

Psychotherapy By Karma Transformation

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Prelude

There are plenty misunderstandings about *karma* whose conceptualization in non-Buddhist quarters carries the flavor of fate or destiny due to the working mechanism of cause-and-effect. This usually boils down to: “good deeds lead to heaven, an after-life paradise, and bad deeds lead to hell in the beyond”. The Buddha allocated from his awakening point-of-view a specific this-worldly/here-now meaning of *karma*, a term borrowed from Brahmanism, as intentional action that is subject to choice. Furthermore, from a Buddhist psychological perspective heaven and hell are metaphors for joy and anger, while good and evil only exist as non-foundational qualities which are basically empty. This essay draws on the tenet that the Buddha was an “analyst”/*vibhajjavadin* (*Subha Sutta*)² and that his transforming dialogues were meant to change intention/*kamma*, motivation/*hetu*, and performance/*kiriya*. In order to contribute to the daily psychological “rebirths” of wholesome emotional episodes, the Buddha’s tactics of transforming *kamma* can be summarized in a centerpiece called *Karma Sequence*, which is a combination of the modalities/*khandhas* and the 3-Poisons: (1) awareness of sensory perception (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, and viewing through the mind’s eye) which are felt relatively positive, negative, or neutral, (2) awareness of dys/functional cognitions due to ignorance on how the mind works which usually fabricates projections of illusory selves and delusional gods, (3) awareness of un/wholesome cognitions of intentional planning also called volition or conation which inhere in the motivational factors of action, (4) awareness of self-sabotaging thoughts which reflect the proclivity of irrational craving (“musts/shoulds”), greedy grasping (fear-of-loss and grief-of-loss), and hateful clinging (aggression/other-hate and depression/self-hate), and (5) awareness by mindfulness unveiling the interactive Dependent Origination of body/speech/mind which incorporate karmic antecedents and consequents leading to balanced interactivity. In effect, *Karma Transformation* starts with an unwanted emotional state and works at changing unwholesome/*akusala* perception, cognition, and behavior with regard to an external or internal activating event by choosing for wholesome/*kusala* perception, cognition, and behavior to alter affect. Thus, the *karma* of drama, distress, and agony is transformed into the *karma* of contentment. This is illustrated by a case example detailing the construction of wholesome *karma* as rational cognitions and functional behaviors. Insiders have observed that karmic sequences run parallel to the centerpiece used in Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT), a school of psychotherapy, which implies that the two methodologies of change overlap considerably. Indeed, one of the founding fathers of CBT, the legendary Albert Ellis, noted that these disciplines bear more commonalities than differences, particularly by abolishing “most of the human ego” (Kwee & Ellis, 1998). Psychotherapy, also if Buddhist, operates in the realm of the “provisional self”; hence therapy logistically precedes meditation towards “ultimate no-self”. At bottom: only when calmed down, free from emotional quagmires and *horror vacuum*, is one ready to shift toward emptiness and Buddhahood.

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² Thanks are due to Dr. Dion Peoples who proficiently brought the correct *sutta* to my attention.

Introduction

There is a growing interest worldwide amongst scientists-practitioners for the Buddhist Teachings (Buddha-Dhamma/Dharma) as an applied science of psychology to guide people's ways of living toward emotional balance (e.g. De Silva, 2010; Kwee, 2010 and 2011, Kwee, Gergen, & Koshikawa, 2006). This is in spite of the fact that the Dharma is considered by many, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, to be a *religion* and a *philosophy* rather than a *psychology*. However, because these three words/concepts do not exist in the pristine Dharma and in the languages of Buddhist Asia, it is neither of these three. Because Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha – who lived around 563-483 Before Common Era – never claimed to be some intermediary between humanity and the beyond, a messiah or a prophet, or anything else but a human being, who claimed to be just “awakened”, i.e. not asleep (*Dona Sutta*), the Dharma is definitely not a religion in the Abrahamic sense.

Moreover, as in the discourses (*nikayas*), one might infer that the Buddha promulgated a this-worldly teaching of wisdom that is non-theistic implying that the *Dharma* is “neither theistic, nor a-theistic” (*Sabba Sutta*, *Vacchagotta Sutta*, and *Malunkyaputta Sutta*). In the *Tevijja Sutta* the Buddha pointed out that it is foolish to assimilate with an imaginary or visualized god. In effect this boils down to the reading that “god is non-of-our-business”. Nonetheless, the Dharma was and is usually categorized as a “religion”. Even if termed a “secular religion” this classification is a consequence of Eurocentric/neo-colonial thinking. However, from a pragmatic point of view, there are advantages to treat the Dharma as a religion, because then it is: (1) recognizable, (2) organizable, (3) subsidizable, and (4) viable in multicultural societies.³ Hence, on the bottom line, radically resisting the erroneous view of the Dharma as a religion becomes questionable. But Buddhists know better: our teaching is about disseminating loving-kindness against the backdrop of an emptiness of the wise. God-heads merged with the Dharma are cultural atavisms meant to attract the illiterate and not to scare off the meek by an “empty teaching”. In certain psychological quarters it is not at all praiseworthy to consider the Dharma as a religion. To the renowned Sigmund Freud (1927) religion is a collective obsessive-compulsive disorder due to an infantile wish for a parent which is much akin to a psychotic disturbance; and the legendary Albert Ellis (1980) straightforwardly called religion mental illness. As both giants are of Jewish descent they alluded to the Abrahamic faiths when talking about religion.

While the interpretation of the Dharma as a religion was in the tradition of Louis de Vallée Poussin (1869-1939), a Belgian who explored Indian Mahayana that includes god-like interpretations through its representations of cosmic Buddhas meant as “skilful means” (*upayakaushalya*, *S*), there was another tradition that views the Dharma as a philosophy. This current was spearheaded by the Russian scholar Fyodor Stcherbatsky (1866-1942) who explored Tibetan Buddhism as a philosophy. The term Buddhism is exemplary to denote the philosophical take. Notwithstanding, the Dharma is a *magga*, a way or practice (comparable to the Tao in China), not an “ism”; hence it is not a philosophy, nor a theory, but a guide for practice. Hence, rather than “opium for the intellectuals”, the Dharma is a *modus vivendi* for seekers of liberation from experiential malaise by tailored experimentation called meditation. If the Dharma is not a philosophy, should this Western word, enforcing misguided semantics, be banned from the Buddhist vocabulary?

As long as the user knows better, using Buddhism as a container term that includes religion and philosophy is surely convenient. This implies that Buddhism could also be a psychology (De Silva, 2005; Kalupahana, 1987). However, because psychology is a typical Western discipline, it is for clarity reasons advisable to explicitly talk about Buddhist Psychology to acknowledge the confluence of the Dharma and psychology. According to the

³ E.g., if not as a religion, the Dharma would be unclassifiable and unviable in Indonesia. By declaring the Adhi-Buddha as a god-head, Buddhism enjoys the status of a formal religion in the framework of religious freedom.

American Psychological Association (APA) psychology is “the study of the mind and behavior. The discipline embraces all aspects of the human experience, from the functions of the brain to the actions of nations, from child development to care for the aged. In every conceivable setting from scientific research centers to mental health care services, ‘the understanding of behavior’ is the enterprise of psychologists” (www.apa.org).

Psychologists/psychotherapists are scientists-practitioners who attempt to understand mind, experience, and concomitant behaviors; these are themes overlapping the Buddhist venture. The Buddhist project is to responsibly watch over *kamma/P* or *karma/S* which can be defined in psychological terms as: intentional/cognitive activity/behavior in relational context. How does *karma* come about? Which factors are functional in contributing to its multi-causal (body/speech/mind) and multimodal (doing/talking/thinking) arising, peaking, subsiding, and ceasing? What remedy is prescribed to alleviate people from the *dukkha* of psychological suffering? Which interventions need to be implemented for what ailments, to whom, by whom, when, and under which circumstances? ⁴ William James, father of American psychology, already noted: “I am ignorant of Buddhism... [but] as I apprehend the Buddhist... *karma*, I agree in principle with that.” (1902, p.512). In this essay, I follow his lead.

Karma and Its Metaphors

A Buddhist approach considers meaning as derived from the compassion and care for interpersonal relationship in harmony with oneself. This stretches out to Buddhist Psychotherapy that could be pinpointed as an evidence-based system of assessment and intervention. To date, the school of psychotherapy that is researched best is Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT) which is an amalgam of Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Therapy; both began in the 1950s.

Behavior Therapy is based on a model derived from the psychology of learning by conditioning: (1) Pavlovian classical conditioning (food associated to a ringing bell will eventually result in salivation when only hearing the sound), (2) Skinnerian operant conditioning (rewarding a target behavior will result in its frequency increase), and (3) Bandura’s vicarious conditioning which is cognitive learning through modeling and imitation. Cognitive Therapy targets the analysis of dysfunctional or irrational thoughts, cognitions-concepts/images-visualizations which are highly correlated to affect-emotion and individual/interpersonal manifest behavior. Affect⁵ is the psychologist term for emotions which form the prime target of CBT that is mainly focused on alleviating suffering from anxiety/fear, anger/aggression, sadness/grief, and clinical depression. There are two schools of CBT, Beck’s Cognitive Therapy and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) founded by the legendary Albert Ellis (1913-2007). According to a survey of 800 counseling and clinical psychologists, members of the APA (Smith, 1982), a more recent one is not available, Beck and Ellis were the seventh and second in the ranking of most influential psychotherapist. This author has worked closely with Ellis on ferreting out commonalities and differences

⁴ Research (Lyubomirsky, 2008) suggests that un/happiness is determined by a genetic set-point (50%), circumstantial factors (10%), and intentional activity (40%), called *karma* in Buddhism. The latter opens a window of opportunity. Human beings are equipped by a personal genetic set-point for un/happiness comparable with a set-point for weight or length which is hardly modifiable. People with high set-points will find it easier to be happy, while people with low set-points will have to work harder to achieve and maintain happiness under similar conditions. Long term overall circumstances include correlational demographics happening to us like age, health, education, money, country, religion, or marital status. While these factors matter, they only determine a small percentage to un/happiness. Due to human hedonic adaptation, it is a misguided hope that they will impact long-lasting happiness. Rapidly accustomed to sensory or physiologic changes, they deliver short-lived boosts of happiness. Happy people do not just sit around being happy. They make things happen and this activity spins off a by-product which is happiness over and above the genetic set range and life circumstances.

⁵ Affect can be any inner short and long term feeling, from weak moods to strong emotions with a positive, negative, or neutral quality.

between REBT and Zen (Kwee & Ellis, 1998) and was one of the first to connect CBT with Buddhism, along with P. de Silva (1984) and W. Mikulas (1978) (Kwee, 1990).

This was the formative beginning of a development that has led to a confluence of CBT and Buddhist practice for which I have coined the phrase: *Psychotherapy by Karma Transformation* (Kwee & Kwee-Taams, 2010a and 2010b). *Karma Transformation* targets *karma* plainly defined as (motivated) action. This definition is blurred by supernatural notions, an unfortunate development that will be avoided here; Buddhist Psychotherapy is interested in this-worldly karmic sequences. These sequences function according to “Dependent Origination” (*paticcasamuppada*), the *summum bonum* of the Buddha’s awakening. Understanding *karma*, a proposition that intentions implicate activity and its fruits (*karmaphala*) is quintessential in the Buddhist practice to end suffering. In effect, intention is a mental state of heart/thought (*Cetana Sutta*) which leads to karmic action of body/speech/mind through volition and intention. “Intention... [I say] is *kamma*.” (*Nibbedhika Sutta*). The importance of *karma* can be inferred by the Buddha’s further statements that *karma* is imbibed: we own, are born of, relate to, and live by *karma*, and whatever *karma* we create, unwholesome or wholesome, that will be “inherited” (*Upajjhathana Sutta*). Moreover, the Middle Way⁶ is also known by its essential dealings with “capricious” *karma*: (1) *kammavada* (the application of wholesome *karma*), (2) *hetuvada* (the analysis of *karma*’s motivation, causation, and function, and (3) *kiriyavada* (the effect or “seed to fruit” performance result of *karma*). Hence, the Buddha was also known as a *kammavadin*, *hetuvadin*, and *kiriyavadin*. Even though it can be read about in various discourses (e.g. *Mahanidana Sutta*, *Kammavada Bhumiya Sutta*, *Maha- and Cullakammavibhanga Suttas*), as yet, a crystal-clear, systematic, and unequivocal interpretation of *karma* is scarce. It is however a pan-Buddhist given that “absolute predestination” is anathema in a Buddhism without godheads (Kalupahana, 2010).

The following is an attempt to offer an unambiguous psychological interpretation of Dependent Origination and the vicissitudes of *karma*, which is secular and this-worldly. Analyzing the Buddha’s wondrous instances of teaching, the observation stands out that he frequently made proficiently use of “psychological metaphors” and “double entendres”. A case in point is his dialogue with the “finger necklace serial killer”, who, surprised to see a fearless ascetic passing his notorious residence, stopped and yelled at the Buddha “to stop or otherwise...” whereupon the Buddha, while continuing his walk, replied that he had stopped already and retorted: “don’t you want to stop?” Hearing this, the bandit was puzzled, because he was asked to stop while he was not walking and because the ascetic said he has stopped while he is still walking (*Angulimala Sutta*). Obviously, the Buddha was juggling with semantics as his use of “stopping” carries the double meaning of stopping to walk and stopping to kill. The thesis submitted here is that the Buddha was a “semantic artist” or “poetic activist”. He showed that terms can be interpreted as psychological metaphors, particularly when terms are borrowed from Brahmanism. The task is to seize their “awakened” meanings. Based on this author’s explorations as a student in psycholinguistic and general semantics (Kwee, 1982), here is a list

⁶ The Middle Way avoids the extremes of asceticism and hedonism and the 8-Fold Practice conveys how to balance and comprehend it. It is definitely not creatorism (*issaranimmanavada*), nor nihilism (*ucchedavada*) or fatalism (*pubbekatahetuvada*). As Dhamapalla stated (*Maha Bodhi Journal*, vol. 34, 1926), there is a host of names denoting the Dhamma: *Sambodhiyana*, *Dhammayana*, *Jhanayoga*, *Diithijala*, *Attajala*, *Brahmajala*, *Brahmayana*, *Vibhajjivada*, *Samukkansadhamma*, *Vimuttinadassana*, *Ariyamagga*, *Ariyadhamma*, and *Bodhipakkhiyadhamma*, which are not translated due to space constraints. Most importantly, the Dhamma is also known as *kammavada*, *hetuvada*, and *kiriyavada*, and the Buddha as an analyst (*vibhajjavadin*) of intentional action (*kamma*), motivational factors (*hetu*), and performance efficacy (*kiriya*). In the framework of Dependent Origination the *kammavadin* is a collaborative practitioner who puts wholesome *karma* in place while extinguishing unwholesome *karma*. This requires *viriyavada*, the tenet that necessitates “human effort” in skillfully pursuing wholesomeness
(www.ucalgary.ca/numatachair/files/numatachair/Karunadasa_2001.pdf).

containing a selection of terms which could be acquainted with as “deep metaphors”. Their proposed psychological meanings discard literal exegesis, e.g. of Mara (*Padhana Sutta*).⁷

Table 1: Selected Buddhist Terms/Metaphors and Proposed Psychological Meanings

Rebirth: psychologically, this is limited to a this-worldly/daily recurrence of emotional episodes
6-Realms of rebirth: 1. heaven, 2. hell, 3. titans, 4. hungry ghosts, 5. humans and 6. animals
Heaven: feeling “godly” as if in heaven, a metaphor of bliss/pride which doesn’t make one a god
Hell: feeling the heat of “hellishness” if hateful, angry, furious, resenting, hostile, and aggressive
Titans/demi-gods: experiencing conflict, struggle, fight, envy/jealousy, distrust, and paranoia
Hungry ghosts: frustrated state due to insatiable craving/grasping/clinging to impermanence
Humans: most common/normal rebirth realm that offers the best opportunity for Buddhahood
Animals: most frequent depictions are a cock (greed), a snake (hatred), and a pig (ignorance)
Nirvana: experiencing extinction of the state or trait of unwholesome affect/emotional arousal
Dukkha: a damaged wheel axle preventing a cart from riding smoothly, a simile for suffering
Mara: mental projections of emotions re lust-confusion as a deadly “army” of demonic states
Poisons: intoxicants, metaphoric for the psychological afflictions of greed, hatred, and ignorance
Brahmaviharas: “divine dwellings”, metaphoric for kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity
Arahant: not a saint, but someone who has vanquished her/his inner enemies and is awakened
Wheel of life: cycle of life-death of this-worldly, daily karmic greed, hatred, and ignorance
Karma: not fate or destiny, nor a book-keeping of “good” and “bad” deeds, but intentional action

That *karma* is not the bottom line of an accounting system of deeds but rather a “no-nonsense” teaching of calming, *nirvana*, insight, and emptiness/not-self is illustrated in the following anecdote on the Indian Bhikshu Bodhidharma, the alleged founder of Chan, who, in 521, visited the emperor Wu, a great patron of the Dharma. Having built many priories, the emperor asked what merit his generosity had earned. "No merit," was the answer. Astonished, he asked what the Dharma's supreme essence is. "Vast emptiness, nothing holy", was the reply. Finally, he asked, "Who are you?" "Don't know" said Bodhidharma alluding to not-self. In a psychological approach, *karma* leads to rebirth in the space of body/speech/mind. This can take place in heaven or hell. That heaven and hell are to be sought here-now, was already acknowledged for centuries like in the following *koan* (Reps, 1957):⁸

A proud warrior - a samurai - visited a Zen master to learn about heaven and hell; do they really exist? Instead of answering immediately the teacher kept him waiting for a while, treating him like a beggar. The samurai gradually became impatient, angry, and at last demanded a proper answer. "You are too stupid to understand", the master replied. Furiously the samurai drew his sword to kill the teacher, who at this very moment raised his index finger and then said: "Experience the gate of hell!" All of a sudden the samurai understood that this was his lecture, bowed in deep grace and kneeled in merciful surrender. The monk smiled, raised his finger again and concluded: "Experience the gate of heaven!" (Hakuin, 1685-1768)

⁷ Obviously, I am not the first or only to point at the metaphoric nature of the Dhamma/Dharma. The late Ven. Buddhadasa discerned “everyday language” and “Dhamma language” in 1966, October 8, in a splendid lecture at Suan Mokkhabalarama, Chaiya, Thailand (www.buddhadasa.com/naturaltruth/twolanguage1.html). However, to date it seems that only few people consequently apply psychological interpretations. E.g., if *dukkha* is literally the axle of a chariot's wheel that does not run smoothly, if the chariot is subject to wear away due to life's imperfection and impermanence (*anicca*), and if the chariot when torn apart does not accommodate any self or soul (*anatta*), then this is a psychological simile about the 3-Empirical Marks of Existence of human beings.

⁸ A *koan* is an exemplary teaching anecdote comparable to jurisprudence in law making.

Karma Sequence

As *karma* usually refers to the becoming/birth and the ageing/death of feelings like pain and pleasure in a recurrent cycle of rebirths, this gives rise to the idea that this birth and death are not physical, but an analogy to explain the beginning and end of daily pleasures and pains. Thus, metaphors for birth and death are a poetic description of the Dependent Origination, arising, peaking, subsiding, and ceasing of karmic sequences which take place during “emotional episodes”. The cycle of births and deaths of suffering (*samsara*) can be ceased by transforming the *karma* of drama, distress, and agony into the *karma* of contentment and *nirvana*. Hence, *Karma Transformation* aims at preparing the “nirvanic extinction” of karmic arousal by skillfully eradicating unwholesome *karma* moving forward, i.e. by working at unsatisfactory rebirths one by one. The therapeutic aim of *Karma Transformation* is to prepare and lay the basis for working at contentment and *nirvana*, but not at “emptiness” and Buddhahood. *Karma Transformation* is therefore only an initial phase in a long Buddhist quest. This first phase is meant to alleviate the suffering of anybody who feels distressed or in agony and needs therapy. Only when calm, tranquilized, and freed from the quagmire of emotional impasse, with or without therapy, is one able to pursue the next phase. This second phase targets Buddhist aims and is therefore almost exclusively suitable for Buddhists who want to take up the painstaking journey toward not-self and Buddhahood.

Before going into the *Karma Sequence* as the operational centerpiece, let us dwell on the *raison d'être* of *Karma Transformation*. This is a transformative process of eliminating emotional quandaries and conceptual confusion by decreasing unwholesome *karma* and increasing wholesome *karma*. Skilful and wholesome *karma* is rooted in non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-ignorance (*amoha*), while unskillful/unwholesome *karma* is rooted in the 3-Poisons: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and ignorance (*moha*). Ignorance refers to not-knowing how the mind functions. Pitfall is the difficulty to see and understand the projections of the mind which result in the illusion of “self” and the delusion of “god/s”. The antidote to ignorance is (1) wisdom on the mechanisms and workings of the mind and (2) knowledge and savvy about putting this wisdom in practice. The remedy to heal greed is heartfelt generosity. The cure for hatred is loving-kindness. Because body/speech/mind inhere in the causes and effects of *karma*, the 3-Poisons afflict body and bodily action, contaminate speech and vocal action, and defile mind and mental action.

From my clinical point-of-view greed and hatred mask negative “basic emotions”. Greed conceals the fear of future loss and the grief of past loss. Hatred is the result of anger which could proliferate (*papanca*) to other-hate/aggression and self-hate/depression. The socio-cultural expressions of *depression*, *anxiety*, *anger*, and *grief* are the prime targets to decrease. They are the emotional states to zero in during *Karma Transformation* which then works at focusing on feelings which are neither painful, nor pleasurable. Affect of neutrality and contentment clear the air for the alternative scenarios of *joy*, *love*, and *serenity*. In *Karma Transformation* client and therapist usually dig into the karmic feelings/thoughts/activity of a past event, when things went wrong, in order to ameliorate future emotional episodes. Hence, the focal point is here-now, even if the intentional activity was originally created in the past (*puranakamma*): one cannot but live in the present. If discussed here-now, emotional events that took place in the past are something of the present and usually one also gets the same feelings. Even though the subject stems from a very long time ago, the karmic implication of the past (*kammavipaka*) becomes actual and changeable now (*navakamma*).

Karma Sequence almost always takes place in a relational context and starts with a stimulus situation, here called an “emotional episode”. This can be summarized as: *It is not the perceived things without or within (point A-activating event) that upset me (point C-consequence) but my very own thoughts-images/conceptions and concurrent interpretations-evaluations/judgments (point B-beliefs) which make me feel bad, sad, and mad (C: emotion)*

and motivate me to intend/plan regrettable karmic acts (C: behavior).⁹ This ABC terminology, derived from Ellis' REBT (Kwee & Ellis, 1998), is an echo of the Buddha's saying that "we are what we think...",¹⁰ which emphasizes responsibility (*Dhammapada*): "By oneself is unwholesomeness done and is one afflicted; by oneself is unwholesomeness not done and is one not afflicted. Affliction and non-affliction depend entirely on oneself; no one can non-afflict another." A most educative presentation of the ABC is through the following Jataka-story inspired simile:

Once in a forest, a sleeping hare heard a hullabaloo. Believing it's the end of the world, he began to run. Thinking the same, others joined him: the deer also thought so and joined the flight... and one species after the other started running until all animals were in a frantic sprint which would eventually have lead to their demise. When the Buddha saw them in panic, he asked them: "why?" "Because the world ends", they said. The Buddha: "That can't be true... let's find out why you think so." Questioning them in succession, he finally arrived at the hare that started the run: "where were you, and what were you doing when you thought 'it's the end of the world'?" The hare: "I was sleeping under a mango tree"... the Buddha hypothesized: "you probably heard a mango fall... startling you (A, the activating event), you thought it's the end of the world (B, the un/wholesome belief), you took fright (Ce, the emotional consequence) and ran (Cb, the behavioral consequence)... let's go back to that tree... to verify and falsify"... Thus, the Buddha saved the animal kingdom.

In a more scholarly fashion, the commonality comes to the fore in the firing order of the "street" (*vithi*) which refers to our *Karma Sequence* as described in the *Abhidhamma* (the deeper teachings, one of the three canonical works containing numerical abstractions of the Buddha's discourses written by adepts). The street follows 17 infinitesimal steps of mind moments (*cittas*) which strikingly correspond to the ABC-sequence:

There is an *Activating event* (e.g. a mango falling): 1. baseline awareness (e.g. deep sleep) ~ 2. vibrating input (a sound) ~ 3. interruption (waking up) ~ 4. adverting (5 sense doors) ~ 5. perception (e.g. eye consciousness) ~ 6. receiving awareness-attending ~ 7. investigating awareness by "the mind's eye" (incl. memories) ~ 8. determining/noting awareness by "the mind's eye" (incl. memories) ~9~10 ~11~12~13~14~15... impulse awareness: reflection by un/wholesome *Beliefs* with a karmic history and fresh intentional will to (not) act as a *Consequence* engendering an emotional and a behavioral output ~ 16~17 followed by subliminal storage and retention of an I-me-mine/self experience. (NB: 6~7~8 refer to apperception which is

⁹ We have 100 billion nerve cells (neurons) i.e. 1 million billion connections flickering when we think: ca 1000 thoughts per hour which is about 16.000 up to ca. 64.000 per day of which 95% is the same as yesterday's thoughts and 85% is negatively colored (C. Greer, National Science Foundation; www.hvacprofitboosters.com).

¹⁰ The *Dhammapada* (423 verses; transl. Byrom, 2001), a gem of world literature, clarifies (Byrom, 2001; p.3):

"We are what we *think*. All that we are arises with our *thoughts*. With our *thoughts* we make the world. *Speak or act* with an impure mind, and trouble will follow you as the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart. We are what we *think*. All that we are arises with our *thoughts*. With our *thoughts* we make the world. *Speak or act* with a pure mind, and happiness will follow you as your shadow, unshakable. 'Look how he abused me and hurt me, how he threw me down and robbed me.' Live with such *thoughts* and you live in *hate*. 'Look how he abused me and hurt me, how he threw me down and robbed me.' Abandon such *thoughts* and live in *love*. In this world *hate* never yet dispelled *hate*, only *love* dispels *hate*. This is the law, ancient and inexhaustible... However many holy words you read, however many you *speak*, what good will they do you, if you do not *act* upon them?" NB: As in the *Rohitassa Sutta*, by "the world" is not meant the world in the beyond or out there (in the iron age conceived as flat), but the mind's world, with data entering through the sense doors and whose minutiae are observable in meditation: "In this very one-fathom-long body, along with its perceptions and thoughts, do I proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world."

post-perceptual but pre-conceptual, observable in mindfulness; 9-17: include the therapeutic awareness that might transform unwholesome *karma* into neutral feelings.)

Candle Karma and Domino Karma

Interestingly, neither the REBT centerpiece, nor the *Karma Sequence* endorses a “ghost in the machine”. Because the *khandhas*, which we call psychological modalities, are empty, this basically implies that there is no self to identify with. The self’s emptiness is obvious when the nature of reified abstractions is understood. Pirsig’s *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance* (1974) deals with this issue: where does inherent existence, soul, or self reside if the bike is torn apart? This is a variant of a comparison highlighted in the *Milindapanha* (2nd century BCE): the Bhikkhu Nagasena explained the Indo-Greek King Menandros that the modalities are like the chariot’s parts. Mind deconstructed in its modalities disintegrates like a decomposed body like a chariot. Its constituent parts are but a temporary assemblage. The Buddha also used the analogy of a lute, whose elusive music is composed by the combination of strings, box, and bow that is full of momentary experience but empty of the “self-nature” of eternal sound (*Sigalovada Sutta*). Not only sound, but all perceptible phenomena are impermanent, non-abiding, and ever changing by nature, thus they are essentially empty and lack “inherent existence” (*sabhava*). The self exists only as a mind construction that freezes the flux of the modalities’ processes and is therefore nothing but an illusion. Another way to arrive at self’s emptiness is Nagarjuna’s (2nd century) *sunyata/S*, the emptiness of everything that is impermanent. He discerned the “ultimate emptiness of not-self” and the “provisional self of the householder” who is aware of the futility of a name, but simultaneously appreciates the convenience of “being indexed”, e.g. by having an identity card. The crux is to keep *karma* un-afflicted by not attaching to greedy or hateful thoughts/feelings/deeds. The following two schemes are tools of analysis.

(1) *The candle metaphor* (cf. *Gaddulabaddha Sutta*). Habitual behavioral patterns are the bulk of regrettable intentional action. With the negative karmic impact of regret, reflection as well as *karma*’s assessment often begins. Habits come about by the interplay of the *khandhas*. The dynamic combination of modalities reflects the structure and process of what is called “personality”, i.e. a snapshot description of a psychological profile. These comprise *body-rupa-kaya/speech-vak-alapa/mind-nama-citta* out of which consciousness or *vinnana* emerges and functions through awareness. Mindfulness enables the full experience of the modalities: perceiving-sensing (A), conceiving-cognizing (B), emoting-feeling (Ce), and conating-acting (Cb). Experiencing may take place consciously, in full awareness, or non-consciously, in subliminal awareness, depending on the willful attention paid to what is perceived outside or inside the body. Our daily experiences are mostly governed by habit which happens “automatically” due to too ingrained conditioned and conditional learned responses. A habit may be an inappropriate reaction to an activating event requiring adequate consequences which is a process of figuring out and creating new beliefs. Whether the client’s responses are adequate, appropriate, and wholesome can be experienced on the affective level.

An inadequate response is likely connected to some emotionally distressed and unhappy feeling and is often the beginning of somebody’s voluntary paying attention and focusing awareness to the modalities. In line with the metaphor, *Karma Transformation* eventually results in flame extinction (*nirvana*) (see Table 2).

Table 2: The Buddha’s Karma Sequence and REBT’s Centerpiece: Parallel Approaches to Karmic Emotional Episodes[©]

Body/speech/mind (<i>kaya/vak/citta</i>): Basic mindfulness¹¹ of the phenomena in these spaces	A momentary external or internal stimulus configuration impinges on the subject, i.e. something one is aware of in fleeting sense consciousness after detection and being in contact with on the radar screen of one of the six sense organs, to be perceived...
Perceiving (<i>vedana</i>): Awareness of the 6 Senses (seeing, hearing, smelling tasting, touching, and the mind’s eye), felt: + / 0 / –	<i>Activating event</i> : sensing, while apperceiving, which is post-perceptual but pre-conceptual, there is willful attending and perception which is influenced by memory and recognition, and the perceiver gets some sense feeling (partly overlapping affect/emotion) which is relatively positive, negative, or neutral...
Conceiving (<i>sanna</i>): Awareness of projections due to ignorance: illusion of self and delusion of god(s)	<i>Beliefs</i> : imagery and conceptions, the cognitive representation by the subject becomes interpreted and evaluated – i.e. dualistically fabricated and proliferated as good/bad, right/wrong, etc. – and to be tapped as ir/rational and un/wholesome cognitions and ideas...
Conating (<i>sankhara</i>): Awareness of ignorant craving and subsequent proclivities of action: greed-grasping or hatred-clinging	<i>Consequences</i> : karmic affective/emotional and (interpersonal) behavioral responses – having appraised thoughts (“self-talk”) as unskillful-irrational/unwholesome, the subject skillfully transforms these into new rational/wholesome thoughts in order to plan/emit new karmic rational/wholesome motivated intentional activity...
Consciousness (<i>vinnana</i>):	<i>Advanced mindfulness</i> is the next post-therapy phase to <i>bodhi</i> ...

(2) *The domino metaphor* (cf. *Dutiya Gaddulabaddha-Sutta*). Unwholesome *karma*, noticeable by craving affect, grasping thought, and clinging behavior, does not breathe the quality of freedom, it feels like being shackled. Wholesome *karma* is free from attachments. It is a state attained when ignorance is over and knowledge is wisely applied. Like in a court of justice intentions and wishes count less than actual facts, observable conduct, manifest behavior, pre-meditated performance, or motivated action comprising *karma*.¹² However, planned intentions form the seed for future activity. To be mindfully aware of them prevents unwholesome *karma* and likely promotes wholesome *karma*. *Karma*’s working is elucidated by the Buddha through an analysis of its conditionality/functionality comprising 12 links, interconnected like domino pieces. This is a more detailed assessment than the candle view (Conze, 1980). The domino metaphor offers a this-worldly/here-now interpretation of these links and discerns three parts: a general part (steps 1-4), a specific part (steps 5-10), and a cyclical part (steps 11-12). They are translated into the ABC-sequence (see Table 3).

The metaphors of re/birth, ageing, and death have made many credulous followers believe that the 12-linked stepwise exposition is about the metaphysics of the soul, reincarnation, and “Transcendental Truth”, rather than a tool to closely examine Dependent Origination this-worldly/here-now. The metaphysical flirtations notwithstanding, the Buddha was not concerned with the cosmological order of the universe. He was involved with the impermanence of the human condition and the quest to know how to come to grips with the fringes of existential trouble due to impermanence/imperfection. That the Buddha’s discourses unambiguously reject metaphysics, cosmology, and ontology, and breathe a this-worldly/here-now psychological spirit can be read in the following quote (*Sabba Sutta*):

¹¹ As in the *Bahiya Sutta*: O Bahiya, whenever you see a form, let there be just the seeing; whenever you hear a sound, let there be just the hearing; when you smell an odour, let there be just the smelling, when you taste a flavour, let there be just the tasting; when you experience a physical sensation, let it merely be sensation; and when a thought or feeling arises, let it be just a natural phenomenon arising in the mind. When it is like this, there will be no self, no I. When there is no self, there will be no moving about here and there and no stopping anywhere. That is the end of *dukkha*. That is *nibbana*. Whenever it is like that, then it is *nibbana*. If it is lasting, then it is lasting *nibbana*; if it is temporary, then it is temporary *nibbana*. In other words, it is just a principle.

¹² In a way *Karma Transformation* resembles “detecting” because like a Private Investigator, confronted with a puzzling act through a killed body, will always look for the motive of the murderer, the Buddhist psychotherapist is keen about the whereabouts (ABC) of an act (*karma*) and the motive/s (*hetu*) leading to karmic suffering.

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

Table 3: A Psychological Interpretation of Karma’s Dependent Origination

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Link 1 conveys that the links are a stepwise model about karmic greed, hatred, and ignorance which concurs with REBT’s ABC-centerpiece and displays an emotional episode, as follows:

Link 2 explains A: while ignorant, an Activating event arises *in sensorium*, e.g. a fight
Link 3 explains B: out of this, awareness arises, i.e. irrational Beliefs on the fight
Link 4 explains C: out of B, Consequential emotional action (Ce/Cb) arises, e.g. aggression

Link 5 specifies A: out of bodily sense organs as condition, perceiving arises
Link 6 specifies A: out of perceiving, contact arises, e.g. seeing John
Link 7 specifies B: out of contact, cognitive experiencing arises, e.g. feeling angry
Link 8 specifies B: out of inferences, craving evaluations arises, e.g. “I wish him dead”
Link 9 specifies Ce: out of craving unwholesome emotions arise, e.g. hatred (other-blame)
Link 10 specifies Cb: out of hatred as motivation, aggressive behavior will find expression

Link 11 A-B-C cycling: step 10 originates the conception and re/birth of steps 5-10
Link 12 A-B-C cycling: birth of an emotion undergoes ageing toward death, rebirth, etc.

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Karma Transformation

Psychotherapy by *Karma Transformation* takes place after assessment by means of the *Karma Sequence* formulated as the ABC-centerpiece of an emotional episode. Typically, a client will not seek council for a “problem of greed or hatred”, s/he will likely come with complaints of depression, anxiety, anger, and/or grief. The therapist then pinpoints, in collaborative practice, the treatment target like for instance “overcoming the incapacity of crying while in a sad situation of divorce from a verbally violent husband”. Despite it is functional to be strong and to “stick to her guns”, it would be stronger and healthier to cry than not to cry. Crying is not *per se* weakening and could even strengthen one’s immune system; hence it is advisable to cry when alone or with family or friends to get rid of the waste products in tears. Hence, the target is not to cry in the middle of yelling and scolding, but to learn to cry if sad. In this case the client was in first instance encouraged to visualize sad situations of the past and to watch movies with the potency to strike a sensitive string. In second instance, *Karma Transformation* using the ABC-centerpiece weighs in. The Activating event is: “Sitting while visualizing him damaging my clothes and jewelry after my telling to leave him”, The irrational Beliefs with unwholesome karmic impact are: 1. “He shouldn’t yell at me and now he does, he’s a son of a bitch...”; 2. “He mustn’t scold at me; I wish him bad luck...”; 3. “He is a lazy man, how could I ever marry him?” And so on. The karmic Consequences of these thoughts on the emotional level are “Anger/hatred” and on the behavioral level of manifest action is “Having restless legs”.¹³

After formulating the ABC, the transformational karmic Dispute and aimed karmic Effect come next in the process. The pursued goal (E) set by the client is: “To feel sad and cry if alone, but to stay firm with regard to my divorce decision, and feel relatively happy amidst

¹³ The thoughts in this case vignette, although realistic, are inspired but not based on reality; they are made up for illustrative purposes.

life's adversity". In order to attain this aim each cognitive strand is "microscoped" by first disputing (D) its completeness by questioning the evaluation impacting the emotional experience. Evaluations lie below the tip of the iceberg of the surface cognition. The second step is to question the un/wholesomeness and ir/rationality of the complete cognition. A thought is wholesome and skillful if it is rational/logical/realistic/factual and likely leads to the pursued goal of intrapersonal and interpersonal harmony. In the vignette, the first sentence is completed through questioning its evaluative and motivational impact resulting in: "He shouldn't yell at me and now he does, he's a son of a bitch... *and I hate him.*" The second sentence: "He mustn't scold at me; I wish him bad luck... *because I hate him.*" And the third sentence: "He is a lazy man, how could I ever marry him? ...*I wish I never met him, now I've ruined my life, stupid me.*" Table 4 provides karmic wholesome/rational cognitions, alternatives accrued in collaborative practice.

Table 4: Three Karma Transformation Scripts

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The creation of an alternative for *the first sentence*: "He shouldn't yell at me and now he does, he's a son of a bitch... and I hate him" goes as follows: Is this thought rational/realistic and wholesome/skilful, and will it result in my karmic goal? "This thought is irrational and unrealistic, because he has reasons which are logical from his stance, hence the most rational and realistic thing to do for him is that he should yell at me which is not reasonable to me, but that does not make him a son of a bitch all of a sudden... besides his mother is my daughter's grandmother"... "To think this way is unwholesome because it leads me to hate him and his family and others who do like him... Hate creates hollowness in me and is not healthy for my system, it works like poison and could make me sick... I can't love him anymore, but perhaps ...yes sure, I can empathize with his feeling of being deserted by a woman, which happens to be me... and stay friendly with him despite what and how loud he is yelling at me, now... and stay friendly next time we meet again"... "My goal to feel sad and cry if alone, but to stay firm with regard to my divorce decision will be reached with my new karmic thoughts, because the fire of anger and the poison of hate will diminish, if I really believe in what I'm just thinking... my softness/sadness will return and in due time, if triggered, the chances that I'll cry if alone and feel happy again, even in pain of divorce, are now increased... crying cleanses my system, detoxifies, and pours waste out of me, let me therefore surrender in crying whenever and wherever suitable, so that I can rise in loving-kindness."

The second sentence: "He mustn't scold at me; I wish him bad luck... because I hate him." Is this thought rational/realistic and wholesome/skilful, and will it result in my karmic goal? "The fact that he's mad at me for leaving him is unwise of him but highly understandable to me... whatever he scolds at me, if I stick to my mantra that *sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me*, he may scold at me the nastiest things possible and I can remain in my serenity, if I decide and want to"... "So, he must scold at me and it would be illogical if he wasn't scolding at me if he is furious and not eating up his anger: can I then feel compassion for him and empathize...? ...since it's irrational not to expect him to scold at me and it's more realistic to expect that he will or even must scold at me, it's just good that he scolds at me"... "To wish him bad luck is to wish me and our daughter bad luck which is therefore an unwise wish... I'd better wish him good luck because his happiness will increase everyone's happiness... and if I do so, say so to him, *I wish you the best of luck and the happiest of happiness now we are separated*, this could create good-will and at least not create ill-will"... "Hatred is fermented anger which will result in a life which carries an acetified taste... and since I do not wish a sour life but a sweet and happy life full of love and kindness... my energy is better used to be kind now to him, even if it's hard"... "My goal to

feel sad and cry if alone, but to stay firm not to share life with him... will be reached with my new *karma* as hate diminishes... and if I deeply believe my wholesome thoughts and act to my new intentions... the chances that I'll feel happy again amidst adversity will increase."

The third sentence: "He is a lazy man, how could I ever marry him? ...I wish I never met him, now I've ruined my life, stupid me." Is this thought rational/realistic and wholesome/skilful, and will it result in my karmic goal? "A realistic view would be that he isn't lazy but a man who usually behaves lazy"... "With the wisdom of the present, it is an irrational wish to not having met him back then when I felt joy and was hopeful to share life with him, and even to bear and give birth to our child... all of which was meant to be happy as a family... however, as many marriages this one was also bound to end in separation"... "Calling me stupid will only motivate self-hatred and is not realistic by any standard... Is it stupid not to presage this end? As I am not a fortuneteller, I could not foretell this unfortunate chemistry occurring between laziness and my temperament, so it was not stupid at the time... but with today's painfully gained wisdom, it had been better to stay attracted at some distance and to find out character in/compatibilities first which is my karmic decision now when I meet a nice young man who doesn't behave lazy I would like to relate with... so, it was a mistake which does not make me a stupid person: at worst *I did a stupid thing*, which I can always correct like I did by separating"... "By thinking so, I'll stay in friendly relationship with myself... this self-talk/self-conversation is meant to have a fresh start and build up a new life which would not be possible if I am ruining myself by irrationalities... I would not say such to someone I love ...unless meant as teasing... Human beings are fallible, even Einstein made mistakes (would the Buddha have made a few mistakes?) ... To make a premature and false foregone conclusion that I've ruined my life because of this marriage is ruining *karma* and won't result in my aim to feel sad, cry alone, be firm on my divorce, and feel happy amidst the hardness of life... so, let me cry in unconditional self-acceptance asap and boost wholesomeness."

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Although opaque, there is an epistemological hierarchy in the above rational analyses which follow the ladder of abstraction. One needs to be aware of conceptual abstractions which boil down to the adage of general semantics that "the map is not the territory". This implies that speech/language can be viewed as a map of the map of the map, and so on, which may lead to identifications and reifications of I-me-mine/self, unless there is awareness of the natural order of abstraction. Mindfulness counters our self-made maps and semantic reactions, and could secure the "pure" perception and description of the territory. Language moves from the concrete to the abstract and from the specific to the general. If we never get general, we don't say anything and if we don't get specific, "real" meaning might remain obscure. Irrationality arises when stuck on the abstraction ladder. Faulty abstractions include: dead level abstracting (e.g. fear of fear, angry at anger, sad about sadness), selective abstracting, arbitrary inferring, misattributing, inexact labeling, dichotomous reasoning, overgeneralizing, magnifying, minimizing, catastrophizing, and personifying. These errors are subject to correction. Abstracting accurately follows the logics of the ladder and starts with a factual description (e.g. "this is a heartbeat"). It continues by a personal inference (e.g. "this feels nasty") and results in some emotional evaluation (e.g. "this is my death") which finally motivates *karma* (e.g. "calling an ambulance"). A sane order of abstraction starts with the "silent" level of the impermanent "process world" of the territory, i.e. atoms, molecules, cells, and so on. What follows is "mapping" which is a descriptive report of the bare facts, i.e. a mindful neutral observation. Subsequently there is an inference containing a cognitive judgment (e.g. "I've made a mistake"), and finally, there is an evaluation, i.e. an emotional

value judgment (e.g. “I’m a worthless human being”). Interpretations and evaluations usually happen unconsciously, automatically, or mindlessly. Mindfulness raises awareness.

Further Similarities

My own work as a therapist in almost four decades was to demonstrate that the pan-Buddhist Dharma and REBT share a common paradigm and use comparable tactics. These are summarized in the following seven points (Kwee & Holdstock, 1996). (1) Although their aims are seemingly different, REBT and the Dharma both work toward optimizing mental health: curing psychological disorders vs. ceasing existential suffering, distress, and agony (*dukkha*). (2) Similar to *dukkha*, REBT expounds that life is a hassle from which there is no escape; both agree that there is no need to suffer needlessly. (3) While the Buddha’s message is to transform karmic activity toward wholesomeness by skillfulness, REBT aims at eradicating irrational cognitions and dysfunctional emotions by changing them via the ABCDE-format. (4) REBT uses homework as an integral part of advancing self-therapy; Buddhism’s reliance on self-healing is adamant as in the Buddha’s last words:

And whoever Ananda, now or after I am dead, shall be... a refuge to themselves, shall take to themselves no other refuge, but seeing... [the Dhamma as a refuge], shall not seek refuge in anyone but themselves, it is they, Ananda... who shall reach the further shore! But they must make the effort themselves (Humphreys, 1987, p.94).

(5) Surprisingly, REBT also propagates the abolishment of (most of) the human ego by defining ego or self as the sum total of c/overt behaviors, thus of *karma*. The rational stance is not to judge behaviors/actions simply because there is no accurate way to rate them. Whatever the outcome, rationally it cannot impact the person as a whole. This is in line with the Buddhist practice not to blame the person while rejecting her/his cognitive defilement and emotional affliction. REBT’s stance is comparable to Buddhism which abolishes all of the self on the ultimate level while acknowledging a “provisional self” for practical reasons.

In both cases the admonition is not to identify with anything in an impermanent world of flux and hence to ban the semantics of the “is of identity”. By questioning the validity of the verb “to be”, mindful attention enables clarity that there is no static self to identify with: “I” consists of many ”iiiiiiiiiii’s” (as a husband, lover, dad, teacher, pie-eater, and so on). This resembles the Buddha’s expression on the modalities of clinging: “this is not me/mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self” (*Anattalakkhana Sutta*). For instance, a client is depressed when thinking: “He must love me or else I am a worthless human being.” Applying REBT’s Unconditional Life-Acceptance, Unconditional Self-Acceptance, and Unconditional Other-Acceptance, the following alternative applies: “By thinking so I won’t reach my goal of regaining equanimity regarding him or myself. There is no evidence that he must love me, nor is there any proof that my worth depends on being loved by him. The fact is that if he loves someone else exclusively, he must *not* love me which feels sad and regrettable, but it is no reason to detest myself as a human being. My worth of self cannot be judged because there is no accurate way to rate it. My mere existence warrants my value unconditionally. By avoiding disharmony with myself, with him, and with life, I will feel OK.”

(6) Next to the most important procedure of the ABCDE-format, there are two dozen additional techniques to tackle emotional disorders. Due to space constraints, these will not be dealt with here. Suffice to say that they intervene in the domains of cognition-imagery, affect-emotion, and inter/personal behavior and show some overlap with Buddhist interventions (P. de Silva, 1984). The Buddha also proposed specific techniques and highlighted e.g. 12 interventions (Premasiri, 2003). The first seven are preventive (*Sabbasava Sutta*):

1. Wholesome affect is preceded by right/balanced/sustainable views: to see not-self and understand that beliefs about events, not the events per se, evoke emotionality.
2. Restraint: it is wholesome to practice self-control and not to cling to what one "must/should" have or not have with regards to what had entered the sense doors
3. Wise indulging in one's basic physiological needs like food, clothing, shelter, to safeguard against physical illness and promote mental well-being.
4. The discipline to endure most pressures from the psychological, physical and social environment to secure freedom from unnecessary and needless worries.
5. To drop unwholesome/unskillful thoughts: one is timely mindfully aware of them, i.e. right from the start before they are able to affect unwholesome *karma*.
6. To avoid places and situations one does not need to be and which might expectedly engender psychological cankers, unwholesome thoughts and emotions.
7. To prevent cankers, one cultivates awakening by being: aware, investigative, persistent, enthusiastic, serene, concentrated, and equanimous.

The next five, derived from the *Vitakkasanthana Sutta*, deal with a flow of unwholesome karmic habits. They are consecutively listed and translated into ABCDE terms as follows:

8. Whenever an unwholesome thought enters awareness, one replaces this with another wholesome thought (e.g. blaming and forgiving): Changing B into D.
9. If that fails, examine the harmful consequences of the unwholesome thought and its inevitable product: the creation of suffering all around: Formulating C and E.
10. If that fails, forget the thought and engage in attention diversion: look for wholesome distraction like reading a *sutta* or jogging: Changing A into another A.
11. If that fails, investigate and reconstruct the antecedents of the thought and remove its cause; e.g. ABC-sadness preceded next ABC with B of anger and fear of sadness.
12. If that fails, resist with force: be harsh and radical by for instance clenching teeth or pressing the tongue against the palate: Changing C-behavior into E-behavior.

Notably, the Buddha dealt with persisting habits and automatic thoughts. Beware if they become obsessive thoughts; they intrude into mind against our will and manifest themselves in a repetitive fashion as if they are not ours. Obsessions and compulsions, if generalized to behavioral acts, come about when mind tricks us by mechanically shifting attention away from a grave emotional knot totally beyond awareness. One advisably turns mindfulness onto the emotional problem, usually something relational and extreme like fury or bereavement, as to disentangle and unwind. Buddhist Psychotherapy could weigh in here from assessment to remedy. All means and methods are to be used like a raft. If the river is crossed, there is no need to carry the boat around (*Alagaddupama Sutta*).

(7) The Buddha also applied empirical wisdom, comparable to evidence-based methods. This is exemplified by a homework assignment of a performance-based intervention in this inspiring vignette on being obsessive against the backdrop of denial (*Dhammapada*):

Kisagotami, a mother, mourned and wept about the death of her two year old son. Her kid was bitten by a poisonous snake. As she could not accept his death, she was out of her senses with grief. Nobody could comfort her and at last she desperately went to the Buddha for advice. "How can my son be cured?" she asked the Buddha, who replied: "There is only one way to help you and your child. Look for a black mustard seed that must come from a house where no one has ever died and which should be given to you by someone who has no deceased relatives". The woman left with her corpse and

sought from house to house, but was unable to find such a seed. Finally she realized what the Buddha meant with his assignment, got healed, and buried her child.

In effect, *Karma Transformation* is a confluence of REBT and Buddhism through the psychological modalities/*khandhas* of clinging and the ABCDE format around the 3-Poisons and basic emotions. Capturing all of this requires the observational awareness of “basic mindfulness”: (1) awareness of sensory perception (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, and viewing through the mind’s eye), (2) awareness of irrational cognitions due to ignorance on how the mind works resulting in projections: illusory selves (I/me/mine) and delusional god(s), (3) awareness of un/wholesome cognitions of intending (volition and conation) and the motivational factors of action, and (4) awareness of unwholesome thoughts which reflect the proclivity of irrational craving (“musts/shoulds”), greedy grasping (“should have”), and hateful clinging (“must not be”). Basic mindfulness opens the window for “advanced mindfulness” which unveils the Dependent Origination and interactivity of body/speech/mind and the psychological modalities; this includes their karmic antecedents and consequents. Eventually the result is balanced interaction, emptiness, and Buddhahood.

In Closing

A pointer indicating that the Buddha is a psychotherapist and that his Dharma can be inferred as an applied psychology is the illness metaphor of his “4-Ennobling Realities”.¹⁴ These are: there is suffering, to be understood (*diagnosis*), this is due to ignorance, to be abandoned (*cause*), there is a way out, to be realized (*prognosis*), and this way comprises the “8-Fold Balancing Practice”, to be cultivated (*therapy*). Attention (8) and awareness (7) are the two components constituting mindfulness which require effort to develop wholesomeness (6) to apply in life (5) on karmic activity (4), speech (3), and intention (2), whose effect depends on a realistic view (1): mental suffering exists and can be ceased. To luxuriate on the metaphor, the illness to be cured is a “dis-ease” to be healed and as dis-ease refers to mind and speech rather than to body, the cure is not medication but meditation (Kwee & Holdstock, 1996). It is bold but not unrealistic to draw the analogy of the Buddha as a 21st century clinician. His acumen in dealing with greed, hatred, and ignorance based on a wholistic view of body/speech/mind resembles the World Health Organization’s paradigm of the human being as “biopsychosocial” system (Engel, 1977). If agreed that the Buddha dealt with the mind and its concomitants, he could be called the first psychologist and psychotherapist ever.

To be sure, Buddhist Psychotherapy by *Karma Transformation* takes place in the space of the “provisional self” and the client’s self-talk. Framework is the collaborative practice of dialogical speech between client and therapist. The quintessence of change is that un-skillfulness leads to unwholesome, irrational, and “unhealthy” *karma*, while skillfulness leads to wholesome, rational and “healthy” *karma*. All of these is rooted in non/greed, non/hatred, and non/ignorance (e.g. *Baahitika Sutta* and *Chakkanipata Nidana Sutta*). Apparently fitting original meanings, psychological interpretations of *karma* do not have the monopoly on “truth”. Others who prefer interpretations in terms of “good/right/virtuous” vs. “evil/wrong/sinful” will consider theirs as true. However, such explanations squeeze Buddhism into religious and ethical pipelines (Keown, 1992) which were not included in the pristine Dhamma. Buddhist Psychotherapy discards Eurocentric, utilitarian, and un-aesthetical interpretations by appreciating the empty nature of the self and of Buddhism itself which includes the present views. Interestingly, even the last of the original Buddhist thinkers, Dharmakirti (7th century), who belonged to the Yogacara denomination, dealt with epistemology rather than with religion or ethics (Dunne, 2004). He discerned valid (*prama*)

¹⁴ From a psychological view of emptiness which discards Transcendental Truths, it would be erroneous to continue to use the Eurocentric expression “Four Noble Truths” for the Pali: *catvari aryasatyani*.

and invalid (*aprama*) thoughts as if he was a cognitive-behavior therapist. Dharmakirti secured cognitive validity by scrutinizing: (1) the direct object of observation, evident and public; e.g. a tree, (2) its private cognitive representation appearing as mental images and as (3) conceptualizations colored by inferences (e.g. “a hateful stinking tree” or “a lovely comfortable parasol”). The validity of cognitions is rooted in the 3-Empirical Marks of Existence which are congruent to the non-absoluteness and relativity of reason.

The practice of *Karma Transformation* is concerned with down-to-earth daily hassles like anger which, if accumulated, could explode in aggression. In the Buddhist lore anger is seen as garbage; but rather than something merely destructive to cut down and throw out, anger can be “composted”, a transforming process of creativity (Thich, 1998). If expressed as catharsis to feel good in the short-term, the opposite will probably occur in the long run. One likely becomes angrier and if reciprocated by the other a vicious *samsara* cycle might develop; somebody will get hurt and physical damage might occur. Pounding on a cushion is not a solution either; although relieved the seed of anger will continue to slumber. The Buddhist attitude to take care of anger does not mean to suppress or run away from it, but to allow its “suchness” and tolerate the “hellish” experience in silence. While breathing in and out, tenderly embracing the anger, one focuses on the anger in mindful and neutral observation, let it be. The garbage of anger hides flower seeds of kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. By the sun beams of attention garbage ferments into dung, empowering the lotus’ flourishing.

Nirvana, long-lasting trait or short-lived state, belongs to the normal range of human experience and is not something “out of orbit”. It is accurate to state that *nirvana* is attained if the flames of emotions are extinguished. Negative emotions, i.e. confusing depression, suffocating fear, burning anger, and drowning sadness, belong to the basic emotions from which the variations of affect are derived. Basic emotions can be depicted as layers of an onion, consecutively from the outer to the inner: depression, anxiety, anger, sadness, joy, love, serenity, and *nirvana*. The first group of four are quite unwholesome, thus to be abandoned, while the second group is quite wholesome, hence to be cultivated. In the Buddhist lore love (kindness/compassion), appreciative joy, and relational equanimity are to be acquired and “immeasurably” amplified to secure wholesome *karma*. Interestingly, the term emotion is derived from the Latin verb *e-movere*, which means “to be moved”. This being moved or in motion implies that there is a condition engraved as “unmoved”, not being in motion due to “nirvanic extinction”.

A practitioner of *Karma Transformation*, therapist, coach, or teacher, practices what s/he preaches. Practice implies meeting new challenges which accrue new learning experiences. After all, “nobody is perfect” and balancing toward contentment, happiness, and Buddhahood is usually a life-long cultivation. The Buddhist therapist not only shares wisdom and savvy, but also helps the client to become her/his own therapist. Since there are different strokes for different folks, *Karma Transformation* seems not particularly suitable for the faint-hearted who will be better off by “dos” and “don’ts”, religion, ethics, or the metaphysics of heaven and hell. For those who wish to choose and are capable to think and decide for themselves, a psychological roadmap built on ancient wisdom and evidence-based science may engender karmic bliss. Nonetheless, as M.W.P. de Silva (pers. comm., 2008), *nestor* of Buddhist Psychology, cogently admonished: “science may enhance the credibility and relevance of Buddhist concepts, but awakening may be achieved without science.”

Scriptures

Most Indian references in the text refer to Pali (P) *suttas*; Sanskrit terms are indicated as such (S), except for the household terms like *karma* or *nirvana*. All *suttas* and *sutras* can be found online, e.g. www.metta.lk (for *suttas*) and www.e-sangha.com (for *sutras*).

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