On the Path of the Buddha

A Psychologists' Guide to the History of Buddhism

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Siddhartha Gautama was the heir of the rajah of the small republic of Sakkka near the southern border of today's Nepal, in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains of northeastern India some twenty five hundred years ago. His father, Suddhodana, was a member of the Kshatriya warrior caste and therefore undisputed ruler of his kingdom. Legend has it that because of a prophecy that Suddhodana's son would grow up to be a great king only if he did not choose to become a great holy man, Siddhartha's father (his mother had died shortly after giving birth) made the decision that the boy should be raised in great luxury. This way he would ensure that the young prince would never be tempted to renounce his throne to pursue life as a homeless holy man and ascetic.

Thus Suddhodana decreed that the noble family should live in splendid isolation. And since his kingdom was both economically rich and politically stable the rajah was able to devote much of his life to giving his son a splendid and, by design, an almost entirely uneventful royal childhood. Siddhartha married at age 16 and his first son was born some ten years later.

The dominant religious practices of the time dated back at least a thousand years and focused on burnt offering sacrifices made to thirty-three gods known as *devas*. Only Braham priests were considered sufficiently pure to make these sacrifices, and they developed a wide range of esoteric practices to purify themselves before each sacrifice. These practices based on various aspects of what we know today as Yoga included intensive practice in meditation, fasting, celibacy, social isolation, and physical privation.

The ultimate purpose of these religious practices was to achieve liberation from reincarnation after death, which was to be achieved by the accumulation of *karma*, benefit derived from performing appropriate sacrifices. Many of these Brahmic beliefs and practices would eventually be codified into the religion of Hinduism, but at the time of Siddhartha's life and teaching they represented the practices of the dominant folk religion of "the people of the woods" – holy men who had withdrawn from society to live solitary ascetic lives devoted to pious ritual and practice. This was, of course, precisely the lifestyle choice that Suddhodana was most desperate to keep from his growing son.

As many famous princes have done, and continue to do, the boy Siddhartha grew to a jejune manhood untroubled by the concerns of ordinary mortals. His closest friend and constant companion was Channa, who also served as the young prince's chauffeur, charioteer, and informant about the world beyond the family cloister. The two young men conspired to have adventures, as young men will; but Siddhartha reached the age of marriage and even became a father without once experiencing the joys or sorrows of the real world just beyond his illusion of his reality.

Gradually, however, Siddhartha grew increasingly curious about life beyond the walls of the royal compound, and he prevailed upon his loyal friend to take him on a clandestine excursion around his kingdom. What he encountered on this trip and its effects on the young man's consciousness were destined to change human history.

What Siddhartha saw in the world that his father had tried to hide from him was nothing at all like the world his loving father had so carefully constructed for him in the first 25 years of his life. With his own eyes he experienced a world filled with human misery and despair. On that day, in rapid succession the young prince encountered a withered old man bent with infirmity and close to death, another man who was consumed by a disfiguring disease, and then to his ultimate dismay, he saw his first corpse – borne aloft by a large group of tearful mourners. He was struck senseless by the horror of the sorrowful world he saw all around him. Bewildered, he asked the loyal Channa if this is the world in which all men lived. Channa replied, "Yes, master, there is no escape. Old age, sickness, and death – such is the lot of all men."

This discovery of the sorrows of life had a profound effect on the young prince, and he was devastated to learn that there were no learned men who could soften or even explain the brutal truths that he had so unexpectedly learned. This new knowledge profoundly changed the young prince, who now withdrew into a period of intense introspection. He could not fathom how ordinary life could be so unrelentingly harsh. Beyond that he understood all at once that all of the pleasures of his youth had been false; that his happiness had been permitted only by his utter and complete ignorance of the sorrow of the world all around him. In his despair he entertained the idea that life was utterly futile and that there could be little justification even to bring children into the world. What meaning could anything have in life with the inevitability of disease, infirmity, and ultimately death?

At the depths of his anguish, searching everywhere for answers to questions he could barely comprehend, Siddhartha encountered the fourth great image that would shape his character and the

religious faith of millions of people in the future. He observed one of the thousands of mystic ascetic men of the forest who populated India during this era.

The prince inquired of this strange man, this beggar who struck him as being both wise and untroubled, how he could learn about the meaning of life and get to the heart of the nature of all the suffering he saw all around him. Being an ascetic, the wanderer of course told the prince that the only path to finding the answers to his questions required the young man to resign his privileged place and to take up a life as a wandering seeker, to devote his life to solitude.

So, at age 25 Siddhartha left the court, his wife, and his infant son and took up the life of a religious ascetic. He became the pupil of a series of holy men who instructed him in mental and physical discipline, and spent the next six years in self-imposed exile, sustained only by what he could beg from the common people. He nearly died from this regimen of starvation and asceticism, but became a master of what we know today as the practice of hatha yoga. In six years of rigorous self-denial he learned how to master his desires and how to quiet and focus the "drunken monkey" mind of ordinary consciousness. He had conquered the desires of his body and he had tamed his mind; beyond this, he had gained a significant following of disciples. But he was still no closer to answering the great questions in his heart about life, suffering, and death that continued to demand answers.

At the end of this period in his life, and near death from starvation, he came to the realization that continuing the severe regimen of privation that he was following would almost certainly bring about his demise before it would lead to his enlightenment. He understood that the answers he was seeking required him to harness not only the energy of his mind, but the resources of his body and his heart as well. So he left the company of the ascetics and accepted food and drink from a young woman named Sujata, who had been caused by a dream to bring him a meal of rice-milk in a golden bowl.

Nourished by this worldly gift, Siddhartha now embarked on a continuous meditation under an ancient fig tree known in Buddhist legend as the Bodhi Tree, or Tree of Wisdom. He vowed to remain under the tree until he had attained the Great Enlightenment. On the 49th day of his meditation, under the full moon of May in 544BCE Siddhartha attained the Supreme Enlightenment and became the Buddha, the enlightened one.

> No one, it is said, can possibly explain enlightenment. It does not lend itself to description or explanation in words. The man who has awakened, however, is in no doubt about the occurrence. Although unable to describe it, he knows what has happened to him, just as someone in love may not be able to describe his feelings, yet is himself in no doubt about his particular physical and emotional state, or as a man dying of thirst will know when his thirst is quenched. As a term,

> Enlightenment signifies a direct, dynamic spiritual experience brought about, in the Buddhist view, through the faculty of intuition, a faculty developed and sharpened by such spiritual disciplines as intensive meditation and contemplation. It is a condition beyond the power and pull of "the opposites," a full realization of the universe and the self as one. (Ross, 1981, pp. 14-15)

After he attained enlightenment, Siddhartha was called Shakyamuni, which means "sage of the Shakyas, the clan his father ruled. The Buddha would spend the rest of his life spreading the word of his Enlightenment to his disciples throughout India. These disciples in turn carried the message southward into the South East Asian countries of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Cambodia and eastward into China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan.

The message that the Buddha's disciples carried was one of supreme compassion. Their mission was to offer humankind the opportunity to make the same discoveries about the nature of life, and of suffering, that the Buddha himself had made. There were, of course, certain central propositions that the Buddha's disciples taught, but the central message of Buddhism always was, and to this day continues to be, an experiential one.

> A perfected Buddhist might be described as a human being who has reached a state in which moral training has become so deeply a part of his nature that it would be impossible for him to be involved in violence, cupidity, insensibility, low physical passion or other "unaware nesses." (Ross, 1981, pp. 36-37)

One of the principal things that stands out about this legend is that the central teachings that inform Buddhism were not revealed to the Buddha in a divine message "received" from on high. They came to a mortal man who had spent six long years of his life in relentless search of a philosophy that would inform his existence and make the world around him sensible to him. To this day Buddhist teaching is much less about doctrine than it is a dedication to a set of mental practices, a firm mental discipline, through which Truth is revealed by the fullest awakening of the human mind. Buddhism holds out the prospect of peace, fulfillment, and ultimately release from suffering not through any sort of divine intercession, but through the exercise and control of one's own mind and senses. The release that is spoken of in Buddhism is not into a supernatural realm, but into a human zone where greed, hate, and delusion are turned aside – simply by the disciplined act of systematically letting go of attachment and desire. Reduced to its core, Buddhism is about developing a form of universal wisdom rooted in compassion for all living things.

The great power of Buddhism for many psychologists is that it is so completely and powerfully true. Day after day we encounter clients who work single mindedly and furiously against their own best

interests. They seek to impose their will upon the world in order to secure love, respect, or devotion. Yet the harder they rail against reality, the more isolated, alienated, and alone they become. We want to say to them: Be still! Give your kids a chance to come to you; risk not controlling every human interaction; trust that your heart can lead you where you want to go. Calm your monkey-mind! Listen to the wisdom of your body. See that there are no closed doors; feel the release that comes with every breath.

The wisdom of the Buddha's revelation is that the answers to life's most perplexing and persistent dilemmas are not outside our selves. The therapist cannot cure; God is unlikely to rescue you. Love is a gift that is offered – it can no more be seized, contained, controlled, or consumed than air. There is no meaningful distinction between you and me. Age, gender, skin color, infirmity, flags of nations – none of these constructs are for you a different world than the one I inhabit. Our tears are the same; our children are the same; our fears, our hopes, and our minds are the same. Every atom that divides us is an illusion. Every perception, attitude, sensory impression is arbitrary; every distinction, every category, every drawn line in the sand is meaningless. There is no fixed trait that is the center of a human being, any more than there is a fixed point that is the center of the universe. Life is a never static. All life is process; it is not in any way, shape or form a fixed entity. Life is an ever-moving stream of atoms, molecules, energy fields, beings, becomings and, yes, even extinctions.

The one great idea that defines Buddhism, and that informs every chapter in this book, is that the universe is a system of interrelated parts – a seamless, beginingless, endless flow of energy and appearances. You try to explain to your client that she can't coerce her spouse into loving her; you try to help him to see that whatever power he achieves will only deepen the insecurities that haunt him. Joy is not in the substance – be it gold or crack cocaine. You try through your work with families, schools, communities, and legislative bodies to increase motivation to end the violence in human society; to end the greedy destruction of our trees, rivers, and oceans; and to cultivate moral responsiveness to other beings and to the life of Earth itself. Yet the false gods all require us to suspend our rational powers – to discredit what we have known intuitively since infancy; that the possibility of human happiness can only be realized by embracing our humanity and recognizing that it exists only in connection with others and the rest of creation. The greatest and most powerful human faculty is empathy. The most profound and transformative human motive is compassion.

The central problem addressed by Buddhism is: How can we overcome the universal illusion of our unique, separate, bounded individuality? How do we get beyond the false notion that I am "I" and you

are "other"? How do we strike through the masks, the pretensions, and the cowardice of the illusion of our own immortality? For the central irony of our existence is that our life long quest for union, for oneness with the universe, and for transcendence, in reality, ultimately requires us to develop an extraordinary sense of our own being and non-being. The key to solving this problem lies in the development of our consciousness; for if we do not preserve and deepen our natural consciousness, how can we ever see the truth? True, I am just a subatomic speck in the universe, but I am a subatomic speck with mind! I possess potential awareness not only of my own "speckness," but also of the thousands, and even millions of other specks all around me. The faculty of comprehension that I need to understand this awareness is the defining characteristic of "I" – but not a separate, separated, and independent I. This comprehension is what Buddhism refers to as the "compassionate oneness" of the self.

Roger Walsh, a psychologist who has spent many years focusing on the ways in which Buddhist practice and modern psychology inform each other about the nature of reality, has developed a special interest in how Buddhism casts a light on the experience of the self. Walsh (1998) has written:

> The extent to which consciousness is normally occupied by fantasy is enormous. That this gross encroachment on awareness has gone largely unnoticed, for example, by behavioral scientists, represents a significant hiatus in Western psychology. Meditation tends to reduce the amount of this fantasy, and initial fantasy-free episodes may elicit feelings of strangeness, unreality, and discomfort. Reduction in the amount of fantasy, therefore, may reduce the sense of separation from others. It may be impossible to think or work one's way out of these fantasies and, in fact, such attempts may even exacerbate them. However, withdrawing attention from them and continually fixing the mind on a neutral object may collapse them. (Walsh, p. 19)

The Basic Teachings of the Buddha

After attaining enlightenment the Buddha spent the rest of his years teaching the truths that he had realized. He was never doctrinaire in his teaching, and always instructed his followers to "Work with diligence. Be lamps unto yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Look not for refuge to anyone beside yourself. Hold fast to the Truth as to a lamp." Indeed he taught the ideal that his followers should "just sit" and engage their practice, so that others might join them in their own practice. No salesmanship, no proselytizing; in the Buddhism of the Buddha there is no dogma, no hierarchy, and no idea of an elect group of keepers of a received Truth.

The Buddha died after eating a meal of poison mushrooms in the forest. He instructed his followers to burn his body, and asked that his relics should be placed in a Stupa, or burial mound, at a place where four roads meet. He then said, "And whoever shall put flowers or scents on it, or whitewash, or shall

express devotion or feel confidence in his heart here, that will be long for his welfare and happiness" (Harvey, 1990, p. 27). And that was the end.

The Core Teachings of the Buddha

So the ultimate Truth of the Buddha is that the answers to life's most pressing and vexing questions lie entirely within us. These Truths, however, will not become clear to us so long as we lead lives that are disruptive and full of the contamination of the "three consuming fires" of greed, hate, and delusion. We must, therefore, adopt habitual practices to center our attention and cultivate our consciousness. We must come to understand our lives, our selves, as ever changing and infinite yet universal and part of the totality of the universe. At the heart of the teaching lies the idea that everything matters, everything is connected, and that we are vulnerable to suffering because suffering is part of being a living thing.

Dukkha, or suffering, is the principle focus of the core of the Buddha's teaching. Indeed, almost everyone who has had any passing acquaintance with Buddhism knows that among the Four Noble Truths identified by the Buddha, the first and most profound truth is that "All life is suffering." For Buddhists, however, this dukkha, this suffering, is a sort of universal sickness, not unlike in its nature the Christian concept of original sin. To be human, to have awareness, and to participate fully in life one must encounter the inescapable facts of sickness, death, and decay. Because we are human we are vulnerable to sorrow, pain, grief, and despair, to separation from what we love, what we want, and what we need. Life is never precisely as we would have it, and thus life is always to some degree unsatisfactory. The problem is that we become attached to our desires, and when they cannot be fully met, we feel discouraged, abandoned, and resentful. Every happiness eventually passes into regret for its unsustainability, and we become greedy, fearful that we haven't had our fair share, that life has cheated us.

This doctrine is not just a rephrasing of the wisdom of the ascetic forest dwellers, however. The Buddha had experienced the extremes of deprivation, and knew that extreme hardship was not the route to enlightenment or self-discovery. It is not the experience of pleasure that Buddhism sees at the heart of the human dilemma. It is attachment – dependency – on the things that bring those pleasures that must be overcome.

> Giving up attachments does not mean giving up enjoyments of life's pleasures. It means rather, never being dependent on the pleasures. It means being ready to forgo the pleasures without frustration. If a splendid meal is available, enjoy it; if not, be content with a humble meal. You've gotten tickets to this special concert? Wonderful! If not, find some other useful way to spend the evening. If you have nice clothes, enjoy them; if you have shabby clothes, ignore them (Levine, 2000, p. 44).

The Second Noble Truth therefore explains that the suffering that is so central to and so much a part of our lives, is something that we create out of our ignorant greed and grasping. Our suffering is rooted in our desires; and our desires are rooted in our selfish self-centeredness. We are too attached to a world that, in reality, is completely transitory. But we both console and fool ourselves into believing that if we can just possess "just one more" person or thing, that we can escape the sorrows associated with being alive. We crave pleasures – that are never just exactly what we crave them to be because the world is constantly changing and is never perfectly as we desire it to be. We seek pleasures, and even beliefs, to enhance our own being, but we are blindly and perhaps deliberately ignorant of the cost of those pleasures and beliefs to other beings.

At the heart of the Buddha's teachings about these desires were his teachings about the nature of the self. Especially in the West we tend to see ourselves as detached, independent, autonomous actors – "This is the basic attitude of 'I am': deep-rooted self-assertion or egoism, which is concerned about how 'I' measure up to 'others'" (Harvey, 1990, p. 54). Buddhism replaces this egoism with the unifying concept of *Conditioned Arising*, or *Dependent Origination*. Almost every chapter that follows in this volume is directly or indirectly concerned with this concept. The Buddha himself and his closest disciples considered this specific doctrine to be so clearly at the heart of the teaching that it was said that until the Truth of Conditioned Arising is comprehended there is no possibility for enlightenment.

The essence of this doctrine is the idea that every aspect of creation originates from every other aspect of creation; no part stands alone or outside the whole. This principle, called the principle of conditionality, states that all things, mental and physical, arise and exist due to the presence of certain conditions, and cease once their conditions are removed. Nothing is independent. The most obvious, but in some ways most obscure lesson to be learned is the absolute interdependence of everything in creation. This is the teaching of Buddhism that demonstrates that concern for the environment, for other species, and for all other organisms isn't just anthropomorphic sentimentality, but is actually a profound spiritual concern. This doctrine of Conditioned Arising is the source of the deep ecology that many Buddhists practice in their politics and in their daily lives (Barash, 2001).

Buddhism directly applies these principles to the whole concept of suffering, *dukkha*; and this is where many psychologists find the most relevance of the teachings to their personal and professional lives. The conditions that give rise to suffering, which can be thought of as constituting spiritual ignorance, can

be changed through education. Thus suffering can be eliminated by the destruction of the ignorance that gives rise to it. Ignorance is abolished through the development of conscious compassionate awareness.

Thus is derived the Third Noble Truth, that suffering is not permanent or eternal; that the roots of suffering – egoism, greed, selfishness and the like, can be known, understood, and rooted out. When craving comes to an end, it brings about the end of *dukkha*. This is the teaching that comes closest to the Buddha addressing the process of renunciation. But what is critical in this doctrine is that it is not the prospect of happiness, harmony, or enlightenment that is renounced – Buddhism is most definitely not an iteration of nihilism or of any sort of radical relativism. The renunciation one focuses on in Buddhism is the renunciation of craving – the usual Buddhist metaphor is the quenching of fire.

> This [the Buddha's "fire sermon"] teaches that everything internal and external to a person is "burning" with the "fires" of attachment, hatred, and delusion, and of birth, ageing and death. Here the "fires" refer both to the causes of dukkha and to dukkha itself. Attachment and hatred are closely related to craving for things and craving to be rid of things, and delusion is synonymous with spiritual ignorance. Nibbana [Nirvana] during life is frequently defined as the destruction of these three 'fires' or defilements. When one who has destroyed these dies, he cannot be reborn and so is totally beyond the remaining "fires" of birth, ageing and death, having attained final Nibbana (Harvey, 1900, p. 61).

The ability to vanquish desire is developed, according to the Fourth Noble Truth, by living one's life in accord with a set of eight highly refined principles, widely known in the Western world as the Noble Eightfold Path. These are the so-called eight "rights" – right understanding, purpose, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Nancy Wilson Ross (1980) presented these as they were reconceptualized rather gracefully by the Anglo-Irish historian and philosopher, Gerald Heard (1889-1871):

1. *First you must see clearly what is wrong.*
2. *Next you must decide that you want to be cured.*
3. *You must act and*
4. *Speak so as to aim at being cured.*
5. *Your livelihood must not conflict with your therapy.*
6. *That therapy must go forward at the "staying speed," that is, the critical velocity that can be sustained.*
7. *You must think about it incessantly and*
8. *Learn how to contemplate with the deep mind.*

> *These were the basic precepts of the Way of Life which the Buddha undertook to preach in forty-five years of active ministry after he had made the initial great decision to "beat the drum of Dharma [truth] in the darkness of the world"* (Ross, 1980, pp. 24-25).

Thus the Buddha's message is that we can control and even extinguish our suffering if we dedicate ourselves to a drastic change in our consciousness through a deliberate recharting of the way we think, perceive, and relate to others (karmic tendencies). This is more than just following Alfred Adler's admonition to ask each day what you can do today to make life better for someone else [though that is surely a good start!]. It is a change in our moral reasoning, a transformation in the way we live – carried out in order to increase our understanding of own nature, and our own place in creation.

The problem of course is, that as the famous Buddhist prayer recognizes, "though the number of my passions is infinite; I vow to conquer them all." The struggle to live life on the correct path, to take charge of one's passions, and to recognize the futility of trying to escape from taking responsibility for one's thoughts, motives, and deeds is indeed difficult. But it has one powerful ally deep within one's own consciousness. For the Buddhist prayer quoted above has a second verse; it goes something like this: "Though the number of feeling, thinking beings is infinite; I vow to help them all." This is how the actions of ordinary men and women create and maintain <u>karma</u>, the Buddhist term for deeply engrained patterns of thoughts, words, and deeds that constitute our style of relating in the world.

Compassion is the priceless jewel in the center of the granite carving of the Buddha at his most serene. As Ross (1980) has noted, Buddhism goes beyond the doctrine that you should be your brother's keeper or that you should treat everyone as your brother; it states that you <u>are</u> your brother. Compassion is a sort of compass that keeps one clear about the course of the Noble Eight-Fold path. Compassion subverts my devotion to preserving a separate and isolated "I." It is the heartfelt aspiration that all living beings will know relief from the harshness of the world.

Compassion connects me to all living things. In an ancient Buddhist chant, followers are told to "conquer anger by loving kindness; conquer evil by good; conquer the stingy by giving; conquer the liar by truth."

> May all beings be happy and secure, may they be happy-minded! Whatever living beings there are – feeble or strong, stout or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born or those who await rebirth – may all beings, without exception, be happy-minded! Let none deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place; in anger or ill-will let them not wish any suffering to each other. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let his thoughts of

> boundless loving kindness pervade the whole world: above, below and across, without obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity. Whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should develop his mindfulness. This, they say, is divine abiding here. Not falling into wrong views, virtuous and endowed with insight, he gives up attachment for sense-desires. He will surely not come again to any womb (quoted by Harvey, 1990, pp. 209-210).

Buddhist Practice

The practice of Buddhism can be seen to have three basic components. These include, the development of a moral lifestyle informed by a strong ethical code; membership in a community, or *Sangha,* where one fulfills one's responsibilities to society; and developing mindfulness, or meditation, chanting or enlightenment.

As should be clear, the cornerstone of Buddhist ethics is the eradication of sorrow and suffering from the world. Thus one's thoughts, speech, and behavior should all be attuned to creating the greatest amount of happiness for one's self and others. This is not an ethics that is described by rituals and duties; it is a natural ethics that evolves out one's awareness of the suffering of others.

> I get the impression that when people are not much interested in religion they also neglect values like compassion, a sense of sharing, a sense of caring – all the things that people consider to be a religious message and reject. That's a mistake. These are secular ethics, not a religious message, and they are for everyone. Everyone can understand that being human, you want a happy life, a happy family, and to be a happy individual. But material things will not provide you with genuine inner peace or inner happiness. Human values are essential. We must find a way to present basic human values to everyone – and present them not as religious matters but as secular ethics that are essential whether you are religious or not (Dalai Lama, 2001, p. 57).

As we have seen, the doctrine of Conditioned Arising clearly defines the self as existing only in relation to all other beings. If I behave in a way that causes another pain, it can not have any effect except to increase my own pain and alienation as well. As one sutra says: "Since the self of others is dear to each one, let him who loves himself not harm another." When I help you I am, in fact, helping myself; and by helping myself I further my potential to help others. Beyond this general principle, there are five ethical precepts that constitute the core of Buddhist ethical teaching (Harvey, 1990).

The first precept here is to avoid taking or injuring another life. The second is to foreswear any act of theft or thievery, fraud, or cheating. The third is to refrain from any inappropriate sexual acts, although Buddhism does not provide any universal definitions of what is or is not appropriate sexual interaction. The fourth precept prohibits any form of lying or intentional deception. Lying is bad when it manipulates others for one's own gain, of course; but it is also a bad practice because it removes one from the course of finding

the Truth – in other words lying increases delusion and self-deception. The fifth precept warns against the use of intoxicants or engaging in any practice that clouds the judgment or disturbs mental clarity.

At the heart of all Buddhist ethical systems is a clear concern for compassion and developing loving kindness towards all beings. And this generalizes into one's actions towards and responsibilities to the other members of one's community, the *Sangha*. In the ancient texts the writings about the *Sangha* were intended to set out the rules by which monks and nuns should live and practice with each other in closed religious communities. In modern usage the *Sangha* refers more broadly to all of the members of one's religious community. Beyond that, in this book, the editors and several of the authors would like to extend the notion of the *Sangha* to include all of the members of one's professional and residential community, and ultimately to extend that concept to all the people of the world. Thus Buddhists around the world are increasingly concerned with issues such as social justice, human rights, the protection of the environment, the rights of women, the development of strong community structures, the plight of refugees, and world peace.

An exemplar of this tradition, the current Dalai Lama, his Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, whose writings are widely distributed around the world, is widely regarded as one of the leaders of the modern era who is most clearly identified with the promotion of world peace and the resolution of global conflicts. Other major Buddhist figures promoting world peace are Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist priest whose writings for peace are also known world wide, and who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize; and Daisaku Ikeda, the President of the Soka Gakkai International whose peace proposals have been made to the United Nations since 1978 and whose mission for *Kosen Rofu* or World Peace is practiced by his 12 million followers in 177 countries and territories around the world.

The third domain of practice refers to the activities undertaken by individuals, whether or not they call themselves "Buddhist" to engage in certain practices with the aim of developing wisdom or *prajna*. The collective name we give to all of these practices is "meditation" but as we will see, the scope of various meditative practices ranges far beyond the common notion of sitting silently in the lotus position while repeating a mantra in one's mind to include chanting a mantra, reciting the Buddha's teachings, mandala meditation and many other highly disciplined practices.

The sort of meditation one learns to practice depends as much upon geography as anything else. As Buddhism spread across Asia in the centuries after the Buddha's death, it took on the distinctive characteristics of the cultures where it took root. These regional and cultural variations differ more in form

than in substance (although important differences in teachings do exist), and we can expect that as Buddhism gains increasing numbers of adherents in the Western world, the practices employed by Western Buddhists will take on a flavor and character of their own.

Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism is the oldest of the Buddhist branches. The Theravada branch has been defined as "The Way of the Elders," a term for the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia based on the Buddhist scriptures preserved in the Pali language (Chappell, 1999). It traces its roots to the time of the Indian Emperor Ashoka (264-226BCE) who was responsible for the spread of Buddhism into Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. According to legend Ashoka converted to Buddhism after encountering a Buddhist monk who refused to be physically or emotionally disturbed by the process of being boiled in a cauldron of water in the emperor's torture chamber. The emperor witnessed the monk chatting affably with the men who were stoking the fire under the caldron, and was so impressed that he converted to Buddhism on the spot. The monk went on to become the king's religious teacher (Levine, 2000), and Ashoka's daughter, Sanghamitta, went on to bring Theravada Buddhism to the people of Sri Lanka.

The Theravada Buddhists eventually created a vast, powerful, and enlightened empire throughout Southeast Asia over the ensuing centuries. The vast temple complexes in Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka are testimony to the extraordinary technical and aesthetic heights achieved by these communities.

Vipassana or Insight meditation has as its primary goal the development of a calm centered comprehension of the self and the world. Practitioners of this form of meditation are concerned with developing "mindfulness" – a heightened state of awareness of all of the sensations associated with ordinary acts such as breathing, walking, digesting, and experiencing moods and emotions. It is said that the skilled practitioner of Vipassana meditation can find Truth in every dimension of his/her being – s/he knows no such thing as a "distraction." The progress of the student of Vipassana meditation is first to achieve the ability to experience a global Calming [sic] of the body and mind "to temporarily suspend, and thus weaken, attachment, hatred and delusion" (Harvey, 1990, p. 253); and then to deepen that practice to move beyond calm into an experience of Insight, the product of a higher level of mindfulness while the physical body is in a near state of suspended animation. When Calm and Insight can be achieved effortlessly and spontaneously the practitioner is said to have experienced *Nibbana*.

The quest of the practitioner of mindfulness meditation is to break through the illusions of ordinary consciousness to become aware of the "fundamental three marks" of all experienced phenomena.

This includes comprehension of impermanence, of the pervasiveness of frustration, unsatisfactoriness and suffering, and of *anatta*, the principle of not-self. Of these the doctrine of *anatta* is probably the most difficult for Westerners to grasp. The key to understanding this teaching is the realization that the world exists independent of my self's relation to it. It will not die when I die, it will not change as I change, and it is void or empty of any "extra" meaning that I impart to it.

> The teaching [on anatta] is not only intended to undermine the Brahmanical or Jain concept of self, but also much more commonly held conceptions and deep-rooted feelings of I-ness. To feel that however much one changes in life from childhood onwards, some part remains of the "real me", is to have a belief in a permanent self. To act as if only other people die, and to ignore the inevitability of one's own death, is to act as if one had a permanent self. To relate changing mental phenomena to a substantial self which "owns" them: "I am worried … happy … angry", is to have such a self-concept. To identify with one's body, ideas, or actions, etc. is to take them as part of an "I" (Harvey, 1990, p. 51).

The doctrine of *anatta* has a strongly psychological flavor to it. The observation that my life is continuous, and that I have various personality traits and characteristic ways of perceiving and behaving, is in Buddhism simply a reflection of the empirical self – a pattern of conditioned responses to the events of life – recurring patterns of responses to patterned stimuli. Moreover, while some Buddhist teachings assert that many such patterns are nearly automatic and difficult if not impossible to alter with the will, other teachings hold that precisely because one's life is continuous and constantly changing, the tendency to respond in a certain way (an aspect of one's karma) is subject to behavior modification through developing new conditioned responses. But this does not make relatively fixed behavioral patterns absolute or essential. The existence of distinctive patterns of thought and behavior does not demonstrate some sort of super-human attachment to the world. Rather it simply calls on us to examine such phenomena with interest – to see these patterns as clearly and as objectively as we see anything else. "Buddhism sees no need to postulate a permanent self, and accounts for the functioning of personality, in life and from life to life, [is understood] in terms of a stream of changing, conditioned processes" (Harvey, 1990, p. 53).

These are truths that can be confirmed in the practice of meditation. As Harvey (1990) has observed, these truths are there for anyone to see who pursues mindfulness. They are not conceptual, or intellectually abstract; in fact as some Buddhist teachers have pointed out, they are as evident and irreducible as mathematics. They are the key observations that a human being makes in the process of gaining understanding of the self and the universe – of attaining wisdom.

Mahayana Buddhism has been defined as "a term for the Buddhist community in East Asia based on a new scriptural collection that appeared after the death of Gotama Buddha which survives in Chinese

and Tibetan and encourages the use of new methods of practice based on the emptiness and interdependency of all things, the compassion of the Buddha, and the equality of practitioners as fellow bodhisattvas" (Chappell, 1999, p. 245). Mahayana Buddhism arose more than a thousand years after the Buddha's death, and has developed over the ensuing millennium almost completely independently of any "alien" influences from Western culture. It was initially a social reform movement and Bodhisattvic practice of helping others, embodying the Bodhisattva ideal as the epitome of Mahayana ethics. The great Indian philosopher Nagarjuna (1st Century CE) is credited as being the father of the Mahayana movement, having established the dominance of the Mahayana teachings over both Hinayana and Brahman teachings. The central core of Mahayana teaching recognizes the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra and the primacy of the doctrine of the emptiness of all phenomena, non-self (*sunyata*).

Northern Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism (also known as Vajrayana Buddhism) developed through interaction with a very different set of local cultures, traditions and religious practices. This form of Buddhism, one of the major practices following the Mahayana Buddhist teachings, is a much more exotic and colorful practice with less emphasis on the early teachings of the Buddha as in Theravada, and more emphasis on a wide range of deities, spirits, and tantric practices. Many scholars of Buddhism believe that as a result of its many centuries of sociopolitical and geographical isolation, Tibetan Buddhism is a manifestation of ancient Mahayana Buddhism in its purest form.

The central teachings of Tibetan Buddhism replace the notion of the sorrow and pain of life with the observation that, as befits the ancient experience of a nomadic people, life is in a constant state of flux. In addition to their transmission by scriptural text, the core of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism have historically been passed along through successive generations of the nomadic population as a central part of their oral tradition – scripture is more likely to be recalled than to be read. The great teachers of Tibetan Buddhism are revered as those who possessed great wisdom, and their lineage is believed to be passed down through successive generations of holy Lamas through the process of reincarnation.

With the incursion of China into Tibet in 1959, the Tibetan way of life changed dramatically. In order to preserve the tenets and practices of Tibetan Buddhism the Dalai Lama was forced to flee the country, residing in India and traveling extensively throughout the world. One consequence of this Diaspora is that Tibetan Buddhism has become widely accessible to the Western World for virtually the first time in its thousand plus year existence. Many lamas have come to America and have set up major centers for prayer and study further expanding the availability of the practice to the West. American Vajrayana has

modified many traditional practices, most notably reducing the traditional separation between monastic and lay communities. Thus Tibetan lamas in the Kagypa and Nyingmapa orders have taught their senior American disciples ancient tantric practices and their accompanying rituals, that were rarely if ever practiced in Tibetan households (Lavine, 1998).

Robert Thurman, a Buddhist scholar and holder of the first endowed chair in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies in America, was the first Western Tibetan Buddhist monk. Thurman studied under the Dalai Lama and has been a major force in bringing Tibetan Buddhism to the west. He expounds the ancient Mahayana doctrines of the eight-fold path, the four noble truths, karma, personal and community responsibility, and the enlightenment movement. Thurman (1998) teaches that appropriate awareness of these truths, along with proper meditation and other practices will produce the "inner revolution" that will ultimately lead to peace in the world. His writing offers the Western reader a vision of the enlightened community by way of the example of Tibet as a model for how religious beliefs and practices can move a society to the full achievement of peace.

Tibetan beliefs and practices have also been incorporated into therapeutic institutions. One example of this is in the Tara Rokpa Therapy (www.tararokpa.org/article.htm). Rokpa is the humanitarian, medical, and spiritual teaching of Dr. Akong Tulku Rinpoche. It utilizes techniques such as relaxation massage, and art therapy training to aid in physical and emotional healing. It challenges the familiar notions of western psychopathology by suggesting that the "Buddhist notions of the mind open the possibility that we could experience the world without this defensiveness, without emotional cloud between us and reality, without the suffering created by this defensiveness. That we could even find within ourselves joy, and the ability to open to further caring, and to a very full life" (Sweeney, 1996). Rinpoche's writings explain that Tara is a method of freeing or creating spaciousness - which holds everything through love and compassion. Rokpa means help, the creation or harmony or coordination between inner and outer environment. Tara Ropka therapy allows one to encounter the raw experience of life directly so that it can manifest the understanding that is already within us; indeed revealing our highest self is a key concept in Mahayana Buddhism.

It is important to note that Tibetan Buddhism is a philosophy, but it is also a political and social movement that has a strong following in the West in the struggle for Tibetans to regain their freedom and autonomy from China. Significantly, many scholars have pointed out that the traditional Tibetan society historically demonstrated the most advanced form of the integration of religion, politics, and society that

has ever been seen. This is, of course, completely consistent with the living tradition of Buddhism throughout the ages, but it is largely contrary to strongly held belief in North America in the separation of "church and state".

Distinction between Theravada and Mahayana: Engagement with the World.

As we have seen, there are many types of Buddhism; and Buddhist-derived practices that vary in goals, philosophy, and practice. Their goals may range from personal enlightenment to human revolution, social reform, and world peace.

The traditional Theravada branch was a monastic order based in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Its practitioners removed themselves from society to engage in rigorous practice in pursuit of their spiritual development. Thus Theravada was absent of a proselytizing spirit, remained aloof from politics, and largely inaccessible to the masses of working people.

Mahayanans on the other hand have been described as social and political activists. They are said to have viewed Buddhism as a faith to be vigorously disseminated throughout society; not merely practiced by monks confined in a cloister but spread to the masses who lived in poverty and misery. Mahayanans were more likely to make political statements based on Buddhist ideals embodied in the Dharma, and to actively challenge the social order. However, as Ikeda (1977) pointed out, "Though dissatisfaction with the apolitical attitude of the early Hinayanaists was among the factors leading to the rise of the Mahayana school, the problem of the proper relationship between politics and religion is a highly complex one and cannot be settled in haste" (p. 83).

These early distinctions between Theravada and Mahayana are beginning to fade in the modern era with the emergence of Socially Engaged Buddhism. For example in Southeast Asia, the Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh who coined the phrase is quoted as saying:

> When I was in Vietnam, so many of our villages were being bombed. Along with my monastic brothers and sisters, I had to decide what to do. Should we continue to practice in our monasteries, or should we leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering under the bombs? After careful reflection, we decided to do both—to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We called it engaged Buddhism. Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting…. We must be aware of the real problems of the world. Then, with mindfulness, we will know what to do and what not to do to be of help. (as cited in Rothberg, 1998, p. 268)

Currently Socially Engaged Buddhism is a modern movement of Buddhists committed to social reform, and guided by liberal and progressive values. It includes a broad range of approaches which collectively involve the direct application of Buddhist teachings and practices to the social, economic,

political, and environmental concerns that have not been traditionally associated with Buddhist practice" (Rothberg, 1998, p. 268). These concerns include human rights, social justice, ecological sustainability, community development and empowerment, and prevention of nuclear warfare.

Internationally, a number of Buddhists have entered the political process to affect social reforms including for example, English Vipassana teacher Christopher Titmuss who ran twice as Green party Candidate for parliament, and Soka Gakkai members in Japan who maintain a powerful, albeit controversial, elected presence in the Japanese government's Komeito Party. Many North American Buddhist organizations are presently involved in socially engaged Buddhism, organized under the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, which has a national and international advisory board of members of prominent socially engaged organizations; the International Network of Engaged Buddhists; and the Soka Gakkai International-USA.

The question of the legitimacy of religion's involvement in social reform and public policy is reminiscent of an analogous concern in the history of Western psychology. Not unlike the emergence of engaged Buddhism, community psychology emerged out of clinical psychology as a social change movement within the mental health field. Its emphases have some interesting parallels to those of engaged Buddhism: leaving the clinics and going out into the community; collaborating with the people as equals to solve the social problems of the masses; emphasizing prevention through individual competency building, empowerment, and ecological interventions; community capacity building; and reforming policy to protect the welfare of human society. These parallels are further discussed in Dockett's chapter on community empowerment in this book. On the question of whether scientists should be involved in public policy, Reiff (1971) took the position, common among members of the Critical Psychology movement, that all scientific activity is a political statement, either for or against the status quo (see Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997). Thus the question is not whether one should be involved but rather to be conscious of one's involvement and the values that involvement supports. The same may apply in the case of religion but the jury is still out on that point. Jason and Moritsugu address the issue of values to guide our interventions in a later chapter in this volume.

Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism is a form of Mahayana Buddhism introduced into Japan from China in the 12th Century BCE. The earliest traces of Buddhism in China trace to around the year 50 CE, brought there by traders who were practicing Buddhists. As Buddhism spread through China in the first two centuries of the

current era it was influenced by both Confucianism, with its emphasis on filial piety, duty, and harmonious social relationships, and Taoism. Taoism was a religious and philosophical tradition that encouraged meditation, contemplation, alchemy, and spiritual immortality. Perhaps more profoundly, however, Chinese Buddhism encountered two distinctly Chinese philosophical traditions: a deep and pervasive humanism and down to earth pragmatism (Chan, 1967a). Chinese humanism resisted seeing the Buddha as a god or a divine; instead he was viewed as a man of extraordinary and wonderful moral achievements. What was enshrined about the Buddha was that he was a man of supreme virtue; indeed Chinese Buddhist temples were called *jen-tz'u*, "temples of goodness."

Chinese humanism didn't depict the Buddha as sitting on a heavenly throne; instead it shows him sitting in a bamboo grove, carrying a baby, or holding a fish basket (Chan, 1967a). Moreover what the Chinese valued in the life of the Buddha was the Buddha's dedication to the human world, the world of responsibilities, relationships, and duty. As Chan (1967a) pointed out, the Chinese Buddha was also a very good Confucian.

Chinese pragmatism is seen most clearly in the practices that emerged in the centuries following the Buddha's death. Chinese Buddhists focused on a doctrine that held that human beings were responsible for their own salvation, and as Chan wrote, "What is more interesting, salvation is to be achieved here and now. And most interestingly of all, it is to be achieved 'in this very body'" (1967a, p. 21). In emphasizing the importance of seeing, clarifying, and strengthening one's own nature Chinese Buddhists incorporated both the moral rigor of Confucianism and the ideal of an everlasting life on earth from Taoism.

By the 5th Century CE Chinese Buddhism had divided into two branches. The larger and more successful branch became known as Pure Land Buddhism. Pure Land Buddhism was and continues to be a religious sect whose followers are concerned almost exclusively with issues related to spiritual salvation. It has a creed of faith, religious practices, and is primarily concerned with salvation of souls; until the 10th Century it was headed by a group of patriarchs who controlled and issued the faith's doctrines. It is called Pure Land Buddhism because it has interpreted Enlightenment as arrival in the land of the Buddha of Infinite Light – a concept analogous to the Christian teaching about heaven. Because it is almost devoid of philosophical implications, it does not seem to have much direct relevance to the work of psychologists.

The other branch of Chinese Buddhism, Ch'an Buddhism, however, is all about philosophy and psychology. It is, almost supremely, about practice. In fact one of its legendary founders spent nine years in

meditation gazing at a wall, until his legs fell off! (Harvey, 1990). Ch'an has really only one aim, and that is to enable a person to come to a full and even serene knowledge of his or her innermost nature.

> Ch'an is basically a method, not a method of writing or words, which the school rejects, but a method of "direct intuition into the heart to find Buddha-nature." Nevertheless, this method is based, on the one hand, on the assumption of the eightfold negation of production and extinction, annihilation and permanence, unity and diversity, and coming and departing, and, on the other hand, on the affiliation of the reality of Buddha-nature in all things. The Ch'an method of "direct intuition, together with its "sudden enlightenment," gave the Chinese mind a way of ready and complete release, and for this reason had a peculiar charm. Above all, its sole reliance on meditation imposed on the Chinese mind a severe mental and spiritual discipline which was invigorating and quickened the Chinese imagination …(Chan, 1967b, p. 56)

Under the T'ang dynasty (618-907) both China and Buddhism flourished. Much to the displeasure of the Taoists, Buddhist monasteries became rich and powerful by becoming a sort of court religion, until it fell out of court favor and onto hard times both politically and economically.

During the period of its greatest power, however, Ch'an Buddhism spread into both Korea and Japan. By sometime in the late 6th Century under the Emperor Shotoku, Buddhism became the official court religion of Japan (and Confucianism became the official court philosophy – even then showing the Japanese genius at incorporating diverse foreign elements into their culture and life). During the height of the Heian period (794-1185) the royal court was moved from Nara to Kyoto, and Buddhism essentially subsumed the native Japanese religion of Shinto – by the clever expedient of naming the spirit *kami*, the central component of Shinto, as *Bodhisattvas*.

Tensions between Pure Land Buddhism and Ch'an Buddhism followed the movement across East Asia and into Japan. Ch'an Buddhism was the Buddhism of court and of the elite. It was the practice of the warrior class, but it had little impact on the masses, whose allegiance was to the Pure Land Sect. By the beginning of the 12th century this schism was so great, and the varieties of Ch'an practice so diffuse that a new practice was begun that did not carry with it the baggage of centuries of theological debate and division over practice. This new Buddhism was Zen.

> The monk Eisai (1141-1215) first introduced [Zen] from China …and experienced opposition from [other] monks when he said that Zen was the best form of practice. … He argued that [Zen] would strengthen [the people] and protect the land. Indeed, Zen's meditational and ethical discipline, and indifference to death, appealed to the samurai, who were thereby better able to resist two attempted Mongolian invasions in 1274 and 1281. Eisai gained the protection of the Shogun at the capital Kamakura, and established the long-lasting alliance between [Zen] and the samurai. This can be seen as an example of "skillful means", in the form of adaptation of Buddhism to the way of life of a group of people (Harvey, 1990, p. 165).

Zen thus became the Buddhism of the samurai warrior, and the hard working farmer. It is vastly less verbal, less scriptural, and less spiritual than all other forms of Buddhist practice. It is a form of Buddhism with austere temples, a strict and disciplined life, and practice that can be reduced to its essence of "just sitting."

There is at times a clearly stated anti-intellectualism in Zen, and there are hundreds if not thousands of Zen stories that focus on the moral superiority of the well disciplined student of Zen who makes a fool out of the visiting Southeast Asian Buddhist monk whose life is full of religious teaching, but who does not know how to separate his practice from his devotion to the sutras. The jokes, tricks, and pointed lessons aimed at followers of Pure Land Buddhism are even more numerous. Here is just one such story:

> A monk came to Master Ma Tsu for help in solving the koan (a sort of riddle that can not be solved with logic] he had been given" "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming to China?" The Master suggested that before preceding with the problem the monk should make him a low bow. As he was dutifully prostrating himself, Ma Tsu, the great Master, applied his foot to the monk's posterior. The unexpected kick resolved the murky irresolution in which the monk was floundering for some time. When he felt the impact of his teacher's foot, he is said to have "attained enlightenment." Subsequently he said to everyone he met, "Since I received the kick from Ma Tsu I haven't been able to stop laughing" (Ross, 1980, p. 170).

Zen can be seen as a deliberate reaction to both the scholarly Buddhism of Southeast Asia and the "bells and whistles" of Tibetan Buddhism. Zazen, the practice of Zen meditation is not seen as a route to some higher order of being, a path to enlightenment strewn with golden lotus flowers – the practice of zazen is understood as Enlightenment. As Shunryo Suzuki (1970) always reminded his students, everything else is "extra" and must be gotten out of one's practice.

> A person must sit in zazen with constant awareness [as befits a warrior] and with faith that he is already a Buddha. The process is one of self-forgetting in which the Buddha-nature gradually unfolds its infinite potential throughout one's life. As an aid to this, physical, mental, moral, and intellectual discipline provides a fitting framework for the life of selfless action (Harvey, 1990, p. 166).

Zen practice involves a wide range of disciplined activities including flower arranging, calligraphy, writing haiku poetry, arrowless archery, ink painting, drinking tea, solving mental puzzles, and above all – telling stories. Zen stories are all about the destruction of ego, and the foolishness of hollow pride. They generally focus on the wisdom of the body, and of the uselessness of the over-educated intellectual rule keeper. In Zen monks die standing on their heads – just to prove it can be done. They break all the rules, forget the sacred lines, and deflate the pompous with the turn of a quick-witted phrase. Zen is

the only form of Buddhism where enlightenment can come on a person who is engulfed in laughter, after a truly satisfying meal, while viewing cherry blossoms, or while watching a cascade of autumn leaves falling from a thousand-year-old oak.

> In summation, what can one finally say about Zen? It is not easy; in fact it may be impossible. One can only try. First, perhaps, it should be reaffirmed that there is in truth no goal to be attained. Even satori, enlightenment, is not to be imagined as something achieved after arduous effort. Arduous effort may be involved, to be sure, but it is not the real meaning. The real meaning, the real enlightenment, happens in the way a ripe fruit falls from a tree. All the effort of the seed struggling up through the soil, the tree putting down roots and putting out branches, leaves, blossoms, its patient endurance of the many opposing natural forces – all in the end produce the fruit which, when fully ripe, silently, easily falls. Yet, this whole process of fruition was a process, not a goal and the seed itself was as much the goal, the reality as the fruit itself. The seed as seed is eternal; an apple seed is eternally an apple seed, and given the chance it will become an apple tree producing more apple seed. As Dogen said, wood is wood and ashes are ashes. Enlightenment is, then, to live in accordance with one's true nature. That is what the Buddha did. That is how he was "Enlightened" (Ross, 1980, pp. 172-173).

The role of the teacher is supremely important in Zen practice, and this is probably one of the main reasons why so many Western psychotherapists and counselors have been attracted to its application in the consulting room. This is also, of course, one of the main potential drawbacks to the application of Zen in therapeutic settings. The teacher/therapist/Master/sensei is so important and so powerful in the life of the student that the danger of abuse and exploitation is always present. Reading first-hand accounts of encounters of somewhat naïve Westerners with unscrupulous "Buddhist" gurus (Bankart, 1997; Singer & Lalich, 1996) will fill any ethical therapist with anger and disappointment.

As a great many other writers have noted, individuals encounter great risk in the process of finding either a therapist or a teacher. It is sadly unlikely that many people in the West will ever encounter a *sensei* with the skill, moral fortitude, personal openness, and human compassion that is required to guide a student/client through the labyrinth of self discovery that is involved in wisdom practices. The possibilities for personal, financial, and sexual exploitation are too numerous, and the screening/training of Western therapists is too superficial for us to imagine otherwise. It has taken our profession altogether too long to recognize the vulnerability of women and girls in this process; and we still don't have any deep awareness of how often boys and men are also exploited by others in positions of trust (Bankart, 2000).

Nichiren Buddhism

Nichiren Buddhism is a socially engaged form of Mahayana Buddhism. It emerged in 13th Century Japan at a time of considerable confusion in the religious community about which of a conflicting array of teachings and practices represented the definitive teachings of the Buddha. It was also a time of unprecedented natural disasters, man-made conflicts, and great suffering among the people. Remonstrations, propagation, and conversions among different sects were the order of the day as they debated which of the Buddha's sutras was correct and therefore had the power to alleviate the sufferings of the people and the disasters befalling the nation.

Nichiren (1222-1282), the only son of a poor fisherman's family, was dissatisfied with the contradictory teachings of the eight Buddhist sects of his day. Deeply motivated to discover the wisdom of Buddhism and the correct practice to alleviate the people's suffering, he entered the priesthood at age 16 and devoted the remainder of his life to study and propagation. Exhaustive study of all the sutras of the Buddha and the eight sects of Japan led Nichiren to conclude that the correct teaching for the time was the Lotus Sutra. This sutra is "a core Mahayana Buddhist scripture that emphasizes the worth of all people as possessing the Buddha nature and the mission of Buddhists to be socially active to help others based on compassion and the sustaining power of eternal Buddhahood" (Chappell, 1999, p. 245).

At age 32, Nichiren proclaimed that chanting the phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra, would lead one to perceive the essential, enlightened nature of their life and thereby attain Buddhahood. Believing the practice of propagating the Lotus Sutra to be *shakubuku*[1], the refutation of competing doctrines, Nichiren assumed the role of a religious reformer (similar to Martin Luther in the Protestant Reformation [Hurst, 2000]) and sharply criticized the Pure Land, Zen, and other schools for not adhering to the highest teaching of the Buddha—the Lotus Sutra. His proclamations and remonstrations with the government and other Buddhist sects had severe repercussions, marking the beginning of a series of persecutions, exiles, and attempted assassinations that persisted throughout the remainder of Nichiren's life until his death at age 61. Yet he was never dissuaded from his vision of propagation throughout the world and took his persecutions as proof of the power of his teachings. Nichiren's early forms of "social engagement" aimed at securing the peace of the land were to continue albeit in different forms throughout the history of this school as practiced by the Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist organization, and today represent a world-wide movement for peace.

Nichiren Buddhism holds that all living beings possess the potential for enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra teaches that this state of freedom is accessible to us in this lifetime and through our own efforts. It teaches that life is eternal; that the accumulated effects of our thoughts, words, and deeds determine our current life circumstances; and that by taking control of our cognitions in a single moment of life, we can change each of the moments that follow. As stated by Nichiren in 1222, *On Attaining Buddhahood* (*Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1999):

> If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-renge-kyo. Chanting Myoho-renge-kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life.
>
> The Lotus Sutra is the king of sutras, true and correct in both word and principle…it reveals the principle of the mutually inclusive relationship of a single moment of life and all phenomena. That is why this sutra is the wisdom of all Buddhas.
>
> Life at each moment encompasses the body and mind and the self and environment of all sentient beings in the Ten Worlds as well as all insentient beings in the three thousand realms, including plants, sky, earth, and even the minutest particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the entire realm of phenomena. To be awakened to this principle is itself the mutually inclusive relationship of life at each moment and all phenomena (p. 3).

Nichiren's teachings of the theories of the "ten realms" (i.e., the Ten Worlds) of existence and the "nine consciousnesses[1]" are key concepts for understanding how and why the transformation of the self is possible (SGI-USA, 1997):

> The expression of the "ten realms" describes the ten basic states of life, or life-conditions that comprise the life potential of every human being. Everyone possesses and intermittently experiences each of these life states, which range from the lowest--Hell, Hunger, Animality, and Belligerence--through Tranquility, Rapture, Learning, and Realization to Bodhisattva and, ultimately, Buddhahood or Enlightenment. These states should not be mistaken for moods we pass through. They are patterns into which one's entire existence falls, and although each person tends toward one particular state more than any other, whatever one's life-condition at a given moment, in the next it can readily fall into a lower state or be raised to a higher one. The aim of Nichiren's Buddhism is to establish and maintain the predominance of the state of Buddhahood (p. 10).

The theory of the nine consciousnesses presents a construct for understanding the layers of the mind. The first five correspond to the five senses; the sixth integrates information from the five senses and allows us to make judgments and function in our daily lives. The seventh, or *mano* consciousness, allows for abstract thought, thereby fostering an awareness of and attachment to our sense of self (ego) as a unique, separate entity, isolated from other things. The eighth consciousness is our “karma storehouse” or *alaya* consciousness, which contains memories of all our experiences in the current lifetime and in the

remote past. Due to the “karmic seeds” or latent causes stored there, the *alaya* consciousness imperceptibly influences everything we experience, including the functioning of all lower levels of awareness. The ninth consciousness is our pure or *amala* consciousness. Unaffected by karma, it allows us to purify all other functions and manifest our Buddhahood. It is the ninth level of consciousness that “manifests the wisdom to understand that we are one with the cosmic life force…. that, at the most profound level, we are all interconnected and interdependent (Kawada, 2001, p. 22). Nichiren taught that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo allows us to access this level, thus transforming all layers of consciousness to bring forth our enlightened nature in the present moment. The correspondence between the theory of the nine consciousnesses and concepts elaborated by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (ego-consciousness, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious) is of interest to scholars of psychology and Buddhism (cf., Kawada, 2001; Stacks, 1996; Yamamoto's chapter on the consciousness-only theory in this book).

At its core, Nichiren Buddhism is a teaching of psychological empowerment. Practitioners learn self-control, self-responsibility, and self-change. Through an empowering philosophy and practice, members learn that they can achieve enlightenment in this lifetime just as they are; that they have within themselves the power to transform everyday sufferings into happiness. As practiced through the lay organization of the Soka Gakkai International, Nichiren Buddhism has two aims. One is to teach individuals how to uncover their highest potential, which is the Buddha nature inherent within their life. The second aim, which is inextricably linked to the first, is to promote peace through the collective "happiness" of enlightened individuals who act in harmony with others and with the universe. As articulated in the Soka Gakkai International Charter (SGI-USA, 1995), members "embrace the fundamental aim and mission of contributing to peace, culture and education based on the philosophy and ideals of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin."

The core philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism (SGI-USA, 2001):

> is expressed in the concept of human revolution, a process of inner transformation that centers on the idea that the causes we make through our thoughts, words, and actions have influence that extends beyond their immediate context to affect the vast and complex web of life. Through undergoing our individual human revolution, we awaken to the responsibility we each have for our own circumstances and for our environment. Our inner transformation will lead us to take the actions that bring about personal fulfillment and help us contribute to the harmony and healthy development of society. These ideals are based on the Buddhist worldview of dependent origination, a concept of interrelation where all things in the realms of humanity and nature are dependent upon each other for their existence and nothing can exist in isolation. (p. 1)

Among the various schools of Buddhism in America, Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism is unique in several ways. First, it has the largest, most ethnically and racially diverse membership of all forms of North American Buddhism. It "is the only North American Buddhist group with a large number of African Americans and Hispanics (who represent over 20 percent of local leadership). This contrasts sharply with the Zen and Tibetan communities in North America which are largely educated, middle class, European Americans and have virtually no African Americans, Latin Americans, or Asian Americans from other Asian countries" (Chappell, 2000, pp. 302-303).

In the 41 years since 1960 when Soka Gakkai International President Daisaku Ikeda first visited the United States for the purpose of spreading Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in America, the Soka Gakkai-USA has grown to a reported membership of 300,000 members and 77 community centers (SGI-USA, 1997). Internationally its membership of 12 million people from 177 countries and territories throughout the world including 8 million in Japan (McCloskey, 2001) attests to the successful efforts of Ikeda and his predecessors. What began in 1930 Japan as a society influenced by Nichiren's teachings and dedicated to educational reform under the leadership of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the first and second presidents of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society), has become a vehicle for societal reform based on the values of Nichiren Buddhism. Under Ikeda's leadership the movement's goals have shifted from the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Buddhism to the establishment of world peace through cultural, educational, religious, global outreach, and diplomatic activities as a Non-Governmental Organization of the United Nations. It's values as articulated in the Soka Gakkai International Charter (SGI-USA, 1995) include respect for life, human rights, religious tolerance and interfaith collaboration, cultural diversity, environmental protection, and humanistic education.

The board-based appeal of Soka Gakkai in America is consistent with the desire of the Buddha to alleviate the suffering of the masses. Several factors may explain the attraction of this form of Buddhism. (a) The simplicity of its practice, which involves chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo at a shrine in one's own home without necessarily understanding complicated theories, renders it readily accessibility to all socio-economic classes and language groups. (b) Its ability to foster a sense of personal control over one's life is appealing to all people and especially to disenfranchised groups such as African Americans, Latin Americans, and people who are poor. (c) Its method of propagation, which in the past involved assertive proselytizing to people of all walks of life, reaches out to diverse segments of the population.

Second, as Chappell's (2000) research shows:

> Among all Buddhist groups in America, Soka Gakkai excels in its organizational capacities. The social solidarity in Soka Gakkai is not an accidental feature or a byproduct of its teaching, but is at the core of its understanding and practice. One of the reasons why the Soka Gakkai was so attractive to those without social stability in the 1960's and 1970's was its capacity to welcome them into the organization and to develop their abilities. Homeless youth in the drug culture in the 1960s discovered that Soka Gakkai did not discriminate against them...Everyone was accepted and encouraged to chant for whatever they wanted, lofty or mundane--for world peace or for money… (p. 323)

The social organization of the Soka Gakkai provides a network of constant personal support and a host of public events that provide a training ground for honing interpersonal, social, and leadership skills. Against this backdrop and combined with the practice of chanting, members undergo a transformation. They learn to accept responsibility for their lives, experience the control they have producing positive outcomes (internal locus of control), and become confident, optimistic, and empowered. According to Chappell (2000) "This social development is not a major part of Zen, or Tibetan Buddhism, or Vipassana, but it is at the heart of Soka Gakkai, which is not just socially active, but is socially transforming at the very core" (p. 324)…The organizational strength of Soka Gakkai is not a method to control membership as critics might claim, but an expression of social connectedness and social responsibility, which Soka Gakkai regards as the life of a bodhisattva and as their highest mission" (p. 325). Compared to other popular forms of American Buddhism, the Soka Gakkai probably provides the best example of an active sangha, which is one of the three basic practices of the Buddha.

Lastly, "The secret at the heart of Soka Gakkai is the discovery that, through practice, individuals participate in a universal reality that unleashes their personal creativity to transform life's problems into blessings, to "change poison into medicine" (*hendoku iyaku*). This is the fuel that feeds the life of Soka Gakkai" (Chappell, 2000, p. 303).

As an organization that intentionally blurs the distinction between the public and the private, the personal and the political, and the spiritual and the secular, SGI has always been at the center of considerable controversy. The following excerpts from Professor of Religion Jane Hurst (1992; 2000) provide a view of some of the controversies surrounding the SGI.

> The Soka Gakkai movement has not been without controversy, both in America and elsewhere. …Reaction to the Soka Gakkai movement in Japan has been highly emotional and steeped in controversy from the start.... From the beginning people distrusted the Soka Gakkai because it promoted a passionate belief in the truth of its own cause (Hurst, 1992, pp. 107–108). To outsiders, there is much to criticize in the wealth and power of the Soka Gakkai and its dedication to its leaders, especially President Ikeda. The Komeito Party's unofficial affiliation with Soka Gakkai is suspect and troubling in a nation that formally separates church and state…

> [The split in 1991 when] the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood excommunicated all 11 million Soka Gakkai members, [brought] to an end the more than fifty-year cooperation between the largest of the Nichiren sects and its lay organization. The causes of this split are complex, but largely have to do with disagreement over matters of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist teachings, the function and power of the leadership in each of the two groups, and certain financial issues" (Hurst, 2000, p. 77).
>
> It is probable that some of the criticisms of Soka Gakkai in the early phases of the movement have some basis in the facts of the behavior of an overzealous young organization [e.g., aggressive proselytizing]. What is disturbing is that these negative treatments of Soka Gakkai all discount the validity of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism as a legitimate religion.... To research a new religious movement without taking seriously its religious aspects is an unacceptable approach. It has been used all too often with regard to Soka Gakkai (Hurst, 1992, p. 112).
>
> In simple functional terms, Soka Gakkai helped members organize their lives by encouraging personal hard work and participation in group activities. Furthermore, Nichiren's Buddhism, with its absolute insistence on the ability of the individual to change his or her own destiny by chanting to the Gohonzon, gives Nichiren …believers a sense of personal power. In the modern world, such a sense of power is not often experienced by individuals, and in fact its opposite, anomie, seems to be a fixed feature of modern life. One might in this sense see Soka Gakkai as a socializing agent, creating group identity and personal strength in its members (Hurst, 1992, pp. 113–114).
>
> What is most impressive is the spiritual work for self and society that these SGI members are doing in an era in which materialism and greed are so easily rewarded. The members of this group have high ideals for themselves and for the future. Whether or not one agrees with their method for achieving them, the fact that these ideals are held and worked for is admirable (Hurst, 1992, p. 195).

The interested reader should see Dockett's chapter on empowerment in this volume for a more detailed explication of the SGI's activities for world peace.

Buddhism and the West Today

Buddhism first came to North America with the Chinese immigrants who began coming to California in the middle of the 19th Century. By the time of the great California gold rush, 10% of the population of California was Chinese, and Buddhist temples had been erected all along the coast and throughout the San Francisco Bay area. They were joined a half-century later by a surge of immigrants from Japan, so that by the turn of the century there was a large thriving community of Buddhists on the west coast, most of whom were practitioners of Zen (Prebish, 1998).

In the United states today there are active Buddhist organizations representing the various Buddhist traditions of immigrants from all over the world; in addition there are a number of Westernized secular Buddhist organizations whose emphasis is on personal development. Interestingly enough, however, the same tensions that broke the Buddhist legacy into dozens of competing schools in ancient times are still very much at work today. We can suggest that most of these concepts and divisions can be

understood within the framework of three primary competing forces that even the Buddha's immediate followers faced.

The first force is the impact of what the noted scholar Charles Prebish (1998) has called "ethnic Buddhism." Originally this referred to the problem of exporting the Buddha's teachings from the foothills of the Himalayas in Northeast India to the various kingdoms in South East Asia, Sri Lanka, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, and a thousand places and principalities in between. In North American however it refers to the types of Buddhism practiced by immigrants who came to the United States for various reasons and brought their religion with them (also referred to as "baggage Buddhism.") These Buddhist communities are deliberately and primarily mono-ethnic and use their religion in part to preserve their sense of cultural identity as well as for the spiritual benefits. Ethnicity is a primary defining characteristic of these communities (Nattier, 1998). One of the brilliant aspects of Buddhism is that it is easily adapted to the mores, customs, values, and existing belief structures of people all around the world; "Sit and practice; and some will sit and practice with you." However, as Prebish has noted, the task of reconciling the differences between these various doctrinal schools is truly formidable.

Buddhism in northern California probably doesn't look much like Buddhism in Southern California, Buddhism in the Green Mountains of Vermont, Buddhism in the inner city of Washington DC, or Buddhism among the diverse people who live in the Virgin Islands. So is there a consistent practice that is "truly" Buddhism? Prebish (1999) tells us that the Buddhism that is practiced by many Americans doesn't look a thing like the Buddhism practiced by Vietnamese or Lao immigrants to the United States. Pure Land Buddhists and Zen Buddhists have little to say to each other after a thousand or so years of doctrinal disputes. Prebish has wisely observed that we run the danger of so westernizing our practice that it becomes "Buddhism without the Buddha" (Prebish, 1999).

At the other end of the continuum is "socially inclusive" Buddhism. According to Buddhist scholar David Chappell (2000), the primary characteristic of these Buddhist communities is the ethnic, racial, and social class diversity of their membership. The Soka Gakkai International-USA is the "single most prominent example of socially inclusive Buddhism;" it is "more culturally diverse and multiracial than any other form of Buddhism either in Japan or in America" (Chappell, 2000, p. 302).

A competing characterization of the Soka Gakkai by some writers is that of "Evangelical Buddhism" (Nattier, 1998; Tweed & Prothero, 1999). Evangelical Buddhism is spread by missionary activity, by Buddhists who seek to engage their practice for spiritual enlightenment and the attainment of

world peace. The Soka Gakkai International, the largest Buddhist organization operating in North America, is a prime example of this force.

The SGI-USA aims to empower its members to take control and responsibility for transforming the suffering in their lives into happiness. It also embraces the mission of contributing to peace, culture and education based on the philosophy and ideals of Nichiren Buddhism (SGI-USA, 1995). Through active proselytizing of these "missions" in a wide range of settings, it has become the largest and most diverse Buddhist organization since setting foot on American soil in 1960. The mid-1990's split with its exclusivistic Japanese priesthood and the establishment of participatory lay leadership methods changed the Soka Gakkai from a charismatic cult to a denomination (SGI-USA) (Chappell, 2000, p. 300).

Meanwhile another group of Western “Buddhists,” those identified by Tweed and Prothero as “Elite Buddhists,” seek only the transcendental benefits of Buddhist practice. They eschew its spiritualist connections, seeking empowerment of individuals, groups, and communities in roughly the same way that the long-ago Samurai sought empowerment by their adherence to Zen and zazen practice. This group is so labeled because its defining characteristic, even though most members are of European ancestry, is social class background. Most are middle to upper class Americans who have the leisure time and economic opportunity to engage in travel to sometimes expensive training sites and pursue strenuous meditation training. Tibetan, Vipassana, and Zen sects of Buddhism tend to attract those of privileged class background (Nattier, 1998) and thus have been labeled "Elite Buddhism." The divisions between the Elite Buddhists and the Evangelical Buddhists at some level also obscure the fact that these two movements hold vastly different attractions to racial and ethnic minorities, women, homosexuals, intellectuals, radical humanists, and those with a missionary zeal.

The use of these classification systems – “elite,” “ethnic,” “evangelical,” etc. – is problematic. They use non-parallel bases of classification, specifically member characteristics for "elite" and "ethnic" and propagation method for the "evangelical." A consistent application of the dominant characteristic or the membership criterion would result in a reclassification of "elite,", "ethnic," and "socially inclusive." Moreover, the labels probably exaggerate the differences in the actual practices between different groups of modern Buddhists, especially those who live (and practice) in the West. Yet it is important to recognize that Buddhism is not a monolithic enterprise, and further to recognize that there are a wide variety of motivations, practices, and belief systems subsumed by the term “Buddhist.”

In the midst of all this diversity, Western psychology has also “discovered” Buddhism, and Western psychologists and psychotherapists have been intrigued by the evident power of Buddhist practice to transform individual lives as the following passage, composed more than a quarter century ago, shows.

> Perhaps more than any other areas of cultural life in the West, modern psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry have felt the impact of Buddhism. The great discovery of the unconscious by Freud, Adler, and Jung paved the way into hitherto unexplored regions: the drives underlying human behavior, the sources of artistic and intellectual images and ideas, and the causes of mental disturbance and physical illness. This breakthrough to the level of the unconscious caused European thinkers to realize the import of various forms of Eastern meditation, above all of Buddhist meditation. Not only did this centuries-old discipline lead to a deep knowledge of the unconscious; it also served as a means to exercise voluntary control over images, moods, passions, and intuitions of the unconscious mind. The psychology of the unconscious noted in amazement that the Eastern religions, especially Buddhism, had developed a methodical mental discipline in regions that had largely been hidden to European science. And thus a novel attempt was made to incorporate Eastern meditation into European psychotherapy (Benz, 1974, p. 320).

That "the Buddha was also a social activist" (Chappell, 1999, p. 202; Chappell chapter in this book) is another important "discovery" of Western psychology, especially among psychologists concerned with issues of social justice, ethnic conflict, peace, environmental concerns, and community empowerment. These psychologists have discovered the applicability of Buddhist principles of ecology, compassion, non-violence, and empowerment, to social and community change. Thus an earnest effort is now underway to study models of socially engaged Buddhism that could inform our interventions to create healthy communities.

As can be seen from the preceding brief review, the interface between psychology and Buddhism has a long and rich history. There is much psychology can learn from Buddhist philosophy and practices. Most important, as psychologists take their place on the world wide stage, it is hoped that the Buddhist principles aimed towards peace and mutual understanding can be an important component of the work on all levels including research and intervention.

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1. As Hurst states, "Although one possible translation of shakubuku is 'break and subdue,' this has been most often used by critics of the method. One Soka Gakkai leader told me, 'The *break and subdue* translation of shakubuku is misleading perpetuating the unsubstantiated accusations of violent proselytization which affected Nichiren himself and the Soka Gakkai centuries later. Even the word *forceful* suggests physical, rather than moral strength. Shakubuku does mean to refute (break) another's attachment to provisional Buddhist views and to remove (subdue) the suffering, which accompanies such attachments'" (Hurst, 2000, p. 72).

2. Contributions of the Consciousness-Only School which the brothers Vasubandu and Asanga of the Yogacara School (the second main school of the Mahayana Branch along with Nagarjuna's Madhyamika School) introduced from India to China.