

Actualizing our Human Potential. By Rodger R Ricketts, Psy.D. A chapter in the book, The Buddha's Gift: A Life of Well Being and Wisdom. Copyright Rodger R 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. Self-published in CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

“In contrast to the approach of this book, many psychologists talk about how it is healthy to develop a strong ego, a good self-concept, a strong character, etc. Any such image of myself is a fantasy, an idea. To the extent that I am preoccupied with this fixed idea of myself, I lose touch with the flow of my actual present experiencing. At best a strong self-image will cause me to become a rigidly predictable, socially useful automation - a person who identifies with an idea of myself instead with the reality of my actual feelings, experiences, and actions. My living becomes split between image and reality, between what I think I am and what I am.” [3] John O. Stevens

“Buddhist philosophy is ethical first and last. Buddhism set itself to analyze and classify mental processes with remarkable insight and sagacity”. [4]
Caroline Rhys Davids

‘We do not possess an 'ego'. We are possessed by the idea of one.’ [5]
Wei Wu Wei

Actualizing our Human Potential

“We live our lives in relationship; we have a choice to live in dependence, independence, or interdependence.” [6] Stephen R. Corvey

‘What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself’ [7]
Abraham Maslow

Everyone seeks the natural wellbeing, peace and harmony, which is inherent in all of us. However, how is it possible for us to develop and remain peaceful and harmonious with our self, and endeavor peace and goodwill with the people and world around us? When we crave for something or events that are contrary to

our desires and wishes would occur, we start generating heightened tension and negativity in our mind and easily become agitated. The common result is stress, anxiety, disappointments, conflict, and even depression. In fact, personal peace and harmony cannot co-exist with such a negative state of mind. So, we ask ourselves, how can I not react heedlessly to things I crave for or do not like? How can I remain in my natural potential of ease and goodwill and wisdom and not create heightened tension? An answer is in the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha's original teachings are not a religious doctrine divinely revealed to him as he meditated under a tree, as some might think. Nor do they constitute only a philosophy. Rather, the Buddha's teachings foreshadowed modern psychology in many ways and are profound and unique in the history of humankind. This book will show important connections between the Buddha's teachings and psychology which can aid in the psychological and emotional wellbeing and, ultimately, the enlightenment of all people. Through the teaching of the Buddha, we can eliminate the ignorance that causes us to think and act unwholesomely and creates unhappiness. The teachings are a system for self-transcendence by purposely transforming self-knowledge to understand the reality of our true nature. By doing so we learn to act in accordance with this reality, resulting in our leading a productive, harmonious life of wellbeing and contentment.

Buddhism shares with modern psychology a strong belief in our ability as human beings to transcend our historical patterns and fully actualize our special human potential. This optimistic approach is central in Buddhist teaching, which "aims at producing a state of perfect mental health, equilibrium and tranquility" [8] (Rahula, 2000). In fact, the Buddha has long been described as the peerless physician (*bhisakko*) and unrivalled healer. In the Four Noble Truths, like a physician, he first diagnosed the dis-ease of suffering (*dukkha*); next he discovered the cause of the illness (craving or misplaced desire, ignorance) that prevents us from attaining our fullest potential of wellbeing; then he discovered the cure (enlightenment), and lastly prescribed the remedy - The Eightfold Path. His focus of investigation was, "*Both formerly & now, it is only dukkha that I describe, and the cessation of dukkha.*"— SN 22.86.

Dukkha, often translated as suffering, has no single English word that adequately captures the full depth, range, and subtlety of the general psychological pain that it describes. It also translates as dis-ease, uncertainty,

alienation, irritation, dejection, worry, despair, fear, stress, anguish, and anxiety. The teachings that the Buddha proclaimed, known as the Dhamma, are a powerful therapy and method of treatment for the gradual psychological transformation of our cognitive apparatus to cure the deep dissatisfaction of dukkha that afflicts us all. The Buddha's treatment purposely develops and cultivates a peaceful mind based on a daily ethical practice; a mind firmly concentrated and calm; mindfulness which easily discerns the arising and disappearing of what is wholesome or not and the elimination of mental defilements. The tranquil, natural, wise, and fully conscious mental state created by advancing through the transformation and purification of our Citta or Mind/Heart, is metaphorically referred to as an inner refuge, a shelter, or sanctuary which is always accessible to us. The Buddha provided a comprehensive plan to transform and transcend the ignorance that creates the dis-ease of aversions, cravings and obsessions in our life, thereby liberating our innate potential for inner peace, wellbeing, compassion, knowing, and wisdom - our true natural and original mind.

A transformative cognitive process attains the Original Mind. While our current mental and physical state is strongly determined by the automatic habits created by our past thoughts and actions, our future development is firmly established through our thoughts and actions in the present moment. Simply making resolutions to change, however, is not enough. So long as unwholesome habits remain in the non-conscious, eventually they will express themselves, no matter how earnest the resolutions we have promised. It is essential, therefore, that we bring a knowing awareness to the conditioned reactions of our citta or mind/heart, which then gives us the opportunity to intervene and alter our previous conditioning. This book will explore numerous proven interventions to do that.

The Buddha's Way to Awakening is a sequential cognitive cultivation process (Bhavana), with each step smoothly transitioning to the next. In addition, accompanying each successive level of cognitive transformation, are refined positive emotions including bliss, equanimity, and compassion. The suttas affirm that the attainment of the final state of Nibbāna is by means of development: "*He should train himself towards Nibbāna*" - SN 1062. The attainment of Nibbāna is the insightful transformation of one ego state to another until, finally, "*He (the Arahant) understands.*" Indeed, the Sanskrit word

‘Buddha’ literally means one who has awakened. One awakens and leaves behind the distorted reality when one develops insight and understands the truth behind suffering. Awakening was the final radical cognitive transformation that created the Buddha’s understanding of undistorted actuality. Once understood, it fosters a new wellbeing of living and will not be forgotten.

Transformation, Interbeing and No-Self

The empirical reality, which we access through our six senses, consists of a never-ending, ever-fluctuating field of vibrational activity. There is no inherent permanence, not only in anything that we experience, think, or are, but also in existence. Modern science postulates that all existence is in flux, it is only vibration. Everything that exists is in motion, vibrates, and transforms. The Buddhist doctrine of *Anicca*, or universal transformation, describes this perspective. Numerous recent scientific discoveries confirm what the Buddha taught more than 2500 years ago. Michael Talbot suggests, *‘Even the world we know may not be composed of objects. We may only be sensing mechanisms moving through a vibration dance of frequencies.’* [9] (Talbot, 1991). Renowned physicist Nikola Tesla reportedly observed, *‘If you want to find the secrets of the universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration.’* Also, biochemist Mae-Wan Ho wrote, *‘One comes to the startling conclusion that the coherent organism is a macroscopic quantum object, it has a macroscopic wave-function that is always evolving, always changing as it entangles its environment. This wave-function is the unique, significant form of the organism. In the quantum coherent state the organism is maximally sensitive and can best respond to opportunities and cope with all contingencies. It is source of the organism’s remarkable flexibility, resilience and creativity’* (54) (Ho, 2008).

There is a growing consensus in Western thought and science that field-based relationships are fundamental, a condition described by the Buddha as Dependent Co-Arising, or *Interbeing*. We can understand our world and ourselves more deeply if we think in terms of dynamic patterns of relationships rather than of reified essences or entities. Ryuei Michael McCormick also explains this in a descriptive manner: *‘So nothing exists as a static, isolated*

entity. Everything arises and ceases depending on causes and conditions which themselves arise due to causes and conditions. There is no ultimate ground or primordial cause, but a network of causes and conditions. This undercuts the view of metaphysical selfhood, fixed entity, or substance underlying the constant change which is life.'[1] Through effort, self-responsibility and ego transformation with the practices of the Eightfold Path we gain the insight to realize *Anattā* (no-self).

Of all our preconceptions about ourselves, the most basic and what we each give highest importance to, is the self. Even though the Buddha has shown how our common belief of the substantial self is a misunderstanding, nevertheless we dedicate our lives to seeking its fulfillments, considering that as the way to happiness. For most of us, the thought of living in a different way seems unnatural or even impossible. As long as we are compelled by the illusion of an inherent self, we remain driven by the 'I' and 'Me' wants, fears, and identities, separated and alienated from the world and from experiencing the interbeing of life. By awakening and emerging from this ignorance and obsession of the self, we truly find release from self-entanglement, enabling us to step forth unencumbered into the world, to be open and compassionate to life, to others, and to find real wellbeing. Our orientation becomes Being instead of Having. With this transformation, we understand that what we call 'self' is, in fact, merely an ephemeral abstraction, a script in constant change. This is right understanding. The Buddha said, '*Right Understanding comes first*'. Since the Buddha's precept of 'no self' is radically different from basic beliefs and emphasis of Western culture, we need to have right understanding to trust and correctly follow the Eightfold Path.

With a similar perspective to Anicca, modern science has come to view humans as autopoietic, coherent, dynamic organisms who exist and constantly interact and transform in a field of the intricate web of life. However, we misinterpret our aware agency (the capacity of exerting influence) and mistakenly create the cognitively abstracted representation of an 'I' as our permanent self. In fact, since the 'I' is a cognitively created abstraction, a concept, and a narrative, the entity we call our self is only a character in the constantly developing mentally devised story of our life. It is also helpful to understand that the self-narrative is platformed or supported by one's memory [10] (Klein, 2001). The memory of our emotional, cognitive and behavioral tendencies created through repeated past

reactions and experiences, conceives a perceived continuity of a participant, which becomes petrified as a continual identity – a static entity. Through the Buddha’s remedy of the Eightfold Path, we replace the consequential dis-ease generated by our conviction of being a static, afflicted, and isolated self, with a refined understanding of the dynamic interconnectedness and impermanence of all experience.

The only real solution to Dukkha is cultivating the Citta by knowing, dis-identifying, and transforming our cognitive apparatus. This is accomplished by a profound change in lifestyle through various direct behavioral interventions and a regular Bhavana practice. While Bhavana or meditation is the best-known tool of this practice, ethical and virtuous behavior is also necessary. A restrained and orderly mind is expressed through the proper application of moral virtue in everyday life. By consequence, this natural mind is associated with a calm mind, as well as a compassionate and prosocial motivation. Compassion is the feeling of concern for oneself and another sentient being’s wellbeing, which is accompanied by the motivation to support that. The follower of the Eightfold Path establishes together all facets of the path: the practise of *sīla* (ethics or morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom). There is a stable unification when the natural mind, the calm established mind, and the knowing mind are together as one. Each of the three aspects support the others like the three legs of a tripod.