



Buddhist Mindfulness and the True Purpose of Conflict

A Buddhist Model of Conflict Resolution and
Mindfulness

We know conflict can exist as a state of opposition between persons or ideas or interests. But what about the internal kind of conflict that we are experiencing almost every day within ourselves? The practice of Nichiren Buddhism explains the true purpose of conflict, and how to deal with it effectively to get better outcomes. Being aware of the true nature of all phenomena as identified by the concept of ichinen-sanzen and expressed in the Buddhist chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is the key to maintaining effective mindfulness.

By Jorg Thonnissen
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“Bhikkhus, this is the one and the only way for the purification (of the minds) of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the cessation of physical and mental pain, for attainment of the Noble Paths and for the realization of Nibbana (Nirvana). That (only way) is the four satipatthanas. What are these four? Here (in this teaching), bhikkhus, a bhikkhu (a disciple) dwells perceiving again and again the body (kaya) as just the body (not mine, not I, not self, but just a phenomenon) with diligence, clear understanding, and mindfulness, thus keeping away covetousness (i.e. greediness) and mental pain in the world; he dwells perceiving again and again feelings (vedana) as just feelings (not mine, not I, not self but just as phenomena) with diligence, clear understanding, and mindfulness, thus keeping away covetousness and mental pain in the world; he dwells perceiving again and again the mind (citta) as just the mind (not mine, not I, not self but just a phenomenon) with diligence, clear understanding, and mindfulness, thus keeping away covetousness and mental pain in the world; he dwells perceiving again and again dhammas (i.e. “Nature”, or, “the way things really are”) as just dhammas (not mine, not I, not self but just as phenomena) with diligence, clear understanding, and mindfulness, thus keeping away covetousness and mental pain in the world”

Siddhartha Gautama - Buddha (approx. 544 B.C.E.)

“The mind is inherently empty – it doesn’t start and doesn’t end anywhere.

For reasons of simplicity, imagine emptiness being like water – imagine belief to be a vessel. The water (mind) takes on the shape of the vessel it is provided with. However, even though the mind is empty, the Buddha’s teaching points out that it is nevertheless subject to the universal law of Myoho-Renge-Kyo. For ‘Self’ to exist, mind needs boundaries, through setting boundaries ‘Ego’ and ‘Identity’ are born.

What do you want to be? This is life’s constant quest. It is a creative process that never ends”.

Jorg Thonnissen (2010)

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Aim

Numerous models of mediation and conflict resolution have been successfully used to get win-win outcomes where two parties with perceivably different agendas have sought to resolve their differences. We know conflict can exist as a state of opposition between persons or ideas or interests.

But what about the internal kind of conflict that we are experiencing almost every day somehow within ourselves? How many times do we experience opposition between two simultaneous but seemingly incompatible feelings? Why aren't we able to be of one mind when it comes to making decisions about certain things that we know are perfectly sensible, but yet on another level we still have great difficulty acting on it?

Nichiren Buddhism – Conflict Resolution through Enlightenment

ND Buddhism proposes a model of internal conflict resolution that facilitates a process by which one becomes enlightened to the true nature of everyday existence. Internal conflict is resolved through practicing an approach that generates a deeper understanding of the causes and conditions within daily life. This is achieved through focusing and reflecting (i.e. meditating) on an object that is representative of the objective and universal truth that operates within the self and the environment.

The ultimate truth in NDB is defined as a single law that expresses itself through 'distinct' phenomena. Put differently, the law manifests as seemingly distinct phenomena through a process of cause and effect where in truth all is of the one source. This function is necessary for life to find expression in the phenomenal world.

This law is viewed as infinite and eternal, and all aspects of its phenomenal expressions are therefore temporary in nature. In other words, all of existence is in constant flux and ultimately expresses itself in a dichotomous fashion within the self and the environment 'spiritually as well as materially'.

The practitioner knows and comes to accept that the process of distinction not only plays a necessary and integral part in forming a self defining ego, but also appreciates the many facets of the expressions of that law.

Thus, through understanding and recognising the dichotomous and distinct aspects within, the practitioner of NDB is able to generate an observer like status that allows for a greater internal locus of control.

Identifying him or herself as an eternal aspect of the law which transmigrates from one moment to the next into infinity, practitioners have the ability to be more objective, balanced and make wiser choices that affect their life and their environment in a more positive way.

This consequently leads to better life coping skills, identifiable within the practitioner as reduced levels of stress, anxiety, depression and probably a whole host of other psychological benefits yet to be determined. Most of all, practitioners tend to have a much more positive and controlled outlook on life which virtually knows no bounds and no end.

Living in the moment, enjoying what there is to be enjoyed and challenging what needs to be challenged but never forgetting for a moment their true identity, practitioners are therefore eternal optimists that embrace all aspects of their life with the knowledge and belief that they are the masters of their own destiny.

This follows that practicing NDB has important implications for the field of psychology. To comprehensively understand the philosophy and motivation of Buddhism it is necessary to be familiar with its history, as well as the concepts of reincarnation, dependant origination and a variety of general Buddhist concepts all of which are addressed here.

A brief history of Buddhism

Siddhartha Gautama - the first recorded Buddha

Starting with the birth of Siddhartha Gautama who later came to be known as ‘Shakyamuni Buddha’ in the 5th century (623BC) before Christ in what is now modern day Nepal. Buddhism is considered to be one of the oldest philosophies in the world. Shakyamuni was a prince, next in line to the throne, and married. However, even though he had all needs met and his way mapped out, it so happened that he became preoccupied with the meaning of life after realising the four truths, birth (coming into existence), old age (impermanence), sickness (decline), and death.

In other words, he realized that all things go through these stages and he really wanted to make sense of it all. Thus, one could say that he became rather anxious to get answers. In Buddhism this is referred to as a ‘seeking mind’.

He therefore left his well sheltered palace to embark on a life of meditation and asceticism joining the religious organisations at the time. However, having applied himself sincerely and gone through many extremes and self mortification in his practice of seeking enlightenment, only to reject them later when he eventually discovered a path of moderation – the middle way - as holding the true answer to his quest.

Three marks of existence

According to tradition, Siddhartha became the Buddha Shakyamuni after achieving enlightenment through meditation. In other words, he became a wise man who could perceive the true meaning of existence. He perceived that everything in the physical or phenomenological world is marked by three characteristics. These were, ‘inconstancy’ (or impermanence), ‘unsatisfactoriness’ and ‘not-self’. He proposed that by correctly meditating, understanding and keeping these three characteristics of existence in mind, suffering is brought to an end.

As such he proclaimed that impermanence refers to the fact that all things are in a constant flux and therefore they are fleeting phenomena that will change from moment to moment. Yet, so he taught, in essence there is ultimately no such thing that actually ceases to exist. It is the appearance that changes from one form to another. For instance if we imagine how a leaf falls to the ground and decomposes its changes its form but it lives on in other plants. It is a stream of existence that never ends rather than an end in itself.

Similarly, 'unsatisfactoriness', also often referred to as 'suffering', is related to the understanding that ultimately nothing that is found in the physical or psychological realm can bring about lasting satisfaction. As soon as something has been achieved something else will need to be achieved. It is as if the horizon never comes any closer, or like a dog chasing its tail. That way, true and lasting happiness constantly eludes our grasp.

Non-self on the other hand is the understanding that all phenomena, entities, etc., even though they may look like having a permanent and unchanging self, are in fact the opposite, i.e. they are a constantly changing, constantly renewing 'self'. Thus, our essential energy may be eternal, but the way it expresses itself through us changes all the time. Shakyamuni therefore taught that there is no such thing as an unchanging 'identity' to anything. If we were to look at pictures of our past we will surely come to realise that the way we view the world and ourselves has changed quite significantly, and if we were able to look at ourselves in the future we may not be able to even recognise who we might become.

The four noble truths

Shakyamuni consequently proclaimed that there were Four Noble Truths when it came to the dilemma of 'unsatisfactoriness' or suffering.

1. The nature of suffering - People suffer because their minds are not at ease. Birth, ageing, illness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, not getting what one wants, separation from what is pleasing, union with what is displeasing and clinging are all suffering.
2. The origin of suffering - Suffering comes from craving (delight, lust, sensual pleasures, etc.). Craving leads to our renewed existence.
3. Suffering's Cessation – as craving causes suffering, one has to stop craving in order to be free from suffering.
4. Follow the Eightfold Path- in order to be free from suffering one must follow the eight fold path.

The eightfold path

Shakyamuni said:

In the same way I saw an ancient path, an ancient road, travelled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times. And what is that ancient path, that ancient road, travelled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times? Just this noble eightfold path: right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration...I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of aging & death, direct knowledge of the origination of aging & death, direct knowledge of the cessation of aging & death, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of aging & death...Knowing that directly, I have revealed it to monks, nuns, male lay followers & female lay followers... —Nagara Sutta

The threefold division of the Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path can be divided into three divisions:

<i>Division</i>	<i>Eightfold Path factors</i>	<i>Acquired factors</i>
1. Wisdom	1. Right view	Right knowledge
	2. Right intention	Right liberation
2. Ethical conduct	3. Right speech	
	4. Right action	
	5. Right livelihood	
3. Concentration	6. Right effort	
	7. Right mindfulness	
	8. Right concentration	

This threefold division is also called the 'Three Higher Trainings' in Buddhism as they aim to instil a higher level of wisdom, a higher moral discipline, and a higher level of concentration in the practitioner.

Today, depending on the many different schools of Buddhism, the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path varies greatly between them, with each school claiming the ability to implement it in the way most conducive to its followers.

The Lotus Sutra

However, because the Eightfold Path did not explain the actual source of Shakyamuni's enlightenment, he eventually made it known through the Lotus Sutra (*Saddharma Pundarika Sūtra*) towards the end of his life. In the sutra he identified a universal law which he described as eternal and based on strict causality. He made it known that enlightenment can be achieved by everyone, and that a Buddha has achieved spiritual immortality through understanding and embracing this law. Shakyamuni makes it clear that the perceiving of emptiness of all phenomena is not the ultimate aim of Buddhist practice, rather it should be the attainment of Buddha wisdom which enables the practitioner to see phenomena for what they truly are, and with that enjoy a happy meaningful existence.

During his lifetime he taught his enlightenment in many stories and parables. However depending on the mental capacity of the audience he was addressing, he would use different levels of teachings that would bring about varying levels of understanding. In other words, similarly to worrying that teaching a child university level mathematics in primary school would leave students more confused than enlightened, Shakyamuni revealed the essence of his enlightenment towards the end of his life to those of his followers who had formed the basis for such understanding to take place. Therefore, he exclaimed that the Lotus sutra should be seen as his highest teaching and that all others sutras were mere supplementary teachings in preparation to the wisdom expounded in the Lotus sutra. He was also able to make a prediction at what time in the future all people would ultimately be able to 'comprehend' the teachings thus expounded (the latter day of the law). In fact, he predicted the appearance of a number of Buddha's in the future who would become leaders in propagating enlightenment based on the teachings of the Lotus sutra. It was Shakyamuni's constant aim to 'awaken' people to a true understanding of their life based on their capacity. He did so relentlessly up until his death and in the process left a substantial body of teachings behind.

His followers would in the style of the day commit his teachings to memory and orally transmit his knowledge and insights from generation to generation. For easy memorization, this was done through putting his teachings into doctrinal summaries in the form of prose (sutra's) that would reflect the essence of his many teachings.

It wasn't until 300 years later that the orally transmitted teachings were put into Sanskrit writing and sometime later translated into Chinese, and eventually Japanese.

Before the Buddha died he told his followers that the 'Dharma' would be their leader from now on. He made explicitly clear what that meant. Shakyamuni explained that his teachings were merely designed to 'open a path of awakening'. In other words, those who hear the teachings should question their own cherished views and beliefs in life, and compare through a process of investigation and insight, how this would measure up with the 'actual' truth.

Once the truth of one's life is therefore discovered and implemented, the teaching can be put aside as a practitioner would then live the truth. In other words, the Buddha was concerned that people would simply follow his teachings in a literal sense without understanding the actual principles behind it. He encouraged a seeking mind and a followers true questioning to clarify his or her own understanding. However, he proclaimed that the nature of his enlightenment, i.e. the truth, was to be found in the 'Lotus sutra' and thus it had to be treated as the foremost of his teachings.

Differences in interpretation after Shakyamuni's passing

Nevertheless, with the passing of time this 'truth' became more obscure and hidden, and eventually rather difficult to discern. It was thus left open to speculation which teaching would reign supreme and despite all the good intentions, Shakyamuni's legacy of teachings became the cause for many arguments and misunderstandings over the next few thousand years after his passing.

Having lost the true meaning of the Buddha's intention, there were many sutras to consider and Buddhist followers were trying to determine which of the teachings were most supreme. As time passed people naturally added to the interpretations and it became even harder to discern the truth of Shakyamuni's intentions.

However, there were also many Buddhist followers throughout the ages of propagation who were absolutely determined to maintain a consistent and 'true' lineage of transmission all the way back to Shakyamuni's time.

Understandably, it became a lot easier to keep track of the many sutras when the orally transmitted sutras could eventually be committed to a written format. But it was no doubt a difficult task to maintain an 'original' spirit throughout at least the first 300-400 years before this was possible.

To understand this dilemma, it is probably a good idea to imagine the following. If the truth was a big tree that consisted of leaves, twigs, the trunk, and its many branches, then all these aspects of the tree represent the truth only as a whole (i.e. the Lotus sutra).

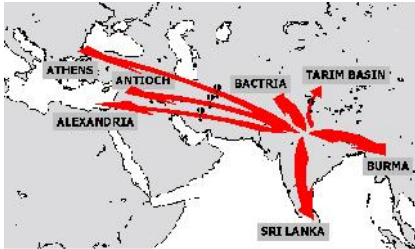
Let's assume one does not know what the whole tree looks like. If someone would come to think that only a leaf or a branch represents the complete truth to the exclusion of everything else that makes up the tree, it will in fact only represent a partial truth.

If one would be deluded of this fact and instead make the statement that a branch and some of the leaves of the tree are the only truth, then that person would tell a lie. So... the quest would be to see first and foremost the tree. Only then would we be able to understand where the leaves and the branches and the bark fit in exactly. Only then would it all make sense.

Nevertheless, it didn't quite turn out this way and many different schools developed all proclaiming that they were holding the 'truth' as intended by Shakyamuni. Therefore Buddhism divided up into numerous movements such as Theravada, Hinayana, Mahayana, and Varayana Buddhism.

The spread of Buddhism into Asia and the West

This way Buddhism expanded through most of the Asian continent as well as all the way along the silk road through the Middle East, Turkey, Egypt and Greece hundreds of years before the advent of Christ. There is even evidence of entire Buddhist communities living in ancient Alexandria (Egypt) as confirmed by gravestones found there depicting the Dharma wheel.



But it didn't stop there if we believe Clement of Alexandria who lived in the year 200 after Christ in Alexandria. He acknowledged the influence of Buddhism not only on the Egyptians, the Middle East and the Greeks but also on the Celts and the Gauls of Northern Europe, by saying the following:

"Thus philosophy, a thing of the highest utility, flourished in antiquity among the barbarians, shedding its light over the nations. And afterwards it came to Greece. First in its ranks were the prophets of the Egyptians; and the Chaldeans among the Assyrians; and the Druids among the Gauls; and the Sramanas among the Bactrians ("Σαμαναῖοι Βάκτρων"); and the philosophers of the Celts; and the Magi of the Persians, who foretold the Saviour's birth, and came into the land of Judaea guided by a star. The Indian gymnosophists are also in the number, and the other barbarian philosophers. And of these there are two classes, some of them called Sramanas ("Σαμάναι"), and others Brahmins ("Βραχμαναί")."

Clement of Alexandria "The Stromata, or Miscellanies" Book I, Chapter XV

Scholars have pointed out that there is a link between Buddhism and Christianity, which was especially apparent in Alexandria. In other words they think that Buddhist philosophy has influenced the development of Christianity.

As Buddhism expanded from India into China it flourished in various forms. The sutras were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese and just as in India there was much confusion of which teachings (sutra) would reign supreme.

T'ien-T'ai's interpretation of Buddhism in China

One man who made it his life's quest to shed light on the merit of the individual sutras was the Chinese scholar T'ien-T'ai (538-597 AD). He assessed and arranged all sutras based on their

content and after many years of study came to the conclusion that the Lotus Sutra was the one that indeed holds supremacy and through which all the other sutras could be explained.

He provided a conceptual framework that would have the capacity to universalize Buddhism. In other words, he systematized the teachings, correlated them and divorced them from their cultural context to arrive at an essential concept that is applicable to any phenomenon in the universe, seen or unseen. It is the concept of '3000 worlds in one moment of existence', also known in Japanese as 'Ichinen Sanzen', something that will be discussed in more detail later.

More than 1000 years after Shakyamuni's passing it is believed that T'ien-T'ai once again uncovered the essence of Shakyamuni's enlightenment and therefore came to realise that enlightenment (Buddha-hood) can be achieved by anyone.

The advent of Tendai and Shingon Buddhism in Japan

T'ien-T'ai's understanding was widely accepted and eventually made its way into Japan around the 8th century AD through a Chinese monk named Jianzhen. Consequently the 'Ritsu school' formed to propagate the teachings in Japan.

However, it was not until about 5 years later when the Japanese monk Dengyo (or Saicho) made his way to China and returned with more comprehensive writings that the concept expounded by T'ien-T'ai became more widely accepted in Japanese society.

At the same time when Dengyo made his way to China he had a companion priest by the name of Kukai that also travelled with him. While in China Kukai studied tantric practices which was yet another interpretation of the many sutras Shakyamuni had left behind.

As such tantric practices are all about energy and consist of the idea that through accessing the microcosm one can access the macrocosm. Through the use of rituals the practitioner seeks to access the divine power that flows through the universe and his or her own body to attain purposeful goals which can be of a material or spiritual nature.

Through daily practice the practitioner of tantric practices seeks to 'raise' his or her energy through the visualizations of deities, the making of gestures (mudras) or the uttering of words and phrases (mantras).

The practitioner may also concentrate and focus on symbolic diagrams (called mandalas and yantras) that represent the forces in the universe and that are designed as aids to raise the awareness of that energy.

The ultimate aim is to achieve complete self control and control over the forces of nature, so that a union between cosmos and the divine can be internalised. This kind of seeking of spiritual perfection and magical power usually requires long training a master or guru that initiates the practitioner in the practices.

This heavily ritualised practice found many supporters within the nobility of Japan and Kukai named his sect Shingon. He established a monastery on Mount Koya which became the centre of Shingon Buddhism in Japan.

Dengyo too was eager to pass on his knowledge and built a temple at Mt. Hiei which was exclusively designed and used for the study of T'ien-T'ai's interpretations of the Buddha's teachings. This was the beginning of the rise of Tendai Buddhism in Japan and from here on it was to be the most dominant influence of the development of all other forms of Buddhism that would follow thereafter.

However, as so often the case when things come of age, after some time Tendai Buddhism became more and more formalized and infiltrated with other philosophical influences, such as Shingon.

It was now the 13th century AD, more than 1500 years after the original Buddha's passing and more than 400 years after T'ien-T'ai's doctrine had been introduced to Japan, and the true meaning of Buddhism was once again lost in translation.

By then Tendai and Shingon Buddhism was firmly recognized, acculturated and sheltered by the population and governmental establishment. By now these philosophies had powerful friends in high places and they were well positioned to protect their interests.

Alternative interpretations of Buddhism in Japan

During those years a number of disenfranchised monks left the Tendai temple in order to find the true way to enlightenment and after some soul searching and study at various Buddhist monasteries came up with different concepts of how this was to be achieved. .

Amongst them was Honen who believed that by chanting the name of a mystical Buddha living in the West of the universe one was guaranteed to gain rebirth in a Western paradise. Honen designed a practice that was simple and easily accessible to the general population. All people had to do in addition to chanting the name of Amida Buddha was to follow the five precepts (i.e. to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication) and this would allow the practitioner to be reborn in a pure Buddha land where they could become enlightened. This

simplicity was very attractive to many people as there were many upheavals at the time, and Honen therefore established what was called the 'Pure Land Sect', also called the 'Nembutsu' and attracted many followers.

Then there was Dōgen Zenji who travelled from Japan to China and found Zen, yet another form of Buddhism that developed from within Chinese interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures about 1000 years after the Buddha's passing, i.e. around 500AD.

Zen is seen as 'anti-philosophical' and 'anti-theoretical' and practitioners are encouraged to seek their own answers internally as it argues that the Buddha's awakening came through his meditation practice and not from words. Therefore, focusing on emptiness or nothingness, Zen meditation aims to seeing into one's own nature to achieve Buddhahood. It places no dependence on words and letters and claims to be directly pointing to the human mind. A special 'dharma transmission' from one Zen master to the next is necessary to pass on the teachings and Zen thus claims to have an unbroken lineage all the way back to the Buddha Shakyamuni.

Neither of these different interpretations of Buddhism would sit well with the old Tendai or Shingon establishment and so the Nembutsu and Zen sects were initially persecuted by the authorities for their beliefs but eventually they too gained greater and greater recognition within Japanese society.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

However, the person that didn't agree either with the Tendai, Shingon, Nembutsu or Zen interpretation of Buddhism was a Buddhist monk named Nichiren Daishonin.

Nichiren was trained in the Tendai tradition. From age 16 to 32 he studied at numerous temples and monasteries throughout Japan and like T'ien-T'ai long ago in China, he assessed the many various sutras that were available at these places. Throughout his studies Nichiren was driven by his desire to 'make sense' of the multitude of interpretations and practices that resulted as a consequence of what he saw as a 'confused age' where all Buddhist sects wanted the same, yet all had vastly different interpretations of how to get there.

He went back to basics and discovered the true meaning and essence of the lotus sutra once again. This time, in order to make it easier accessible and less confusing for people, he clearly identified and named the essence of the sutra and what it meant as MyoHo-Renge-Kyo to which

he added the word 'Nam' to indicate the kind of attitude one should have to open up to enlightened wisdom.

Using his comprehensive understanding of the Buddhist scriptures he made the effort to analyse the essence of the diverse teachings of the Tendai, Shingon, Nembutsu, and Zen sects and came to the conclusion that some would offer a very complicated and almost impossible to achieve path to enlightenment, whereas others would utterly confuse their followers and lead them straight into hell. Unsurprisingly, being that frank didn't make him any friends, at least not initially. Through his outspokenness he was therefore not only disliked by the establishment, but also by all other Buddhist sects that existed at that time.

One needs to consider that Nichiren was a very compassionate but scientifically and therefore objectively minded person who had a very stringent standard by which he measured the truth and value of Buddhist philosophy. He was convinced that Buddhism is 'reason'. In other words, it needs to make sense, even though there were aspects within life that were simply unexplainable in an academic or purely logical way.

He sincerely believed the practice of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo to deliver the enlightenment people were seeking and many followers throughout the ages confirmed his conviction.

Chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is enlightenment

Nam

As such, the word *nam* comes from the Indian Sanskrit and simply means "to devote oneself." It means to take action and develop the right kind of attitude one needs to have in order to attain enlightenment in this lifetime. It is like saying 'I devote myself to seek the law of life with all my heart – I open up to my inherent wisdom and nature that I believe exists within me and within all others'. In other words, having an 'open mind' is a prerequisite for enlightenment.

Nichiren explained that Nam-Myoho-rence-kyo identifies the Law of life, or the universe, which all the many teachings of Shakyamuni in one way or another seek to explain through metaphors, stories or parables.

Myoho

Myoho literally means 'Mystic Law'. So, the question arises, what is the Mystic Law? As such *Myo* refers to the very essence of life. The essence is 'invisible' and beyond intellectual understanding,

although by means of abstraction it is possible to get the ‘idea’ behind it. Tien-Tai’s has just done that with his concept of the 3000 worlds perceivable in one moment of existence, i.e. the theory of *ichinen sanzen*, something that will be discussed later on in this book.

For now let’s just say that this ‘invisible’ essence of the ‘mystic law’ always expresses itself in a ‘seen’ form (*ho*) that can be perceived by the senses (i.e. in the form of touch, smell, vision, taste and hearing). So, the ‘mystic law’ is ‘in’ all the things or phenomena we can see, touch, etc.

However, all phenomena that we perceive that way constantly change, but there is also a constant and unchangeable reality which is called ‘*myo*’.

In other words, all phenomenal (seen or perceived) manifestations of ‘matter’ anywhere in the universe are constantly changing but the principle (the law) through which that change occurs is a constant and eternal.

In its simplest form we can say that what is ‘seen’ (*ho*) is constantly changing but what is unseen never changes (*myo*) with regards to the mystic law.

For example when we look at our body right now it doesn’t seem to change.

However, our cells are constantly dividing and changing even though it looks like we are standing still – in real time we ‘never’ stand still, not even for a moment. When looking at past photographs of ourselves when we were younger this most definitely becomes apparent.

Therefore we could say for example that the ‘process’ of ‘aging’ is based on a ‘law’ that is constant whereas our appearance changes all the time.

This follows that something that is constant is also eternal. Something eternal has no beginning and no end and is therefore neither created nor could it ever be destroyed. The mystic law therefore is the fundamental truth ‘forever’ and will always be observable in all the phenomena around us.

This is similar to the first law of physics which states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed, it can only be ‘transformed’. If we think of ‘water’, it may help to explain what is meant by this.

For example, when we look at a water melon we see water in a different form, as a piece of fruit. When ingested it becomes part of us, and thereafter we get rid of it in the obvious way. As it

flushes out of our body it is reabsorbed by the environment. Some of it is absorbed directly by plants, and that which hasn't, will simply evaporate into the sky where it forms clouds which will eventually produce rain once again and the cycle is complete.

Thus, even though it looks different at each moment, this water has been transformed but not destroyed. It is simply impossible to destroy it, even when we use fire, it simply evaporates and then forms somewhere else anew. This is the same with the 'energy' that specifies the mystic law.

This law is realised by an 'enlightened' person, and therefore leads to the three enlightened properties or abilities of a Buddha. They understand first and foremost how the spiritual and material/physical aspects of all things work together. Secondly, based on that knowledge they get the wisdom and understanding of what is true and what isn't. Thirdly, because of this, they can take the right sort of action or show behaviours that leads to positive outcomes.

As such, we come to realize that all is ONE and there is no 'real' distinction between phenomena as perceived by the senses, it all belongs to the same essence. We are made of this essence, and because the essence is eternal, we too are eternal but we are expressing ourselves in distinct shapes, forms and phenomena.

All phenomena we perceive with our senses are constantly changing but they change based on a mystic law that has always been constant throughout past, present and future.

In other words, day and night are different in appearance, just as there is hot or cold, up and down, good and evil, pain and pleasure, this or that, life and death, etc. – but they are actually all part of the same essence – there is no division, there is no dichotomy (distinctions are an illusion of the senses).

All is one therefore, all is interconnected, all is the Mystic Law without distinction, it always has been from the time of no beginning to the time of infinite future. Thus, Buddhism considers that distinctions are the very means by which we have an illusion of self. By making distinctions we experience desires- wants and dislikes, etc.

Nichiren teaches that we need to see desires for what they truly are, a fact of life, a necessity that makes us who we are, and we should cherish that, but at the same time we should live our lives as the observer of our mind rather than losing ourselves in desires without understanding their true nature.

Thus, Nichiren makes it clear that we should enjoy what there is to enjoy, and suffer what there is to suffer, but we should never forget that the life we are living consists merely of passing and fleeting phenomena of no real substance. As such, the purpose of all phenomena is to function as a motivator for enlightenment. In other words, all phenomena are expressions of the law, and these expressions have only one constant aim – that of EXPANSION of life into ever greater awareness (one could say ‘evolution’).

Even so called ‘evil’, when correctly understood, functions as a motivational force to bring out ‘good’ simply through creating the desire to seek the meaning of life.

Renge

Renge represents the other very important aspect of the ‘mystic law’. Renge means ‘lotus flower’. The Buddha realized that the lotus flower blooms and produces seeds at the same time and therefore thought of it as an excellent representation of the simultaneity of cause and effect. Hence, he named his most important teaching the ‘lotus sutra’. It is literally the understanding of ‘what goes around comes around’. Our thoughts, words, deeds and actions at each moment create causes that will have effects that we will have to deal with sooner or later.

This is what karma is all about. We have the power to change and create our destiny anew anytime. We are therefore cause and effect and so is everything else in the universe. Thinking of the ‘mystic law’ discussed earlier, the outcomes of our ‘good’ or ‘bad’ action (karma) cannot be destroyed, they can only be transformed into something else.

Every effect has a cause and every cause has an effect that creates the next cause. Thus cause and effect actually exist simultaneously, they are in fact indistinguishable.

Taken into consideration that we are eternal beings, all effects we are experiencing are the causes of our own doing. There is no escaping from ones words, deeds and actions– but at the same time one can change everything instantly by changing one’s words, deeds, action right now. Then, it’s just a matter of focus and consistency of (changed) action until the time arrives where the kind of outcomes we wish to see will eventually materialize.

Kyo

Kyo means ‘teaching’ that which enables us to see the continuity of life throughout past, present and future. There are only two ways to become enlightened to our ‘true self’. Either through others (mentors, their writings, etc.) assisting us in finding out what and who we truly are, or

through the environment itself, such as when looking at natural phenomena and realising the mystic law within all things just as Shakyamuni did.

The truth of the mystic law is actually expressed all around us we just have to be 'enlightened' to be able to perceive it. For instance hearing others chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and sharing the truth of the lotus sutra allows those who have forgotten their 'true self' to be reminded once again that they are in fact Buddha's too.

This is why Nichiren Daishonin says 'the voice does the Buddha's work'. Kyo represents the interconnection of all things and the way we can affect people and situations with the power of our voice.

Either way, eternal life is experienced when one understands and is connected to that which is unchanging, i.e. the mystic law that pervades all phenomena. Kyo is what connects us to our past, present and future existence (i.e. eternity). The transmission of the law, and therefore the ability to become enlightened, has been communicated to us (by voice, writing or other means) and we are therefore once again able to connect to our true self – our inherent Buddha nature. This way we gain immortality.

The spread of Nichiren's Buddhism

Nichiren made it clear that reflecting and chanting the phrase 'Nam Myoho Renge Kyo' would lead to enlightenment. The following quote summoned up his conviction:

"When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo."
--Nichiren, *On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime*

As mentioned earlier, Nichiren publicly refuted the teachings of the other sects and was always willing to debate his findings and comprehensive understanding of Buddhism with others. This

included not only other Buddhist sects, but also the emperor as well as the governmental establishment in general.

For his courage he was heavily persecuted, put on death row and was twice exiled to a remote island. However, he found an ever increasing following and he was eventually pardoned.

Nichiren made it clear that all he ever intended was to bring a true understanding and peace to the country and its people no matter whether they were commoners or nobility. He did not distinguish between women and men, proclaiming that all can equally achieve enlightenment through understanding the mystic law. He followed his conviction and propagated Buddhism till his death (1222-1282).

When he finally passed away Nichiren had many followers who were able to keep his philosophy alive. However, over the many years after his death the wisdom of his teachings became confined to a priesthood that passed his many writings on from one generation to the next without sharing it with lay people. In the process it became yet another case of ritualising and ‘formalization’ which consequently divorced Nichiren Buddhist practice from the common people for some time. However, the priesthood guarded the heritage of Nichiren’s philosophy into the 20th century.

Makiguchi & Toda – opening the path for lay believers

Then one day a Japanese Educator and teacher by the name of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1870-1944) came along. He served as principal in six primary schools, from 1913 to 1932 during which he devoted himself to the development of value creation in education and life in general. He was a progressive thinker that had the happiness of the individual and prosperity of society at large in mind. He published a number of books aimed at reforming the Japanese educational system that he believed would ensure that children would be able to learn and train in a more balanced way and that by implementing his system he would be able to change bored, apathetic learners into eager, self-directed students. His works attracted much attention not only in Japan but also overseas. His books have been translated into English, Portuguese, French and Vietnamese.

But he was looking for something even more inspiring. Eventually he came across Nichiren Buddhism and after some careful analysis he realized that this philosophy had all he hoped for. He started to practice Nichiren Buddhism and soon others would join him. He would be the one to take the philosophy beyond the realms of an exclusive priesthood back into the hands of lay

believers thus establishing a grassroots level organisation with the objective of bringing lasting peace and personal fulfilment to the individual. Together with his close disciple Josei Toda he held gatherings that would promote the Nichiren practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The corruption of Shintoism to control the masses

However, soon they would find themselves on a collision course with the Japanese government which was busy getting ready for war. For this purpose the government prescribed all Japanese households to accept and practice Shinto as a state religion as they thought it would bring out a stronger national identity and thus would make the population more susceptible to the influence of the establishment. Shinto is a pagan religion that originated in early Japan, long before Buddhism took hold, and like most 'native' forms of religion believes in many types of gods.

Followers of Shinto practice ancestor worship, offer prayers, and conduct various rituals to appease the many gods who are believed to control the forces of nature and the human condition. Practitioners of Shinto believe these gods live in specific places and so they erect shrines in their homes as well as in public places to which they make pilgrimages.

The emperor of Japan was thus seen as a Shinto 'god' and all his subjects were to follow his command.

Many Buddhist sects fell in line with the demands of the government who asked them to accept a Shinto talisman in their places of worship, therefore effectively acknowledging that they are subject to Shinto rule.

Nichiren Buddhism today – Daisaku Ikeda

This didn't go down well with Makiguchi and Toda who both stood up and opposed the tyranny of what they saw as an evil misguiding of the Japanese people by the government.

Thus, they were persecuted and eventually imprisoned with Makiguchi dying in prison for his beliefs. After the war was eventually lost, Toda was released and he single-mindedly began to rebuild the practice of Nichiren's Buddhism by forming the Soka Gakkai, which means 'Value Creation Society'. The purpose of the Soka Gakkai was to assist people in their practice of Nichiren Buddhism by providing an organisational structure that would give access to resources and places to gather, all with the aim to promote peace, culture and education regardless of gender or race. The current president of the organisation, Daisaku Ikeda was a disciple of Josei

Toda. He too has been heavily challenged in his struggles to make the teachings of Nichiren available to the wider community.

Despite all the obstacles Daisaku Ikeda is accredited with bringing Nichiren's Buddhism to more than 190 countries with an estimated 19 million practitioners worldwide of which 10 million are practising in Japan. He has been awarded many peace prizes and more than 200 honorary doctorates from international universities for his efforts to spread peace through the promotion of a Buddhist concept that offers a true understanding of the human condition and which provides hope for the future.

Using the words of Daisaku Ikeda, *"Enlightenment is the joy of joys. Birth, old age, illness and death are no longer suffering, but part of the joy of living. The light of wisdom illuminates the entire universe, casting back the innate darkness of life. The life-space of the Buddha becomes united and fused with the universe. The self becomes the cosmos, and in a single instant the life-flow stretches out to encompass all that is past and all that is future. In each moment of the present, the eternal life-force of the cosmos pours forth as a gigantic fountain of energy."*

The organisation that provides overseas practitioners with support is called Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and besides being heavily involved in many charitable causes and events it is also a passionate policy contributor to the United Nations.

Today there is a system of Soka schools throughout Japan, as well as a number of secondary schools elsewhere in the world, as well as one university in Japan and one in America all based on Makiguchi's educational principles.

The basic practice of a Nichiren Buddhism practitioner is based on faith, practice and study, and consists of chanting - Nam-myoho renge-kyo for 5-10 minutes in the morning and then again in the evening. However, there are no time limits on how long one should chant. It is really up to the practitioner. Some will chant less, some more, especially when experiencing great obstacles in their lives. Most important is the consistency in approach.

Regular meetings are held in most cities where practitioners can exchange their views, share their struggles, and study Buddhism. Practitioners typically report that they feel energized, both spiritually and mentally. They are happier, feel more compassionate and wiser which translates into greater productivity and prosperity in all areas of their lives.

Conflict as viewed in Nichiren Buddhism

Nichiren Buddhism is all about conflict resolution internally as well as externally. The way conflict is viewed in NDB is quite unique. It is based on the premise that the conflict we are experiencing is most definitely conflict we ourselves have created. It originates from within our life and perpetuates into the future based on what is termed the 'law of cause and effect'.

In other words, even though we may be unaware of the original event that has been at the starting point of it all (in psychology we call it 'the initial sensitizing event'), the practitioner of NDB sees it as a given that s/he has created the causes for this experience in the infinite (or more immediate) past and that s/he is thus responsible for changing the undesired effects (experienced as conflict) into desirable outcomes in the here and now.

The assumption of responsibility is furthermore based on the belief that one's life has eternal existence, from infinite past to infinite future and thus escaping from the self-perpetuating cause and effect relationship of one's actions is simply impossible.

This way, there is no externalisation of problems, no blaming of others, just a seeking of inner wisdom through the act of practicing mindfulness, focus and meditation (i.e. the chanting of Nam-myoho renge-kyo) as a means to sincerely understand the true purpose of the current experience.

Practicing in this manner the practitioner will eventually come to accept and realize that the perceived undesired experience makes perfect sense in the grand scheme of things.

Buddhism holds that if someone has the desire (knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously) to achieve a specific goal, the environment immediately provides the perfect circumstances for the desired effect to manifest eventually.

How is this possible?

The problem is of course that we have a habit of not realising that this is actually taking place due to our delusional understanding of many of life's actual rather than perceived functions. In other words, we find it hard to see the underlying laws that govern the universe and instead are focused on that which 'appears' to be a rafter of disjointed events that have seemingly nothing to do with us.

For instance, if you desire to become rich it most likely means that you perceive (believe) yourself as poor (or not rich) at present. If this is your belief, well then that's what you are likely to get. This was highlighted in the widely publicized book 'the secret', which if one would take the time to carefully analyse it's content, is really only a very limited explanation of the universal law of cause and effect.

The fact is that we are often utterly unaware of our 'programs' that run mostly at a subconscious or unconscious level. Therefore, the crux is to uncover first of all what it is that we are really believing at the deepest level of our consciousness in order to effectively change our current circumstances, or as Buddhists would say, change our karma. When we come to think of it, this is usually also the aim of therapy provided in psychological settings with the difference that we are staying within the realms of a limited lifetime spanning from birth to present, rather than taking into consideration that there are no such limits as proposed by Buddhism.

So, using the example I have indicated further above, how can we become rich then, might be a warranted question?

Faith and Manifest Effect

Well, the answer is surprisingly simple and yet a complex one to comprehend as it is related to the most elusive concept that human kind has to offer – faith. Well... that's right. The outcome is purely based on faith (belief) alone.

We need to believe that we can achieve our target despite all the negativity that will invariably arise from the depths of our internal being.

In other words, faith brings out hope that one 'could' indeed be(come) a rich person. Believing just that, the practitioner of NDB experiences the benefit of 'possibility' that this will happen eventually and thus keeps on forging ahead.

This follows that even if one were to have only little 'faith' (hope) in the initial stages, through consistent Buddhist practice i.e. the chanting of Nam-myoho renge-kyo mornings and evenings with the goal in mind of becoming rich, a practitioner is well equipped to maintain focus long enough to make what is desired a reality even though life's inherent negativity is doing its best to stir him or her away from getting there.

The act of faith generates hope, and hope ultimately translates into the motivation of keeping a consistent focus. Bring into the equation that the ‘eternal’ law of cause and effect is indeed a ‘real’ phenomenon and that we ourselves are entities of that law, the outcome is always certain.

Consistency of focus yields manifest effect – the law of cause and effect

Unsurprisingly, Nichiren Daishonin states that no prayer goes unanswered if one is steadfast in faith. Thus, there is no doubt that those who are steadfast in their faith will be certain to see actual proof of this belief which in turn proves that the Buddhist law is indeed operational.

In any case, without such consistency of focus we are literally unaware why ‘things’ are happening to us. These ‘happenings’ (often experienced as internal or external conflict) are actually products of our own unfocused mind. In other words, being utterly unaware of our subliminal motivations, we are producing effects that we cannot recognise as being of our own making.

This lack of awareness is called ‘Fundamental Darkness’ in NDB and thus represents the antithesis to ‘Enlightenment’.

In therapy many clients come to realise that a cause and effect relationship between their actions and reactions exists. In fact, most are somewhat keenly aware of this. However, even though they may have repeated various cycles of behaviour that have led to similar (undesired) circumstances or outcomes, they are nevertheless at a loss of how to get a different (desired) outcome in future.

Causes for the erosion of confidence – lack of faith

The problem is, at least in my experience, that in many cases my clients have repeated these cycles of conflict so many times that their confidence in their own ability to do so (getting better outcomes) has seriously eroded, resulting in low levels of self esteem or/and self worth. Thus, they are caught in a self enforcing cycle of disappointment that keeps chipping away on their confidence. In other words, they lack faith that they could indeed get a different outcome from the one they keep so persistently reinforcing.

By doubting their ability to have control over their circumstances they are losing the ‘battle’ that rages between internally conflicting positive and negative forces.

In NDB this struggle is seen from a vastly different perspective. It is seen as an opportunity for growth. In our aim to become enlightened one faces relentless internal conflict, a conflict between belief and doubt. Although doubt is a function that has its place when one is in the

company of people who want to tell lies and thus intents of leading us down a path of deception, that very same protection that works so well in an environment of deception all of a sudden has the effect of preventing us from believing the truth, when in the company of those who are honest.

Doubt and belief – two necessary aspects of existence

Doubt appears to be in direct conflict with the innocence of ‘simply believing’ or faith. There seem to be always at least two voices in our mind that are conflicting over what should be done with the information that we are receiving from the environment, and our own internal representations. Based on that, we are habitually orientating ourselves on past experiences and consequently make future projections of what might and what might not happen.

There is always a right or wrong to consider, a left or right, a good or bad, a hot or cold, the typical yin and yang dichotomous conflict seems relentless. Accordingly, those who have not learned how to cope with such relentless internal conflict due to their lack of understanding of the true nature of life, are most at risk to succumbing to the negative fallout of such struggle. They are thus likely to keep repeating the same unwanted experience, just in different environmental settings.

The intense unbalanced negative self talk potentially leads to increased levels of stress, anxiety physiological illness and eventually to depression (no hope) or other undesired mental health conditions.

In order to avoid such outcomes, it is therefore of the greatest importance to the Buddhist practitioner to first and foremost understand the challenges and opportunities presented through conflict.

Darwinism and the nature of problems

One could best highlight this Buddhist concept when considering the science of the great evolutionary Charles Darwin. According to Darwin any creature or sentient beings (Buddhists include insentient beings as well) are motivated by the obstacles or 'problems' they are experiencing.

In other words, 'nature' rewards those who successfully overcome their problems with an expansion in 'brain capacity' and thus ever greater levels of awareness. This follows that human beings are believed to be where they are today.

They are the 'pinnacle' of evolution, because they successfully mastered innumerable challenges. One could say that without problems or obstacles this development would have never been possible. Therefore, it is only natural for the Buddhist practitioner to show an appreciation for 'problems' and perceived obstacles as they enable us to further our development.

To elaborate further on this, and to perhaps use a metaphor to better grasp this concept, one could ask the question 'why has a beautiful colored fish in the coral reef its form and colors?' Well....because it has a big problem. Because there is a shark out there that wants to eat the fish (i.e. threatens its life) for instance.

Thus, it had to learn (adapt) how to swim fast and hide between the reef, and camouflage accordingly if it wants to survive. Therefore, even though a fish hasn't got an evolved consciousness to the extend we do as human beings, every cell within it is nevertheless motivated (unconsciously) to make it through to see another day.

There is no doubt from a scientific standpoint that the constant environmental pressures exerted on the fish have caused its cells to produce form and color, and advanced its brain cells. In other words, without the external stimulus that is exerted through the shark (i.e. the problem), the fish wouldn't exist in the first place as no motive (drive) would have stimulated it to BE what it is NOW. But it doesn't stop there.

Each time the fish makes an evolutionary move (which is a constant invisible cellular process that never stops, even though to the observer's eye it looks like the fish is and stays what it is)

the shark will also have to change its behavior because it too wants to survive (i.e. after all it wants to eat fish).

This is the master plan of nature. This way the expansion of 'intelligence' is promoted and which thus has resulted in a brain (human) that for the first time in evolutionary history has the capacity to be 'enlightened' as to what life is all about. It becomes clear that there is a reason for overcoming challenges after all.

Furthermore, it is an interesting proposition to think that if a psychologist would have the ability to speak with the fish and ask it what it thinks about the shark, he or she would probably get a very conflicting answer such as "I hate it – I wish it wouldn't be here, I can't see why I have to face this monster – I like to have an easy life". This makes of course perfect sense as the fish is unable to consciously recognize that the challenge of facing a 'monster' has brought about the fish's very existence.

Thus, it is only too understandable that the fish would find it very hard to bring up feelings of appreciation, and we come to think of it carefully, we too would find it a tall order to appreciate our daily problems as they come into our lives.

Yet, if we think deeply, what would happen if we could truly understand and embrace our life in a way that would enable us to appreciate our daily challenges as great opportunities and fuel for personal growth?

What if we could see our illness, the conflict at work, in our relationships, our feeling of depression, etc., as a motivational push for greater spiritual development, for a push that forces us to open up to our unlimited potential?

Well... I guess we still wouldn't really feel comfortable with something that could potentially kill us. But let's not forget, only physically – not spiritually, as life goes on eternally in Buddhist terms.

Yet we will all have to admit that without a certain threat, there is no doubt that our motivation would not kick in to get us where we need to go. For the serious Nichiren Buddhist that kick leads to the discovery of an even greater self – that of being completely enlightened about life.

According to Buddhism this is the master plan, a homecoming to our Buddhahood that has always existed, and is now revealed, yet something that can only be experienced when we are motivated enough.

Yet, the conscious part of us is motivated to be free of obstacles and challenges – our conscious awareness says I want to be able to be free of problems and thus I keep pressing on to overcome what lies before me. One could say that this is evolution in its purest form, spiritually as well as materially. Obstacles and challenges are a constant that drive everything whether that is the bacterium that has been challenged by a dose of penicillin, survived the onslaught, and has thus changed its cell structure to become immune to a similar threat in future, or the person who is seeking to surmount the perceived obstacles in front of him or her.

Conflict is opportunity for growth

Thus if one really comes to think of it, evolution is a process fuelled by conflict. Only as human beings do we have the ‘conscious’ capacity to be enlightened about the illusive ‘meaning of life’ and look at conflict as an opportunity. We are the pinnacle of life, fully capable to understand ‘what it’s all about’ and this is the true benefit of ever increasing awareness.

However, even though it is the aim of Buddhism to end all conflict between us and the environment we live in by walking the ‘middle way’, it is also quite clear about the about the fact that our internal conflict will never end even when enlightened to such understanding.

Initially, this may seem to sound counterintuitive to the purpose of seeking enlightenment in the first place. But when we expand this idea further it becomes quite clear why this is the way.

Buddhism sees conflict as an integral part of the function of life, i.e. as outlined previously, it is because of the functions of like and dislike that we can make distinctions and thus have an awareness of self. Perhaps a good way of explaining this is by use of yet another metaphor.

The two poles of a battery – how conflict creates energy

Consider the function of an ordinary battery. It has two poles, one negative the other positive. It is precisely because the positive pole wants to be as far away as possible from the negative pole that in the process of ‘opposition’ something miraculous takes place – the creation of ‘energy’.

Now...if one were to take away the negative pole there would be no more positive either. In other words, the creation of energy is simply dependent on the opposition of two apparently different poles. Yet, even though the poles appear distinct, they nevertheless are part of the same paradigm and only 'look' different.

In fact, every living cell in the body has electrical charges of the same complexity, even the air around us is positively/negatively charged; water as well has a constant electrical current flowing through it. Thus, the question occurs...what would we be without opposition? What would we be without 'conflict'? Put differently, would an aircraft be able to fly without the opposition (resistance) provided by the air? As we know, it would not.

This shows that our very definition of the perceived 'self' is completely dependent on that which provides opposition. When taking this one step further, from a psychological point of view, as mentioned earlier on, our own internal representations are of similar complexity. There seem to be always at least 2 opposing expressions at work when we are 'thinking' or 'feeling'.

Internal decision making conflict – something we are all experiencing

For example, most of us will probably easily identify that we are always somewhat internally torn when we have to make decisions.

We all know that it is easy to sit in the chair and say that we will go and get fit eventually. But that is easier said than done as ‘something’ inside of us seems to stop us from actually doing it.

Or we may have the idea that we will start eating more healthy, stop smoking, etc., but when it comes to actually doing it, one part of us seems to provide some real resistance whereas the other part is all for it. It is a battle of the wills within, and more often than not, the ‘bad’ guy seems to win.

For instance, in the case of the smoker who wants to stop the addiction, the question of crucial importance here to the therapist is ‘who am I talking with, the part of you that doesn’t want to smoke, or the part of you that wants to smoke?’ Can I make the client ‘believe’ that he or she has what it takes?

Or for those who are severely depressed, there is that part that really wants to get better whereas the other part is completely unwilling to make that move. It is as if we are under a hypnotic spell and it takes immense effort to affect change, even though that conscious part of us really wants to do things differently.

Whenever I ask a client ‘who am I speaking with right now? – the one who wants to change or the one who wants to keep doing the same old thing as yesterday’, most clients are at a loss of how to answer that question. But it gets them thinking that there is a clear internal distinction between what they want and what they believe about themselves.

In my experience, the lower a client’s self confidence the more they are inclined to listen to their inherent negativity and the more they are afraid, insecure and in complete disbelief that they could ever get a better outcome.

They are trapped in their ‘belief’ that nothing ever good can come to them. Even though unwanted, this is their mantra, this is their philosophy, and this belief has usually its root cause in their early years. It is in our younger years where we have been most impressionable, it is here where we take on what is modelled through our parents, society and the environment. It is here where we come to belief or disbelief that we’ve got what it takes or not for that matter.

But what do we do if there are no good mentors when we are of tender age? What do we do when our parents do the best they can, but they just don't know any better? Well... then the best we can do is to take on what we can get and make do with that.

Whatever the belief that we have developed in this manner, we seem to have a tendency to keep reinforcing it throughout our lives.

For instance there is the example of the 45 year old man who has been told by his mother while struggling with his math homework back at age 6 - 'Good lord – you really are dumb - I wish you would just be as smart as your brother!' Feeling rejected, these words became stuck in his mind and whenever he had to do his math work all he could think about was 'I am dumb!' 'I am less worthy than my brother!' 'I don't like math!' 'I feel inferior to my brother!'

Believing strongly in all of this, he started to show that he was indeed pretty bad at math. Whenever there was a test to complete he had no confidence in his ability and thus the results of his failure to produce good marks kept reinforcing not only his belief, but also that of the surrounding environment. Especially his mother felt reinforced in her belief about her son.

Of course, depending on the circumstances this scenario could have played out differently. For instance her son could have excelled at maths just to show his mother that he was good enough and thus appease her and win her admiration.

However, in both cases the feeling of rejection and worthlessness would have been the same and served as a cause for his motivation to either fail or excel in his endeavour to master math.

From my own clinical understanding I have come to realize that once we have experienced an event that has caused a conflicting belief within us, we are likely to project it on the environment.

This is of course perfectly OK for as long as it is not something that is irrational and thus serves no purpose other than that of making our life miserable.

For instance, fear and anxiety is a good thing when we stand in front of a lion, but it may not be of much value when we have a deep seated phobia of fruit and vegetables and thus are unable to attend dinner parties or go socialising with others in pubs and restaurants, as was the case with one client that presented with just such phobic condition.

He associated fruit and vegetables with weakness and sincerely believed that others would not perceive him as a real man if he ate them. Part of him was completely aware that these thoughts

were utterly irrational. However, his deep seated belief was much stronger and told him otherwise.

Thus, it is to no surprise that a tree is perceived differently by those who had a good time building a tree house compared to those who fell off it. The tree itself is impartial to the way we perceive it. It is our internal representations that make things look good or bad.

Yet, no matter what might befall us, practising faith in Buddhism enables us to see things in their true perspective. No matter how conflicting we may feel inside about our past or present experiences, the distinctions we used to make will become nothing more than observable phenomena in an ocean of life because we know that we have the power to change anything, all we need is 'belief' that we are a lot more than we think we are (i.e. a Buddha).

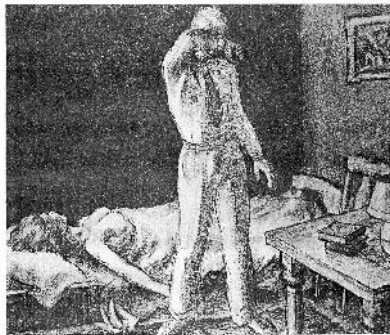
How we project our conflicts onto the environment around us

There is much evidence that we have a tendency to project our beliefs on the environment as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) shows.

The Thematic Apperception Test is a psychological assessment tool that was developed by psychologist Henry Murray from Harvard University in the 1930's in order to explore the underlying dynamics of personality within a person such as internal conflicts, dominant drives, and likely motives.

The TAT is a projective test and assesses what a person projects onto a set of ambiguous images. In other words, you will be shown a series of pictures and make up a story of what you see and in the process you are asked questions such as:

- what is happening at the moment
- what the characters are feeling and thinking, and
- what the outcome of the story was
- what has led up to the event shown



Critics may say that the TAT is based on the Freudian principle of repression which some see as outdated or even unscientific due to its lack of statistical validity and reliability. However, having used it myself there is little doubt in my mind that after a client has interpreted about 10 images in the manner described, their situation in life becomes quite clear as they somewhat unconsciously project their issues and personal circumstances onto the images they are viewing.

Thus, one could argue that the TAT suggests that we do this in our daily life as well. In other words, we seem to project our beliefs onto the environment around us and may see events and situations in an unrealistic or in a distorted manner.

Therefore, one could argue that it is what we project that creates our reality which in turn then keeps creating our subsequent experiences in life. For instance, if we have come to believe that we are unworthy of respect and things are 'unfair', we will see and find evidence for it anywhere and everywhere we go.

We may see our perception confirmed through that waiter in a restaurant who just doesn't seem to pay the 'proper' attention to our needs, or the government that 'appears' to send us an undue bill, it is all proof of the unfairness towards us that we perceive. This happens over and over until our view eventually becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. Thus one 'becomes' what one believes to 'be'.

Yet a person with a different belief may not even notice the waiter serving the drink, and the governmental bill hardly raises an eyebrow. They don't have the same 'baggage' and thus have an entirely different awareness of the presented environmental stimuli. In such case, there is no need for negative projection and thus the potential for conflict is minimised.

In the case of the depressed person, the function of the positive negative paradigm that exists within all of us and which should ideally be balanced can thus be seen as having almost completely tipped towards the negative end of the scale of an otherwise 'normal' internal conflict dialogue. As a result, the voice that would normally throw in some positive affirmation is almost completely silenced. The depressed person is typically stuck in believing that they are unable to get out of their negativity. There is little hope that things will ever get better and the struggle to 'function' in everyday life takes all their energy.

They tell me 'please assist me in getting a handle on that part of me that I seem to have so little control over, I am tired of that constant internal struggle. I've got nothing left. I don't believe very much that you can help me, because I just can't see that this is possible, but I have an inkling of hope left that you might be the one who can make things better'.

The physiological evidence of internal conflict

In my clinical experience I come across this kind of internal conflict almost every day. Clients present with 'issues' that in most cases are between what they would like to achieve and their perceived inability of actually getting there. In short, it is a conflict between their conscious, rational mind and some undefined mostly irrational hindrance that is beyond their conscious awareness (i.e. the subconscious or unconscious). As a first step, therapy deals with this by investigating where these often irrational thoughts or beliefs have their origin (also called the Initial Sensitising Event in professional terms) and by doing so making the conscious rational mind aware of the possible reasons behind the irrational or unwanted behaviour.

Yet, even if the client is thus made aware, the desired changes don't necessarily take place. In fact, there appears to be 'someone' within the client that just doesn't want to make that change at all. As mentioned, there is the smoker who wants to stop, but somehow cannot really do it, there is the overweight client who wants to be slim, but finds him or herself unable to engage in a healthier lifestyle, there is the depressed client who wants to think positively but hears and sees only negatives. The list is endless and the multitude of internal conflict knows no bounds.

The question then occurs, if everyone can identify with this, is conflict a normal state of mind? And if this is indeed the case, is there some evidence for this in the real world?

Splitting the human brain reveals two distinct memory systems

Perhaps the answer lies with people who have experienced the 'Split Brain Syndrome' (SBS). The SBS is a consequence of surgery performed mostly to relieve violent, drug-resistant epileptic seizures. It involves the cutting apart the two hemispheres of the human brain by severing the corpus callosum, a band of 200-250 million nerve fibres connecting the left and the right hemisphere.

The surgeons who have pioneered this technique, Roger Sperry (who received the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1981) and Ronald Meyers initially operated on cats then monkeys and in 1961, humans joined the list. Psychological testing after the procedure revealed some very intriguing results which prompted Sperry to call the brain "*Two separate realms of conscious awareness; two sensing, perceiving, thinking and remembering systems.*"

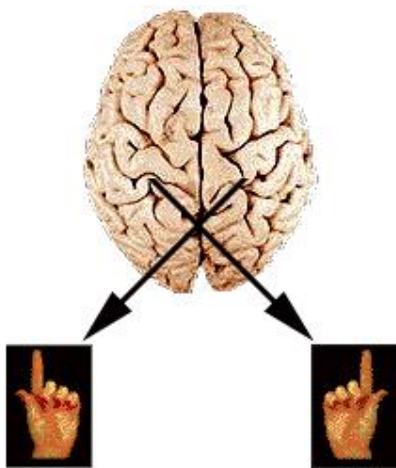
In other words, Sperry and other neurologists are of the opinion that the brain houses two minds, each in one hemisphere and they orchestrate into a single personality when communicating with each other.

Initially, after the surgery patients appeared perfectly normal. They had no problems with talking, reading and recognizing the world about them. Finding their seizures eliminated, they appeared happy, healthy and alert, until a certain Jekyll and Hide effect became apparent.

Michael Gazzaniga a psychologist who conducted a lot of the early psychological research on split brain patients discovered that if the patient would hold something in the left hand (like a cup or a hair comb for example) and it was out of the visual field of the right side, he or she couldn't *say* its name. However, when the item was transferred to the right hand –the patient had no trouble at all verbalising it.

Similarly, Gazzaniga found that the same happened with words. He would hold up a card with a large printed word but observable only in the patient's left visual field. Unsurprisingly, even though there was absolutely nothing wrong with the left eye, the patient was unable to read it out. But when the same word was presented to the right visual field (i.e. the right eye) the patient had no trouble recognising it and saying it out loud.

Knowing that the visual field of the right eye crosses into the left hemisphere, while the visual field of the left eye crosses into the right (see picture underneath) Gazzaniga and others decided to investigate this phenomena further.



Gazzaniga decided to set up a number of experiments designed to investigate whether the brain was a combination between genius and idiocy or whether there were other reasons for the apparent differences in perception. He knew that vision and touch were most definitely transferred from one visual field to the opposing brain hemisphere, so much was clear. Based on this, he knew that the left hemisphere could verbally express itself, but what about the other?

He also knew that he could cue his patients by voice, as sound would reach both hemispheres simultaneously and that learning occurs in a verbal and non verbal format (for example in art, music, geometry, abstractions, etc). Thus, he decided to design a screen behind which he would hide 10 commonly known objects that the patient would be able to touch, but not see.

He would then flash a picture of an object in the left visual field of the patient (i.e. cueing the right hemisphere) and ask him/her to find that object behind the screen. The reader should remember, in previous situations patients who were presented with an object in the left visual field were unable to 'speak' of what they saw. However, this time, to his amazement Gazzaniga found that the patient had no difficulty finding the object behind the screen by means of touch.

Being of two minds – a well established fact

In other words, one part of the brain wasn't really aware of what the other part was actually doing. There was no communication between the hemispheres, and thus their independence was confirmed.

The implications of this research were ground breaking as it became evident that the right hemisphere, although mute and illiterate, was indeed an intelligent entity that was very imaginative and even had a sense of humour, as other experiments would confirm. However, even though it had great capacity to deal with abstraction, it had next to none capacity to deal with words, while the opposite held true for the left hemisphere.

Further experimentation lead to the understanding that people would use different kinds of memory to make sense of the world, and the earliest memory when one comes to think of it, is usually non-verbal. For instance in early childhood most learning is non verbal and our experiences are thus very much memorized in non-verbal format. A baby doesn't have words for 'feeling' hungry, sad, joy, and it doesn't necessarily consciously know why it feels that way. The

conscious understanding usually progresses with age where logic and analysis would become more and more dominant.

Thus, a specialisation occurred where one hemisphere would do that what it had learned to do best. For the right hemisphere there was no need to learn words, as the left would have to do this job. In other words, if a word had to be identified, all the right hemisphere had to do was to transmit a request to deal with that situation to the left hemisphere, something we would call 'good teamwork'.

However, the truly amazing part of the research became apparent when the word lazy and illiterate right hemisphere of patients was suddenly confronted with the fact that this kind of teamwork was no longer possible.

But instead of giving in to such obstacles the right hemisphere started to learn to be more independent from the left within a space of six months. Researchers were amazed to find that even though there was such obvious hemispherical specialisation, the right hemisphere would be able to hang on to information coming from the external environment and eventually express itself verbally (although never to the level and expertise of the hemisphere that was originally responsible for that ability) .

It is a proven fact that each brain hemisphere can hold different emotions about a subject and thus may think and feel quite divided and conflicting when it comes to making decisions of how one should feel and think about what is presented. Gazzaniga points out that SBS patients who are devoid of the kind of communication that normally takes place between hemispheres via the corpus callosum learn how to do this by simply speaking out loud what they want the other hemisphere to know. The most interesting part about this is that should a conflict arise, such as who operates the voice, the dominant hemisphere always wins out.

From a psychological perspective, this is a very relevant discovery. For instance, the topic of psychotherapy and especially hypnotherapy has been surrounded by a lot of controversy and mystery. However, when using guided imagery or hypnosis with my clients I often come to experience firsthand how they enter into an altered state of mind where part of their personality seems to be functioning independently without the other part being consciously aware that this is actually happening. Thus, facilitated by the hypnotic process, they are often surprised when they

find themselves unconsciously doing what is suggested, such as elevating their arm into the air while consciously thinking about something entirely different. Nevertheless, they are still able to observe what is going on, yet to them it appears to happen automatically without their own conscious input.

This would suggest a disassociation between hemispheres during hypnosis similar to that achieved in SBS patients, and thus it may be warranted to refer to the left hemisphere as the conscious mind whereas the right hemisphere is responding to unconscious processes.

Whether this is truly as clear cut as saying that the left or the right hemisphere is entirely responsible for either subconsciousness and the other for conscious processes is perhaps a little too simplistic. However, knowing that the right hemisphere is generally non verbal and therefore largely hidden from conscious awareness this may not be too far from the truth.

Either way, we seem to be pre-programmed to often experience internal conflict because of our inability to reconcile the rational thoughts of the left hemisphere with the sometimes rather irrational thoughts of the right.

Therefore, it may be beneficial at this stage to elaborate on the various concepts of 'consciousness' as it is as elusive and mysterious today, as it was many centuries ago. Yet the understanding of consciousness forms an important and integral part of Buddhism just as it does to the field of psychology and psychiatry.

A definition of consciousness

There is often confusion when it comes to terminology relating to the subconscious-, and unconscious minds. Some people use these terms interchangeably, but this is not accurate according to Sigmund Freud's original definition, who, after all, was the one who brought the term 'consciousness' back into vogue.

The Freudian view – the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind

Put simply, Freud believed that the unconscious is a person's store of collected information, such as memories, thought patterns, desires, or traumas, etc. that have been repressed and are not easily brought to the conscious mind, this information remains far below the consciously accessible surface. Yet, the information stored there drives and controls the conscious mind on many unseen levels creating conflict that expresses itself as psychosomatic illness, mental problems, neuroses, etc.

Bringing unconscious processes into conscious awareness through psychoanalysis is thus believed to assist in resolving these issues. The subconscious mind on the other hand lies just below consciousness, and is easily accessible if attention is paid to it.

For example, we might know someone's address, and phone number, or how we felt a few weeks ago when we went to the movies. Nevertheless, this information is not necessarily stored in our conscious mind, but in our subconsciousness. Thus, when required to think about it for a little while, we are able to recall the experience or information easily when we focus our attention.

However, this may not be as easy when we have to recall a rather traumatic event, because the experience may have been so bad that we have repressed it to the unconscious either fully or in part, so that we are able to continue to function in everyday life and not being swamped with images and emotions that we are unable to deal with at this point in time. As a result, the unconscious according to Freud is seen as a protective function of the mind, even though this protection could be misguided.

The Jungian view - the collective unconsciousness

Carl Jung on the other hand understood the unconscious mind as the storehouse of all those aspects of an individual's personality that are not part of his or her awareness yet. These aspects

have to be brought into consciousness so that that person can become a fully competent individual. If this is not achieved, that person will be in a state of conflict between the unidentified forces of the unconscious and his or her conscious awareness. The more of the unidentified forces of the unconscious are brought into consciousness, the more they serve the person rather than discomforting him/her.

This is very much in line with the Buddhist idea of enlightenment which can be seen as the ultimate awareness and understanding of the true purpose of one's life, whereas being unenlightened renders one a common mortal, and thus someone who will invariably experience conflict with the self and the environment.

Keen to understand the human condition Jung went even a step further. He defined yet another level of consciousness, something he called the collective unconsciousness. This concept came to Jung in a dream where he saw a house that had a cellar under which was yet another cellar and under which was a storehouse full of prehistoric pottery, bones, and skulls.

To him the collective unconsciousness is information, images and ideas to which all people regardless of cultural background or heritage have equal access to. In other words, Carl Jung was convinced that there is a level of consciousness that is a constantly expanding storehouse in which all of the human experience, history, knowledge, ability, etc. is deposited, and to which we all are connected.

Freud on the other hand believed that evolutionary patterns are common to all people, just like our genetic information is passed on from generation to generation, but he did not share Jung's idea that all our actions (i.e. the Buddhist term for karma) should be deposited into an interconnected consciousness.

This is where their views parted. Freud only believed in the individual's personal unconsciousness influenced by ancestral and evolutionary patterns, whereas Jung saw a whole new level below that, a real time storehouse of collective information to which we all constantly contribute and have access to.

Even though Freud didn't accept Jung's theory, Jung nevertheless incorporated Freud's view of the personal unconsciousness in his framework of understanding the human psyche.

Based on his theory, Jung believed that the collective unconscious and the external world are two opposites which between them gives rise to the observing ego or self of a person (think of the battery example given earlier, the plus and the minus are opposing forces and thus create energy).

The Jungian based personality assessment for example, the MBTI, encapsulates this concept of dichotomous relationships within a person. Having dealt with many clients during his career, Jung realised that there were a number of personality traits that were common to all people.

He noticed that people have a preference to be either more extraverted or more introverted when it comes to dealing with their environment. The more extraverted the person the more he or she would consider him or herself a 'people person'. Conversely, the more introverted a person, the more 'personal space' they may need. These preferences have of course consequences in the way that person feels and thinks about him or herself and how he or she responds to the environment.

If we think about this for a moment then we will come to understand that a certain type of personality would benefit a certain type of jobs. For instance if one would have to work in sales and thus needed to talk to many people, it would probably make it easier if that person were to have a more extroverted personality. On the other hand, for a job behind a desk somewhere hidden away from too many people, a personality with a higher degree of introversion may be more preferable as it would be less internally conflicting to that person's natural tendencies. Many psychologists today agree that there are at least eight personality traits that we all share to varying degrees. There is Introversion as opposed to Extroversion, Intuition as opposed to Sensing, Thinking as opposed to Feeling, and Perceiving as opposed to Judging.

However, neither an extremely extraverted person nor an extremely introverted person can ever divorce him or herself from the other side of their personality. In other words, even though the extroverted person is less 'conscious' of his or her introversion he or she is nevertheless also introverted. Thus Jung named this hidden, less conscious part of personality the 'shadow'. It is hidden from conscious view but it is there nevertheless.

The Buddhist view – the nine consciousnesses

In his assumption that there is indeed a greater, interconnecting consciousness, Jung's view is very similar to the Buddhist understanding of the 8^h consciousness. In fact, Buddhism even

considers an additional 9th consciousness. However, in order to understand this concept fully, it is necessary to first see the Buddhist concept as a whole. As such, Buddhism understands the first five consciousnesses to be the basic senses of:

The 5 consciousnesses - the five senses:

1. Touch
2. Taste
3. Sight
4. Hearing
5. Smell

For example when we imagine the birth of a baby, we could say that at that moment the newborn is predominately aware of the five sense organs of sound, touch, smell, taste and sight and has no or little conscious awareness of the workings of the deeper layers of consciousness.

The five senses enable us to take in information from outside ourselves, i.e. these are our sensors that collect data which will be analysed and assessed in the sixth consciousness.

The 6th consciousness – the conscious mind

As the newborn continues to grow, it learns more and more how to give meaning to the information taken in through the five sense organs. In other words, the growing person learns to recognise, organise and allocate information from the outside world, i.e. for instance the developing person learns what is 'red' or what is cold or hot, etc. and thus forms judgement and makes sense of the external environment.

The 7th consciousness – the subconscious mind or limited egotistic self

The 7th consciousness is all about the inner self. It is here where our perception of who we are is based. The question is how did we come to know that we are who we are? Well, in Buddhist terms that's not too complex to answer.

It is all about the way we have been brought up, and the things we have come to believe about ourselves that has created this consciousness. Parents have given us a name, taught us a language and we have accepted it. The society we live in has taught us what it means to be one of its members, and we have come to accept it. Teachers have taught us how to read and write, and name the things and phenomena that surround us, and we have come to identify with it. This is

how our ego is formed. We now know our name, our language, our nationality, our culture, what's right or wrong, we have knowledge and a view of the world we live in, and thus we have a sense of being something quite specific.

All of this 'knowing' has given us an inner mental representation of what and who we 'think' we are. From the Buddhist perspective, at the level of the 7th consciousness we are a limited egotistic self.

Up to this point the Buddhist view of consciousness doesn't really differ much from the Freudian or Jungian view.

The 8th consciousness – the Alaya or Karma Consciousness

However, as mentioned earlier, only Jung hinted that there may be an even deeper level to it all, something he termed the collective unconsciousness. Jung saw the collective unconsciousness as a storehouse of the collective human experience created and constantly updated by each individual, and so does in fact Buddhism. But instead of calling it the collective unconsciousness it is called the Alaya consciousness, which means Karma (Action) Consciousness.

It is here where all past causes and effects (actions) of not only the individual, but those of society and the environment at large are stored. They are stored as inherent causes ready to manifest when the external conditions are right for a manifest effect to occur. Up until then, these past actions of the individual, society and the environment are in a state of latency.

For example, let's assume you have damaged someone's car accidentally, but you weren't courageous enough to tell that person that it was you who did it and after a while you forget that this ever happened. As such, you carry an inherent cause which is registered with the 8th consciousness and thus will eventually manifest in someone doing something to you that gives you a similar experience to that which you have caused that person with the damaged car to experience. That doesn't necessarily mean that your car get's damaged in retaliation, but it may be that you experience a loss of some kind to bring things back into equilibrium.

Now, at this stage one could come to think that this kind of consciousness storehouse, i.e. karma, is rather fatalistic and bleak as it would presume that there is a strict and inescapable law of an 'eye for an eye' causality at work.

This would mean that one cause would create its effect which in turn would condition all the future causes and their effects and so on, thus leaving us stuck on a certain path with certain tendencies. Buddhism teaches that the law is indeed strict unless there is some higher awareness that causes us to change our action. In other words, if we have a 'bad' attitude or behaviour we are likely to get a certain response from our environment. If the response we are getting from our environment keeps reinforcing our 'bad' attitude we are indeed repeating a self fulfilling prophecy.

Many therapists will know clients that have had 2 or 3 marriages that all ended up 'the same' even though they had different partners. In fact there are those clients that have become so disillusioned that they swore to never get married again, and yet they may instead find themselves in an employment situation that brings out the issues that have formerly been confined to their personal relationship with their partner (i.e. the boss at work or their business partner gives them a hard time for one reason or the other). This constitutes a change in environment, but not in circumstance.

The strict law of causality is thus inescapable no matter where we go and we are therefore bound to repeat cycle after cycle of the same unconscious behaviour until a higher level of awareness allows us to do things differently.

However, as soon as we are aware of what causes our behaviour, we are able to change the outcome instantly or at least start working on it. Therapy as mentioned earlier, functions by raising our subconscious or unconscious issues into conscious awareness. This is the first step. In therapy we largely depend on the therapist who enables us to get in touch with the deeper levels of consciousness.

By aiming to keep the practitioner in the right 'frame' of mind Buddhism does this by default without necessarily relying on another person but an external 'object of worship' which functions as a reminder that this potential does indeed exist within us. Yet, this requires a concept of what would be termed a greater self. Therefore, in addition to the 8th consciousness, Buddhism proposes that there is an even greater level of consciousness, namely the 9th consciousness, also known as the Buddha consciousness. It is here where Buddhist philosophy leaves the concept of contemporary psychotherapy behind.

The 9th consciousness – the ‘Amala’ or the Buddha Consciousness

Put simply, the 9th consciousness is the true identity of all things, the essence and the basis of all of life's functions. On the most fundamental level everything is connected to it without distinction. This is where everything comes from and this is where everything returns to. This is the beginning and the end. The good or evil, right or wrong, large or small, Ying and Yang, anything, distinction does no longer exist here.

Here we know that our life is eternal and that it operates within a strict law of causality. All is one, we are one and all is a function of the 9th consciousness. As such, the 9th consciousness is pure life force, it offers a complete understanding, it is full of compassion, wisdom and love. It is the eternal and we are all part of it, no matter what our shape and form, we can never be divorced from it. This condition is always pure and can never be diluted or tarnished. Here we know that even the villain has a mission to fulfil, that of creating a hero.

Here we know that all aspects of life, all phenomena; our current circumstances no matter how challenging are manifestations of our own creation. Here we know that even those around us are created through us, and we are in turn created by them. However, the difference in this life condition compared to others is that it is marked by freedom of ‘how to react’ to the circumstances we find ourselves in.

By knowing that we are the creator we can thus ‘change’ what we no longer desire. All that is required is faith that this is in fact possible and this is where the challenge lies. So...the question is, ‘can you really believe that you are indeed of such power and influence?’ ‘Can you believe that you are the creator of your circumstances?’ Faith is the key. We have access to this life condition at all times, but only faith manages to open the door to experience conscious awareness of this deep seated consciousness that has always existed.

The purpose of practicing Buddhism lies in accessing the ninth consciousness

Therefore, the sole purpose of Buddhist practice lies in accessing the 9th consciousness in order to purify the many causes and effects that lie within the 8th consciousness. This way, we are able to change our action based on wisdom, and consequently make new causes and therefore can expect different outcomes. Having changed our action (karma) this way, the 8th consciousness will have also changed, and we will consequently experience those changes in the other 7 consciousnesses.

The NDB practitioner sees these outcomes as ‘actual proof’ of his or her practice and thus gains even more faith in his or her practice. This is the condition of a Buddha’s life. By accessing the 9th consciousness, practitioners are free of perceived impurities or negative causes, no matter what the circumstances. To the Buddha all phenomena make sense, s/he is awakened to the true nature of life and all phenomena. In this life condition we will see things with pure perception and clarity.

There is no doubt that this life condition is difficult to maintain as we are swamped with daily obstacles in life. There are bills to pay, people to please, illnesses to overcome, the onslaught of life’s challenges are too numerous to count. However, they are an inescapable fact of life and will have to be dealt with in one way or the other.

In order to access this deep life condition, the NDB practitioner chants Nam Myoho Renge Kyo to remind him or herself consistently of his or her true nature at all times, especially when facing unavoidable daily obstacles and deadlocks.

In summary, the Buddhist perception of consciousness holds that the ninth and the eighth consciousnesses represent the concept that we are all interconnected. The way we are experiencing distinction in the seventh consciousness by perceiving ourselves as a fixed, isolated individual self is therefore deluded and distorted in terms of NDB.

The seventh consciousness – the seat of ego and delusion

The deep seated delusional ego of the seventh consciousness has a tendency to resist life expansion as it fears constant annihilation through impending death of its ‘falsely’ perceived individuality. It is therefore constantly preoccupied with perceiving duality (distinction) in all things. A life based on this nature is called delusional in Buddhist terms as it has no ability to see that the eighth consciousness connects the energy of this life to the one that was before and the one that follows.

The seventh consciousness is ignorant, arrogant, discriminates, separates, and is concerned with matter, i.e. material possessions. Its tendency to protect its ‘turf’ by being ignorant is in direct conflict with the greater self that is all about awareness or enlightenment as found in the eights and ninths consciousnesses collectively.

Understanding and believing that there is indeed something like an eighth consciousness that records and accumulates our action, desired or undesired, wanted or unwanted, makes all the difference.

We come to see that every aspect of our living thought, word or deed, our looks and circumstances, our relationships, health, good or bad fortune are all stored as internal causes waiting for external causes to be activated once again. This shows the way we are migrating through our life, not just in the here and now, but also in those that follow. As such, we are a never ending cause creating an effect that makes another cause creating another effect...and so on into infinity. We are constantly 'on the move' nothing ever stands still we are a process that knows no end. The only constant is the law itself and this is where true identity lies.

This is indeed a very advanced interpretation of consciousness, something that contemporary psychology cannot parallel at this stage. Contemporary psychology is mostly preoccupied with defining the sixth and seventh consciousnesses, whereas the 8th and 9th consciousnesses are seen as rather illusive and abstract.

Thus, even though there may be differences in interpretation, Buddhism agrees with contemporary psychology to varying degrees about the functions of the 6th and 7th consciousnesses. Either one of these theories proposes that there is an aware and an unaware aspect to the human experience. This in turn causes an experience of internal conflict as the aware aspects of the self perceives itself as separated or distinct from its unaware aspects.

Taking all this into account, it is unsurprising that there is the assumption in psychoanalysis that the distinction between the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind can be defined as follows:

The function of the conscious versus the unconscious minds

The Conscious Mind (aware)	The Unconscious Mind (unaware)
<i>External</i>	<i>Internal</i>
<i>Logical</i>	<i>Irrational</i>
<i>Thoughtful</i>	<i>Emotional</i>
<i>Controlled</i>	<i>Wild</i>
<i>Mature</i>	<i>Childish</i>
<i>Concerned for others</i>	<i>Self-involved/ narcissistic</i>
<i>Strives to be perfect</i>	<i>Feels imposed upon-rage</i>
<i>Strives to be good</i>	<i>Feels imposed upon-rage</i>
<i>Guilty</i>	<i>Unconcerned</i>
<i>Courageous</i>	<i>Fearful</i>
<i>Independent</i>	<i>Dependent</i>
<i>Self-confident</i>	<i>Low self-esteem</i>
<i>Civilised/ Moral</i>	<i>Savage</i>

The Conscious Mind (Outer Mind)	The Subconscious Mind (Inner Mind)
Sometimes inactive i.e. sleep	Always active since birth
Organises	Instincts and habits
Discriminates	Uncritical acceptance. Literal interpretation
Active memory	Long term “forgotten” memories
Makes logical decisions	Preferences based on emotions
Critical thinking	Fantasy, imagination
Concepts	Images
Tries to control emotions	Origin of emotions
Avoids silence and reflection	Prefers quiet reflection

Considering the research into the Split Brain Syndrome it appears that there is indeed some physiological basis of what many psychotherapists have long assumed - the idea that we all have a mind that consists of ‘seemingly’ independent parts that are undoubtedly designed to work together but are often (if not always) in conflict with each other.

However, if one considers all of this from a Buddhist perspective, it is unsurprising that the human brain should have developed in this specialised way. As mentioned earlier, perceived distinction (although Buddhism explicitly says that all is one) gives rise to conflict which in turn provides the necessary motivational drivers for greater development or self discovery as Carl Jung would have likely put it.

Buddhism and the concept of distinction

Perceived distinction springs from the same source

The practitioner of ND Buddhism recognises that all these phenomena are nonetheless functions of the same mystic law, even though they look distinct and conflicting. Put differently, even though very hot is different from very cold, in both instances these experiences are nevertheless part of the same paradigm. Both experiences are expressions of what is termed 'temperature', yet they no doubt feel very different on either end of the spectrum and thus can be easily misperceived as having nothing to do with each other.

As NDB points out, all phenomena always expresses itself that way, whether this is good and evil as expression of the paradigm of love, or any other dichotomous interrelation that one could possibly think of. They are ultimately all ONE even though they look like they have nothing to do with each other.

In NDB being human means accepting that the dichotomous nature of all phenomena is what makes our life possible in the first place. This means that because we experience pleasure, there will be pain, because we experience like, there must be an experience of dislike and so on.

Our current experiences in the phenomenal (saha) world are after all only possible because our senses perceive a distinction between things. Hence, living in the physical world of matter, there is no real use for abstract philosophical terms that deal entirely with the spiritual aspects of existence and are difficult to adopt.

Buddhism - life is to enjoy distinction without forgetting the true nature of existence

For a philosophy to be effective, it has to be practical and deal with our experiences in the here and now, in the way we live and perceive our lives. It has to provide us with an understanding of the purpose of our existence, help us understand where we are coming from and where we are going to in future. Most importantly, it needs to be true.

Thus, NDB transpires that we should appreciate rather than condemn that life expresses itself the way it does, because this is its ultimate purpose and in this we should find our joy, even though this may be hard to believe for us right now as we are struggling with the various issues we are facing – never forgetting that we can change everything.

As such, Nichiren Daishonin wrote the following to one of his disciples:

“Though worldly troubles may arise, never let them disturb you. No one can avoid problems, not even sages or worthies. Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. How could this be anything other than the boundless joy of the Law? Strengthen your power of faith more than ever” Happiness In This World 13th century Japan

Therefore, like Nichiren, the Buddhist practitioner accepts that for as long as we live in the world of matter, in a physical body, there will always be a distinction between things we perceive with our 5 sense organs (1. smell – pleasant/unpleasant, 2. hearing-loud/quiet, 3. sight-black/white, 4. touch – hot/cold, 5. taste – sweet/sour). As mentioned earlier, these are the distinctions made via the 5 consciousnesses and the information is defined by the 6th consciousness as good/bad.

This dichotomous nature of the way we perceive things in the phenomenal world of time and matter is a must so we can create our current experience. However, having to decide somewhere between 2 options (ex. hot/cold) invariably invites conflict which will have to be resolved somewhere in the 6th consciousness.

Buddhism – how to deal with conflict arising from distinction? - A third party approach

How best to resolve conflict? Buddhism argues that there is always a middle way. Using the example of the hot/cold paradigm such approach would correspond to ‘warm’.

In terms of conflict resolution this would be a win/win outcome as opposed to win/lose. It means being ‘objective’ and deciding for the middle ground. So, how according to NDB should we live in a phenomenal world made of distinction? How can we cope with internal conflict arising from worldly distinction?

The Buddhist practitioner takes the approach of viewing the internal conflict from a distance, rather than being directly involved in it. This requires what could be termed a ‘third party’ approach.

This third party approach requires one to be the observer of one's mind. In other words, by being the observer with a firm understanding of life's true purpose and function the practitioner is grounded in his or her Buddhist practice.

Letting the argument play before him/her the practitioner of NDB uses wisdom that derives from accessing the Buddha mind and thus has the means to get better outcomes. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the internal conflict has ceased. On the surface level the internal conflict still exists, but at the Observer/ Buddha level there really is no conflict at all, other than that between doubt and belief perhaps.

Obtaining objectivity and wisdom through practicing faith

Thus, through the act of faith (i.e. the consistent chanting of NamMyoHoRengeKyo), the Buddhist practitioner is firmly grounded in an objective view of life and therefore comes to understand the interactions or phenomena that take place.

In that sense, the practitioner of NDB has connected with his/her eternal identity and thus is no longer 'slave' to the secular (saha) world, although s/he continues living in it. Hence the expression 'true believers are no longer of this world'. True wisdom of how to handle the situation arises from such mindset.

For those who know mediation and conflict resolution techniques, this approach sounds somewhat familiar. Here, instead of mediating between different parties of people, the Buddhist practitioner mediates internally within him or herself.

The Australian Parliament – a model for internal conflict resolution

To clarify further, let's use the example of the workings of the Australian Parliament (or any other parliament of a democratic nature for that matter) to highlight how this would work.

There we have the green party on the left wing and the more nationally oriented one nation party on the right. In the centre left there is labour and the centre right the liberal party. There is also a speaker of the house whose responsibility it is to be objective based on the rules and regulations of parliament, and thus keeps order when parties debate the various issues and policies they address.

It is the opposition's job to hold the government accountable for its actions hence there is a lot of argument in the house as a matter of principle. A good democratic process is based on debate, and a good government is one that finds a suitable 'middle way' i.e. one that makes policies that serves the majority of its people.

When one comes to think about this carefully, this is very similar to what happens internally, the battle between good and bad is just like that. The difference is that only very few people are aware that this is a normal process, and even fewer are in touch with the 'speaker' of their house, the one who knows all the rules.

But make no mistake even those who may be in touch with their speaker are not necessarily acting on his/her advice. Thus, one can see that it is a constant struggle to stay in the highest life condition without being swept away by ones daily occurring obstacles.

Nevertheless, once a practitioner knows, accepts and maintains faith in the Buddhist practice (through chanting at regular intervals), s/he will naturally develop a greater ability to stay focused on what needs to be resolved, as well as take action based on the highest possible life condition.

Nonetheless, life's relentless obstacles provide ample challenges to the faithful to maintain their belief. NDB practice is designed to remind us of our true nature and give us focus. NDB holds the conviction that eventually all people will have grasped their true potential and develop an understanding of the principles that underlies human existence.

This is the aim of evolution and all factors in the universe work towards this. Science as a truth finding faculty works to support the underlying principles of Buddhism. In essence, science investigates the cause and effect relationship between phenomena and provides confirmatory evidence.

To summarise once more, conflict is viewed as a change agent that provides the 'motive' for expansion into a greater self. The practitioner understands that a motivational factor is required to expand his/her capacity. As such, all effects of the past (karma =action) whether they are perceived positive or negative can be seen as opportunities for growth.

The practitioner accepts life's dichotomous expression (good and bad, seen and unseen, matter and antimatter, life and death, up and down, hot and cold, Buddhahood and fundamental delusion, etc.) as an expression of the SAME law.

The purpose of dichotomous relations is to provide 'stimulation' to the senses, hence we can have the perception of 'being' 'something' (i.e. an individually recognisable entity that perceives itself as a 'self').

Experiencing conflict in the Buddha state

Thus, the view that conflict is to be perceived as 'bad' or 'negative' does not apply to NDB. Rather, as we expand into a greater life condition, the conflict we are experiencing is more and more refined and aimed towards creating value.

For instance, a person in the Buddha state will experience conflict very different to a person in the Anger state. Let's say if you are enlightened to your true nature (Buddhahood) and you face a conflict situation (imagine someone is driving his/her car like mad and cuts you off), you are likely to first feel fear, then anger.

But as you remind yourself of your Buddha nature, your consequent reaction will most definitely be different from that of a person in the world of Anger. A person with an already angry life condition however will perhaps react by falling into a road rage and thus creates more unwanted outcomes for him/herself.

Thus, it is the nature of an unaware person, not to see that all things are essentially interconnected.

As Nichiren points out:

"When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo." --Nichiren, On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime

The interconnection between all things is essentially explained in the Buddhist concept of dependent origination.

Dependant Origination – and the expectancy effect

The theory of dependant origination is central to the practice of Buddhism. In its simplest form it elaborates on the interdependence of all things. It is epitomised by the saying that even the smallest particle of dust penetrates the rest of the entire universe and that each action gives rise to another action and so forth.

With today's technology ever advancing and awareness increasing, there is much evidence for the validity of this concept in science. By now we are all aware how the many ecosystems are working together to facilitate life on earth. It is evident that when we deplete the rainforest in Brazil it has global consequences on the climate. We know that when we pollute the oceans it destroys the coral reefs and thus important fish breeding grounds that provided a once plentiful resource, which in turn influences our ability to get tourists into the country who will spend money with the local baker, who in turn pays his taxes to support the building of new roads, etc.

The list of interconnection goes on into infinity. The exact effects of our doing (action=karma) are too plentiful to comprehend. Nichiren Daishonin knew already in the 13th century that a limited understanding of the concept of dependent origination would lead people to the three lower life conditions of hell, hunger and animality, which are expressed as greed, anger and stupidity within the self, the society and the natural environment.

Either way we look at it, our actions have universal implications even if we are mostly unaware of this in our daily lives.

In fact, we technically know that even far away phenomena, such as the perfect balance between interstellar constellations such as the moon and earth, the distance of the sun to the earth or any other star therefore are of great importance to sustain life as we know it.

All has a certain balance but that balance is constantly challenged through not only our actions as human beings, but the actions of the environment in general, may that be through microbes, insects, animals, comets, the moon or the sun or any other aspect of the universe – life is truly dynamic.

For example, if a sizable comet hits the earth, life will be very different from what it is now. This can be perceived as a good or a bad thing (i.e. we know that we have to thank the comet that hit our earth a few million years ago for our current existence).

We observe stars and whole galaxies being born and dying in the universe. We also know that the sun has a life expectancy of 10 billion years, and as such is already 5 billion years old. As the sun continues to age, it will increase steadily in luminosity. Towards the end of its lifespan, when the hydrogen in the sun's core is mostly exhausted, the core will collapse, the temperature will rise until the sun starts fusing helium into carbon.

This releases more energy causing the outer layer of the sun to swell. By the time this process is completed, the sun will be a lot cooler than it is now and have extended out to the current orbit of Earth and Mars. By then the sun will have the appearance of a cool deep red giant. But we don't have to go to the largest to understand the interconnection of all things.

Bacteria too are just as influential. They are extremely flexible, and have a great capacity for rapid growth and reproduction. The oldest fossils known, nearly 3.5 billion years old, are fossils of bacteria-like organisms. We know that the life we live is impossible without micro-organisms as they play an essential role in the cycling of nutrients and energy. They break down dead organic matter to make the resources available again to other living organisms like ourselves. This process happens right inside of us when we digesting our food.

Thus, without the support of the smallest, we wouldn't be able to be here and see the sun. We can undoubtedly say that the smallest is just as important as the largest for life to exist. One phenomenon gives rise to next and not one day is like another, everything is constantly changing even though it appears to us that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west just like the day before. The universe is interdependent and dynamic and change is the only constant.

The Buddha Shakyamuni understood this interconnection of all things already more than 2500 years ago when he expounded the concept of dependant origination.

He knew that even the smallest action of an individual has global, in fact universal consequences. The 'snowball effect' of our actions has been the subject of many Hollywood movies but I will elaborate here once again as many of us tend to think about ourselves as powerless to influence change on a large scale.

How we facilitate change, knowingly or unknowingly

For instance, let's imagine one comes across an 'ant' crawling on the ground and stops to observe the insect for a little while when on the way to the bus stop. Let's assume that person watching the ant is you. As you have to write an assignment on the life of ants, you take a deep interest in what the insect is doing and come to forget the time, thus missing the bus.

This will have changed everything for everyone. Now...you may want to ask yourself, how could this single, to the naked eye insignificant event have changed the rest of the world and indeed the universe? Do you really have that much power and influence? Yes you do, according to Buddhism.

Impossible as it is, let's analyse and consider the sum total of effects of you having stopped to observe the ant and consequently missing the bus. This is of course only possible in hypothetical format, our conscious mind could never comprehend all the complex interactions that take place but let's give it a go.

But, for the purpose of simplicity, let's assume you would normally have been on that bus, and for that to have happened the bus would have needed to stop at your hand signal. The bus driver would have taken your money and all passengers would have waited for a minute as this process went on. You would have then taken a seat, perhaps talking to the person next to you, and so on it goes.

Let's furthermore assume for a moment that because of the short stop it took for the bus driver to take your money, the bus did not enter the freeway at a certain time just when the driver of another large vehicle lost control while looking out of the window to see whether he could turn into another lane. Therefore, an accident was avoided as the bus wasn't there due to your earlier action/interaction (i.e. karma). Of course, the same could have happened in reverse, i.e. you may have had an accident because of it.

Either way, because of your action all people on the bus come a little earlier into their offices or wherever they think they have to be at the time, and thus influence their environment based on these (by you) changed circumstances. This will affect the people they meet, and the people they meet, etc. the list of causes and effects goes on through society, the environment until the effects are again felt by you, at which stage you in turn will react once again to these perceived external effects.

This is how it keeps going round and round in constant exchanges between cause and effect, between the self and the external environment. There is no doubt that we cannot possibly fathom how our action of not attending the bus ride leads eventually to us hitting ourselves with a hammer on the finger or any other effect therefore. But according to the principle of dependant origination this is exactly what happens when we experience what we are experiencing right **NOW**. Even while you are reading this, you are impacting the rest of the entire universe. In other words, you are influencing me and I am influencing you in equal fashion.

Now is the moment where we are experiencing the accumulated effects of our past doing and NOW is the time where we can change the future.

This shows that our future potentially holds ANY outcome all depending and determined by our current action. In other words action based on the deepest wisdom is the greatest determinant of well intended outcomes.

Personal influence and power – resolving conflict by taking responsibility for our outcomes

It may in many ways be a mystery or secret to us of how all we are experiencing is of our own making as we cannot consciously see all the connections and interactions. However, as Buddhists we take full responsibility for what we are experiencing, good or bad.

Then again, one could question ‘what is good and what is bad?’ Many of us would say that winning a million dollars in lotto is a good thing. Isn’t that so?

Yes for sure we would say, because now I can buy a Ferrari. But what if I drive too fast in it and have an accident because of it? Good or bad? We would probably say that it’s bad. Then again, what if I meet the love of my life in the hospital I am recovering in from the crash? Good, we would say. This shows that the mystic law doesn’t have any value preferences. It is us and our projections who give it meaning.

This principle is known to many scientists when conducting experiments by employing the law of cause and effect in the laboratory. Therefore the scientific community has little hesitation to acknowledge that this law is indeed a reality. But the laboratory is a confined space and the interactions are carefully controlled so that they can be made visible.

However, the Buddhist practitioner sees the far more reaching interactions of cause and effects beyond the controlled experiments in the laboratory. There is no doubt that the multitude of variables which our ordinary ‘thinking’ mind would have to process could possibly supplement the necessary deeper level processing required to get the more significant changes happening in life.

We can plan and control the environment but ultimately, the multitude of internal and external factors are beyond our conscious mind to compute and control. Thus, we may plan to go to the bank this afternoon, we know the way, we know how to do it, but can we get there really? Will

other factors get in the way? Perhaps a phone call bearing good or bad news changes everything? Or an airplane falling out of the sky on top of our house? Maybe our car breaking down? Or your neighbour requiring your assistance when you were about to leave?

The list of variables goes on, and yet you want to make it to the bank, and you are likely to get there because you made up your mind.

Faith or good intent is the most essential ingredient in getting where we want to go at the end of the day.

Simple as it may seem, higher order processing in terms of faith is simply saying “it is my aim to make it to the bank, but whatever happens on the way, it happens for a reason and I know that if I keep my mind focused I will eventually get where I need to go”.

In addition to that, the Buddhist practitioner uses the obstacles or conflicts that may arise on the way as opportunities for greater development or way markers that are required to show him or her the way towards the ‘truly’ intended outcome (i.e. the outcome that we subconsciously believe we should get).

Put differently, faith enables the Buddhist practitioner to direct his or her ‘whole’ being towards achieving the intended outcome. Faith allows one to ‘pluck’ into the greater workings of the universe without being necessarily ‘consciously’ aware of how it all works.

Just like we are able to drive a car without knowing anything about the mechanics, we will still be able to use it to get from A to B.

The practitioner finds comfort in believing that all works towards his/her intended outcome because of his/her faith. Many people will identify this feeling as ‘going with the flow’. In other words, by practicing faith the ‘thinking’ and the ‘feeling/intuitive’ minds; the conscious, subconscious and unconscious minds; are equally directed towards the desired outcome. ND Buddhists are eternal optimists who can see nothing but opportunities for growth even under the most trying of circumstances.

The power of now – changing our action means changing our karma

The true power of Buddhism lies in the practitioner’s belief that s/he can act differently in the here and now, and because the NOW being the only constant reality that exists, the potential of having different outcomes NEVER ceases to exist.

Thus, karma is instantly altered as soon as the practitioner alters his/her action, i.e. by changing thoughts and consequent behaviour, and thus s/he can expect different outcomes almost instantly.

Why therapy works – the power of faith

This is the sole reason why cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) works. In fact, if one comes to really analyse it, this is why any kind of therapy works. A client that believes (has faith) in the suggestions of his or her therapist ultimately changes his or her action and therefore has different outcomes.

But these outcomes are not due to the power of the therapist. They are entirely due to the client's belief that 'now I can believe I can change because I have been told'. Thus unbeknown to them they produce the desired changes themselves by believing in the 'power' of the therapist.

Telling a client straight away that they have got what it takes to effect these changes entirely by themselves would fall on deaf ears as they don't believe in their own ability (this is why they come to see a therapist in the first place).

Therefore, in the initial stages, the greater they respect and believe in the therapist, the greater the power of the therapist to affect change in the client.

Herein also lies the mysterious power of hypnotherapy. A client surrendering to the power of the hypnotist during therapy simply allows the client to believe in him or herself.

The dangers of delusion

There is a real danger that some therapists don't know of these principles as outlined here, and they may come to the false conclusion that they really are 'special' and a lot more 'important' than their clients. Being aware that we are all equal Buddhism warns of such arrogance. A therapist who comes to see the changes in a client as a product of his or her making is simply just as deluded as the client. This would be a case of 'the blind leading the blind' and would eventually lead into a dead end.

However, one doesn't necessarily have to be a hypnotherapist or psychologist to affect self induced changes in others. Any kind of person that is perceived as being 'special' can do so. Medical practitioners, celebrities, religious or non religious mentors, etc., can all function as change agents as they inspire belief. Yet, Buddhism clearly states that this is an illusion – there is no distinction between a beggar or a king. This is not to say that we all have different skills and

abilities that create a level of distinction between us depending on our specialisation, however, we essentially all carry the same 'action and achievement potential'.

The halo effect – the self fulfilling prophecy according to Thorndike

In psychology this kind of projection (delusional projections) is called the 'halo' effect. In the 1920's a psychologist named Thorndike found out that we have a 'cognitive bias whereby our perception of a particular trait in another person is influenced by the perception of the former traits in a sequence of interpretations'.

Now this may sound a bit complicated, but generally speaking, Thorndike found that once we have a good impression of a person, may that be because their features remind us of someone that we know, or trust, we automatically assume that they are 'good'. The same holds true for the reverse (i.e. bad). In other words, instead of thinking of other individuals in mixed terms we seem to see each person as roughly good or roughly bad across all categories of measurement.

For instance, the level of attractiveness of a person is an essential trait to this concept. So if we think someone is attractive because of looks, intellect or some other ability, we presume all the other traits of that person are just as attractive and sought after.

This is one of the main reasons why we see that a lot of celebrities are used to endorse products that they have no actual expertise in evaluating. Social Psychologist Richard Nisbett demonstrated that we do this unconsciously. In a 1970's study he found that even though participants of the study were told that this effect exists, they continued judging people in the same manner.

Therefore, instead of being concerned with 'make believe' through therapy, Buddhism is concerned with making people aware that they are 'Buddha's' endowed with everything they need. However, due to the delay we perceive through the time/space paradigm, we have the illusion that the cause exists separate from the effect and therefore we may doubt that this is true. In other words, as we have no immediate confirmation that the cause we have made has the desired effect, we once again find ourselves in conflict between faith and doubt.

Then we are likely to question whether what we want to achieve 'could really happen', and because we don't have the instant gratification, we may give in to our doubts and change our minds. We thus never get the desired outcome and are likely to maintain a negative view of our abilities to affect the kind of change we wish to see.

In Buddhist terms we are like atoms constantly ‘bumping’ into each other and the environment and as we are exciting each other that way, we are consistently challenged to alter our course and direction.

The practitioner on the other hand, through the act of faith, maintains his/her course of action in an ocean full of seemingly unexplained waves, knowing fair well that s/he is the creator of such waves. As pointed out much earlier, we could say that all we are experiencing is our own creation. The question that many will ask at this stage is of course how could I have possibly created the reality of another human being or anything else in the environment for that matter?

How we create each other’s reality – the parable of the two unenlightened people

Well...if we come to think of a simple interaction between two people this process of creating each other’s reality will become quite clear. As outlined a little earlier in the example that described the halo effect, which pointed out that the ‘attractiveness factor’ increases belief in the therapist, there is also an interaction effect that alters the perception of the ‘attractive’ person just as much.

For instance, suppose two equally powerful people meet. But, let’s say they have the dilemma that they both have no idea that they are endowed with the power to create and influence everything around them. In other words, they are both completely unenlightened about their true nature or in Buddhist terms they are ‘ignorant’.

Let’s further assume it so happens that one asks the other what s/he thinks about him. Thinking for a moment the person that has been so questioned answers “You look to me like you are a pretty good salesman”.

“Oh, do you think so?” the person may hesitantly replies. “Yes, I really do” confirms the other.

As the mind of the person that has posed the question rendered itself open and impressionable, let’s assume this person starts ‘believing’ that this is in fact so (i.e. the thought ‘I am a good salesman’ takes hold in that person’s mind – or to the contrary ‘I am not!’).

Based on this assumption one could argue that an internal reality seeking belief is thus created. In other words, that person may believes that s/he is indeed a good salesperson, therefore looking for opportunities that would confirm this belief and consequently persuades a successful career in the field.

Thus, by simple means of suggestion, and by environmental reinforcement a self fulfilling prophecy is created.

This is the nature of questioning – we either accept or reject what has been offered, but either way, it is an indicator that someone has opened their mind to receive a new impression (i.e. I am or I am not what has been suggested, yet either way - it has equally influenced my perception and belief).

This is especially true when the question is sincerely asked. Hence, the Buddha Shakyamuni was renowned for only speaking about the deepest levels of understanding when people asked the ‘right’ sort of question. This way he was able to assess the level of sincerity and the seeking mind of a follower, and thus determine what could be imparted. If we are honest we will have to admit that people who make us question ourselves are of the greatest influence to us.

However, returning to our example of the two ignorant people, it is easy to imagine the following scenario.

‘Most certainly impressed with the great and perceived ‘truthful’ observational skill of the other, that person may go back to the one who told him or her about the unbeknown sales skills saying “Oh, wise man (or women), what you have told me was true, I wonder if you can tell me more about me?” not recognising that the actual manifestation of what was observed by the other was completely due to his or her own belief, and the consequent workings of the law of cause and effect.

This has consequences for the one who made these suggestions also. For instance, the person addressed as the ‘wise’ man may now come to believe that s/he indeed has a ‘special’ gift (that of telling others what is best for them), thus the two participants in this dialogue have created a circular reference that is self perpetuating and really nothing more than an illusion. In fact, it is a well hidden lie because both people have not recognised the true operational factors of their perception.

Because as we now know, the underlying truth is that both have exactly the same ability (being all powerful) but instead of realising this fact, each one has taken on a role that they keep reinforcing. Both are unaware of the underlying factors and thus believe that they ARE the roles they are playing (when in reality they are something entirely different – a fully endowed Buddha, yet they remain common mortals that cannot see the true aspects of the phenomenon they are experiencing)

Based on Buddhism, this is how distinction and conflict is created. It is nothing more and nothing less than a role play that has taken on an identity of its own. This is why we have kings and beggars, commoners and popes, holy men and thieves. Buddhism makes clear that the roles we are playing are not our true identity.

The Pygmalion effect – the self fulfilling prophecy according to Rosenthal

In psychology this 'role play' is termed the 'Pygmalion effect', or 'Rosenthal effect'. It refers to the phenomenon in which the greater the expectation placed upon people, the better they perform.

Rosenthal defined this effect as a form of self fulfilling prophecy showing that people with good or poor expectations internalize their label, positive or negative, and fail or succeed accordingly.

Between the 1970's to 1992 Rosenthal and Jacobson studied this effect in educational settings. In the experiment teachers were led to expect improved performance from some children consequently children did indeed show that enhancement. If they expected poor performance, this would be true also.

In other words, teachers who have low expectations of the children they teach have unconsciously created a self fulfilling prophecy in the classroom. Children of whom was little expected have in fact performed way below what they were capable of. Worst of all, they started believing that they indeed are incapable of being any good in the subject. The teacher therefore will see his/her expectations confirmed and thus keeps reinforcing his/her prejudice towards the pupil.

Thus it became clear that reality can be influenced by the expectations of others. Depending on the intent, this influence can be beneficial or detrimental. Again, from a Buddhist perspective this is regarded as a clear case of 'ignorance' leading to undesired outcomes. We could say that an uneducated person makes uneducated choices and creates therefore an environment that reflects these choices. Let's not forget, action is another word for 'karma'.

It shows how not knowing the 'truth' can create people with low self esteem and they will eventually have to deal with the consequences and conflicts of their belief and action when realizing that they are not getting the outcomes they truly desire. This is an example of how belief creates reality.

However, there a number of other empirically assessed experiments that prove beyond a doubt that our beliefs are indeed creating our reality.

The Hawthorne effect – observation leads to increased productivity

For instance, psychology talks about the so called ‘Hawthorn effect’. In 1955 Henry A. Landsberger was employed by an electric company in Chicago to investigate how workers could be made more productive.

He began by researching older experiments conducted in the Hawthorn factory between 1924-1932. These showed that increased lighting had significantly improved productivity, as well as a host of other interventions such as clearing floors of obstacles, maintaining clean work places in general and even the relocation of entire workstations. They all had significantly improved productivity.

Nevertheless, Landsberger found that as soon as those studies were completed, productivity slumped. He concluded therefore that the increase in productivity back then was due to the motivational effect of the interest being shown in the workers who participated in the experiments.

Perhaps by far the greatest example of how belief affects our reality may be found in the ‘placebo’ effect. It is commonly known that placebos work through an expectancy effect. In the case of drugs, this means that an inert substance which is believed to be an effective drug has similar effects to the actual drug.

Placebos can also act through classical conditioning. In such case a placebo and an actual stimulus are used simultaneously until the placebo is linked with the effect from the actual stimulus. Expectations and conditioning both play a crucial role in the placebo effect. Conditioning affects earlier stages of information processing and is generally believed to have a longer lasting effect.

The expectancy effect on the other hand can be improved through a number of factors such as the size and colour of the pill, or the demeanour of the doctor, i.e. the level of enthusiasm he or she displays when talking to the patient about the effectiveness of the intervention.

Whether patients taking part in placebo studies suffered from pain or depression, as soon as they were told that they were given placebos, their condition quickly deteriorated. One study showed that the effects of the placebo increased from 44% to 62% when given by the doctor with attention, warmth and confidence.

A large 1998 study identified that 75% of the effectiveness of anti-depressant medication was due to the placebo effect. Similarly, a study in 2008 found that 79% of patients receiving placebo treatment for depression remained well for 12 weeks after an initial 8 week successful therapy trial.

It is also known that as soon as patients have been told that the placebo intervention is ineffective, or that their expectations are unrealistic, the positive effects disappear. The placebo effect is that well known that it is used by many medical practitioners in the treatment of their patients.

For example a study shows that 48% of general practitioners in Denmark had prescribed placebos for their patients at least 10 times per year, usually antibiotics for viral infections, or vitamins for fatigue.

Similarly, a 2004 study of physicians in Israel found that as many as 60% use placebos to calm their patients or to fend off those patients who request unjustified medications.

These examples clearly show that the more we 'believe' in another person (idols, pope, hypnotherapist, mentors, kings, queens, pop stars, etc) the more impressionable we are, and that keeps reinforcing the illusion that they have a power unlike our own.

Taking the placebo effect into consideration, this would also hold true with regards to our belief in pills, talismans, 'holy' rocks, or any other kind of object onto which we project our belief.

What we believe creates our reality and not seeing the truth is likely to create a self fulfilling prophecy that we do not recognise as our own creation.

Buddhism teaches that there is NO DISTINCTION. All phenomena are simply expressions of the same LAW.

Just think, even the most advanced computerised game with all its fantastic graphics, can ultimately be traced back to a simple 0 and 1. That's that, a binary stemming from one source.

NDB calls this understanding 'esho funi' which means 'two but not two'. It explains the principle that life and its environment, though two seemingly distinct phenomena, are essentially non-dual; they are two integral phases of a single reality.

It isn't hard to see how our behaviours are shaped by our beliefs and thus they have the power to shape the environment we live in. The stock market is a good example where millions of people decide through buying and selling shares which way the economy of a nation and ultimately that of the world goes. Thus, 'belief' is clearly linked to changes in the environment.

Perhaps a more 'naturalistic' explanation provides an even greater insight into how behaviour influences the environment.

One who was convinced of the interlinked causality was the great Charles Darwin who proposed the theory of evolution. During his trip that took him to the southern ocean he noticed that one species of turtles of the same kind developed distinct features depending on the environment of two different islands of the Galapagos.

He observed that due to a certain species of plants on one island, turtles there had a long neck, whereas the other island which was devoid of these plants had a short neck. He pondered for a while and came to the conclusion that the external causes on both islands (environment) stimulated this development.

This follows that in terms of the law of cause and effect, there is always the potential that by eating all those plants which have caused the turtle to develop a long neck in the first place, it will then have to look for a new food source and therefore may again develop a short neck in order to survive as a consequence of its own actions.

Seen from the Buddhist perspective, this is how the environment and the self are in constant interaction with each other. In other words, the environment (i.e. people, animals, plants or rocks, etc) is stimulating us to do things differently. By doing so, the environmental interaction is actively creating us mentally and physically. Based on the environmental input, we in turn create (change) the environment through our interactions and then the changed environment causes us to interact with it differently again (and so on). Thus, the cycle is closed. It is an eternally reciprocal creative process that never ends (at least not according to NDB).

NDB explains "The ten directions are the 'environment,' and living beings are 'life.' To illustrate, environment is like the shadow, and life, the body. Without the body, no shadow can exist, and without life, no environment. In the same way, life is shaped by its environment"

Nichiren also writes in On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: "If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds"

However, even though we may be endangered to live a self fulfilling prophecy when we are not careful, this is not to say that we shouldn't have trust and believe in mentors, doctors, mechanics or any other person who has advanced specialised knowledge or experience.

After all, these people have focused their attention in various fields of endeavour and are therefore qualified to share the 'truth' of what they have learned and discovered with the rest of us. Theirs is a gift to advance and confirm our enlightenment. This is especially true if there are people who mentor us compassionately on our true potential. However, they are only any good to impart their understanding if they 'truly' are aware of life in its purest form, otherwise we may come to be led by blind men, and that can only end in disappointment.

As such Buddhism is practical in approach. It acknowledges that action needs to be taken in the real world of distinction. In other words, if you have a broken leg, it is obvious that practising faith alone will not yield the most effective outcome. You most definitely need to go and see the doctor to get it 'fixed'

Similarly, if you break down with your car and you don't know how to fix it, go and see a mechanic. However, in either event, having faith in the Buddhist practice will ensure that we have the confidence and wisdom to take the 'right' action in the moment.

But whatever may happens, we should never for a moment come to believe that just because the doctor can fix our broken leg, or the mechanic fix our car, that there is a distinction in potential between us.

We are of the same substance and we are just playing different roles for now. Think of the halo effect and remember that we have the capacity to reinforce a self fulfilling prophecy when we are blind to our true nature.

The greatest and most significant outcomes can be experienced when two highly sincere and objective people come together, both fair well understanding the 'true aspect of all phenomena'.

In Buddhism those who understand the true aspect of all phenomena are called Buddhas. If we have the opportunity to be mentored by a person who has the correct understanding of the workings of life, we are indeed very fortunate.

Shakyamuni and Nichiren were just such people, but they were people nevertheless. In a way they were great scientists investigating the nature of all things and who made it their mission to spread the knowledge of their findings to those who had a seeking mind.

But there were many more people over the history of Buddhism who also knew of the law that governs the universe. For instance even before Nichiren's time it is said that the scholars Tien Tai from China had a comprehensive understanding of the law, and so did Dengyo from Japan.

As outlined in the introduction part, both were studying the lotus sutra and knew in essence what is discussed here. Nevertheless, they did not make it their mission to spread that knowledge far and wide. Nichiren pondered why this was the case. He came to the realisation that the time for spreading such complete knowledge and wisdom wasn't right as they lived in what Shakyamuni termed the 'middle day' of the law (specified as beginning approximately 1000 years after Shakyamuni's passing).

In other words, the people of that time during which Tien Tai and Dengyo were active, lacked the capacity and seeking mind to understand the true essence and magnitude of the teaching expounded in the lotus sutra.

Even if told that they were in fact just as much a Buddha as Shakyamuni, people back then would have had a very hard time making any sense of such statement. Their self belief was very limited and the various provisional teachings of Shakyamuni were providing enough 'spiritual' stimulation.

They were getting sufficient benefits following certain rules (precepts) of which Shakyamuni said would lead them to enlightenment 'eventually' sometime in the far and distant future.

However, Shakyamuni also foretold 2500 years ago that there would be a time after his passing when people have the capacity to understand the essence of his teaching, and he named this time the 'latter day of the law'.

Nichiren believed that the latter day of the law was heralded in during his lifetime (the 13th century) as he was able to understand the essence of the lotus sutra and spread it throughout Japan amidst great opposition from established Buddhist orders.

Ever since then the practice he proposed, i.e. the chanting of NMHRGK and which was designed that we can keep connected to this truth, has been transmitted from one believer to another.

Thus it becomes clear that it is of utmost importance that the knowledge of this law continues to be passed on to as many people as possible so that they too can bring up their enlightened understanding of their own true nature.

NDB believes that the more people become enlightened to their innate Buddha nature, the closer we get to a world that lives in peace and harmony and that can finally work towards ever greater humanistic goals without having to be sidetracked with conflict based on the lower life conditions namely greed, anger and stupidity.

Passing on the practice of enlightenment is traditionally done from one person to another through what is called the 'mentor and disciple relationship'.

In NDB a true mentor is someone who unselfishly wants to see his disciples surpass him or her in benefits and understanding. It is someone who is keenly familiar with the true aspect of all phenomena and has shown actual proof that he or she can indeed 'walk the talk'.

It is someone who knows fair well that those around him or her are just as endowed with the potential to achieving enlightenment. It is someone who knows that there is no distinction between him and others. It is someone who delights in seeing others the happiest they can possibly be, because it makes them happy.

The four truths – birth, old age, sickness and death is a universal phenomenon

As outlined earlier, no matter how hard we try to avoid unpleasant thoughts about death and dying, part of being enlightened entails that the Buddhist practitioner knows that life goes through the stages of birth, aging, sickness and eventually death, and thus it is only a matter of time when one is faced with the resulting challenges of those truths. This truth does not only apply to our own life, but can also be observed in the environment and society we live in.

For example when we look towards the stars we see whole galaxies being born and dying. In fact our own sun has a life expectancy of 6 billion years from now after which it will have burned out, in the process becoming what is called a red giant a hundred times larger in size than what it is at present. Thereafter, what we would have known as the most significant cosmic influence is said to 'implode' creating a black hole in its place.

But one doesn't have to go too far to see or experience these truths. They are omnipotent. We all know that plants and animals are born and consequently go through these stages. We also know that societies rise and fall, countries are born and eventually cease to exist. The 4 truths as termed in Buddhism are evident wherever we look. Time, is mercilessly progressing forward into infinity.

Continents continuously shift along the tectonic plates, new moments are constantly born and then instantly drift into past. Any matter that has been brought into existence will consequently

be destroyed through the relentless advance of time, whether it is the car we like so much, people we love, a rock or any other thing or phenomena we lay our eyes on, it all comes to past. The same applies to thoughts. Nothing ever stands still, all rises and then changes its state to extinction (i.e. a better way of saying it would be - it no longer remains what it was a moment before, which is technically speaking not really extinction but transformation).

Even our bodies are changing moment by moment, cells dividing, new cells are being created and the old ones die. It is said that every 7 years a human has renewed all his cells (with the exception of some dental and grey matter cells).

All is in a constant flux and yet, the one thing one can rely upon is that the law is the only constant, a continuum along which we experience ourselves anew at every moment. Change is the only certainty we can bank on, and those who can embrace change knowing that they are mere travellers of the mystic law are the ones that truly have the best ride.

They know that although on the surface all is forever changing, their true substance is eternal, and they thus enjoy what there is to enjoy and suffer what there is to suffer, playing the role they came here to play, but never for a moment forget that they are in fact the Buddha of eternal wisdom, and the chanting of NamMyoHoRengeKyo keeps reminding them that this is so.

This is enlightenment. Understanding this means understanding the Buddhist concept of 'Non Self'. This is freedom, as we move from one moment to the next we know we can change everything. Yet we will still experience all the emotions that there are to experience, but we will never lose ourselves in the dark night of unenlightened despair, because we know we are travellers that are prepared for the journey into infinity, in life like as in death.

Nevertheless, maintaining this lofty life condition requires consistent effort, it is a process that has no end. In fact it is one's engagement in the process that is the goal of the practice of NDB. Reflecting on one's action and interaction while understanding fair well what is possible is what defines the practitioner of ND Buddhism.

But even though it sounds simple, it isn't easy. We are relentlessly swamped with influences that could lead us astray from remembering who we truly are, this is why practice is so important.

People often ask, why practising? Isn't it enough to know what is true? Well...one needs to understand that we have a tendency to forget. Suppose you have read the book of 'universal truth', a book that explains life as it is – all the truths there are to learn are described in it.

You have undoubtedly gained great knowledge and come to think that this is all you ever need to know. You feel happy that you ‘understand’ (even though this may be in theory only) and you put the book aside. What usually follows is a gradual erosion of the thoughts and feelings associated with the newly gained understanding.

Thus, for the first week you are delighted as you can put many of the concepts you’ve learned into context. Many realizations are apparent and things go well.

Then, one day, you receive an unexpected bill in the mail asking you to pay for something you’ve already forgotten. You start feeling ‘not so good’ for some reason. Next you may get the news that you couldn’t get the job that you have been applying for weeks ago.

As you will recognise, by this time your initial feeling of happiness that resulted from your earlier readings has been slowly but steadily eroded and it becomes increasingly difficult to stay on top of your mood.

However, we have used a negative sounding example here to highlight how our mood and associated coping strategies can erode. NDB mentions that an initial positive sounding event can be just as detrimental to our ability to control our state of mind.

Suppose that instead of getting a bill in the mail, you may receive confirmation that you have inherited 3 million from an aunt you’ve almost forgotten. You cannot believe your ‘luck’ and go on a spending spree, forgetting all about what ‘true happiness’ really is. You are now so absorbed in your new sports car and parties that you haven’t got much time to really assess what is going on for you. Needless to mention, it is just a matter of time when we come to realize the flipside of this event.

Living life like this puts us on an emotional rollercoaster with no controls. It is then that we are at the mercy of the unrecognised external factors of our own making. This is why ND says *“enjoy what there is to enjoy and suffer what there is to suffer, but never stop chanting the daimoku (NamMyoHoRengeKyo)”*.

In the same context he also states *“A truly wise man will not be carried away by any of the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honour, praise, censure, suffering and pleasure. He is neither elated by prosperity nor grieved by decline. The heavenly gods will surely protect one who does not bend before the eight winds.”*

Happiness is the state of mind that remains connected to what is constant, i.e. the law as expressed in NamMyoHoRengeKyo. According to Buddhism this is our true identity which we

should aim to remember under any circumstances. NDB points out that we need to be the observers of the roles we are playing, not the ones lost in it.

As soon as we forget, we will become embroiled in the snares of our own delusion. When this happens we are more likely to take action (create karma) based on our lower life conditions and thus are firmly embraced in an unenlightened dance with our environment, not recognising the shadow cast of our own body; not recognising that we are shaped by our environment and our environment is shaped by us.

Many of us may find this hard to believe.

Karma & retribution

As we so aptly say in Australia, “what goes around comes around” – but Buddhism points out that that doesn’t necessarily literally means that we receive an equal ‘perceptual’ response to our action.

In other words, if it should so happen that you steal one dollar of a man that has nothing, and he wanted to use this money to buy a meal, there are some real consequences that you may have not realised at the time of committing this action.

To you it’s ‘only’ a dollar, but to the robbed man it was his chance to survive another day.

Well... what one’s ‘karmic retribution’ in that case? The consequence of this action will be indeed very difficult to discern. It shows that our intellect has little ability to fathom the sum total of our actions from a societal, environmental and individual perspective. However, generally speaking it is the emotional value that we have to reconcile, not necessarily the material one, as that will naturally follow.

Shakyamuni Buddha has once received an offering made of mud from two children and thus, sensing their sincerity and true intentions proclaimed that they would become great kings in a future life time. He made clear that it is all about intent.

Although the earlier explained interaction is clearly based on cause and effect from a Buddhist point of view (i.e. the robbed has committed the cause to be robbed in the past, whereas the robber committed the cause of robbing) it may be misunderstood of how one should respond to this.

There is a tendency by some who misunderstand the true implications of the mystic law to say, well...both got what they deserved (caused) and that's that. They may say "It's their own fault and therefore it has nothing to do with me!" How wrong they are. Knowing that we are eternally interconnected beings, the Buddha knows that the effects concern us all eventually – sooner or later.

It is as if we are saying that our toes don't concern us because they are too far away from our head. The interconnection of all things will make itself known in the scheme of things, it is only through the illusion of time and space that we feel somewhat disconnected from the 'perceived other'.

NDB on the other hand would have a very different view as the following example will highlight.

Let's further assume that it was you who we are talking about here. First of all the effects of you having taken the one dollar will ultimately become your internal cause, and you carry a latent effect (which has not become visible yet, either to you or to the environment). So, when the time is right, an external cause will bring out your internal cause and produce a manifest effect once again (i.e. a point in time will occur were you will be repaying for having committed something that caused somebody else an unpleasant experience). In other words, 'what you do onto others, you do onto yourself (as so aptly pointed out in the Bible).

Thus, one could say that both, you and the one you have robbed are intrinsically connected through your interactions. Based on that, you will be the one that inescapably has to suffer the consequences of your actions sooner or later (but as pointed out earlier, you can change your karma at any time by taking a different course of action NOW or as soon as you become aware of your ill guided action).

Causality and other religious denominations – conflict resolution through forgiveness

Other religious denominations too identified a link of causality in their teachings. For example Judaism and Christianity made a clear reference to these interactions in the Old as well as New Testament featured in the Bible.

There the Old Testament speaks about 'who takes a sword in his hands will die through a sword' and 'an eye for an eye' and a multitude of other examples designed to make people aware that their actions have indeed undesired consequences.

The Old Testament is based on the prophet Moses and predominately bases itself on the 10 commandments which are technically designed to please 'god', and from a Buddhist perspective

correspond to a cause and effect relationship determined by the aforementioned interaction between self, the environment and society we live in.

Noticing that people were no longer aware of the true purpose of Judaism as prescribed by the Old Testament, and seeing that people would under the guidance of priests misunderstand and even engage into revengeful acts based on its writings (i.e. if you have taken an eye, I now have the right to take yours – thus sparking a cycle of self reinforcing negative consequences), the advent of Jesus Christ brought a new area of change as he proposed the concept of forgiveness.

Forgiveness by its very nature is, according to Buddhism, a lessening of karmic retribution. This applies to forgiveness of self as much as to the forgiveness of others.

To highlight this, let's suppose someone hits you on the left and you then give him the right instead of responding in the same revengeful fashion (i.e. you are not hitting back), while at the same time keeping in mind that you love that person as your brother/sister, i.e. unflinchingly believing in the others goodness, what would happen to the obvious cause that shows its effect by you getting hit right now?

Well...the person that would dish out that kind of treatment is likely to eventually be convinced of your inner strength and recognise that s/he is of much lesser inner ability than you (even though that person may have much greater physical power). That would initially probably bring out an even more severe reaction on behalf of the aggressor as s/he feels even greater anger over the apparent superiority of his/her victim (as it makes him or her feel inferior).

But eventually that person would want to know how such life condition can be achieved, knowing fair well, on a much deeper level, that great physical strength and dominance in the material world does not hold the all important answers to the mystery of life.

For the one being mistreated that way this provides an opportunity to really confirm his/her belief in 'the flesh', i.e. live the truth rather than theorise in abstraction. This does not mean that we should become like sheep between wolves, but rather use our wisdom to take the right kind of action.

One could argue that this is what Jesus Christ did in the world of Christianity. He was tested to the point of death for his unflinching belief. Only then had those around him the confidence that he really meant what he said. By that, he has given his life to show to himself and others that he is indeed 'the son of god' and therefore was able to lead countless others to a greater understanding of the mysteries of their own life.

All great people have been somewhat persecuted and tested for their beliefs. Historically speaking, we are certainly more impressed with people that have great mental/spiritual strength, for they represent something that is so much more powerful than brute physical force.

They seem to have the ability to control their destiny beyond the physical world. They all seem to know that the physical world does not provide true happiness until we have reached true spiritual salvation. Buddhism knows that what is timeless and eternal can only be found deep within our minds. Yet, as NDB points out, it is crucial to understand that happiness is found in the here and now, not in some faraway place like a paradise or nirvana after we die.

Where is the love in Buddhism?

Up until now we have spoken very much in a language that would assume that the ‘mystic law’ is something rather impersonal, perhaps cold and somewhat uncaring. It frightens some people to think of the universe as a place of strict rules (laws). A universe that regardless of what its inhabitants are doing, ensures that they get exactly that which they are asking for (good or bad – consciously or unconsciously); A universe that responds to the actions (karma) of all that which exists within it equally and fairly, but at the same time is instantly forgiving when one changes his/her actions sincerely.

Scientists typically have no problems relating to this as they can see these causal laws operating in their experiments. They are evidence based investigators, logic driven and they are used to only believe what they can prove beyond a doubt.

But even learned men find it rather disturbing to find themselves reduced to the simply self enforcing effects of a cause. We know deep within that there must be more than this cold hard rule by which everything seems to function. Perhaps something greater than us? This is why many of us like the idea of a creator; something larger than us; a benevolent being, God or Allah, Krishna or Buddha, someone that we can relate to; someone that takes care of us, guides us and gives us hope; someone that we can trust beyond our limited smaller self.

But when we assess it carefully, then we will come to the conclusion that the mystic law is very much a conscious entity in the way just described. Perhaps a better way of defining it (which is of course only possible in a hypothetical way) is by calling it a ‘superconsciousness’ which is made up of the sum total of all individual consciousnesses combined.

Just like our body exists because of its many cells that make up our body, but with each cell having its own individually important function.

But then we have to ask ourselves ‘who runs the operation?’ ‘Who is in charge of all these individual consciousnesses that make up the superconsciousness?’

Or when thinking of our own body, who is in charge of all these cells? We will probably have to say that it is our mind (thoughts and feelings) that moves our body, and thus we have the impression that we have a sense of control over what we do, think and feel.

At the same time, there is no doubt that we are absolutely dependant on every single cell in the body to function in perfect harmony with the rest of the body so that we can sustain our life. On

the other hand, every single cell in the body benefits from the coherent workings of all cells making up that body. If even one cell ‘misfires’ the body as a whole is affected (i.e. think of cancer cells). Therefore, one could say that there is a universe within and we are its creator (consciously or unconsciously).

Then again, according to NDB we are the expression of the mystic law, and even if we come to know ourselves as the creator of our own universe, we are after all the ‘mystic law’ expressed (our true identity), and even if we were part of an even larger being, that being too would be the ‘mystic law’ expressed.

It is like the Russian Doll game where one doll fits into a larger doll and the larger doll fits into an even larger doll, and so on. No matter how many dolls there may be, they are all still expressions of the mystic law.

Thus, we are back where we have started, the mystic law as expressed in NMHRGK.

So, again, is the universe really uncaring and cold when examined from a Buddhist perspective? It seems quite the contrary. We could say that the purpose of the universe is to create conditions that support life, just like our body provides nourishing support for all of its cells. This is the bodies constant (subconscious) thought ‘how can I make sure that all my cells are in perfect working order?’ – or ‘in event of an illness, what can I do to make things better?’ – or ‘how can I develop an even better adapted body?’ The list of life affirmative thoughts goes on. Even the brutality of a volcanic eruption is at the end of things a life giving event. Without it, we wouldn’t have an atmosphere and the nourishing nutrients that make the soil fertile. Life dies to give life in a never ending sequence.

Thus, the universal mystic law of life is ultimately loving and supportive by default. It is plain to see that even under the most trying circumstances life takes hold wherever it can. May that be in the icy desserts of Antarctica or the Sahara, wherever there is an opportunity, life will blossom and it will endeavour to evolve towards enlightenment from the depths of delusion to the highest possible state of being. Giving and sustaining life is the main aim of the mystic law. Buddhism is life promoting.

Even when we should get sick, the purpose and challenge of our sickness is to bring out a better more enlightened way to go about our lives in future.

Life is all around

For those who are sceptical when it comes to believing that the potential for life exists everywhere in the universe, perhaps it would be best to consider that there are people in gas, rocks and water.

Now...this statement may puzzle some and that is perfectly understandable. However, when we look out into the distant Milky Way we can only see gas and stars in the making. If one follows the logical argument that the human body consist of a number of gasses, at least 70% water and minerals, it is really not too difficult to realise that we are indeed star matter and that life is possible wherever there is an environment that provides the right circumstances for life to form. To believe that this should only be possible on planet earth is rather unlikely when we consider the unfathomably size of the universe. Buddhism regards the universe as a living entity in general.

How did it all start?

Many of us will eventually want to make sense of the big 'how' did it all start? Even children typically ask "what was first, the chicken or the egg?" Parents will struggle with an adequate answer that would meet their level of understanding as we are mostly at a loss ourselves of how to answer such a question.

However, when seen from the perspective of the mystic law, it can indeed be explained. The question that we first of all need to ask ourselves is "how do we know that we ourselves exist?"

The answer could be as complex as it is simple. Psychologically speaking we define ourselves by that which surrounds us. By being able to give names to the things we perceive in the environment we have a sense of 'being'. Because I interact I have a sense of existence.

Psychological experiments show that when people are put in isolation deprived of external stimuli they will lose their sense of self rather quickly. When we are thus deprived for too long our brain will in fact create hallucinations to keep some level of stimulation going. If we are too long without stimulation entire neural pathways literally 'die'.

To understand the theory behind 'pure consciousness' (or the Buddhist term of 'emptiness') imagine someone is taking your whole environment away, step by step, all is disappearing until you are just a couple of eyes looking out into – well...nothing (which is hard to imagine of

course). But just for hypothetical reasons, let's imagine that this is the case. There is no environment left and all you are is a couple of eyes that stare into nothingness.

At this point you have no more awareness of self because you can't bounce off anything that surrounds you. Let's further assume that you have lost all memory of what you have ever been before. Your mind is empty and so is the environment around you (in fact, there is no environment in the first place). At this stage you have simply no way of knowing yourself because there are just no reference points which could give rise to such belief in a 'self'.

However, in Buddhist terms at this stage you are pure consciousness that is ready to be 'potentially' anything it wants to be. But you need a cause. At this stage you are ONE.

But now there is the problem, you have no awareness that you exist and there is no environment that could give you such awareness. You are simply completely ignorant of your existence. So...the question would be, what could you do to change that?

The following metaphor will highlight what could have happened.

At the beginning there was only ONE (Buddha, God, Life-force, etc.). This ONE had a dilemma, IT could not experience itself because IT was ALL there was (and nothing else, i.e. no environment, no space and thus consequently - no time or reference point for awareness to exist). Therefore IT decided to 'split' (i.e. 'divide/explode') into two (i.e. 'matter and antimatter', 'good and evil', 'yin and yang', 'positive negative', etc...) and so on into 'many parts' (to create reference points in order to look at ITSELF)– an event physicist Albert Einstein called the 'Big Bang'.

This 'explosion of the smallest – 'all there was' thus created 'space' (defined as the 'distance' between matter) and consequently 'time' (also measured as the distance between parts) came into existence.

Science at this stage has hinted that this process of expansion (measured by means of cosmic radiation), will eventually lose its velocity and thus reverse to contraction (the dichotomy of life once more at work- up/down, left/right, good/evil, yin/yang, hot/cold, life/death, happy/sad...!). In other words, everything will shrink back to being ONE once again.

This process is believed to be eternally repeated. In other words, to motivate this process of expansion (or evolution), the positive/negative relationship (dichotomy) is essential, i.e. if no pain/desire, there would be no movement towards happiness (or experience of what one would call 'life' for that matter).

Taking the likelihood of this 'split' scenario into consideration we may even relate the biblical Adam and Eve story back to the attempt of explaining that eating an apple from the tree of knowledge in paradise to the cause for the occurring split.

In other words, when the ignorant was infiltrated with 'knowledge' it started a process of awareness and with it came the desire of expansion. Hence we have what is called 'evolution'.

Therefore the 'big bang' is still in all of us and everything around us. We are all still expanding. And the law by which this process operates requires the transformation of energy expressed through the phases of birth, aging, decline and death (i.e. constant flux). However, death in Buddhism is simply seen as a phase of eternal life which brings us to the concept of reincarnation.

Life after death? - The concept of reincarnation

Reincarnation, in a literal sense means "to be made flesh again". Yet, even though it may sound novel to some, the belief in reincarnation has a strong connection to the majority of religions and philosophies that attempt to deal with the age old quest for answers to the mystery of life.

Hinduism

For instance Hindus believe in a soul (atman) that is immortal whereas the body is simply a shell that houses that soul and which is subject to birth and death. As such the soul takes different bodies and goes repeatedly through the stages of birth and death each time the soul has the desire to enjoy worldly pleasures and the only way to do so is through a body. Hindus believe that there is nothing wrong with worldly pleasures, just that we cannot achieve lasting peace or happiness that way. Being trapped by desires without understanding the true nature of existence will lead to suffering. Once a person realizes their own divine nature the desire for rebirth will have vanished and they have finally realized freedom from birth and death and therefore salvation.



Sikhism

Similarly Sikhs believe that every creature has a Soul. Once dead that soul passes from one body to another until salvation has been achieved. The journey of the Soul depends on what the person did through his or her lifetime.

Taoism

Taoists too believe that: "Birth is not a beginning; death is not an end. There is existence without limitation; there is continuity without a starting-point. Existence without limitation is Space. Continuity without a starting point is Time. There is birth, there is death, there is issuing forth, there is entering in."

Western religions and reincarnation

Ancient Greek philosophy

However, reincarnation is not just a belief of the Asian cultures. The ancient Greeks like Socrates, Pythagoras and even Plato were all convinced that reincarnation was indeed the way through which life would express itself. In fact, Socrates is quoted as saying "I am confident that there truly is such a thing as living again, and that the living spring from the dead."

Judaism

The idea of reincarnation appeared in Jewish belief some time after the Talmud which is the collection of ancient rabbinic writings on Jewish law and tradition. For instance the teachings of Rabbi **Isaac Luria** (1534 –1572) describe the laws of reincarnation in a book that has been compiled by his disciple Rabbi Chaim Vital and which is named 'The Gate of Reincarnations'.

Christianity

Christianity today overwhelmingly rejects the concept of reincarnation however, there is evidence that the earlier Christian sects such as the Sethians and the Gnostic Church of Valentinus believed in reincarnation and they were subsequently persecuted by the Romans for their beliefs. There are writings which point out that people need to 'learn to be good through various lifetimes in order to attain a level of goodness after which salvation can eventually be acquired'.

Islam

Similar to Christianity, mainstream Islam principally rejects the concept of reincarnation. However, some Sufi groups believe in reincarnation and point towards the Koran which says:

"How can you deny God, when you were dead and God gave you life? Then God will cause you to die, and then revive you, and then you will be returned to God." (Quran 2:28)

They also point out that poets in the Islamic tradition have celebrated this belief such as the Persian Sufi Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi (1207 - 1273 A.D) who said:

"I died as mineral and became a plant,
I died as plant and rose to animal,
I died as animal and I was man.
Why should I fear?
When was I less by dying?"

Native American nations

Reincarnation also forms an intrinsic part of most Inuit and American Indian traditions. In fact the concept of reincarnation is enshrined in Inuit language.

Norse mythology

It is assumed that the Vikings believed in reincarnation if we believe the *Poetic Edda* (13th century) which is a collection of very old Norse poems and Germanic heroic legends and which states that 'It was believed in olden times that people were born again' and 'Of Helgi and Sigrun it is said that they were born again; he became Helgi Haddingjaskati, and she Kara the daughter of Halfdan, as is told in the Lay of Kara, and she was a Valkyrie'.

Modern thinkers

Reincarnation played also on the minds of modern thinkers such as Goethe, Lessing Schopenhauer, Bonnet, Hume and Herder. Irish poet and Nobel Laureate William Butler Yeats (1865 –1939) had probably the most interesting view of the concept. He proposed that reincarnation does not occur within a framework of linear time. In his writing 'The Vision' (1925) he projected that a person's past and future lives are actually all happening at once. And this is all happening in a never ending and eternal 'now' moment. Furthermore, whenever we

make a decision 'now' it will influence all other lives and which in turn will be influenced by them.

The German born Literary Nobel Prize winner Hermann Hesse (1877 –1962) too believed in reincarnation. He saw the concept as "... a mode of expression for stability in the midst of flux."

Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin, the American president stated his view of reincarnation in a letter written in 1785 to his friend George Whately:

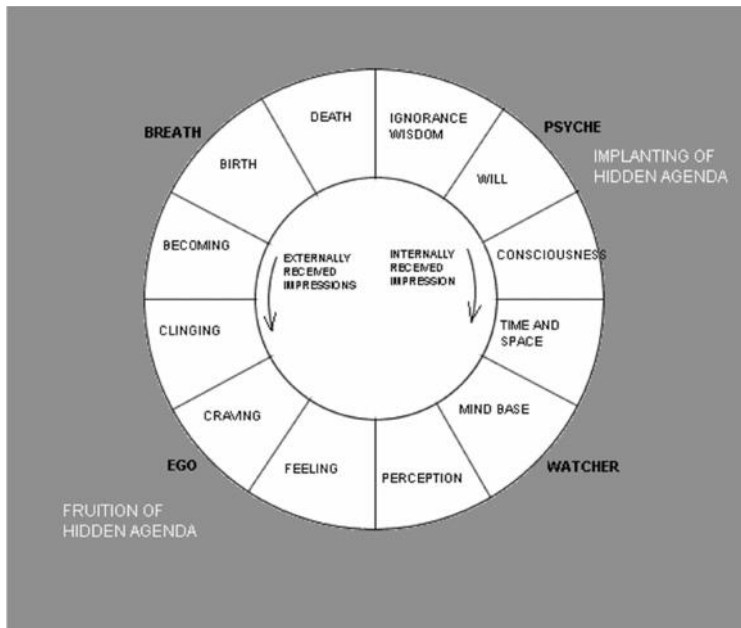
I say, that, when I see nothing annihilated, and not even a Drop of Water wasted, I cannot suspect the Annihilation of Souls, or believe, that [God] will suffer the daily Waste of Millions of Minds ready made that now exist, and put himself to the continual Trouble of making new ones. Thus finding myself to exist in the World, I believe I shall, in some Shape or other, always exist; and, with all the inconveniencies human Life is liable to, I shall not object to a new Edition of mine; hoping, however, that the Errata of the last may be corrected.

Henry Ford

Henry Ford, the first man to mass produce cars believed that he had lived before. His view of reincarnation was printed in a newspaper, the San Francisco Examiner in 1928. In it he says:

I adopted the theory of Reincarnation when I was twenty-six. Religion offered nothing to the point. Even work could not give me complete satisfaction. Work is futile if we cannot utilise the experience we collect in one life in the next. When I discovered Reincarnation it was as if I had found a universal plan I realised that there was a chance to work out my ideas. Time was no longer limited. I was no longer a slave to the hands of the clock. Genius is experience. Some seem to think that it is a gift or talent, but it is the fruit of long experience in many lives. Some are older souls than others, and so they know more. The discovery of Reincarnation put my mind at ease. If you preserve a record of this conversation, write it so that it puts men's minds at ease. I would like to communicate to others the calmness that the long view of life gives to us.

Buddhism and reincarnation



Buddhism too believes in reincarnation, although it differs significantly from the Hindu concept. Whereas Hindus believe that their soul is 'unchanging', Buddhists believe that everything changes all the time, except for the law by which this change occurs.

In other words, Hinduism believes that there is a 'self', 'ego' or 'identity' which moves from one body to another, whereas Buddhism believes that the components of the body including one's personality are subject to dissolution from moment to moment.

Put differently, Buddhism holds that what is conceived as identity or self changes from moment to moment and something that always changes cannot have a 'fixed personality' which transmigrates from one body to another.

What transmigrates is the moment which gives rise to the next moment, just like the flame of one dying candle lights the next candle thus leaving the old candle behind. Consequently, Buddhism believes that we are a constantly evolving consciousness which evolves within one's current lifetime and continues to evolve when reborn. Death just interrupts this stream of consciousness for the purpose of recharging our 'energy' for yet another lifetime.

Daisaku Ikeda explains: *Consider birth and death in terms of space. Galaxies wax and wane in size as stars within them are born and perish. In the existence of each star are the births and deaths of myriad living beings, as well as the appearance and disappearance of mountains, rivers and valleys.*

What about our own lifetime? We do not maintain the same matter we were born with from beginning to end. Most of our body cells continually die, to be replaced by new ones. Their births and deaths --- metabolism --- keep the body constantly provided with fresh life force and enable it to live on.

Life and death coexist in our bodies. Fingernails and hair are "lifeless," insentient things, but they originate from living material. They move from a living to a dead state in a smooth, unruffled change, followed by new fingernails and hair. The births and deaths of these and other parts of the body all combine to form a greater life. Thus life is neither a single-unit entity nor a mere assembly of parts that work independently of each other. It is something that consists of multiple components functioning in perfect unity, smaller lives combining to form a greater life. Tiny streams of births and deaths flow into broader rivers of births and deaths, which in turn pour into the vast ocean of cosmic life. The mystic nature of life is truly incredible in its working.

Buddhism believes that our energy is eternal and indestructible, but our ego and identity is in constant flux, yet this is difficult for us to see. For those of us who are preoccupied with our daily lives it may be a big ask to believe in a concept that concerns itself with the transmigration of focused energy from one bodily entity to another.

Nevertheless from a scientific point of view this appears to be the concept that makes most sense. We discussed earlier that energy cannot be destroyed, it can only be transformed. Technically speaking, when we really think about it, we have always transformed our energy throughout our existence. We must admit that we look now very differently from when we were an infant and when we look into the future our prospects to stop the 'change' process are rather bleak. All along the process of 'aging' our thoughts and emotions have changed, yet, we retained our entity throughout all these years. It shows that life is truly dynamic.

In fact many of us who have made some significant changes will find it hard to believe that we did some very 'stupid' things in the past. In that case we may even find it hard to recognize the kind of personality we had 'back then'. Looking back at our lives from the vantage point of hindsight is always easy because we know what to expect. Looking forward is always hard because we don't know what's in store.

Nevertheless we were that same entity back then and we will be that same entity when we reached some other point in the future. Therefore we could say that we are indeed something that can only be described as fleeting and dynamic, yet at this very moment we have the illusion of an internal identity that seems to be fixed.

So, why is it so hard for us to believe that we may inhabit a differently looking body in future or that the energy we once were scatters and then finds an opportunity to manifest once again in physical form?

The venerable Vasubandhu (a Buddhist monk from the 5th century AD) is quoted saying: “At death the body is separated into two, the ‘seen’ body and the ‘unseen’ body. This unseen body is called *sai-shin* which means ‘very small body’ which cannot be seen by the physical eye. It is so small that it can move through any physical matter. The eyes, ears, nose and tongue keep perfect sense, not as a body, but as an ability. This small body is able to float and fly any distance instantly. Every life in this condition has the potential to be born again, but it cannot be born when and where it likes, it is decided by what the person did while s/he was alive. S/he is born in a situation or place which is most suitable for the causes s/he made. At the moment the female egg is fertilized by the male, if it is suitable for someone’s new life, this very small body arrives there instantly, and a new physical form starts. When the physical body dies, it is impossible to either change the good or bad effects contained within its life. For some it will be a very long time. It is all decided by what that person did during his life”

These are some very insightful words indeed. It is almost hard to believe that Buddhist practitioners 1500 years ago should have had such a comprehensive understanding of life. Taking the above views into consideration, one is led to believe that there is something that quite rightly could be called a ‘consistent entity’.

In fact, if one would dismiss such concept accountability for one’s actions beyond the ‘here and now’ would be ‘out the window’ (to use a more contemporary expression) and the mystic law as well as the law of cause and effect would be a seriously challenged concept.

However, when we come to look around ourselves and consider the evidence we find in our own lives, we would probably find it extremely hard to deny its existence.

Where do we go when we are dead?

So, the question is, where do we go when we are dead according to Buddhism? We hear a lot about how we get absorbed into the 'greater life of the universe', but what does this actually mean? There is no doubt that our bodies that consist to approximately 70% water, some calcium and a host of other minerals and metals will become available again to other life forms. This disintegration process is part of the cycle of life and we all know this fact is hard to deny.

However, many of us feel very much attached to our bodies and find the imagination unbearable that we will eventually be devoured by worms, bacteria and the multitude of other creatures that do the job of rendering what we have taken from the earth, back to the earth.

Yet, this is the recycling process of life and we are part of it no matter how hard we want to beautify our thoughts around it, our bodies will disintegrate and in the process will be rather unpleasant in appearance and have bad associated odors.

Death is always a shock to the system and it is especially shocking for those who have not developed a coping 'strategy' when eventually confronted with it. And happen it will - it is only a matter of time, but we all seem to think that for some miraculous reason we are somehow exempt. It is somewhat incomprehensible that it could be me who's next. Other people die, but not me!

However, no matter how much we want to put our heads in the sand, trying to pretend that there is no 'elephant' in the room, the experience of parting from loved ones and from our own bodily existence will certainly occur, sooner or later.

So, the question the ego really wants to have answered is where does that other part of us go - the energy that is so aptly described by Buddhists as 'life force'?

If we take into consideration what Buddhists describe as the function of the '8th consciousness' or karma consciousness, and what Karl Jung describes as the 'collective unconsciousness', then that will provide a somewhat reasonable explanation.

Jung was convinced that our consciousness and that of everything and everyone else is collected and 'stored'. Similarly, Buddhists believe that the karma consciousness stores all our actions in 'real time'.

Taking this point of view, it would mean that once we are departed, our 'mental' energy that represents all our thoughts, words, deeds and actions are stored in this consciousness and this is where it remains until 'reentry' into the physical world. In other words, we are an 'action potential' but have no means to alter the essence of our lives, if we believe Vasubandhu and Ikeda, as we need to be within a physical body to effectively influence the world of 'matter'.

It is like having a dream when asleep. We have some kind of an idea that it is us who is having the dream, and we experience all sorts of fleeting thoughts and feelings, but we are unable to change anything at all in the physical world while we are sleeping.

No matter what we might dream, the problem we went to bed with the night before is still the same problem in the morning when we get up. Only when we take action in the world of 'matter' changes our experience of life.

So we could say that when we are dead our consciousness is in a dreamlike state. The Australian Aboriginals too have in fact often referred to 'the dreaming' as a 'spirit world' to which the ancestors would go after departing from their physical body.

Hence, there is a common understanding between Buddhism, Psychology and some earlier belief systems.

For instance, ancestor worship was all about 'accessing' the 'spirits' of our forefathers. Mediums that would use trance induced states would be able to be 'in touch' with the spirits and transfer their knowledge and wisdom to the next generation. Ancestor worship was a common practice to early cultures worldwide. From a Buddhist perspective these worshippers just didn't know what exactly they were 'tapping into' when they practiced their philosophy.

Talking to the dead- psychic abilities and the likely consequences

Hence, taking Jung's theory as well as the Buddhist assumption of a karma 'storehouse' as confirmed, it would be unsurprising that back in ancient times, or now, people who claim to

have access to this consciousness – so called mediums of the likes of John Edwards, may indeed connect with this energy, and it is therefore plausible that they are able to identify what a deceased entity has contributed to this pool of energy.

The sightings of ‘ghosts’ may also fall into a similar energy realm, whereby a sensitive person may indeed ‘pick up’ the energy of an event or entity that has occurred in the past.

We all have the ability to be ‘intuitive’ which could be defined as an instinctive knowing. There seems to be no doubt that some may have developed this to a level where these energies are more easily perceived.

However, Buddhism also explicitly warns that engaging in these kind of ‘psychic’ activities without actually understanding the true factors behind it calling in ‘ancestors’ or ‘ghosts’ can be confusing and therefore outright dangerous to an impressionable person.

Such person could come to the ‘wrong’ conclusion. For instance it is very fashionable these days to get advice from ‘psychics’ or mediums appearing to access a ‘greater power’ for the purpose of telling an obviously insecure and impressionable client what the future holds.

First of all we know now that the ‘halo effect’ described in an earlier chapter produces self fulfilling prophecies. Therefore, it is only too likely that a person having been told what the future holds will in fact create what has been foretold.

This will be especially so when the person has been in touch with a ‘real’ psychic, someone who had indeed the power to consciously access the collective unconsciousness or karma consciousness and has therefore been able to tell his client a few things that were recognized as ‘absolutely’ true.

In such case the belief of the client that the suggestions by the psychic about the future are indeed real, the faith thus generated will ensure that the self fulfilling prophecy is about to be fulfilled with an even greater thrust.

Unfortunately with each and every visit to the 'psychic' the person's dependency increases and so does the decline of confidence in his or her own ability to make independent decisions. It is a game of cat and mouse and leads into mental despair sooner or later.

The irony is that the psychic thus reinforced by the client as being 'superhuman' also believes s/he is something truly special and therefore comes to be just as blind to what truly happens as the one he is trying to help. The Buddha's warnings are best illustrated by the following story:

'Once a man named Kevatta went up to the Buddha, paid homage, and said, "Lord, Nalanda is a successful city. The people living in Nalanda are prosperous, and they have confidence in the Blessed One. Lord, it would be good if the Blessed One appointed a monk to work a marvel of supernormal power, so that the people of Nalanda might become much more confident in the Blessed One."

The Buddha replied, "Kevatta, I do not teach the Law to monks in that way". The Buddha gave the same reply when the question was put to him the second and third time. After the third question, the Buddha replied that there were three kinds of supernormal levels:

1. The marvel of supernormal power to appear as many persons, to pass through walls, to fly through the air, walk on water. All these are physical actions the ordinary people cannot perform.
2. The supernormal power to read other people's minds
3. The supernormal power to be able to guide people according to their mental development, for their own good, using suitable methods that fit these people.

He taught that a monk who displays the first two supernormal powers for their own sake in order to impress people, is no different from the performance of a shaman or a magician. The Buddha said that a monk who practices such worldly miracles is a source of shame, humiliation and disgust. This is because such actions may impress and win converts and followers, but they do not help them put an end to their suffering.

The third kind of supernormal power which the Buddha calls "the miracle of instruction" helps people to get rid of suffering. This is the only supernormal power that is fit to be practiced and is encouraged and praised by the Buddha.

"Furthermore, there is the case where a Tathagata appears in the world, worthy and rightly self-awakened. He teaches the Dhamma admirable in its beginning, admirable in its middle, admirable in its end. He proclaims the holy life both in its particulars and in its essence, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. ~ Kevatta Sutta"

Another story illustrates the Buddha's attitude towards miraculous powers. One day the Buddha met an ascetic who sat by the bank of a river. This ascetic had practised austerities for 25 years. The Buddha asked him what he had received for all his labour. The ascetic proudly replied that, finally, he could cross the river by walking on the water. The Buddha pointed out that this gain was insignificant for all the years of labour, since he could cross the river using a ferry for one penny!

When the uneducated, the unsophisticated and the naive see the performance of miracles, their faith and incredulity deepens. The converts who are attracted to a religion through witnessing these powers embrace a faith, not because they realize the truth or gain in wisdom, but because they are either frightened or impressed by matters they do not understand. In contrast, the Buddha appealed to the reasoning power of people to consider his teachings.

It is possible and even quite common for a person to gain psychic abilities without gaining any wisdom. The Buddha teaches that if we first gain spiritual power, then we can easily develop the miraculous or psychic powers too. But if we develop psychic abilities without spiritual development, then we are in danger. Because of man's ego it is easy for him to misuse this power for worldly gain, to impress others and for other selfish purposes. Indeed, many people who have obtained some psychic abilities have merely succumbed to their ego and vanity' (pj pilgrim, 2005).

This is why Nichiren was convinced that practicing enlightenment through the teachings of the lotus sutra holds the key that will deliver practitioners from the confusion of such nature.

Is the concept of time inconsequential in death?

However, returning back to the subject of life after death, many people concerned with matters of death are also very much concerned with the 'time question'. In other words, besides the question of 'what kind of a place will I inhabit after dying', the next most pressing question would be 'for how long will I be gone?'

Besides that the 'T' in terms of individuality seems to be a questionable interpretation of how we come to experience life after death, just as much as 'T' seems to be somewhat fleeting when asleep, or when we experience ourselves as an infant, there is nevertheless some possible interpretations of what happens if we take the teachings of the lotus sutra into consideration.

As Nagarjuna mentions – *“For some it will be a very long time. It is all decided by what that person did during his life”*.

As death is considered a state of ‘non substantiality’, and as such in light of the space/time paradigm that was explained earlier in conjunction with the Einstein’s ‘Big Bang’ theory, it could be argued that neither time nor space ‘matters’ in death. To highlight this further; a state that is perhaps a little (or a lot?) like death is ‘sleep’. Time and space is completely irrelevant when we lay our bodies to rest because we are switching our senses ‘off’ that would normally be concerned with judging where we are in space and time – the eyes judge distance and appearance, the ears do something similar, and so do our touch, smell and hearing sensors. However, they are all dependant on stimuli that comes from the ‘material’ world.

This is perhaps best explained by the following metaphor. When we go to bed, close our eyes, fall asleep, open our eyes, we will find that as if someone has used a magic wand, 6 to 8 hours have passed in the blink of an eye. We could argue therefore that the duration of our conscious ‘absence’ (sleep) is immeasurable. We only become aware of the time that has passed when we look at the alarm clock positioned next to us.

However, if we would have been awake during the same ‘time’ and had completed an endless amount of tasks, this time would have appeared as ‘long’. This is proof that time is entirely ‘perceptual’. Consequently, if one is to die, we could argue that we are ‘reborn’ in the very next instance as time during death does not exist in the conventional sense. In other words, we are HERE in one way or the other all the TIME!

Perhaps the whole death paradigm is best summoned up by Daisaku Ikeda’s explanation of the subject matter when elaborating on a letter written by Nichiren Daishonin in 1272. In this letter a priest from the Tendai Buddhist school approached Nichiren Daishonin and asked him to explain the ‘ultimate law of life’ and the question of life and death.

He explains that life and death are the two phases that all living beings must pass through. In fact, living beings can 'exist' only in the state of life or death. Whereas the ordinary person can see his or her life only as it begins with birth and ends with death, the Buddhist perspective goes far beyond this rather limited view. It sees life as a changeless entity that exists eternally, where at times it appears in the manifest phase called life, and at other times in the latent phase called death.

So, what is the Buddhist view of the two phases of life and death? The 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes what Shakyamuni thought about living and dying:

"The Buddha perceives the true aspect of the threefold world (desire, form and formlessness) exactly as it is. There is no ebb or flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction (i.e. death). It is neither substantial nor empty, neither consistent nor diverse. Nor is it what those who dwell in the threefold world perceive it to be. All such things a Buddha sees clearly and without error.

"Because living beings have different natures, different desires, different actions, and different ways of thinking and making distinctions, and because I want to enable them to put down good roots, I employ a variety of causes and conditions, similes, parables, and phrases and preach different doctrines. This, the Buddha's work, I have never for a moment neglected.

"Thus, since I attained Buddhahood, an extremely long period of time has passed. My life span is an immeasurable number of years, and during that time I have constantly abided here without ever entering extinction (dying). Good men, originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed. Now, however, although in fact I do not actually enter extinction, I announce that I am going to adopt the course of extinction. This is an expedient means which the Buddha uses to teach and convert living beings.

"Why do I do this?

"Because if the Buddha remains in the world for a long time, those persons with shallow virtue will fail to plant good roots but, living in poverty and lowliness, will become attached to the five desires (riches, sex, food and drink, reputation, and sleep) and be caught in the net of deluded thoughts and imaginings. If they see that the Buddha is constantly in the world and never enters extinction, they will grow arrogant and selfish, or become discouraged and neglectful. They will fail to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha and will not approach him with a respectful and reverent mind.

Shakyamuni thus denies that there is an 'ebb and flow of life' – i.e. there is no such thing as birth and then death, only eternal life.

Nichiren Daishonin says that we should instead regard birth and death --- the ebb and flow --- as essential phases of the ultimate entity of life.

However, both believe that no matter what happens, the ultimate entity of our life remains unchanged, as it keeps repeating the endless cycle of birth and death. In other words, life and death are one and the same – they are both the ultimate entity of life which is 'active' when 'alive' and 'latent' when 'dead' until a cause brings it into 'active' once again.

Daisaku Ikeda states:

“What allows life to continue is the mystic energy accumulated in its latent state. When the latent form is aroused by some external influence, it becomes manifest once again, giving full expression to its individuality. Eventually, it quietly recedes into the state of death. However, during this latent state, that being stores up fresh energy in preparation for its coming rebirth”

“Life is like the explosion and combustion of a force stored up during its rest period. When it has completed its lifetime, it passes away, merging into the universe. During this latent state it refuels itself with cosmic force, awaiting the time when it can spring to life once again”.

“This is a macroscopic view of life, seen in terms of one lifetime within the eternity of past, present and future. We must also look at life microscopically, seeing the births and deaths that occur within each of us at every passing moment. A lifetime is made up of the repetition of this process, for births and deaths of smaller lives combine to ensure the continuation of a greater life”

As I use hypnotherapy extensively in my practice with clients, I come across some evidence for this. Although I am myself rather critically inclined when it comes to matters of the 'unseen' and the probability that some people 'imagine' things rather than having in fact experienced them, it does not explain the frequency with which some of my clients have 'unintended' past life regressions during therapy.

This seems to happen to people who don't even have the religious denomination that would provide the framework for such thinking.

The process of regression during therapy usually requires a client to connect with the initial sensitizing event believed to be the cause for some of his or her currently experienced troubles. Due to the risk of 'false memory creation' clients are guided through a process that excludes the use of leading questions.

The aim is to get to a particular childhood issue that may have caused a certain undesired thought pattern which has ultimately manifested and created all subsequent experiences and reinforced beliefs. This usually happens early in life, typically before the age of 6 or 7.

However, when guiding clients 'back', they often go way beyond birth and find themselves in another time under conditions that were somewhat similar to their present problems. They may have been of a different gender or felt that they are of different race, or built, either way, they are always quite amazed that there was a part of themselves that they were utterly unaware of.

There is some scientific literature that aims to prove that reincarnation is in fact a reality. However, as one might imagine researching matters that involve the unseen, such claims are often difficult to confirm. Nevertheless, there are a number of scientists that have made an attempt to prove the theory with interesting results.

Scientific research into reincarnation

For instance the famous English biologist Thomas Huxley found the idea of reincarnation plausible and discussed the subject at length in his book *Evolution and Ethics and other Essays*.

However, by far the most comprehensive scientific work in the field has been undertaken by psychiatrist Professor Ian Stevenson from the University of Virginia. He published a detailed collection of personal reports in books such as "Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation" and "Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects Volume 1: Birthmarks" and "Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects Volume 2: Birth Defects and Other Anomalies".

Using strict scientific methods, Professor Stevenson devoted over 40 years to the study of children who could remember a past life. Using both, children from Asia and from Europe his methods ruled out all possible "normal" explanations of a child's past life memories. He would laboriously identify the closer circumstances of the deceased person that the child would claim as having been in a previous lifetime. He would then verify the facts and publish the results in peer reviewed papers. He took a special interest into abnormalities such as birthmarks, scars, and birth defects and was in many instances able to relate these defects back to the person who was deceased.

For example Professor Stevenson writes:

A boy in Beirut spoke of being a 25-year-old mechanic, thrown to his death from a speeding car on a beach road. According to multiple witnesses, the boy provided the name of the driver, the exact location of the crash, the names of the mechanic's sisters and parents and cousins, and the people he went hunting with – all of which turned out to match the life of a man who had died several years before the boy was born, and who had no apparent connection to the boy's family.

Another prominent researcher into reincarnation is the American psychiatrist Brian Weiss. Initially a 'non believer' in past lives Weiss came across a patient by the name of Catherine in the 1980's. During regression hypnosis Catherine began discussing a past life which he was able to confirm through some research into public records. Thus convinced that this was indeed plausible, he has regressed more than 4000 patients since. Weiss is a great advocate for using hypnotic regressions to alleviate present life problems as he believes that many present life phobias and illnesses are connected to past life experiences.

Like Stevenson and Weiss, there are a multitude of people from the scientific community who have aimed to highlight that the reincarnation phenomena does indeed exist just as there are at least the same number who claim that the evidence is just not sufficient to substantiate these claims.

Either way, the idea of reincarnation forms the conceptual basis of Buddhism. Assuming that reincarnation may indeed be a reality, the question then remains what is the purpose of living lifetime after lifetime? In other words, what is that we need to learn, do or understand while we are in a body wandering the earth? What is this conflict between matter and antimatter all about? Buddhism states that we should enjoy our lives. However, it also says that this joy can only be experienced in all its glory through enlightenment.

When we are not enlightened to our true nature, life becomes a real rollercoaster ride and the kind of identity or perception of ego that we have when unenlightened ensures that we go through life with real sorrow and indeed hopelessness. Without enlightenment we perceive ourselves as beings of temporary existence. Daisaku Ikeda elaborates further by saying that a life lived out of step with enlightenment as defined by Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo must go through a cycle of birth and death burdened by a limiting destiny. In other words, if we don't know what we are all about we will always have the impression that we are 'final', i.e. from one point to another and thus put limits in place that will prevent us from allowing our energy to express itself fully.

Only when we are enlightened can we be truly limitless. We all know what it means to limit our life. So, let's think about a person that has a rather limited view of life, someone who would think that it is all over when he or she is dead. There really is not much of a future at all and this will ultimately show in a person's attitude.

For example, let's assume such person is of an advanced age and it so happens that there is something new to learn, like a degree at university. I think we could all agree that the lack of faith in the future would mean that some people would be less motivated to exert their energy 100% as there really is nothing to gain anyway. Wouldn't such person ask "what's the point when I have to die soon anyway?"

The practicing ND Buddhist on the other hand will simply say "I give it my best shot to the last breath, because I have an eternal future!" Having a future means having hope. Having hope means having limitless motivation and energy for as long as there is life. This attitude makes already all the difference.

Daisaku Ikeda writes:

The state of mind with which we meet our death will greatly influence the course of our lives over eternity. Granted if one is unconcerned how one dies, or if one dismisses any connection between this existence and the next, then there isn't any need to practice the Daishonin's Buddhism. But the truth is that life is eternal, that our existence continues even after we die. Moreover, during the latent stage of death before rebirth, we cannot change the essence of our lives, we cannot carry out Buddhist practice. Only while we are alive as human beings can we practice Buddhism.

Using the example of sleep and being awake here we could say that while we are awake we can take action in the physical world. This will bring some real changes. However, when we are asleep, it doesn't matter how much we may dream about change, it remains nothing but a dream that finds no expression in the 'real' world. When we wake up in the morning we will have to deal with the things we have left unfinished before we went to sleep.

Now, what has all this to do with the concept of conflict resolution? Well..., if one considers that we are indeed all one (from the same source – the ONE), and only perceptually separated; that we are actually all just here, friend or foe, to motivate our expansion and experiences to new heights, then we can truly say that Buddha (God...etc) is always here, never dying, teaching the law to those (parts of ITSELF) who want to hear it (lotus sutra).

Thus there really is no such thing as 'evil' in a deeper sense as it is necessary to motivate good – thus, can we still judge it as 'evil'? – The Buddha called the evil Devadatta (the cousin who betrayed and even tried to do away with him) a good 'friend' because he could see the necessity for his actions to prove the truth of Buddhism. If this philosophical 'tack' is indeed correct, we could say that everything is an act of 'self love', even though it does not necessarily appear that way (at least not to the deluded).

So, what's enlightenment again?

The concept of Ichinen Sanzen explained

As outlined earlier, Tien Tai from China correlated all sutras and established that the Lotus sutra reigned supreme as it incorporated all that what Shakyamuni wanted people to understand – that they too are in fact Buddhas just as he is, they just have to become aware of this. As we know, Tien Tai from China has put the Buddha's enlightenment into a schematic format which is now called ichinen sanzen. Translated this means 'a single life moment possesses three thousand realms'. In other words, there are 3000 possible conditions in which life expresses itself in ourselves, the environment and the society we live in. This is the ultimate truth as distilled by Tien Tai of which he says represents the Buddha's (Gautama Siddharta's) enlightenment.

Now, the explanation of the concept may sound rather abstract and complex but we will be able to relate to it as the following explanation will show.

In short, the concept of ichinen sanzen says that we all have 10 possible psychological states. These states are described as hell, hunger, anger, animality, tranquillity, rapture, learning, realization, Bodhisattva (being humane inclined), and Buddhahood (having an enlightened understanding of the workings of life).

These psychological states are usually strongest in one way or the other, depending on a person's basic life condition. In other words, some people are 'generally' more angry others more tranquil for example. However these conditions can fluctuate at any moment. For instance someone in the life condition of 'learning' can suddenly fall into 'anger' or 'hell' if presented with a situation in which he or she experiences injustice or when receiving a phone call conveying a message of an accident to a loved one.

Seen from this perspective we can say that whenever we are in 'one' life condition, we can quickly get into another as soon as changes in the environment occur.

In order to better understand what the 10 states indicate it would be best to first of all explain each one in a little more in detail.

1. **Hell**; this is a state that is utterly devoid of freedom. Dominated by rage and the impulse to destroy oneself and others Hell is a state where one undergoes extreme suffering and despair and it appears that there is just no way out.

2. **Hunger**; is a condition where one is never satisfied. No matter how much food, clothes, wealth, pleasure, fame, power and so forth one has, if in the state of hunger it will never be enough. One suffers the torment of relentless craving and there appears no way to alleviate it.

3. **Animality**; Buddhism defines this state as a condition governed by instinct without self control, morality or reason. There is no wisdom and when in this life condition we are following the rule that the strong are to be feared and those weaker than us are despised and preyed upon.

As becomes evident, the states of Hell, Hunger and Animality are rather undesired life conditions and they are thus collectively called 'the three evil paths', defining the lowest states of being.

4. **Anger**; Here we are dominated by our own selfish ego and we are compelled to be competitive as we feel the need to be superior to others. The only person that counts is us and that is all we can really hold dear in this state.

Buddhism names the conditions of Hell, Hunger, Animality and Anger collectively the 'four evil paths' for obvious reasons.

5. Humanity or Tranquillity; is a state in which we are able to control our instinctive desires through reason, thus allowing us to judge a situation fairly. Here we are able to live harmoniously with our environment.

6. Heaven or Rapture; is a state where we experience a sense of pleasure once a desire has been fulfilled. However, that sense of pleasure is temporary and therefore short lived as it disappears as soon as the circumstances change or as soon as we are getting used to the new situation (i.e. which will only be a matter of time).

The first 6 stages from Hell to Heaven are called 'the six paths' as they are governed by our reaction to the external circumstances. Here we are like on a rollercoaster 'up and down', whenever changes occur. Our locus of control is minimal. Buddhism explains that the majority of people spend their time moving back and forth on these 6 paths, sometimes full of rapture because they have received what they desired, and then falling into the depths of hell or anger the moment their expectations haven't been met.

In the lower six paths we can at best expect uncertainty. This is why we strive to attain higher life states such as the next four from Learning through to Buddhahood. Buddhism refers to those as 'the four noble worlds'.

7. Learning; realizing that the lower six paths are very volatile and offer no security the state of learning is defined by our seeking of lasting truth and self reformation through the teachings of others.

8. Realization; specifies a life condition in which one is aware of the impermanence of all phenomena. Realizing that the six lower paths (hell, hunger, anger, animality, tranquillity, rapture) don't make for secure living, one is inclined to seek salvation through perceiving lasting truth through one's own observations and efforts to escape the suffering.

In Buddhism these two states, Learning and Realization, are often referred to as the two vehicles. The problem with the two vehicles is that when we are in these states we are likely to only seek our own salvation.

(9) **Bodhisattva**; this state is characterised by one's desire to devote oneself to altruistic and compassionate actions and aspiration for enlightenment itself.

(10) **Buddhahood**; Understanding Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. Buddhahood is a condition of absolute freedom and comprehensive understanding. Because an enlightened person understands all phenomena and their true meaning, that person consequently possesses great power and wisdom. One's Buddhahood will be expressed in the actions of the Bodhisattva.

Combining the question of life and death and the 10 worlds Daisaku Ikeda states the following: *We experience life and death at every moment. If our life at the present moment is in Hell, the state of Hell is "alive," and the other nine worlds are "dead." Suppose you are finally cured of a long, drawn-out disease. You dance with joy in the state of Rapture. The agony of Hell you felt a moment ago is gone; it has died. Hell and the other worlds have passed away, replaced by the vigorous life of Rapture. You want to tell other people of the joy of your recovery and attribute it to your Buddhist practice so they can possibly benefit from your experience. Then Rapture vanishes and your life changes to the state of Bodhisattva. Our lifetime is an accumulation of momentary lives and deaths. Even if Rapture is alive now, the other nine worlds have not in the least ceased to exist; they have merely become dormant. Since they are latent, any one of them can come to life in the next moment.*

Since our lifetime is an accumulation of moments, the most important thing is the state of life we assume at each moment. Eternity consists of moments, and each moment has a lifetime condensed in it. Hence our state of life from moment to moment determines the overall course of our life. This, more broadly, is the key to changing one's karma. When we value each moment and live actively, enthusiastically, ready to greet the next moment, we go through a state of life and death free from suffering and directed toward enlightenment. If not, we will have to go through lifetime after lifetime in the six paths (from Hell to Rapture), passing from one dark state to another. That is why we must embrace Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Law which penetrates the ultimate in life and death. Only this Law will enable us to attain the state of life in which it is possible to live eternity in a single moment.

The ultimate law of life is the fundamental force which penetrates and pervades not only humanity but all things in the universe. It denotes the universality of life. All phenomena from the tiniest particle of dust to the galaxies move in rhythm to the law of life. There is nothing in the entire universe which is not touched by it.

The number 10 is therefore easy to understand. So how then do we get to 100? Tien Tai explained that each of the 10 psychological states also has the 10 states within it. As mentioned earlier, whenever we are in 'one' life condition, the other nine are dormant but potentially occur as soon as the circumstances of our life change.

This means that the life condition of 'learning' for example has the states of hell, hunger, anger, animality, tranquillity, rapture, learning, realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddhahood within it.

In other words, someone who experiences the life condition of 'learning' could do so in a state of 'anger' or he could do so in a state of 'realization'. Thus 'learning' would 'feel' very different in each state.

This then means that the 10 states can be multiplied by the 10 states and we therefore arrive at the magic number 100.

The 10 States	
1. Hell	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
2. Hunger	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
3. Anger	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
4. Animality	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
5. Tranquillity	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
6. Rapture	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
7. Learning	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
8. Realization	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
9. Bodhisattva,	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment
10. Enlightenment	Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Hunger, Realization, Bodhisattva, Enlightenment

10 X 10 = 100 possible (mental) states

So, how do we arrive at 1000 would be the next question? Tien Tai explains further that the 100 possible psychological states find expression in the 10 factors.

The 10 factors are:

1. appearance (body),
2. Nature (mind),
3. Entity (the combination of body and mind),
4. Power (energy),
5. Influence,
6. Internal cause (karma),
7. External cause (catalyst that causes a response),
8. Latent effect (action potential),
9. Manifest effect (when action has been taken),
10. Consistency from beginning to end (all these 10 factors are dependent on each other and are 'happening' at the same time – i.e. none of these factors can exist purely by itself).

For example, an 'angry' person in the state of 'learning' will have an 'appearance'. This means he or she has 'influence' and through some action shows a 'manifest effect'. This also means that all

the other factors that I haven't mentioned here must be consistent from beginning to end even though they may not be visible to the observer. In other words, we only see anger in the person's face and behaviour but for it to be there, there must be an internal cause that has created a latent effect which has been brought out by an external cause and so on.

This follows that the 100 possible psychological states can be multiplied by 10 factors – and that makes 1000. As we continue to follow the process of deductive reasoning, we now need to ask 'how do we arrive at 3000 states in one moment of existence?'

That's possibly the easiest to explain when we come to think that in order to find expression the 1000 possible states will have to manifest in our 'self', the 'environment', and the 'society' we live in.

In other words, the three realms in which the 1000 states are expressed in the phenomenal world are:

1. **The self** (which has temporarily formed through the union of form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness- also called 'the five components')
2. **The society** (the social group of cultural and economic organization with its rules and regulations)
3. **The environment** (the natural environment with its natural laws in which something exists or lives)

Each one of the realms has the potential to express the 1000 states, thus making it a total number of 3000. They are of course, intrinsically interconnected and cannot be separated.

It is easy to imagine that a volcanic eruption (hellish) is differently perceived from a peaceful valley (tranquillity). It is also easy to imagine that a society could collectively decide that human rights are of utmost importance (Bodhisattva) versus deciding they should go to war with their neighbours (anger).

To further explain the interactions between all states (i.e. self, society and environment), we could within our 'self' experience 'anger' whereas the 'natural environment' where we are experiencing this anger is in a state of 'tranquillity' (i.e. angry as we are, we may be standing next to a beautiful perfectly still mountain lake), whereas the society we live in may be collectively in a state of rapture (maybe after winning the Olympics?).

Some people tend to ask 'how can the environment manifest Buddhahood (i.e. enlightenment)? For example we could simply think that books are part of the environment in which enlightenment may be explained. Also, Shakyamuni observed the processes of a lotus plant to become 'enlightened' of the functions within life. Therefore, we could say that the cause for enlightenment is inherent in the environment, we just need to have the ability to perceive it.

All this equates to 3000 possible life states to be experienced within a single moment of existence.

The teachings of the Lotus Sutra as expressed by Tien Tai of China

(The Buddha's enlightenment)

Ten Worlds (10)

1. Hell, Hunger, 2. Anger, 3. Animality, 4. Tranquility, 5. Rapture, 6. Learning, 7. Hunger, 8. Realization, 9. Bodhisattva, 10. Enlightenment

X

Ten Worlds (10)

1. Hell, Hunger, 2. Anger, 3. Animality, 4. Tranquility, 5. Rapture, 6. Learning, 7. Hunger, 8. Realization, 9. Bodhisattva, 10. Enlightenment

X

Ten Factors (10)

1. Appearance, 2. Nature, 3. Entity, 4. Power, 5. Influence, 6. Internal Cause, 7. External Cause, 8. Latent Effect, 9. Manifest Effect, 10. Consistency from Beginning to End

X

3 Realms (3)

1. The Self, 2. the Society, 3. the Environment

=

3000 possible moments of existence
(fluctuating from one moment to the next)

Utilising the concept of 'ichinen sanzen', the term (1) 'appearance' thus corresponds to 'beginning' and the term (9) 'manifest effect' corresponds to 'end' (i.e. outcome or the results of one's karma/action in life).

Nichiren Daishonin explained this concept by explaining how the body (appearance) relates to its shadow (manifest effect).

Writing about the oneness of the body and mind (shiki shin funi) he explains that when the body is crooked, the shadow is also crooked.

In other words, if a person's mind is distorted, his actions too will be distorted and consequently his life will also take on that distortion in the form of suffering (shadow)-i.e. manifested effect.

In the words of Billups (2010) *"This ultimately means that all suffering that manifest in one's environment is directly related to the individual's mind or the collective mind's of all the people in that environment. This is the principle of Esbo funi, the oneness of life (body) and its environment (shadow). The illusion that most people follow is to try to make the shadow stand up by focusing on it externally (trying to manipulate the environment and other people). The source of the shadow is from the self (spiritual disorder from within), the inherent cause (karma) that produces the manifest effect in the environment. This is the most difficult illusion for a common mortal to perceive (but not for a Buddha). The 3 poisons of a people's minds (greed, anger and stupidity) are said to manifest as the conditions of famine, war and pestilence. So, this shows how important and practical it is to be responsible for purifying one's heart and mind through the practice of Buddhism (Hendoku Iyaku - Changing poison into medicine through chanting NMHRGK), which extinguishes the source of all the sufferings which originate from within each and every individual"*.

Nichiren Daishonin states *"Even more so our past slanders of the Law, which stain the depth of one's heart. A sutra states that both the crow's Blackness and the heron's Whiteness are actually the deep stains of their past Karma."* (Major writings Volume one page 39).

"There are no mistakes in the perfect manifestation of the law of cause and effect, only suffering as one's mind moves away (illusions or ignorance) from the awareness of this constant truth in life" Billups (2010)

For the purpose of illustrating the concept of ichinen sanzen once again, let's assume you have caused another person some distress (knowingly or unknowingly) which has turned into anger to the point where that person decides to get revenge to get even. This person thus decides to scratch the paintwork of your beloved car and does some damage to its tyres to make sure it

really hurts (the decision to do so equals ‘inherent cause’ which has not yet progressed to ‘manifest effect’).

However, that person follows through with the plan (manifest effect) while you are peacefully asleep in your bed. In the morning you get a phone call from your boss who tells you that you have just been nominated as employee of the month something that besides recognition of your efforts is also connected to a bonus payment of \$1000. You are dancing with joy (rapture) but as you open the door you become aware of the rather sorry sight of your car (external cause) which almost immediately overshadows your rapturous life condition to one of severe anger or even hell.

Your anger is evident in your demeanour, your facial expression and of course the physiological changes that take place in your body (adrenalin is pumping, cortisol levels increasing, your stomach churning, etc.) and subsequently the actions you take there and then (manifested effect) as well as the action you are planning to take (latent effect - i.e. creation of new karma) in response to it all. You think that whoever has done this to you will get a hiding (animality) when you come across that person. And so acting like this you stay in the lower paths of existence and there you’ll stay until you decide to apply a deeper level of wisdom to the situation (the stages of realisation, Boddhisattva, Buddhahood).

This example shows how the 3 realms of the 1. individual interrelates with the other two realms of 2. sentient beings (i.e. people/society) and 3. the environment.

Billups (2010) states “As the dynamic aspects of each of the 10 worlds, 10 factors and the 3 realms interplay with each other, these realities intermingle to give life to the objective appearance it has as it manifest in each and every phenomena (shobo jisso). Every person sees life exactly the way they see it as true (subjective truth or belief), whether in the condition of hell, rapture or learning. Each experience is unique to that individual’s condition of life and perceptions relative to that condition Nichiren Daishonin states that beings in the state of hell see the Ganges river as fire, people in the world of rapture see the ganges river as water and the beings in the worlds of bodhisattva and Buddhahood see the Ganges river as the eternal unchanging law. The same objective reality is seen a different way by each individual based on their life condition (one of the 10 worlds) and their inherent cause (karma)”.

The Gohonzon – the instrument for reminding us of our highest life condition

Nichiren Daishonin was able to transfer his life condition on paper and he called this inscription the Gohonzon (great object of worship). In Japanese, "go" means worthy of honor and "honzon" means object of fundamental respect. He inscribed the Gohonzon in Chinese and Sanskrit characters, symbolically depicting the life state of Buddhahood, which, as we now know, all people possess. The Gohonzon essentially represents the 3000 life conditions in one moment of existence (Ichinen Sanzen) with the words Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo written in the centre. It serves as a focal point and catalyst for Buddhahood to emerge within NDB practitioners. In other words, the Gohonzon, together with ones faith and the chanting of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, acts as a stimulus to activate the life-condition of Buddhahood innate in our life.

ND Buddhists typically chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo to a Gohonzon enshrined in their own homes. People can apply for a Gohonzon through the SGI and after having shown that they indeed are 'serious' about their practice they will receive one. Nevertheless, this is not to say that we can't practice NDB without an object of worship. In fact many people do.

However, as our inner life-condition changes constantly, it makes sense to have an object of worship that reminds us of our highest potential life condition.

Staying in the highest life condition – being aware of the three obstacles and four devilish functions within life

There is no doubt that staying in Buddhahood is accompanied with struggles. As we keep striving for greater development, obstacles will invariably arise. Just like an Olympian encounters great challenges in his or her efforts to be the best he or she can be, so does anybody who rises to the challenge of becoming a wiser, more humane individual face obstacles.

Buddhism refers to these challenges and obstacles as ‘the three obstacles and four devils’. The three obstacles and four devils is a literal translation of the Japanese term ‘sansho shima’. This is a traditional classification of the types of difficulties and obstacles we encounter when we practise Buddhism.

Obstacles usually refers to external problems we may meet, whereas devils refers not to scary demonic spirits, which do not really exist, but rather to our own innermost negative tendencies, or the workings of life's innate deluded nature. We could say that obstacles are anything that functions to obstruct our practice of faith, whereas devils are self-destructive and destroy the quality of life itself.

The three obstacles

1. Earthly desires, or obstacles arising from the three poisons of greed, anger and stupidity.
2. Karma, or obstacles due to karma created by committing any of the five cardinal sins or ten evil acts (this category is also interpreted as opposition from one's partner or children).
3. Retribution, or obstacles due to painful retribution for actions in the three evil paths (Hell, Hunger and Animality). This category also indicates obstacles caused by one's sovereign, parents or other persons who carry some sort of secular authority.

The four devilish functions

1. The five components, that is, those hindrances caused by one's physical and mental functions.
2. Earthly desires, or illusions arising from the three poisons.
3. Death, because the fear and suffering that death entails, whether our own or someone else's can shake our faith and obstruct our practice of Buddhism, especially if death seems untimely.
4. The Devil of the Sixth Heaven. This is regarded as the most serious hindrance; in Indian cosmology this king of devils represents the fundamental darkness inherent in life itself. This can assume any number of forms to obstruct believers and is often said to take the form of

persecution by those in power. It is the most powerful of all the negative forces, and takes the form most likely to trouble us or cause us to suffer from doubt or illusion.

Why consistent Buddhist practice is important

All said and done, we could now assume that knowing what we know now about enlightenment is all that is required to achieve happiness.

However, it is within our human nature that we tend to forget things. Even though we may have found great delight and understanding in these few lines, and the many research efforts into the subject matter of Buddhism that is yet to follow, if we don't keep the one essential phrase in mind, Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, we are in danger of forgetting once again who we truly are, so tells us Nichiren Daiushonin.

Thus, the Buddha's of present and past have made it absolutely clear that there can be no 'maintenance' of enlightenment without consistent practice. As mentioned, in NDB regular chanting and keeping the phrase of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo in mind will remind the practitioner of the true nature of all phenomena.

Yet, many people shy away from a commitment towards practice as they see it as chains seemingly shackling them to some sort of undesired routine. They say "I want to be free" only to be trapped by their inability to overcome their own negativity eventually.

We just have to think of the smoker who can't stop smoking, the overweight person that cannot get up and exercise, the person that cannot forget and forgive or the man or woman who doesn't believe he or she could do a certain thing, etc. Are they not chained to something more terrifying? Are they not chained to their fundamental darkness nevertheless they are under the illusion that they are in fact 'free' when in reality they are just ignorant.

Yet, those who discipline themselves by observing their mind and see it for what it truly is through consistent practice are seen as 'trapped'. How could this be? Wouldn't we be better off to have the ability to see phenomena for what they really are, and then act wisely?

Conclusion (part 1)

We have come to understand that conflict has its cause in ‘distinction’. ‘Distinctions’ are a necessary function of the mind to have the perception of being ‘something’. The NDB practitioner aims to see distinctions for what they truly are and understands that all is ultimately one (i.e. without distinction) as highlighted by the concept of ‘dependant origination’. The practitioner furthermore understands that life as it presents itself as a function of distinctions is eternal and dynamic, and is to be enjoyed. Thus, life’s ultimate purpose is finding happiness through maintaining a high life state through practice no matter what the circumstances. Conflict in its highest state of mind is therefore seen merely as a motivator for eternal growth and cause for change and expansion, conflict in the lowest state of mind is seen as hellish function

Buddhism specifies an unenlightened person’s mind as driven by ignorance and therefore their mind is likely to create undesired consequences. Furthermore, an unenlightened person cannot ‘see’ that all effects, desired or undesired are thus ultimately self-created and can be changed as soon as the mind changes. Unenlightened persons are also unaware of their eternal existence and therefore may lack the motivation and understanding that allows for an ‘escape’ from ones action. The enlightened person (Buddha) knows the only way to change the undesired consequences of a past action (karma) into desired consequences is through changing the current action with the power of wisdom derived from Buddhist practice. Thus, NDB holds the view that through practicing enlightenment (chanting), besides ensuring good mental health, it will also be an effective determinant for good physical health as it offers practitioners the necessary psychological coping mechanisms needed to face the daily challenges of this life and beyond.

Part 2

Buddhism and the Merit of Mindfulness Therapies

Depression, the driver of Mindfulness therapies

The World Health Organisation predicted that by the year 2020 depression will impose the second largest burden of ill health worldwide.

The tell tale signs of depression range from prolonged sadness, anxiety, lack of motivation, hopelessness to fatigue.

The most common and seemingly most cost effective treatment for depression is antidepressant medication prescribed by medical practitioners (GP's).

However, 50% of clients taking antidepressants report that once they discontinue their use, depression returns with a vengeance, even though they have been diagnosed as depression free when taken off medication. The most challenging problem is that those who are experiencing a second or third episode of depression increase their chances by as much as 90% to have a relapse of depression sometime in future. It has also been noted that the earlier in life depression has occurred in the individual, the more likely they are to suffer a relapse.

Thus, it is unsurprising to see why many people are seeking alternatives to drugs.

It is now known that during an episode of depression negative mood (i.e. fatigue or sluggishness) occurs alongside negative thinking (i.e. I am worthless, a failure, etc.). Once the mood has eventually normalised the negative thoughts and feelings have disappeared as well.

Hence, new research explains the pathology of depression now to be as follows:

During an episode of depression, negative mood has been associated with negative thought patterns (stimulus and response pattern). This is resulting in the likelihood that once a situation or circumstance triggers a relatively small amount of sluggish mood, negative thinking will invariably arise by association. Even if not relevant to the situation, the individual making that association will again begin to think he or she is a failure, worthless, etc. and thus feel like they are back to where they started.

This is where the cycle begins the individual gets stuck in a ruminating loop in which s/he asks 'why is this happening?' The longer the individual asks that question in desperation to finding a

solution, the longer and deeper the mood spiral winds on potentially leading into another bout of full blown depression.

Understanding that there is a link between negative moods and thoughts show that it is possible to stop negative thoughts from spiralling out of control through learning how to manage our thinking with the help of mental strategies, i.e. mindfulness. CBT, etc.

To properly evaluate some of these more common approaches, a short historical outline of mindfulness in psychology is presented further below.

Mindfulness in psychology

The concept of mindfulness in psychology has been around since the 1970's and what started off as a Buddhist meditation has been applied in various therapies in modern psychology and psychiatry to address mental health conditions such as anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression to name only a few.

Mindfulness forms an essential part in the teaching of Buddhist 'awareness' meditation and is seen as a crucial step towards enlightenment. In Buddhism mindfulness is described as a calm state of awareness of one's feelings, thoughts, body functions and/or consciousness. As such, it is an analytical approach with the aim of gaining wisdom.

Similarly, in the psychological domain mindfulness is defined as non judgemental awareness that focuses on the present experience. Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt and Walach (2004) define Mindfulness as follows:

"Mindfulness is characterized by dispassionate, nonevaluative and sustained moment-to-moment awareness of perceptible mental states and processes. This includes continuous, immediate awareness of physical sensations, perceptions, affective states, thoughts, and imagery. Mindfulness is nondeliberative: It merely implies sustained paying attention to ongoing mental content without thinking about, comparing or in other ways evaluating the ongoing mental phenomena that arise during periods of practice. Thus, mindfulness may be seen as a form of naturalistic observation, or participant-observation, in which the objects of observation are the perceptible mental phenomena that normally arise during waking consciousness."

The most common approach to mindfulness is based on two steps.

1. Self regulation of attention. The practitioner focuses on the experience that comes to the fore of the mind at the present moment. Put differently, a practitioner controls his or her concentration (focus) in order to be 'conscious' of present moments feelings, thoughts and surroundings (being in the now/present).
2. Observation of mind. Using an attitude of curiosity and openness the practitioners' orientation is directed towards accepting one's stream of thoughts that will invariably arise from such focus without passing judgement. In other words, the practitioner takes the position of observer and acknowledges and accepts whatever comes to the fore of the mind without 'getting involved'. For example if we are starting to think "This meditation is a waste of time - it just doesn't work for me", or "I don't think I can do this" then we just need to continue observing these thoughts, and the emotions linked to these thoughts until we are fully aware that we are the one observing what happens before us, but we are also aware that we don't have to react to any of what plays out before us.

Even though based on Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness techniques have been utilised as secular practices for centuries to address psychosomatic illnesses and mental health in general. The more recent discovery of mindfulness as a psychological tool to assist people to intentionally recognising each moment as it lay before them has led many who took up the practice to a richer, more expressive and less stressful life experience.

Although a relatively new psychological tool, mindfulness has been the subject of much research and a number of mindfulness measures have mainly been correlated with variables relating to the field of health and performance as well as general subjective well being. The results of such studies have shown that mindfulness meditation reduces ruminative and distractive thoughts and behaviours (Jain and Shapiro, 2007), induces declines in mood disturbances (Brown, 2003) and stress Garland (2009), protects against functional impairment due to high stress situations (Jha, 2010), as well as increases emotional regulation generally (Arch, 2006).

Furthermore, other researchers have found that mindfulness increases a practitioners purpose in live, brain and immune function, activation in the left-sided anterior, a rise in antibodies in response to influenza (Davidson, 2003), an increase in academic performance in women (Shao, 2009), an increase in subjective well-being through inducing a feeling of 'having enough' (Brown, 2009) as well as decreased symptoms of illness (Fredrickson, 2008).

It is unsurprising therefore that a multitude of mindfulness therapies have been developed in an attempt to bring the philosophy at its heart to those who are suffering from unwanted thoughts and feelings.

However, they all seem to be quite similar in essence and it is difficult to see which one of these approaches would yield the better outcomes. Hence, in order to define some of the similarities and differences to mindfulness a number of the more common therapy approaches to mindfulness have been outlined below:

Morita Therapy – Mindfulness as a 4 step approach

Created by a Japanese psychiatrist, there is the rather lengthy Morita Therapy, which is based on Zen ideology of non attachment. Morita utilises a structured approach based on four phases.

Phase 1 requires the practitioner to learn how to separate from the noise of an intrusive world that constantly bombards the senses. This stage requires a great level of solitude whereas phase 2 requires an engagement in monotonous work that has to be executed in silence.

This stage is dominated by leaving the solitude of phase 1 behind while also writing a reflective diary, enabling the practitioner to learn how to separate thoughts and feelings.

Consequently, the practitioner increases his or her awareness again that comes with opening up to the stimulation of the world, but this time with a deeper level of understanding of their own thoughts and feelings in association brought on by such stimulation.

In phase 3 the practitioner is engaged in strenuous physical work, such as chopping wood, etc. The work needs to be challenging and hard so that the practitioner gets a sense of achievement, a feeling of 'ability' to be able to handle difficult challenges.

This translates into greater levels of confidence and the practitioner thus gains the realisation that s/he has the ability to cope with whatever lies ahead. This phase is concerned with transitioning the practitioner from victim to victor. In this phase passive treatment given by others is transformed into motivating the practitioner to find his/her own inner strength and belief that 'they can'.

For those who have physical ailments (such as an injury) that wouldn't really allow for a 'boot camp' type physical challenges to take place, this phase may be all about learning to do some uncomfortable stretching, or strength exercises (i.e. challenging physio therapy).

To balance this rather physiologically demanding approach, practitioners are encouraged to spend time creating works of art. This may be painting, writing, carving, or whatever connects a practitioner to the creative aspects of their humanity.

In phase 4 practitioners are reintegrated into the 'non treatment world'. Here they would utilise and integrate what they have learned in the earlier three phases. At this stage they should have 'changed' into a 'self' who has clearer thoughts, is more ordered and thus they have the capacity to control their set of circumstances rather than being controlled by it.

Gestalt Therapy

Since the 1940's mindfulness has been part of Gestalt therapy, either in theory and practice. In the most simplistic terms, Gestalt therapy founded by psychoanalyst Fritz Perls is concerned with teaching people a method of awareness that distinguishes between their pre existing attitudes and their actual perceiving, feeling and acting in a situation.

Put differently, in Gestalt therapy attempted interpretations and explanations of a situation are considered less reliable in terms of what 'is real', and thus it is better to communicate a phenomenological experience directly as it comes to the fore of the mind (saying/noticing it as it is) rather than filtering the experience through perceptual filters.

As such, the aim for practitioners of Gestalt therapy is to create awareness of what it is they are doing in the present moment, understanding how they are actually doing it, and how they can change themselves, while learning and accepting to value themselves at the same time.

As such, Gestalt therapy focuses more on process than on content. Put differently, the focal point is on what is happening right now (process) rather than thoughts of the should's, could's and must's which are thoughts believed to have their origin in past or future oriented schema patterns (content).

Adaptation Practice

Developed by psychiatrist Clive Sherlock Adaptation Practice is based on his interpretation of Zen Buddhism. His approach to mindfulness can perhaps best be described as opposite to that of cognitive behavioural therapy where therapists aim to change their patient's thoughts and thus their behaviour.

Instead Adaptation Practice asks practitioners to simply accept their thoughts for what they are but not to react to them, just to observe and then letting them go while at the same time do what needs to be done at this very moment (like following a schedule) .

Consequently, practitioners aim to stop thinking about the past or the future by eliminating thought processes involving questioning, reflection or contemplation in order to free their mind from otherwise debilitating (unhelpful) thought processes.

Sherlock proposes that tolerating feelings without attaching oneself to it brings about the changes one desires. The willingness to letting go of a thought instead of holding on to it and having it 'your way' is all that is needed.

Hence, following a defined schedule (i.e. getting up at a certain time every day, go to work, etc) becomes the focus of the mind to the exclusion of thinking too much about anything else (i.e. wouldn't it be nice sleeping in, etc) – 'just do what needs to be done' without dwelling on it is the slogan that describes the mindset one should hold.

Sherlock points out that his approach requires a great level of self-discipline to be effective. Some of his patients were concerned that the required level of commitment and directing their thoughts entirely on what needs to be done there and then would turn them into emotionless machines.

However, to their surprise they found that they can still express emotions internally without having to behave differently.

Sherlock's mindfulness philosophy can be summoned up in three statements:

1. To counteract the way most of us live, i.e. what we feel is what we do – hence we need to be simply doing what needs to be done without rationalising it.

2. Do not procrastinate rather deal with everything there and then, so there is no need to think about it later.
3. Work with your feelings by neither suppressing, nor expressing or distracting from them. Just allow yourself to feel them for a short moment and then let them go

Mindfulness-based stress reduction

Developed by bio-medical scientist Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction follows the typical mindset prescribed by Zen Buddhist philosophy which is that of paying moment to moment attention without judging.

The idea here is that worries fall away when mindfulness is achieved in the present moment. There are a number of meditation techniques that are taught in courses designed to bring mindfulness to the way one walks, sits, lies and conducts other everyday activities as well as muscle relaxation techniques.

Practitioners aim to observe their feelings, thoughts and experiences with detachment and redirect their focus to the here and now. One then owns the moment, no matter what circumstance one finds him/herself in whether they are perceived good or bad doesn't matter, and thus experiences of anxiety, depression and stress believed to be triggered by thoughts of past or projected 'possible' future events are greatly reduced.

The main concept of MBSR can best be summarized by the metaphor that the mind is a guesthouse where all thoughts and feelings are invited as welcomed guests. We know they only stay for a while until they leave again and we accept whatever they bring to us without aversion, rejection or hatred but we are also perfectly clear that we are not attached to any of those thoughts and feelings.

Acceptance and commitment therapy

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) uses a mix of mindfulness and acceptance strategies in conjunction with commitment and behaviour change strategies and has been developed by psychologist Steven Hayes to increase psychological flexibility in practitioners of ACT.

Hayes' technique is based on the assumption that our mind has an observing self which is distinct from the thoughts and feelings we may be experiencing.

He calls this approach ‘comprehensive distancing’ and it differs from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) which aims to teach people how to control thoughts and feelings in that it trains practitioners to notice, accept and consequently embrace whatever comes to their mind.

ACT takes the view that psychological processes of individuals have destructive tendencies signified by cognitive entanglement, and experiential avoidance which in turn leads to a rigid psychological mindset that prevents the individual from taking the necessary behavioural steps based on their core values.

The model is summarized by identifying the core of the kind of problems an individual is experiencing through the acronym **FEAR**:

- **F**usion with our thoughts
- **E**valuating our experience
- **A**voiding our experience
- **R**eason giving for our behaviour

To counteract **FEAR** the alternative is to **ACT**:

- **A**ccepting one’s reactions and being in the present
- **C**hoosing a valued direction (goals)
- **T**aking action

In order to achieve psychological flexibility in individuals ACT employs six core principles, these include:

1. **Cognitive de-fusion**: Learning to perceive our thoughts, images, emotions, and memories for what they are, not for what they appear to be.
2. **Acceptance**: Allowing our thoughts, images, emotions, and memories to come and go without struggling with them.
3. **Contact with the present moment**: Developing awareness of the here and now with openness, interest, and receptiveness.
4. **Observing of self**: Accessing a transcendent sense of self, a continuity of consciousness which is unchanging.
5. **Core Values**: Discovering what is most important to one's true self.

6. **Committed action:** Setting goals according to values and carrying them out with commitment and responsibly.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Another Zen Buddhism based mindfulness therapy is dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) developed by psychologist Marsha Linehan. DBT aims to reconcile opposites in thinking through observing the mind without judging what comes before it.

Lineham came to mindfulness after observing that clients with borderline personality disorder as well as non motivated chronically suicidal clients of therapists who refused to cooperate in traditional therapy techniques would show a better response to treatment when unconditionally accepted.

She also realised that for her clients to change for the better they had to come to accept their level of emotional dysfunction and show commitment to therapy.

She developed a therapy based on the concept that ‘thesis plus antithesis leads to synthesis’ and included assertiveness training and CBT as well as Buddhist mindfulness into the mix.

Lineham’s approach is very structured and based on an interaction between therapist and client in which the therapist’s role is to validate the feelings and emotions of the client, while at the same time informing the client that some of the thoughts and feelings they experience are unhelpful. Once accepted, the therapist would now be in the position to proposing better alternatives.

There are 2 components to DBT

1. **Individual** – Client and therapist discuss how DBT skills can be applied or improved. Applying learned DBT skills, a client is required to record his or her experiences on diary cards during the week. Therapist and client meet on a regular basis to discuss these experiences and validate the thoughts and feelings that came up. Using a prioritised approach, together they identify which thoughts, feelings or behaviours weren’t helpful in achieving the goals they have been aiming to achieve.
 1. First priority is focused on suicidal and self harming.
 2. Second priority focuses on behaviours that interfere with therapy

3. Third priority focuses on quality of life skills
4. Forth priority is on general life improvements
2. **Group** – meets regularly for 2-3 hours where participants learn how to use specific skills based on 4 modules.
 1. Core mindfulness skills
 2. Interpersonal effectiveness skills
 3. Emotion regulation skills
 4. Distress tolerance skills

DBT - Core Mindfulness Skills (What and How)

"What" Skills (Observe, Describe, Participate)

Observe-

Non-judgmentally observe the environment internally or externally. Understand what is happening in any given situation.

Describe-

Without using judgment, describe to others what has been observed

Participate-

Focus and become fully involved in the activity you are doing

"How" Skills (Non Judgemental, Mindfully focused, Effective)

Non-Judgmentally

Describe the facts, without evaluating whether these are good, bad, fair or unfair (as this would constitute 'judgement'). Being factual in this manner provides an objective way to communicate your point of view across to others without having to worry that others might disagree.

One-Mindfully

Be mindfully - keep focusing on one thing at a time without straying away into emotion mind.

Effectively

Do what works best for you.

Interpersonal Effectiveness

Interpersonal effectiveness skills taught in DBT include strategies for asking for what one needs in a particular situation, the ability to saying no, and coping with interpersonal conflict.

DBT's interpersonal effectiveness skills have the objective to change something in one's usual behavioural patterns when dealing with others, for example requesting that someone do something for you that you feel is required but in the past you may have been unable to express such request, or to learn how to resist changes that someone else is trying to make that you don't agree with.

The skills aim to maximize that your goals are met in a way that retains self respect and without damaging your relationship with others.

Interpersonal effectiveness Skills

DEARMAN – the acronym to get something

Describe the situation you find yourself in.

Express to the other person why this situation is an issue and your feelings about it.

Assert yourself – ask clearly for what you want.

Reinforce your position -offer a positive consequence on your behalf if you were to get what you want.

Mindful be mindful and focus on the situation by focusing on the aim and ignoring distractions.

Appear confident even though you may not be it.

Negotiate with hesitant people and achieve a comfortable compromise based on your request.

GIVE - giving something

These are skills that can aid in the maintenance of relationships and is to be used in conversations. The acronym stands for the following:

Gentle: be gentle and use the appropriate language, no put downs, no sarcasm (unless you are sure the person is alright with it), be courteous, be non-judgmental.

Interested: act interested in what is said, maintain eye contact and ask questions, when the person you are speaking with is talking about something.

Validate: through words, body language and facial expressions show that you understand a person's point of view situation

Easy Manner: endeavour to be calm and comfortable when conversing with others, smile and show a sense of humour.

FAST - keeping your self-respect

This skill aids in maintaining self-respect. used in combination with the other Interpersonal Effectiveness skills, the acronym stands for:

Fair: Be fair to yourself and others.

Apologies (few): apologise for something that was not effective, however, don't apologize more than once.

Stick to Your Values: stand by and stay true to what you believe and don't allow others to manipulate you to do something that doesn't agree with your value.

Truthful: Endeavour not to lie. Lying erodes trust in yourself and others and can damage relationships and self respect.

DBT uses tools such as specially formatted cards to identify therapy interfering behaviours that distract from progress. It uses chain analysis in order to identify the cause and effect relationship of behaviour and it views the cultural heritage and upbringing of an individual as key to their behaviour.

Emotion Regulation

Due to the emotional intensity (anger, depression, frustration, anxiety) that individuals with borderline personality disorder and suicidal individuals typically experience, DBT teaches skills aimed to regulate emotions based on the following strategy:

- Identification and labelling of your emotions
- Identification of obstacles that stop you from changing your emotions
- Reduction of vulnerability to your *emotion mind*
- Increasing awareness of your positive emotional events
- Increasing your mindfulness to the emotions currently experienced
- Taking of opposite action to counteract your current unwanted emotion
- Application of distress tolerance techniques

Skills within the Emotion regulation module

Story of Emotion

This strategy is used to understand what kind of emotion you are feeling. List the following:

1. What prompted the event?
2. How do you interpret the event?
3. What does your body feel like – where do you feel it?
4. What is your body language like?
5. What is the action you would want to take (impulsive)
6. What is the action you did take?
7. Name the emotion that you feel (based on items 1-6)

PLEASE MASTER

Unhealthy habits are likely to make you more vulnerable to emotion mind. To maintain a healthy body and with it healthy emotions, you need to do the following:

Physical Illness (treat): get proper treatment if you are sick, injured or ill.

Eating (balanced): Eat a healthy balanced diet.

Avoid Mood-Altering Drugs: In order to avoid unpredictable mood swings ensure that you do not take non prescribed drugs

Sleep (balanced): Ensure you sleep enough – not too much and not too little – 8 hours is recommended per night for adults.

Exercise: get exercise to improve your body image and increase endorphine production

MASTERy (build): focus on doing one thing a day to build up your competence levels and control.

Opposite Action

When faced with an unjustified emotion do the opposite of your urges that you feel at the moment. This skill enables you to replace unwanted emotions with emotions that are opposite (i.e. wanted).

Problem Solving

When experiencing justified emotions use this skill in combination with other skills to overcome problems.

Letting Go of Emotional Suffering

Stay in the observer mode and allow yourself to experience your emotions, accept them and let them go.

Distress Tolerance

When compared to many current mental health treatment approaches that are focusing primarily on changing distressing events and circumstances Lineham's DBT approach focuses on acceptance of the current situation and the finding of meaning in the experienced distress.

This in turn will increase distress and pain tolerance in the practitioner of DBT. It is pointed out that this does not mean that the practitioner of DBT is to develop an attitude of approval and resignation, but rather is encouraged to recognize distressing situations and their impact instead of hiding from them or becoming overwhelmed by negativity.

The state of mind achieved this way gives practitioners the ability to make better decisions about what action to take rather than engaging into destructive and unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

Skills within the Distress tolerance module

ACCEPTS is the acronym of skills within the tolerance model and is used to temporarily distract a practitioner from unwanted thoughts and feelings

Activities: Engage in positive enjoyable activities

Contribute: by helping out others.

Comparisons: make comparisons between yourself and people that are less fortunate or compare yourself to a previous situation in which you felt worse than now.

Emotions (other): make yourself feel something different right now by engaging in activities that bring out your sense of humour or feelings of happiness.

Push away: put what is bothering you to the back of your mind for a while and temporarily concentrate on something else.

Thoughts (other): redirect your thoughts and force yourself to think about something else.

Sensations (other) – Do something other than what you are doing right now that has an intense feeling, like taking an ice cold shower or eating a spicy candy.

Self Soothe

In moments of distress or agitation behave gently, comforting, soothing, nurturing and kind to yourself.

***IMPROVE* the Moment**

In moments of distress use the following skills to relax:

Imagery: imagine images of success, or relaxation, pleasing things.

Meaning: finding meaning and purpose in the experience

Pray: pray to the object of your belief

Relaxation: Relax and breathe deeply

One thing in the moment: Stay in the present and focus your attention on what it is that you are doing right now.

Vacation (brief): turn your attention to something else – take a short break.

Encouragement: develop some positive self talk – yes I can

Pros and Cons

Think about the positives and negatives consequences of not tolerating distress.

Radical Acceptance

Letting go of fighting against reality (letting go) and accept the situation the way it presents itself.

Turning the Mind

Turn your mind towards accepting the situation (used with Radical Acceptance)

Willingness versus Willfulness

Be willing and open towards what is effective. Let go of a willful stance as it counteracts acceptance. Keep your focus on the goal you have set for yourself.

Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS)

The Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS), developed by psychotherapist Dr. Richard C. Schwartz, proposes an internal self (spiritual centre) that is by default curious, open and accepting of what arises in its present experience.

IFS is based on the theory that our mind consists of a number of sub personalities that all have their own point of view and also includes ‘systems thinking’ (a holistic form of viewing the smallest as part of the whole) in its theory.

Family Systems Theory (family members have many roles that define the world of the individual) is used to understand how the identified collections of internal sub personalities (namely Managers, Exiles, Fire-fighters, and the Self as a central point) are organised within the individual.

Schwartz noticed that many of his clients reported experiencing a number of parts within themselves. He found that these parts had their own agenda and only when their concerns were

properly addressed would they become less disruptive and adhere to the wise leadership of the 'self'.

Like in Family Systems Theory Schwartz concludes that the roles these parts are playing define the inner world within the individual. IFS holds that the self is the coordinating centre which exhibits qualities of confidence, compassion and openness, and around which all other parts constellate.

The aim of therapy is to guide the client to his or her 'true self'.

Parts

IFS believes that consciousness (mind) is made up of a number of parts (i.e. sub-personalities) each with differing points of view, interests, perspectives and memories but all are united in their intention to get the best possible outcome for the individual.

Some may want to help to protect the person against pain even though the action it exhibits causes dysfunction in the overall situation.

However, understanding and accepting that all parts ultimately 'mean well' there is no reason to eliminate any part from the system, instead understanding and acceptance is sought with the view of promoting internal connection and harmony between parts.

IFS suggests that there are three parts, namely, managers, exiles, and fire-fighters which can play either extreme or healthy roles and thus the focus is on transforming the extremes through therapy.

On the one hand, 'managers' are parts that play pre-emptive protective roles. They handle the person's interaction with the external world and ensure that hurtful or traumatic experiences are prevented from flooding consciousness.

'Exiles' on the other hand are those parts that are in fear, trauma, shame or pain and which managers and fire-fighters try to exile from consciousness to avoid pain coming to the surface.

If exiles do make it to the surface (into awareness) 'fire-fighters' emerge to distract attention from the pain, shame or hurt by engaging in compulsive/impulsive behaviours such as alcohol or drug abuse, fights, inappropriate sex, overwork, anything really that distracts attention from the exile.

The true 'Self' is seen as having healing qualities (curiosity, connectedness, calmness and compassion) and is the spiritual centre of the individual. It is the whole beneath the parts.

People have access to the self even though they may be dominated by their parts. The IFS therapist aims is to help the client to get in touch with his or her true self and in the process disentangle the parts so the person can let go of the distractive roles and, under the directive of the 'self', harmonious collaboration can be achieved.

The Internal System

The goal of IFS is the achievement of a trusting and cooperative relationship between the parts and the self. IFS proposes three types of primary relationships between parts (protection, polarization, alliance).

For example, the role of 'protection' is played by parts consisting of managers and fire-fighters who aim to protect the self from exiles and the pain they are causing when coming to the surface, whereas 'polarization' takes place when parts are arguing with each other over how the individual actually feels or behaves during a certain situation. 'Alliance' is formed when two parts work with each other to achieve the same goal.

IFS is based on a number of well defined methodological principles. Burdens (painful beliefs or emotions developed through past experiences) carried by parts need to be released through therapy in order to regain its healthy role.

The IFS therapist facilitates the process of psychological healing through assisting the client to assess his or her true self which is considered the pure and natural leader of the system and thus functions as the change agent of the healing process. IFS takes the position that the system has experienced many harmful past events and relationships which has activated numerous protector parts leading to dysfunctional behaviour. In addition to this, protector parts may even be in conflict with each other which furthermore upset's the psychological equilibrium of the individual.

Parts taking on the role of protectors of exiles can't be relieved of their burden until exiles are unburdened. Permission must be obtained from the protecting part to work with exiles. Unless such permission has been granted no attempt will be made to work with the exile.

In summary, IFS helps clients to access their true self (increasing confidence) in order to get to know the protector parts better and to understand its intention. Once the protector part has

given permission the client then accesses the 'protected exile' to discover the incident that was previously hidden from view so that it can be released from its burden.

This will affect 'protector' and 'exile' part as they can both be liberated to take on healthy roles. Once protectors start to trust the 'self' internal harmony can be achieved.

IFS has been used in various applications from trauma where the self views the experiences of the 'exile' without getting involved and thus can't get re-traumatized, to couples therapy where it is used to investigate how a part in one partner can trigger an extreme part in the other.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy

As the name suggests, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) blends two styles of therapy into one. Whereas traditionally cognitive therapy aims to actively identify and then alter unhelpful thoughts in people, mindfulness as we know is all about identifying and accepting thoughts from the observer position without passing judgement.

MBCT is about changing the clients' relationship to their negative thoughts by accepting that they are part of life, but we can build cognitive resilience with the right mental schema. As such, MBCT should not be misunderstood as meditation exercises aiming to bring relaxation or some sort of illusive happiness, but rather control of thought processes and therefore freedom from otherwise automatically generating negative thoughts and feelings.

'Responding rather than reacting through focused attention – recognising unhelpful thought patterns and then deliberately breaking away from them in order to stop an otherwise vicious cycle of negativity' may best describe the aim of MBCT.

In other words, once a practitioner notices negative thought patterns arising, he or she is required to shift attention to the here and now, on that which is 'actually happening' instead of allowing to generate thoughts associated with what 'might', 'could' or 'should' be happening, hence through cancelling out anything but the present moment, judgement cannot be placed.

In summary, the technique of MBCT entails the following benefits:

1. The recognition that holding on to some feelings is ineffective
2. Instead of turning away from our thoughts and feelings, all are welcome without judgement and we are open and experience whatever comes before the 'observer'

without activating our defences that would normally be activated once a threat is perceived.

Mindfulness and Buddhism

Having identified the various mindfulness approaches outlined above we may feel the urge to ask the question, “what does mindfulness represent in its’ truest Buddhist form,— how did the Buddha achieve spiritual enlightenment and how did this enlightenment transfer into living daily life?”

According to ND, through great meditation and insight, Shakyamuni grasped the universal spiritual law of Myo Ho Renge Kyo. In other words, Shakyamuni viewed all existential phenomena, all his experiences, internal or external as manifestations of the law of NMHRGK. This understanding enabled him to identify the essence of the law within himself. He firmly observed his mind with the understanding that based on cause and effect, all phenomena are forever changing, thoughts come and go but the essence of one’s life remains always part of the whole transcending the perceived stages of life and death, forever interconnected with all there is.

Mindfulness as it is currently practiced in psychological therapy and Zen type Buddhism however appears to limit its focus only on the present moment by entering an accepting observer perspective. This is most certainly of therapeutic value if clients are plagued by overwhelming thought processes at the time, but beyond this, it neither gives the practitioner of mindfulness an explanation of ‘who’ and ‘what’ the observer within them really is, nor does it provide a construct which would clarify their experiences and greater significance in the world they live in.

Hence, the more existential questions brought on by events such as birth, aging, sickness and death, and the greater quest for meaning remains largely unresolved through the practice of mindfulness.

Thus, even if one were able to remain focused on the here and now most of the time, practitioners of these techniques will most likely come to realise that there are significant limitations to the experience, latest when life circumstances such as the mentioned experiences of birth, aging and death bring on existential questions about the very nature of existence.

Psychology has embraced mindfulness as a technique because it appears to be devoid of religious or spiritual content. We know that currently used mindfulness techniques are effective in

changing thoughts and behaviours. Then again, so do most behavioural therapies that enable people to develop a focus, acceptance and schema by which their experience can be put into perspective.

But is what has been so enthusiastically embraced by psychologists as mindfulness really what the original Buddha, Shakyamuni had envisioned when he expounded his version of mindfulness?

What did the kind of mindfulness he practiced do for him, he who sought true liberation and refuge from the woes of existence? How did he perceive the world through mindfulness meditation?

We know that 'being of correct understanding' his worries of the stages of birth, old age, sickness and death most certainly dissipated because he perceived the true nature of phenomena and the world around him. Furthermore, he must have been a very motivated individual as he went through great lengths teaching others to become enlightened to the true nature of their lives just as he had.

So the question is, what would we do when we, like him, come to believe and embrace the idea (philosophy) that we are living eternally, interconnected with all there is, going through the stages of birth, aging, sickness and death faced by the consequences of our actions (cause and effect) no matter where we go?

What would we do when we, like Shakyamuni come to realise that our perceived self is 'plastic' (non self) constantly changing and evolving into 'something else' as we are stimulated by the world around us and our own creations?

If we would come to firmly believe this, what would psychologically change for us?

Would we feel empowered?

Would awareness of these rather aspects of Buddhist mindfulness which are nevertheless rather scientific in nature cause us to feel better about ourselves and the things we do?

Would we be wiser?

Would it cause us to change our behaviour for the better?

It appears that a more comprehensive level of Buddhist mindfulness as prescribed by the Buddha himself has a lot more to offer when compared to maintaining focus only on the here and now to the exclusion of yesterday and tomorrow.

Understanding the past and projecting hope towards an even better future are just as important to a healthy mind and our ability to truly value our experience of the here and now.

Nichiren Buddhism and Mindfulness

Hence, ND made this argument already 750 years ago when he stated that the doctrine of Zen has limited benefits and would pale in the face of Shakyamuni's original intention – the promotion of mindfulness practices and action based on NMHRGK.

It is of course plain to see that this approach borders on 'religious practices' as it entails an entire belief system based on philosophical ideas rather than a simplistic focus on the here and now from an observer's perspective.

Yet, is the philosophical groundwork of Shakyamuni's belief system really removed from true scientific evidence if we consider the 'energy conservation principle' (explaining eternally transforming life), the butterfly effect or the 'concept of *sensitive dependence on initial conditions* in chaos theory' (i.e. evidence for interconnection of all things and the law of cause and effect)?

As such, Shakyamuni's enlightenment is based on scientific endeavour and corresponding evidence that can be found in the phenomenal world around us rather than ideas springing from illusions of an overactive imagination.

Yet, when we take the time to assess the various psychologically based mindfulness therapies that are currently practiced, much of the richness in deeper level understanding of existence is missing.

Even though there is no doubt that there is much to be gained from practicing mindfulness the way it is currently practiced in its various psychological approaches the question needs to be asked of how we can improve on current therapy techniques to get better outcomes.

Hence, taking the strong points of each therapy outlined earlier into consideration, a new approach to mindfulness based on ND Buddhism is proposed with the aim to expanding a practitioner's human experience in the here and now.

The practice of Nichiren Buddhism Mindfulness

In Nichiren Buddhism mindfulness in essence can be described as follows:

The observer or true self in us that has been pointed out in various other Mindfulness therapies is named in NB as the law identified as MyhoRengeKyo. It is that in us that never changes, which will always be there throughout the eternal phases of life and death, eternally connected to all there is. Hence Nichiren calls it the ‘true and eternal unchanging Buddha’. It represents our pure and eternal life force that cannot be destroyed, nor has it been created and so it purely ‘is’ (i.e. eternal).

In Nichiren Buddhist practice this mindfulness is the baseline from which all else develops.

As such in Nichiren Buddhism our thoughts, feelings and expressions are seen as ‘acts’ that we (life) have been creating (consciously or unconsciously – aware or unaware) for experience sake. This creative act is how ‘life’ expresses itself inside and outside ourselves (self, society and environment) based on the strict law represented by MHRGK. This is what is expressed through the concept of ‘ichinen sanzen’, which when translated from Japanese literally means 3000 realms (sanzen) which can potentially be experienced by a person’s mind in a single moment of life (ichinen).

It also means that we can change what lies before us internally as well as externally. In essence, we do this anyhow in some way or another as we live our lives. The difference lies whether we do it in an aware (enlightened) or unaware (unenlightened) state of mind and so Nichiren argues that if we do it with awareness then we are also aware of our control and thus can be of a ‘sound and healthy mind’ with which we can confidently face life’s daily challenges.

Awareness of true self means being aware that our essence is NMHRGK

- a. Consequently:
 - i. I accept that internal conflict (distinction) is a driver for development
 - ii. I take responsibility for my actions and experiences
 - iii. I believe in the interconnection of all phenomena
 - iv. I believe that my essence (energy) is eternal
 - v. I believe that I can change what lies before me

- vi. I believe that all experiences (whether perceived as good or bad) lead towards an expansion of my capabilities

The practitioner of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is mindful that he or she 'is' NamMyHoRengeKyo and that all phenomena in the environment are expressions of NamMyHoRengeKyo

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