, but rarely at the post-rational (wisdom) level. It is on this wisdom level that we are able to see and understand that to be means to be related. Life means being interconnected and socially embedded: there is no other way. Thrown from birth on into a social web, it is impossible to be self-contained. Anything that we can conceive of is injected by interpersonal meaning. Although we often take our being embedded in bonds for granted, interrelatedness is to stay from the cradle to the grave. Ensued from a history of interdependency, even our individual private worlds of *dharmas*

are encapsulated in an inextricable relational network. Looking outside in the social realm, we see mirrors of our inner worlds. Looking inside in the private realm (like in wall gazing meditation), we see the relational everywhere. And although we are dancing alone in the room, the interpersonal dimension is still omnipresent. Because we are intricately related to each other, it is safe to conclude that even anything appearing in the mind's closed privacy is a social construction. In such vision human beings are subsumed under a sublime meta-order of the interpersonal. This meta-vision necessitates a view of reality as a collaborative practice and an existential stance of caring responsibility for each other.

The metaphor of "Indra's Jewel Net" is particularly appealing to social constructionists who regard the individual psyche and its contents (i.e., feeling/thinking/behaving) as atomistic elements. Although not dismissed, "elemental" views lack the capacity to satisfactorily explain the vicissitudes of human functioning embedded in relationship. Like in the Buddhist vision, Gergen (2000) de-constructs the binary "inner-outer"/"I-other" and replaces it by a socially co-constructed relational self that necessarily repudiates the "individual self behind the eyeballs" as an explanatory entity. Due to "unobstructed" mutual identity penetration, each individual is interconnected with other individuals. Change in one individual results in a relative change in all other individuals through a web of interconnected relations. Individuals can only exist in the context of relationships, thus to be is to inter-be and to act is to inter-act. If from womb to tomb relationships precede the notion of the single person, the mind is not contained under the skin but is bound to be extended and reconstituted as a reflexion of interpersonal process.

The New Buddhist Psychology's love affair with Social Construction is centred round "Relational Interbeing" and mounts in what I have called "Relational Buddhism". This offers a social constructivist perspective of the Dharma and Buddhist Psychology. Focusing on interactions, the binary "you-me" collapses. It crumbles in emptiness. "Relational Interbeing" necessitates the emptiness of solitary selves, which is the Buddha's psychological proposition par excellence. Endorsing the view that an individual is a manifestation of a relationship and not an isolated independent being, persons are empty of the purely private. Even private thinking cannot be solipsistic as it ensues from a history of language and long lasting relations. The relational perspective does not discard psychobiology, but completes the picture of the human being as a Body/Speech/Mind system. "Relational Interbeing" is neither within body, nor within mind, but in its members' encounter and dialogue. For "Relational Interbeing" to become, the members must necessarily move like in a dance.

From both the Buddhist non-independent and social constructionist co-dependent perspectives, self is an atomistic agency, bounded, segregated, and alienated from the profound reality of Interbeing (*The Heart Sutra*; Thich, 1998) or Relational Being (Gergen, 2009, 2009a). "Relational Interbeing", as it is called here, is a milestone next to emptiness on the road of awakening to Dependent Origination. In the present quest for meaning, it is the understanding and realizing of our human interconnectedness which will, by superseding individual separation, lead to sustainable happiness. The future of global intimacy is bright if we are able to move on to collaborative practice of Social Construction. This stems from the discipline of social psychology and has at its start got nothing to do with the Dharma. However, by discarding "Transcendental Truth" and embracing the reality of the relational as standing prior to the concept of the individual, Social Construction definitely bears Buddhist marks.

Thus, not only "Relational Interbeing" comes to be, but "reality" in general as well (in Dependent Origination of collaborative practice). Both are defined by what the particular social group believes they are. In other words, reality is not a solipsistic matter. Not located within biology or psyche, it exists in the social experience: $2 + 2 = 4$ because we agree. Because reality is constructed between communicating people, it may be "true"

in one community, but “untrue” in another one. Beyond community there is thundering silence. “Absolute reality” and “truth” are at best provisional tools which are historically, culturally, and linguistically co-constructed by people and negotiated in a dance of meaning. Data are man-made, thus intersubjective and relative – space-time-culture bound – even if scientifically unveiled as facts. Vico (1668-1744) already contended that facts are man-made and constructed (*verum ipsum factum*). In a world of impermanence and imperfection, data and facts are conceivable as narratives to be amended and replaced by more adequate constructions going forward.

Toward a New Buddhist Psychology

“If you call this a stick, you affirm, if you call it not a stick, you negate: beyond affirmation and negation what would you call it?” (Ta-hui, 12th century). This is a famous *kung-an*, a Chinese word signifying a case of “jurisprudence” that has proven its utility to awaken (provide an “aha” experience). It is better known by its Japanese translation, *koan*, a kind of paradoxical riddle that cannot be solved by reason or language. Language is an instrument that functions like a map and is itself an active form of life within relationship. From a social constructivist perspective, theories are not telling us how the world really is, but are a medium to participate in a relationship. Using language we are eventually unable to tell the truth about the Buddha, the Dharma, or Social Construction. What matters is to be aware of the constructed and gaming character of language including the language of Social Construction (Gergen & Hosking, 2006). Unable to escape the social predicament of the local culture, all that one can conceive is a polyvocal narrative. This also applies to science as well as to the Dharma as a religion, philosophy, or psychology.

In Wittgensteinian terms, Dharma qua religion applies the “language game of religion” that inheres in intrinsic rules applied to a family of terms from which each word derives its meaning and out of which corresponding affect and behaviour emanate. In the same vein, a Dharma that uses philosophical terminology adheres to the rules of the “language game of philosophy” implying a fabric of relational stance and actions into which it is woven. The present proposition – to view the Dharma as a psychology – requires rules and actions of a “language game of psychology”; this language utilises words inhering in particular meanings and functions in the psychological idiom. These words are tools that help to structure conceptualisations of reality in a psychological way. Obviously, the Dharma’s psychological language game differs from other language games. Wittgenstein (1953) – on whose work Social Construction leans heavily – claimed that words derive meaning from their use in language games: words by themselves have no intrinsic meaning. Meaning is socially, not privately, constructed through the active use by members of a community that develop ways of speaking to serve their needs as a group. From a language game perspective absolute meanings do not exist. Consequently, science is as much linguistic and social. Buddhist cosmology is, against the backdrop of emptiness, an exotic *language game* that, although still appealing to many, might have outlived its usefulness. For instance, in the Buddhist “cosmos game” the world is played as a flat mandala, analogous to the thesis that the world is round. This is neither true nor false in terms of representational value. It is practical to play it round when flying from New York to New Delhi and useful to play it flat when walking on Wall Street (cf. Gergen 2009a).

The Dharma as a psychology tries to be the top game in town. If we agree on the proposition that psychology’s language game is most apt to serve 21st century “free thinking” humanity, it is imminent to get rid of the religious and metaphysical idioms that hamper the Dharma’s development as a psychology. It is an arduous task to unlearn old vocabularies and to adopt psychological interpretations of selected keywords as proposed below (Kwee, 2010).

(1) *Dharma* as disseminated by the Buddha is a *modus vivendi* rooted in meditation

practice toward emptiness and friendliness. It is not a religion that alludes to a creator, supernatural beings, and worshipping rituals; nor is it a philosophy, a theorized belief system on metaphysics, ontology, ethics, or politics. Colonial scholars trying to catch its meaning looked for a convenient category within their own vocabulary and moulded the god-less soteriology into a concept implying inaccurate notions: *Buddh-ism*. However, this Eurocentric fabrication has no classical Indian semantic equivalent. Considering that there is no western equivalent for the Buddhist Dharma either, the term seems to be better off if untranslated. In the absence of an exact Buddhist meaning, the term Buddhism might then be used as a “storehouse” containing every existing manifestation of the Buddhist Dharma. Thus, *Relational Buddhism* refers to a relational re-conceptualisation of the Buddhist Dharma in its totality. NB: Dharma with a capital “D” is differentiated from *dharma* with a lower case italicized “d” denoting the smallest unit of experience appearing as social constructions in protean versatility and changeable in form and content: *perceivables* (verbalized sensations) and *thinkables* (verbalized thoughts).

(2) *Dukkha* or suffering, a loose translation that is not per se incorrect, arises from non-satisfaction or discontentment which is not a moral punishment or sacrifice. It is dependently originated in existential *impermanence* due to the human condition of aging, illness, death, and birth, and of not getting what one craves for; life is imperfect and full of gnawing imbalances. *Dukkha* is omnipresent. Even if joyous and happy, there is a disquieting uncertainty to be endured as regards to what the next moment will bring. This gives rise to unsteadiness and uneasiness, here called *dis-ease*. Life does not spin around smoothly when adversity is met. *Dukkha* is a daily state of being which is stuck due to bearing agony, affliction, anger, angst, anguish, anxiety, aversion, discomfort, despair, frustration, hunger, grief, lamentation, misery, pain, sadness, sorrow, stress, and the like. *Dukkha* likely perpetuates and augments itself, and may become cyclical (*Samsara*) by the daily recurrence or “rebirths” of negative affective episodes. Life does not spin around smoothly when adversity is met. Sustainable happiness is hence necessarily *chaironic* (amidst adversity) < www.meaning.ca >.

(3) *Modalities*: the *Skandhas* are usually translated as “aggregates” or “heaps” and are viewed here as congruent to the BASIC modalities of psyche (Kwee, 1998; Kwee & Lazarus, 1986). This acronym stands for *Behavior* (referring to body), *Affect* (motivational), *Sensation* (perceptual), *Imagery* (visual), and *Cognition* (conceptual), all of which appearing in consciousness as *perceivables* (the visible, hearable, smellable, tasteable, and touchable) and as *thinkables* (conceivables, imaginables, memories, dreams, illusions, and delusions). Craving results in grasping and clinging onto illusory certainties and eventually in their piling in the *BASIC* modalities of which one can be mindfully aware. Mindfulness might sharpen awareness of the Dependent Origination, arising, subsiding, and ceasing of daily emotional episodes by recognizing the modalities involved, their interplay and firing order. Emotions like fear, anger, sadness, or joy move in a flux in conjunction with biological and relational processes, and imply their cyclical rebirths if not processed well. Altogether, the atomistic modalities constitute the “provisional self” that is subject to the conditioned habit of attachment. On the ultimate level, this I-me-mine/self is “empty” which is obvious when its nature as a reified abstraction is understood. *BASIC*’s emptiness implies that there is no soul in the machine with which to identify. Known as the Buddhist “all and everything” the *Skandhas* are a down-to-earth dismissal of transmigration and reincarnation (which is viewed here as a Tibetan atavism).

(4) A psychological perspective discards the common literal exegesis of the Buddhist lore, for instance of *The Six Realms* and of the demon *Mara*, viewing them instead as mental projections of inner states. Thus, the “realm of the gods” stands for bliss-pride, “demi-gods” stand for envy-struggle, “animals” for greed-ignorance, “hell fires” for hate-anger, “hungry ghosts” for craving-grasping and “humans” for doubting-clinging as well as for the potential of awakening. Instead of a seducing demon, *Mara* symbolizes the

Buddha's overcoming his four inner enemies of awakening: the five non-human realms mentioned above, the fear of death, the illusion of self or soul, and the delusions of god and celestial beings.

(5) Enlightenment, a translation of *bodhi*, is a term tasting Eurocentric if alluding to the 18th century European age of enlightenment. Based on Cartesian "modernist" thought, people came to belief in the light of reason and timeless truths, and to uphold the supremacy of rational-empirical and logical-positivistic science. However, the Buddhist "enlightenment" stems from *budh* meaning "to be wakeful and aware of (i.e., not asleep or ignorant)". Although the Dharma may elucidate, illuminate, and enlighten, it does so by means of "heartfelt understanding", rather than through the thinking mind (to be mindfully observed). The potential for *bodhi* inheres in everyone and simply needs uncovering like in the smelting process which separates gold from ore.

(6) *Nirvana* (from *nir* [un] and *vana* [binding]) is often erroneously inferred as a tangible paradise in the hereafter like in the Abrahamic religions of the early translators. However, the metaphysics of the beyond is at odds with a teaching of emptiness. In effect, Nirvana means *coolness* as a result of the *extinction of unwholesome emotions* due to the three poisons of *greed/grasping* and *hatred/clinging* engendered by *ignorance/craving* and their cognitive-affective-emotive-behavioural-interpersonal ramifications. While greed inheres in anxiety (fear of shortage) and sadness (grief of loss), hatred inheres in anger (other-blame) and depression (self-blame). Nirvana may also refer to the smiling contentment and happiness as an epiphenomenon while on the path. Nirvana as a state or trait disrupting Duhkha's rebirth is temporary when "hot" arousal keeps arising and enduring when death quenches the Samsara cycle.

(7) Instead of *Buddhist ethics*, suggesting a western type of formalistic theory, we are advisably skeptical as the Dharma is best described as a morality without ethics (e.g., the moral standards of Robin Hood differ from the sheriff's). The social constructivist "non-foundational morality of collaborative practice" is an appropriate re-conceptualization of a moral view rooted in differing interpersonal values and conduct. Because "musts" and "shoulds" are anathema in the Buddhist pursuit of free inquiry, Dharma's morality is based on interpersonal motivation. And as there is no morality without relationship, the focus is on the relational process itself in "reflective negotiation" and "transformational dialogue". This is exemplified in fairy-tale-like allegories of the *Jataka stories* where the Buddha allegedly lied and killed in certain life circumstances.

Closing Remarks

Viewing the Dharma as a *modus vivendi* based on Buddhist psychological insights as contended here is not a matter of course. Its acceptance depends on the culture one lives by and requires a paradigm shift in conceptualizing the Dharma (Gergen, 2000; Kwee, 2007). The "New Buddhist Psychology of Relational Buddhism" concurs with the social constructionist view that "truth" and "reality" are a cultural-historical narrative, a thesis that is conceptually dislocating. Few are prepared to go along with such wrenching view. However, for both Buddhists and social constructionists, who are adventurous, innovative, and resilient, the horizons are exciting if one dares to go ahead by:

- (1) Challenging the belief in the Cartesian type of knowledge – which separates body-and-mind and gives an account of reality based on rationality, testability, and objectivity – as *the* absolute truth.
- (2) Questioning the permanence of reality and the immutability of truth (like of "holy" books or cities): the meta-process of communality accrues intelligible co-constructions, not Transcendental Truths.

- (3) Viewing empirical data as social constructions, fabricated, and based on local agreements that lack everlasting foundations: science, a relevant narrative about reality, is not the “eternal truth”.
- (4) Pointing at the limitation of the positivist approach in finding timeless truths (while endorsing the indexing value of quantitative research) and valuing qualitative research as immediate social action.

A social constructivist New Buddhist Psychology deconstructs and reconstructs. It deconstructs by making the (by indoctrination) taken for granted delusion of a god and the illusion of an unchangeable self transparent. Although these are habitually viewed as real or true, they are social constructions. In order to deconstruct illusions language needs to be disillusioned. Language creates a picture of provisional reality, but cannot ever fully represent or express ultimate emptiness that can only be experienced. Language is to be understood as socially constructed maps serving a human purpose. Although deconstructing has a liberating effect, for it frees from the automatism of conditioning and literalization, reconstructing and alternative practices are still needed. The social constructionist way of reconstructing implies to keep on seeing how daily realities owe their existence to relationships and interacting networks. From this and the insight in the processes and potentials of Relational Interbeing comes forth the social constructionist practice to consequently appreciate and mutually accept each other (but not necessarily approving someone’s unwholesome behaviours). Both practices consider care for relationships as the most worthy value. The Buddhist caring of relationships is operationalized in the social meditations.

Loving kindness, empathic compassion, and shared joy practiced in meditative equanimity form the alpha and omega of Buddhist action. These practices exist since the Buddha’s time, some 100 generations ago. One can find instructions for these “immeasurables” in any Buddhist handbook; they aim to immeasurably multiply the Buddhist core social affects. A radical application in daily life is pursued until there is enough love to go round in the world. Recently it was shown that Tibetan monks who permeate themselves with kindness and compassion (an empathic understanding and an unconditional readiness to help) on a long term basis (more than 10.000 hours) alter the structure and functioning of their brain (Lutz et al., 2004). They show gamma wave synchrony, high frequency oscillations (40Hz), indicating that the brain integrates ongoing processes by transient varieties of widely distributed parallel processes of neuronal networks into highly ordered cognitive and affective functions (perception, attention, learning, and memory). This induced synaptic changes across different scales of the brain. The data suggest neuroplasticity. Contemplative practices, involving temporal integrative mechanisms, seem able to induce lasting neural change (like aerobics ability to sculpt the muscles), thus upgrading the brain to improved cognitive-emotional achievements.

The Nirvana of emptiness and the extinction of unwholesome craving are not sufficient in themselves. Meaning is derived from the daily practice of the social meditations. Thus, awakening – the experience that Duhkha has ceased – is just the beginning to be better able to help others. Because Karma (meaningful intentional action) starts with emotions, emotionality, and emotional vicissitudes, evidence-based cognitive-affective-behavioural/interactional tactics implemented through collaborative practice in interpersonal relationships, which include Buddhist meditation, belong to the most straightforward scenarios to work toward positive affect and eventually happiness. Such might be called a self-applied “Karma Transformation”. Interestingly, the concept of intentional activity recently appeared in Positive Psychology’s happiness literature, without however alluding to Karma (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Research suggests that sustainable happiness is determined by three factors: a genetic set-point (50%), circumstantial factors (10%), and intentional activity (40%), a window of opportunity to

be happy which from a social constructionist's view is necessarily within relationship. Humans are equipped by an idiosyncratic genetic set-point for happiness comparable with a set-point for weight or length which is hardly modifiable. People with high set-points will find it easier to be happy, while people with low set-points will have to work harder to achieve and maintain happiness under similar conditions. Long term overall circumstances include demographics which happen to us like age, health, education, money, country, religion, or marital status. While these factors matter, they determine a small percentage to happiness, do not impact long-lasting happiness, and only deliver short-lived boosts of happiness. Happy people make things happen and their activity spins off a by-product which is happiness over and above the genetic set range and life circumstances.

Granted, there are different strokes for different folks and Karma Transformation is not particularly suitable for the faint-hearted. The faint-hearted would rather profit from a list of dos and don'ts of a "holy" book, heavenly ethics, hellish morality, and from the metaphysics for saints and sinners. However, for the mature, who has the capacity to freely think, pick, and choose, who wishes to decide for her/himself in joint collaboration, and who does not want to blindly follow "holy" dead men and their rules, there is a psychological roadmap that might generate sustainable happiness for all in interrelatedness.

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