

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

*“As soon as we cease to regard Buddha's teachings simply intellectually and acquiesce with a certain sympathy in the age-old Eastern concept of unity, if we allow Buddha to speak to us as vision, as image, as the awakened one, the perfect one, we find him as a great prototype of mankind. The intellectual content of Buddha's teaching is only half his work, the other half is his life, his life as lived, as labor accomplished, and action carried out. A training, a spiritual self-training of the highest order was accomplished and is taught here, a training about which unthinking people who talk about "quietism" and "Hindu dreaminess" and the like in connection with Buddha have no conception.”*

~ Mahatma Gandhi

*‘...that first drew me to the world of Buddhist thought but my professional interest as a doctor. My task was to treat psychic suffering and it was this that impelled me to become acquainted with the views and methods of that great teacher of humanity, whose principal theme was the chain of suffering, old age, sickness and death.’ ~ Carl Jung*

Over 2500 years ago there was a prince named Siddhartha Gautama, who achieved after an intensive seven-year psychological quest the title, Buddha— meaning *Awakened One*. With his awakening, the Buddha discovered the answer to the question of what creates suffering. To be Awakened means having ‘woken up to reality’, to see Reality as it is, not as we want it to be. We understand that our dis-ease and dissatisfaction in life is not created so much by external conditions, but by our cognitive apparatus which easily creates psychological myopia, misperceptions, obsessions, cravings, anger, bias and prejudices. Through our own mental training we can end the cause of our suffering. This insight, culminated as the Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree on a full moon night, was a unique psychological epiphany which forever changed his life; and has continued to change millions of other people’s lives. The Buddha’s insights and teachings remain radically cogent and inspiring. In fact, the Buddha

remains one of the most original and profound thinkers to have graced the earth.

The focus of this book is on linking Buddhist teachings with modern psychology in a mutually illuminating way. Even though the Buddha taught over 2500 years ago, his insights are being supported by the newest discoveries in psychology, biology and other branches of science. While western mainstream academia still mostly perceives Buddhism as a religion and/or philosophy and it is generally taught in those departments, in fact the teachings of the Buddha are not a religious doctrine (religion defined as the belief in or the worship of a god or gods). The Buddha did not endorse a god or external agency that interfered in the lives of living beings, nor did he encourage or endorse the metaphysically sacred or divine. According to the Dona sutta, his answer when asked the question, 'Are you a god?' was "No, brahman, I am not a god." and finally after answering several more questions he ended by saying, 'Remember me, brahman, as 'awakened.' While the Buddha was alive, his followers did not worship or make statues of him. Instead, the earliest and most common symbols, like the Lotus flower or the dhamma wheel, were used as representations of his teachings. Throughout his teachings, the Buddha attributed all of humankind's attainments, achievements, and foibles to human effort and human understanding, or the lack thereof.

This book will explore how the Buddha's teachings offer to the world of psychology and psychotherapy, significant and groundbreaking perspectives, and solutions to many of the most pressing psychological and social difficulties in the human condition. While the Buddha never completed a scientific theory of personality (he wasn't a scientist) there are striking similarities, as well as several significant underlying differences, between modern western psychology's analysis of the human being's personality and the early Buddhist view. In fact, the Buddha's teachings and original suttas are a sophisticated psychological doctrine with very rich psychological concepts. I use the term psychology here defined as the study of mind and behavior. Psychological knowledge forms an essential part of the training for and ultimately to experience the

definitive goal of Buddhism- nibbana. Detailed ongoing personal psychological analysis is a significant objective of meditation. Even though the Buddha's teachings have become better known and analyzed in Western societies, many academic psychologists still often perceive the Buddha's fundamental teachings as being irrelevant or inappropriate as a study in psychology. Nevertheless, in the past 50 years some attempts have been made to bridge and integrate clinical psychology, such as psychoanalysis and other schools of psychotherapy, with Buddhism; however, these attempts have viewed Buddhism through the lens of Western psychology, which has then lost or obscured much of the significance of the Buddha's original and radical message. In this book, it is my intent to use Western psychological and biological concepts not to assimilate the Buddha's original perspective into an already preconceived Western psychological theory, but to illuminate both, enhancing the understanding of each. The Buddha's teachings are profound, unique, and revolutionary in their understanding of human psychology and have in many ways foreshadowed modern psychology—this book endeavors to explore these connections.

## **The Three Universal Truths**

In the Buddha's teachings there are three core concepts, often called *The Three Universal Truths*:

*Anicca* - The law of impermanence asserts that all phenomena are always in a process of existing, in constant flux, co-rising and falling at different complexities.

*Dukkha* - The law of dukkha states that the unenlightened experience suffering since the origin of suffering lay in one's dualistically based egotistical psychological perspective creating craving (binding, sense-based and selfish) which is in the final analysis infatuating, insatiable, stressful, insufficient and unquenchable .

*Anatta*- The third law states that no fixed essence or no permanent self, ego, or soul in phenomena exists – No-Self.

As we can see, these three basic concepts are interrelated. This book will show how these, and other core teachings of the Buddha create a significant radical understanding and perspective for us and our world. Since the Buddha's teachings are psychologically based, they are explained within that framework. In this work I am highlighting this remarkable teaching in relationship to many disciplines including the study of psychology, psychobiology, biology, ecopsychology, evolutionary psychology and wellbeing. The Buddha's teachings directly challenge the very notion of an independent, inherently existent self and therefore offers a groundbreaking perspective for the understanding of human nature, motivation, and how we create our own pain and suffering as well as happiness. Of course, due to the multi-dimensionality of the teachings, these vital insights are not the only that are possible, but I believe all insights gained to be well worth any effort. Also, the reader won't find extensive translation discussions or excerpts from the original texts—instead, the reader will be given selective and appropriately well-thought-out translations and sutta examples, based on scholars' interpretations, for ease of reading and clarity of the presentation of the Buddha's teachings. This book will be breaking new ground in the interpretation of the application of the Buddha's teachings in Psychology and I sincerely hope that through that interpretation, new relevant understandings on how human beings can be happier with greater wellbeing will emerge.