

Chapter 13, Avoiding the influence of Identifications and latent Tendencies in The Buddha's Gift: A life of WellBeing and Wisdom. Copyright Rodger Ricketts, 2017. All rights reserved. Protected by international copyright conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever, or stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, without express permission of the Author-publisher, except in case of brief quotations with due acknowledgement. Published through CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Avoiding the influence of Identifications and latent Tendencies

On his Path to the Buddha's mind, as Gautama discovered how the self is cognitively constructed, he discerned the importance of the phenomenon of identification or *tammayatà*. In social psychology, identity is distinguishable from identification; identity is a label, whereas identification refers to the process. Identification is the process whereby a person assimilates an aspect, characteristic or attribute of another. Therefore, the core meaning of identification is, in simple terms – to be like or to become like another.

Since this proliferated and expanded self is always created by a bifurcation of the world of “self” and “other” or ‘myself’ and ‘us’, the world becomes increasingly experienced as a dichotomized ‘other’. By identifying a person has an increased feeling of specialization and separation between ‘self’ and the outer world, which creates self-encapsulation or boundedness. This subjectification of what is cognized creates judgments of ‘like’ – to crave, to grasp and possess that which is liked; or ‘dislike’ – aversion, and the desire to expel what is disliked. The liked object becomes imagined to be possessed as ‘me/mine’ while the disliked object rejected as ‘not me/mine’. These resulting value judgments (e.g. “I like and identify with these people, but not with those people”) often lead to embracing ‘group think’, and other biases resulting in narrow judgmental attitudes, envy and conflict.

As described in the Buddha's teaching, through the process of identification, an identity is created when one becomes – through craving, grasping, conceit, and views – attached, emotionally entangled, affected and united with concepts judged as liked or the opposite with the disliked. An expression of this phenomenon has been described as identifying with the ‘in-crowd’ or clique and contrasting or disliking the ‘squares’ or other disparaging labels.

Cognitive and Buddhist psychology teaches a broader meaning of identity

beyond the social aspects. We identify with and psychologically attach to not only people, but also objects and concepts that can remain and lie dormant in the schemata as latent tendencies below the conscious level. While latent, these tendencies can become activated during the perceptual processes: through contact or during a sense impression at any of the six sense-doors (i.e. the five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, or the processes of the mind).

The process of perception is normally experienced as a conditioned sequence, and functions in this way: with contact via sense entry and sense datum – feeling and cognition arises, thought emerges, which in turn stimulates conceptual proliferation. Therefore, to intercept and transform our habitual identifications bound in memory most effectively, we focus our awareness and objectify the processes of the mind in the present moment, thereby, becoming aware of the latent cognitions that reside in the pre-conscious state. A simile commonly used in the suttas is that this process of becoming aware of the non-conscious is like switching on a light in a dark room so that what was unseen becomes seen.

Taṇhā is defined as a mental state of craving, either for or against; craving for continuing or acquiring that which is pleasant and craving to get rid of or repelling that which is unpleasant and for neutral experiences or feelings. Taṇhā is a principal cause of suffering in the world and it is an egotistical desire based in ignorance. This type of desire is contrasted to chanda which is translated as positive, non-pathological and wholesome desires such as to apply oneself to a wholesome action such as meditation, to benefit others, or to follow the Buddhist path.

Ultimately, our suffering arises from selfish cravings and grasping for or against our feelings/sensations. The greater the craving, more is the agitation, tension and frustration. Yet, when we maintain knowing with equanimity, we transcend and halt the harmful proliferation of fascination with taṇhā or our egotistical craving/desire or aversion. Insight meditation encourages meditators to maintain a constant and unaffected knowing (mindfulness) of their sensations/feelings and any associated desire, craving, or aversion that arises into awareness. Doing so, extinguishes any attachment. The Buddha did not even grasp the most refined pleasure associated with liberation, *'This was the third true knowledge attained by me in the last watch of the night. Ignorance was*

banished, and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who abides diligent, ardent, and resolute. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.'

We accomplish equanimity in both formal meditation and everyday life situations. Through the composed observation of either unpleasant or pleasant sensations while they arise, manifest, fall away, we eventually bring our latent tendencies of craving under control. Remembering and applying this discovery by the Buddha, helps us transcend the habitual, non-conscious unwholesome behavior patterns. With cultivation, we learn to observe our respiration and sensation and remain balanced and calm, even in high-risk situations. With this balance equanimity at deep levels of the mind, we become capable of responding instead of reacting. "When I look back on my knee-jerk reactions now, I realize I should have just taken a breath." (Fred Durst)

A reaction is instant. It is driven by the beliefs, biases, and prejudices in the non-conscious mind. A reaction is based in the moment and does not take into consideration long-term consequences of what we do or say and we often regret it later. Instead, a response is based more on deliberations from the conscious mind. A response is more careful about the overall wellbeing of all, therefore, it better examines any long-term effects and is more congruent with our Buddhist core values. Instead of automatically reacting to the negativity of others, for example, we can choose a wholesome, virtuous and skillful response.

When confronted by someone with anger, an unskilled person reacts with anger, and the result is a quarrel of two angry people that further creates more unhappiness for both. However, if we remain calm and balanced, we can better help an angry person emerge from anger and cope more constructively with the problem. Whenever we are overwhelmed in negativity, we suffer in mind and body. Therefore, when we calmly and objectively see others reacting negatively, we understand that, like us in a similar situation, they are stressed, confused and suffering. After all, mental unwholesomeness – our own and others' – is the root cause of the sufferings of the world. With this understanding, we can easily feel compassion for other people and we can act to lessen their misery by not entangling with and strengthening that misery. We can remain peaceful and happy and help others to be peaceful and happy. When the mind has become mature, a broader range of life responses opens before us, and we can enjoy and share with others real wellbeing. The establishment of this wellbeing is not

through self-denial or repression, but liberation from our ignorant belief of static, encapsulated self that constantly reacts mindlessly and habitually.

To practice non-attachment, it is important to witness our thoughts, feelings and behaviors objectively, creating some psychological distance from our subjective experiences and suspending without adhering, judging, or being critical. The Buddha taught people to notice anger arising "without self", to dis-identify with the anger, and not attach their "self" to the anger. Instead, we knowingly observe our anger, our physical response and fully understand it as a transient 'wave' phenomenon; the anger arises, abides, changes, and passes away. Later, there can be time for rational analysis, however, not while observing.

To facilitate this intervention of observation and self-inquiry, we can prompt ourselves by asking: What thoughts am I having? What feelings am I having? How is my body reacting right now? How am I responding? This practice of dis-identification and objectification helps us acquire more accurate self-knowledge while at the same time not automatically reacting. We can practice dis-identification in every situation of the day.

The accomplishment of the complete extinguishing of craving or nibbāna is an act of knowing. A person who has eradicated craving and grasping is one 'released by understanding' and 'through dispelling of ignorance comes release by understanding' (AI 61). The amount and type of development needed for awakening varies according to each person. With the insight method, which integrates meditation as knowing, the practitioner, not just by faith, can personally verify for him/herself, the truth of the teachings of the Buddha.

Techniques for dis-identification

"Dis-identification, the capacity to observe myself, is a wonderful tool and practice that^[18] can give self-knowledge in an objective way." [60]

Tomás Agosin

In his development of psychosynthesis [18], psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli asserted, *"The direct experience of the self, of pure self-awareness... – is true."* He also recognized the illusion and risks of believing in our identifications. Central to Assagioli's doctrine was *'self-realization and the interindividual psychosynthesis of social integration...the harmonious integration of the individual into ever larger groups up to the one humanity'*. He created several

techniques to help his clients see behind their certainty and belief in their cognitive constructions. The following intervention helps for moving towards realizing the primary awareness of the original mind and away from static cognitive encapsulation. As developed by Assagioli, it uses the principle of affirmation through negation, which can have a powerful desired effect. For example:

I have a body and sensations, but I am not my body and sensations. I have feelings and emotions, but I am not my feelings and emotions. I have a mind and thoughts, but I am not my mind and thoughts.

I am I, a center of pure self-consciousness and of will.

Also, a shorter version can be used: *I have a body but I am not my body, I have feelings, but I am not my feelings.*

An instruction Assagioli taught is the following:

'My feelings and emotions are diversified, changing, and sometimes contradictory. They may swing from love to hatred, from calm to anger, from joy to sorrow, and yet my essence – my true nature – does not change. I remain. Though a wave of anger may temporarily submerge me, I know that in time it will pass; therefore, I am not this anger. Since I can observe and understand my feelings, and can gradually learn to direct, utilize, and integrate them harmoniously, it is clear that they are not my-self. I have feelings, but I am not my feelings. Yes, there is a potential for anger that can arise easily within my body, but it's seldom there and it arises only under certain conditions. And those conditions are when (...).'

Assagioli referred to this process as 'dis-identification' by finding our natural awareness (original mind) behind our many identifications. At the heart of psychosynthesis lies the continued practice of dis-identification that weakens our habitual schemata imbedded in our subjectivity. Like the Buddhist experience of glimpsing the original mind, psychosynthesis interventions create for a person a more conscious connection to unfettered [a10] [A11] awareness, and, hence, becoming more integrated, develop a greater sense of connection and responsibility to him/herself and the 'greater whole' – the planet, community and our interbeing with all things. Therefore, there are numerous benefits of the incorporation of psychosynthesis 'dis-identification' practices in our relapse prevention program of the middle way path to awakening.

Similarly, psychiatrist Dr. Tomás Agosin, in his article published on Seeds of Unfolding [60] (Agosin, 1985), affirmed that, *'In this way, dis-identification leads to an expansion of awareness because, by separating myself from what is transient – thoughts, feelings, reactions – I can be centered in what is not bound by time and space. There is an aspect of my consciousness that does not change – it only "is." That "isness," that pure consciousness, is my capacity to observe myself. If I can remain centered in the transcendent, I open myself to life with a new awareness. I can then integrate the transcendent and the contingent at each moment, because both dimensions exist always.'* When the 'I', which is maintained by memory and reinforced by habit, is transcended, one's experience is not, anymore bound by time and space [61] (Kihlstrom et al., 2003). Instead, my awareness becomes pure and empty of conceptualizations – my inner refuge or sanctuary. Interestingly, on a more modest level, after a thought has dispersed but just before a new thought appears, there is an 'empty', no-thought, quiet moment, where structure has not yet congealed – the refuge. A useful meditation practice is staying in and even trying to expand this empty thoughtless moment and increasingly abide within it.

Our practice of dis-identification, which frees our original mind from behind the layers of cognitive veils, is to not identify with our thoughts, but simply to recognize their insubstantial, dreamlike nature and allow them to transform and dissolve of their own accord. When we identify with a thought's contents and point of view, we become absorbed in it and incarnate it in a way that limits our mature mind. The immature conscious mind is unknowingly tied to its constructions by a fascination, grasping, and unconscious identifications. Our beginner's mind or creativity becomes trapped and bound and stifled. Nevertheless, acknowledging the fabricating power of our thoughts, allows us to become the authors of our scripts, instead of being created by them. Recognizing that normally we experience this moment through the 'coloured' schematic lens, empowers us to disengage and transform our cognitive experience, and, by extension, our interaction with the environment we exist in.

When not revealed through conscious analysis, the non-conscious identifications create the self with its compulsive acting out. The realization of this enlarges our perspective, removing our self-generating, narcissistic trance of the representational self, and connects us with the 'whole' through the comprehension of interbeing. The emotional expression of this realization is

compassion and affinity. The original mind is the source that prompts the development and realization of its natural state through which eudaemonia desire guides us for its actualization through knowing awareness. We realize how we can transform our citta or mind/heart and develop discernment into the dreamy habitual experiencing of life, as well as awakening from the previous illusion-like nature of unexamined reality. Thus, through the various interventions of dis-identification, we transform and refine our awareness, remain grounded in the vibrational interconnected present, and come again to know our original mind.